



Build Better
COMPARE QUOTES FROM TRUSTED BUILDERS

BUILD PLANNING GUIDE

**The complete guide to
planning your new build
with confidence**

Prepared By Build Better



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Welcome

Welcome

Congratulations on taking the next step towards building your new home.

Building a home is one of the biggest financial decisions you'll ever make. Yet many homeowners begin the process without a clear understanding of the true costs, the risks hidden within builder quotes, or how to confidently choose the right builder for their project.

Often the costliest mistakes happen before construction even begins, including:

- Underestimating the total cost of the project
- Missing important site investigations and reports
- Comparing builders on price alone
- Accepting quotes with hidden exclusions or unrealistic allowances
- Signing contracts without fully understanding the risks and obligations

The good news is that most of these mistakes can be avoided with the right information and a structured approach.

Purpose of this pack

The Build Planning Pack has been created to help landowners make informed decisions and approach the building process with confidence & clarity.

This pack brings together Build Better's most valuable planning resources in the order they are typically needed — from understanding build costs and investigating your section, through to comparing builders, evaluating quotes, and selecting the right contract structure.

By following the guides in sequence, you'll gain a clearer understanding of the building process and be better equipped to avoid unnecessary costs, delays, and surprises.

What is included

- Cost to Build in New Zealand
- Build Cost Calculator
- Reports and investigations before building
- Hidden Cost Checklist
- Common Build Mistakes
- Questions to Ask Builders
- How to Compare Builders
- Prime Cost vs Provisional Sums
- Types of Building Contracts

How Build Better helps

Build Better helps homeowners compare quotes from trusted builders with greater clarity and confidence.

Rather than focusing solely on price, Build Better Compare™ evaluates builders across four key areas:

- **Price:** Understanding the true cost of the project.
- **Scope:** Comparing exactly what is included and excluded.
- **Risk:** Identifying allowances, assumptions, and potential cost increases.
- **Value:** Assessing builder experience, quality, communication, and overall suitability for your project.

Our goal is simple:

To help you **find the right builder** for your new home & build with confidence.

We hope this Build Planning Pack becomes a valuable resource throughout your building journey.

To access Build Better Compare™ for a free quote, start online: www.buildbetter.co.nz/get-quotes



Scan to compare builder's quotes with

Build Better Compare™



Scan to use the **Build Cost Calculator**

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Cost To Build A House In New Zealand

June 2026

Building a new home in New Zealand is one of the largest financial decisions most homeowners will make. Understanding typical construction costs, timelines, and hidden expenses helps you plan your project and avoid costly surprises.

This expanded guide outlines **typical build costs** in New Zealand, **price per square metre** benchmarks, the **key factors** that influence construction costs, and **wider economic factors** influencing construction pricing in New Zealand, including recent global oil market impacts

2026 Update: Oil Crisis Impact on Build Costs

Construction costs in 2026 are being pushed higher by global oil market disruption, particularly due to conflict in the Middle East.

Fuel is a core input across the entire construction process — from transporting materials, to running machinery, to manufacturing key products like plastics, insulation, and roofing materials. As oil prices rise, these costs flow directly into building prices.

Recent data shows:

- Sharp increases in diesel and freight costs
- Significant rises in steel, aluminum, and other materials
- Ongoing volatility in supply chains

For homeowners, this means:

- Higher upfront build costs
- Increased risk of price changes during the build
- Greater variation between builder quotes

Net effect: ~5–15% upward pressure on residential build costs, depending on project timing and spec.

“With construction costs rising and changing rapidly, the difference between quotes has never mattered more.”

Average Cost to Build a House in New Zealand

Construction costs in New Zealand vary depending on the design complexity, materials, site conditions, and builder.

Typical build cost as of mid 2026 (excluding land) are:

Entry-level home

Basic design, standard materials, single level, flat site

\$2,800 – \$3,500 per m²

Mid-range home

Quality fixtures, engineered timber, modern kitchen & bathrooms

\$3,500 – \$4,800 per m²

High-spec home

Architect-designed, premium materials, double glazing, underfloor heating

\$4,800 – \$6,800 per m²

Luxury / Architectural home

Bespoke design, high-end finishes, complex builds, steep sites

\$6,800+ per m²

These examples show typical construction costs only, and represent typical standalone homes built by experienced residential builders.

Regional Influences

Auckland tends to be 10–20% more expensive than many other regions due to lands scarcity, labour demand, council compliance costs, site conditions, and higher demand. Central Otago is close behind due to site conditions and higher labour costs, followed by Wellington with higher costs from steep sections, seismic requirements, and high wind zones. Christchurch has flat and generally easy to build on sections, however there is still some extra cost from seismic requirements. Regional New Zealand has the best value due to less competition and lower labour costs.

Additional Costs Beyond Construction

The construction contract usually does not include many other project costs.

Typical additional costs include:

Architectural design \$15k – \$60k

Engineering reports \$3k – \$15k

Surveying & legal \$2k – \$7k

Building consent \$5k – \$20k

Site preparation \$10k – \$80k

Driveway & landscaping \$15k – \$60k

Utility connections \$5k – \$25k

Many homeowners add a 10–15% contingency for unexpected expenses.

Why Build Costs Vary

Several factors influence the final cost of a home build.

