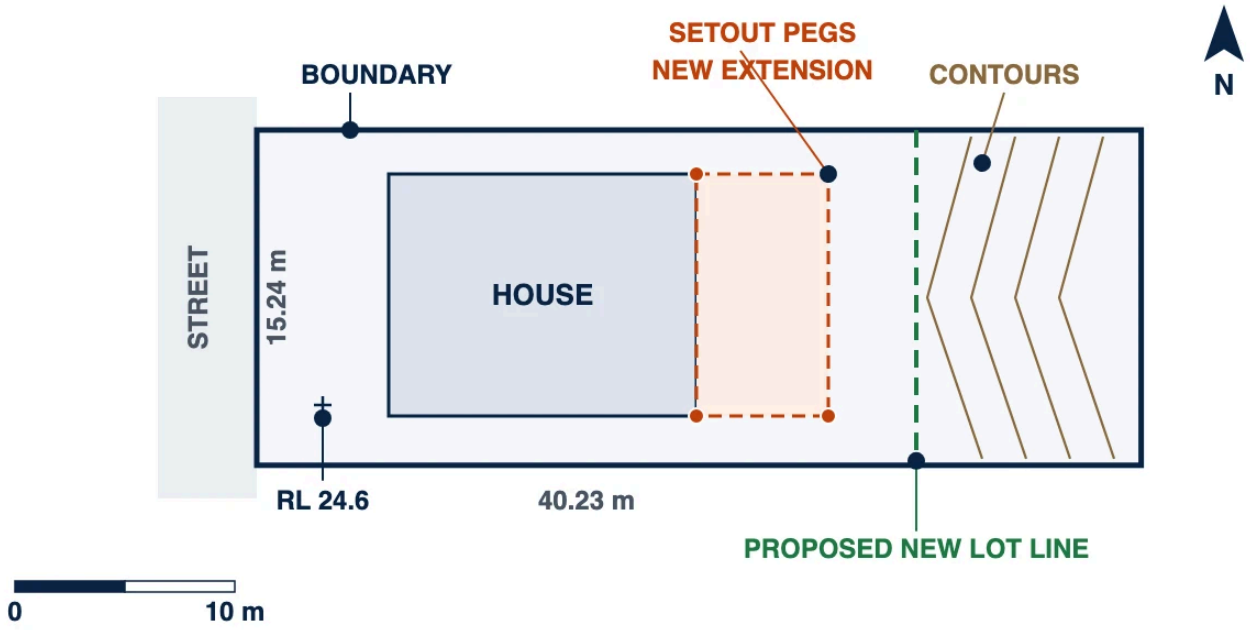


By Sydney Surveyor Solutions | 26 November 2026

Site survey in Sydney: which survey your project actually needs

A site survey is a surveyor's measured record of your land, and in Sydney the term covers several different surveys. Which one you need depends on what you are doing: buying, fencing, designing, building, subdividing or creating strata lots.

This guide matches each kind of project to the survey that councils, certifiers and designers usually mean. It then tells you what to say when you book, so you get the right one first time.

> **Key takeaways**
>
> - "Site survey" is a general name. Ask whoever requested it which survey they need and what it must show.
> - Every development application in NSW needs a site plan showing boundary dimensions, site area, existing levels, trees and buildings. A detail and contour survey usually supplies that information.

> - Councils can ask for more. City of Sydney wants the survey based on a boundary survey when works come within 1 metre of a side or rear boundary.
> - Standard NSW consent conditions have a registered surveyor mark the footings against the boundaries during the build and report to the principal certifier.
> - Only a registered land surveyor may carry out boundary, subdivision and strata surveys for a fee in NSW.

What people mean by a "site survey"

When an architect, builder, certifier or council asks for a "site survey", they want measured information about your land that their part of the job depends on. A designer wants levels, trees and existing buildings. A certifier wants proof the new slab sits where the approved plans put it. A buyer wants to know the house and fences sit inside the title boundaries.

The words differ between councils. The NSW Department of Planning asks for a "site plan" with every development application. City of Sydney asks for a "survey plan". Builders often say "site survey" or "feature and level survey". These all point to the same handful of survey types, set out in the table below.

Which survey for which project

Your project	The survey usually needed	What it gives you
Buying a home, or checking a fence or shed is on your land	Identification survey	Where the buildings, fences and walls sit against the title boundaries
A fence dispute, a new boundary fence or a structure near the line	Boundary survey	The boundary found and marked on the ground by a registered surveyor
Designing a house, extension, pool or granny flat for a DA	Detail survey, often with contours	Levels, contours, trees, services and existing buildings on and near the site
Building: footings, slab and walls	Setout survey	The approved building marked on the ground, then checked as it goes up

Your project	The survey usually needed	What it gives you
Splitting a block into two or more lots	Subdivision survey	The plan of subdivision for registration and the new boundaries marked
Creating units or townhouses on separate titles	Strata survey	The strata plan defining each lot and the common property

If your project spans more than one row, you will usually need more than one survey at different stages. A new house on a narrow block, for example, often starts with a detail survey based on a boundary survey and ends with setout during construction.

