

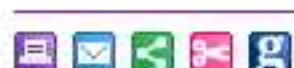
Clue: A major city



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Builders & tradespeople

Sally Hamilton
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Article history



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Money
Property · Consumer affairs

Quick stats

£650 Cost of replacing 10 sq m of three-layer felt roof in the East Midlands. In Greater London it's £800 (source: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors)

£3,000-£16,000 Estimated price range for a 3m x 3m single-storey extension with one window. In Greater London the figures rise to **£16,000-£19,500**

£5,000- £42,000 Estimated national price range for fitting a new bathroom (including tiling costs), from doing-it-yourself to having a bespoke bathroom professionally-fitted

23% Percentage cost above national average of getting building work done in central London. In Greater London the figure is 15% (all statistics: RCIS)

Simple saver

In an industry that's not exactly known for its sparkling customer service, avoiding an expensive bodge job that costs you double your original outlay to fix is even more important than getting money off in the first place. Avoiding cowboy builders isn't easy, so start with a word-of-mouth recommendation - but then check this builder's prices against at least two or three others. A variety of quotes should give you a better idea of how much you might be over-paying, and personal contact with the builder or plumber should then offer an insight into how professional and affable (or otherwise) they might be.

Plenty of websites now let you pitch the details of your job on their site, so that local companies can compete for your business. Get started with [ratedpeople.com](#), [problemsolved.co.uk](#) or [mybuilder.com](#)

Advanced saving tips

1. Check that your tradesman is registered

Don't be embarrassed to ask about builders' qualifications - you don't want to be ripped off by someone who isn't qualified. Look out for NVQs and HNDs in construction, and check that their company is a registered member of a trade organisation.

Don't just accept their answer, mind; check for yourself - for builders, take your pick from the Guild of Builders and Contractors ([buildersguild.co.uk](#)), the Federation of Master Builders ([fmb.org.uk](#)) or the National Federation of Builders ([builders.org.uk](#)). The benefits are two-fold: minimum standards of work should be higher and, in a dispute, you'll have a better chance of success if your builder is a member of a body dedicated to quality standards.

2. Get a detailed quote

Details in builders' quotes can be thinner than gruel, ranging from a couple of lines to barely a paragraph. Come to a mutual agreement of a fixed cost upfront or a daily rate of pay, and the likely number of days your job is going to take.

3. ... and then agree a contract

If you agree to take the builders on, hammer out - whether by letter or a formal contract - what work is to be done, the precise payment (in stages, if a big project), and what happens in the event of a dispute or poor work. This may sound formal but will reap benefits if anything goes wrong. Be suspicious of anyone who balks at such a proposal.

4. If it's a big job, look at their previous work

If you face a major building or repair job likely to cost you several thousand pounds, ask to be taken to see former work by the builder. No builder worth his or her salt will object to such a request, and you'll be able to ask their previous clients questions about time taken, delays and costs. Of course, there's a risk that you'll only be shown recent successes, but at least you'll know that they do actually have some recent successes ...

5. Never pay for all the work upfront

Make sure you draw up a schedule of payment for each stage of the work. Agree to release cash only when each stage is finished to the specification provided and - most crucially - to your satisfaction.

6. And finally ...

To be super-safe, ask to see a copy of the company's insurance certificate(s) to be sure that its cover and liability won't expire during the time the builders are working on your project. This might sound like their responsibility, but too many consumers have had their fingers burned.

Typical tradesmen's day-rates

General builder £120-£180

Roofer £120-£200

Carpenter £100-£150

Plumber £100-£250

Electrician £100-£250

Plasterer £100-£175

Painter/decorator £80-£150

· Source: Price The Job by Sarah Beeny

Planet saver

If your builder embarks on a big project, ensure that they use eco-sensitive materials whenever they can, such as sustainable timber and non-toxic natural paints. Sites such as [greenbuildingstore.co.uk](#) stock a number of materials to suit most eco-approaches.

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