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ENGAGING THE SERVICES OF A BUILDING CONTRACTOR

A CHECKLIST FOR HOMEOWNERS

INTRODUCTION

ENGAGING THE SERVICES OF A BUILDING CONTRACTOR – A CHECKLIST FOR HOMEOWNERS

This guide is aimed at homeowners carrying out building works or renovations to their property.

Such works could include, for example, adding an extension to the property, fitting a new kitchen or bathroom, converting a garage or attic, making energy upgrades, re-wiring the house, re-slating a roof, or fitting solar panels.

Homeowners seeking to have works carried out in their home to upgrade it or alter it to accommodate their changing needs should approach the project with care and attention to avoid any issues. Homeowners should always aim to have all works carried out to a high standard, in line with regulatory requirements, so that the final result is fit for purpose and future proofed insofar as possible.

This consumer guide is intended to assist homeowners by providing an overview of some steps and considerations to bear in mind, with a helpful checklist of questions the homeowner should ask prospective building contractors.



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Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland

38 Merrion Square
Dublin 2
01 644 5500

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When commencing a new project, having determined your requirements and expectations, there are several important areas that you should consider prior to having works carried out on your home.

The following is a guide to some key areas to consider.

Statutory consents

What are the statutory consents, such as planning requirements and building regulations, that your project must comply with?

Planning permission

Small-scale domestic extensions may not require planning permission if the extension is to the rear of the house and does not increase the original floor area by more than 40sq m (430sq ft) (where the house has not been extended before). The area of any converted garage must be included in this total.

A single-storey extension is permitted to the rear of a dwelling once it is less than 40sq m, of which up to 12sq m can be at first-floor level where the house is terraced or semi-detached. You can build a garden room up to a maximum size of 25sq m, provided you leave 25sq m of free space in your garden.



Tip: Check requirements applying to your particular circumstances with your local authority planning office in advance of commencing a project.

Building Regulations

Building Regulations are in place to ensure that designers, specifiers and builders follow standards in construction so as to avoid defects. Defects can occur in many areas and the oversight of a construction professional such as a Chartered Building Surveyor is critically important to avoid future defects. The timing of inspections is also really important, as some works can be installed and covered up in a short period of time and therefore the opportunity to ensure that the works are done to standard can be lost. For example, how can it be confirmed that appropriate steel reinforcement was used in the foundation after the concrete is poured?



Tip: Take photos/videos of as much of the construction as possible for future reference.

Building Control Regulations

Building Control Regulations are procedures to ensure that certain professionals, such as Registered Building Surveyors, are employed to inspect construction work at particular milestones to ensure compliance with Building Regulations. Certain building works are exempt from Building Control Regulations, which means that homeowners can decide not to employ a construction professional such as a Registered Building Surveyor to carry out these inspections; however, it is advisable that adequate professional oversight is provided to ensure compliance, especially where you, the homeowner, may have little knowledge of construction.



Tip: [click here](#) for more information on Building Control Regulations and exemptions.

FIRST STEPS



Thermal upgrades and SEAI grants

When approaching a new project, it can be an opportune time to consider the longer-term sustainability of your home and also to upgrade its energy efficiency. This may include energy upgrades such as insulation, draught proofing, ventilation, heat pumps and heating controls, all of which can lead to long-term savings on heating bills. The Government has introduced several measures, including grant support, to assist homeowners in undertaking home energy upgrades. A range of substantial grants for consumers is available from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).



Tip: Check SEAI.ie for more details on available grants for energy upgrades/retrofitting.

Health and safety

Your project will have health and safety requirements to comply with:

- there are mandatory health and safety obligations that you must comply with when having works undertaken;
- if someone is injured carrying out work in your home, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) may seek evidence of your compliance with these obligations;
- you must determine the competency of the builder appointed in terms of health and safety before proceeding;
- you must appoint project supervisors for the design and the construction stages of a project if there is more than one contractor involved or the work lasts for more than 30 days or 500 person days; and,
- you must notify the HSA of your project if it lasts more than 30 days or 500 person days.



Tip: For further information, check the HSA website.

