

Six common pitfalls and how to avoid them.

1 -Planning Permission – ready to go!

Just because you have a piece of paper that says you have planning permission to build the scheme; it does not mean you can! When designing a building you must look beyond what is simply required for planning permission and ensure the design can comply with other statutory approvals such as the Building Regulations. If you must alter the scheme to meet the Building Regulations after you have obtained planning permission, it is highly likely you will have to go back to the planners and resubmit drawings with no guarantee the changes will be acceptable. This will cause delays and stress and ultimately loss of profit.

As an example, the floor-to-floor heights will dictate the overall height of the scheme which is obviously critical in planning terms. If the designer has not carefully considered the depth for the floor structure and zone for services, your ceiling heights may turn out to be unacceptably low. For me 2750mm floor-to-floor is a minimum for small scale projects, anything lower is not necessarily impossible but needs a careful look at!

These sorts of problems can be avoided by having a good, qualified team around you, who have experience and the right qualifications to undertake the work you are doing.

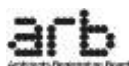
2 – Bought in a site with Planning Permission?

Did you check out the quality of the planning permission on a site you have just bought? By quality, I mean how good is the scheme that has permission. Is it difficult to build, how practical is it to build, are the conditions onerous, will you need to go back to planning because of some changes either you want to make or worse you must make for the scheme to work?

Before jumping in a buying a site with planning permission, ask your Architect and design team to review the approval and what is on the drawings. Assess its compliance with the statutory approvals you will need. It is better to know before buying so that you can plan in the timescales to return the planning or to add in abnormal costs for the construction.

3 – Pre-commencement planning conditions

Most planning approvals will have what some form of pre-commencement conditions, conditions that must be discharged in writing prior to commencement on site. If you fail to obtain approval in writing, this is technically an irreparable breach of planning and you run the risk of the planning approval being deemed void. All too often projects inadvertently manage to avoid such a catastrophic outcome, but it does happen and can happen.



One method commonly adopted is to use a planning tracker to define who has responsibility to discharge the conditions and to update progress. All conditions will need a formal application to the Council to be discharged. This will be useful towards the end of the build as often you will come across prior to occupation conditions. Failing to get these conditions discharged formally can result in delays in completions by solicitors or mortgage companies picking this up.

4 – Budget Control – Get your figure right from the start.

In the early stages when assessing the likely costs of a scheme, a typical £/m² is applied to the total area of the scheme. Using the gross internal area quoted on drawings for the flats will not have the gross internal area for the whole development. Get them checked out and make sure all the communal areas are included. Know the correct size of the project. Obviously, there are other factors which can influence the cost of the scheme, external landscaping and ground conditions are two. Set up a risk register to identify the unknowns in your figures and look to either eliminate or at least minimise those risks.

Use our free budget cost planner for developers or our cost planner for houses and extensions to make a start in the right direction.

5 – Programming – its more than a bar on a chart.

Do not be in a rush to start on site. All too often programmes show a simple bar over a few weeks when a task is due to be happening on site. However, there is much more to the programming to this. Find out the lead in times from when an order is placed, allow for drawings to be produced and approved before manufacture, time to obtain competitive costs, to negotiate and approve. These all add time to the front end and will help prioritise information needed. Show them on your programme with dates when decisions must be made.

6 – Construction Drawings – save money on the ‘drawing board’.

Are you working off drawings for building regulation which are simply the planning drawings with notes added, then you could be risking £1000s of profit? Firstly, you should not be building off the building regulations drawings, there is a full stage after the Building Regulation stage referred to as construction drawings. Carefully considering these details on the drawing board will avoid costly delays and changes on site. It can also help in ordering, with door and window schedules ensuring the correct specification and sizes are ordered. All too often front door sizes, egress windows, stair widths which are all critical are covered by a note even though what is shown in plan is not compliant.

Ensuring your team is using modern CAD packages such as Revit which designs in 3D can avoid problems at the construction stage. For example, when placing steel beams on the drawing in 3D you are considering the top and bottom levels of the beam and it is simply not a dotted line on the drawing, for site operative to sort out at a later date. Stairs not fitting or inadequate headroom in the roof space and sloping ceilings and many more are all avoided by working in 3D.

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