



## Preparing a tender package

Having jumped the bureaucratic hurdles and got your full plans application to the building control officer, you may think that the majority of the design work is now complete. However, as mentioned earlier, the drawings and specification that will keep a building control officer happy are not usually detailed enough for a contractor to price and does not describe in detail all the building work that will be necessary. Things like the decorations and what type of taps you want are of little concern to Building Control, but all the details of the construction have to be worked out by someone, ideally before the day that the labourers and tradesmen arrive on site to start building. How your project proceeds from this point, and how much information that you need to add over and above the building regulations package depends on how you intend to proceed. The table shows some of the implications for the typical build routes.

How your choice of building method affects your project				
	Main Contractor Design and Build	Main Contractor Build Only	Managed Subcontractors	DIY
Price	Fixed at planning stage	Fixed at tender stage	Updated as building proceeds	Updated as building proceeds
Quality	Completely under contractor's control	Strictly controlled by you often through an architect	Controlled by project manager or you day to day	Controlled by you day to day
Amount of drawings & specification required	Drawings by builder, outline specifications only, no detailed drawings	Full working drawings and specifications, all worked out before tenders invited	Either building regulations drawings only, or tender package	Usually building regulations drawings only produced by an architect
Site management	Contractor	Contractor	You, or your project manager	You
Choice of materials	Mostly chosen by contractor	Mostly chosen by you, sometimes with an architect advising	You, helped by each subcontractor	You
Insurances	Contractor	Contractor	You	You
Health & safety responsibility	Contractor	Contractor	You or your project manager	You
Payment	At agreed stages	At agreed stages	At stages or end of each week	As needed or with an account at a builder's merchant.
Certification – if required	Provided by builder	None or by an architect employed by you.	Usually none	Usually none
Detailed programme	Controlled by contractor	Controlled by contractor, sometimes monitored by an architect	Controlled by you or your project manager	Controlled by you and your family

The section that follows next is designed to help those who are preparing to obtain tenders from contractors for the whole project, but the principles also apply to self managers and those who are going to take the DIY route.

### What is a tender package?

The objective for anyone preparing a tender package is to leave as little to doubt as to the scope of the works as is reasonably possible. If decisions on detail and quality can be made before you invite a builder to tender, they will submit a more accurate price. If once you have accepted a tender, you ask a builder to price something not included in the tender documents, you are likely to find that the cost is more than if it had been priced beforehand. It is also essential to make the drawings and specifications as thorough and unambiguous as possible. If something is not referred to, the contractor may not price it and it will become an extra to the contract. If the description is ambiguous and it is not clear as to who will provide something, then contractors will probably not make allowance for it and assume it will not be their responsibility when they are preparing their tender.

It follows from this that if you try to save money by not having a detailed tender package prepared it may be a false economy. If you use only building regulations drawings, or pay the minimum to get a basic specification, you may save a few thousand pounds initially. But this course of action could ultimately cost many times this amount. Even with a detailed package of information, tender prices often vary by thousands of pounds, because a contractor's calculations are based on a mix of how busy they are, their keenness to get the job, how easy it is to get the right trades, practical factors such as the distance from their office and how many other projects they have in the pipeline.



**Watchpoint:** Inadequate drawings and specifications may lead you to employ a builder who will exploit the situation and charge high prices for any missed or inadequately described items. When working out a price, a reputable builder will allow for all the things that you have missed out, and consequently his initial price may appear to be expensive.

### Sources of information

A typical tender package, as produced by an architect, should be the result of several weeks of hard work and collaboration with you. Once you start to look at all the detailed things that go into even a modest building project, all of the decisions that are needed, it is surprising how much work and research is needed. If you have professional advisers they can obviously help you with this task by suggesting alternatives and new ideas, but you should also have been doing your own research. If you are organised you will already have a stack of product literature, magazine excerpts, notes and photos. If the timing is right, it is a good idea to visit one of the exhibitions that are held across the country and pay closer attention to the advertisements and features in the magazines. The exhibitions are useful because you will be able to talk directly to the manufacturers and suppliers of products and collect useful information on their price and availability.



**Hot tip:** If you are going to an exhibition to get detailed information, go during the week rather than the weekend, ideally the first day of the show, and as early as possible. At busy times, people on the stands will not be available for long discussions. Make sure you take spare sets of plans to leave behind if you want quotations.



A typical tender package

### What goes into a detailed tender package?

A comprehensive tender package will be as complete a description as you and your architect can manage. There will inevitably be some details that you are not able to decide upon, and other things that will be unknown, such as the ground conditions. If you cannot or do not want to decide on something, it can be omitted, provided you make this clear in the documents, and then adjust your budget to allow for it going into the cost later. Because most contractors will tend to price items added later on site a bit higher, especially if it disrupts the work schedule, you should at least try to describe the labour element and include it in the documents. For example, you can specify that a wash basin is to be supplied by 'others', but fitted by the contractor. This will allow you to choose it later on, when you can actually see what the bathroom looks like, buy it yourself, and have it fitted by the contractor.



**Hot tip:** If you are going to purchase anything separately, also ask the contractor to quote for its supply only or to suggest an alternative product first. They may be able to get a large trade discount.

It is beyond the scope of this book to advise on detailed design and construction, but a typical selection of things that need to be described in detailed specification is listed on the checklist. It is important that you and your family make the final decisions, rather than anyone else. Apart from the first section, almost all of the items listed have implications for your budget, and it is sensible to have an idea of the cost involved, at least for the supply of the materials, if not the labour element which is difficult to predict. It is likely that, you will at this point specify more than your budget can afford, and you will have to trim down your expectations when you obtain firm prices.

### Some typical items to be included in a detailed specification

#### General conditions

(see later section on contracts for the meaning of some of these terms)

Rate of liquidated damages  
Timing of payments  
Retention  
Working hours  
Who co-ordinates services

#### Excavations

Can any waste or spoil be disposed of on site?  
Topsoil to be retained and re-used on site?

#### Floors

Solid ground floor, or timber joists?  
Pre-cast concrete 1st floor or timber joists?  
Chipboard or solid concrete finish?  
Underfloor heating required?

#### Walls

Brick colour, texture, surface and pointing style  
High level of insulation or minimum required by building regulations?  
Type of cills and heads, any specialist brickwork, e.g. dentil courses  
Any fireplaces, if yes, inglenook or standard, what kind of fire surround?