

2024 EDITION

THE
**ESSENTIAL
PLOT-BUYING
GUIDE**

DON'T AGREE TO BUY ANY BUILDING PLOT
UNTIL YOU HAVE SUBJECTED IT TO
THIS THOROUGH CHECKLIST!

JAY WOODS

**THE
ESSENTIAL
PLOT-BUYING
GUIDE**

Jay Woods BEng, MSc.

THE ESSENTIAL PLOT-BUYING GUIDE

By Jay Woods BEng, MSc.

Copyright © Jay Woods 2017-2024

Jay Woods has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the [Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988](#). All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

The information in this e-book is general in nature and not intended to constitute nor be relied upon for specific financial or other professional advice.

So far as the author is aware, the information given is correct and up to date as of the date of publication.

The author and publisher hereby disclaim any liability arising directly or indirectly from the use or misuse of the information contained in this publication.

All photographs and images herein are the author's own and are hereby claimed as his copyright.

SELF-CONTAINED SIGHT LINES

Does the plot have formally prescribed, or potential, sight lines contained within its own curtilage?

NON SELF-CONTAINED SIGHT LINES

Or do the sight lines pass over another party's land? Even if visual inspection shows that the prospective sight lines are clear over such land, the landowner may find out about your proposals and move fences or hedges forward to block the sight lines, hoping to either create a ransom strip scenario or worse, completely prevent the plot from being developed at all.

MATURE TREES

While securing the sight lines at the plot's entrance is imperative (and planners may allow mature trees there to be removed), scope remains for the plot's access lane / driveway away from the entrance to be impeded by the presence of certain species of **mature trees** which, in many instances, may not be felled, lopped or have their roots damaged. Driveways, for example, may have to be rerouted past the root zone of a tree protected with a preservation order, which in turn may require the procurement of additional land. Site access points may also have to be adjusted (potentially creating sight line issues where previously none existed).

RANSOM STRIPS

Has your solicitor uncovered any ransom strips over land that would be required by sight lines?

The best way to ensure your sight lines will remain unimpeded is for them to be contained within the curtilage of the site you intend purchasing. However, this is not always possible. If they pass over someone else's land and you have no written permission guaranteeing they will not be blocked by fences, hedges, etc., you will have to acquire that permission or more likely, pay the landowner for ransom strips. Either way, buying a building plot without the comfort of the sight lines issue having been resolved is risky.

Discovering you got this wrong after you committed a large financial outlay could send a wrecking ball into your life.



2. GROUND CONDITIONS

A thorough on-site investigation of the ground conditions prior to purchase is imperative. While reeds often indicate wet land, and pine trees often point to shallow dry soil above the rock strata, only by means of test digs can true ground conditions be uncovered.

ROCKY GROUND

Are there any outcrops of rock on the plot? While it is perfectly feasible to create foundations in outcrops of rock using a rock hammer, it is quite expensive work and neighbours may complain about vibrations occurring within adjacent properties.

SANDY / UNCONSOLIDATED SOIL

Is there any run of sand or evidence of unconsolidated soil on the site? This can only be determined by having test holes dug, for which you would require permission of the owner and proper insurance cover. Running sand equates to unstable ground conditions and the development of sound foundations may be difficult and costly depending on the extent of the problem. **Piling or other supportive expedients may be required.**

DEPTH TO BOTTOM

If the test digs reveal a bottom well in excess of 1m below the surface, then normal strip foundations cannot be installed due to the ground being too soft to support them, meaning either **raft foundations** or, if the bottom is really deep, the rather expensive option of **piling** has to be factored into the equation.

.....

3. WEEDS

Since not all weeds were created equal, you must determine if the plot is free of structure-threatening varieties such as **Horsetail / Equisetum** (also known as "Mare's Tail") and **Japanese Knotweed / Fallopia Japonica** which resembles small bamboos. The latter in particular constitutes an existential threat to buildings, as it can eat into concrete foundations and even destroy them. It is a perfidious weed that can take up to seven years to completely eradicate from a site.

.....

4. FLOOD RISK

It is vital to determine from the outset if the land for sale could be in any way compromised by flooding. Accordingly, you - or your architect - should seek to consult the relevant flood risk mapping early on.

