



# Cowboy Builders

Friendly and helpful support from your local authority building control team

## About this leaflet

This leaflet has been written to provide advice if you are considering having building work done to your property and will be appointing a builder to do the work.

Choosing a reputable contractor to build a new extension or carry out internal alterations is very important.

Everyone has heard the horror stories about “cowboy” builders in the press and the problems they cause. This leaflet is aimed at giving you some useful tips on avoiding the “cowboys”.

## Building Control’s responsibility

Building Control is responsible for making sure that buildings are safe for people to use and live in. This is done by ensuring that new building work complies with the current standards of the building regulations. Broadly we do this by checking your plans before work starts and by regular site inspections.



As a general rule most extensions and alterations will need a building regulations application to be submitted. (Planning permission may also be needed for some extensions and you should be aware of special rules for properties within a conservation area or those buildings that are ‘listed’.)

## The first step

The first step is usually to design your project and ideally you will need the help of an experienced professional, such as an architect, surveyor or engineer. If you follow this route they will normally submit the building regulations application on your behalf.

There are two ways to make an application (a Full Plans or a Building Notice submission. In general for extensions we would recommend the Full Plans route for your own peace of mind.

## The Full Plans route

A Building Control Surveyor will check your plans when submitted to confirm they meet with the current building regulations. If they don't you you/your agent will be advised of what work is needed to ensure compliance.

Once you start work on site a surveyor will call to inspect the work as it progresses. However, it is your/your builder's responsibility to ensure the local authority is called out for inspection at critical stages of the build and this will generally be explained fully in correspondence confirming approval of your application.

The final inspection of the work is particularly important and should be carried out before your builder leaves site. (Your completion certificate is the document which confirms that the work inspected met the building regulations and it will be needed should you sell or remortgage your property in the future.)

## The Dos and Don'ts of planning your project

**Do** get at least three written, itemised quotes for your building work as prices can vary enormously. Don't automatically go for the cheapest quote but ensure your quotes are “like for like” i.e. does one quote allow for all fixtures and fittings to a new bathroom but another builds in a nominal sum of £1,000 with you paying the extra. (Your professional adviser may be able to help check these for you.)

**Do** use a reputable builder – preferably one who is recommended to you and whose work you can go and look at and whose existing customers you can speak to. (Ask whether they would use him again, was he tidy, punctual and did he meet agreed deadlines?) Ask potential builders about their expertise in your type of building project, how they would want to be paid, will they give you itemised invoices; can they give you a final completion date?

**Do** spend time early on planning and designing your project as changes made at a later stage can be costly in time lost and additional fees.



**Do** have your plans properly drawn up by an experienced professional and ensure that they are submitted to building control (together with your application form and fee) well before you begin work on site so they can be checked and an approval issued.

(A building regulations approval is valid for three years and providing you start work before this time you can continue through to completion with no time limit.)

**Do** get full contact details for your builder and verify them. Be suspicious of a builder who will not hand out or does not have business paperwork, or who only has a mobile phone number or deals solely in cash.



**Do** agree with your builder before he starts work who will be responsible for contacting building control to arrange site inspections. Then ensure a call is made before work starts on site and at the regular statutory inspection stages. (These include when work starts, drainage, foundations, damp proofing, steelwork and roof construction as well as the final inspection.)

**Do** consider using a written contract if your project is large or complex. Your architect may be able to help you with this or there are a number of simple homeowner building contracts available to buy off the internet.

**Do** consider an insurance backed warranty if you are carrying out larger building works. This will provide funds to put work right should the need arise as even the best firm can run into trouble through no fault of their own.

**Do** check whether your work involves work to a party wall and if so whether you need to liaise with your neighbour or serve a Party Wall Notice on them, this needs to happen a month or two before you start work.

**Don't** deal in cash only. If you must do this at some stage ensure you get a signed receipt for the payment.

**Don't** arrange to pay large sums of money in advance for work. It is better to make staged payments, such as up to damp course, roof level and completion.

**Don't** assume that if your builder tells you no local authority consent is needed that this is always the case. Check with planning and building control yourself if you are unsure. (Also consider water, sewerage authorities' consents.)

**Don't** make alterations to your approved plans unless you check with the planning and building control sections first. If you do, give details of the alterations and agree the timescale and additional costs with your builder in advance.

**Don't** make your final payment to your builder until you are fully satisfied with his work and your completion certificate has been issued.

### We are here to help

We hope the information contained in this leaflet will help you feel more confident when planning your building project. The vast majority of contractors are reputable and reliable but knowing the right questions to ask will help you to make an informed decision about who you should employ to build your project.

Building Control is always happy to offer free pre-submission and on-going advice relating to the building regulations should you need it. However don't forget that whilst we are here to help, we are not a substitute for the professional design and construction and project management advice of your agent or architect.

### A national network

All Local Authority Building Control offices are members of LABC, the UK's leading national building control service and as such we are committed to maintaining the highest standards. We have unrivalled experience of assisting in the design process and inspecting building work on site. LABC is a national network of over 3,000 professional surveyors (Building Control Surveyors) who have a well-deserved reputation for fairness and practicality.

For more information visit: [www.labc.uk.com](http://www.labc.uk.com)

Our aim is to provide an impartial, reliable and professional building control service that ensures the health and safety of people within the built environment.

We are here to help and if you are in any doubt about the Building Regulations or require further information please contact your local authority building control team or LABC

**Please note that every care has been taken in compiling this leaflet however the publishers cannot take responsibility for any inaccuracies.**

**The information herein relates to the Building Regulations as at November 2011 and may be subject to change.**