



# The contribution and value of LABC's plan assessments

**Lychgate Projects Ltd**

Reading, Berks  
0118 9887343  
[www.lychgate.co.uk](http://www.lychgate.co.uk)



**Constructive Research for Building Businesses**

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>NOTABLE FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>QUANTIFICATION OF PLAN ASSESSMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Number of plan assessments and interventions</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Interventions by Part of the Building Regulations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Extent of risk of non-compliance issues identified at plan assessment stage</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Project type</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Additional advice given by plan assessors</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Some case study examples</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>PLAN ASSESSMENTS BY LABC WARRANTY NEW HOME SURVEYORS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Interventions by Part of the Building Regulations</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Extent of risk of non-compliance issues identified at plan assessment stage</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>THE BENEFITS OF PLAN ASSESSMENTS TO LABC'S BUILDING CONTROL CUSTOMERS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Usefulness of plan assessments</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Value to the project clients</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>The benefits of plan assessments</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Value added benefits experienced beyond compliance</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Plan assessment timescales</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>End of interview comments made by customers</b> .....	<b>24</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 1 – PARTICIPATING COUNCILS</b> .....	<b>25</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 2: RISK LEVELS USED AS EXAMPLES WHEN COMPLETING ONLINE FORM</b> .....	<b>26</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 3: CUSTOMER BENEFITS BY COMPANY TYPE AND PROFESSION</b> .....	<b>27</b>

# 1 Introduction

## Background and objectives

This report contains information about the number and type of 'interventions' made by Local Authority Building Control (LABC) at the initial plan assessment stage, and the benefits to customers.

Plan assessment interventions are areas of non-compliance with the Building Regulations identified by the LABC Surveyor, who checks the plans submitted with a 'full plans' application. The Building Regulations require Local Authority Building Control teams to assess plans and give feedback on compliance to the person submitting the plans.

LABC believe the plan assessment is an efficient way to improve compliance and avoid costly mistakes during construction. This research examines this hypothesis.

The project objectives were to understand / identify:

- The total number of interventions at plan assessment stage
- Analysis by type of project and by Part of the Building Regulations
- The risk level of the non-compliance issue, had it not been identified
- Additional value-added advice given
- Extent to which customers feel they benefit from plan assessments and in what way.

## Method

To meet these objectives, the project involved two stages of research.

### Stage 1: online survey to quantify the number of interventions at plan assessment stage

42 Councils (13% of LABC Members) completed an online record for each plan assessment undertaken during a 3 week period (20<sup>th</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> April 2017). A total of 774 forms were completed, one for each plan assessment, with 3,973 interventions identified.

Results have been weighted to represent the total membership, based on a categorisation according to the type of area which they serve; city, suburban, semi-rural and rural. Results have also been grossed up to represent a year's worth of plan assessments.

Other research conducted by LABC indicates that the annualised figures upon which this research is based could be conservative. This is thought to be due to plan assessments not completed in the period, suspended or, in the case of design and build, proceeding through other processes.

Assumptions made in the weighting calculations:

- 50 working weeks in a year (agreed with LABC on basis of workload throughout the year)
- The sample is representative
- The survey period is typical of the year
- 320 LABC Members (sample = 13%).

An additional sample of plan assessments from LABC Warranty for warranty underwriting is also included and the interventions in the new homes work were recorded using the same enquiry methods.

### Stage 2: phone interviews to understand the benefit of plan assessments to customers

36 member councils provided details of companies who have submitted plans for assessment to their Building Control department. 196 contacts were provided from which Lychgate interviewed a random selection of 51 customers in May and first week of June 2017, aiming for a maximum of two from each Local Authority participating in the study.

<b>Phone survey with customers – profile by company type</b>		
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Small Architectural practices	31	22%
Large Architectural practices	2	37%
Professionals / Consultants	14	22%
Housebuilders	1	4%
Commercial Developers	1	2%
Contractors	2	14%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Number of interviews by type of Council area: Suburban: 25, Semi-rural: 16, Rural: 6, City: 4. This reflects the approximate distribution of LABC members by type of area.*

*By profession: Architectural Technician: 19, Architect: 11, Surveyor: 11, Engineer: 2, Plan Drawer: 1, Other inc Project Manager, Planning and Design Director: 7*

Councils participating in the research are listed in the Appendix.

## 2 Notable Findings

- **Local Authority Building Control departments** are estimated to assess or check some 91,000 project plans in total in a year. From this, 476,000 areas of non-compliance with the Building Regulations are identified and 'interventions' made accordingly, thereby preventing potentially costly or dangerous issues having to be rectified at construction stage or later. *These figures are believed to be conservative estimates and the true figures could be twice as much, ie some 200,000 plan assessments resulting in 1 million areas of non-compliance identified at this stage, in the most recent year.*
- 85% of plans assessed at this early stage need one or more interventions and of the total interventions, 40% represented a high risk of failure.
- The most common area of non-compliance relates to Part A of the Building Regulations, which concerns the Structural safety of a building and accounts for 27% of the 476,000 interventions. This is followed by Part B: Fire safety, accounting for 19% of interventions.
- Examining the seriousness or risk level of the non-compliance issues, just over half of the interventions relating to Part A (Structural safety) and Part B (Fire safety) were deemed by the plan assessors to be 'high risk' (rated 4 or 5 out of 5 where 5 = high or intolerable risk).
- Where **LABC's Warranty** for new homes is taken up, plans are subjected to further checks for compliance and underwriting by the Warranty surveyors. Analysis was undertaken as part of this research project of 33 plan assessments for projects involving new build homes, undertaken as part of the warranty inspection process during the period 19th June – 7th July. The interventions made by LABC Warranty have a slightly different breakdown to building control interventions, although 'structure' is the top in both. From this sample, 295 non-compliance issues with the Building Regulations were identified. 26% related to Part A: Structural Safety and 9% to Part B: Fire Safety.
- The new homes sector accounted for 20.1% of interventions.
- The separation of the plan assessment from construction inspections on-site is valued by customers. Examining this service from the customers' viewpoint, 72% of 51 customers interviewed said that they find the plan assessment service from LABC extremely useful and a further 14% fairly useful. Most tell their clients that their plans have been signed off by LABC, with almost all considering achieving this early sign-off to be a positive step for the client and their builders.
- The main personal benefits experienced by customers are having a second pair of eyes to check their plans, which also helps to keep them up-to-date with the Building Regulations. At a project level, benefits are considered by customers to include the prevention of compliance issues which could otherwise have to be put right at a later stage, potentially incurring build and material costs. Most feel it reassures their end customers and helps to demonstrate their own professionalism ("like a stamp of approval").
- When asked to give an example of how a plan assessment had benefitted a recent project, 42% mentioned fire safety and / or means of escape (unprompted) and 53% of LABC customers felt that the advice given at plan assessment stage had led to a safer building.
- 98% believe that having plans signed-off is a positive step. 88% of customers tell the clients that the plans have been successfully reviewed by LABC. 86% of customers were happy with timescales.
- Plan assessors also make additional useful suggestions to prevent over-specification, improve design or reduce costs. 5-10% of the plans assessed for this research project included 'value-added' suggestions. Interestingly, it seems that customers believe they get more value-added than they actually do.

## Quantification of plan assessments and interventions

All figures are weighted to represent the whole of LABC membership and are estimated for the current year.