1. Site Conditions

Sloping sites, poor soil conditions, or difficult access can significantly increase foundation and excavation costs. Other factors that can increase cost include hydraulic reports due to flooding concerns, additional wind rating, geotechnical reports

2. House Design

Simple rectangular homes are generally the most cost-effective.

Costs increase when homes include:

- multiple rooflines
- large glazing areas
- split-level designs
- custom architectural features.

Going two-storey for above 130m² can often be cheaper due to savings on foundation and roof costs.

3. Materials and Finishes

Higher specification materials increase build cost.

Examples include:

- stone or cedar cladding
- premium kitchens and bathrooms
- polished concrete floors

- high-end joinery.

4. Builder Experience

More experienced builders may quote higher prices but often provide:

- better project management
- fewer delays
- higher construction quality.

Choosing solely based on price can sometimes lead to higher costs later.

Typical Timeline for Building a House

The full process from concept to moving in typically takes 12–18 months.

Design & planning 2–4 months

Building consent 1–3 months

Builder selection 3–6 weeks

Construction 6–12 months

Code compliance certificate 2–4 weeks

Complex architectural homes can take longer.

Hidden Costs Many Homeowners Miss

Many new homeowners underestimate these costs:

- retaining walls
- stormwater drainage
- utility connections
- landscaping
- fencing

- driveway construction.

These can add \$30,000 – \$100,000+ to the total project.

Why Compare Multiple Builder Quotes

Two builders can quote very different prices for the same house.

This happens because quotes may include different:

- specifications
- material allowances
- project management costs.

Comparing multiple quotes allows homeowners to clearly see the true value of each builder.

“Building costs are complex, volatile, and hard to interpret — which is exactly why structured comparison matters.”

Build Better helps homeowners compare quotes from experienced builders before starting construction.

Through Build Better you can:

- ✓ receive quotes from multiple builders
- ✓ compare pricing and inclusions
- ✓ choose the right builder with confidence.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/cost-to-build-in-new-zealand>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Guide 2

Build Cost Calculator

June 2026

Estimate the Cost of Your New Build

Get a quick, realistic estimate of what your new home could cost to build in New Zealand.

Our calculator is designed specifically for NZ conditions, using up-to-date cost ranges and real-world assumptions — so you can plan your project with more clarity from the start.

The calculator is spreadsheet format and should be included with this pack. If you received a printed version then head to this link for a free download of the calculator: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/build-cost-calculator>

How It Works

Simply enter a few key details about your project into the YELLOW Cells, including:

- House size (m²)
- Build type (basic, mid-range, high-end)

- Region
- Additional allowances (site works, contingency, etc.)

We'll generate an estimated cost range based on current market conditions.

What Makes This Different

Most online calculators are overly simplistic and don't reflect how builds actually work.

Our calculator:

- Uses real NZ cost ranges (2026)
- Accounts for variation in build quality and specification
- Highlights the impact of site works and additional costs
- Reflects current market conditions, including cost pressures

Why Use a Calculator First?

Building costs can vary significantly — and most homeowners underestimate the true total cost of their project.

This tool helps you:

- Set a realistic budget
- Understand cost ranges early
- Avoid underestimating your build
- Prepare before speaking with builders

Important to Know

This calculator provides an indicative estimate only.

Actual costs can vary depending on:

- Site conditions and complexity
- Design and specifications
- Builder pricing and availability

- Market conditions and material costs

For an accurate price, you'll need detailed quotes from builders.

Next Step: Get Real Quotes

Once you have an estimate, the next step is to compare real builder quotes.

Submit your project through Build Better to receive structured, comparable quotes from vetted builders — so you can understand the true cost and choose with confidence.

Build Better helps homeowners compare quotes from experienced builders before starting construction.

Through Build Better you can:

- ✓ receive quotes from multiple builders
- ✓ compare pricing and inclusions
- ✓ choose the right builder with confidence.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/build-cost-calculator>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Guide 3

What Reports Do I Need Before Building On My Section?

June 2026

Bought Land? Here's What You Need Before You Build

Purchasing a section to build on is exciting, but many landowners quickly discover that choosing a builder is only one part of the process.

Before architects can draw plans, engineers can design foundations, or builders can provide accurate pricing, you'll often need a number of reports and investigations completed first.

Understanding what information is required—and when—can save thousands of dollars in redesign costs, consent delays, and unexpected site expenses.

This guide explains the most common reports required before building a home in New Zealand and what you can expect to pay.

The Typical New Build Journey

Most new home projects follow a process similar to this:

1. Purchase land
2. Obtain property information
3. Complete site investigations
4. Prepare concept plans
5. Complete engineering design
6. Obtain builder pricing
7. Apply for building consent
8. Sign a building contract
9. Start construction

Many homeowners try to jump straight to builder quotes, only to discover that important site information is missing.

The more information you have upfront, the more accurate your builder quotes will be.

1. Record of Title

The first document you should obtain is the property title.

Your title identifies:

- Legal ownership
- Easements
- Rights of way
- Drainage easements
- Covenants
- Land restrictions

These can significantly impact where and how you build.

Typical Cost

Often available through your solicitor or online property information providers.

2. LIM Report

A Land Information Memorandum (LIM) provides council-held information about the property.

A LIM may identify:

- Flood hazards
- Planning restrictions
- Existing consents
- Drainage infrastructure
- Natural hazards
- Zoning information

Typical Cost

\$300–\$500 depending on council.

