

## Ongoing (slow) progress

BY LYNDA WILSON

Council approval of the amended plan with timber floors throughout was finally obtained on 26 April.

All in all, the approval process has taken over four months. The initial plans were lodged on 19 December 2009, with approval obtained on 1 March 2010. The amended plans were lodged 30 March 2010 and approved 26 April 2010.

The footing plan and flooring amendment has cost over \$1300: \$704 to council, \$320 for drawing changes, and \$320 for revised BASIX assessment. So changes are to be avoided!

I decided to do my owner builder course online with Absolute Owner Builder Course ([www.ozob.com.au](http://www.ozob.com.au)). I read the course guide and took the online test – all done in a few hours! My certificate arrived in the post a few days later, which I can now take to the Office of Fair Trading in order to obtain my owner builder permit.

### Surveyed boundaries

One area that was bothering me was the boundary as defined by the surveyors. To our north side, the 'new' boundary runs at an angle slightly inside the existing fence line of our neighbour. As the clearances to boundaries are very tight (900mm each side) due to the narrowness of the block, I was concerned that we build to the surveyed boundary only to later find it is incorrect and the house is therefore illegal! If it was a larger block or even just wider, it wouldn't be quite so much of a concern – but at 10m wide it doesn't leave much room for error.

I called the surveyors and asked them to verify how they obtained the boundaries, and that they are definitely correct. They went through the process with me: they use old survey maps and marks to determine the boundaries; the results are then sent to the Land Titles

**“ My top tip is to set aside an hour each day, just for doing all the chasing that will be required. Early morning seems to be best. ”**

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Registry who recheck it for accuracy before approval. It is apparently common for the fence lines on older properties to be out of line with the boundaries, and our fence line is probably at least 65 years old.

I also asked them to quote on pegging out the site set-up for the house. This was quoted at \$880 to place the four corner pegs. We are still deciding whether to do it ourselves or not – again, the width of the block makes us nervous of making a mistake and placing the pegs too close to the boundary on either side.

### Footing plan

I was not happy with the amount of concrete going into the footings of the original floor plan, so asked the structural engineer, Bruce Fletcher of CSG Engineers, if he could rethink the proposed footing plan. I explained my hesitation at using that amount of concrete in an area where it was not providing any thermal benefits, and said I was happy to consider alternatives to the traditional brick pier and perimeter wall set-up. Due to the sand soils and the need for bracing of the above ground building, Bruce explained that a fair amount of concrete would still be required, but he reduced it back to 'essentials' only – 87 pad footings of 400mm square and 400mm deep, with around 21m of strip footings at 400mm wide and 400mm deep topped with 110m wide brick perimeter walls!

Alternatives that could have been considered were steel or timber posts on steel stirrups, in ground timber posts, Mega Anchors, concrete piers, etc.

### Services

A little curve ball was thrown my way recently, and could well apply to anyone buying land that already has services.

Our plot is one half of a sub division from an old established property that was demolished. As a result, the site already has services available. However, it is not clear which of the two plots has which service. Power is not too much of an issue as it just comes off the closest pole. The sewer lines run in the laneway behind so both plots will run new connections to it. Gas lines run along the street in front, so the same will apply there.

However, the water supply has proved interesting. The old non-functioning water meter is located just inside the boundary of our plot, and the attached tap still allows a water flow. So I decided to call Hunter Water and find out about having the supply switched over to our name and a new meter installed with a lockable tap.

The first bad news was that there was an outstanding balance of over \$300, with interest accruing daily, for service charges! The previous owner had informed them of the change of ownership, but had not provided any new contact details, so the bills had been going to the empty plot with no post box, and then being returned to Hunter Water – unbelievable.

Secondly, we have to get a private plumber to install a new meter – it is not their 'business.' My understanding was that up to the meter is the responsibility of the service provider, after that it is private – but this is obviously not always the case.

Finally, when I asked why service charges were still applicable on a plot that has no residence, nor has had for years, I was told 'the pipes are still there'!

So, if your plot has or had access to services, check out the situation with regards to charging, sooner rather than later. ■