

# BEWARE POOR BUDGET ADVICE

**Although it's tempting, it may not be the best option to take advice on budgets from architects, says Steve Whitby**



**Steve Whitby**

is managing director of Estimators Ltd (estimators-online.com), the UK's leading building estimating service

**Y**ou might be surprised to learn that architects don't escape criticism from self-builders. We find self-builders are given poor advice by some architects about build costs and a few even give outdated square metre rates just to be awarded a fee to draft a scheme. My advice is not to take pricing advice from architects. They're not building estimators or quantity surveyors. You wouldn't ask your bricklayer for advice on heating boilers, or your carpenter about LED lighting. Why do self-builders ask architects how much something will cost and then use that advice as a cast in stone budget?

Many projects never move beyond the costing phase, when they turn out to be over budget. Some self-builders and renovators go back to the architect to revise or completely down-scale the scheme to suit affordability and some take it no further.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of architects and architectural technologists provide exemplary services. The goal is to find one that specialises in your type of project.

Provide your architect with a strict brief to design a scheme that is affordable. Never stretch the purse strings, steadfastly stick to a number and you will be surprised what you can achieve by self-building.

Ensure your architect earns their fee. Long before you see the first draft, a good architect will draw a scheme to your brief. Then check the cost by using an estimating service like ours, for instance. Architects should, if required, revise the scheme as part of the design process. Architects can easily absorb estimating fees and even provide the self-builder with a detailed estimate as evidence of affordability.

I was asked recently: having completed over 40,000 self-build estimates, what is the best advice you can offer self-builders? It's simple really: budgets always seem to get stretched and we see it all the time on TV programmes, when at the end of a build the host asks the self-builder how much the project costs. How many times have we seen participants max out credit cards, take out additional loans and still see the job stopped part way through because they ran out of money? Affordability is affordability, so stick to what you can afford. If it becomes unaffordable, you have defeated the object of self-building. Done properly, you can save thousands.

Most unaffordable projects started at the design stage. Architects play a key role here – and sticking to a strict affordable design brief is an art. Self-builders should demand that the designer provides quantified evidence of affordability as part of the brief. **H**