Why It Matters

Issues identified in a LIM can influence site design, foundation requirements, and overall build costs.

3. Topographical Survey

One of the most important early-stage investments is a topographical survey.

A topographical survey creates an accurate map of your property showing:

- Site boundaries
- Contours and levels
- Existing structures
- Driveways
- Retaining walls
- Trees
- Services
- Road levels

Architects, designers, engineers, and builders all rely on this information.

Think of it as the blueprint of the land itself.

Typical Topographical Survey Cost NZ (2026)

Site Type	Typical Cost
Flat urban section	\$1,200–\$2,000
Standard residential site	\$1,500–\$3,000
Sloping site	\$2,500–\$5,000
Lifestyle block	\$3,000–\$8,000+

Common Mistake

Many landowners delay obtaining a survey to save money.

This often results in:

- Redesign costs
- Incorrect floor levels
- Drainage issues
- Additional engineering fees
- Consent delays

4. Geotechnical Report

While a topographical survey tells you what is on the site, a geotechnical report tells you what is underneath it.

A geotechnical investigation examines:

- Soil conditions
- Ground stability
- Bearing capacity
- Groundwater levels
- Settlement risk

- Liquefaction risk
- Foundation recommendations

The report is prepared by a geotechnical engineer after testing the site.

Typical Geotechnical Report Cost NZ (2026)

Site Complexity	Typical Cost
Simple residential site	\$2,000–\$4,000
Moderate complexity	\$4,000–\$8,000
Difficult sites	\$8,000–\$20,000+

When Is It Needed?

A geotechnical report is often recommended when:

- The site is sloping
- Ground conditions are unknown
- The site contains fill
- Liquefaction may be present
- Retaining walls are required
- Engineers request additional information

Why Builders Care

Without geotechnical information, builders often need to include risk allowances in their pricing.

This can make quotes appear higher than necessary.

Topographical Survey vs Geotechnical Report

Many homeowners confuse these two reports:

Topographical Survey	Geotechnical Report
Shows what is above ground	Shows what is below ground

Prepared by surveyor	Prepared by geotechnical engineer
Used for site design	Used for foundation design
Maps levels and contours	Assesses soil conditions
Typically \$1,500–\$3,000	Typically \$2,000–\$8,000+

In most cases, both reports provide valuable information for a successful project.

5. Engineering Design

Depending on your site, engineers may need to design:

- Foundations
- Retaining walls
- Stormwater systems
- Structural elements
- Earthworks

The complexity of your section often determines how much engineering is required.

Flat sections generally require less engineering than steep or difficult sites.

6. Architectural Plans

Once site information is available, your architect or designer can begin preparing plans.

Typical stages include:

Concept Design

Initial layout and floor plan options.

Developed Design

Refined plans and elevations.

Building Consent Drawings

Detailed documentation required for council approval.

The better your site information, the more accurate these plans will be.

7. Build Cost Estimate

One of the biggest mistakes homeowners make is falling in love with a design before understanding what it will cost.

Before progressing too far, obtain a realistic build budget.

Factors affecting construction cost include:

- House size
- Site complexity
- Foundation requirements
- Specification level
- Retaining walls
- Access constraints
- Services
- Landscaping

Understanding these costs early helps avoid expensive redesigns later.

8. Builder Quotes

Many landowners request builder quotes too early.

The most accurate pricing is generally obtained once:

- ✓ Site survey completed
- ✓ Geotechnical investigation completed
- ✓ Preliminary plans prepared
- ✓ Key engineering requirements understood

At this stage, builders can provide pricing with significantly less uncertainty.

Common Pre-Build Mistakes

Choosing a Builder Before Understanding Site Costs

A cheap quote can quickly become expensive if significant site works are discovered later.

Skipping Geotechnical Investigations

Unexpected foundation costs are one of the most common causes of budget blowouts.

Designing Before Obtaining a Survey

Inaccurate site information often leads to redesign costs.

Comparing Builders on Price Alone

Not all quotes include the same scope, allowances, or risk assumptions.

Pre-Build Checklist

Before requesting builder quotes, ideally have:

- ☐ Property Title
- ☐ LIM Report
- ☐ Topographical Survey
- ☐ Geotechnical Report
- ☐ Concept Plans
- ☐ Preliminary Engineering Advice
- ☐ Build Budget
- ☐ Builder Comparison Framework

Final Thoughts

Building a home is one of the largest financial commitments most people will ever make.

The most successful projects are usually those where homeowners invest in understanding their site before committing to a builder.

A topographical survey helps you understand the land.

A geotechnical report helps you understand the ground.

Together, they provide the information your architect, engineer, and builder need to design and price your project accurately.

The more informed you are at the beginning, the fewer surprises you'll encounter throughout the build.

Ready to Plan Your Build?

Download our NZ Build Cost Calculator, and compare trusted builders using the Build Better Compare™ framework so you can assess Price, Scope, Risk and Value—not just the cheapest quote.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/what-reports-do-i-need>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Guide 4

Hidden Cost Checklist

June 2026

Many homeowners underestimate the additional costs beyond the house itself.

Use this checklist to ensure you have allowed for all potential expenses.

