

SELF BUILD MENTOR

# The 10 Biggest Mistakes

(And How to Avoid Them)

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The costly errors that catch out even experienced self-builders — and how to get your project right from day one.

*By Allan Corfield*

SELF BUILD MENTOR



# Introduction

Building your own home can be one of the most rewarding things you'll ever do.

Done well, self-build gives you a better home, designed around your lifestyle, often at a lower overall cost than buying from a developer. It can be exciting, empowering and genuinely life-changing.

But there's one uncomfortable truth that rarely gets talked about:

**Most self-build mistakes happen long before construction starts.**

In over 20 years of helping homeowners create bespoke homes, I've seen the same issues arise time and time again. The projects that succeed are rarely the ones with the biggest budgets – they're the ones that make informed decisions early.

This guide highlights the **10 biggest mistakes self-builders make**, why they happen, and how you can avoid them.

**The goal is simple:**

**Save money. Reduce stress. Build smarter..**

**[www.selfbuildmentor.co.uk](http://www.selfbuildmentor.co.uk)**

# Starting Without a Proper Brief



## The Mistake

*Many self-builders jump straight into floorplans and Pinterest inspiration before properly defining what they actually need.*

## The result?

A house that looks impressive but doesn't truly suit the way they live – or worse, becomes too expensive to build.

## Why It Happens

People understandably get excited by design. But design without clarity often creates confusion.

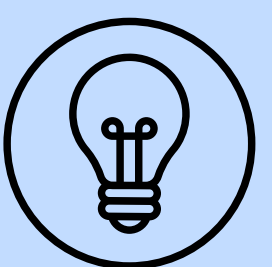
That approach almost always leads to compromise.

## What You Should Do Instead

Start with a self-build brief before any design work begins.

## Define the following elements:

- Lifestyle
- Must-Haves
- Nice-to-Haves
- Budget Reality
- What is affordable – not aspirational?



## Mentor Tip

*The best homes aren't necessarily the biggest – they're the most considered.*

# Underestimating the Total Budget



## The Mistake

*Focusing purely on build cost and forgetting everything else.*

## Hidden Costs Self-Builders Forget:

- VAT timing
- Professional fees
- Structural engineering
- Planning costs
- Building warrant / building control
- Ground investigations
- Utility connections
- Landscaping
- Kitchens
- Bathrooms
- Contingency

Many self-builders underestimate their true project cost by 15–30%. As a rule, you should keep 10–15% contingency untouched. There are always unexpected costs during a self build.



## Mentor Tip

*Cashflow causes more self-build stress than cost itself.*

# Buying the Wrong Plot



## The Mistake

*Falling in love with land before understanding what can actually be built. A “cheap” plot can quickly become an expensive problem.*

## Common Plot Issues

- Difficult planning constraints
- Flood risk
- Poor access
- Expensive foundations
- Trees and root protection
- Drainage problems
- Services too far away
- Bad orientation for solar gain

## The Real Risk

Many buyers assume, “If I can fit a house there, it’ll be fine.” However, planning doesn’t work like that. Instead you should always carry out proper plot due diligence before purchase. This involves reviewing: planning policy, ground conditions, site access, utility availability and build costs.



## Mentor Tip

*The cheapest plot often becomes the most expensive project.*

# Trying to Save Money on Design and Professional Advice



## The Mistake

*Treating professional advice as an unnecessary expense.*

Many self-builders try to minimise fees early – only to pay for mistakes later.

## The Hidden Cost of Cheap Advice can lead to:

Expensive redesigns

Overspend

Planning refusal

Buildability problems

Contractor disputes

Energy inefficiency

Bad, uninformed decisions cost money. Ensure that you build a good team around you as soon as possible.

## This often includes:

- Architect or architectural designer
- Structural engineer
- Energy consultant
- Quantity surveyor (where appropriate)



## Mentor Tip

*Professional advice should save you more than it.*

# Designing Beyond your Budget



## The Mistake

*Creating a dream home that you can't afford.*

This is one of the most common mistakes made by self builders.

## Why this Happens:

People are often influenced by what they see online and create unrealistic expectations.

## People often combine:

- Complex forms
- Huge glazing packages
- double-height spaces
- Premium finishes
- Bespoke detailing

..... whilst still expecting average build costs.

## What you should do instead:

- Create a design that works to your budget right from the very start.
- Simple designs are often more affordable.



## Mentor Tip

*Good design is about spending wisely.*

# Not having a Strategy for your Energy



## The Mistake

*Treating sustainable energy as an add-on.*

Many self builders often leave the heating system design until the end of the design. That's too late!

