HOMEOWNER RESOURCE

The driveway & patio buyer's guide

A practical UK checklist for comparing driveway, patio, paving and landscaping proposals with fewer surprises. Use it before quotations, while comparing contractors and again before final payment.

Compare like-for-like Preparation and drainage can matter more than the visible finish.	**Get it in writing** Scope, price, waste, materials and payment stages should be clear.
Check the business Know who you are contracting with and verify important claims.	**Protect drainage** Levels, runoff and thresholds should be planned before the surface goes down.

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START HERE

The 2-minute buyer's checklist

If you do nothing else, make sure you can tick these before work starts.

[ ] I know the legal name of the person or business I am hiring.

[ ] I have a written quotation, not only a verbal price.

[ ] The quote describes excavation, preparation and sub-base - not only the surface finish.

[ ] Drainage, finished levels and where rainwater will go have been discussed.

[ ] I know whether VAT is included or not applicable.

[ ] Waste removal and disposal responsibility are written down.

[ ] I have checked current insurance and any claimed accreditations that matter to the job.

[ ] The payment schedule is linked to sensible stages of work.

[ ] I understand the written guarantee, exclusions and maintenance requirements.

[ ] I know how variations or unexpected work must be authorised before extra money is spent.

[ ] I have checked whether planning, a dropped kerb or other consent could apply.

[ ] I have not been pressured by a "today only" price or unexplained urgency.

Useful habit	Take your own photographs before work starts, including boundaries, walls, inspection covers and neighbouring surfaces. They create a simple record of the starting condition.

1 - BEFORE QUOTATIONS

Define the job before comparing prices

Contractors can only quote consistently when they are pricing the same requirement. A few notes made before the first site visit can prevent confusion later.

How will the area be used?

• Number and type of vehicles

• Pedestrian routes and accessibility

• Bins, bicycles, gates and deliveries

• Outdoor furniture or entertaining

• Future EV charging or other services

What must stay?

• Existing walls, steps and mature planting

• Inspection covers and drainage points

• Boundary levels and neighbour access

• Utility boxes, water stops and cables

• Existing dropped kerb width

What finish do you actually want?

• Colour and texture

• Border detail

• Pattern or laying direction

• Slip resistance and cleaning expectations

• Low-maintenance versus natural ageing

What does success look like?

• No standing water in normal rainfall

• Sensible access to doors and gates

• Stable edges and neat transitions

• A finish appropriate to the property

• A clear maintenance plan after handover

2 - CHECK THE CONTRACTOR

Know exactly who you are buying from

A polished website is useful, but your contract is with a real person or legal entity. Before paying a deposit, make sure the identity and paperwork make sense.

[ ] Trading name and legal name match the quotation and invoice.

[ ] There is a real business address and working telephone/email contact.

[ ] Current public liability insurance has been checked where relevant.

[ ] Any claimed trade-body membership or accreditation can be independently verified.

[ ] Recent project examples are relevant to the type of work you need.

[ ] Reviews are considered alongside evidence, paperwork and the quality of the quotation - not used as the only test.

[ ] If the contractor removes construction waste, you have asked how it will be transported and disposed of.

[ ] You know whether employees or subcontractors will be used and who remains responsible for the work.

Waste matters	Businesses transporting waste in England may need to be registered as waste carriers. The Environment Agency maintains a public register that homeowners can search. A professional quote should also make clear whether removal and disposal are included.

3 - QUOTATIONS

Compare the work, not just the bottom-line number

Citizens Advice recommends obtaining written quotations from more than one trader. The biggest differences are often hidden in preparation, drainage, quantities and exclusions rather than in the visible surface.

Check the quote states	Why it matters	Your notes
Existing surface to be removed	Clarifies demolition, excavation and disposal.	
Excavation / formation approach	Preparation is a major part of durability and cost.	
Sub-base / bedding / laying system	Lets you compare structural preparation rather than only the surface.	
Drainage and finished levels	Prevents a new surface creating a water problem.	
Edging, steps and covers	These details are often omitted from headline prices.	
Exact product / finish	Avoids later disputes over colour, grade, thickness or range.	
Waste removal	Clarifies who pays and who is responsible.	
Total price and VAT position	Lets you compare the true total cost.	
Start window and approximate duration	Sets reasonable expectations while allowing for weather.	
Payment stages	Avoids vague demands for money during the job.	
Guarantee / aftercare	Shows what is covered, for how long and subject to what conditions.	