Other consents

Consider whether you need other consents before undertaking works:

- if you live in an apartment, you will need to discuss your plans with your owners' management company; and,
- do you need to consider your neighbours – are there boundary or party wall issues?

Know your budget



There are a number of actions you can take to ensure that you have a realistic budget, and that the project remains within budget throughout:

- explore available grant schemes and incentives such as those available through the SEAI, Living City Initiative, or Built Heritage Investment Scheme;
- a Chartered Building Surveyor can prepare drawings and details, and help you seek prices from a variety of builders, assess those prices with you, and help you choose the builder; and,
- for larger projects, the expertise of a Chartered Quantity Surveyor will provide detailed estimates and bring focused financial management throughout the project to final completion.



Tip: Ensure you notify your insurance company before any works are undertaken.

At the start of your project, you should determine your requirements and expectations. Construction work can be difficult and disruptive, and can be dangerous if not managed correctly.

It is important to consider the type of work you require to be undertaken, and the measures required for this to be safely and effectively carried out.

Your builder should:

- minimise noise and disruption;
- communicate frequently, clearly and politely;
- make you aware of any unforeseen problems or delays;
- immediately bring to your attention any unforeseen additional costs and clearly explain the reasons for any additional charges;
- complete the job in a timely manner and remove debris when finished; and,
- provide all commissioning documents on new equipment and give you opinions on compliance with Building Regulations if required by your surveyor.

Consult a surveying professional

If you require further assistance, you can consult an appropriate professional such as a Chartered Surveyor. A Chartered Building Surveyor, for example, can support you during the construction work:

- by regularly inspecting the progress and quality of the work;
- by discussing issues with the builder if any changes are necessary;
- by supporting you in managing the budget and advising on any unexpected additional charges claimed by the builder;
- by reassuring you that the work carried out is completed to a proper standard; and,
- by ensuring that a formal building contract is in place agreeing payment terms, completion dates, etc.

Chartered Building Surveyors, Chartered Quantity Surveyors and Chartered Project Managers are all experienced professionals who can assist you in the successful planning and execution of your project at every step of the way.

Chartered Building Surveyor

Chartered Building Surveyors offer a variety of services across the whole of the built environment based on a solid technical understanding of how buildings work both technically and functionally. Building surveyors can advise on and also inspect projects to ensure that work is carried out in line with regulatory requirements and relevant standards, and is fit for purpose. You can engage a Chartered Building Surveyor from the start of your project as they can prepare construction drawings and a written specification and schedule detailing the work to be done. They typically can also make recommendations of suitable builders that they may have worked with in the past.

Chartered Quantity Surveyor

Chartered Quantity Surveyors are construction cost and project management experts. Chartered Quantity Surveyors add value, particularly at the early design stages of a project, through design solutions that optimise cost and value. A Chartered Quantity Surveyor will ensure that the client will obtain maximum value for money on their project. If substantial expenditure is involved in a project, a Chartered Quantity Surveyor can prepare a detailed estimate or bill of quantities.

Chartered Project Manager Surveyor

Chartered Project Managers are experienced construction professionals who can act as the client's representative and 'single point of contact' on a construction project. Given the increasing complexity of particularly larger projects, and the requirement for multiple professionals including architects, engineers, quantity surveyors and those involved in planning, fire safety and health and safety, having a Chartered Project Manager as the primary interface will ensure that the full project lifecycle is professionally managed.

If you seek the services of a building surveyor or a quantity surveyor, you can check that they are registered on the statutory register at scsi.ie.

Find a surveyor

Visit www.scsi.ie or click here to find a surveyor in your area. Alternatively, email info@scsi.ie or call 01 644 5500.

PROPERTY CLINIC

The SCSI regularly receives questions from house owners, tenants and landlords seeking advice on a wide range of issues: everything from how to manage that attic conversion project, through to disputes with neighbours over straying pets!

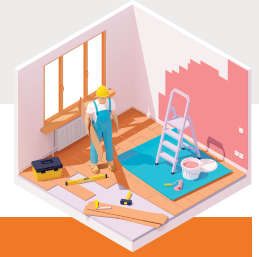
Our online advice centre, as featured in The Irish Times Property Clinic series, allows you to benefit from the advice and experience of our experts and will be of interest to just about anyone who wants to make the most of their home.