Site & Ground Works

- ☐ Earthworks and site preparation
- ☐ Excavation or retaining walls
- ☐ Drainage and stormwater
- ☐ Soil testing and geotechnical reports
- ☐ Erosion and sediment control
- ☐ Piling (for poor ground conditions)

Design & Professional Fees

- ☐ Architectural design
- ☐ Structural engineering
- ☐ Building & resource consent fees
- ☐ Surveying fees
- ☐ Contract works insurance
- ☐ Specialist reports (acoustic, traffic, flood, etc. if required)

Services & Utilities

- ☐ Water connection
- ☐ Wastewater/stormwater connection
- ☐ Power connection
- ☐ Fibre internet installation
- ☐ Council development contributions
- ☐ Temporary power during construction

Structural / Spec Upgrades

- ☐ Window glazing upgrades
- ☐ Insulation upgrades
- ☐ Bracing / engineering upgrades
- ☐ Foundation upgrades (e.g. slab → rib raft)

External Works

- ☐ Driveway
- ☐ Fencing
- ☐ Decking
- ☐ Landscaping
- ☐ Outdoor lighting
- ☐ Retaining walls

Interior Upgrades

- ☐ Appliance upgrades
- ☐ Flooring upgrades
- ☐ Bathroom fixtures
- ☐ Wardrobe fit-outs
- ☐ Window coverings

Nice-to-Have” Costs That Become Must-Haves

- ☐ Heat pumps / HVAC systems
- ☐ Alarm systems / security
- ☐ Garage carpet or storage fit-out
- ☐ Letterbox, clothesline, bins area

Compliance & Handover Costs

- ☐ Code Compliance Certificate (CCC) fees
- ☐ Final inspections and certifications
- ☐ As-built plans / documentation
- ☐ Professional cleaning before move-in

Finance & Holding Costs

- ☐ Interest during construction
- ☐ Rent while building (if applicable)
- ☐ Loan setup / legal costs
- ☐ Valuation fees

Risk Factors

- ☐ Weather delays
- ☐ Material price increases (if not fixed price)
- ☐ Labour availability
- ☐ Design changes during build

Price Cost allowances

Builders often allow Prime Cost (PC) allowances for items that have not yet been selected. These allowances are often based on basic or standard specifications and may not reflect the true cost of higher-quality or upgraded finishes, which can lead to budget overruns.

Ask the builder whether these allowances reflect realistic market prices.

Also check the level of Provisional Sums (PS) in your quote, as these are estimates only and can increase during construction.

Recommended Budget Buffer

Most budget blowouts don't come from the house itself — they come from everything around it. Many builders recommend allowing a 10–15% contingency for unexpected costs during construction. This protects your project if prices change or unforeseen site issues arise.

Compare Quotes from Trusted Builders

Choosing the right builder is one of the most important decisions when building a home.

Build Better helps homeowners:

- ✓ compare quotes from trusted builders
- ✓ understand what is included in each build
- ✓ avoid overpaying for their new home.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/hidden-cost-checklist>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Common Build Mistakes (And How to Avoid Them)

June 2026

Building a new home is one of the biggest financial decisions most homeowners will make — yet many go into the process without fully understanding where things can go wrong.

Most budget blowouts, delays, and stress don't come from one big mistake. They come from a series of small decisions that compound over time.

This guide highlights the most common mistakes homeowners make when building — and how to avoid them.

1. Underestimating the Total Cost

Many homeowners focus on the house price — not the full project cost.

What gets missed:

- Site works and earthworks
- Council fees and consents
- Driveways, landscaping, fencing
- Design and professional fees

These can add 20–30%+ to your total build cost.

How to avoid it:

Start with a realistic full-project budget, not just a build rate per m².

See our [Hidden Cost Checklist](#)

2. Relying on Low Allowances

Builders often include allowances for items not yet selected.

The problem:

- Allowances are often based on basic specifications
- Real selections cost more
- Differences add up quickly across the build

How to avoid it

Check whether allowances reflect realistic market pricing for your expectations.

3. Not Understanding Site Costs

Site conditions can significantly impact your budget.

High-risk factors:

- Sloping sections
- Poor soil conditions
- Limited access

- Retaining walls

These can add tens (or hundreds) of thousands to your build.

How to avoid it

Investigate site conditions early and allow a buffer for uncertainty.

4. Overcomplicating the Design

Complex designs look great — but cost more.

Cost drivers:

- Multiple rooflines
- Large glazing areas
- Split levels
- Custom architectural features

How to avoid it

Keep the design as simple as possible while still meeting your needs.

5. Choosing a Builder Based on Price Alone

The lowest quote doesn't always represent the best value.

Risks:

- Lower quality workmanship
- Delays
- Variations and cost increases later

How to avoid it

Consider experience, communication, and track record — not just price.

6. Underestimating Timeframes

Many builds take longer than expected.

Typical timeline:

- 12–18 months from concept to completion

Delays can come from:

- Consent approvals
- Weather
- Material shortages
- Design changes

How to avoid it

Plan for realistic timeframes and allow flexibility.

7. Making Changes During Construction

Changes during the build are one of the fastest ways to increase cost.

Impacts:

- Rework
- Delays
- Additional labour and materials

How to avoid it

Finalise as many decisions as possible before construction starts.

8. Ignoring Market Conditions

Build costs are not fixed — they change over time.