### 2.1 Number of plan assessments and interventions

- Based on the online survey, the following estimates have been made for the workload of LABC Members at plan assessment stage in 2017:

Number of <u>plans assessed</u> :	<b>90,731*</b>
Total number of identified <u>non-compliance issues</u> or 'interventions':	<b>476,314*</b>
Hence the <u>average number of non-compliance issues per plan assessment</u> :	<b>5.25</b>
% of plans assessed where <u>at least 1 intervention</u> occurred:	<b>85%</b>
Threat level: % of interventions deemed to be <u>high or intolerable risk</u> :	<b>119,962 or 25% of interventions</b>

- The average annual number of plan assessments by type of area is given in the table below. As might be expected, City Authorities undertake on average more plan assessments than Local Authorities in other types of area.

Average number of plans assessed per year Based on 2017 research		
Type	No. councils in sample	Average <u>annual</u> number of plan assessments per council in sample
City	4	735
Suburban	23	285
Semi-rural	9	165
Rural	6	335
<b>ALL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>300*</b>

#### \*NOTE

Further research has shown that these estimates are likely to be conservative. In a separate exercise by LABC to collect data from its members, including the annual number of plan assessments for the most recent full year, the average number of plan assessments per LABC Member was 618, based on data from 46 Local Authorities (14% of Members), which is double the average annualised total based on the original 3 week survey.

**Hence the number of plans assessed across the whole LABC Membership in a year could be more than twice the number indicated above, ie some 200,000. Assuming the average number of non-compliance issues per plan assessment is the same as in the original study – then the total number of interventions across all LABC Members in the most recent full year is likely to be about 1 million.**

The difference between the two figures is likely to be due to plans received but not started, or started but not completed in the research period, including plans set aside awaiting further work. LABC has accepted the published research figure, but anyone reading or using this research should bear in mind that it is likely that the final actual figures are much greater.

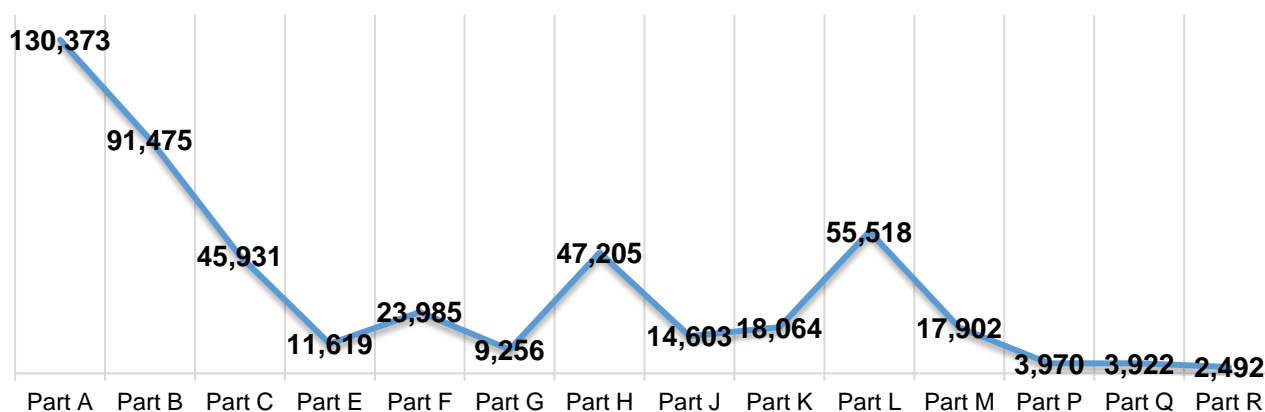
## 2.2 Interventions by Part of the Building Regulations

- The total number of interventions or areas of non-compliance has been analysed by the Part of the Building Regulations to which each relates.
- As shown in the table and the graph below, most non-compliance issues occur in relation to Part A of the Building Regulations (Structural safety) followed by Part B (Fire safety). Together these account for 47% of interventions at plan assessment stage.

Estimate of annual number of interventions by Part of the Building Regulations Based on 2017 research		
	Number of interventions*	% of interventions
Part A: Structural safety	130,373	27.4%
Part B: Fire safety	91,475	19.2%
Part C: Resistance to contaminants and moisture	45,931	9.6%
Part E: Resistance to sound	11,619	2.4%
Part F: Ventilation	23,985	5.0%
Part G: Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency	9,256	1.9%
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	47,205	9.9%
Part J: Heat producing appliances	14,603	3.1%
Part K: Protection from falling	18,064	3.8%
Part L: Conservation of fuel and power	55,518	11.7%
Part M: Access to and use of buildings	17,902	3.8%
Part P: Electrical safety	3,970	0.8%
Part Q: Security	3,922	0.8%
Part R: Electronic communications	2,492	0.5%

- Or, in graphic form:

### Estimate of annual number of interventions by Part of the Building Regulations



\*based on the conservative estimates

### 2.3 Extent of risk of non-compliance issues identified at plan assessment stage

- Those responsible for assessing plans and completing the survey forms were asked about the severity of the non-compliance issues they had identified, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is minimum risk and 5 high or intolerable risk. Risk was assessed against the Part of the Regulations, meaning that a Part A intolerable risk is not comparable with a Part F intolerable risk. An extract from the survey guidance notes about judging risk is given on the next page and in full in Appendix 2.
- The table below shows that 40% of all interventions ('all' row at bottom of table) were judged to be of high risk level, rated 4 or 5 out of 5. About half of Part A interventions (Structural Safety) and almost 60% of Part B (Fire Safety) interventions were regarded by the plan assessors or Surveyors as high risk (4 or 5 out of 5).

<b>Non-compliance issues identified at plan assessment stage</b>					
<b>Risk to the public of the issue, had it not been identified</b>					
<b>Based on 2017 research</b>					
	<b>Minimum risk</b>				<b>High / intolerable risk</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Part A: Structural safety	12%	10%	28%	18%	31%
Part B: Fire safety	6%	7%	30%	21%	37%
Part C: Resistance to contaminants and moisture	17%	13%	36%	12%	18%
Part E: Resistance to sound	22%	24%	34%	6%	13%
Part F: Ventilation	19%	18%	39%	9%	12%
Part G: Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency	37%	7%	31%	10%	14%
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	21%	13%	40%	9%	16%
Part J: Heat producing appliances	17%	14%	27%	21%	20%
Part K: Protection from falling	10%	11%	26%	22%	31%
Part L: Conservation of fuel and power	29%	11%	35%	10%	16%
Part M: Access to and use of buildings	9%	14%	42%	19%	14%
Part P: Electrical safety	25%	6%	15%	9%	46%
Part Q: Security	20%	8%	23%	5%	44%
Part R: Electronic communications	69%	6%	9%	0%	16%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>25%</b>

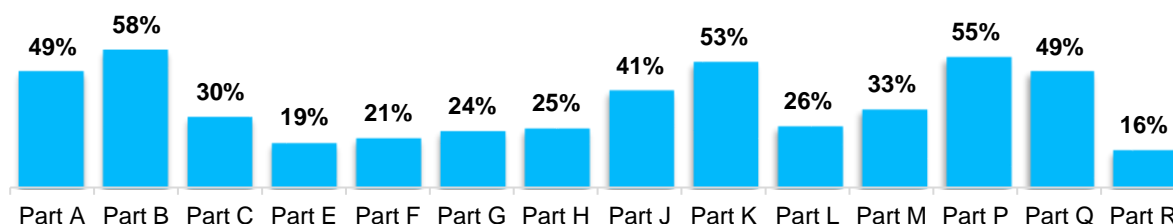
*Part C risk factors add to 96% and some others add to 99% because some did not complete this information*



- The graph below summarises the last 2 columns in the table above, and shows the percentage of interventions relating to each Part of the Building Regulations which were deemed to be risk factor 4 or 5 (for all definitions see Appendix 2).

