

IF YOU THOUGHT HIRING A PROFESSIONAL WAS EXPENSIVE...

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Many of you will be familiar with the phrase: *"if you thought hiring a professional was expensive, try hiring an amateur."* I recently received an appointment to monitor a construction project from someone who is both experienced and knowledgeable on construction matters. This chap is in a small minority, as many people involved in property don't employ a professional when it would be prudent to do so but more worryingly, they don't even engage an amateur. In fact, in a significant number of cases, they proceed without any professional support at all.

My firm pride ourselves on the value we can bring to projects and I often say to clients that I believe we will more than justify our fee. The difficulty from the outset is sometimes in trying to identify where that value will manifest itself.

This month, I thought I would share some experiences of where professional advice and guidance at an appropriate time has saved someone time, money and headaches.

PARTY WALL

I was involved in a party wall situation where a rear extension had been designed to be positioned around 10cm within the boundary. In order to adequately weather the new wall and complete the roof covering, the owner would doubtless need access to his neighbour's land to undertake these works.

I advised him that he had no statutory right to do this and would instead have to rely on being able to negotiate an access licence. This would, even if achievable, take time and have cost implications. My suggestion that the rear extension be positioned 10cm away from its suggested location would enable him to have a right of access to finish that wall under the Party Wall Etc Act.

The consequence was that the customer saved time and money far more than the fees that we charged for our advice.

EPC RATINGS

On another occasion, we were asked to make recommendations of what would improve an EPC score for a property that failed by just one point. The EPC recommended that the electric storage heating be upgraded to high heat retention heaters, which would have involved a cost of over £2,000. This seemed slightly disproportionate for a one point advantage, particularly when the existing storage heaters were only 12 months old.

We undertook an inspection and, upon being advised that the owner owned the whole block including the communal areas, instead suggested that a heater be provided to the communal areas to reduce the heat loss of the flat in question and allow the EPC to pass. A cost of around £100 rather than a cost of over £2,000.

If you are considering a new build or a conversion, then you should certainly take some advice at the outset to ensure your building will pass the required SAP EPC assessment. Minor adjustments at the design stage will doubtless be cheaper than building alterations at the end of the project.

FIRE ESCAPE

Another example was the owner of a block of flats who wanted to remove a very old and rusty external fire escape staircase, and had been quoted almost £100,000 for its removal and the fabrication of a

replacement. By improving the fire protection and compartmentation within the building together with adding an automatic smoke vent, we were able to achieve a better protected building with a considerable cost and time saving.

DILAPIDATION REPORTS

A final example relates to dilapidation reports, which are generally produced either before signing a lease or before surrendering one. You should get a professional to review the proposed lease terms and get a surveyor to inspect the premises before you sign, so you can fully understand your likely lease obligations. By identifying potential problems at the outset, you will have the ability to negotiate on the lease terms before it is too late. This could save you a fortune!

IN SUMMARY...

It seems odd to me that property folk would not want to take advantage of professional guidance. Perhaps the professions are at fault for not making themselves accessible enough or not adequately promoting the breadth of the service offering. Alternatively, perhaps the public perception is that professionals' fees are too high and full of incomprehensible disbursements and other charges.

Whatever the perceived obstacle of seeking professional advice, I urge you to be open-minded enough to explore the guidance that is out there.

My challenge this month is for you to seek out some local professionals who may be able to assist you with a property issue you are currently facing. Have a chat with them so you can understand what they could bring to your project.

I am confident you will find they are approachable, knowledgeable and will hopefully share your vision of getting to the finish line in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

As always I am happy to assist readers of YPN and can be contacted on **01843 583000** or **graham@grahamkinnear.com**

Graham is the author of "The Property Triangle".

