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## Construction and alterations

Whether you are considering simple alterations, a more complicated refurbishment or extension or a completely new building, a chartered surveyor will be able to advise on all stages from inception to completion.

The time and effort spent on the planning and preparation stages of a building project are vital. If you get this right, you can save considerable amounts of time and trouble on the actual construction work.



## Are procedures different for alterations and for new building work?

In essence, no. The same logical approach will ensure that you achieve what you are aiming for with the minimum of expense and fuss but there are some differences in detail.

If you are a tenant you are more likely to be undertaking internal alterations than extensions or new building work. Under the terms of your lease you will almost certainly require the landlord's permission – in the form of a 'licence' – for this work.

## Where do I start?

Clearly, you will have a rough idea of what you are trying to achieve with the alteration or building work, but there are some other decisions you need to make at the outset. Is appearance more important than function? What level of quality are you aiming for? A high quality product is not always the best solution if a simpler structure might work just as well.

On the cost side there are several points on which you need to be clear. Do you want to be certain on final costs from the outset? This assurance might put the price up. Have you considered the cost of maintaining the structure (and related costs) when it is completed? Extra expenditure at the construction stage could save money later.

## Bringing in a chartered surveyor

Engage a chartered surveyor with detailed experience in buildings, especially designing and managing new building works. The surveyor must have good local knowledge and expertise in planning, designing and administering projects. Instructing the contractor and inspecting progress are the most important part of any building work.

You will need to explain to a chartered surveyor what you want in terms of space, finish, equipment, access and similar matters. He or she can then prepare an initial sketch design of your proposals and an outline of the costs. You will also want an indication of how long the work will take. If you need the work completed by a particular date you will need to make this clear in advance.

A chartered surveyor can take your responses on board and draw up a detailed scheme, including likely costs and a programme for the whole project. Detailed construction drawings and the specification of works will then be prepared.

## What local authority approvals will I need?

The detailed drawings will be needed for the requisite local authority approvals. There are two principal types of approval: 'planning permission' and 'building regulation approval'. The two different types of approval are separate and have separate procedures. If your building is either listed or in a conservation area you may also require listed building or conservation consent.

You will have to conform to building regulations (and in some cases obtain fire authority approval – e.g. where the building is put to a 'relevant' use), even for internal alterations. Your chartered surveyor will be able to advise you on the necessary applications and discuss any points with the building control body, which might be the local authority or the 'Approved Inspector' building control service.

## The tendering process

Once you have planning permission (if necessary) and building regulation approval, go carefully through the drawings and specifications to make sure it is exactly what you want. Changes at a later stage may be disproportionately expensive and could cause delay.

Once you are satisfied, your chartered surveyor will prepare tender documentation, which could take the form of a 'specification' or, for larger projects, a 'bill of quantities'. Usually, tenders would be obtained from at least three contractors. These documents will form part of your contract. Your chartered surveyor can help evaluate the result and select the right contractor.

## How will the work be administered and inspected?

Get this clear at the outset. The best course is to name your chartered surveyor as contract administrator on the agreement you sign with the chosen builder. The person named as contract administrator will issue instructions and make sure that the work is properly carried out in accordance with the contract, drawings and specifications. If you have appointed a contract administrator, do not be tempted to intervene and give instructions yourself. This can lead to endless confusion, acrimony and considerable extra cost.

Do not accept the finished work until your contract administrator is fully satisfied. Even after the new structure has been handed over there will be a 'defects liability period' of between three and 12 months. During this period your chartered surveyor will inspect the building and get the contractor to remedy any defects that emerge.



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