### Assessment of risk or threat level of interventions – on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 is minimum and 5 is high or intolerable risk

% shown is the 4+5 risk level for each Part of the Building Regulations



### Examples of risk given as guidance notes in the online survey, scale 1-5

For the full version see Appendix 2

Part	Level 1 (Minimal risk example)	Level 3 (Medium risk example)	Level 5 (Intolerable risk example)
A	Lack of noggins in floors	Insufficient bearing for beam	Steel beam undersized
B	Lack of self-closer to fire door	Escape windows insufficient size	Excessive travel distance for escape
C	DPC only 100mm above ground level	Render choice unsuitable for location	No methane protection indicated
E	Plug sockets positioned in party wall	No insulation specified to party wall	Blockwork density insufficient for preventing sound transmission

- A 'high or intolerable risk' of failure refers to compliance. All risks would receive an intervention, however, in this research we asked the plan assessors or Surveyors to categorise the level of risk. In the case of the structure, fire or electrical compliance a level 5 risk means an immediate life threatening risk to building occupants. However for other parts of the Building Regulations, a level 5 would mean complete failure but not threatening to life.

## 2.4 Project type

- The table below gives an analysis of LABC plan assessments and interventions by type of project. These figures have been calculated from the survey to be representative of a year's worth of plan assessments, across all LABC Members.
- By volume, the majority of LABC's assessed plans are domestic extensions, alterations and loft conversions. Combined, these account for 64% of interventions.
- However, although a smaller number, other types of projects are much larger in size than domestic refurbishments and the scale of risk of any non-compliance issues could therefore be much greater. To put this in context, based on the sample:
  - Average value of non-domestic projects where known: £808,200
  - Average number of new homes per project of this type: 9.3 dwellings

<b>Plans assessed and interventions by type of project Based on 2017 research</b>			
		<b>Plans assessed</b>	<b>Interventions</b>
<b>Domestic</b>	Extensions	58.5%	50.5%
	Alterations	10.5%	5.2%
	Loft conversion	7.8%	7.8%
	New housing	5.0%	11.2%
	New flats	0.4%	0.7%
	Conversion to domestic	4.4%	8.2%
	<b>TOTAL DOMESTIC inc new build homes</b>		<b>86.6%</b>
<b>Non-domestic new build</b>	Education	0.7%	1.1%
	Health	0.1%	0.7%
	Retail	0.4%	0.8%
	All other non-domestic (offices, leisure etc)	1.8%	2.6%
<b>Non-domestic extensions/alterations</b>	Education	0.9%	0.9%
	Health	1.2%	2.5%
	Retail	2.8%	2.7%
	All other non-domestic	4.0%	3.4%
<b>TOTAL NON-DOMESTIC</b>		<b>11.9%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>
<b>Mixed use</b>	Domestic and non-domestic	1.4%	1.8%

## 2.5 Additional advice given by plan assessors

- 6% of the plan assessment reports contained additional advice and information about alternative construction approaches, layouts and / or materials which could lead to improved design, prevent over-specification and potentially reduce costs. Some examples are given below:
  - Agreed reduction in width of returns and piers to facilitate the re-use of existing doors and windows. Advised on specification for older type of insulation incorrect and, using currently available manufacturer's insulation, the overall thickness and layers of insulation are reduced.
  - Advice given on travel distance to reduce number of fire doors.
  - Attempted to design the most cost effective solution to resolve the problem of inadequate escape widths and insufficient number of escape routes from an area being converted from office space to a canteen in an office building which cannot cope with the likely increase in occupant numbers.
  - Discussed proposed foundation design for garage as ground is heavy clay and row of conifer trees nearby, went through options for foundation designs prior to wasting money on digging out unsuitable foundations.
  - Escape windows to first floor bedrooms shown on plan with satisfactory spec but style of window would not be suitable.
  - Offered advice on a cheaper, simple solution.
  - Only a domestic contamination desktop study is needed for this site as the commercial studies are inordinately expensive and not critical for this location.
  - Suggested a fire safety compliance solution.
  - Pre-application meetings carried out with architects to discuss proposals. Ironed out several issues which could have affected overall design.
  - Suggested alternative insulations and/or construction methods to overcome drainage and insulation issues.
  - The architect had specified air bricks to ventilate the cavity in the wall. He had put these below the DPC, I thought this would cause undue wetting of the cavity and cause more problems in the long run.
  - Within the pre-submission advice for this application we assisted in a re-design of the layout to comply with Part B and thus negated the need for an expensive sprinkler system and other compensatory features.
  - Whilst the insulation at rafter level specified complies with the SAP design this would be a less efficient way to insulate the building for studio 7 and 9 as they will be heating the void space above the ceiling.

## 2.6 Some case study examples

- The four examples of projects below selected from the online survey demonstrate the range of interventions, and include some deemed to be of high risk, had they not been identified.
- The additional advice given to help the project designers and end clients are also summarised, not necessarily related to compliance.

Project: Loft conversion, area 77.5m <sup>2</sup> , North						
	Number of interventions	Of which - Risk level (1 is low, 5 is high)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Part A: Structural Safety	4			3		1
Part K: Protection from falling	2		1	1		
Additional 'value added' advice given	Stair detail incorrect resulting in low head height which could lead to accessibility problems with furniture					

Project: Extension, area 9m <sup>2</sup> , London						
	Number of interventions	Of which - Risk level (1 is low, 5 is high)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Part A: Structural Safety	2	1			1	
Part B: Fire Safety	4				4	
Part C: Resistance to contaminants and moisture	10	1		3		6
Part F: Ventilation	2			2		
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	4			3	1	
Part L: Conservation of fuel and power	6	2	1	3		
Additional 'value added' advice given	Alternative insulation and / or construction method suggested to overcome drainage and insulation issues					

Project: New build retail, value £7m, North						
	Number of interventions	Of which - Risk level (1 is low, 5 is high)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Part A: Structural Safety	1				1	
Part B: Fire Safety	4				4	
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	1			1		
Part M: Access to and use of buildings	1		1			
Additional 'value added' advice given	Recommendations made regarding compartmentalisation and fire protection methods – which could have a bearing on project costs					

### 3 Plan assessments by LABC Warranty new home surveyors

#### 3.1 Interventions by Part of the Building Regulations

- Where LABC's new homes warranty is taken up, plans are subjected to further checks for compliance by the Warranty surveyors.
- LABC's Warranty surveyors completed forms as part of the research for this report. Forms were completed for each of 33 plan assessments for projects involving new build homes, undertaken as part of the warranty inspection process during the period 19th June – 7th July.
- These 33 plan assessments covered a total of 750 dwellings, ranging from blocks of flats to individual self-builds.
- From this sample of 33 plan assessments, 295 non-compliance issues with the Building Regulations were identified.
- Of these non-compliance issues, 26% related to Part A: Structural Safety and 9% to Part B: Fire Safety.

<b>LABC's new homes <u>warranty inspections</u> - number of interventions by Part of the Building Regulations Based on a sample of 33 plan assessments</b>		
	<b>Number of interventions</b>	<b>% of warranty interventions</b>
Part A: Structural safety	76	26%
Part B: Fire safety	27	9%
Part C: Resistance to contaminants and moisture	69	23%
Part E: Resistance to sound	17	6%
Part F: Ventilation	13	4%
Part G: Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency	8	3%
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	21	7%
Part J: Heat producing appliances	6	2%
Part K: Protection from falling	12	4%
Part L: Conservation of fuel and power	15	5%
Part M: Access to and use of buildings	13	4%
Part P: Electrical safety	7	2%
Part Q: Security	6	2%
Part R: Electronic communications	5	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.2 Extent of risk of non-compliance issues identified at plan assessment stage

- As in the LABC Building Control survey described in section 3, the new homes Warranty surveyors completing the survey forms were asked about the severity of the non-compliance issues they had identified, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is minimum risk and 5 high or intolerable risk. Risk was assessed against the Part of the Regulations, meaning that a Part A intolerable risk is not comparable with a Part F intolerable risk. The survey guidance notes about judging risk are given in Appendix 2.
- The table below shows that 20% of all interventions ('all' row at bottom of table) were judged to be of high risk level, rated 4 or 5 out of 5. 39% of Part A interventions (Structural Safety) and 48% of Part B (Fire Safety) interventions were regarded by the Warranty surveyors as high risk (4 or 5 out of 5).

