

What is a complete oak framed house turnkey service?

Interviewer: So Andy, can you tell us what the term turnkey actually means?

Andy: The term turnkey is used quite extensively in a number of industries. In the construction industry it's generally used to describe the building phase of a project where a builder will do everything from moving onto the site and 'breaking ground' right the way through to you being able to turn the key and move in. What the builder won't do is everything that comes before the construction. That work is done by an architectural team.

Interviewer: So turnkey doesn't include the design of the house?

Andy: That's right. The architectural team will do the design, get planning permission, produce working drawings, get the house approved by the building control department of your local authority and so on.

Interviewer: So they'll look after all of that for me?

Andy: Well, sort of. The way architectural practices generally work is as well as doing the design they'll also need to coordinate a raft of other professionals, from the project engineer, surveyors for ground conditions, habitat, topographical and arboricultural surveys, a SAP consultant and so on – you name it there's often quite a long list. But most architectural practices will ask you to appoint these specialists directly. They'll normally direct you towards the relevant specialists and they'll coordinate their work but the contracts with those specialists will be between you and them and you will pay their bills as and when they arise. But it does make it difficult for you to know exactly how much you will be paying in advance.

Interviewer: OK, so would cover everything I need to have a house designed and built?

Andy: Not yet. One of the things that is rarely given enough emphasis during the development of the design is cost. I know it sounds a bit crazy but in our experience very few architectural practices manage the design process in a way that guarantees the finalised scheme will be within the client's budget. I've seen a case where an architect got planning permission for a house which would have cost the client 3 times their budget to build. Not just 10, 15 or 20% over but 3 times their budget. And getting to that point had probably cost the client in excess of £10k. They had to tear it up and start again.

Interviewer: So you're saying the term turnkey as used by the construction industry doesn't include perhaps 50% of what actually needs to be done?

Andy: That's right, as I say it's usually reserved for the construction phase of the project.

Interviewer: So when you use the term turnkey what does it mean?

Andy: It's one of our fundamental principles that when we refer to turnkey we include everything. The client shouldn't get any unpleasant surprises along the way. We do all the architectural work in house. The fixed price we give includes all the necessary third parties we will need to complete every aspect of the house design, and we appoint the third parties so the client has one contract with us, one point of contact. When it comes to project cost control, rather than going externally to a quantity surveyor, one of our directors is assigned to the project to ensure it stays within the client's budget. Ultimately we reach a point where we have planning permission, building regulations, construction drawings, a detailed finishes specification, a fixed price and a programme of work for the construction and that's all taken care of by us. During the construction we act as the contract administrator and this role continues for 12 months after the client has moved into the house, it's known as the defects liability period. At the end of that period the client releases the final payment. So when we refer to 'turnkey' it's a complete end to end service from the clients first embryonic idea through to a house they can move into and indeed beyond.

Interviewer: So to summarise, turnkey design and build should include all the design, all the third party specialists, cost planning, cost control and value engineering, construction and looking after the client to the end of the defects liability period.

Andy: In our view, yes!