

Retirement **FREEDOM** 2011

Equity Release to assist Retirement Planning Summer

trinity
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■ **These are Lifetime Mortgages and Home Reversion Plans. To understand the features and risks, ask for a personalised illustration.**

■ **Lifetime Mortgages and Home Reversion Plans are the two main types of Equity Release.**

■ **An Equity Release plan will reduce the value of your estate and as a result there may be no value left to pass on. Equity Release will not be suitable for everyone and may affect your entitlement to State benefits.**

■ **As Equity Release is a complex area only specially qualified advisers can give advice on these schemes.**

To reflect the overall marked rise in property prices over the last couple of decades, there's a considerable amount of 'unmortgaged equity' sitting in the properties of those that are retired, or nearing retirement.

At the same time, this age group may be getting (or may get) less than they hoped for from their savings, or pension. And with increasing longevity, along with the Government making it clear that the State will not be able to provide all-encompassing retirement funding, other options may need to be considered.

In fact, research by one Equity Release provider, LV=, has shown that amongst some over-50s - who are still working - there is a view that their 'Home Is Pension'. Almost a quarter of those surveyed (equating to around 1.2m HIPpies), are considering using their property to help fund future retirement needs.

(Source: LV=, September 2010 press release)

Where Equity Release could help

If you fall into this age group, then releasing equity from your home may deliver the additional income you need to meet bills,

pay off debts, maintain your home, or simply achieve your retirement goals.

And even if you do have enough in savings, or a sizeable pension, it may deliver a way to provide financial support to your children and grandchildren, whilst you're still around to see them benefit from it.

With loans from around £10,000 and upwards, Equity Release may well offer options for those that may be keen to turn some (or all) of the equity in their property into cash.


Consider the alternatives

However, opting for an Equity Release plan is a major undertaking - and may require the input of other family members, as it can affect their future inheritance.

You should also consider if other financial routes are better for you. For example, if you want to extract the full value of your property, you may need to sell up and consider moving to a cheaper home, and release equity that way.

If you are over 55 and in your own property, then Equity Release may be a way of turning bricks and mortar into extra cash for you.

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Equity Release may no longer be viewed as a product of last resort, and instead it can be an important, if not essential, part of retirement planning.

Options for you

There are a multitude of reasons why people will opt for Equity Release, such as: **maintain their standard of living; home improvements; pay bills/clear debts; and mortgage repayment.** On top of this, there's sure to be those that will also want money for the luxury items, such as a 'once in a lifetime' holiday, or to help out their family.

There are two main types of Equity Release scheme:

Lifetime Mortgages

This is where you take a loan out against the value of your property, but you still retain ownership. The amount you can take out against your property value would be largely due to your age, and which Lender you go with. For example, the maximum you may be able to raise might be around 20%, if you're aged around 60 (for the youngest planholder), possibly increasing to a maximum of around 50%, if you're into your 90's.

There are normally no repayments to make and the loan is redeemed when you die or move into long-term care. There are usually two options; either take the required amount as one lump-sum, or you can take an initial lump-sum and then drawdown the additional agreed funds, as and when required. The outstanding amount owing in interest payments will roll-up for as long as you live in the property. Do bear in mind that the loan plus interest amount may grow very quickly. And these 'fixed' interest amount payments, along with the money borrowed, will have to be repaid eventually by your estate.

Home Reversion Plans

This is where you sell all or part of your home to a home reversion company, thereby giving up all or part of the ownership. There may be nominal payments to make and the loan is redeemed, when you die or move into long-term care.

As the plan provider will not get a return until the property is sold, they will not pay the full market value to reflect this. And any percentage of the equity in the property that hasn't been sold can be left to your estate. Of course, in selling some or all of your home, your estate will not benefit (fully) should there be any increase in house prices.

PRO'S | CON'S

Releasing Equity from your property may affect your entitlement to State help or Grants, and whilst everyone's circumstances will be different, here are some general pointers...

First of all, it will not affect your State pension, or any income you receive from an occupational pension scheme.

However, Pension Credits and other State benefits, that are means-tested, may be affected if your income or savings rise above specified limits, as a result of releasing equity from your property.

In short, you may find that you are no better off by taking out an Equity Release policy, if you then lose out on means-tested benefits.