The table below features clickable links to the online flood risk mapping services of the UK plus the Isle of Man:

ONLINE FLOOD RISK MAPS

[ENGLAND](#)

[SCOTLAND](#)

[WALES](#)

[NORTHERN IRELAND](#)

FLOOD PLAIN

Is all - or any part - of the plot within a flood plain?



SEASONAL PONDING

Is there any anecdotal or verifiable evidence of seasonal ponding occurring, that is, large deep puddles forming on the site during periods of heavy rain? Note that even elevated sites, well above flood plains, can experience ponding if they feature undrained hollows.

PERIPHERAL WATERCOURSES

Do any streams, rivers or farm drains, culverted or not, form any part of the plot's boundaries?

SUBTERRANEAN WATERCOURSES

Are there any subterranean watercourses traversing the site? Such streams can usually be culverted away from and around a new building, but this comes at a cost which you might reasonably ask to be deducted from the purchase price.

UNMODELLED WATERCOURSES

Be aware that not every brook and stream is modelled by the various rivers authorities, so you may observe one during a site visit that is unmapped. In the absence of more detailed information, you should assume it to pose a potential flood risk. A [Planning History](#) search may mention its existence.

OVERGROWN DRAINS

Are any agricultural drains or minor brooks on the boundary of your plot overgrown (typically with tall reeds)? This may pose a future flood risk but can be remedied by clearing the overgrowth away; however, doing so may require the cooperation of landowners beside the site and downstream.



5. MATURE TREES & HEDGES

In addition to the plot's access potentially being affected by the presence of certain species of mature trees, the proposed dwelling itself may be impacted.

Accordingly, consider the following:

TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS (TPOs)

Is the land for sale subject to a tree preservation order? This means that formally identified trees on the plot must not be felled. Therefore any property built on the site has to take account of these trees being left as they are.

IMPINGING TREES

Is any part of the proposed dwelling impinged upon by any part (above or below ground) of a mature tree known to be, or likely to become, the subject of a TPO? The position or design of the proposed dwelling may have to be amended. Root containment / protection systems may also be stipulated by planners.

HEDGES

Building plots fronted by a protected hedge will generally not be developable if the hedge is removed. Planners may insist on the hedge being fully replaced before construction can commence, which can cause lengthy delays.



6. ACOUSTICS

Is the site likely to suffer any noise pollution? This could come from an adjacent factory or supermarket working around the clock, or from being under the flightpath of descending or ascending aircraft.

AGRICULTURAL NOISE

Are there noisy, busy farmyards nearby? Do the local farmers graze their livestock (including bellicose bulls or braying donkeys) on land adjacent to the plot? Do any farmers use acoustic scarecrows (loud shotgun-like booms at regular intervals through the night)? If there is a dwelling on a nearby or

adjoining site, does it have a rattly, heavily used, cattle grid?



"Putting your kids to bed early down there? Too bad this is my bellowing time up here."

TRAFFIC NOISE

If the plot is beside or within half a mile from a main road, **is the road busy enough / the noise irritating enough to potentially ruin your enjoyment of the site? Does it ease to tolerable levels at night?** Bear in mind that in winter the noise levels from roads will rise with the loss of sound-absorbing deciduous foliage.

(Note: Although modern regulations stipulate decibel limits for road vehicle tyres, the resultant noise reduction is still not enough to afford a quiet existence in a house adjoining any main road).

URBAN / SUBURBAN NOISE

If the land for sale is located in a village or town setting, is there a loud (read, annoying) clock tower? Do delivery lorries noisily trundle through during the night? Do lorries unload at dawn to supply shops? Do the locals become raucous at the weekends? Is there any known instances of antisocial noise pollution from any of your prospective new neighbours? Are you aware of any premises with ongoing noise issues related to over-sensitive or faulty alarms? Is the plot regularly overflowed at low level by aircraft, military or civilian?

(Note: All modern civilian aircraft have to comply with low noise regulations to minimise annoyance for residents living near airports. That said, it can still prove an irritation for some people and can disturb babies).

.....

7. POLLUTION

The countryside is not always the domain of fresh, clean air that popular perception has it to be. Odours and smoke from agricultural activity and even rural businesses can spoil your long term enjoyment of a building plot. And of course, urban plots can have their own issues also. But in either instance, it is habitual rather than the unavoidable or occasional issues we should consider.

