



Asset Surveys – What’s the point? – by Simon Kennish

Asset Surveys are often instructed by people who have no idea what they actually need the data for or how they plan to use it once they have it. As a result, the data collected is either the wrong information, too much, too little or in a format that cannot be easily crunched into anything useful. All in all a pointless task that costs a significant sum to gather.

So let’s look at how best to go about asset surveys from the start.

First of all, work out why you want to undertake an asset survey. Is it a legal requirement for a public body, or in the interest of good asset management? As Stephen Covey would say ‘start with the end in mind’. It could be for a whole multitude of reasons, but generally it will be one of these:

An overall snapshot of the estates condition now.

This can be used to track the estates overall condition over time and plan for the future. You could split the estate into property types (office, storage, manufacturing , leisure etc) with an overall asset condition grade from A to E. If combined with an accurate floor area for each you can see what percentage of the estate is in each property type by each condition grade.

If you undertake surveys every 5 years or so you can see how it is changing over time, but don’t forget to allow for acquisitions, disposals, refurbishments and changes in use/ property type. So say at this survey you have 30% in category D (Unsatisfactory) and you want to reduce that in 5 years time, you can then plan how best to achieve that either through disposals or refurbishments as part of a wider asset management strategy.

Repair Needs and Costs

Another good output from an asset survey is to identify what the repair needs for the estate will be over the next timeframe, say 5 years. This will help plan for budget purposes, or help inform asset management decisions such as disposal, continued reactive repair or a larger refurbishment scheme.

Cost is a key factor here, you need to gather the data on what the repairs will costs as at today’s rates, then ensure your data handling system can be updated periodically with changes in the market rates, say using the BCIS Cost Information Index published each quarter. You need your system to be able to auto-update all the figures from one keyed entry to make this simple. I have





seen some systems that can days to enter the number in every property survey sheet – which if you have say 500 properties is a killer.

Statutory Compliance

Ensuring you can demonstrate that you are safely managing your estate can be key when auditors or enforcing agencies call, So your data gather should also capture the current compliance position for each property. One factor that most forget is that just because something is in good repair, it may not be compliant, so easily missed if the brief doesn't ask for it.

Reference Survey (Floor Areas)

Whilst undertaking the survey, it is always worthwhile gathering reference survey info for GIA and NIA. Apart from being essential to insurance reinstatement valuations, it is key to using the data gathered for things like costs per sqm for rent, rates, utilities, maintenance and an whole host of other factors. I am continually surprised at how many base sets of data are often wildly out once an accurate reference survey has been undertaken. If you are undertaking a major refurbishment, it's useful to undertake a reference survey at handover and use that to update your base data.

Specific Purpose Survey

Sometimes there is a brief to gather data for a specific purpose, say on historic buildings or for contamination issues, if there is a need to gather this in the future, combine it now with the main asset survey to save cost. One of the largest costs is sending a surveyor to site, so make best use of them whilst they are there.

Finally, once you have gathered all your data, ensure you have it in a form that you can easily use. I saw one old colleague lost for words when 500 neatly bound hard copies of the 'building survey' he had commissioned arrived on a pallet in his reception. These were all beautifully surveyed, with photos and eloquent descriptions of all the properties and their defects – about 60 A4 pages for each property. However the part he was interested in was a single sheet at the back with the cost for the repairs for the next 5 years. He sat there in dismay as he realised he had got what he asked for, not what he needed. It took him weeks to manually enter the data he wanted in an Excel sheet, the hard copies never saw the light of day again. His survey had cost 4x what mine had cost, and was almost entirely useless to him.





Be careful what you ask for, as you might just get exactly that!

Bio Notes - Simon Kennish FRICS, MAPM, MCMI is a Chartered Surveyor, Project and Programme Manager with a passion for delivering major projects and programmes in both the public and private sectors. www.simonkennish.com