In fact, it makes sense to establish if you are also receiving all the benefits you're entitled to, before moving forward on an Equity Release loan. Only then would it be possible to make a fair comparison on the best way forward. For example, Pension Credit is not claimed by around a third of pensioners who are entitled to it. So, a good number are losing out!

(Source: Department for Work and Pensions, A state pension for the 21st century, April 2011)

You may also need to consider if it would affect any Grants (ie. loft insulation, heating, etc) available to you - as many of them may also be means-tested.

Do talk to us if this area is confusing for you and we'll help you along the way.

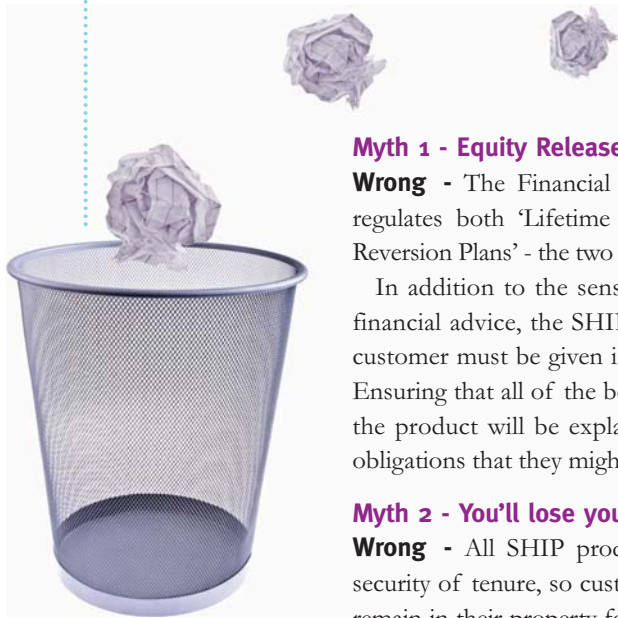
Forever Young

According to some recent research, 60-somethings say, on average, they feel they are 52 years old. With those in their 70s feeling, on average, just 58!

(Source: LV= Research, January 2011)

Dispelling Myths...

Equity Release did have a chequered past back in the late 80's, prompting distrust amongst homeowners, and giving rise to a number of views. Some of which, are no longer true...



Myth 1 - Equity Release isn't regulated

Wrong - The Financial Services Authority now regulates both 'Lifetime Mortgages' and 'Home Reversion Plans' - the two principal routes.

In addition to the sense in taking professional financial advice, the SHIP* code stipulates that a customer must be given independent legal advice. Ensuring that all of the benefits and limitations of the product will be explained, together with any obligations that they might be under.

Myth 2 - You'll lose your home

Wrong - All SHIP products have a guaranteed security of tenure, so customers will be allowed to remain in their property for life, or until they move into long-term care, provided that the property remains their main residence. In the case of a joint policy, then this applies to the last surviving borrower.

Myth 3 - You will face negative equity as the interest mounts up

Wrong - All SHIP products have had a 'no negative equity guarantee', which means regardless of the value of the home or how long the customer lives, the loan plus interest will never be a debt for their family. However, taking out an Equity Release plan may result in a reduced inheritance when the planholder dies.

Myth 4 - You will have to pay tax on the money released

Wrong - No tax is payable on the money drawn down.

Myth 5 - You won't be able to move

Wrong - SHIP providers guarantee that customers have the right to move their plan to another suitable property, without any financial penalty. Although you may have to repay part of the Lifetime Mortgage loan, if moving to a cheaper property.

*SHIP is the trade body for Equity Release providers and represents over 90% of the Equity Release market (by volume).

To fully understand the benefits and pitfalls of Equity Release, you need to take advice - from your financial adviser, your solicitor, possibly your accountant, and quite likely, involve members of your family too.



SEEK ADVICE

Taking out an Equity Release scheme requires a great deal of consideration - hence the reason why advisers who cover this area have to secure additional qualifications. And the complex nature of this product is probably why over 85% of all Equity Release products recently placed, go through advisers.

(Source: SHIP, April 2011 press release for Q1 2011 figures)

Make your life easier

Our role is to take away a lot of the legwork, hold your hand through the process, liaise with the various parties involved and be readily available.

Consider the options

In addition to identifying the most suitable Equity Release product, we need to assess if there are other better alternative options out there for you - such as downsizing, and

also consider how Equity Release may impact upon your existing (or available) State benefits and Grants.