DOWNWIND OF INTENSIVELY USED FARMYARD

Is the plot located on the leeward side (based on prevailing wind which in the UK is generally from the west or south west for most of the year) **of a smelly farmyard nearby?**

PESTICIDE SPRAYING

Are any of the adjoining lands used for growing crops (such as apples) which require regular annual pesticide spraying? Although not a common event, spray days can fill the air with unpleasant irritants that waft over hedges and into gardens, triggering asthma attacks and possibly other respiratory ailments.

BONFIRE SMOKE

Do any of the upwind farmers habitually incinerate waste materials? Smoke from frequent bonfire burning can appear very antisocial to you, yet is seen as the mere effect of an essential act in the farmer's sight.

ALLERGENIC CROPS

Is any of the adjacent farmland used to grow crops that produce pollens or other allergens to which you or any member of your family are particularly vulnerable?

MANURE SPREADING

Is manure / slurry regularly spread on grassy fields beside, or close to, the site? Although only permitted at certain times of the year (depending on region and land use), the smell from manure-spreading may not convince you that "the fragrance of nature is good for you". And it can make

clothes left out on washing lines smell putrid.

FACTORIES

If the building plot is in, or close to, an urban / suburban setting, **is it downwind of food processing or chemical fabrication factories?**

.....

8. CONTAMINATION ISSUES

The soil on the plot itself is not always safe to build on; this is much more commonly an issue on a brownfield site (one that was previously developed and used) than on a pristine greenfield site (one that is "virgin" land). Consider, therefore:

HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES ON BROWNFIELD SITES

A brownfield site needs close scrutiny to determine what its previous use was, even if the previous building has been demolished and cleared away. There may be residues of oil requiring the removal of the topsoil completely and its replacement with clean new topsoil, or worse still, previous industrial use may have left traces of hazardous substances such as asbestos or cadmium, both of which could be extremely costly to clean up, and only an accredited contractor would be allowed to undertake such work. Planning documentation should point this out, but you would like to be sure for yourself anyway.

LEACHING CONTAMINATION FROM ADJACENT LAND

Whether the land for sale is urban or rural, **is there any evidence of adjoining land having been used (or remaining still in use) for industrial or chemical treatment purposes, or for hazardous agricultural activities (such as the storage of slurry)?** Leaching contamination from adjoining lands, whether agricultural or industrial, can render a plot not developable. In some instances, planners will designate part of such a plot as a ***cordon sanitaire***, that is, land on which no construction may take place. A [*Planning History*](#) search may reveal this.

POLLUTED WATERCOURSES

Despite it being illegal and subject to strong punitive measures, some farmers and businesses still sneakily and habitually discharge ***hazardous waste into watercourses***, killing fish and birds and leaving the water smelling bad. Also be aware that there have been instances of persons travelling considerable distances to illicitly dump chemical or biological waste into ponds and streams. ***This is probably only something that chatting to someone with local knowledge will reveal.***

.....

