

'Goodbye Mister HIPs...'



The demise of the controversial home information pack has returned control of the conveyancing process back to the conveyancing solicitor. The general public are also benefitting in that they now only pay once for land and property searches and receive them at the point in the conveyancing process where they can be relied upon.

Liability for negligently-provided search results can be a huge issue for conveyancing solicitors. Solicitors need to know they can rely on the quality of the searches and be assured that the data is current, complete and gives the purchaser an accurate picture. Electronic searches ordered through the National Land Information Service (NLIS) are classified as 'official' searches because they are sourced directly from (and interpreted by) the local authority and other official data providers and therefore, all statutory indemnities remain preserved and transferred to end customers. As well as providing indemnity, in the rare event of an error occurring, local authorities have the power to rectify and remediate.

NLIS the only regulated portal in the market

Official conveyancing search data delivered electronically is not only the fastest way to obtain searches it is also the most secure, and the benefits do not stop there.

Overseen by Land Data, NLIS is the only regulated electronic land and property information process in the market. The NLIS channels operate under strict licence agreements which protect the users, clients and the data providers; this creates an environment which is secure, robust and fully supported. NLIS electronically connects essential data providers such as local authorities, Land Registry, water companies and the Coal Authority via the NLIS Hub to the licensed channels. Conveyancers can easily connect to a licensed NLIS channel from their desktop and be assured that the property search data they receive is pure, complete and direct from an authoritative source.

Modernising the search ordering process

For more than a decade NLIS has partnered with local authorities to modernise the land and property 'search' ordering, payment and information supply process and today every local authority in England and Wales connects with NLIS. Since it began operation in 2001, over 18 million searches have been processed by the NLIS Hub. Today around 80% of local authorities

produce searches in less than six working days and the average turnaround time across the country is 4.5 days.

The Derbyshire and Staffordshire local land charges forum is made up of 16 district and borough councils in the region. All are connected to NLIS meaning they can receive search applications and fees electronically and also return them electronically, directly to a conveyancing solicitor's desktop. The benefits for conveyancing solicitors speak for themselves, not only with secure, fast response times, (the majority of the local land charges teams within the Derbyshire and Staffordshire forum return NLIS searches within 4 days which is lower than the national average) but significant accounting efficiencies are achieved too, through the online handling of refunds and cancellations, streamlined billings and reconciliation. Through its channels, (SearchFlow and Thames Water Property Insight) NLIS operates a fully electronic payment system, meaning a conveyancer's professional time and that of his legal and financial support staff can be spent effectively elsewhere.

Where a conveyancing practice is using case management, search results are filed automatically reducing internal processing costs for the practice and ultimately improving the service to clients. Mapping facilities are available as well, resulting in further improvements in productivity and reductions in internal costs.

Unique NLIS functionality

Through NLIS many of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire district and borough councils can utilise 'Negotiation' a unique NLIS function enabling dialogue to take place between local land charges and the conveyancer, so that if (for example) the wrong fees had been submitted with a search request, a message can be sent through 'Negotiation' requesting additional fees. The fees can be paid immediately, meaning the search can proceed without losing its place in the queue. By contrast, where a search request is sent in by post, the conveyancing solicitor would need to re-submit the search request and start at the back of the queue, losing time and causing delay to clients.

Full cost recovery

Local authority official search fees are based at cost recovery level. Currently, the national average price of a combined LLC1 and CON29R electronic search fee via NLIS is just under £107 and within the Derbyshire and Staffordshire forum, the fees are even lower, averaging at £94 for an electronic full search.

By partnering with NLIS, Derbyshire and Staffordshire local authorities aim to deliver an electronic search service to all their clients in line with legislation and implementation of e-Government requirements. Their service standards relate directly to service elements that matter most to their customers – a flexible, cost effective, accurate and efficient service.

Derbyshire & Staffordshire local land charges contacts

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About NLIS

NLIS connects users directly to land and property information held by local authorities, Land Registry, water companies and the Coal Authority. It offers the highest standards of property search accessibility and by using an NLIS channel, SearchFlow or Thames Water Property Insight (www.searchflow.co.uk, www.twpropertyinsight.co.uk) conveyancers are safe in the knowledge that the search data is authoritative and fully comprehensive. For further information visit the NLIS website at www.nlis.org.uk.