<b>Non-compliance issues identified during new homes warranty plan assessments</b>					
	<b>Minimum risk</b>				<b>High / intolerable risk</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Part A: Structural safety	21%	8%	32%	18%	21%
Part B: Fire safety	19%	19%	14%	24%	24%
Part C: Resistance to contaminants and moisture	20%	27%	42%	4%	7%
Part E: Resistance to sound	44%	19%	25%	0%	13%
Part F: Ventilation	42%	0%	58%	0%	0%
Part G: Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency	50%	13%	25%	13%	0%
Part H: Drainage and waste disposal	39%	39%	22%	0%	0%
Part J: Heat producing appliances	50%	0%	33%	17%	0%
Part K: Protection from falling	11%	11%	56%	22%	0%
Part L: Conservation of fuel and power	33%	33%	33%	0%	0%
Part M: Access to and use of buildings	46%	38%	15%	0%	0%
Part P: Electrical safety	57%	0%	43%	0%	0%
Part Q: Security	67%	0%	33%	0%	0%
Part R: Electronic communications	40%	0%	40%	20%	0%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>

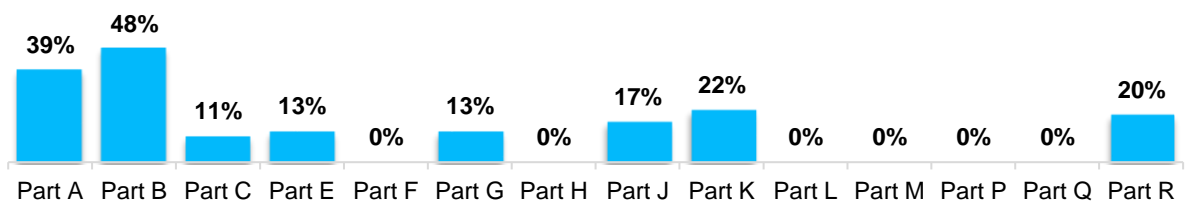
*May not add to 100% due to rounding*

- The graph below summarises the last 2 columns in the table above, and shows the percentage of interventions during a Warranty plan assessment relating to each Part of the Building Regulations which were deemed to be risk factor 4 or 5 (for all definitions see Appendix 2).

### Warranty plan assessments

Assessment of risk or threat level of interventions – on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 is minimum and 5 is high or intolerable risk

% shown is the 4+5 risk level for each Part of the Building Regulations



## 4 The benefits of plan assessments to LABC’s Building Control customers

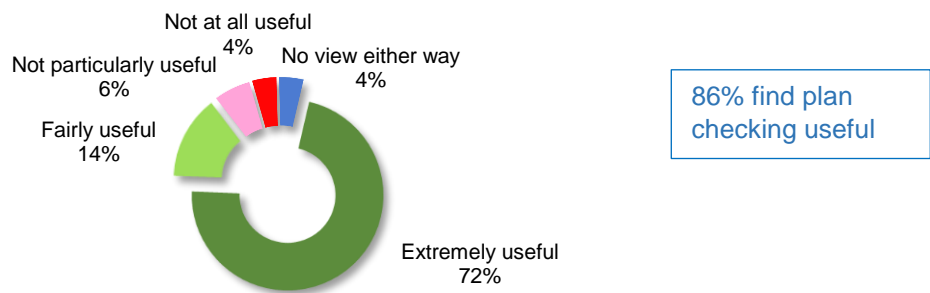
This section contains the results of 51 phone interviews by Lychgate with customers (business customers) who submit their plans to LABC for initial assessments as part of the service provided. The objective was to identify their experience of this process and how they benefit. Customers interviewed include Architects, other Consultants and Contractors.

These respondents had used LABC on average for 17 projects each over the last 12 months.

### 4.1 Usefulness of plan assessments

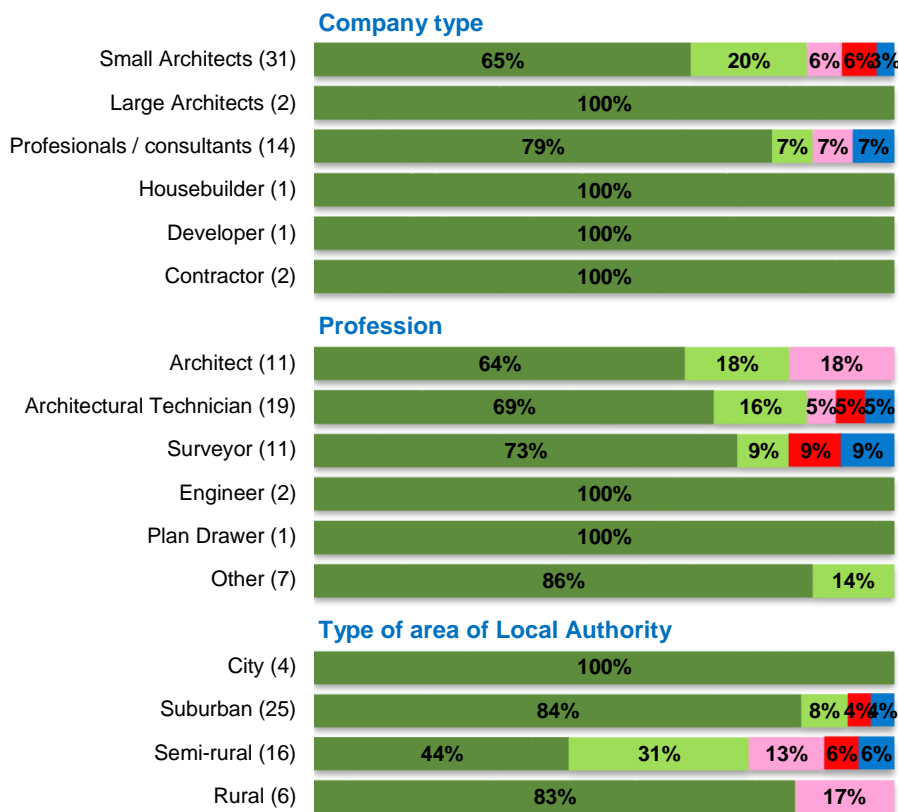
- The majority of those using the LABC’s plan assessment service find it extremely useful.

**How useful is it to you to have your plans assessed by a Council’s Building Control department?**



Base: 51

- Extremely useful
- Fairly useful
- Not particularly useful
- Not at all useful
- No view either way



Least likely to find plan checking useful are professionals in semi-rural areas (who may be repeating the same type of work)



- Only 10% or 5 respondents do not find the service useful and mainly commented that they do not feel they need it. All of these were smaller companies; 4 Small Architects and 1 Professional / Consultant.

