

## The Different Survey Levels in More Detail

### The Inspection

The following should help to distinguish between the different levels.

#### Level 1

This service is designed for clients seeking an objective report on the condition of the property at an economic price. As a result, it is less comprehensive than survey level one and survey level two.

The focus is on making an objective assessment of the general condition of the main elements of a property. The inspection is not exhaustive and no tests are undertaken.

There is, therefore, a risk that certain defects may not be found that would otherwise have been uncovered if a more substantial inspection had been undertaken. The client must accept this risk. Consequently, this service best suits conventional houses, bungalows and flats in a better condition. A survey level one inspection of an unusual property or one in a poor condition is likely to result in an unhelpful level of recommendations for further inspections that many clients would find disappointing.

However, where there is a "trail of suspicion", the surveyor will take reasonable steps to follow the "trail". These "reasonable steps" may include extending the extent of the inspection and/or recommending further investigation.

#### Level 2

This level of service is for clients who are seeking a professional opinion at an economic price. It is therefore, necessarily less comprehensive than a survey level three service. The focus is on assessing the general condition of the main elements of a property. The inspection is not exhaustive, and no tests are undertaken. Concealed areas normally opened or used by the occupiers are inspected.

If it is safe to do so (typical examples include roof spaces and cellar areas). There is therefore, a risk that certain defects may not be found that would have been uncovered if a more substantial inspection had been undertaken. The surveyor will highlight this risk to the client at the outset and the client must accept this risk before the surveyor starts work.

However, where there is a "trail of suspicion" the surveyor will take reasonable steps to follow the "trail". These "reasonable steps" may include increasing the extent of the inspection and/or recommending further investigation.

#### Level 3

This level of service is for clients who are seeking a professional opinion based on a detailed assessment of the property. Therefore, the inspection is more extensive than for levels one and two and the surveyor will spend a considerably longer time at the property.

Where there is a "trail of suspicion", the surveyor will take reasonable steps to follow this. As level three services include a more extensive inspection, "reasonable steps" will go further than those for levels one and two.

### Specific Inspection Details

The extent of an inspection will depend on a range of circumstances (including health and safety considerations).

***Important - the following critical aspects may help distinguish the different levels of inspection from one another, but this is not an exhaustive inspection checklist.***

#### Windows

*In all cases, the surveyor only opens windows where:*

- *permission has been given; and*
- *any keys/locks are available and are easy to operate without force or damage.*

*The presence of owner/occupier possessions and heavy curtains will often restrict level one and two inspections. For level three, a small number of possessions/curtains will be repositioned. Where inspections are restricted, the surveyor must inform the client.*

Level 1

Attempt to open only a limited sample of the windows – this might typically include one on each elevation.

Level 2

Attempt to open a representative sample of the windows. For example, this might include one on each elevation and one of each different type of window where there is a variety.

Level 3

Attempt to open the majority of windows where possible.

### **Roof Space**

*Important note: Energy efficiency initiatives have resulted in thick layers of thermal insulation in many roof spaces. Usually it is not safe to move across this material as it conceals joist positions, water and drainage pipes, wiring and other fittings. This may restrict the extent of the inspection and the scope of the report.*

The surveyor will carry out an inspection of roof space that is not more than three metres above floor level using a ladder if it is safe and reasonable to do so. Level-specific details include the following:-

Level 1

The surveyor will not remove secured access panels and/or lift insulation material, stored goods or other contents. The surveyor will visually inspect the parts of the roof structure and other features, which can be seen from the access hatch.

Level 2

In addition to that described for level one, the surveyor will enter the roof space and visually inspect the roof structure with particular attention paid to those parts vulnerable to deterioration and damage. In these places, a moisture meter will be used where it is considered appropriate.

Level 3

The surveyor will enter the roof space and visually inspect the roof structure with particular attention paid to those parts vulnerable to deterioration and damage. In these places, a moisture meter, pocket probe and magnifying glass will be used where it is considered appropriate.

Although thermal insulation is not moved, small corners may be lifted so its thickness, type and the nature of the underlying ceiling can be identified (if the surveyor considers it safe to do so).

Where permission has been granted and it is safe, a small number of lightweight possessions may be repositioned so a more thorough inspection can take place.

### **Floors**

Level 1

The surveyor will closely inspect the surfaces of exposed floors but will **not** lift carpets, floor coverings or floorboards or move furniture. The surveyor will **not** lift hatches or carry out an “inverted head and shoulders” inspection. The surveyor will assess floors for excessive deflection by a “heel drop” test, and using an appropriately sized spirit level.

Level 2

In addition to that described for level one, where floors have unfixed access hatches/panels or floorboards, the surveyor will inspect sub-floor areas by an inverted “head and shoulder” inspection where appropriate. Surveyors will not enter the sub-floor area.

### Level 3

The surveyor will closely inspect the surfaces of exposed floors and will lift the corners of any loose and unfitted carpets or other floor coverings where practicable. The surveyor will assess all floors for excessive deflection by a “heel drop” test, and using an appropriately sized spirit level. For a more complete assessment, it may be helpful to measure the magnitude of any identified deflection/slope.