Boundary and identification surveys

These two answer the question "where is my land?". An identification survey checks where your house, fences and other improvements sit in relation to the title boundaries, which is what most buyers and owners planning minor works need. A boundary survey goes further: the surveyor finds the boundary from the deposited plan and the survey marks, and marks it on the ground.

In NSW, the Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002 makes it an offence to carry out a land survey for fee or reward unless you are a registered land surveyor. The Act's definition of a land survey includes identifying or marking out the boundaries of a parcel of land. The Board of Surveying and Spatial Information puts it plainly: registered land surveyors are the only surveyors qualified to define and identify land boundaries in NSW.

For a fence, see our guide to surveying before you build a fence. For what these surveys cost, our boundary survey cost guide explains what moves the price.

Detail, contour and feature surveys for designers

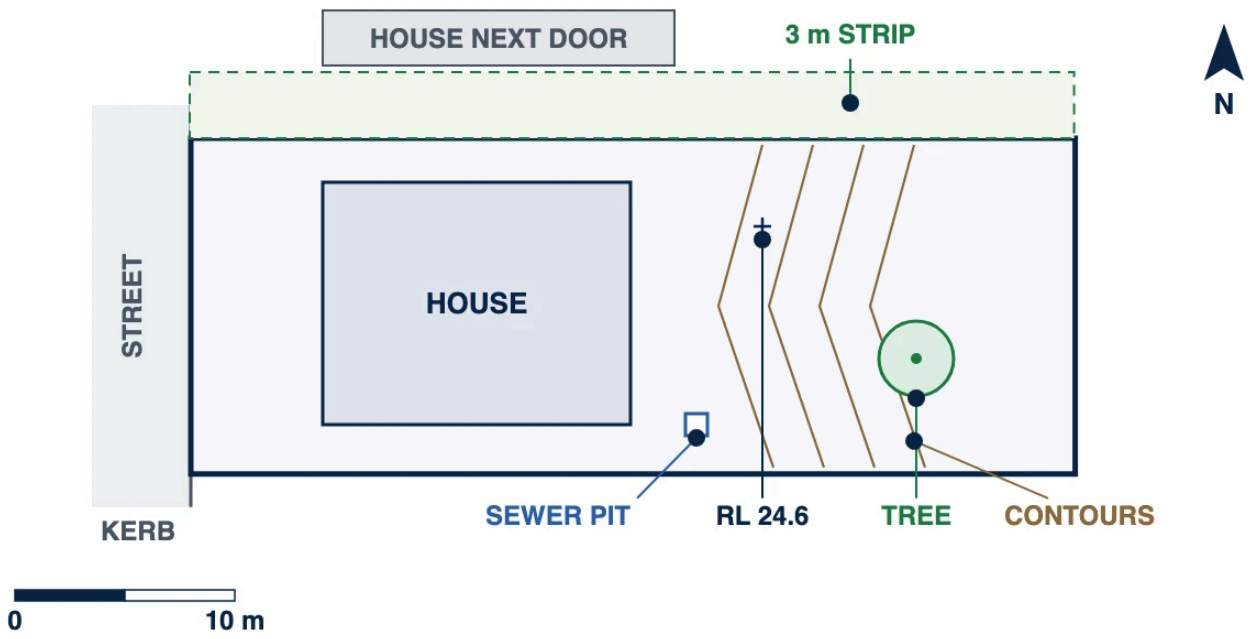
This is the survey most people mean when an architect or building designer says "get a site survey". It records what is on and around your block so the design starts from measured conditions, not guesswork.

Every development application lodged on the NSW Planning Portal must include a site plan. The Department of Planning's application requirements say it must show:

- the land's location, boundary dimensions, site area and north point
- existing vegetation and trees
- the location and uses of existing buildings
- existing levels in relation to buildings and roads
- buildings on the sites next door

Councils can add to that list. City of Sydney's survey plan specification asks for a contour and detail survey prepared by a registered surveyor with most applications. Where the works come within 1 metre of a side or rear boundary, it says the survey must be based on a boundary survey. Its list includes:

- spot levels and contours to the Australian Height Datum
- trees on the site and within 3 metres of it
- visible services
- neighbouring buildings within 3 metres of the boundary, with their floor and window levels



Other Sydney councils publish their own lodgement checklists, so check yours or send it to us with your quote request. Our guide to detail surveys for architects covers what the plan shows in more depth, and our contour survey page covers levels on sloping blocks.