Factors include:

- Material pricing (steel, timber, fuel)
- Labour availability
- Global events (e.g. oil price increases)

Even small shifts can impact your final cost.

How to avoid it

Allow contingency and be aware that quotes reflect a point in time.

9. Not Comparing Builders Properly

Not all builder quotes are structured the same.

Common issues:

- Missing items
- Different specifications
- Low allowances (PC sums)
- High provisional sums (PS)

The cheapest quote can often become the most expensive.

How to avoid it

Make sure quotes are structured the same so you can compare like-for-like.

The Key Takeaway

Most building mistakes come down to one thing:

Lack of clarity.

When you don't fully understand:

- what's included

- what's missing
- and what things really cost

The best way to reduce risk is to:

- Ask the right questions upfront
- Understand the full cost of your project
- Compare builders properly

Build Better helps homeowners avoid these mistakes

- Our detailed quote form, sent to vetted builders
- See what's included (and what's not)
- Make informed decisions from the start

Get clarity before you build.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/common-build-mistakes>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz



Guide 6

Questions To Ask Builders Before Signing A Contract

June 2026

Signing a contract with a builder is one of the most important decisions when building a new home. Asking the right questions early can help you avoid delays, unexpected costs, and misunderstandings during construction.

Before committing to a builder, use the questions below to ensure you fully understand the price, the process, and what is included in your build.

1. Is the Contract Fixed Price?

One of the first questions to ask is whether the build will be completed under a fixed-price contract.

A fixed-price contract means the total construction cost is agreed before building begins. This provides greater certainty for your budget.

Some builders may instead offer cost-plus contracts, where the homeowner pays the actual construction cost plus a builder margin. While common for architectural homes, cost-plus contracts can carry greater financial risk.

Ask:

- Is this a fixed-price contract?
- What circumstances could cause the price to change?

2. What Exactly Is Included in the Quote?

Builder quotes can vary widely depending on what is included.

Make sure the quote clearly outlines:

- foundations and structural work
- cladding materials
- roofing
- kitchen appliances
- bathroom fixtures
- flooring
- heating systems

Two quotes that look similar on price may include very different specifications.

3. What Items Are Excluded?

It is equally important to understand what is not included in the price.

Common exclusions can include:

- architectural design
- engineering reports
- surveying & legal
- building consent
- site preparation
- utility connections

- landscaping
- fencing
- driveways
- decking
- window coverings
- appliance upgrades

Many homeowners add a 10–15% contingency for unexpected expenses.

Understanding these exclusions helps you avoid unexpected costs later.

4. What Allowances Are Included?

Builders often include Prime Cost (PC) allowances for items that have not yet been selected.

These may include:

- kitchens
- bathroom fittings
- tiles
- lighting

If allowances are set too low, the final cost may increase when you choose your fixtures.

Ask the builder whether these allowances reflect realistic market prices.

5. What Warranty Do You Provide?

Most reputable builders provide a 10-year structural warranty.

Ask:

- What warranty is included?
- What does the warranty cover?
- Is the warranty backed by an independent provider?

Warranties provide important protection if problems occur after construction.

6. How Many Homes Do You Build Each Year?

Understanding the builder's experience can help you assess their capability.

Ask:

- How many homes do you build annually?
- Do you specialise in new builds or renovations?
- Have you built homes similar to mine before?

Builders with relevant experience are more likely to deliver predictable results.

7. Who Will Manage the Project?

Some builders personally manage every project, while others rely on site supervisors.

Ask:

- Who will be my main point of contact?
- How often will I receive progress updates?
- Who manages subcontractors?

Clear communication during construction is critical to a smooth project.

8. How Long Will the Build Take?

Typical new builds take 6–12 months to construct, depending on size and complexity.

Ask the builder:

- What is the estimated build timeline?
- When can construction start?
- What factors might delay the project?

Understanding the timeline helps you plan financing and moving arrangements.

9. Can You Provide Recent Client References?

Speaking with previous clients is one of the best ways to evaluate a builder.

Ask for references from recent projects and consider asking clients:

- Was the build completed on time?
- Did the final cost match the original quote?
- Was communication clear during the project?

Positive feedback from recent clients is a strong indicator of a reliable builder.

10. What Happens if Changes Are Made During Construction?

Changes during construction are known as variations.

Ask the builder:

- How are variations priced?
- How will I approve changes?
- Will I receive written confirmation of cost changes?

Clear variation processes prevent disputes later in the build.

11. What Insurance Do You Carry?

Builders should carry appropriate insurance during construction.

Ask whether the builder has:

- contract works insurance
- public liability insurance

Insurance protects both the builder and homeowner if something unexpected occurs.

12. What Makes Your Company Different?

Finally, ask the builder what makes their company unique.

Some builders specialise in:

- architectural homes
- energy-efficient houses
- turnkey home builds
- custom design projects.

Understanding their strengths helps determine whether they are the right fit for your project.

Why Comparing Multiple Builders Matters

Many homeowners choose the first builder they meet. However, comparing several builders allows you to better understand:

- construction pricing
- quality differences
- builder experience

Comparing quotes also helps ensure you are getting fair value for your build.

Build Better helps homeowners compare quotes from trusted builders before signing a contract.

