



Development Department
Building Standards and
Compliance Services

Choosing a Builder You can Trust!



The information contained in this leaflet should help you choose a builder you can trust.

We are well aware of the difficulties involved in finding a good builder but unfortunately we can not recommend anyone, we have to remain impartial in our dealings with any builder or client and this would not be possible if we were in a position to recommend one builder from another.

Do not employ anyone who is prepared to carry out work without Planning Permission and/or Building Regulation approval, if these are required.

You as owner are responsible for any work done to your property and it is you not your builder who will be liable to prosecution.

Choosing a builder you can trust

Choosing a builder to construct any size extension or to carry out building alterations can be a daunting task. Here are a few suggestions that may help you choose the right builder for the job.

Make a list of possible builders

If you have had plans produced by an Architect they may be able to help. If not, the best source is from friends and neighbours who have recently had work carried out. Look for builders' signboards in your area. Local directories and yellow pages often show information on the type of work a builder carries out. If you do not have plans and / or a specification for the work you must select a builder who has the experience to provide these and then obtain approval for the work if this is required (planning permission, building regulation approval etc.).



Making your choice

Once you have a few names, contact the tradesmen or builders that suit the size and type of work you want carried out.

Get confirmation that they can do the type of work you want and when they are likely to be able to do the work. Ask for details of recent jobs they have carried out. who for, when, where and the type of work carried out. Contact the customers for their impression of the builder and their quality of work.

Comparing Prices

When comparing prices with different builders make sure they are quoting for exactly the same work.. Are they quotations (a fixed price for the work) or estimates (price is only guidance)? Often it may be necessary to have a mixture of the two. For example a fixed price to install kitchen units but the cost of the units depends on your final choice.

Other checks

- Do they clearly show a contact address and telephone number (not just a mobile)?
- How long have they been in business?
- Do they have full insurance cover? - even a good builder can make mistakes and/or cause accidental damage.
- Builders often claim they are members of trade associations if they do, check to see if this is correct.
- If the builder is not local and is prepared to travel a long distance to do the work, ask yourself why he can not get work in his own area.
- Good quality builders will be happy to answer all your questions and queries as they have nothing to hide.



A reputable company is proud of its reputation and should always be willing to prove it. Call the local Trading Standards office to see whether any complaints have been made.

VAT registered

Only a very small builder (one or two men!) can avoid registration. Remember, even unregistered builders still have to pay VAT on materials, tools and equipment, vehicles and their running costs.

The difference in price between a VAT registered builder and a non registered builder is much less than you would expect. If the builder is not registered he will be passing the VAT on as a cost. VAT free is a myth.

Cash in hand

Think about the following:

- If someone is prepared to cheat on taxes, are you sure they will not cheat on you?
- If nothing is in writing what happens if you are not satisfied or something goes wrong?
- How do you prove who did the work and is liable for any faults?
- An invoice proves a relationship and, if a dispute follows, it can be very useful.
- Peace of mind is worth a little extra cost.



Contracts

For anything other than a very minor job you should ask for written details of the work to be carried out and the price you will have to pay.

For larger jobs, a written legal contract is strongly recommended. A written building contract protects you, because it gives you the written consent of the builder to cancel the work if it's not being done to the correct specification or within the agreed timescale.

Agree start and planned finish dates, but remember, completion may be delayed due to bad weather or unforeseen problems.

Making changes to your requirements once work has started will cause delay and possibly a risk of mistakes.

Costs for the work may also change. If changes are essential, agree the cost and length of extra time needed before the changes start.



Ten Golden Rules:

1. Ask friends to recommend builders

Ask neighbours and friends to recommend builders if you do not know any. Ask the builders for references and look at examples of their work.

2. Get a number of estimates

Don't use builders who knock at your door, good builders do not need to get work this way. Don't just talk to one builder. Get at least three written estimates.



3. Look at the estimates carefully

Remember that the cheapest estimate you get may not be the best. Make sure that you get the estimates in writing, then check to see if the builders are offering the same work to the same standard. Check whether or not the estimates include VAT.

4. Pick the right expert or trade

Make sure that you pick the right expert or tradesman for the job. For example, do not get a roofer to rewire your home. If employing an electrician, plumber or gas engineer, ask what qualifications they have and if they are registered.

5. Find out if the builder does the work himself or employs sub contractors to do it

If the builder gets other people to carry out the work, make sure he or she is still responsible for all the work.

6. Check the builder is insured

Ask the builder for proof that they have 'public liability' insurance cover for any damage that may be caused to your property or your neighbours property and the people in it. Also check whether the builder belongs to a professional trade association (although this is no guarantee that the work will be better than someone who isn't).



7. Find out about Building Regulations and Planning Permission

Contact the Council Department that is responsible for carrying out the Planning and Building Regulation function to find out if the work you want to carry out needs planning permission and/or building regulation approval.

8. Make your own written agreement

When you have decided to go ahead, write down exactly what work you want doing, confirm when the work will start and finish, and the amount you have agreed to pay. Ask the builder to sign a copy to show they agree to all the conditions.

9. Don't pay for work up front

Never pay for materials or work before the builder starts. Reputable builders usually have accounts with builders merchants. For larger jobs you may need to pay at certain stages as the work progresses, agree this with your builder, but always keep some money back until all the work has been finished to your satisfaction. Make sure that you agree the cost of any 'extras' before the extra work is carried out.

10 Think about employing a surveyor or architect

If you are planning extensive alterations to your home, think about employing a local architect or surveyor to check the estimates, supervise the work and deal with any problems that may arise.

Although you will need to pay a fee, this may avoid problems and save time and money in the long run. It will also give you peace of mind.



Getting the most out of your builder

Wherever possible it makes sense to get on with your builder. This will get the job done faster and you will get quality and service from your builder. It is a good idea if you agree on the following before work starts just to make sure that you both know where you stand with each other.

Decide on:-

- Which rooms are to be cleared.
- Which rooms are out of bounds.
- Where the builder could store materials.
- Use of electricity.
- Access through the house.
- Which bathroom facilities can be used (if any).
- Access to the telephone.
- Your daily routine, as well as the builder's.



Remember, if in doubt ask. This should ensure some peace of mind and, hopefully, a good relationship with your builder.

If things go wrong

Complain to your builder, giving them a chance to put the matter right. If you are not satisfied, put your complaint in writing, saying what you want done and set a deadline.

Keep copies of letters, along with a diary of events and a record of any phone calls. Take photographs if relevant.

Most builders are fair. If you have a valid complaint you have a right to have the problem sorted out. If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with properly by the builder, you may wish to consider going to arbitration or court.

If you would like independent advice on the merits of your case, seek advice from a Trading Standards Department, consumer advice, solicitor or other expert.

Please note:- whilst every care has been taken in compiling this information the Council cannot accept responsibility for any inaccuracies.

For more information on the Building Regulations, useful contact numbers, and much more, visit our web site at www.leeds.gov.uk/buildingstandards

