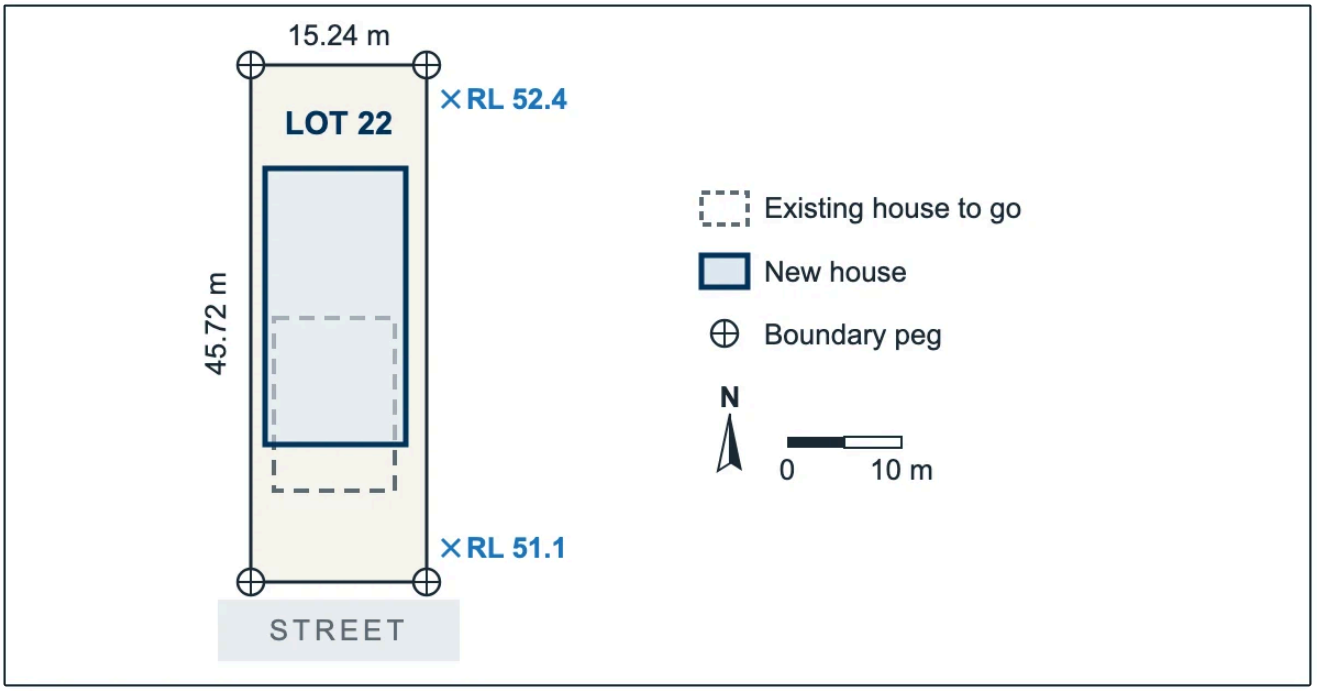


By City Surveyors Adelaide | 24 November 2026

Knock Down Rebuild in Adelaide: The Surveys, Approvals and Site Costs Before the Build

A knock down rebuild in Adelaide has two budgets: the builder's price for the new house, and the site work around it. The site work is often priced separately, so it pays to know what it involves. It covers the surveys that let the builder price your real block, getting the power and water disconnected, any approval or asbestos work before demolition, and block conditions such as slope, trees and a wall on the boundary.

This guide sets out that site work in the order it happens, with the South Australian rules behind each step, so you can ask the right questions before you sign a build contract.

Key takeaways

- A builder's base price is worked out for an assumed site. A detail and level survey of your actual block lets the designer and builder price what is really there.

- Three surveys usually run in this order: detail and levels for design, boundary pegs so the house sits within your land, then a set-out of the new house before the footings or slab.
- Power has to be permanently removed (abolished) before demolition, not just switched off. SA Power Networks says this takes on average about 3 weeks to be ready to book, plus 4 to 6 weeks for a crew.
- Knocking down the whole of a house is generally not "development" under the South Australian regulations, so it usually needs no development approval. The exceptions are heritage places and areas the Planning and Design Code names, such as the Historic Area Overlay. Check your address first.
- Slope, retaining, a wall built on the boundary, easements and regulated trees are block conditions that can move a rebuild price.