Quote or estimate? A quote is intended to be a fixed price for the stated scope; an estimate is a best estimate of cost. Ask which one you are receiving and make sure any circumstances that could legitimately change the price are explained before work begins.

4 - MATERIAL CHOICES

Ask the right question for the surface you are buying

There is no single "best" driveway or patio material. The right choice depends on appearance, use, ground conditions, drainage, maintenance expectations and budget.

Block paving

• Ask to see the actual block range and colour.

• Clarify border restraints and laying pattern.

• Ask how jointing sand and future maintenance are handled.

• Discuss permeable block systems separately from standard block paving.

Resin-bound surfacing

• Ask whether the proposed system is resin-bound or resin-bonded.

• Clarify the proposed base and preparation.

• Discuss UV stability, aggregate choice and slip characteristics.

• Ask how edges, drains and thresholds will be finished.

Tarmac / asphalt

• Ask what preparation and edge restraints are included.

• Clarify the wearing surface and decorative borders.

• Discuss drainage channels and falls before surfacing.

• Ask when vehicles can safely use the new surface.

Porcelain / natural stone patios

• Check slip characteristics for outdoor use.

• Confirm sample colour, pattern and joint appearance.

• Ask about bedding, priming and jointing system.

• Discuss steps, thresholds and fall away from the building.

Gravel

• Ask about membrane, sub-base and gravel depth.

• Plan edging so material stays contained.

• Consider wheelchairs, pushchairs and bicycle access.

• Discuss migration onto pavements or highway areas.

Landscaping around hard surfaces

- Protect retained roots and established planting.
- Decide where surface water can soak into soft areas.
- Consider lighting, power and irrigation before paving is finished.
- Plan future maintenance access.

5 - DRAINAGE, LEVELS & PERMISSIONS

The part you cannot afford to treat as an afterthought

Driveways and patios change how water moves around a property. The design should deal with rainfall on your own land without creating problems at doors, neighbouring property or the highway.

Front-garden paving in England

For houses, planning rules generally allow a new or replacement front driveway of any size where a permeable surface is used or runoff is directed to a permeable area within the property. Traditional impermeable surfacing of more than 5 square metres can require planning permission where that drainage provision is not made.

Dropped kerbs / vehicle crossings

A legal vehicle crossing is separate from the driveway itself. In Southampton, vehicles should not be driven across a pavement or verge unless an authorised vehicle crossover has been provided. Classified roads and some locations can involve additional planning considerations.

Levels to discuss

- Finished level at doors and thresholds
- Fall direction
- Where channel drains discharge
- Inspection covers
- Relationship with neighbouring land
- Existing damp-proof course and building details

Ask before signing

- Where will rainwater go?
- Is the proposed surface permeable?
- Is a soakaway or soft-landscape area part of the solution?
- Could a planning or highway application be needed?
- Who is responsible for obtaining any consent?

Site-specific checks matter	Listed buildings, conservation areas, flats/maisonettes, leasehold property, classified roads, unusual drainage conditions and other restrictions can change what is permitted. Check the relevant authority before work starts.

6 - CONTRACTS, PAYMENTS & CHANGES

Turn the quotation into a clear agreement

A written contract does not need to be complicated. It should make it easy for both parties to know what was agreed, what happens if something changes, and when payment becomes due.

[ ] Scope and drawings / specification are attached or clearly referenced.

[ ] Total price, VAT position and deposit are stated.

[ ] Payment stages are linked to clear progress milestones.

[ ] Start expectations and estimated duration are recorded.

[ ] Weather and genuinely unforeseen ground conditions are dealt with reasonably.

[ ] Any extra work must be described and agreed before it is carried out and charged.

[ ] Responsibility for materials, access, waste, permits and making good is clear.

[ ] Cancellation information is supplied where the law requires it.

[ ] Guarantee wording says what is covered, for how long and what maintenance is required.

[ ] There is a straightforward complaints/contact route.

Cooling-off rights can apply	For many distance or off-premises consumer contracts - for example, where an agreement is made online, by phone or in the customer's home - there is normally a 14-day cancellation period. Different rules and exceptions can apply, including where a consumer expressly asks for work to begin within that period or where urgent repair work is involved. Make sure the trader gives you the required information in a form you can keep.

