Planning a Bathroom Renovation from Layout to Completion

A bathroom renovation is one of the most rewarding home projects you can undertake, but it also requires careful planning to avoid costly mistakes. Whether you are updating a small ensuite or rethinking a family bathroom, the process follows a logical sequence. Understanding each stage before you begin will save time, reduce stress, and help you achieve a finish that works for years to come.

Start with the Layout

The layout is the foundation of any successful bathroom. Before choosing tiles or taps, you need to decide where the main fixtures will sit. The key elements are the toilet, basin, shower, and bath if you are including one. Their positions determine the plumbing runs and drainage routes, which are costly to alter later.

Think about how you use the space day to day. A walk-in shower might suit a downstairs wet room better than a traditional bath. An accessible bathroom needs wider doorways and a level-access shower tray. If the room is small, consider a corner basin or a compact toilet to free up floor area. Draw a scale plan of the room and mark the existing pipework locations. This will show you what is possible without moving soil stacks or main waste pipes.

One common mistake is overcrowding the layout. A bathroom needs clear circulation space around each fixture. Leave at least 900mm in front of a toilet and basin, and 700mm beside a shower entry. If you are fitting a bath, allow room to stand and dry comfortably. Good ventilation is also easier to plan when the layout is settled, so think about where an extractor fan or window will go.

Once you are happy with the plan, get a professional opinion. A plumber or bathroom designer can check that your layout meets building regulations and that the drainage slopes are adequate. They will also flag any issues with soil pipe runs or ventilation requirements before you order anything.



Choose Your Sanitaryware and Fittings

With the layout confirmed, you can select the sanitaryware. This includes the toilet, basin, bath, and shower tray. The quality of these items affects both durability and ease of cleaning. Look for vitreous china for basins and toilets because the glazed surface resists staining and scratches. For baths, acrylic is lighter and retains heat well, while steel or cast iron is more durable but heavier.

Think about the tap finish early. Chrome is classic and works with most styles, but brushed brass or matte black can add character. Whatever you choose, keep the finish consistent across taps, showerheads, and towel rails for a cohesive look. Also consider the type of shower: a thermostatic mixer valve gives precise temperature control, while an electric shower is simpler to install in a wet room without a dedicated hot water supply.

Accessibility matters too. Lever taps are easier to operate than cross-head taps, and a shower with a low tray or level access helps as you get older or if you have mobility issues. An accessible bathroom does not have to look clinical; modern designs offer clean lines and comfortable heights that suit everyone.

Waterproofing and Tiling

Waterproofing is the most critical part of any bathroom installation. Without proper tanking, moisture can seep into the walls and floor, causing rot, mould, and structural damage. A wet room or walk-in shower needs a continuous waterproof membrane applied to the walls and floor before tiling. Even a standard bathroom benefits from tanking the shower area and the floor around the bath.

Use a liquid or sheet membrane that is compatible with your substrate. Pay special attention to corners, pipe penetrations, and joints between wall and floor. These are the most vulnerable points. Once the membrane is dry, you can tile over it. Ceramic and porcelain tiles are popular because they are waterproof and easy to clean. Natural stone looks beautiful but needs sealing and more maintenance.

The tile finish affects the room's feel and safety. Large-format tiles reduce grout lines, making the room look bigger and easier to clean. Small mosaic tiles work well on shower floors because they grip wet feet, but they need more grout. Choose a slip rating of at least R10 for floor tiles. For walls, a rectified edge gives a tighter grout line and a more polished look.

Grout should be waterproof and stain-resistant. Epoxy grout is more expensive but does not need sealing and resists mould better than cement-based grout. If you are using a dark tile, a matching dark grout hides dirt and keeps the finish crisp.

Lighting and Ventilation

Good lighting transforms a bathroom from a purely functional space into somewhere you can relax. The ideal setup combines ambient light, task light, and accent light. Ambient light comes from a ceiling fitting, while task light is essential around the mirror for shaving or applying makeup. Wall lights on either side of the mirror cast even light on the face, avoiding shadows. A single light above the mirror is less effective.



Ventilation is equally important. Without it, moisture builds up and leads to mould and peeling paint. If the room has no window, install an extractor fan that vents to the outside. The fan should have a humidity sensor so it runs automatically after a shower. For a wet room, a higher extraction rate is needed because more moisture is released into the air.

Consider adding a heat lamp or heated towel rail to keep the room warm and dry. These also help prevent condensation on mirrors and windows.

Heating and Plumbing Preparation

Before the walls are closed up, all pipework and heating connections must be in place. This is the time to reroute pipes if you changed the layout. Copper or plastic push-fit pipework are both reliable, but push-fit fittings are quicker to install and easier to modify later. Ensure all hot and cold water pipes are insulated to reduce heat loss and prevent condensation.

If you are installing underfloor heating, it should go in before tiling. Electric underfloor heating mats are simpler to retrofit, while warm water systems are more efficient but need a manifold and connection to the boiler. Both systems work well with tile finishes because the tile conducts heat effectively.

Radiators and towel rails should be sized to match the room's heat loss. A plumber can calculate this based on the room size, window area, and insulation level. A correctly sized

radiator keeps the room comfortable without wasting energy. Carswells, a provider of plumbing and heating services across Berkshire and nearby Surrey areas, often advises homeowners to plan heating early in the renovation process so that pipe runs can be hidden behind walls or under floors.

Installation Sequence

The installation follows a set order. First comes the first fix: running all the pipework, waste pipes, and electrical cables. The soil pipe for the toilet must be positioned accurately because moving it later is difficult. Next, the electrician installs the wiring for lights, fan, and any heated towel rail. All electrical work should comply with Part P of the building regulations and be signed off by a qualified electrician.

After the first fix, the walls and floor are prepared for tiling. Any plasterboard that needs replacing should be moisture-resistant. Then the waterproofing is applied, followed by tiling. Once the tiles are set and grouted, the second fix begins: fitting the toilet, basin, bath, shower tray, and taps. The final stage is installing the shower screen, mirror, towel rail, and any accessories.

Leave the toilet and basin until last to avoid damage while you are working around them. Also, check all connections for leaks before sealing the edges with silicone. A small leak behind a tile can go unnoticed for weeks and cause serious damage.



Final Checks and Snagging

Once everything is installed, run a thorough check. Turn on all taps and flush the toilet several times to confirm the drainage works and there are no leaks. Test the shower at full temperature and check that the extractor fan operates. Look at the grout lines for cracks or gaps and seal them if needed. Make sure the shower door opens and closes smoothly without binding on the tray.

If you used a contractor, walk through the room with them and note any snags. Most professionals will return to fix minor issues like a loose handle or a dripping tap. Keep the manufacturer's instructions for all sanitaryware in case you need spare parts later.

A bathroom renovation is a significant investment, but with a clear plan and careful execution, the result will serve you well for decades. The key is to think through each stage before you start, choose durable materials, and leave technical work like plumbing and electrical connections to qualified professionals. Carswells, with its experience in bathroom and renovation services across Berkshire and nearby Surrey areas, sees many projects where good planning makes the difference between a smooth renovation and a stressful one. Taking the time to get the layout right, waterproof properly, and sequence the work correctly will give you a bathroom that looks great and functions reliably for years to come.