Involve the family

It's recommended that the family's view be sought, as they may be future beneficiaries of your estate and taking out an Equity Release policy may mean less of an inheritance for them.

Other factors

As part of the process, we may also need to consider the role of a Will and/or Trusts.

It's a pretty complex area, but one that we're familiar with, so do get in touch to find out more.

The Financial Services Authority does not regulate Trust Advice or Will Writing.

If you feel you should be easing up when you retire, and that Equity Release is only for helping ends meet, then Tom Lackey will dispel those beliefs.

How it's worked FOR OTHERS

As he entered retirement, **Tom Lackey**, took up Wing-Walking! And the Equity Release policy he's taken out is largely to enable him to continue with his charitable work.

And there's more! At the age of 92, Tom, from Birmingham, is the proud holder of four Guinness World Records for aerobatic stunts. Most recently, in 2010, he broke his own record to become the oldest person to loop-the-loop, whilst strapped to an aeroplane. And in the process, he's raised over £1.25m for charity.

Tom still lives in the house he built in 1966, where he and his wife, Isabel, brought up their family.

Sadly, Isabel died 10 years ago and it's at that stage that Tom looked for something else upon which to focus his energies, and took up wing-walking to help keep him mentally and physically active - as you do!!

However, due to the costs of hiring planes and equipment, his own personal savings started to dwindle; this prompted him to look at Equity

Release to provide on-going funds. He took out an initial lump sum and then had the option to draw down further money within a 15-year period.

Most recently, he released some additional funds, part of which helped pay for a cruise for him and his daughter. Albeit it's a bit of a busman's holiday, as he has now been booked to give a talk to his fellow holidaymakers!!

Paying off the Mortgage

Elsewhere, other people have used Equity Release for more traditional reasons. In the case of **Mr & Mrs E from Essex**, they were motivated by the opportunity to pay off their remaining mortgage, as it was becoming a drain on their existing retirement income.

Mr E had been self-employed all his working life and was still working at the age of 65, but his wife was keen for him to reduce his working hours.

One option to raise the necessary money would have been to move, however, they were very happy in their home, and had lots of friends and neighbours close by. So they felt an Equity Release mortgage was the best route for them.

Their property was valued at £200,000, and they released an initial cash lump sum of £46,000, with the option of applying for two further advances at a later date.

This has enabled the couple to continue enjoying life in their bungalow, without worrying about the monthly repayments on their mortgage, and also allowed them to have a small amount of cash set aside for emergencies.

Do get in touch to see if Equity Release may be the best option for you too.

*Both case studies were supplied by LV=.
Image is posed by models.*



→ (contd from page 1)



If you already have savings and investments in place, then assess if they would meet your current retirement needs.

Or maybe you can obtain some financial support from family and/or friends.

Additionally, a possible disadvantage of Equity Release is that it could interfere with your entitlement to some State benefits or Grants (see page 2 for more).

This is why **it's essential to take advice** from a qualified Equity Release adviser, along with input from a solicitor and perhaps an accountant too - especially if tax planning is involved. This should enable you to establish the best way forward to meet your own particular needs.

Safeguards for you

If you want to consider Equity Release as an option, then you'll be pleased to know that over recent years the plans have improved enormously. Members of the industry trade body - 'Safe Home Income Plans' (SHIP) - ensure that certain key safeguards are now in place to protect customers.

All plans provided by SHIP members allow customers to stay in their property for life, provided the property remains the main residence. Furthermore, all SHIP schemes carry a 'no negative equity' guarantee, which means that customers will never owe more than the value of their home and no debt will ever be left to the estate.

Also, the Financial Services Authority

■ For Equity Release, a fee of up to £500 is payable at the outset and is not refundable if you decide not to proceed. We will also be paid commission from the lender.

■ The contents of this newsletter are believed to be correct at the date of publication (July 2011).

■ Every care is taken that the information in this newsletter is accurate at the time of going to press. However, all information and figures are subject to change and you should always make enquiries and check details and, where necessary, seek legal advice before entering into any transaction.

■ The articles are for information only and do not constitute advice. You should seek professional advice tailored to your needs and circumstances before making any decisions.

now regulates both 'Lifetime Mortgages' and 'Home Reversion Plans' - the two principal forms of Equity Release.

Do contact us to find out more.