SCSI Chartered Surveyor members answer your questions on topics relating to property including:

- boundaries and planning regulations;
- home issues and improvements;
- damp, mould and condensation;
- roofs;
- structural problems;
- buying and selling; and,
- much more.

Access the articles here: <https://scsi.ie/consumer/property-clinic/>; or at, <https://www.irishtimes.com/tags/property-clinic/>.

QUESTIONS FOR BUILDERS



The following are some questions and tips to bear in mind before engaging the services of a builder:

Suggested question for your builder

1. How much will the works cost? Seek a minimum of three quotes from builders. Ask for a detailed quotation based on a detailed design/scope of works. You should be clear about what is not included within the price, e.g., floor finishes, wall finishes/painting, kitchen, tiling, footpaths, sewage/water connections. Avoid builders offering VAT-free or cash-only offers.
2. Does the quote include a complete supply and fit contract, including VAT, i.e., the owner is not responsible for purchasing certain materials?
3. What insurance does the builder have? This is to remove financial risks to you as the homeowner, e.g., due to accidents on your property. Ask for a copy of the policy and retain the policy for your file.
4. Is your builder registered with CIRI, the Construction Industry Register of Ireland? Ideally, your builder should be registered with CIRI, as registration gives you confidence that your builder is competent and compliant with relevant statutory requirements. Check at www.ciri.ie
5. Will qualified and competent tradespeople be used to carry out the work? For example, electricians should be registered on the 'Safe Electric' register. If the work requires installation, repair or alteration of gas supplies or gas appliances, the contractor must be registered with RGII, the Register of Gas Installers of Ireland.
6. When will the work commence and when will it be completed? Will the builders be working on site each day and what hours do they work? What disruptions are expected during the works, such as water/electricity disconnections?
7. Do you have a contract in place? It is important to have a construction contract in place and signed by both parties. What are the payment terms of the contract? **It is advisable that the homeowner is never out of pocket. You may decide to ensure that the frequency and amount of money transferred to the builder is never in excess of the value of work completed on site.** For example, if foundations are needed for a new extension, the builder pays for the installation of the foundations in full, and once the stage works are completed to a satisfactory standard, the homeowner could pay for this element of the build, minus 10%. You should always retain 10% until all works are completed at the end of the build.
8. Ask the builder to provide a program with a start and finish date. This is important so that progress can be tracked, but also to determine when certain client direct items(if any) will be ready on site for installation, i.e. kitchens or windows.
9. Will it be feasible to stay in the home during construction and if not, advise the builder you may be incurring additional costs if a rental property is required. If the contract is breached, costs may be recuperated.
10. Never pay in cash to ensure that there is a payment paper trail.
11. How long has the builder been in business? Are they registered with the Companies Registration Office?
12. Does the builder have a valid Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) clearance form provided by the Revenue Commissioners to ensure that they are a compliant company? Where is the builder's registered office? Does the office exist?
13. What references can the builder provide of local work completed? Contact these references and ask to see the works and meet with the homeowner if possible.
14. Will the builder provide a handover file and safety file at the end of the works to include any warranties and user manuals, e.g., heat pump, to include instructions of how these installations are operated?
15. If you are considering installing a heat pump, consider its location to avoid any noise concerns regarding the unit from neighbours.
16. Have you decided on the position of kitchen waste outlets and the location of electrical sockets throughout the build. Determining these locations early is important. It avoids further costs and delays if they need to be moved at a later date.
17. For certain complex or larger projects, you may wish to consider appointing a Chartered Building Surveyor, Quantity Surveyor or Project Manager who respectively can prepare construction drawings and a written specification, cost plan and control, and coordinate and oversee the entire project.

Beware of the lowest quote, particularly quotes that are much lower than others. Remember, the cheapest quote does not necessarily mean that you will receive a satisfactory standard of building work.

QUESTIONS FOR BUILDERS

Your notes:

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Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland

38 Merrion Square,

Dublin 2,

Ireland

+ 353 (0)1 644 5500

info@scsi.ie

www.scsi.ie