

## Asset Protection Trusts

Asset Protection Trusts are used to 'ring fence' assets and provide peace of mind that the assets are protected for your chosen beneficiaries. These Trusts are lifetime settlements used to provide for a surviving spouse, civil partner, co-habitee and future generations and to protect hard earned assets against the possible claims of third parties by splitting the beneficial enjoyment of assets from their legal ownership. The beneficiaries are the beneficial owners of equitable interests in the Trust assets, but the legal title to those assets is held by the Trustees.

A couple can transfer the family home into a Trust and continue to live there for the rest of their lives. The death of the first spouse will not affect the right of the survivor to occupy the home. The equity of a property which is not subject to a mortgage can be placed within a Trust and secured by a restriction on the land registry title without needing the consent of the lender.

It is not just the family home which can be put into the Trust. Other assets such as building society accounts, bank accounts and equities can be placed into the Trust for the use of the settlor etc during their lifetimes and for other beneficiaries after the death of the survivor(s). Income and capital can be paid to the survivor(s) for their welfare at the Trustees' discretion.

## Benefits of This Planning

Placing assets within a Trust can, in some circumstances, protect them from:

1. Divorce: claims upon the divorce of a beneficiary
2. Sideways Disinheritance: if the settlor leaves assets to a new partner, it protects assets from then going to their children instead of the settlor's own
3. Bankruptcy: bankruptcy claims against a beneficiary
4. Inheritance Tax on the Beneficiary's estate: If the beneficiary passes away, the assets are not inside their estate for IHT calculations
5. Probate Fees: These can be mitigated or avoided as the assets within the Trust are not part of the estate for distribution or probate purposes.
6. Claims under the Inheritance Family Provisions legislation: The assets don't pass through the Will.

## Taxation

1. Inheritance Tax  
The purpose of the Trust is not to mitigate or avoid the settlor's IHT but to protect and preserve assets. It is IHT neutral in this respect and does not remove the value of the assets from the IHT calculation if the settlors continue to receive a benefit from the assets.
2. Capital Gains Tax  
The principal residence exemption for Capital Gains Tax will continue to apply to a property held in Trust as long as the settlors continue to occupy it as their principal residence
3. Income Tax  
In addition, income generated within the trust is taxed at a higher rate so income producing assets are not an ideal asset to put into a trust, unless a deed of mandate is created to show which beneficiary is benefitting from the assets, so that they can claim this on their own tax returns.

## Asset Protection Trusts and Care Fees

Clients often ask whether Asset Protection Trusts can protect against care home fees as the fear is that the family home will be taken from them and sold so that nothing is left for future generations. This is a complicated topic and involves consideration of the concept of 'deliberate deprivation'.

Any act carried out whereby assets are transferred, sold or used up deliberately to diminish the settlor's means and thus to avoid paying care fees can be considered as deliberate deprivation. The assets will then be included in any care fees assessments as if they're still in the settlor's own name.

If assets are transferred into an Asset Protection Trust whilst care fees are not even contemplated and when the clients are still healthy and not considering going into care, the assets may be excluded from a local authority assessment for care fees. A full assessment of the settlors' circumstances will be required to provide full and accurate advice in this respect. You should however be aware that regardless of the Trust's provisions, it is always open for a creditor or local authority to challenge its provisions. That said, the Trustees would still be free to use the Trust assets to pay for or top any care requirements.

## Disadvantages

Placing your home in an Asset Protection Trust is an irrevocable step and not without its disadvantages, not least of which is the cost. In addition, it would be difficult if not impossible to mortgage the property or take an equity release loan should you later need it; not for any legal reason, but because mortgage lenders and equity release companies simply don't like them.

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