

Choosing Builders

Many people experience problems when having their homes improved or extended and their dreams can become a nightmare. These problems can include poor workmanship, overcharging and excessive delays

These sorts of problems are becoming more common and where most building companies provide a good quality service, there are unfortunately, the exceptions to the rule.

We are unable to advise on which builders are the best to use, we can only regulate the work that the builder undertakes.

If you are considering undertaking any work on your property, the following advice will reduce the likelihood of problems occurring.

- Check with us to see if you need to make a Building Regulations application. If you ever consider selling your property the purchaser's solicitors will ask for a copy of all Planning and Building Regulations consents. If you do not have them it will hold up and in some circumstances even prevent the sale of your property.
- Do not randomly select a Builder to carry out your work. See if your friends or neighbours can recommend anyone to you. Choose two builders with good reputations and ask them for a written quote. Ask for the address of work that they have recently completed so that you can check them out. Also ask them if they are able to offer you a ten year insurance backed guarantee for the work that they are doing.
- Be wary of Tradesmen that just turn up offering to repair something that they "have just noticed while passing". Try to avoid salesmen selling you a service that you do not need or want.

- Make sure that the builders provide you with a written quotation detailing all of the work that is to be carried out. Do not accept documents headed "estimate" other than in exceptional circumstances.
- Remember that the cheapest price may not necessarily be the best price. Quality work and value for money should be the aims, so try to find the best builder for the best price.
- Avoid cash deals to save VAT. If you deliberately avoid paying VAT you may expose yourselves to prosecution if you subsequently try to make a claim under Consumer Protection Law.
- Ask for a copy of the Builder's Insurance. Public liability cover should be at least £500,000. Do not accept any excuse. If valid insurance cannot be shown choose another builder. Also check your own property insurance to ensure that you are covered while building work is being carried out and inform your mortgage company as some have a requirement to notify them of works to a mortgaged property.
- Use the Joint Contracts Tribunal (JCT) Building Contract for a home owner/occupier to confirm your agreement with a builder. A reputable builder will want to use it. A copy may be obtained by telephoning 0121 722 8200 or through local stockists and bookshops or stationers.
- Check to see that your chosen builder is a fully paid up member of a recognised trade organisation. Do not assume that just because they show a logo their membership is valid. Ring through to the organisation shown and check their membership.
- When carrying out work that may need Building Regulation consent, ensure that Building Control has been notified as required at various stages

and that Council Building Control Surveyors have been along and inspected the work. Building Control will issue a Completion Certificate which covers Building Regulations matters, but you must assess the condition and quality of those parts of the project not subject to control under the Building Regulations, such as finishes, painting etc.

- Do not part with money until you are satisfied with the work. Ideally you should pay in stages as the work progresses. If disputes arise then keep copies of correspondence, notes of conversations, photographs etc. as evidence to support your case. Contact the Building Control Surveyor to check that they are satisfied and are prepared to issue a Completion Certificate.
- A number of laws offer some protection for consumers. Many of these such as the Trades Description Act 1968 and the Consumer Protection Act 1987 are enforced by the Council's Trading Standards department.
- Please remember that these are only guidelines for you to consider which may or may not all apply to you. In the unfortunate event your building works do not come up to your expectations you can contact the Trading Standards department or take independent legal advice from a solicitor or Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Do not forget that building work can be a source of noise and pollution. Please think of your neighbours and your local environment, restrict work to reasonable hours, keep noise levels to a minimum and do not obstruct pavements and roads with materials.
- The new Government supported 'Trustmark Scheme' provides details of approved contractors. Go to www.trustmark.org.uk for further info.

Doing it yourself?

There is no reason why you cannot do the work yourself but be warned even a confident DIYer should think about employing specialist trades where appropriate e.g. electricians, plumbers – do not attempt to install an unvented hot water system or gas water heater yourself without advising Building Control. It is a legal requirement that anyone working on a gas installation has to be registered.

In the long run, jobs such as roof felting are also best left to a professional, ensuring that the correct materials are used and applied properly to maximise the life span of the roof.



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**NB: This leaflet can be supplied
In other formats.**

Building Control



**Householders Guidance
Leaflet No 7**

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