

Home



HOME HELP

PARTY HOUSE NEXT DOOR
Our daughter recently bought and moved into a semi-detached house. It turns out the house next door is let out. Students have moved in and are making considerable noise, partying until 3am. Should the fact that next door is an investment property have been flagged in searches? She is distraught because this is her first home.
D Gulliver

The fact that the adjoining property is not owner-occupied is not something that could be established by conveyancing searches.

Late-night house parties can be great fun — unless you live next door

However, your daughter’s solicitor will have asked a series of standard questions of the seller, one of which asks about disputes. If the sellers had a dispute with the neighbours, but represented that they had not, your daughter might have a misrepresentation claim against them. Your daughter would need evidence to support the claim, such as copies of

emails with the neighbours or the council. Your daughter could also complain to the local authority in the hope that they might serve an abatement notice. They will ask your daughter to complete a noise diary to establish a pattern of persistent nuisance. But I would try to discuss the problem with the neighbouring owner first. Contact details will

DO YOU NEED HELP FROM ONE OF OUR EXPERTS?
Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility

be available from the Land Registry.

Ed Cracknell, partner, Russell Cooke, russell-cooke.co.uk

TREES AND SUBSIDENCE
I love my old eucalyptus, but it is far too near the house. It has multiple branches from low down and grows two metres per year, which we keep cut back. Should I fell it? I fear that, because it is old and must have roots under the house and into drains, it might cause subsidence.
Jennifer Wilkinson, Leeds

The right tree in the right place can add value and beauty to your property, but they can cause problems. Is it protected by a tree preservation order or in a conservation area? Your local authority will tell you. If it is protected, permission is needed to prune or fell it.

Trees can cause subsidence when the ground beneath the building shrinks in summer. Tell-tale signs include doors and windows not shutting properly, and diagonal cracks which open in summer and partially close in winter.

Some trees are thirstier than others, and eucalyptus is

particularly water-demanding. The larger the tree, the more it will drink. The closer the tree to your house, the higher the risk.

Only heavy clay soils are a problem because they shrink when dry, and swell when wet. A quick way to see if you have heavy clay is to take a handful of soil from the bottom of a spade depth, lightly wet it and if you can roll it into a sausage and form a doughnut, it’s probably clay. If the soil falls apart, it is unlikely to be a shrinkable clay. The deeper the foundations, the lower the risk. Conversely, removing a large thirsty tree on a heavy clay can cause structural heave, but this is much rarer.

If you enjoy your tree, and have no problems with your house do not worry, but you can contact a chartered arboriculturist if you are still concerned, at charteredforesters.org and trees.org.uk.

Sharon Durdant-Hollamby, chartered arboriculturist, sharonhosegoodassociates.co.uk

CREAM ON THE CARPET
I have spilled double cream on a nearly new pale carpet. In spite of immediate efforts to clean,

and later attempts with supermarket carpet cleaner, we still have a large, darker mark. Help please!
Ann Dickinson

When anything spills on a carpet, it’s best to try to get it up immediately. Start by diluting the stain with water, then drying, before using baking soda to absorb as much of the stain as possible; then blot with a damp cloth.

Some of the high-street carpet treatments that are left to dry and then vacuumed up as a powder are very good, but check they don’t contain bleach. Most consumer carpet stain sprays do contain bleach and I advise you never to use these, because they will often stain a carpet in their own right, which is likely what has happened here with the darker yellowish stain.

As a rule, it’s only good to put down chemicals on a carpet if you can then suck them up afterwards. We use extraction carpet cleaning machines, which spray a mix of water and carpet detergent and suck up the waste water, to make sure no harmful chemicals remain on the carpet or inside its pile. We charge from £100 plus VAT including pre-treating the

stain before cleaning with something to try and break it down, and have a good success rate if we arrive early.

We would likely be able to get rid of cream, but the darker mark is likely a permanent bleach burn. To prevent further damage from the bleach, I’d suggest you douse it gradually in water from a jug and blot it up as you go, or call a carpet cleaning company to just use plain water extraction.

Edward Jonkler, director, Remora Cleaning, remoracleaning.com

READERS CLINIC
I HAVE BOXES GALORE FROM LOCKDOWN DELIVERIES. ANY GOOD USE FOR THEM?

Lynn Matthews, Surrey

Our foodbank will take the boxes along with any poly delivery bags.

Mike Bostock-Smith, Halesworth, Suffolk

Lay cardboard flat on your garden beds. In time rain and ground moisture will make it soft. Worms will be encouraged and will drag it beneath the surface, breaking it down and making

for good fibre in the soil. You can also lay it flat and then cover with a thin layer of soil so you don’t see it during the composting process and it doesn’t blow away in winds if it gets dry. Either way, when it’s gone soggy, you can easily plant through it into the soil beneath. Meanwhile weeds are denied light and so don’t grow. Remove any parcel tape before using, because it won’t break down, and avoid heavily

printed cardboard as ink chemicals are not good.
Peter Cartledge, Shropshire

Keep the sturdiest, along with packaging. This week, I needed to send my sewing machine to be repaired and found a box in the loft, with polystyrene pieces — perfect. Offer what you don’t want on Freecycle.
Deborah Bardsley, Cambridge

efficient and lower-carbon heating system when the boiler reaches the end of its life? Should we replace the gas boiler with an alternative?” There are a lot of options and sticking with gas is usually the simplest and cheapest option, but usually the highest carbon one too. Switching to direct electric heating should reduce carbon emissions in the future, because the national grid emissions are reduced through increased use of nuclear and renewable energy to power them.

The two main challenges of direct electric heating are the

higher running costs (electricity costs three times as much as gas) and ensuring you have a large enough electricity supply to heat a house.

The much more carbon-efficient method is to switch to an air-source heat pump, which will have similar running costs to a gas boiler, but has less than a third of the carbon footprint.

A large Victorian semi is likely to have low levels of insulation, and the first thing we would recommend by adding wall, floor and loft insulation. You will then need to find a heat pump supplier to do heat-loss calculations to make sure the system is sized correctly: for example, the radiators must be large enough to heat each room with the lower flow temperature of the heat pump system (underfloor heating is ideal for this).

To ensure sufficient hot water for a large family, I would recommend a large hot water cylinder (250 to 300 litres), regardless of the heating source. I would be happy to discuss the options with you.

John Taylor, managing director, Enhabit, enhabit.uk.com

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