## Why this Matters:

your energy efficiency levels are often influenced by:

- Building form
- Glazing strategy
- Fabric performance
- Airtightness
- Ventilation
- Solar gain

You cannot bolt energy efficiency onto poor design.

## What you should do instead:

- Think 'fabric-first' approach
- Think about how your home will be heated
- What type of heating do you want?
- Are you designing to passive house principles?



## Mentor Tip

*The cheapest energy is the energy you never need to use.*

# Choosing the Wrong Procurement Route



## The Mistake

*Choosing a build route without understanding what suits your skills and time.*

## Main Procurement Routes

### Main Contractor

- Simpler and lower involvement, but typically higher cost.

### Package Company / Timber Kit

- Can improve speed and predictability.

### Project Managed

- Potential savings but requires time and confidence.

### Self-Managed Trade Build

- Maximum involvement and risk.

## What You Should Do Instead

### Be brutally honest about:

- Your available time
- Construction knowledge
- Stress tolerance
- Budget flexibility



## Mentor Tip

*The cheapest route on paper is not always the cheapest in reality.*

# Poor Contractor Selection



## The Mistake

*Choose a contractor based purely on price.*

Low quotes often become expensive projects.

## Red Flags

- No programme
- Poor references
- No contract
- Unrealistically cheap
- Weak communication
- Large upfront payments

## What You Should Do Instead

Choose based on:

**Experience + Trust + Process + Price**  
**Not price alone.**

### Always:

- Check references
- Visit previous projects
- Use contracts
- Compare like-for-like quotes



## Mentor Tip

*The cheapest route on paper is not always the cheapest in reality.*

# Making Endless Changes



## The Mistake

*Changing your mind on the design after work starts.*

Even small changes can have major consequences.

## Changes often trigger:

- Labour rework
- Delays
- Material wastage
- Structural changes
- Service redesign

## The Domino Effect

A “simple” kitchen move may affect:

- Drainage
- Steelwork
- Electrics
- Lighting
- Ventilation
- Programme

Making decisions early helps to freeze key design features before construction begins.



## Mentor Tip

*Changes are expensive because they interrupt the momentum.*

# Unrealistic Timescales



## The Mistake

*Assuming self-build will happen faster than reality.*

## Typical Delays

- Planning
- Utility providers
- Weather
- Labour shortages
- Material lead times
- Design changes

## Reality Check

Many self-builders underestimate programme length by 6–12 months.

## What You Should Do Instead

Build realistic float into the programme.

Expect delays.

Plan finances accordingly.



## Mentor Tip

*A realistic programme reduces stress dramatically.*

# Strategy Session

## What is a Self Build Strategy Session?

### What we can cover:

- Plot review
- Project Feasability
- Design Advice
- Procurement Strategy
- Budget
- Planning Concerns
- Team Selection
- Passive house/Low Energy Strategy
- Builder Concerns

### What you get:

- 90 min zoom call with Allan
- Video recording and transcript
- PDF Session Summary

A 90-minute one-to-one consultation designed to give you clarity, direction and practical next steps for your project.

This is not sales-led advice.

**It is: Independent – Honest – Practical – Tailored to you**

**£250**

Book your session [here](#)

# Mentoring Membership

## Bronze Mentoring Package

**£295** per month (3 month min)

Ideal for early stage self builders who want clarity before making major decisions.

This package is designed to help you build strong foundations before costs and complexity start stacking up.

**£295** paid each month (3 month min)

Or **£810 for 3 months** paid in advance saving £75

### What you get:

- **45 min** zoom call with Allan where you can ask anything
- Video recording and transcript
- PDF Session Summary
- Emailed support (limited to 60 mins pm)
- Review of **1** key document per month
- Guidance on your next steps



### Best for:

Plot finding, early feasibility, design bried development, budget planning, understanding the self build process, avoiding common mistakes, assembling your design team.

Find out more [here](#)

# Mentoring Membership

## Silver Mentoring Package

**£595** per month (6 month min)

This is the core mentoring package and where most self builders get the biggest value.

Ideal for live projects where decisions are happening fast and expensive mistakes become very real, very quickly.

You'll have ongoing access to experienced independent advice throughout key stages of your build.

**£595** paid each month (6 month min)

Or **£3,210 for 6 months** paid in advance saving £360

### What you get:

- Two **60 mins** zoom calls with Allan where you can ask anything.
- Video recording and transcript
- PDF Session Summary
- Emailed support (limited to 120 mins pm)
- Review of **2** key document per month
- Guidance on your next steps



### Best for:

Active self build projects, design reviews, builder quote challenge, procurement advice, planning guidance, contractor sanity checks, tender comparison, low energy/passive house guidance, strategic project support.

Find out more [here](#)