Designing, building or subdividing? Send us the address and what you are planning, and we will tell you which survey you need and send a free quote.

GET A QUOTE FOR YOUR SITE SURVEY · **CALL (02) 5114 2551**

You can upload your plans, the council or certifier's request, or any old survey on the form.

Setout surveys during the build

Once the construction certificate is issued, the approved design has to be put on the ground in the right place. A setout survey marks the building corners, offsets and levels so the builder knows where to dig and pour.

The NSW Department of Planning's standard conditions of consent for residential development include a condition headed "Surveys by a registered surveyor". It applies while building work is carried out. A registered surveyor must measure and mark the positions of all footings and foundations in relation to the site boundaries and any registered and proposed easements. Those positions go to the principal certifier, along with any other marks the certifier requires.

City of Sydney's specification says the same for setout. New buildings and additions will need to be set out by a registered surveyor once the construction certificate is issued.

Councils adapt these conditions, so read your own consent. The survey your consent asks for is the one your certifier will check.



Subdivision and strata surveys

Splitting a block or creating strata lots changes the titles themselves, so the survey becomes the legal plan. The Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002's definition of a land survey also covers two kinds of work here. One is a survey for a plan lodged under the

subdivision provisions of the Conveyancing Act 1919. The other is a strata document that the Strata Schemes Development Act 2015 requires a registered land surveyor to prepare. Both must be done by a registered land surveyor.

The same standard conditions also let a council ask for a registered surveyor's documentation that existing survey marks were preserved or re-established. The council sets when, such as before a subdivision or occupation certificate. If your certifier has asked for a survey before you move in, our occupation certificate guide explains what they usually want.

See our subdivision survey and strata survey pages for how those jobs run.

What to tell the surveyor when you book

A clear request gets you the right survey and an accurate quote. When you contact us, include:

1. **The address**, and the lot and deposited plan number if you have them. Our guide on how to read a survey plan shows where to find them.
2. **What you are planning**: buying, a fence, an extension, a new house, a pool, a subdivision or strata.
3. **Who asked for the survey and their exact words.** Forward the email from your architect, builder, certifier or council if you can. "Contour and detail survey with boundary to AHD" tells us far more than "site survey".
4. **Your project stage**: design, DA lodged, construction certificate issued, building, or finishing.
5. **Anything you already have**: old surveys, the deposited plan, approved plans or the consent conditions.
6. **Access notes**: locked gates, dogs, steep or overgrown areas, and whether the neighbours know.

Our quote form has room for the project description and lets you upload plans and documents.

Frequently asked questions

What is a site survey?

It is a surveyor's measured record of your land. Depending on the job it can mean an identification, boundary, detail and contour, setout, subdivision or strata survey. Ask whoever requested it which one they need.

Do I need a site survey for a DA in Sydney?

Every development application in NSW must include a site plan showing boundary dimensions, site area, existing levels, trees and buildings, and a detail survey is the usual way to get that information. Some councils ask for more. City of Sydney wants a contour and detail survey by a registered surveyor with most applications, based on a boundary survey where works are within 1 metre of a side or rear boundary.

Who can do a boundary survey in NSW?

Only a registered land surveyor may carry out a land survey for fee or reward in NSW, and that includes identifying or marking out boundaries. Students and surveyor's assistants may do the work only under a registered land surveyor's supervision, and a survey drafter may prepare the plan for a registered land surveyor.

Is a detail survey the same as a contour survey?

They overlap. A detail survey records buildings, trees, services and levels; a contour survey focuses on the shape of the ground. For a DA they are usually done together as a contour and detail survey.

When does the builder need a setout survey?

After the construction certificate is issued and before footings are dug. Standard NSW consent conditions then have a registered surveyor mark the footings against the boundaries and give that to the principal certifier.

Can I use an old survey?

Send it to us. It can help, but it may not show what your council or certifier now needs, and buildings, fences and levels change. We will tell you whether it covers the request or what needs adding.

Get a quote for your site survey

Tell us the address, what you are planning and who asked for the survey. We will confirm which survey fits, what it will show and send a free quote.

Not sure which survey you have been asked for? Send us the request as you received it and we will work it out with you.

GET A QUOTE FOR YOUR SITE SURVEY · **CALL (02) 5114 2551**

You can upload plans and documents on the form. Find us on **Google**, or read more **about Sydney Surveyor Solutions**.

Sources checked 26 November 2026: Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002 (NSW), section 21 and definitions; Board of Surveying and Spatial Information, What is a Land Survey? (September 2024); NSW Department of Planning, Application requirements (March 2022); NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Standard conditions of consent: Residential (November 2024); City of Sydney, Survey plan specifications for planning applications (July 2025). General information only; your consent conditions and council requirements decide what your project needs.