Where the sub-floor is inspected, an inverted “head and shoulder” inspection will be carried out at the access point. If it is safe to do so, the surveyor will enter the under-floor area to carry out a more thorough inspection. In this respect, “safe to do so” can be defined as:

- an adequately sized access panel;
- a minimum of one metre between the floor void surface and the underside of the joists; and
- a lack of obvious hazards in the floor void (for example, sharp and uneven oversite, hazardous and obstructive electric cables or gas pipes, and so on).

## **Furniture and Possessions**

### Level 1

The surveyor will **not** move furniture or possessions.

### Level 2

The surveyor will **not** move furniture or possessions.

### Level 3

The surveyor **will** move lightweight, easily moveable, non-fitted items where practicable and safe, and where the owner/occupier gives permission.

## **Services**

The surveyor does not perform or comment on design calculations, or test the service installations or appliances in any way. At all levels, inspection chamber covers in common areas of flats are not lifted. Additionally:-

### Level 1

The surveyor will **not** lift inspection chamber covers.

### Level 2

The surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers (where it is safe to do so) and visually inspect the chamber(s).

### Level 3

The surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers (where it is safe to do so) and observe the normal operation of the services in everyday use. This will be restricted where properties are empty, drained down and services disconnected. Assuming all services are connected and fully and safety functioning, “normal operation” usually includes:

- operating lights and extract fans where appropriate
- where appropriate, asking the owner/occupier to switch on the heating appliances/system
- when the surveyor considers it appropriate to the assessment of the system, turning on water taps, filling and emptying sinks, baths, bidets and basins, and flushing toilets to observe the performance of visible pipework; and
- lifting accessible inspection chamber covers to drains and septic tanks and so on (where it is safe to do so), identifying the nature of the connections and observing water flow where a water supply is available.

*In all cases, the surveyor will advise the client that further tests and inspections will be required if the owner/occupier does not provide evidence of appropriate installation and/or maintenance, or the client requires assurance as to their condition, capability and safety.*

## **The Grounds**

### Level 1

Surveyors will carry out a visual inspection of the grounds during a general walk around, and where necessary and appropriate, from adjoining public property. The assessment should include such external features as retaining walls, gardens, drives, paths, terraces, patios, steps, hard-standings, dropped kerbs, gates, trees, boundary walls, fences, non-permanent outbuildings, rights of way and so on.

The inspection should also include the inside and outside of all permanent outbuildings not attached to the main dwelling, where access is possible. This includes garages, summer houses, substantial greenhouses, follies and leisure buildings, but not the leisure facilities inside, for example, swimming pools, saunas, fitness gyms, and so on.

Surveyors will use a ladder to inspect a roof that is not visible from a window or another part of the building that is not more than three metres above ground level if it is safe and reasonable to do so.

*The inspection will be similar to that described under level one, i.e.*

### Level 2

Surveyors will carry out a visual inspection of the grounds during a general walk around, and where necessary and appropriate, from adjoining public property. The assessment should include such external features as retaining walls, gardens, drives, paths, terraces, patios, steps, hard-standings, dropped kerbs, gates, trees, boundary walls, fences, non-permanent outbuildings, rights of way and so on.

The inspection should also include the inside and outside of all permanent outbuildings not attached to the main dwelling, where access is possible. This includes garages, summer houses, substantial greenhouses, follies and leisure buildings, but not the leisure facilities inside, for example, swimming pools, saunas, fitness gyms, and so on.

Surveyors will use a ladder to inspect a roof that is not visible from a window or another part of the building that is not more than three metres above ground level if it is safe and reasonable to do so.

### Level 3

In addition to that described for level one, surveyors should perform a thorough visual inspection of the grounds, and, where necessary and appropriate, from adjoining public property.

Specific defective features and other matters associated with the grounds can be costly to resolve and may affect the client's purchase decision.

Consequently, the surveyor should fully account for these during a level three service and be prepared to "follow the trail" of suspected problems to a greater extent than at levels one and two. Examples include assessing retaining walls in danger of collapsing, deeply sunken paths or driveways, dilapidated boundary walls or fences, as well as the legal and insurance implications.

## **Surveyor's Overall Opinion**

### Level 1

At this level of service, the focus of the report is the succinct and objective description of the condition of the property. It will include little or no advice but have an assessment of the relative importance of the defects/problems. Consequently, this section is likely to be restricted to a concise listing of the different parts of the building, an indication of their relative condition (for example, condition ratings or other prioritisation method) and little else.

### Level 2

**A level two report objectively describes the condition of the different elements, provides an assessment of the relative importance of the defects/problems and gives brief advice about the repairs and any ongoing maintenance issues. Therefore the overall opinion should include that described for level one reports, as well as a concise summary of the likely level of repair required.**

### Level 3

At this level there will be greater focus on:-

# the adequacy of services # a comparison of the condition of the property with others of a similar age and style # conformity with modern requirements where appropriate and applicable # the likely scale of maintenance required; and # where agreed, a clear reference to cost advice contained within the report, and any other special client requirements.