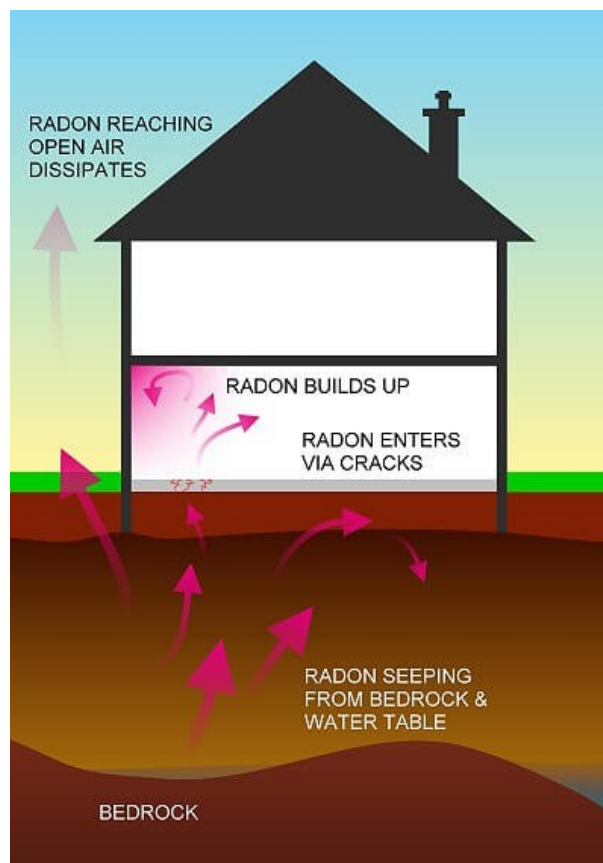
9. CABLES & MASTS

Officially, overhead power cables and mobile phone masts are harmless to the health. Without wishing to appear conspiratorial, governments the world over plainly have very deeply vested interests in maintaining that assertion. There is, however, a wide array of anecdotal evidence, as well as scientific research, that suggests otherwise. Besides, whichever side of the fence you stand on with this issue, the fact remains that **many people disbelieve the official position and accordingly, the resale value of a property developed on a site thus affected could be heavily degraded.**

.....

10. RADON RISK

Radon is a colourless, odourless and tasteless natural gas produced when traces of uranium radioactively decay in underground soil and rock. When radon is released into the atmosphere it is harmless; however, it can enter a dwelling through joints or gaps in the floors or walls that are near to ground level or around service pipes. Eventually this can accumulate, leading to high concentrations that are very harmful to the health (studies have found that it is the second largest cause of lung cancer). Accordingly, modern building regulations in the UK require new dwellings in the worst affected areas to have radon barriers installed, effectively specialised damp proof membranes.



Three ways in which radon levels can be reduced in the home:

1. Installation of specialised damp proof membranes during construction.
2. Natural or forced ventilation under the ground. Positive pressurisation of the house using a fan in the roof space prevents radon entering the building.
3. A sump or extract pipe can be installed beneath the floor, and a fan can then be fitted to extract the radon and blow it into the atmosphere.

HIGH RADON AREAS OF THE UK

Is the plot located in a generally high radon area? (See this [interactive map online](#)). Are there any granite outcrops on the site or buried beneath it?

.....

11. DEMOLITION

Planners may insist that old buildings on a site must be demolished before work - **even as little as clearing the topsoil** - on any new dwelling may commence. That raises these points:

ASBESTOS

Is there any evidence of the existence of asbestos in the buildings to be demolished? An [asbestos survey](#) will reveal its presence or absence; if present, a specialist contractor will have to be employed to remove it.

OLD RAFT FOUNDATIONS

Does the building to be demolished possess a raft foundation? There is the possibility that this may be used as part of the foundation for your new dwelling. **(Note that raft foundations tend to be used where there is risk of subsidence, so their presence in an old building might point to regions of unconsolidated soil on the plot).**

SALVAGE

Can any of the materials from the demolished dwelling be salvaged? Such as lead slates, bricks, cast iron items, etc?

DEMOLITION COST

Demolition cost will vary across the country and from contractor to contractor, but should be at least determined on an indicative level prior to purchasing a plot with a derelict building on it.

12. PROTECTED WILDLIFE

Does the land for sale have any endangered species of fauna residing on it?

Great Crested Newts, for example, are protected by law to preserve them from extinction; accordingly, it may be extremely difficult to obtain permission for development near or on their immediate habitat - although **mitigation licences can be applied for in some circumstances**.

You would be breaking the law if:

- you kill, injure or even disturb them;
- destroy their breeding or nesting locales;
- obstruct their access to said locales.

A search of [Planning History](#) might reveal the presence of protected species, but even if no mention appears, that is no guarantee that your application won't be met with stipulations relating to any interim discovery of their presence.

13. PLANNING PARAMETERS

As the potential purchaser of a building plot, you are advised to engage the services of an architect (or qualified technician) to read, understand and explain the finer points of your prospective site's planning approval documentation (assuming there is valid outline or full planning permission for the site, or previous, now lapsed applications that may be viewed by appointment).

The architect should advise what can be built on the plot within the planning parameters set out on the approval document. Some key things to look out for:

RIDGE HEIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Does the planning documentation impose a ridge height restriction? It makes no sense to buy a plot on which you want to build a two storey house if planners will only permit a bungalow on it. Ridge heights are typically restricted for aesthetic reasons, particularly to avoid a new dwelling's roof encroaching on a rural landscape's skyline.