What a builder's base price usually leaves for you to sort out

Builders' knockdown packages are priced on a house design and a set of assumptions about the site. Ask your builder what their base price assumes, and which of the items below are included, provisional or left to you. The answers differ from builder to builder, so read the contract rather than relying on the package page.

Item	Who usually arranges it	Where the figure comes from
Detail and level survey of the existing block	You or your builder, before design	A surveyor's quote for your address
Boundary identification and pegs	You or your builder	A surveyor's quote for your address
Set-out of the new house	Usually the builder, before footings	A surveyor's quote, often in the builder's price
Power abolishment	You, through your electricity retailer	Charged by the retailer on your final bill
Water and sewer disconnection	Your builder, demolisher or plumber, with SA Water	SA Water's fees and charges schedule, by connection size

Item	Who usually arranges it	Where the figure comes from
Asbestos inspection and removal	You or your demolition contractor	A licensed removalist's and assessor's quotes
Demolition	You or your builder	A demolition contractor's quote
Approval for demolition, if the house is heritage listed or in an area the Code names, such as a Historic Area Overlay	You or your builder, through PlanSA	The application fees for your development
Site works for slope, fill or retaining	Builder	The builder's site costs, once levels are known
Tree removal, if a regulated tree is affected	You, with council approval	Council and an arborist's quote

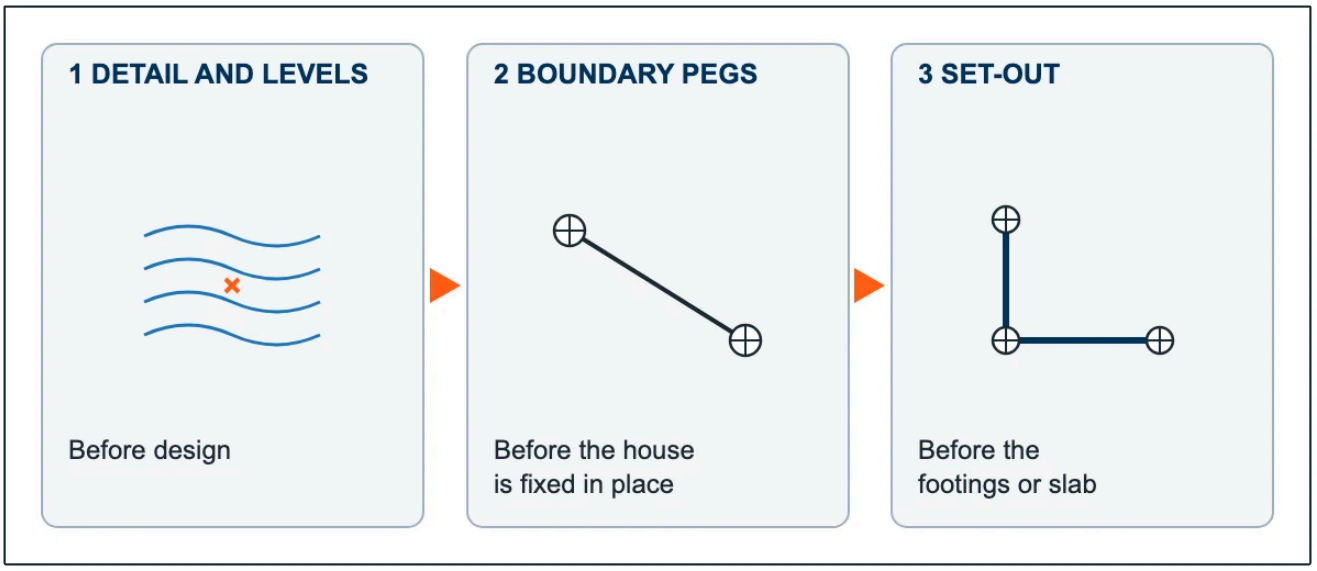
For the surveys, our own price guide for residential surveys on standard-sized blocks is $800 to $3,500, depending on the type of survey and the size and complexity of the land. We quote each survey on your address.