**Why is this service not useful to you? Respondents said...**

*A lack of flexibility with the local government system in terms of communication and pricing structure. (Professional / consultant, semi-rural)*

*It really doesn't benefit us because we go straight to Building Control usually but sometimes it's useful to have prior help and advice. (Small Architect, rural)*

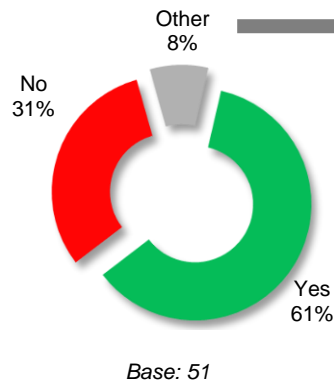
*I have some 20 years' experience as a Building Control Surveyor myself. (Small Architect, semi-rural)*

*It is a legal requirement rather than being anything I find particularly useful. (Small Architect, semi-rural)*

*My work is very mundane and run-of-the-mill. (Small Architect, sub-urban)*

- 61% went on to say that having plans assessed and signed off is a factor in their decision to use Local Authority Building Control.

**Is having your plans assessed and signed off a factor in your decision to use Local Authority Building Control?**



*"I only ever use Building Control in a few instances. The Council Building Control Manager is the local organiser of my professional institution and his team provide a very good service."*

*"Convenience, I have used private inspectors as well but my LABC is more convenient."*

*"It falls between both. All I am after is: 'Statutory Approval' written by a private inspector or the council."*

*"Mostly with me it comes back down to the contractor. If a contractor has had dealings with an Approved Inspector he may want to use them, but if I am in control I would tend to use Local Authority."*

**No, plan assessment is not a factor in my decision....**

*Because traditionally we have gone to private building inspectors who have let us down so we have gone back to LABC now.*

*My prime drive is local knowledge, which is why 99 times out of 100 I would always go to local authority.*

**Yes, plan assessment is a factor in my decision....**

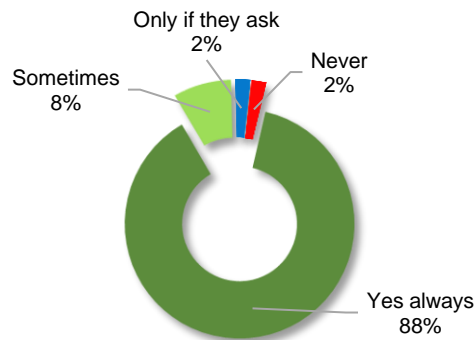
*It minimises work on the project, preserves our responsibilities and enables us to provide a more accurate service to the client.*

*You don't get the same response from the independents.*

#### 4.2 Value to the project clients

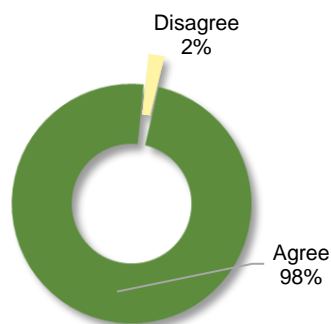
- The majority (88%) always tell their clients that plans have been signed off by the local Council's Building Control department, and virtually all agree this is a positive step for their client and the builder.

#### Do you tell your clients that the plans have been signed off by the local Council Building Control?



Base: 51

#### Do you agree, disagree or have no view either way that having plans signed off is a positive step for the client and builder?



Business customers say that LABC's sign-off is a positive step for the client and the builder

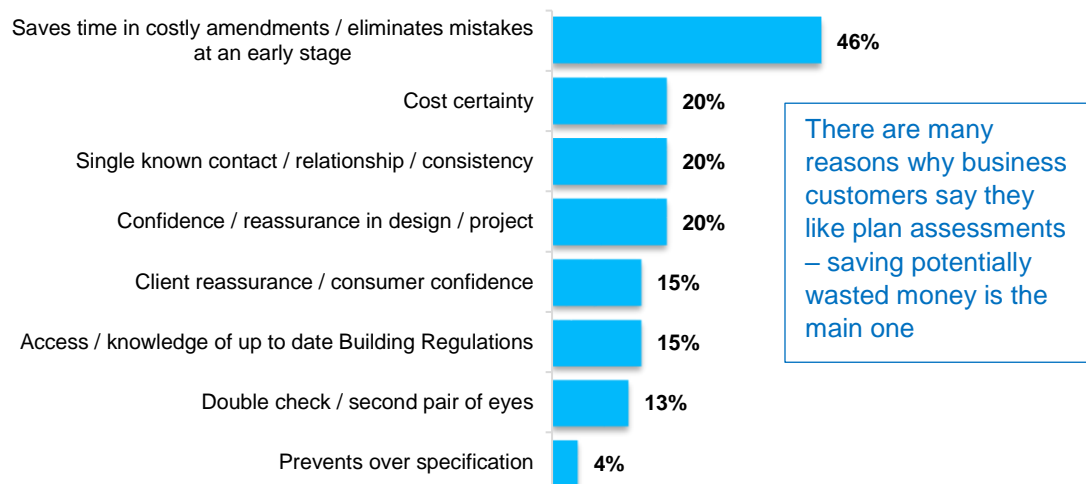
Base: 51

Disagree, comment made: signed off plans don't make a difference to the end result or what the client expects

### 4.3 The benefits of plan assessments

- The benefit most mentioned, unprompted, of the plan checking stage is that it saves time and money. Additionally it is considered to eliminate mistakes, provide cost certainty, and enhance confidence in the project.

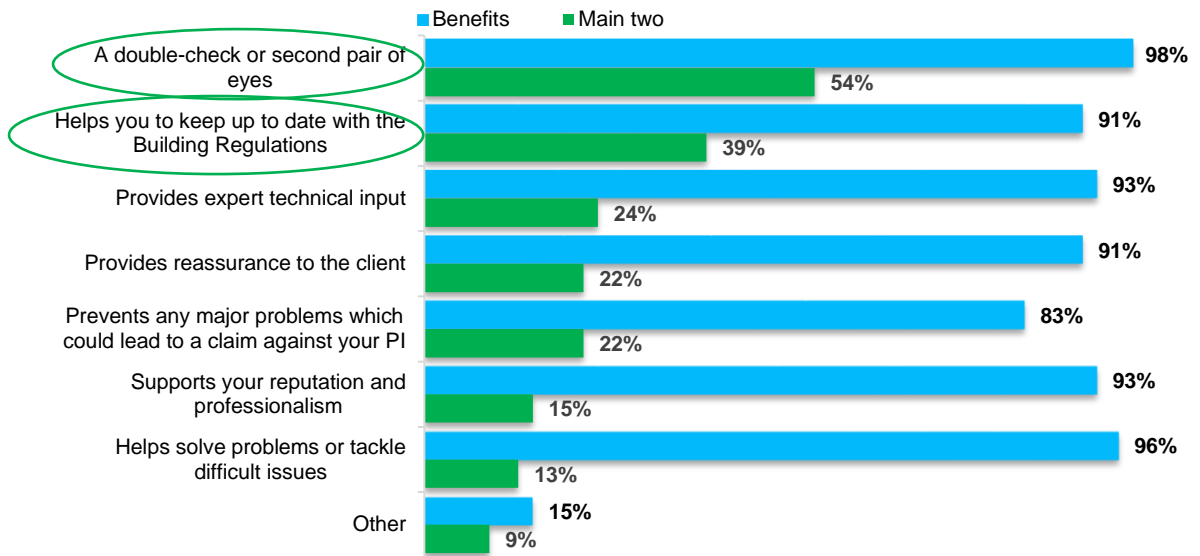
#### Can you describe how the plan assessment stage carried out by the Building Control department benefits you and your projects? Unprompted



Base: 46 (consider plan assessment by Building Control to be useful or had no view)