Through Build Better you can:

- ✓ receive quotes from multiple builders
- ✓ compare pricing and specifications
- ✓ choose the right builder with confidence.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/questions-to-ask-builders>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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How to Compare Builders Before Building

June 2026

Choosing a builder is one of the most important decisions when building a new home. A good builder can make the process smooth and predictable, while the wrong choice can lead to delays, cost overruns, and stress.

Many homeowners receive one quote and assume it represents the true cost of building. In reality, quotes can vary significantly depending on what is included.

This guide explains how to properly compare builders so you can choose the right one for your project.

Step 1 — Get Multiple Builder Quotes

The first rule when choosing a builder is simple:

Always compare multiple quotes.

Different builders can price the same house differently depending on:

- materials and specification

- allowances included in the quote
- project management costs
- construction methods

Getting two to three quotes allows you to see the market range and avoid overpaying.

Step 2 — Compare What Is Actually Included

A common mistake homeowners make is comparing only the total price.

Instead, review what is included in each quote.

Items that can vary between builders include:

- foundation type
- cladding materials
- roofing materials
- kitchen appliances
- flooring
- heating systems
- landscaping

A cheaper quote may exclude important items that appear in another builder's price.

Step 3 — Check the Price Per Square Meter

Comparing the price per square meter helps identify pricing differences between builders.

Typical New Zealand construction ranges:

Entry-level home

Basic design, standard materials, single level, flat site

\$2,800 – \$3,500 per m²

Mid-range home

Quality fixtures, engineered timber, modern kitchen & bathrooms

\$3,500 – \$4,800 per m²

High-spec home

Architect-designed, premium materials, double glazing, underfloor heating

\$4,800 – \$6,800 per m²

Luxury / Architectural home

Bespoke design, high-end finishes, complex builds, steep sites

\$6,800+ per m²

If one quote falls significantly outside these ranges, it's worth asking further to understand if there's a valid reason why, rather than just dismissing the quote.

Step 4 — Check Builder Experience

Not all builders specialise in the same type of home.

When comparing builders, ask:

- How many homes do you build each year?
- Do you specialise in new builds?
- Have you built similar homes before?

Builders who regularly construct homes similar to yours are more likely to deliver predictable results.

Step 5 — Review Past Projects

Looking at past work helps you evaluate a builder's quality.

Ask builders to provide:

- photos of recent projects

- completed home addresses
- examples of similar builds

If possible, visit one of their recently completed homes.

Step 6 — Speak With Previous Clients

References are one of the best ways to evaluate a builder.

Ask previous clients questions such as:

- Did the build finish on time?
- Did the price change during construction?
- Was communication good during the project?

Good builders will usually have happy clients willing to provide references.

Step 7 — Understand the Contract Type

Most builders offer one of the following contracts:

Fixed Price Contract

The construction price is agreed before building starts.

This provides greater budget certainty.

Cost Plus Contract

The homeowner pays the actual construction cost plus a builder margin.

These contracts are often used for architectural homes but carry greater financial risk.

Step 8 — Understand Allowances and Provisional Sums

Some quotes include allowances for items that haven't been fully specified.

Common examples include:

- kitchens

- bathroom fixtures
- flooring
- lighting

If these allowances are too low, the final cost may increase during construction.

Step 9 — Compare Build Timelines

Construction timelines can vary between builders.

Ask each builder:

- how long construction will take
- when they can start
- how many homes they build at the same time

A realistic timeline is often better than an overly optimistic one.

Step 10 — Choose the Right Builder, Not Just the Cheapest

While price matters, the cheapest quote is not always the best option.

Consider:

- builder experience
- quality of previous work
- communication and project management ability
- clarity of the quote

The difference between builders isn't just price — it's what you get for it.

Choosing the right builder from the start can save significant time, cost, and stress throughout the build.

Compare Quotes from Trusted Builders

Compare builders with our free tool, Build Better Compare™.

Build Better Compare™ standardises every quote into a clear, side-by-side format so you can accurately compare pricing, scope, and value.

