

Building Surveys – an overview

Marjason & Associates

David Marjason formed the firm in 1991; the firm specialises in the survey of residential property and energy assessments of residential, commercial and public buildings. Based in Oxted, Surrey, David Marjason as a Chartered Surveyor and Corporate Building Engineer has over 25 years of experience in undertaking Building Surveys of all types of residential property.

What is a Building Survey?

Over the years many surveyors, structural engineers and similar professionals have undertaken detailed inspections of property and have referred to these inspections as "Structural Surveys" or "Structural Appraisals". Structural engineers usually restrict their inspection to the load bearing structure whilst surveyors include non load bearing parts, surface finishes, services and so on. It is not surprising therefore that potential clients can be confused as to the depth and scope of inspections that they wish to have undertaken and cannot always compare "like with like" in trying to decide which surveyor/property professional will provide the most cost effective service. In this overview I hope to explain the extent and scope of Building Surveys that I can undertake, together with advising of the limitations that must be accepted with surveys of this type.

Building Surveys of Flats and Houses are carried out for a number of reasons such as for purchase, for investment or occupation, for structural alterations and so on. As the particular circumstances dictate so the survey and report must be tailored to the requirements of the instructing client. The most usual requirement is to establish condition of the property prior to purchase. If an alteration is envisaged, the client will need to know whether it is feasible and if there is a suspicion of a structural problem, professional advice should always be sought.

When you need a Building Survey of any type of property, you should instruct an experienced and qualified surveyor who will discuss fully the scope of the survey and its limitations.

Scope Of Building Surveys

My inspection of the structure and finishes of the building will include items such as roof coverings, roof spaces, chimney stacks, parapet walls, rainwater gutters and down pipes, external walls, ceilings, internal walls and plasterwork, floors, external and internal joinery. I will test with an electric moisture meter for evidence of rising and penetrating dampness, inspect where practical for visible evidence of woodworm and rot and will undertake a visual inspection of the service installations. I will also carry out an inspection of permanent outbuildings and boundary walls sufficient to be able to advise upon their general condition. Other matters which may affect the building or its value will be reported such as large trees, a nearby motorway or river, or adverse subsoil conditions.

Although my survey will include a visual inspection of heating systems, water services and drainage systems, the electricity installation and gas supplies, you should bear in mind that only specialist engineers are sufficiently qualified to report in detail on the condition of service installations.

I will examine everything that is reasonably visible, from accessible roof spaces to cellar areas; a 3m (10 foot) ladder, moisture meter, torch, binoculars, tape, hammer, screw driver and other such tools will be used to assist me in the investigation to establish the condition of the structure. However, I cannot risk causing damage to someone else's property and it may not be practicable to remove heavy items of furniture, shelving etc. If windows have been screwed up or are stuck fast with paint, it could be unwise to attempt opening these for fear of damage. Similarly drainage inspection chamber lids may have become rusted to their frames, hardboard sheets may have been secured beneath carpets and other physical restrictions may exist but I will always make these restrictions clear in my survey report.

Guideline Budget

It is not always easy for a client to understand how serious a reported defect may be. Usually the best way to interpret severity is to ask how much it will cost. This is why I include in all of my Building Survey reports a guideline budget that will need to be put aside for urgent repairs.

An urgent repair is defined as a defect that must be repaired within six months otherwise it will lead to significant damage or deterioration to the structure. Examples of this would include failing roof coverings; blocked, broken or inadequate gutters and downpipes; eroded pointing; and active beetle infestation.

The "guideline" budget should help to provide focus, to help the client to understand how potentially serious the defects may be in order to prioritise a repair programme.

Choice of Report

I can offer a 'Building Survey Full Report' or 'Building Survey Summary Report' for pre-owned property or a 'Building Survey New Property Report' for properties that have just been constructed.

The object of a Building Survey Full Report will be to advise upon the general construction and condition of the property, its stability, the need to carry out urgent repairs and other potential expenditure. Defects will be analysed and where necessary remedial action will be recommended. A guideline budget for the urgent repairs will be provided. Future problems and general improvements may also be discussed. I will recommend as necessary, further opening up and investigation with the owners consent.

I recognise that not everyone will want to read a "Full" report but will want the assurance that a thorough inspection has been carried out. I have therefore introduced a "Summary Report" that focuses on serious structural defects and urgent repairs only.

Serious structural defects are defined as defects that threaten the stability and safety of the structure. Examples include subsidence; wall-tie failure; excessive bowing or fracturing of walls or chimney stacks; and extensive dry rot in structural timbers. The Building Survey Summary Report will also include a guideline budget for urgent repairs as outlined above.

The 'Building Survey New Property Report' is very much tailored for new or nearly property; this follows the format of the 'Full' report but it is unlikely that there will be any 'serious structural defects' or 'urgent repairs' required and so a 'Snagging List' is included to cover all defects or incomplete construction that I feel should be attended to by the builder before the purchase is completed. This style of report is also used for nearly new property, still within new build warranty, where the 'Snagging List' acts as list of repairs or improvements that could be carried out to complete construction or bring the property up to current standard.

Whatever your choice of report, it can be sent by post or e-mailed and will include colour photographs.

The next step

Please feel free to contact me for a no obligation discussion and quotation. I will advise the basis of the fee plus builder's attendance or travelling or other expenses if applicable.

When you instruct me, make it clear for what purpose the survey is required, express your particular concerns and advise if you are thinking of having structural alterations carried out. For pre-owned property please also indicate your choice of report either 'Full' or 'Summary' and remember I cannot advise you fully if you do not make your requirements known.

A Building Survey is a report on the condition of the building; it is not and does not contain a valuation.

Please feel free to contact me and discuss your requirements.

Tel: 01883 730341

E-mail: surveyors@marjasons.co.uk

Website: www.marjasons.co.uk