Start with the next decision.

For your next small residential development, a useful starting point is a clear brief and a short list of unanswered questions. Label anything unverified **to confirm**.

1. Prepare a one-page brief

Include	What to write
Property and control	Address or project reference; whether you own, control or are considering the site.
Outcome	What you want to explore, without assuming it is permitted. Live in, retain, rent, sell or undecided?
Known constraints	What you know, the source and date, and what still needs confirmation.
Timing and spend	Actual deadlines versus preferred dates; the amount authorised for this investigation.
Questions and output	Three precise questions, the deliverable you need and the decision it will support.

2. Assemble what you already have

[ ] Property identification, title or survey documents available to you.

[ ] Existing plans, approvals and conditions, if held.

[ ] Dated photographs, existing buildings and access information.

[ ] Earlier reports and advice, with dates, versions and limitations.

[ ] A preliminary concept, relevant quotes and servicing questions.

Ask which missing documents are essential now and which can wait. Share only information you are authorised to share; remove unrelated personal details.

Ask your consultant: What is the smallest piece of work that would answer the next important question? Agree the output, fee basis, exclusions, timing and who supplies missing information.

My next decision: _____

Evidence needed / person responsible / target date: _____

What could change your plans?

Room on a block is only the starting point. Work through these questions before paying for detailed drawings. Record the answer, source and anything still to confirm.

1. Define the outcome

Live in, rent, sell or subdivide? Describe the proposed use and the number of homes. Ask your planner which controls apply to that specific proposal.

2. Check the rules and approval options

Zoning alone does not answer every question. Start with the NSW Planning Portal and council controls. Ask a planner or certifier which approval pathway needs investigation; do not assume a neighbour’s approval applies to you.

3. Understand the site

Slope, flooding, bushfire, vegetation, heritage and ground conditions may affect design and cost. Check available maps and council information. Ask which site investigations are needed before committing to a design.

4. Check access, title and services

Where will vehicles enter? Where are sewer, water and stormwater connections? Ask the relevant advisers to check easements, connection requirements and any upgrades. Avoid assuming a service nearby has spare capacity.

5. Test the whole cost

Allow for reports, authority charges, services, site works, finance and contingency as well as the building. Obtain scoped quotes and record exclusions. Keep unknown costs visible in the workbook.

6. Choose the next useful check

Resolve the question most likely to change the project first. Ask for a defined piece of advice, its fee and the decision it will help you make. Revisit the idea before commissioning further work if a major issue emerges.

Your next step: _____ Who can help: _____

Download the Project Tracker and Budget workbook to record actions and costs. These prompts do not determine what is permitted or whether the project is viable.

Starting sources: NSW Planning Portal: local development and planning approval pathways. Check current council information for your property.

Compare scope before price.

Two quotes may cover different work. Use the same questions for each and resolve unclear answers in writing before accepting.

Compare in every quote	Confirm
Outputs and boundaries	Deliverables, included stages, exclusions, revisions and responses to later questions.
Responsibilities and timing	Information you supply, consultant coordination, start date, delivery and dependencies.
Fee and payment	Fixed/hourly/staged basis; tax, disbursements, third-party charges and payment milestones.
Changes and terms	How extra work is authorised, applicable rates, quote validity and relevant terms.

Keep your project costs in four separate buckets

Bucket	What belongs here
Paid	Money already paid for this item.
Invoiced, unpaid	Bills received but not yet paid.
Committed, not invoiced	Remaining agreed obligations, excluding amounts above.
Uncommitted estimate	Expected work not yet contracted, excluding amounts above.

Expected final cost = all four buckets added together.
A $6,000 fee might be $2,000 paid + $1,000 unpaid + $3,000 still to be invoiced. When the $1,000 bill is paid, move it to paid. Do not add a second cost.

Check for missing categories

Acquisition and transaction costs; investigations; design and consultants; authority charges; servicing; construction; site works; funding and holding costs; insurance and administration; completion and selling/leasing costs; contingency.

Use a consistent tax basis and label it. Keep contingency separate and state whether totals include it. Preserve the original budget alongside the latest forecast. These categories are prompts, not a complete cost plan.

Loan drawdowns are funding, not sales income. Track principal repayments separately as financing movements so the underlying project cost is not counted twice.

Know what comes before the next commitment.

Use these checkpoints to organise evidence and responsibilities. Revisit them when information changes; they do not replace professional assessment.

Checkpoint	Evidence to gather	Decision to record
1. Explore	Objective, initial documents and critical questions.	Which investigation is worth paying for next?
2. Define	Written scope, findings, preliminary programme and cost range.	Proceed, change, investigate further or stop?
3. Commit	Relevant advice/approvals, agreements, funding and cash timing.	Who authorises which commitment, within what limit?
4. Deliver	Milestones, authorised changes, invoices and completion records.	What remains open and who owns it?

A ten-minute weekly review

Decisions. What is next, and what evidence is missing?

Actions. Choose three useful actions. Give each a person and a date.

Money. Update paid, unpaid and agreed costs. Check upcoming cash needs.

Changes. Record changes to scope, cost and timing, with their approval.

Documents. Find the current version and identify overdue responses.

Keep a short decision record.
Date / decision / reason / supporting document / approver / next action. Mark provisional advice and missing information clearly.

Make the next action easy to find

Action: _____

Responsible person: _____ **Due:** _____

Evidence or document reference: _____

Starting folders: Brief / Property documents / Advice and approvals / Quotes and agreements / Costs and payments / Decisions and actions. Keep received advice and signed agreements separate from working drafts.

General educational project organisation only. This resource does not establish development potential, approval requirements, financial viability or funding eligibility. Obtain advice relevant to your site and circumstances before making commitments.