

## Finding a builder

Embarking on building projects can be exciting but also full of obstacles. Make sure you don't fall at the first hurdle; find a good builder that you are happy to work with.

Finding the right builder can be daunting but it is crucial as not only will you have to live with the work the builder does for you but you may also have to live with the builder whilst the work is being done. "The best way to find a good builder is through personal recommendations" said Brian Berry, Director of External Affairs at the Federation of Master Builders, the largest trade association in the UK's building industry. "Ask Friends, family and neighbours for details of builders they have recently used." continued Brian. "It's also worth trying the FMB's Findabuilder website ([WWW.fmb.org.uk/findabuilder](http://www.fmb.org.uk/findabuilder)). Where you can search by postcode as well as trade."

Before you contact any builders you should make sure you know exactly what your project will entail. "Set out a clear and detailed brief that you can give to the builder when she or he comes to quote. If you have already had designs drawn up give the builder a copy of those too." said Brian. This will help the builder understand exactly what you want as well as ensuring that the quote the builder gives you is in line with your specifications for the job.

Once you have a brief ask at least three builders to visit and quote on the work. Remember if you would like an insurance backed warranty on your project you will have to use an FMB member who is also registered with the National Register of Warranted Builders (NRWB). "Show them round the site and talk to them about your vision for the project. It might be handy to ask for their thoughts and advice on the project too." advises Brian. When the builder comes to quote ask them for references from previous customers too. Then go and see the completed projects and ask the customer about their experience.

When you get the quotes back from the builder make sure it covers everything you would like done such as supply of materials, removal of rubbish and 'making good' after the work is finished. "Don't decide which builder to use on price alone. Consider how well you communicated together and the builder's references too." said Brian.

"Once you have made your decision, let your builder know and decide who will be in charge of drawing up the contract. You can download a free contract from the FMB website (<http://www.fmb.org.uk/find-a-builder/free-contracts/>)." added Brian. If you are using an NRWB member and would like to take advantage of the MasterBond warranty make sure that you tell your builder and that they included the premium cost in your contract and send the forms back to the NRWB offices to process.

As part of the contract you should also agree a payment plan, with instalments to be paid as parts of the project are completed. Your builder may ask for a deposit to secure the date for your project to start, which is reasonable. It's also worth remembering that paying by credit card may offer you more protection too.

Your project is now ready to begin. "Throughout the course of the project make sure that you and your builder have regular catch up meetings and that both parties keep communicating. This will help reduce the amount of time you need to be on site." advises Brian. "Ensuring you keep communications open is important, let your builder know if you're not comfortable with something; smoking, radios etc but remember on issues like these the key to a happy project is compromise.

Regular progress meetings during the build should ensure that any misunderstandings can be cleared up straight away. However another benefit of using an FMB member is that if any disagreements cannot be resolved there is somewhere to turn as the FMB has an independent complaints handling procedure. It's worth remembering that out of the estimated 250,000 jobs FMB members do each year less than half a percent result in any type of complaint.

Once your project has started, try not to change your mind but if you must make sure you speak to your builder straight away, agree the changes and a new price and ensure that this is included with the contract using "Changing The Work Form".

When the project is complete make sure you pay your builder on time, according to the contract you have both agreed to. Then all that remains is for you to sit back and enjoy your improved home.