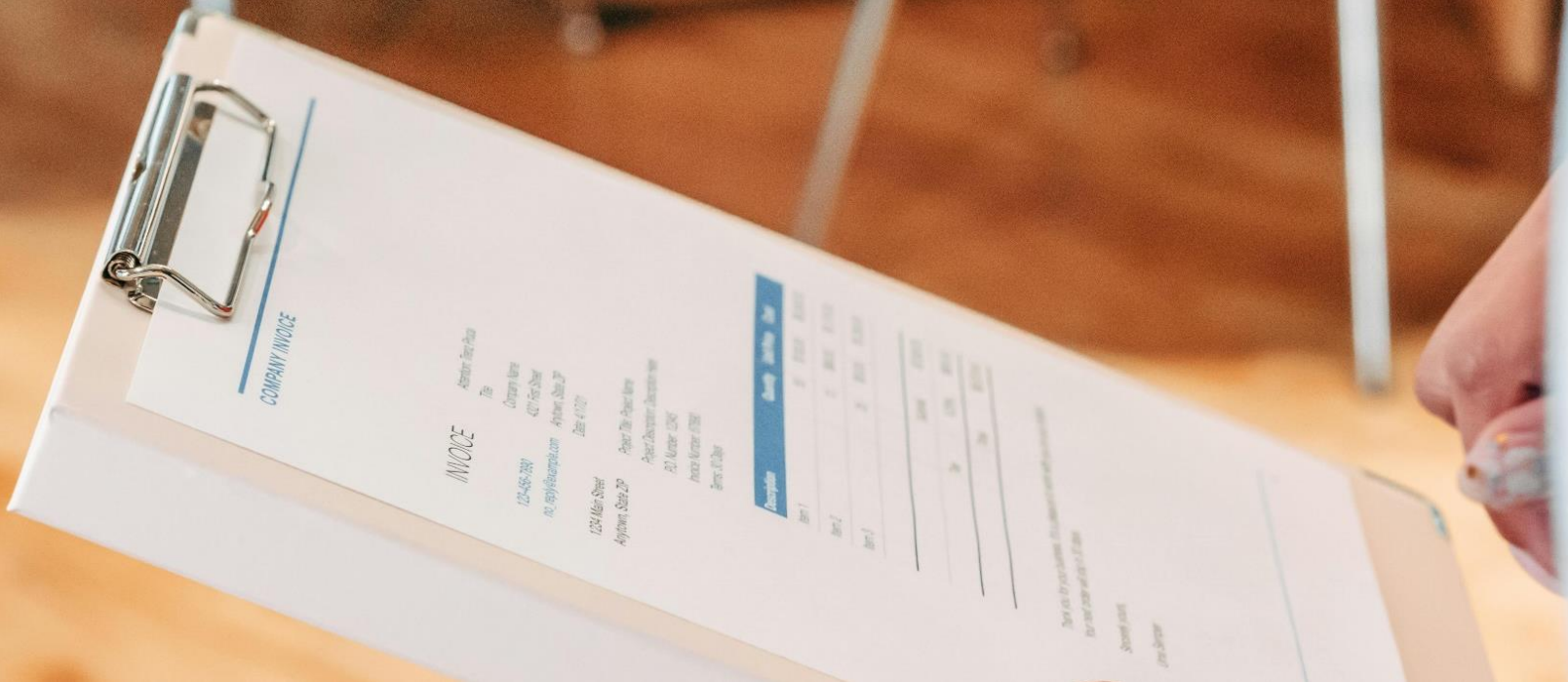
Build Better helps homeowners:

- ✓ receive quotes from trusted builders
- ✓ compare pricing and inclusions
- ✓ choose the right builder with confidence.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/how-to-compare-builders>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Guide 8

Prime Cost (PC) vs Provisional Sums (PS), And How They Can Cause Cost Increases

June 2026

If you're building a new home, you'll almost certainly see the terms Prime Cost (PC) and Provisional Sum (PS) in your builder's quote.

They're often misunderstood — and they're one of the biggest reasons why build costs can change during construction.

Understanding the difference is critical if you want to:

- Compare quotes properly
- Avoid budget blowouts
- Know what you're actually paying for

What is a Prime Cost (PC)?

A Prime Cost (PC) is an allowance for an item that hasn't been selected yet.

It usually covers supply only (not installation).

Common PC items include:

- Kitchen appliances
- Bathroom fixtures (toilets, taps, vanities)
- Tiles and flooring
- Lighting fittings

Example:

Your builder includes:

Kitchen appliances – PC allowance: \$15,000

If you later choose appliances worth:

- \$15,000 → no change
- \$20,000 → you pay the extra \$5,000
- \$12,000 → you save \$3,000

Key Point:

PC sums are placeholders, not fixed costs.

What is a Provisional Sum (PS)?

A Provisional Sum (PS) is an estimate for work where the scope is not fully known.

It usually covers both labour and materials.

Common PS items include:

- Earthworks and excavation

- Drainage
- Foundations (on unknown ground conditions)
- Retaining walls

Example:

Your builder includes:

Earthworks – PS: \$40,000

If the actual cost ends up:

- \$40,000 → no change
- \$65,000 → you pay an extra \$25,000
- \$30,000 → you save \$10,000

Key Point:

PS sums are uncertain costs, not just unselected items.

Why This Matters

PCs and PSs are one of the biggest reasons quotes can vary — and why costs increase during a build.

1. They Can Make Quotes Look Cheaper

A builder may:

- Use low PC allowances
- Include high PS estimates

This can reduce the upfront quote — but increase the final cost later.

2. They Hide the Real Cost of Your Build

Two quotes may look similar — but:

- One has realistic allowances
- One is heavily reliant on PCs and PSs

The second quote carries more risk.

3. They Transfer Risk to You

- Fixed price = builder takes risk
- PCs/PSs = homeowner takes risk

Builder Variations

Even with a fixed-price contract, PC and PS items are where variations still occur.

A variation is any change to the contract price after signing — and they are one of the most common causes of budget increases.

How variations happen

Variations are typically triggered when:

- A PC allowance is exceeded
→ You choose higher-spec finishes than allowed
- A PS estimate is inaccurate
→ Actual work costs more than expected
- The scope changes during the build
→ Design changes, upgrades, or unforeseen issues

Example:

- Kitchen PC allowance: \$20,000
- Final kitchen selection: \$28,000

Variation: +\$8,000

Why this matters:

- Variations are added on top of your contract price
- They often occur mid-build, when decisions are harder to change
- Multiple small variations can quickly add up

Key takeaway:

PCs and PSs don't just affect your estimate — they directly drive variations during construction.

How to Manage PC and PS Items

1. Select as much as possible upfront

The more items you choose before signing your contract, the fewer PC and PS allowances are needed.