BUILDING LINE

Is it stipulated that no part of the dwelling may protrude beyond a set distance from the plot's frontage (for example)? In some instances, planners do not want to see a new dwelling appear closer to the road in an urban setting than all the existing dwellings on one or both sides of it, lest the established building line be violated.

STYLE & MATERIALS

The style of the house and materials permitted in its construction may also be compromised by planning parameters, with greater rigidity in **Conservation Areas**. Integral garages may also, in some locales, be frowned upon, as may balconies and other features you may have been hoping for. If the plot you are looking to buy already has current planning permission, you (or your architect) should be able to see right away what else can be built on it.



14. PLANNING HISTORY

Planning history means what approvals, if any, were previously granted on the plot. To do this properly, you would typically have to arrange a meeting at the planning office to go over the plot's historical applications. That may, in turn, raise some questions:

UNMODELLED WATERCOURSES, PONDING, ETC.

Sometimes the only formal place on earth you will discover these is on planning permission documentation. Previous flood concerns might also be flagged, but do not rely on that alone – do your own due diligence as described under [Flood Risk](#).

ACCESS ISSUES

While old or lapsed planning approvals may, for example, show where a site should be accessed (and thus provide strong indication as to its future permissible access point), bear in mind that **sight lines in old approvals may be shorter than what will be required for any new approvals**. This is because their length is determined by the assumed average speed of traffic (as opposed to the official speed limit) on the road they open out on and this assumed average speed can creep upwards in very short time frames.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

If the land for sale was ever flagged as being of archaeological interest, it would probably (in my view) be best avoided altogether, at least if there is planning precedent of the requirement for an archaeologist to be present on-site to practically examine every bucket of soil being excavated. **That could lead to a potentially devastating cessation of construction work in the event of the discovery of a valuable artefact.**

Note on Conservation Areas

Your Local Planning Authority's Development Plan will include maps indicating Conservation Areas (or "Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest" in Northern Ireland). These are areas of special architectural or historic interest, normally at the centre of a city, town or village, the character or appearance of which is esteemed desirable to preserve or enhance. Planning Permission is generally more difficult to obtain (or restrictive) within these areas than elsewhere.

FLORA & FAUNA

Previous ecological stipulations should be taken, unless otherwise assured, as factors likely to abide when you receive fresh approved planning

documentation for your own project.

SIZE, AESTHETICS, PERMISSIBLE MATERIALS, ETC.

Received wisdom posits that previous planning approvals point to the likely success (or failure) of future applications on a plot, with greater weight of influence being placed on more recent past approvals. Nevertheless, **regulations and policies change**; external finish materials in some regions of the UK have a history of becoming increasingly restricted. Ridge heights, floor areas, garage dimensions and septic tank / soakaway requirements might also become different for you than they were for the previous applicant.

CONTAMINATION ISSUES

Old **cordon sanitaires** and other contamination-mitigation measures should, in the absence of an extant, confirmed remedy having been implemented, be assumed as remaining a requirement when you make your own application.

PLANTING & FENCING

Old post-build planting out and fencing requirements should be assumed to be what you will be asked for also. These are seldom onerous.

DEMOLITION

Any old buildings standing on the site may have been the subject of a **Demolition** requirement in previous planning approvals. **Assume this requirement remains.**

SERVICES TO THE BUILDING PLOT

Previous planning approvals will flag the presence (or absence) of **Public Utility** infrastructure adjacent to the plot, and will also reference acceptable remedial measures in their absence.

MULTIPLE PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS IN CLOSE SUCCESSION

This may point to either the rejection by planners of unreasonable expectations on behalf of the previous applicant(s) or it may point to difficulties with **neighbours objecting** to proposals.

.....

15. NEARBY FUTURE BUILDS

Some people move to the countryside in expectation of escaping the noise of city life and embracing the blissful quiet of a rural idyll... Only to be rudely awakened when their neighbours unleash plans for noisy or smoky self-catering cottages (for example). So:

DISUSED BUILDINGS ON NEIGHBOURING LAND

Are there any disused buildings on your neighbours' land close to, or with line-of-sight towards, the site you are interested in buying? These may not seem problematic while they stand idle, but a developer might have them earmarked for conversion into holiday accommodation or (in urban areas) apartments overlooking your property, with the additional problem of more passing traffic to consider.

