

Could you Project Manage your Self Build Home

This marvelous article can be found in the Home Building & Renovating magazine by the equally marvelous Mark Brinkley who is the author of the acclaimed "House Builders Bible" being required reading for potential self builders. By [Mark Brinkley](#) on 25 January 2018

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From managing the neighbours to clearing up the site ready for the next subcontractor, Mark Brinkley explains what you need to know if you decide to project manage your self build

[Self building](#) does not necessarily mean constructing your home single-handedly, brick by brick – although some aficionados wouldn't dream of doing anything else. In reality, you are going to need some help to either run the site on your behalf or assist you in your elected commanding role.

Lots of self builders choose to [project manage themselves](#), often without realising just how much work is involved. If you decide to project manage your build, you are committing to a lot of work, stress and daily site visits for at least a year – but as you can save around 20% on your build cost doing so (as you're taking on the role of the main contractor and keeping his 10- 20% added cost), it's an appealing option.

Are You Prepared to Get Stuck In?

As project manager, you'll be responsible for [hiring subcontractors](#). However, one of the weaknesses of hiring trades to undertake the bulk of a building job is that there are many actions required that don't fit easily into the standard subcontractor job descriptions. Tasks such as keeping the site tidy, stacking and storing materials, site security, taking in deliveries and temporary weatherproofing all fall on

the project manager.

Anything that you've overlooked is unlikely to get done by anyone except you, so you rapidly find yourself building up a tool box of shovels, wheelbarrows, ladders and portable screwdrivers to fix those little in-between jobs to get the site ready for the next set of subcontractors.

It is here that the role of project manager gets conflated with that of being a site janitor, sometimes referred to as 'management with a broom'. Be aware that running a building site requires lots of hours spent on site. If you can't be there, then make sure that there is someone covering for you.

Do You Have Professional Friends to Call On?

Unless you are a very experienced builder, you would do well to have some support from someone who is. However much you can glean from books and articles, there are still aspects of the trade that you cannot know about until you get your hands dirty on site. If you do decide to go ahead without professional support, then prepare for it to take a lot longer, as you are likely to make a number of sub-optimal decisions that will add to costs and time taken.

The obvious person to have as a professional friend is the architect who designed the project. However, many architects are somewhat reluctant to fulfil this role – some like to just draw the plans – and the ones that do will make a significant charge.

Another route would be to have someone fulfilling the role of site foreman, someone who is very experienced in the trade who can spot the pitfalls before they happen and can also be around to lend a hand on the many in-between jobs. Again there is a cost, but often many things simply can't be done by one person so you need to be realistic about this.

Are You Confident in Buying Materials?

Be aware that many subcontractors work on a labour-only basis and expect you to have [purchased all the materials](#) they need and for them to be ready on site at the scheduled hour. This is especially true of two of the critical trades – bricklayers and carpenters. You need to know both the [quantities needed](#) and to have an idea of what price you should be paying.

If you haven't a clue, then this would be a useful moment to hire the services of a quantity surveyor who would create a bill of quantities with indicative prices. Also avail yourself of the local merchants and introduce them to the job you are undertaking. Organise credit facilities with several of them so that you can order without having to use a credit card every time you make a purchase.

Will You Be Able to Keep Track?

It is important to keep on top of the money side of things. If you choose to project manage the build and you are [working to a budget](#) – you should be – then keep expenses on a spreadsheet, broken down into the relevant cost centres to see how your job is doing against budget. Another very useful idea is to keep a diary of what happens when, who was on site and any unusual events that might later be of significance.

You also need to keep all paperwork in order to [claim VAT back](#) if it's a new build or a conversion that qualifies for reduced or zero-rated VAT. The VAT rules are complex but potentially very beneficial to organised self-builders so you should familiarise yourself with relevant VAT notices and guidance. You need to keep all the original receipts to make a DIY reclaim, so you must organise your filing.

Are You Organised?

Running a good to-do list is key to every successful project. Some miraculous people do this entirely in their heads, but most of us need to write it down in order not to overlook items. The to-do list needs to be updated frequently, and also

to be acted on.

For instance, it is all very well noting down the date the bricklayers plan to start, but you have to keep the bricklayers in the loop by ringing them every so often and letting them know how your schedule looks. Communication with suppliers and subcontractors is vital.

Start a new worksheet every couple of weeks and copy the previous list onto it before editing it to reflect the changes that have taken place in the meantime. Writing the list down adds discipline to the whole process. The list itself is divided between immediate tasks and longer term goals, which include a schedule of works that may be many months ahead.

Can You Manage the Neighbours?

It is well worth taking time out to chat to neighbours and explain what you are doing and when you plan to do it. They tend to be far more amenable if you can give them confidence that you are managing the process properly so that it will be as quick and painless as possible.

Sometimes a contentious planning application can sour the relationship before you even start on site and nothing you can do will make this better. But most people are realistic and understand that once planning permission has been granted, the building will take place and it's actually also in their interest to get it done amicably.

Depending on how near your neighbours are, you may have to parlay with the [Party Wall Act](#), for instance, which sets out ground rules for the responsibilities on both sides of the fence, and puts forward a mechanism for resolving disputes accordingly.

Do You Have a Handle on the Budget?

Have a [realistic budget](#). Decide early on what sort of finish

you are going for: the difference between the cheapest and the most expensive is staggering and while we might all want the best, realistically we have to make a lot of sacrifices if we want to stay on a reasonable budget.

The budget must also include a realistic contingency sum at the outset, probably around 15% of your overall budget. A contingency sum may well be spent before the project has even got out of the ground, as this is an area where unpredictable extras are commonplace.

After this stage, the contingency is more manageable and, in general, the better managed the project is, the less likely the contingency sum is going to get used up on unexpected costs.

In such cases, you will almost certainly spend it by upping the specification of the finishes, something that is all too easy to do. Look at it as a reward for spending all that time managing the project.

Can you handle it?

Only if the answer to all of the following questions is yes, should you consider it:

- Are you able to spend time on site almost every day?
- Do you feel confident at the thought of hiring, firing and negotiating deals?
 - Are you an expert at organising?
- Will you dedicate time to researching products, trades, prices and materials?