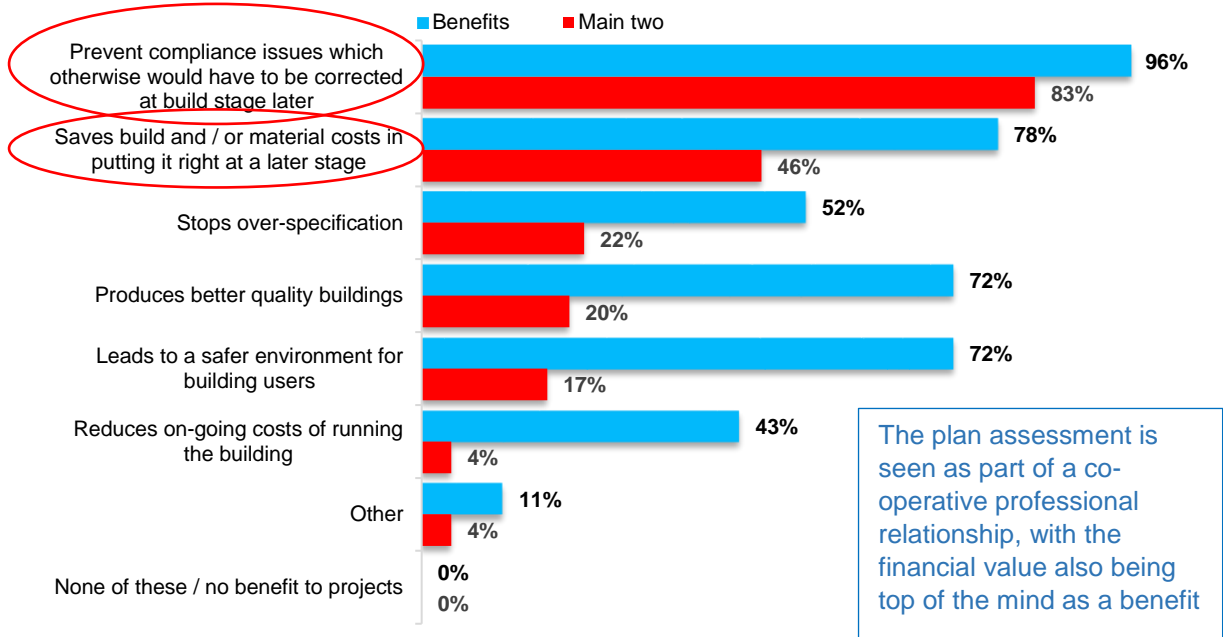
- When prompted, the main personal benefits to customers are regarded as (see graph on following page):
  - Acting as a second pair of eyes
  - Helping to keep up-to-date with the Building Regulations.
- The main benefits to projects are (see graph on following page):
  - Prevention of compliance issues which otherwise would have to be corrected at build stage
  - Saves build and / or material costs in putting it right at a later stage.

**Which of these describes how the plan assessment stage personally benefits you?  
Which are the two main benefits to you personally?**



Base: 46 (consider plan assessment by Building Control is useful)  
Other includes: Picks up where I might need an expert, e.g. contamination. The local knowledge of the inspector. Sorts out inconsistent applications.

**Which of these describes how the plan assessment stage benefits your projects?  
Which are the two main benefits to your projects?**

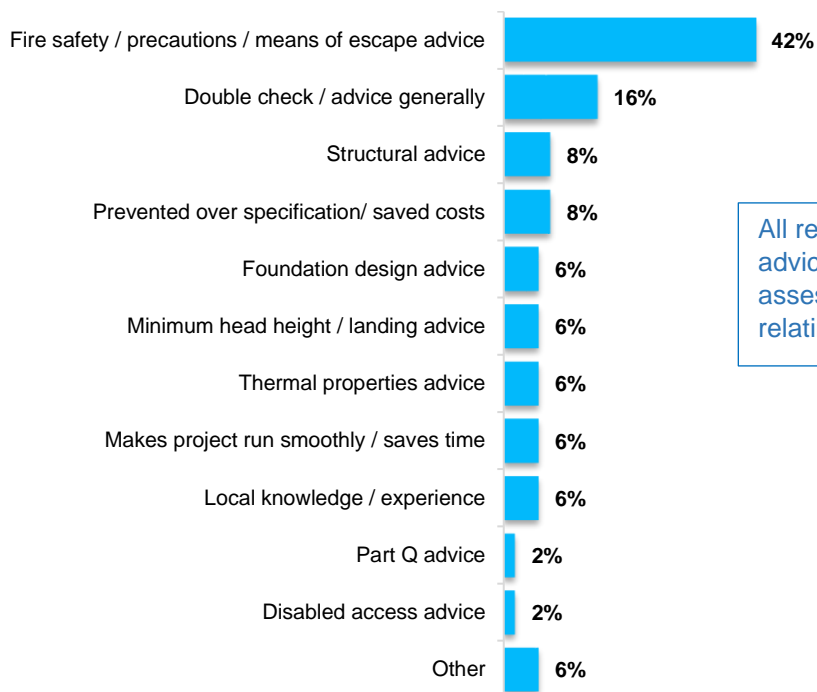


Base: 46  
Other includes: Fire risk assessment. Saves labour costs. The local knowledge of the inspector.

- Analysis of these benefits by company type and profession are given in Appendix 3.

- Respondents were asked to give an example of how a recent plan assessment had benefitted the project. 42% mentioned the assistance it had provided in relation to fire safety. Two-thirds of these project examples were domestic including new build homes and just over one-third were non-domestic including mixed use schemes.

**Can you give an example of how the plan assessment benefitted a recent project?**  
**Unprompted**



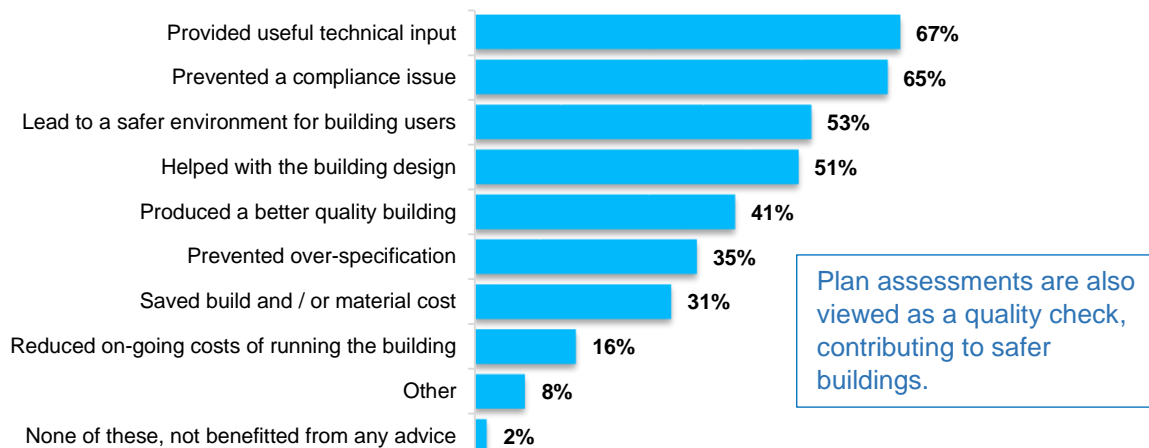
All recalled receiving advice in a recent plan assessment, particularly relating to fire safety.

Base: 51

Other includes: The customer gets a certificate of completion. Having the site inspections.

- 65% felt that the initial plan assessment on a recent project had caused at least one non-compliance issue to be avoided and 53% that it had led to a safer building environment. Further benefits included better quality buildings and the prevention of over-specification.

