



Home Owner's Guide To Working With Acorn Construction



INTRODUCTION

Acorn are a leading residential building specialist in South East London. As such, we are keen to help home owners to carry out major works to their homes. If you are reading this guide, then hopefully you have already selected, or are seriously considering, Acorn as your builder.

This guide is intended to be a summary of the things that you should consider in working with your builder and in making the necessary arrangements or alterations to your home before and during the works.

Like any relationship, your relationship with Acorn requires open communication and mutual trust & confidence if it is to succeed. The references or Google reviews that you've checked so far will hopefully give you the confidence that you have, or are about to, make the right decision.



FORMALISING OUR AGREEMENT

Contract

Having agreed what is to be done, for what price and within what period of time, these should be written into a contract. Which we can then both forget all about as we concentrate on getting your project successfully delivered. Acorn recommend the JCT Homeowner Contract. Having been written by a body representing both customers and builders, you can have confidence that it is impartial.

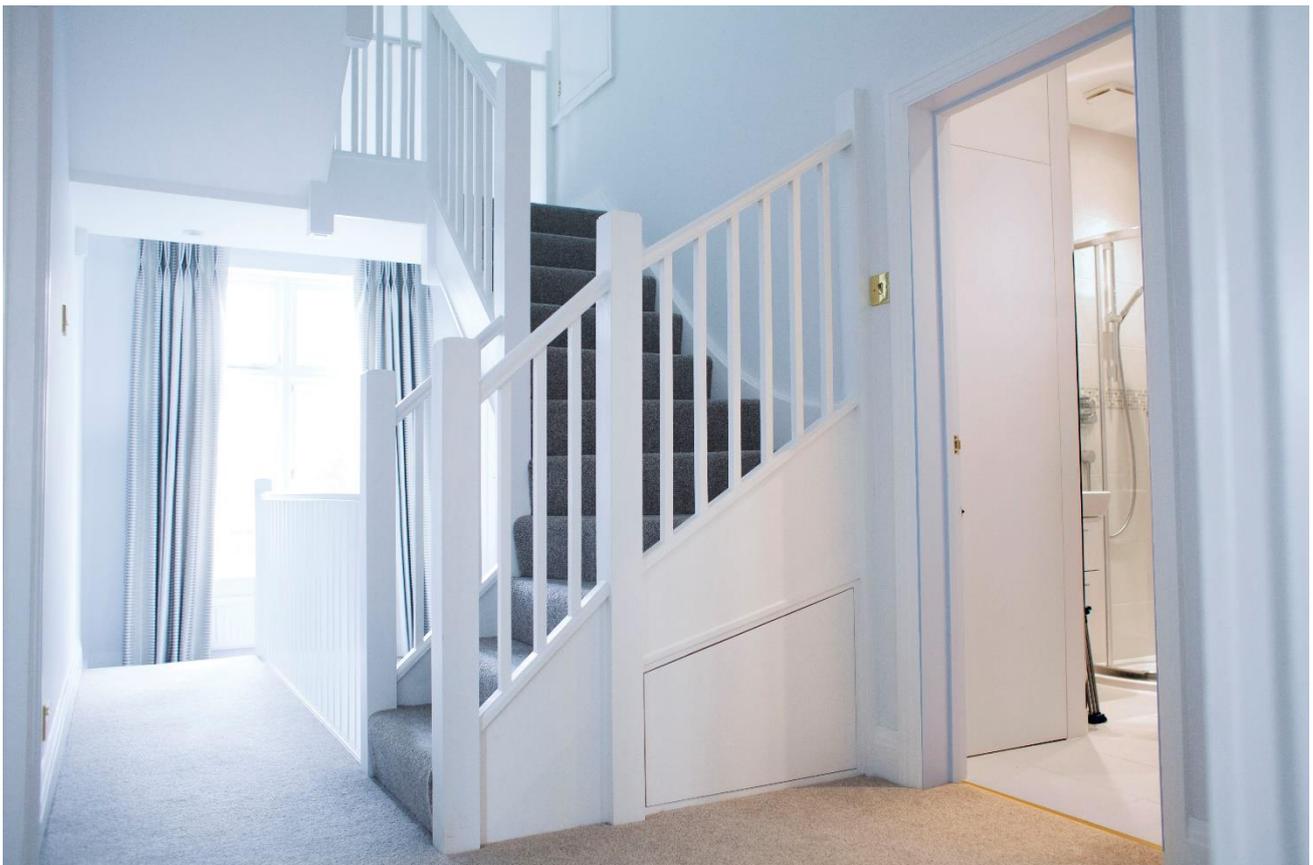
Contract Drawings & Specification

The final drawings that you had prepared by your designers should be referenced in the contract, as the baseline for what you want done. If your contract with Acorn envisages something different from what those documents say, then any changes should be noted on the documents or be described in a schedule that accompanies them.

Acorn's Quote

This is another key element of the contract. It clearly sets out exactly what we have priced to carry out and therefore what we have not. It also sets out, in notes at the end, a number of important points about how the contract shall work.

It contains items, called Works Budgets, for things we cannot accurately cost until later in the project when all the facts are known, or a final scope of work can be agreed for whatever other reason. It also contains items, called Supply Budgets, for the purchase of certain items usually including things like flooring, tiling, kitchens, or whatever, that you will select later in the process.



GETTING STARTED

Start and finish dates

We will give you the most accurate estimate of the start date that we can, based on our future workload and the likely availability of one of our excellent teams. This may be altered slightly before the actual start date, usually by factors outside our control, but we will keep you informed. We are not a builder that will make a token start in order to secure some payment and then pull off to work on something else. Our policy is to start when we are really ready and then proceed properly with the work.