Variations should not be surprises	If excavation reveals an unexpected problem, stop and agree the proposed solution, extra cost and any effect on timing before the additional work proceeds. Keep that agreement in writing.

7 - DURING THE WORK

Keep a simple project record

[ ] Take photographs before key preparation layers are covered.

[ ] Keep copies of quotations, invoices, receipts and agreed changes.

[ ] Record any product substitutions before they are installed.

[ ] Raise concerns early rather than waiting until final payment.

[ ] Check drainage routes and threshold relationships while they are still visible.

[ ] Keep children and pets away from plant, open excavations and uncured surfaces.

[ ] Confirm how access will work overnight if the job spans several days.

[ ] Ask before using the finished surface if curing or settlement time applies.

8 - HANDOVER

Before the final payment

Walk the completed work with the contractor while any final details can still be discussed clearly.

[ ] Surface and borders match the agreed scope.

[ ] Drainage channels and outlets are clear.

[ ] Inspection covers and access points remain usable.

[ ] Gates, doors and thresholds work as expected.

[ ] Waste, spare materials and temporary protection are dealt with as agreed.

[ ] Any snagging items are written down with an agreed next step.

[ ] Maintenance / cleaning guidance has been supplied.

[ ] Written guarantee or warranty information has been received where promised.

[ ] You have the final invoice / receipt and contractor contact details.

[ ] You know when vehicles, furniture or pressure washing may safely resume.

9 - RED FLAGS

Pause before you pay if something does not add up

• Pressure to sign immediately because the price is "today only".

• A refusal to provide the full scope and price in writing.

• An unexplained demand for a very large payment before meaningful work starts.

• No clear business identity, address or paperwork.

• Claims such as "No.1", "approved", "guaranteed" or "fully insured" that cannot be explained or evidenced.

• A quotation that describes only the surface and says nothing about preparation.

• No explanation of drainage or where excavated material will go.

• Unexpected extra work being carried out before you have agreed the additional cost.

• Cash-only pressure or requests to pay a different person / business without explanation.

• Reviews that look impressive but cannot be connected to genuine recent work.

• An unusually cheap quote that is not clearly like-for-like with the others.

• Advice that your entire driveway/patio "must" be replaced without a clear explanation of why.

10 - QUESTIONS TO ASK

20 questions to take to a site visit

1. Who exactly will my contract be with?

2. What insurance do you currently hold?

3. What exactly are you removing?

4. How will you decide the required excavation and preparation?

5. What base and laying system are you proposing for this site?

6. Where will surface water go?

7. Could planning permission or a highway consent apply here?

8. Who will be responsible for any applications?

9. What exact surface product / range is included?

10. Can I see the material sample before ordering?

11. How will edges, steps and inspection covers be finished?

12. How is waste removed and disposed of?

13. Who will actually carry out the work?

14. What happens if the ground conditions are different from expected?

15. How are variations agreed and priced?

16. What deposit is required and when are later payments due?

17. How long do you expect the work to take, subject to weather?

18. What does the written guarantee cover and exclude?

19. What maintenance should I plan for?

20. Who do I contact if I have a question after handover?

PROJECT NOTES

OFFICIAL & INDEPENDENT SOURCES

Useful places to check before work starts

This guide is intentionally practical rather than legal advice. For current rules and independent consumer guidance, use the official sources below.

Planning Portal - paving your front garden
Planning guidance for permeable and impermeable front-garden hard surfacing in England.

GOV.UK - permeable surfacing of front gardens
Government guidance on reducing runoff from paved front gardens.

Citizens Advice - home improvements
Independent advice on choosing traders, quotations, contracts and problems with building work.

Environment Agency - waste carrier public register
Check a waste carrier, broker or dealer registered in England.

Redditch Borough Council - reducing flood risk
Local guidance including front-garden paving, permeable surfaces and runoff.

Important

This buyer's guide provides general project-planning information for homeowners in England. It does not replace a site-specific assessment, planning/highway advice, structural or drainage design, legal advice, product manufacturer instructions or the terms of your individual contract. Rules can vary by property and location. Always check current requirements with the relevant authority where necessary. Statutory consumer rights are not affected.

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