This reduces uncertainty and helps keep your budget predictable.

2. Make sure allowances are realistic

Allowances should reflect what you actually intend to build — not just basic or entry-level specifications.

Always ask your builder:

- How were these allowances calculated?
- Do they reflect current market pricing?

3. Understand what could change

For every PS item, ask:

- What assumptions have been made?
- What factors could increase the cost?

This helps you identify risk before construction starts.

4. Minimise Provisional Sums where possible

PS items carry the most uncertainty.

The fewer PS items in your contract, the lower your risk of cost increases.

5. Compare quotes beyond the total price

When reviewing quotes, look at:

- The number of PC items
- The size of allowances
- The number and value of PS items

A lower quote with more allowances may carry higher risk.

Key Insight

The more that is fixed upfront, the more control you have over your final build cost.

Build Better makes it easier to understand and compare:

- Prime Cost allowances
- Provisional Sums
- What's included (and what's not)

So you can see the real cost of each builder — not just the headline number.

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/prime-cost-vs-to-provisional-sum>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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Types of Building Contracts

June 2026

When building a new home, one of the most important decisions you'll make is how your contract is structured.

Most residential builds in New Zealand fall into two categories:

- Fixed Price contracts
- Cost Plus contracts

Understanding the difference is critical — because it determines who carries the risk, how costs are managed, and how predictable your final price will be.

What is a Fixed Price Contract?

A Fixed Price contract means the builder agrees to complete the build for a set price.

The total contract price is agreed upfront — before construction begins.

How it works

- Builder provides a full quote
- Scope and specifications are defined
- Price is locked in (subject to variations)

Advantages

- Price is locked in (subject to variations)
- Cost certainty
- You know your base build cost before starting
- Easier budgeting
- Banks and lenders prefer fixed price contracts
- Lower financial risk
- The builder carries more risk for pricing errors

Things to watch

Fixed price doesn't mean "no changes".

Costs can still increase through:

- Prime Cost (PC) allowances
- Provisional Sums (PS)
- Variations during construction

A contract with many allowances can still behave like a variable-cost build.

What is a Cost Plus Contract?

A Cost Plus contract means you pay the actual cost of the build, plus a builder's margin.

There is no fixed total price at the start.

How it works

- You pay actual labour + materials
- Builder adds a margin (e.g. 10–20%)
- Final cost depends on actual spend

Advantages

- Greater flexibility
- You can make changes during the build more easily
- Transparency (in theory)
- You see actual costs as they occur
- Useful for complex projects
- Often used where scope is uncertain

Risks

- No cost certainty
- Final cost can be significantly higher than expected
- Budget control is harder
- You carry most of the financial risk
- Requires trust and discipline
- You must closely monitor costs throughout the build

Where Most Homeowners Get Caught Out

The biggest misunderstanding is this:

A “fixed price” contract is only as fixed as its allowances.

If your quote includes:

- Low PC allowances
- High provisional sums

Your “fixed price” may still increase significantly during construction.

How PC and PS Fit Into This

- Fixed Price contracts often include PC and PS items
- These introduce uncertainty into an otherwise fixed contract

The more allowances in your contract:

- The less “fixed” your price actually is

Variations Apply to Both

Regardless of contract type, variations can still occur.

Common triggers:

- Upgrading finishes
- Changing design
- Site conditions differing from expectations

In both contract types, variations = additional cost.

Which Contract is Right for You?

Fixed Price is best if:

- You want cost certainty
- Your design is well defined
- You prefer a structured process
- You are working within a strict budget

Cost Plus is best if:

- Your design is still evolving
- The project is complex or high-end
- You are comfortable managing risk
- You want flexibility over cost certainty

Key Takeaway

It's not just the contract type that matters — it's how well the quote is defined.

A well-structured fixed price contract with clear inclusions:

How to Protect Yourself

Before signing any contract:

- Understand all PC and PS items
- Clarify what is included vs excluded
- Ask how allowances were calculated
- Minimise unknowns where possible

Why Comparing Quotes Properly Matters

Two builders may both offer “fixed price” contracts — but:

- One may include realistic allowances
- One may rely heavily on estimates

The second carries far more risk.

Compare Contracts with Confidence

Build Better helps you:

- Understand what's fixed and what isn't
- Compare allowances and risk
- Choose the right builder — not just the lowest price

Guide link: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/types-of-build-contracts>

Build Better website: www.buildbetter.co.nz

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READY TO COMPARE QUOTES?

Ask the right questions from the start with our custom quote form for new builds. Combined with our quote comparison framework, Build Better Compare™, this gives you clear, side-by-side quotes so you can choose with confidence. Don't just compare prices. Accurately compare builders across four key areas:

- **Price:** Understanding the true cost of the project.
- **Scope:** Comparing exactly what is included and excluded.
- **Risk:** Identifying allowances, assumptions, and potential cost increases.
- **Value:** Assessing builder experience, quality, communication, and overall suitability for your project.

How It Works

- Upload your plans and project information
- Receive structured, comparable builder quotes
- Understand what is included, excluded and allowed for
- Choose a builder with confidence



Scan to compare builder's quotes



Scan to use the Build Cost Calculator

Compare Quotes: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/get-quotes>

Build Cost Calculator: <https://www.buildbetter.co.nz/build-cost-calculator>

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Last Updated: June 2026

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