

How to Find the Right Builder for Your Construction Project



Making sure you find the right builder for your construction project is essential if you want to be sure that your project will be a success.

Get it right and you should have a partner who helps guide you, and works together with you throughout the process.

Get it wrong and your project – and frankly your happiness and stress levels - could be put at risk.

Step 1: Prepare a longlist of 8-10 local builders

The first stage of selecting a builder is to prepare your longlist. Ask your local friends, neighbours, and family for recommendations. Also ask about any builders they would avoid. Look out for builders who seem to regularly work in your area – if they are professional enough to display a board they may be worth checking out. It is also worth asking tradespeople you know such as local electricians or plumbers as they often know who's got a good reputation. Check local trade associations and speak to local trade suppliers. Ask other construction professionals such as architects, project managers, quantity surveyors or structural engineers for their recommendations. Planning departments and inspectors may also be able to help if you ask them in an 'off-the-record' way too. Try to match the type and scale of your building project to the company. If you're planning a major historic renovation you'll probably be looking for a builder of a different size and with different skills and experience to a small modern kitchen extension project.

Step 2: Check your longlist – carry out due diligence

This second stage is designed to shorten your list of 8-10 builder to a short list of 5 or 6. This is all about carrying out desk research to enable you check the companies credentials, that the companies are financially watertight, reliable and can potentially able to carry out your building works within the timescales you require etc.

Set up a spreadsheet and use it to present all the information you collect – that way you can tick things off once they're complete and rate each company versus the others to ensure you can make a fair and balanced decision :-

1. **Check their basic company information** – trading name, address, contact information, directors: does everything thing look ok? Are they who they say they are? Are they well established? Check their company registration details – you can easily do this online. Take a look at their trading premises – via Google or in person if you can: does everything look above-board? If all you can find is a mobile number avoid at all costs!
2. **Check the nature of their business** – take a look at their website. How large are they? Do they employ a workforce with all their own trades or do they subcontract most of their work? What types of projects do they undertake? Do they work in your area? Do they present themselves in a clear and professional way?
3. **Professional trade association membership** – are they members? If so again is everything as it should be?
4. **Make an initial approach** – call them with a general enquiry. Chat in the broadest terms about what you're planning to do, to get a feel for how organised they are. How quick are they getting back to you? Are they happy to chat about how they work? Do they seem professional? Do they seem interested in your project? Are they happy in theory to put you in touch with previous customers to see and hear about their experiences? Do they have the capacity and space in their schedule to potentially carry out your project? However, it's also worth saying at this stage that it's prudent to beware builders who say they can start right away – unless they have had a last-minute cancellation or can explain the situation it may be worth wondering why this is the case!

Step 3: Meet with the shortlist

This list of questions below is aimed at helping you prepare for the face to face meetings you should have with your shortlist of prospective builders. It should help you get a good idea of what makes each builder tick and whether you can imagine working with them.

Builder Questions for Initial Meeting

- i) About Your Project
 - Do you think it's do-able
 - What do you think is the most challenging aspect
 - Any aspects of the design or construction that concern you about it
 - Anything important you think is missing from the specification

- What prior similar experience do you have of my type of project – historic renovations, uber-modern features, specialist elements such as alternative heating systems or high-tech AV or lighting systems.

ii) Timescale

- How long would you expect it to take, will you give us a completion date, what happens if you miss it
- Will you have other jobs on at the same time? How many, how will that affect us
- What risk that it takes longer than agreed, what happens if it does
- What happens if one or more of your workers is sick
- When would you be able to start, if selected

iii) On Site

- How many people will be on site usually and who will be supervising them
- How will you deal with rubbish and waste and site tidiness generally
- Access etc Do you think you'll be able to get your equipment/materials through to our back garden
- Do you think it can be done without us moving out? What will we need to do to prepare for you coming?
- What steps will you take to protect the rest of the house from dust/damage and to maintain security etc?
- How will you deal with the effect on our neighbouring properties?

iv) Communication

- Who will be our prime point of contact with you during the build
- How would you expect we communicate during the build – phone, email, text
- How do you deal with conflict with your clients if you ever have disagreements
- We haven't decided yet if we will use an independent project manager -- how would you feel about working with one if we go down that route?

v) About the Builder

- What insurance do you have
- How would you finance the build and what will be your payment terms
- Do you have trade accounts with your suppliers?
- Are you VAT registered?
- How do you balance your selection of subcontractors (price vs quality)
- How long have you worked with your subcontractors

- Are you a member of a trade body?

vi) Quality

- Can we have references for 1-2 completed projects and 1-2 in progress, and meet with at least one of them
- What type of projects and clients do you generally work with – basic quality, good mid-range, upmarket
- Do you offer any building warranties

vii) Finances

- How firm is your quote, what sort of thing would change it in progress, what would not
- Can you complete the tender return in our format?
- What if anything would be excluded from your quote?
- What percent retention would you agree for snagging and how long after completion
- If we proceed, can you give us a quote within 21 days of being asked?

If the builder is evasive, struggles to answer or engage with the questions or the way you are structuring the meeting, it will tell you a great deal about him. While he may need to get back to you on some elements, how quickly he does this will also give you an indication about his interest in your project and his organisational skills! Don't be surprised if some builders do not fare well coming under such scrutiny – it may be that they prefer to work on simple, small projects and simply means that perhaps they're not the building company for you.

Hopefully however, this meeting should then get you down to your final list of 3 or 4 to ask to quote for your building project – the next stage of your builder project; the tender stage!

Alternatively, we can help!

Here at CLPM we appreciate that most people lead busy lives and would struggle to set aside enough time to do all of the above. As a multi-disciplinary construction project management company CLPM can do all of the above on your behalf. If you're looking to find the right builder for your construction project our team of highly experienced Quantity Surveyors can check your plans, create a shortlist of suitable, high quality builders and carry out the tender process for you. For more information call 01923 896550 or email us at info@cl-pm.com.