We will have given you our best estimate of the period required to carry out and fully complete your project. There are of course a range of events that can arise during the works that may affect the completion date, covering everything from unexpected issues with the property, illness of key members of our team, through to changes that you ask to make to the scope of the work. We will do our best to keep you fully informed of any implications on the expected completion date that these events may have.

Preparing your home for the works

The first question is whether you will continue to live in the property during part or all of the works.

Either way, please make sure that you clear all works of all your furniture and thoroughly wrap everything up to prevent it getting dusty. Sadly, the dust gets everywhere. Absolutely everywhere.

If you will be staying in your home, we will suggest measures to close your living space off from the works. If your kitchen is being refurbished or re-built as part of the works, we will suggest providing you with a temporary kitchen, using items from your existing kitchen, in a suitable location in your home close to water and drainage supplies.

Once you give your home over to the works, the works areas should be considered as being unsafe areas for the duration of the works. Please ensure that you keep children and pets away from the works at all times.

Letting your neighbours know

Building work can be disruptive to your neighbours, so make sure you let them know exactly what's going to be happening, how long you think the work will last. Our separate guide explains a little about the party wall process, so let's assume that you have this in hand.

Works often require access onto, or over, a neighbour's land. It is important that this is discussed with your neighbours to get their agreement before it needs to happen.



MANAGING PAYMENTS AND FORECASTING FINAL COSTS

Payment plan and payment periods

We usually ask to be paid fortnightly in arrears. We will either agree a specific payment plan with you, setting out precise amounts on specific dates, or we will prepare fortnightly progress statements requesting payment for works carried out. Either way, you will only pay for work done, since even with a payment plan, if either of us feel that we are running behind, we will adjust the plan so that it feels fair again.

How we track changes and firming up of budget allowances

Shortly after we start works, we will submit to you a revised version of the Acorn quote. This will add a new section to the end, which will include every single change to the work scope and will track the firming up of every budget item into an agreed final cost. This will be issued to you regularly, so that there is a common view at all times of what these various changes are.

Running total of the expected final cost

The format referred to above is also a running tally of what the final cost is expected to be. This means that there should be no surprises, for either of us, about what the expected final bill will be. And allow continuous discussion about any issues, so that there are no awkward conversations at the end.



RUNNING YOUR PROJECT TOGETHER

Regular communication

We are confident that there will be no problems with Acorn. But if there could be, it would be because most problems occur when there is breakdown in communication.

We recommend having regular sit-down meetings, in some form, so that everything can be discussed openly as things go along. We will make sure that you're fully aware of how everything is going so if any issues arise, they can be dealt with quickly.

It's OK to change your mind about certain aspects of the works, but make sure you communicate the changes to us as soon as you can and wherever possible, agree the expected cost of the changes before you confirm if you would like to go ahead.

Final design and product selections

During the project, you will have quite a few key decisions to make to finalise aspects of the design. It is right and healthy that some of these, hopefully minor, will be changes or refinements that you make once you see and feel your new or refurbished spaces.

We expect some of this, so don't worry. The whole reason that you are commissioning the project – and asked us to carry it out – is that you should love the space when you see it every day for the rest of your occupation of the property. Otherwise, we have both failed somewhere in the process.

We understand that you don't do one of these projects every day, so some of these decisions may be difficult for you to make. We will be as helpful as we can be, suggesting websites or shops to look at, etc. And helping guide you to make these decisions in an order that best helps the project to proceed.

For instance, key early issues are usually to locate any items that produces waste water that will need drainage; any areas of underfloor heating you want; and the thicknesses of the final floor finish that you have in mind, as this affects any new door openings that we need to build for things like bi-fold or sliding doors. However, things like final tile choices and wall paint colours can wait a little longer, even if these may be things that you have given early thought to. As above, your views about some of these things may develop as you see the project progressing anyway.

We often get customers referring us to Pinterest or similar as their way of trying to make decisions. Please avoid the "death by Pinterest" approach of sending us multiple images of something and then saying that it what you want. We find that the multiple images are all different enough to not actually tell us what you want. Better to send one image and say something like "We want this, but specifically different as.....".

At the end of the day, you need to love everything that goes into your home, so you should ideally select it. We will of course offer helpful advice about anything that you pick, to make sure that it works properly for you.

Make sure you're happy

It is absolutely essential that you are comfortable with everything that is going on. This is a process in which you are fully involved. You are not meant to be, or feel, a victim of it! So if you feel at any point that things are getting away from you, then we have failed and you should raise your concerns, whatever they may be, so we can jointly deal with them before they can become big issues.

Inspections

There are usually two types of inspection involved in your project.

Firstly, Building Control will carry out all the necessary inspections to confirm the works comply with the Building Regulations. Acorn will coordinate these and will ensure that on completion, a Building Control Completion Certificate is issued.

But just as important, it is essential that you can check that the works meet your expectations. It is therefore vital that you have a look frequently as the work proceeds, to ensure that what you expected gets done – and done to a good standard. There are no silly questions or irrelevant challenges if you think that something is unfolding that is not what you had in mind.

Final completion process

The run up to completion is a vital phase of the project. Quite apart from ensuring that Building Control are satisfied with the works, we will want to ensure that you are too. It is possible that we will have been discussing all this stuff as the work went along, in which case, there will be no issues.

But at the end of the project, things can move very quickly and you may want a final inspection before you are comfortable to say that you are also happy with everything.

Snagging

The process of sorting all the final bits & pieces is known as “snagging”. We will aim to have got through this before completion. But there may be issues, perhaps spotted at the last minute, arising from a last-minute change or where replacement parts take some time to get hold of, that may run past your occupation or re-occupation of the work area. We will try to resolve these issues as soon as we can.

We hope that this guide has been useful. For more information, please contact Colin or Paul on 020 8355 5557 or at info@acornconstruction.co.uk