**Which of these best summarises the benefits of the advice you received at plan assessment stage on that recent project?**



Base: 51

Other includes: Fire safety a major precaution on a conversion job. Listed buildings never fully comply with modern day Building Regulations and it is essential to have the items which have been relaxed recorded in writing. The avoidance of later disputes.

<b>Which of these best summarises the benefits of the advice you received at plan assessment stage on that project?</b>					
<b>By project type</b>					
	<b>Domestic extension / alteration (22)</b>	<b>New build homes (7)</b>	<b>Non-domestic new build or refurb (14)</b>	<b>Mixed use (2)</b>	<b>Conversion to domestic (6)</b>
Provided useful technical input	68%	57%	57%	100%	83%
Prevented a compliance issue	64%	43%	79%	50%	67%
Lead to a safer environment for building users	41%	14%	71%	100%	83%
Helped with the building design	50%	29%	57%	50%	67%
Produced a better quality building	36%	14%	50%	50%	67%
Prevented over-specification	27%	0%	57%	0%	67%
Saved build and / or material cost	32%	0%	43%	0%	50%
Reduced on-going costs of running the building	9%	0%	21%	0%	50%
Other	9%	14%	0%	0%	17%
None of these, not benefitted from any advice	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%

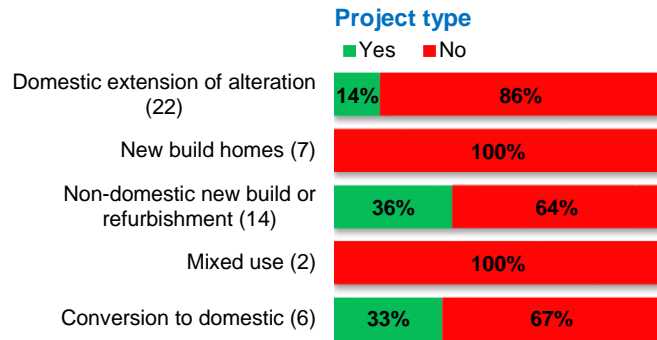
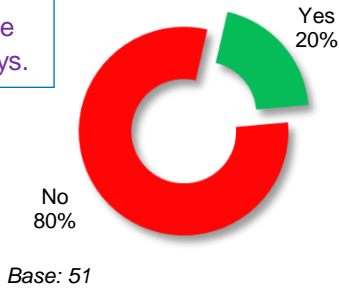
Top 2 for each project type in red

#### 4.4 Value added benefits experienced beyond compliance

- 20% felt they had received advice at the plan assessment stage which benefitted their project in ways beyond compliance with Building Regulations.
- Most described this as saving time or preventing over-specification. Two were able to cost the value of this advice; one said it had saved 15% of the build costs and the other than it had saved £20,000.

**Did you receive any advice which benefitted the project in other ways, beyond compliance with the Building Regulations, such as preventing over-specification?**

20% received additional advice which benefitted the project in other ways.



**Can you quantify in any way the value of the additional advice that was given, beyond compliance? Unprompted**

**Domestic extension or alteration**

That advice was particularly useful, as we knew we had to reduce the size of the extension, otherwise we would have failed the regulation on drainage, there was no option. Prior knowledge is always best, and we found out specific information that gave us the size of extension we were able to have prior to construction.

Confirmation of timber services.

Informed me of a build over agreement under the water utilities.

**Non domestic new build or refurbishment**

The benefit was having early drawings and agreeing early what we needed to do.

It saved 15% on building costs.

It led to me not over specifying, by not putting in extra staircase, saving on costs and space.

**Conversion to domestic**

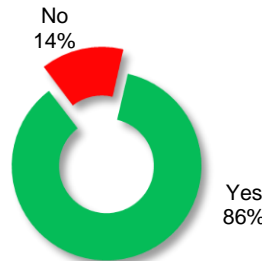
It saved £20,000 on costs.

We saved costs because we prevented over specification. It goes hand in hand with the simplest way to achieve compliance.

#### 4.5 Plan assessment timescales

- 86% of customers interviewed find that plan assessments are carried out within satisfactory timescales. Some commented that it varies from Council to Council.
- Of the 14% (7 respondents) not usually receiving advice in a satisfactory timescale. 5 of these 7 were small Architects' practices.

**Do you usually receive advice within a satisfactory timescale at the plan assessment stage, from Local Authority Building Control?**



The majority of business customers find that plan assessments are carried out in a satisfactory timescale.

Base: 51

#### Yes, receive advice within a satisfactory timescale.....respondents' comments

*We are partnered with the Local Authority and all Building Regulations come from the same office from which any planning issues are sent. This remedial way of dealing with any issues works very well for me and ensures advice is given within a satisfactory timescale.*

*They are very, very proactive and come back with any comments or advice very quickly.*

*Yes but it varies. Last week I was assessed and approved within twenty four hours on a project. By comparison eight weeks ago another project took four weeks and that was only after rattling their cage.*

*Depends who you use. It is getting better. We have got a pretty good relationship with the two most local authorities we use.*

*Until the last 3 months yes. In the last 3 months it's been poor because of the wait time. I don't know what's happened but there has been a big change.*

*They are getting better and better.*

*Generally advice comes back to us within two weeks which is an acceptable timeframe, however, it can take up to 1 month when they are busy. I still consider this to be acceptable.*

*We have built up a relationship with the Local Authority build team and plan checks are usually turned around within 48 hours, which is a good benefit to us and our clients.*

#### Do not usually receive advice within a satisfactory timescale.....respondents' comments

*It is a bit slow. Can depend on the resources as everyone is so busy.*

*Not all the time, medium overall, I would say. Depends on which council it is, and how busy they are.*

*Not always. I partner with one LABC so I can liaise directly, but with other Authorities it is a bit slower and more difficult.*

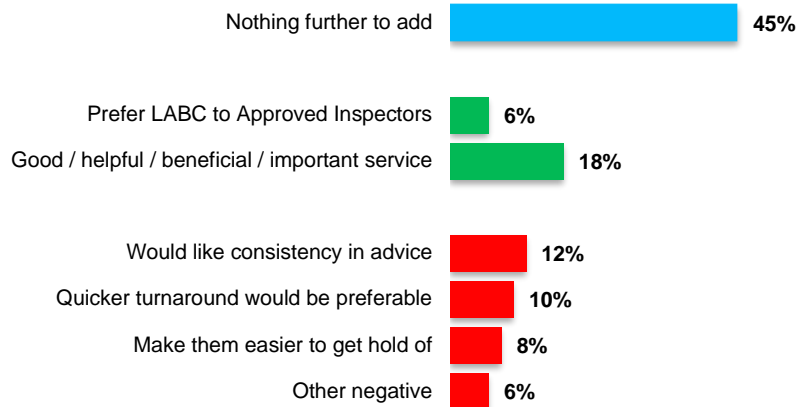
*I would prefer it to be quicker i.e. we have a fee structure based on certain approvals and therefore it affects our cash flow in that we can't send an invoice until the approval has come through.*



#### 4.6 End of interview comments made by customers

- At the end of the interview, respondents were given the opportunity to add any final comments about the plan assessment service from LABC. Some comments relate more generally to LABC rather than the plan assessment service itself. A need for more consistency in the advice given, a quicker turnaround and being easier to get hold of were mentioned. Some again mentioned the importance of the plan checking service.

