

Building Control Overview

Building Control

Douglas Borough Council has had the responsibility for controlling new building work since 1887. The authority provides a service to the public, the construction industry, elected members and the business community to ensure that people live, work and enjoy their leisure time in and around buildings which are safe, convenient for use by those with a disability, and thermally efficient.

The Building Control section hopes that the following information will provide the general public, architects, builders, advocates and other services users with an increased awareness of the services available. This will in turn make a valuable contribution towards achieving the Building Control section's objective of always providing accessible and effective services for the benefit of the whole community.

The main aim of the Building Control section is to protect the public through the use of the provisions of many pieces of national legislation, including the Building Control Act, the Building Regulations, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, and the Local Government Acts.

Plan appraisal:

Before any building work is carried out, plans and details have to be submitted to the Building Authority for consideration under the Building Regulations. Having carefully checked the submitted details, the Building Control officers approve or reject the application. Approval has to be given by the authority before building work starts.

The reason for examining the plans is to make sure the building work when completed provides satisfactory health and safety standards. This is achieved through compliance with the Building Regulations and observing supporting guidance contained in approved documents or other standards.

In certain cases the proposed work either involves buildings close to, or over public sewers. The section tries to identify such cases in the early stages of consideration of the application and, after consultation with the department's drainage section, gives information and guidance to the developer on the ways of providing protection to the public sewer so as to avoid damage from the proposed building.

Buildings or parts of buildings that project over the public highway, for example canopies or the building itself, or under the highway, for example cellars or basements, require the consent of the Department of Infrastructure.

When a major project is proposed the section encourages the developer to take part in pre-submission meetings with the relevant Building Control officer. These meetings may include representatives from the Isle of Man Fire and Rescue Service. During these meetings matters such as the provision of fire resistance, means of escape in case of fire, and access and facilities for persons with disabilities are discussed. Building Control staff are always available to offer advice and guidance on the building regulations, approved documents and other legislation and standards.

Inspection of building works:

The professional expertise of the Building Control staff in the application of the building regulations is unequalled. Building Control officers are experienced building surveyors with a long history of professional working relationships with builders, developers and the construction industry.

Over the many years that the section has been responsible for building control extensive local records have been gathered covering geology, site use, drainage and other vitally important information.

In addition to local conditions, advice is given on such matters as ground conditions, foundation design, drainage works, structural integrity, suitable materials and accepted building practice.

Building Control officers inspect building works at key stages in construction, having been requested to do so by the builder or applicant. Typical inspection stages include excavations for foundations, damp proof courses, drainage, and the completed building. Officers also carry out additional interim inspections, and witness the testing of below ground drainage and flues to heat-producing appliances.

The section works closely with government bodies responsible for planning, environmental health, housing and highways.

Building Control officers provide a totally impartial service committed to the achievement of high quality workmanship in buildings. The service is also publicly accountable and this is the industry's safeguard against a reduction in standards.

Making an application:

Persons intending to carry out building works should in the first instance contact the Building Control section to establish if a building regulations application requires to be submitted.

The regulations consider the following to be building works:

- The erection or extension of a building;
- The provision or extension of a controlled service or fitting in or in connection with a building;
- The material alteration of a building, or a controlled service or fitting;
- Work relating to a material change of use;
- The insertion of insulating material into the cavity wall of a building;
- Work involving the underpinning of a building.

Having established an application is required, the submission should contain the following:

- A completed application form;
- Two copies of the detailed drawings of the proposed building work. The plans should be drawn to a scale of not less than 1:100;
- Three copies of detailed drawings are required when work is to be carried out on premises which are to be put to a designated use under the Fire Precautions Act 1975: e.g. offices, shops, factories, boarding houses and hotels;
- Two copies of a site or location plan drawn to a scale of not less than 1:1250 that shows the proposals and the site boundaries;
- The relevant fee. (Work to provide access and facilities for the greater health, safety, welfare and convenience of persons with physical or sensory disabilities is the only work exempt from the Building (Fees) Regulations 2004).

Dangerous buildings and structural danger:

Dangerous buildings are the legal responsibility of the building's owners but the local authority has powers under the Building Control Act to take action in certain circumstances.

The Building Control Act allows the local authority to seek an Order from the High Bailiff requiring the owner to carry out work to make the structure safe. If it is necessary to take immediate action to make the building safe, the authority has emergency powers to carry out works in order to safeguard the public.

Following notification that a potential danger to the public exists as a result of a dangerous building or structure, a Building Control officer will carry out an initial inspection. Following this initial inspection a further more detailed inspection may need to be carried out by the authority's structural consultant.

Immediate measures may require to be taken to safeguard public safety such as closing the highway or restricting access to the premises. Under such circumstances close liaison is required with other bodies such as the police and fire services, the highway authority, the health and safety executive, and service utilities.

Unightly and dilapidated properties:

Unightly or dilapidated property is the responsibility of the owner of the building or land. However, where the condition of the property is considered seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the local authority can take action under the Building Control Act or the Local Government (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act.

A formal notice can be served on the property owner by the authority using the powers available under the acts. The notice details the work required to deal with the problem, and sets a time period that is considered sufficient to carry out the work.

The property owner has a right of appeal, however, subject to any appeal, if the work specified on the notice is not carried out in the time period given, the owner may be liable to pay a fine for failing to comply with the order. In addition, the local authority may carry out the work itself and recover any costs from the owner.

Contact:

Building Control, Douglas Town Hall, Ridgeway Street, Douglas. IM99 1AD.
Telephone 696375.