The three surveys, in the order you need them

Each survey answers a different question, and each one feeds the next stage of the job.

1. **Detail and level survey, before design.** This records what is on and around the block now: the existing house, levels across the site, fences, trees, driveways, kerb and footpath, and the floor levels and windows of neighbouring houses where the design needs them. The designer draws the new house on it, and the builder uses the levels to price slab, fill and retaining. A detail survey is the step that turns a package price into a price for your block.
2. **Boundary identification and pegs, before the house is fixed in place.** The design has to sit within your land and meet the setbacks the Planning and Design Code sets for your zone. A licensed surveyor works the boundary out from the title, the registered plan and the survey marks, and pegs it. Old fences are not always on the line, so a boundary survey is the reliable way to know where it is before you build near it.
3. **Set-out, before the footings or slab.** Once the plans are approved and the old house is gone, the surveyor marks where the new house goes, using the approved

plans. A construction set-out survey is what puts the slab where the approval says it goes.



Doing the detail and level survey early means the slope, trees and levels are known before the contract is signed, not after.

Starting a knock down rebuild? Send us your address and where you are up to. We will tell you which surveys you need now and quote them, free.

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Getting the power and water off before demolition

Power. Switching the power off at the meter is not enough for demolition. SafeWork SA explains that after a disconnection, live electricity is still present between the meter and the street. The supply has to be permanently removed, which the industry calls an abolishment. According to SA Power Networks:

- you arrange the abolishment through your electricity retailer, who sends the request to SA Power Networks
- the cost is charged by your retailer and appears on your final electricity bill

- on average it takes about 3 weeks from when SA Power Networks receives the request until the job is ready to book, then 4 to 6 weeks for crew availability, which can vary with demand
- solar panels and batteries must be decommissioned by a licensed electrician before demolition starts

Before demolition, SafeWork SA says to check that the meter has been removed and that a yellow SA Power Networks sticker is in the meter box, which confirms the grid supply is disconnected. Lodge the abolishment request early, because its lead time can set the demolition date.

Water and sewer. The existing water and sewer connections also have to be disconnected or altered for the new house. SA Water sets its disconnection and connection fees by connection size in its fees and charges schedule, which is updated for each financial year. Your builder, demolisher or plumber may arrange this. Ask who is lodging it and whether the fee is in their price.

Do you need approval to knock the house down?

Usually not, if the house is not heritage listed and is not in a protected area. The Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 counts demolition as building work, and building work as development. But the General Regulations then exclude "the demolition of the whole of a building" from development (Schedule 4, clause 10, read with regulation 3C). That exclusion does not cover:

- a State heritage place
- a local heritage place
- a building in a zone, subzone or overlay that the Planning and Design Code identifies for this purpose

PlanSA's practice guideline on the Historic Area Overlay confirms that partial or whole demolition of a building in that overlay is development and is assessed on its merits. The same guideline notes that demolishing a representative building in a Character Area Overlay is not development and needs no approval to demolish. Partly demolishing a house, for example keeping the front rooms, is not covered by the whole-building exclusion, so treat it as needing approval.

To check your address, look up its zone and overlays on the state's free property map, as explained in our guide to the SA Property and Planning Atlas, or ask your council. Where

demolition does need building consent, the Regulations require the application to include a site plan showing the building in relation to the boundaries of the site and any trees or buildings nearby that the work might affect. A detail survey gives you an accurate base for that plan.

The new house itself needs development approval, lodged through PlanSA, before building starts. That is a separate application from any demolition approval.

Asbestos. Older houses can contain asbestos products. SafeWork SA's asbestos guidance for demolition says that before demolition of a house, a competent person must inspect it for asbestos. Where a licensed quantity is found, a licensed asbestos removalist does the removal, and a licensed asbestos assessor may be needed for air monitoring and the clearance inspection. Friable asbestos must be removed by a Class A licensed removalist. Ask your demolition contractor how asbestos is handled and priced in their quote.

Block conditions that move the price

These are the things a detail and level survey shows early, so they can be priced before you commit.

