

EXTENSION / NEW ECO-HOME / CONVERSION / KITCHEN-DINER

7 costly mistakes that homeowner's make on their building projects

by Matt Turner

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Introduction

Hi. Are you planning your next project? Perhaps it's an extension or creating a kitchen/diner? Whatever your project, congratulations! It's the start of an exciting journey.

There are many elements to architecture, design and construction that people overlook. Some of these things are essential, to ensure your project is;

1. delivered within your budget
2. delivered on-time
3. looks awesome! And fulfills your requirements and family needs

Fear not! I've written this guide to assist you with your project. I am a Notting-ham-based architect specialising in low-energy design.

Read through the following 7 costly mistakes that home-owners make. They will help you maximise your project's potential, reduce your stress levels and obtain value-for-money.

1. What do you really want?



Be clear on what you want. Is it what you need?

Many clients do not really know what they want. An architect can help you realise your home's potential. Maybe there's another layout you haven't thought of? We design all day long and can often see opportunities for maximising space, light and views to the garden.

If you're not sure what you want, hire a professional. Otherwise;

- (a) Your project may not be as good as you want it to be.
- (b) Changing your mind at a later stage, will normally cost you more money.

If you are unsure of what you want, your builder will struggle to price your job accurately. The price may be too high or too low.

Both of these options are bad for you. You need a realistic cost

A really cheap price may cost you more in the long run, once you've added in all of those extra's.

2. Contingency!

Right.... Now I've got your attention it's imperative that you allow for contingencies. Something WILL go wrong with your project: Guaranteed.



Allow 5-10%

If your builder uncovers a load of rotten timbers for example, you won't want to choose between having to sacrifice your dream kitchen to pay for new floor joists.

If you don't allow for this you may not have spare cash to resolve it, your builder won't be able to continue with the works, and there may be a knock-on effect with the other subcontractors, resulting in a massive head-ache for you!

Even the smallest projects don't go according to plan. I have seen so many clients (including myself!) who for one reason or another, did not allow for a large-enough contingency.

3. Flexibility

It's important to be flexible (up to a point). There are some things you should remain fixed on, that are imperative to the success of your project.

However, some clients can hold onto ideas that don't work particularly well. This holds the project back. Your builder or architect should be able to suggest better ways of doing things, or alternative designs or materials. This will hopefully save you time and money.

If someone tells you it can't be done a certain way, ask why? You might find that it CAN be done, but they are not the best person to do it for you. Listen to views from other people. You might not agree with them, but they may give you another idea or viewpoint which may ultimately make your project better.



Know WHEN to take advice...
and
Know when NOT TO

Your architect can help you reconfigure the internal space of your house so that you get the maximise usable space possible. By using an architects' design skills, you may no longer need that huge extension that you were thinking of.

The skills of an architect will ultimately save you money and maximise your projects potential

4. Estimate vs Quote

An estimate is an approximate price for the project. A quote is a specific amount for the prescribed services. But how detailed is the quote? What does it include and what does it exclude?

If it seems too good to be true,
it probably is...

My advice is to deal with each tradesperson up-front and fairly. Tell them what you need, and ask for a written price for each separate item.

Make sure that you obtain
three 'Like for Like' quotes.

To be clear, make sure that each builder quotes for the same thing. If one builder has quoted for supplying all of the windows, doors and roof-lights, make sure that the other two do as well. It sounds obvious, but many builders will give you a rather vague quote. You won't know whether it includes architraves and skirtings, or whether they pay for skip hire.

4. Estimate vs Quote

Be specific.

You may think that it's obvious that your builder will need to strip the hall wall back, fit new plaster and skim and decorate. But unless it's written down, don't assume they will price for it. And when all of these little things come to the surface, your bill will start to sky-rocket.

Example Quote (basic)

Electrician to supply and fit;

1. – 3 x new sockets for the living room, 3 for the kitchen, 2 for the dining room
2. – 3 x light switches in total
- 3 – new consumer unit
- 4 – kitchen extract
- 5 – two outside lights (motion detectors)
- 5 – extra's / worktop flush electrical sockets

A detailed quote will help you to prioritise.

In the example above, it might be that the two outside lights and work-top sockets have to wait a few months until you have some more money available.

5. Money

Budget Tracker

It's important that you're clear on what you can realistically afford to spend on your project. Does the 100k budget include those huge bi-fold doors, your planning/building control application fees and the cost of your architect and structural engineer?

It's imperative that you manage your finances accurately. A simple excel spreadsheet will help you manage your budget. There also more bespoke software packages out there like U by BB&T. This can help you manage your bank account plus specific projects like a house renovation.

For larger projects where your architect will manage the building contract for you, they will manage the budgeting side.



Materials

Some contractors can provide discounts for certain construction materials and products. Thanks to the internet, you have more options to buy products from abroad, which can help reduce costs and give you a wider choice.

Your builder may find it easier to source materials locally, but this is not your ONLY option. (Remember you will have to pay extra if there is more inconvenience/collaboration/time spent).

Is the cheaper item, really the same quality? You can source end-of-line products on the internet to reduce costs.

Another piece of advice: Use a credit card for your purchases. You will get extra protection if the firm goes bust.



We ordered a bath from a well-known supplier that went into administration. Luckily, I was able to get a full refund because I had credit card protection.

6. Project Management

By this I mean, who will be managing your project? Will it be you or your builder? If you want to take on the mantle, will you be at home to resolve the issues during the day?

Are you able to spend 20 mins on the phone whilst at work to resolve an issue with the builder/sub-contractor?

If not, you will need to meet with your builder regularly (perhaps as soon as they start their day, for a 15 minute chat). Use this time to go through the work they have planned for the day. Discuss potential problems or decisions that need to be made, as well as things like deliveries, payments etc.

Will you be the main point of contact?



If you're part of a couple, it's a good idea to decide on who will be the main decision-maker/spokesperson to liaise with the builder and all tradespeople. It's very tricky to manage taking instructions from two people who may not agree!

If you are confident to project manage yourself, you will have better control over the project and should be able to deliver it to the budget you have allocated/agreed.

As project manager, the buck stops with you!

If you use your builder, he will coordinate the tradespeople for you. If anything goes wrong, the builder is responsible for sorting it out. But he will charge you extra for this service. Only you can decide if it's worth it.

Make sure the right person comes at the right time.

If you project manage, you are responsible for coordinating the plasterer, builder, electrician, plumber etc. If things go wrong, it's down to you to coordinate and resolve them.

7. DIY or Professional?

There are many simple jobs that home-owners can do themselves to reduce their costs. For example, it might be cheaper for you to do some strip-out and demolition works yourself. This could be simple things like the removal of plaster from walls, removal of debris.

This might save you a day or two's labour for your builder. These are messy and dusty jobs which are not for everyone. However, the savings will soon add up to hundreds or even thousands of pounds. You will also be learning new skills and investing a bit of yourself in the project! It's a win-win situation!

There are many YouTube and DIY blogs which can help you with basic building/ carpentry work. Luckily, there are lots of professionals out there who are happy to share their knowledge and skills.

If you're not confident,
leave it to the professionals.



Please note, that this is a guide only.
You should consult with a professional regarding your own project,
to get the most accurate advice relevant to your set of circumstances.

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