.....

16. PUBLIC UTILITIES

Planning documentation will mention the availability of water-based public utilities, but typically omits references to electricity or telephone.

All but the very remotest of rural building plots will have ready access, or access via lengthy bespoke outdoor plumbing, to mains water, which usually runs alongside the nearest public road.

STORM WATER DRAINAGE

It is generally safe to assume that plots in urban or suburban settings, or in edge-of-town rural settings where footpaths still flank the roadside, will have ready access to storm water drainage.

However, sites in the countryside beyond that will require an alternative arrangement; typically, planning documentation will say that **storm water drainage must (a) not connect to foul water drainage, but rather (b) should be discharged into agricultural drains or nearby watercourses.**

FOUL WATER DRAINAGE

You can usually also safely assume that sites in urban or suburban settings, or in edge-of-town rural settings where footpaths still flank the roadside, will have ready access to foul water sewerage infrastructure and therefore not require septic tanks.

Conversely, it should be assumed that **building plots in the countryside proper will require septic tanks (or equivalent / successor technology)** - but

be aware that your plot might be in a **Groundwater Source Protection Zone** and therefore a soakaway for your septic tank might not be permitted – this will be something planning documentation might flag or, in the absence of planning permission, it is something you should research yourself.

MAINS ELECTRICITY

Unless the land for sale is very remote, for example, located on an island, a mains electricity connection should normally be straightforward to achieve. You could do your own quick survey of rural telegraph poles based on this general rule-of-thumb: **electricity poles tend to support two or three parallel cables and often traverse fields, whereas telephone poles feature just one cable and tend to run alongside country roads.**

TELEPHONE & INTERNET

See commentary on mains electricity above about telephone cables in the countryside. There may also be extra installation charges for remote sites. **Note: Satellite broadband is an option for those unwilling to pay for a lengthy wired connection to a remote building site.**

.....

17. NEIGHBOURS

Regardless of how cordial your prospective new neighbours may appear, human nature being as it is means there is a chance that at some juncture you will come into conflict with them. The key thing from the outset is to resist the temptation of always idealising how life would be in your new surroundings. With that caveat out of the way, let's review two project-killing threats potentially posed by neighbours:

HOSTILITY TO NEW DEVELOPMENT

Of particular danger to the prospects of a plot currently lacking planning permission subsequently being granted it are **objections from neighbours**. Their reasons may seem very valid and noble to them (few people would care to admit to being petty or spiteful), but for you it could be earth-shattering (which is one of two major reasons why plots without current or lapsed planning represent a great risk to the buyer; the other being that, objections aside, planners may find some compelling reason to refuse a grant of permission themselves, without neighbour influence).

BUSINESS INTERESTS

As mentioned in **Point 13** above, your dream site could turn into a nightmare if your neighbours obtain permission themselves for something that you find intolerable.

.....

18. LAND REGISTRY

As your solicitor will know, *the UK's Land Registry is incomplete*, that is to say, it is fragmentary. It is therefore likely you will encounter some kind of legal delays caused by the absence of Land Registry folios. Nevertheless, assuming you have managed to obtain access to them early in your own personal due diligence process, consider:

RANSOM STRIPS

Are any ransom strips discernible at this stage? Your conveyancing solicitor will have to undertake comprehensive searches for these anyway.

ALIGNMENT BETWEEN FOLIOS & OS VECTOR MAPS

Does the deed mapping match the [OS Vector Map](#) (in Northern Ireland, that would be [ACEmap](#), and in the Isle of Man, [MANNGIS](#))? If there are discrepancies or aberrations, can they be accounted for?

MISSING FOLIOS

Is folio mapping available for the entirety of the building plot? Sometimes only part of a plot is registered and it requires multiple folios (occasionally overlapping) to determine the complete title status of a parcel of ground.



View to kill for? Check! Southerly aspect? Check! Quiet area? Check! Land Registry folios present? Oh...

