THE TIMES

Tuesday March 10th 2026

My sister's house sale collapsed. I'm making sure yours won't

We exchange, we pack, we plan. But when a property purchase falls at the final hurdle, the seller pays the price. Peter Thompson has a fix..

Selling a home is the largest financial transaction most families will ever make. Yet in England and Wales, even after contracts are exchanged, a property sale can still collapse. When it does, the consequences fall overwhelmingly on the seller.

I saw this first hand through my twin sister.

During their divorce, she and her ex-husband had agreed a sale, exchanged contracts, packed up home and committed to the next stages of their life. On completion day, their buyer failed to complete due to a change in circumstances resulting in the mortgage offer being withdrawn.

What followed was not just inconvenience; it was financial fallout. Many thousands of pounds in fees, interest and other costs were lost. The onward purchase collapsed. Financial struggles ensued and their three young daughters were caught in the middle.

In property language, it was a “failed completion”. In reality, it was a family crisis.

At the time, and for much of my career, I was working in wealth management, managing financial risk for clients every day. It struck me as extraordinary that almost every kind of risk can be mitigated, yet we have no mechanism to protect a homeowner once contracts have been exchanged with their buyer.

And that is the critical imbalance: once exchange takes place, the seller is legally bound. They may have committed to an onward purchase. School places may have been arranged. Removals booked. Finances reorganised. Life plans set in motion.

Yet completion still depends on multiple moving parts, with the most common cause of post-exchange failure being a broken chain. Mortgage withdrawals due to changes in circumstances are also high on the list, as well as personal crisis and legal complications. Operational resilience of professional firms is also now in the spotlight. The recent collapse of PM Law, which has left thousands stranded, is an example of this.

After seeing the real-life consequences close up, I decided to create a business to fix this.

ClozeSure exists to protect both the agreed sale price and the future life plans that depend on it.

For a fee starting from £60, payable on completion, we guarantee that if their buyer fails to complete, the seller still receives 100 per cent of their agreed price.

When a default occurs, the seller can obligate us to step in the same day as their safety buyer and purchase the property for 90 per cent of their agreed price. The original buyer’s 10 per cent deposit is forfeited to the seller. The result is simple: the seller receives the full amount they were contractually promised, in time, so that their onward plans do not collapse.

Importantly, the protection works both ways. If a buyer were to withdraw after exchange, ClozeSure limits their exposure to the contractual 10 per cent deposit. The financial uncertainty does not spiral beyond that point.

There are more than a million residential transactions in England and Wales each year. Post-exchange failures are relatively rare — about 500 annually — but for those affected, the consequences can be severe. The cost of a failed completion can easily exceed £15,000 once legal fees, bridging costs and collapsed chains are factored in. The emotional cost is arguably much higher but harder to quantify.

And in Scotland, reservation agreements may bring parties to the table earlier, but they provide no protection if the buyer ultimately fails to complete unexpectedly.

From conversations I've had with estate agents and conveyancers, many say the situation feels as if it's getting worse, as a more fragile economic backdrop and rising financial pressures leave consumers walking ever-thinner tightropes.

The UK homebuying system evolved long before modern consumer protection standards. Sellers technically have legal remedies (litigation) if a buyer defaults, but pursuing them for any additional losses above the 10 per cent deposit already forfeited is slow, costly and uncertain. In practice, most absorb the extra losses and move on — a national shrug that "these things can happen". But it needn't be that way.

Selling a home will always be emotional, but exchange of contracts should mean certainty, particularly for the seller who has already committed.

My sister's experience could have remained just one family's misfortune. Instead, it became the spark for a solution that I believe can help thousands of others avoid the same fate.

In 2026 financial instability should not be an accepted feature of moving home.

Peter Thompson is the founder and director of ClozeSure