



Choosing a PROJECT MANAGER

Overseeing the day-to-day coordination of your own project isn't a job for the faint hearted, so it might be best to hire in a professional, says **Andy Butchers** from Build-Zone Survey Services

Once planning and building control approval have gone through on your scheme, someone needs to oversee the work as it progresses on site. This is the project manager (PM), who will be there to handle any issues that crop up along the way, ensuring the build is produced on time and to the quality expected. Here, I'll be taking a look at what being the PM involves and the risks of doing it all yourself.

What is project management?

PMs are there to oversee/procure a building within the budget and time parameters set. This means that the role involves general management, trouble-shooting, problem solving and diplomacy, plus it requires an in-depth knowledge of building practices and the built environment. The PM will oversee health and safety on site, cost control, contracts and time management; all requiring significant commitment, often equating to a full time job. All these responsibilities also demand a good knowledge of finance and construction, which is where self builders taking on the role themselves can sometimes struggle.

The PM will create a programme for the works, appointing individual contractors, trades, suppliers and services, and deciding when each one needs to be on site. They'll get quotes from contractors and negotiate the pricing structure and discounts with suppliers. Confirming contracts and tenders will also be their responsibility.

Project managers need to liaise closely with the homeowner, but also with neighbours, material suppliers, hire companies, contractors and

trades, utility providers and building professionals – such as structural engineers, warranty surveyors and building control.

How much does it cost?

If you're constructing your own home, it's inevitable that you'll be looking for places to make savings. Hiring in a professional to take on the PM role costs between 5%-8% of your overall budget, so many self builders see the potential rewards in terms of value for money when doing this job themselves. However, having an experienced professional on board could actually offer great savings.

The ability to keep on top of the project's finances is where the value of a professional PM really comes into play. They are trained to understand exactly what's needed to bring the scheme together and can therefore budget accordingly. Fundamentally, less is likely to go wrong during the project because they'll have planned efficiently. Their experience means they're more likely to know how to deal with trades and to notice early on if something hasn't been done right prior to it becoming a major issue.

So before you dismiss bringing in a qualified professional, it's worth considering whether the benefits could actually outweigh the expense. Doing it yourself will come with a host of responsibilities and getting it wrong could cost you a lot of money.

Who can be PM?

It could be your architect, the builder, a freelance project manager or other building professional, ie a quantity surveyor or structural engineer. Every scheme is different, so it's important

to do your research and appoint the most appropriate professional to suit your bespoke requirements.

Look for an individual who has good local contacts and a verifiable history of similar projects nearby – this is especially important if your self build isn't close to your current place of residence. Another thing to bear in mind is the kind of experience that your potential project manager has.

For instance, not all architects specialise in one-off builds and there can be huge differences in one professional's knowledge of the construction phase to another. Architects often focus more on the design, technical and contract side of a build rather than actually running a project on the ground.

If you do decide to do the project management yourself, bear in mind it's not a venture for the faint hearted. The worst thing to do is to have a go, only for things to go wrong so you end up paying for work twice. Remember you need enough time, too. Coming home late into the evening to work on your project is a tough call – the stress involved can put a strain on relationships with partners and family.

From our many years of experience handling claims made by self builders, unless you feel really confident about what you're doing, a professionally competent PM is a must.

MORE INFORMATION

Andy Butchers is a building surveyor with over 25 years' experience in the construction industry – and regularly shares his knowledge to help self builders and renovators avoid and overcome issues on their projects. He is a director of Build-Zone Survey Services, which provides technical services for a number of warranty providers. **Call 01732 744186 or visit www.bzss.co.uk to find out**