ACCURACY OF FOLIO OVERLAPS

Although rare, title documentation has been known to refer to areas of ground shaded in colours which some individuals have misidentified due to colour blindness (red and green or, less commonly, light blue and yellow). Again, this is more for a conveyancing solicitor to resolve, but if you notice anything of that nature, be sure to flag it.

19. OTHER EARLY LEGAL

EASEMENTS / RIGHTS OF WAY

Are there any rights of way or easements affecting the site? Your solicitor can determine from the legal pack pertaining to the land for sale if there are any such encroachments which might affect positioning of the house, driveway, etc.

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

Are there any restrictive covenants involved? Again, your solicitor would unearth these from the legal pack. A restrictive covenant might compromise the size and or appearance of any proposed dwelling for the plot or may impose other more obscure compromises on the development of the site.

INFRASTRUCTURE BENEATH SITE

Is there any utility infrastructure beneath the site? In urban plots, this is a possibility but early examination of utilities markup maps might reveal this.

20. FREE POWER POTENTIAL

You might wish to consider the site's viability for producing some or a major part of its own energy needs, regardless of your own immediate intentions for the site; in the future, its marketability might be enhanced (or diminished) on the strength of this issue.

Consider then:

SOLAR ORIENTATION

Does the plot experience limited exposure to sunlight? Mature trees on or off the plot may have implications for the positioning of solar photovoltaic or solar thermal panels.

WIND POWER

Is the site screened by high trees or in a dip or hollow which seldom experiences gusts? Note that some farmers plant high trees to shield delicate fruit trees from strong wind. If your site is in the prevailing lee of such trees, its wind-generation prospects may be poor.

MICRO HYDRO

Does the site possess access to a medium-to-fast flowing watercourse? Micro hydro is the "gold standard" of self-sufficient energy production, being well capable (with the right water throughput) of producing more than enough electricity to power a household all the year round; excess electricity is then fed into the national grid, so micro hydro producers can end up being net contributors, rather than net recipients, of mains electricity.

SPRING WATER

Is there a source of fresh, potable water at the site? If the plot is located above a spring, you have the opportunity to create a bore hole to draw your own water.



BONUS #1: PLOT SIZE ISSUES

DO YOU REQUIRE A LARGE GARDEN?

If you have young children or your hobby is sitting on a ride-on mower as often as the grass growing season allows, then maybe you fancy a large garden. Just be mindful of the maintenance entailed come the summer; a building plot my father once owned quickly became overgrown and

required the use of a friendly farmer's livestock to get it back under control. **A tenth of an acre** is the typical upper limit before keeping it trimmed becomes something of a regular chore.

HOW BIG WILL YOUR HOME'S FOOTPRINT BE?

Will you need a detached garage or other outbuildings? If you need a large footprint for the developed portion of the site or want to leave space for future expansion, then that becomes a factor in assessing the ideal size of your plot.

DO YOU INTEND TO GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES?

Want to be self-sufficient in food? You'll need at least one acre for staple vegetables and some leg room for any chickens you might want to populate it.



BONUS #2: PLOT ILLUMINATION

This last one is very dear to my heart. As I type these words, I sit in a house that has tall Scots Pines forming a wall of darkness to the south. In winter, it gets so dark that even with indoor lighting, the sense of gloom is all-pervading. My advice? **Don't put yourself through this;** we need sunlight during the day to keep the pineal gland happy and to enable us to sleep properly at night.

Accordingly, ponder:

CURRENT SIZE & SPECIES OF ADJOINING & ON-SITE TREES

Trees may be small now, but depending on the species, may grow for the whole of your sojourn in your new home and thus become, in time, pestilential barriers to light, especially in the wintertime when the sun hovers at its lowest.

KNOWN / LIKELY TREATMENT BY PLANNING STIPULATIONS

Planners are rather fond of mature, native species and are likely to insist on their protection in most instances, so razing them to the ground is unlikely to prove a viable solution.

RISK OF NEIGHBOURS BUILDING SUN-BLOCKING STRUCTURES

You might want to take an early view on the likelihood of adjoining land anywhere across your plot's southern aspect becoming developed and thereby posing a sun-blocking risk. All it takes is one neighbour with a

[Leylandii](#) fixation and you have a problem on your hands.