

A PRIVATE CLIENT GUIDE

Do You Need a Quantity Surveyor?

A Guide for Private Clients: Controlling the cost of your building project.

Whether you are extending your home, building from scratch, converting a property or developing a small commercial scheme, this short guide explains what a quantity surveyor does, when one saves you money, and how to tell whether your project needs one.



The hidden cost problem

Almost every private client asks the same question once the dust settles: *"Why did this cost so much more than I was told?"*

It is rarely because the builder was dishonest. It is because, on most projects, no one independent was ever responsible for the money. The architect designs. The builder builds. And the budget (your budget) is left to look after itself.

On many domestic and small commercial projects, the final cost lands 15% to 30% above the original figure. On a £300,000 build, that is anywhere from £45,000 to £90,000 you had not planned to spend.

15–30%

Typical overrun above the original figure on domestic & small commercial work

£45k–£90k

Unplanned spend on a £300,000 build you had not budgeted for

THE SINGLE MOST EXPENSIVE ASSUMPTION

"The builder's quote is the price."

It rarely is. The quote is a starting point. What you actually pay is shaped by what the quote left out, how changes are priced, and who checks the bills along the way.



What a Quantity Surveyor actually does

A quantity surveyor (QS) is the construction industry's cost specialist. On large projects a QS is taken for granted; no developer would build without one. On smaller private projects, most clients have simply never been told the option exists.

In plain terms, a QS is the one professional whose entire job is to protect your money. Not the design, not the build but **the budget**. A QS gives you independent cost advice before you commit, and keeps the project honest financially from the first sketch to the final invoice.

HOW A QS DIFFERS FROM YOUR ARCHITECT & BUILDER

	Architect	Contractor	Quantity Surveyor
Whose interest do they serve?	The design vision	Their own margin	Your budget
Main focus	How it looks and functions	Building it for the agreed price	What is should cost and why
When they add most value	Concept and detailed design	On site, during the build	Before you commit and throughout
Do they price your changes independently?	Not their role	They quote their own price	Yes, checks it is fair

Important: QS does not replace your architect or constrain the design. The two work together; the architect shapes what you build, the QS keeps it affordable so the design can actually be delivered.



The five moments a QS saves you money

A QS earns their fee at five distinct points. Miss these, and each becomes a place where money quietly leaks away.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Feasibility | Before you buy land or commit to a scheme, a QS tells you whether your idea is affordable and whether the numbers stack up; while you can still change course cheaply. |
| 2 Cost Planning | As the design develops, a cost plan keeps the architect's ideas tied to a realistic budget, so you avoid the painful moment where a finished design has to be cut back or abandoned. |
| 3 Tender Evaluation | When builders' quotes come in, a QS checks they are complete, fairly priced and genuinely comparable; exposing the cheap bid that is light on detail and will balloon later. |
| 4 Payments During the Build | A QS values the work actually done before each payment, so you never pay for more than has been built and your cash is protected against an over-claim. |
| 5 Variations & Final Account | Changes are where budgets unravel. A QS prices each variation independently and agrees the final account, so the closing figure is one you can defend. |



"Isn't a QS just another fee?"

It is the most common objection; and a fair one. The honest answer is that a QS is the rare professional fee that is designed to **pay for itself several times over.**

A typical QS fee on a smaller project is a low single-figure percentage of the build cost. The savings come from catching pricing errors at tender, preventing over-payments during the build, and pricing changes fairly rather than accepting whatever the builder asks.

Figures are illustrative and vary by project. The point is the ratio: a well-used QS typically saves a multiple of their own fee; and removes a great deal of stress along the way.

Illustrative £500,000 project	Outcome
Original builder's tender	£500,000
Pricing errors and over measure found at tender review	-£18,000
Over claims caught in monthly valuations	-£9,000
Variations priced down to fair value	-£12,000
Typical QS fee	£7,000 - £15,000
Net benefit to you	Several times the fee



Is your project at risk? A 60-second checklist

Tick every statement that is true of your project today.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have a fixed, independently checked budget for the whole project. | <input type="checkbox"/> My contingency for the unexpected is a guess rather than a calculation. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No one has prepared a cost plan before the design was finalised. | <input type="checkbox"/> I am relying on the builder to tell me what variations should cost. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I only have one builder's quote, or the quotes are hard to compare. | <input type="checkbox"/> I would struggle to challenge the final bill with evidence. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I expect to make changes once work has started. | <input type="checkbox"/> The project is a significant part of my personal or business finances. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am unsure whether the builder's monthly payment requests are fair. | <input type="checkbox"/> I have never run a construction project of this size before. |

HOW TO READ YOUR SCORE

0-1 ticked

You are unusually well covered. A short cost review may still be worthwhile for peace of mind.

2-4 ticked

There are real gaps. A QS at the right stage would very likely save you more than the fee.

5+ ticked

Your budget is genuinely exposed. Speaking to a QS before the next major decision is strongly advised.



When you might not need a QS

Good advice cuts both ways. There are projects where the cost of a QS outweighs the benefit, and we would rather tell you that than sell you something you do not need.

- **Very small, fixed-price jobs** — a single straightforward task from a trusted tradesperson on a firm fixed price, with no expected changes.
- **Work already covered by another professional** — occasionally a project manager or experienced contract administrator is already fulfilling the cost-control role independently.
- **Projects where you genuinely have the expertise yourself** — if you have run comparable builds and are comfortable measuring, pricing and challenging variations.

If none of those describe your project; and most private clients find they do not, then independent cost advice is likely to be one of the best-value decisions you make.





Talk to us before your next decision

Avisen Consulting provides independent quantity surveying and cost management to homeowners, self-builders, developers and businesses across the UK. We work to **RICS professional standards** and can come in at any stage, though the earlier we are involved, the more we can save you.

The most useful first step is a short, no-obligation conversation. There is no charge for an initial chat about whether, and when, a QS would add value for you.

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