- **Slope.** A fall across the block can mean a cut and fill, retaining walls, a stepped or split-level slab, or extra stormwater work. The levels from the survey are what the builder prices these from.
- **A wall on the boundary.** Building a garage or carport wall on the boundary saves space on a narrow block, but the Planning and Design Code rules for your zone apply to walls on a boundary, the wall has to be built on the true line, and access and the finish on the neighbour's side usually need to be agreed with them. A boundary survey and a set-out to the pegged line are part of the cost of that choice. If the old fence is coming down too, our Fences Act guide covers the neighbour side.
- **Easements and old services.** An easement on the title, such as a sewer or drainage easement, can limit where the new house goes. Your certificate of title and the registered plan show registered easements. The detail survey shows where pits, meters and other visible services are on the ground.
- **Trees.** In South Australia a regulated tree, under the General Regulations (regulation 3F), is one in a designated regulated tree overlay with a trunk circumference of 1 metre or more, measured 1 metre above natural ground. A circumference of 2 metres or more makes it a significant tree. Some trees are exempt, for example many trees

within 3 metres of an existing house on the same block, though not gum trees and a few other listed species. Removing or damaging a regulated tree that is not exempt, including one on the neighbour's side near your works, needs approval, so check with your council. The detail survey records tree positions so the designer can plan around them.

What to have in hand before you sign a build contract

1. A detail and level survey of your block, given to your designer and builder.
2. Your certificate of title and registered plan, so easements and the boundary are known.
3. A written answer from your builder on what the base price assumes for slope, fill, retaining, site access and services.
4. The abolishment request lodged with your retailer, or a date for it.
5. Confirmation of whether your demolition needs approval, from the zone and overlays for your address or your council.
6. An asbestos inspection result and the demolition contractor's quote.
7. Who will arrange the boundary pegs and the set-out, and whether they are in the builder's price.

Frequently asked questions

Is it cheaper to knock down and rebuild or to renovate?

It depends on the house and the block. Compare builders' fixed prices for both on the same block, with the site costs in this guide included in each. A detail and level survey lets both quotes be priced on the same measured site.

Do I need council approval to demolish a house in Adelaide?

Not usually for the whole of a house. The General Regulations exclude whole-building demolition from development, except for State and local heritage places and buildings in Code-identified areas such as the Historic Area Overlay. The new house always needs development approval through PlanSA.

How long does it take to get the power abolished?

SA Power Networks says that on average it takes about 3 weeks from when it receives your retailer's request until the abolishment is ready to book, then 4 to 6 weeks for crew availability. Lodge it through your retailer early.

Which survey do I need for a knock down rebuild?

Usually three: a detail and level survey before design, boundary identification with pegs, and a set-out of the new house before the footings. Your builder may arrange the set-out.

What does a survey cost for a knock down rebuild?

Our price guide for residential surveys on standard-sized blocks is $800 to $3,500, depending on the type of survey and the size and complexity of the land. Send us your address and we will quote the surveys your job needs.

What is the cheapest way to demolish a house?

Compare several demolition quotes on the same scope: each should state how asbestos, the slab, fences, trees and driveway are handled and what is taken off site. Having the power abolished and the water disconnected in time keeps the demolition date on track.

Before you budget

- Order the detail and level survey and lodge the power abolishment first; both have lead times that the rest of the job waits on.
- Check whether your address is heritage listed or in an area the Code names, such as a Historic Area Overlay, before booking demolition.

City Surveyors Adelaide has more than 10 years of experience with detail, boundary and set-out surveys across Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills.

Get the site figures before you sign. Tell us the address and where you are up to with your builder. We will tell you which surveys you need and send a free quote.

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Sources checked 24 November 2026: Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 (version 30 July 2026) and General Regulations 2017 (version 29 October 2026); Planning and Design Code version 2026.22 (19 November 2026); PlanSA, Practice Guideline 3, Historic Area Overlay; SA Power Networks, permanent disconnections; SafeWork SA, abolishment of electricity supply and asbestos in homes. SafeWork SA's demolition asbestos page (December 2025) and SA Water's fees and charges page (March 2026) were read from archived copies. General information only, not legal, planning or building advice.