

The Different Survey Levels in More Detail

Helping to Define the Levels of Inspection

The following should help to distinguish between the three different levels of service. The vast majority of our surveys are conducted at level 2.

Level 1

This service is intended for clients seeking a professional and objective report on the condition of the property at an economic price. As a result it is less comprehensive than survey level 2 and survey level 3. The focus is on assessing the general condition of the main elements of property, but with more limitations than for a higher level survey.

The inspection will be less extensive than for the other higher survey levels. The roof space and any cellars will not be entered, nor visible drain covers lifted. No tests of the services are undertaken. The report describes the condition of the building, its services and grounds and highlights any relevant legal matters. The report gives an assessment of the relative significance of any defects. Where the Surveyor is unable to reach a conclusion with reasonable confidence, a recommendation for further investigation will be made.

It does not include advice on repairs or ongoing maintenance, and is more suited to conventionally built, more modern dwellings likely to be in comparatively better condition. It will **not** be suitable for older or complex properties, or those in neglected condition.

Level 2

This level of service is intended for clients who are seeking a professional opinion and report at an economic price. It is more extensive than level 1 but less comprehensive than a level 3 service. The focus is on assessing the general condition of the main elements of a property, but does extend to include roof spaces, cellars and lifting drain covers where possible.

This level of service includes a more extensive inspection of the building, services and grounds but still without service tests. Concealed areas normally opened or used by occupiers are inspected if it is safe to do so e.g. roof spaces and cellars. The report describes the condition of the different elements together with an assessment of the relative significance of any defects. At this level the report will include advice about repairs and any ongoing maintenance issues. Where the Surveyor is unable to reach a conclusion with reasonable confidence, a recommendation for further investigations will be made.

This level of service will suit a broader range of conventionally built properties. It is unlikely to suit complex buildings e.g. extensively extended or altered, unique or older historic properties or those in neglected condition.

Level 3

This level of service is intended for clients who are seeking a professional opinion based on a detailed assessment of the property.

It consists of a detailed inspection of the building, its services and grounds and is more extensive than a level 2 survey. Concealed areas normally opened or used by occupiers are inspected if it is safe to do so e.g. roof spaces and cellars. Although the services are not tested, they are observed in normal operation i.e. they are switched on or off or operated where the occupier has given consent and it is safe to do so.

Note: Clients may choose or be recommended to opt for specific service testing eg drainage or electrical testing, by arrangement with specialist contractors at extra cost to be agreed and payable to the contractor direct.

The report describes the form of construction and materials used for different parts of the property. It also describes the condition of the main elements and provides an assessment of the relative significance of any defects. Additionally, it will describe the identifiable risk of potential or hidden defects, suggest the most likely cause, outline the envisaged scope of remedial work, make recommendations in respect of priority and timescale (and where specifically agreed give an indication of anticipated costs)

Where the Surveyor feels unable to reach a conclusion with confidence, he/she will refer the matter for further investigation. However, at survey level 3 such referrals are usually an exception rather than rule.

This level of service will suit any residential household property in any condition depending on the competence and experience of the Surveyor, but tends to be more common for older properties, or those of non-traditional construction.

Benchmarking the Levels of Inspection

The following is intended to help distinguish between the different levels of inspection, but this should not be construed as 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.

Level-specific details include the following:-

Level 1

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

Level 2

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

In addition to that described for level one, the Surveyor will enter the roof space and inspect the roof structure with particular attention paid to those parts vulnerable to deterioration and damage.

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.

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 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.

Level 2

The Surveyor will 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. 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 shoulders” inspection where appropriate. Surveyors will not enter the sub-floor area.

Level 3

The Surveyor will 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. For a more complete assessment, the magnitude of any identified deflection/slope should be measured.

Where the sub-floor is inspected, an inverted “head and shoulders” 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.

Drainage Services (Inspection chambers and underground drainage)

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

In all cases, the Surveyor will recommend to the client that further specialist tests and inspections be commissioned if the occupier does not provide evidence of appropriate installation and/or maintenance, or if the client requires assurance as to their condition, capability and safety.

Level 1

The Surveyor will not lift inspection chamber covers to drains or septic tanks.

Level 2

The Surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers to drains or septic tanks where safe to do so and without risk of damage, and inspect the chamber.

Level 3

The Surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers to drains and septic tanks where safe to do so and without risk of damage and observe the normal operation of the drains in ‘everyday use’. This will be restricted where properties are unoccupied or where plumbing systems are drained down.

Where the Surveyor considers it appropriate and where practical to the assessment of the system, ‘everyday use’ will usually include turning on water taps to sanitary ware and flushing toilets so the performance of drainage pipework can be observed and the nature of the below ground connections established.

Other Services

‘Other Services’ means all piped and cabled services visible within the property including the electrics and other cabled systems, hot and cold water systems, heating, above ground drainage, ventilation services, renewable energy systems etc.

The Surveyor does not perform or comment on design calculations or test the service installations or appliances in any way.

In all cases, the Surveyor will recommend to the client that further specialist tests and inspections be commissioned if the occupier does not provide evidence of appropriate installation and/or maintenance, or if the client requires assurance as to their condition, capability and safety.

Level 1

The Surveyor will inspect a specified sample of the parts of the different service systems that can be seen.

Level 2

The Surveyor will inspect all parts of the different service systems that can be seen within the normal course of the inspection.

Level 3

In addition to those actions described under “Inspection Chambers and Underground Drainage” the Surveyor will observe the normal operation of the services in ‘everyday use’, where safe to do so and without risk of damage, including operating a specified sample of lights and extractor fans and asking the occupier to operate the heating.

The Grounds

Level 1

The Surveyor will carry out a cursory inspection of the grounds during a general walk around and where necessary from adjacent public property. The assessment should include external features relevant to the survey instruction and requests from the client eg boundary walls and fences, paths, driveways and patios. The inspection should also include the inside and outside of all permanent outbuildings not attached to the main dwelling where access is possible, as relevant to the survey instruction and any specific client requests. The Surveyor will use appropriate methods and equipment to inspect a roof that is not visible from a window or another part of the building, and that is not more than three metres above ground level if it is safe and reasonable to do so.

Level 2

The Surveyor will carry out a cursory inspection of the grounds during a general walk around and where necessary from adjacent public property. The assessment should include external features relevant to the survey instruction and requests from the client eg boundary walls and fences, paths, driveways and patios. The inspection should also include the inside and outside of all permanent outbuildings not attached to the main dwelling where access is possible, as relevant to the survey instruction and any specific client requests.

The Surveyor will use appropriate methods and equipment to inspect a roof that is not visible from a window or another part of the building, and 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 for level 1 above, but the Surveyor will conduct a more thorough inspection of the grounds, noting any limitations.

Level 3

In addition to level 2 above, the Surveyor will conduct a comprehensive inspection of the grounds, noting any limitations. Specific defective features and other matters associated with the grounds can be costly to resolve and may affect the client’s decision to proceed.

Consequently the Surveyor should fully account for these during a level 3 service and ‘follow the trail’ of suspected problems to a greater extent than at levels 1 and 2. Examples might include assessing retaining walls in danger of collapsing, deeply sunken paths or driveways and dilapidated boundary walls or fences, as well as the legal and insurance implications.

Surveyor’s Overall Opinion

For all levels of survey, the summary will provide a clear and simple overview that should be helpful to the client. Where condition ratings are used, this section will help put such assessments into context and give a balanced overall view of the property. The overall opinion will be as concise as possible, be property specific and not repetitive. It will express the Surveyor’s view of the main positive and negative features of the property and highlight areas of concern.