#### Is there anything else you would like to add about the plan assessment service from Local Authority Building Control? Unprompted



Base: 51

#### Examples of comments

*I am extremely frustrated with Building Notices. When it was first brought out it was designed for small minor build work but it is being abused. People can carry out works with no plans.*

*He was overzealous thus a hindrance to the project and led to us spending a lot of money and time by demanding British Standards, yet we were working towards Building Regulations.*

*We are happy with it but plan checks could be done quicker, it would be nice if they were done within a week.*

*Some are good. Others don't give and take - it's either yes or no. The best ones will discuss the context and listen and sometimes change their minds.*

*We are on first name terms with a lot of the Building Control Officers, and it just makes life easier, they are very helpful, and easy to deal with.*

*It can often be the case that less technically able or inexperienced surveyors checking plans raise minor issues which can lead to arguments. I think they should concentrate on major issues of compliance rather than small nettv issues.*

*It is very valuable for us to engage early, sometimes before the formal application goes in. We can build relationships with them and deliver the best value products.*

*I know them well. They are very flexible. My only criticism is they are very difficult to get hold of when they work from home*

*The only think I would say, which is the case for private companies as well, is that it makes life easier if the same person who checks the plans also goes out to site to check the building control. I appreciate it is not always possible, but it does help.*

*Previously several councils had their own BC officers, now it's been passed to consultants to their detriment because of lack of local knowledge and experience. My local authority brought in Capita and others and it's not been successful because of a lack of local knowledge. They have got rid of all the staff who know the area so well.*

## Appendix 1 – participating councils

Amber Valley Borough Council  
Ashfield District Council  
Aylesbury Vale District Council  
Bassetlaw District Council  
Bath and North East Somerset Council  
Bedford Borough Council  
Bracknell Forest Council  
Bradford Council  
Breckland Council  
Bristol City Council  
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
Carmarthenshire County Council  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Christchurch and East Dorset Council  
Dartford Borough Council  
Devon Building Control Partnership  
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
East Devon District Council  
East Midlands Building Consultancy  
Erewash Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Harlow Council  
Hartlepool Borough Council  
Leeds City Council  
London Borough of Harrow  
London Borough of Havering  
London Borough of Hillingdon  
Manchester City Council  
Milton Keynes Council  
North Yorkshire Building Control Partnership  
Northumberland County Council  
Powys County Council  
Rochdale Borough Council  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
Slough Borough Council  
Stratford on Avon District Council  
Sunderland City Council  
Swansea Council  
Warrington Borough Council  
West Suffolk Council  
Wirral Council

## Appendix 2: risk levels used as examples when completing online form

Part	Level 1 (Minimal risk example)	Level 3 (Medium risk example)	Level 5 (Intolerable risk example)
A	Lack of noggins in floors	Insufficient bearing for beam	Steel beam undersized
B	Lack of self-closer to fire door	Escape windows insufficient size	Excessive travel distance
C	DPC only 100mm above ground level	Render choice unsuitable for location	No methane protection indicated
E	Plug sockets positioned in party wall	No insulation specified to party wall	Blockwork density insufficient for preventing sound transmission
F	Trickle not noted on plan	Lack of mechanical extract ventilation to bathroom	Roof void detail shows insufficient ventilation
G	Lack of hot water to sink	Hand wash facilities not provided to or adjacent to a WC	Safety device not installed to limit bath water temperature to 48 degrees C
H	Lack of roddable access on excessive pipe length	Gutter size is insufficient for roof area	Public sewer shown in vicinity of proposed extension
J	Hearth size insufficient	Position of flue in relation to timber joist insufficient	Inappropriate flue size
K	The 'going' on the stair is insufficient	Door swings across foot of stair	Guarding to edge of atrium is climbable
L	Cavity closers required to reveals	Incorrect choice of insulation	Excessive glazing
M	Tactile & Audible facilities required to lift	Manifestation details insufficient	Stepped access to new office unacceptable
P	Installation not specified to BS7671	Circuit required for new cooker	Plug socket proposed within 600mm of a bath
Q	Letter plate exceeds 260mm x 40mm	Easily accessible window at first floor	Secure doorset not specified
R	Access point not provided to new dwelling	Network termination point not provided to new apartment building	

### Appendix 3: customer benefits by company type and profession

Which are the <u>two main</u> benefits to you personally?							
By company type							
	All (46)	Small Architects (27)	Large Architects (2)	Professionals / consultants (13)	House-builder (1)	Developer (1)	Contractors (2)
A double-check or second pair of eyes	<b>54%</b>	56%	50%	54%	100%	0%	50%
Helps you to keep up to date with the Building Regulations	<b>39%</b>	44%	50%	31%	100%	0%	0%
Provides expert technical input	<b>24%</b>	19%	50%	31%	0%	100%	0%
Provides reassurance to the client	<b>22%</b>	22%	0%	23%	0%	0%	50%
Prevents any major problems which could lead to a claim against your PI	<b>22%</b>	22%	0%	23%	0%	100%	0%
Supports your reputation and professionalism	<b>15%</b>	19%	0%	8%	0%	0%	50%
Helps solve problems or tackle difficult issues	<b>13%</b>	7%	50%	15%	0%	0%	50%
Other	<b>9%</b>	7%	0%	15%	0%	0%	0%

Which are the <u>two main</u> benefits to you personally?							
By profession							
	All (46)	Architects (9)	Arch Technicians (17)	Surveyors (10)	Engineers (2)	Plan Drawers (1)	Other (7)
A double-check or second pair of eyes	<b>54%</b>	56%	53%	70%	0%	0%	57%
Helps you to keep up to date with the Building Regulations	<b>39%</b>	44%	35%	50%	50%	0%	29%
Provides expert technical input	<b>24%</b>	22%	24%	40%	50%	0%	0%
Provides reassurance to the client	<b>22%</b>	11%	29%	0%	50%	100%	29%
Prevents any major problems which could lead to a claim against your PI	<b>22%</b>	33%	24%	30%	0%	0%	0%
Supports your reputation and professionalism	<b>15%</b>	33%	6%	0%	0%	100%	29%
Helps solve problems or tackle difficult issues	<b>13%</b>	0%	18%	10%	0%	0%	29%
Other	<b>9%</b>	0%	6%	0%	50%	0%	29%

Which are the <u>two main</u> benefits to your projects?							
By company type							
	All (46)	Small Architects (27)	Large Architects (2)	Professionals / consultants (13)	House-builder (1)	Developer (1)	Contractors (2)
Prevent compliance issues which otherwise would have to be corrected at build stage later	<b>83%</b>	78%	100%	85%	100%	100%	100%
Saves build and / or material costs in putting it right at a later stage	<b>46%</b>	48%	0%	46%	100%	0%	50%
Stops over-specification	<b>22%</b>	22%	0%	23%	0%	100%	0%
Produces better quality buildings	<b>20%</b>	26%	50%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Leads to a safer environment for building users	<b>17%</b>	15%	50%	15%	0%	0%	50%
Reduces on-going costs of running the building	<b>4%</b>	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	<b>4%</b>	4%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%
None of these / no benefit to projects	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Which are the <u>two main</u> benefits to your projects?							
By profession							
	All (46)	Architects (9)	Arch Technicians (17)	Surveyors (10)	Engineers (2)	Plan Drawers (1)	Other (7)
Prevent compliance issues which otherwise would have to be corrected at build stage later	<b>83%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>82%</b>	80%	50%	100%	86%
Saves build and / or material costs in putting it right at a later stage	<b>46%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>41%</b>	20%	100%	0%	71%
Stops over-specification	<b>22%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>18%</b>	40%	50%	0%	0%
Produces better quality buildings	<b>20%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>35%</b>	20%	0%	0%	0%
Leads to a safer environment for building users	<b>17%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>18%</b>	30%	0%	0%	14%
Reduces on-going costs of running the building	<b>4%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>0%</b>	10%	0%	0%	0%
Other	<b>4%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>6%</b>	0%	0%	0%	14%
None of these / no benefit to projects	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%