

Communion Architects

Getting Started On
Your Building Project



www.communionarchitects.com

A quick start guide covering what you need to know about working with an architect as well as designing, planning and managing a successful build.

The Journey Starts Here

A building project isn't something to be taken on lightly. It's an option that involves difficult decisions and has serious responsibilities. But it is also a journey that, when embarked upon, offers incredible rewards. It is an opportunity to take an idea, develop it and see it take its place in the world for generations to come.



We've put together this pack to give you information that will help you when you're thinking about starting building work on your home. It is based on our experiences of working with clients over many years on their new homes, extensions, barn conversions and listed building projects.

You'll find it useful if you're planning to commission an architect. You'll find it equally useful if you are planning to do the work yourself.

There is a section with guidance on what to look for if you decide to work with an architect.

There is a section that talks you through the five Stages that we divide a project into to help you understand the process of turning an idea into reality. It contains an invaluable exercise that will help you focus your thinking and gain clarity on what you want to achieve from your project.

There is a section on what it is like to work with Communion. Finally, there are three articles that answer the two questions we are most frequently asked: 'Is it worth extending my home?' and, 'How much will my project cost?'

Working with an Architect

If you choose to work with an architect, part of our role in your journey is to help you to enjoy it as much as possible. We will be your professional partner when difficult decisions need to be made. We will also do everything we can to remove as many of the unknowns as we can and ensure your experience is as inspirational and smooth as it possibly can be. Our job is to utilise our knowledge, experience and connections to help you realise your dream.



How To Choose Your Architect

Whether it's a new home, extension, a barn conversion or a listed building renovation, deciding to take the plunge and build is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make. Once you've made that decision, you've got another one to think about: how do you choose the architect who will realise your ideas?

Use the RIBA Website

In the first instance, it's simple. The RIBA website has a handy [Find an Architect](#) application that will help you narrow down your choice. It will also give you the reassurance that you have chosen a fully qualified individual. But where do you go from there? Once you have got your shortlist of architects, how do you go about choosing the one who's right for you?

Personal Taste

It's about personal taste as much as anything else. Do you like what you see? Architects will use their creativity to open up a world of possibilities: the right architect for you is the one who delivers your wow factor. When you look at their portfolio, is each design unique to the client so it's delivering exactly what is required? Are their designs forward-thinking but also sensitive to conservation requirements where necessary?

Experience and Recognition

You might also like to think about the experience your architect has of working on similar projects. Knowing your architect has worked on similar projects in the past can give you confidence, and essential publicity (potentially opening up additional funding) if your project involves a public building.

Personal Connection

You need to be sure you'll be able to build a strong relationship with your architect - realising your vision will depend on this. You will only know whether you have this connection by meeting them.

Our Communion podcast features our clients talking about their projects. We find it helps prospective clients gain an insight into what it is like to work with us.

At the end of the day, if you choose a RIBA architect, you can't go far wrong. But by taking the time to consider the more intangible things, you can build a strong relationship with your architect. It means that not only will you have the end result you always imagined but you'll also enjoy the process of getting there.



“We felt it was essential to have an architect. We probably could have scribbled some drawings together and said ‘this is the sort of thing we want’. We could have got a technician to draw them up and maybe even got planning permission. We could have got a builder to quote for it, but the result would not have been anything like we have here. The expertise we got from an architect in terms of detailing, material choices and design just lifts it.”

Felicity

Turning an Idea into a Building

Here at Communion we find it is useful to break the journey of transforming an idea into a building into five independent but interlinked Stages: Idealise, Visualise, Verbalise, Materialise, Utilise.



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Stage Zero - Idealise

Agreeing the Brief & Testing the Principle

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Designing the Details & Agreeing the Price

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Living the Life & Making Everything Good



Stage Zero - Checklist



Here is a checklist you may find useful at these very early stages of your journey. It will help to focus your thinking and identify what is important to you.

Problems to Solve

Think about the problems that your project could help you solve. What don't you like about your building at the moment?

Spaces Required

Think about your project in practical terms. What do you need from any new space? Another bedroom? A home office? A bigger kitchen?

Planning and Legal Constraints

Think about the planning and legal requirements involved. Will your project need planning permission? How likely is it to receive it?

Immediate Issues

Think about the immediate issues involved. Has your conservatory reached the end of its life? Do you have a flat roof that is leaking?



Impact of Problems

Think about how these problems manifest themselves. Do you spend less time together as a family than you'd like? Are you unable to entertain friends and family easily?

Dreams and Desires

Think about what your dream space would allow you to do. Could you host big dinner parties? Could you enjoy breakfast bathed in morning sunlight or sip a glass of wine looking at the sunset?

Timescales Required

Think about when you want your new space to be ready. Is there a deadline such as the arrival of a new baby? Is it better to get it done right than done fast?

Budget Available and Value

Think about cost and value. How much are you willing or able to spend on your project? Is the value you'll gain from improvements to your lifestyle more important than some of the financial considerations?

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Stage Zero - Idealise

Agreeing the Brief & Testing the Principle

According to Jim Rohn, “Fundamentals form the beginning, the basis and the reality from which everything else flows.” It’s why ensuring a project is fundamentally sound is an essential first step of every project. We establish the fundamentals at our first meeting with you and summarise them in our follow up letter to you. Through this process we will have:

- » Reflected on your needs, wants and desires and made note where these conflict with other issues.
- » Agreed the problems that need to be solved and how they will impact on the project.
- » Agreed the project principles and established the spaces that are required.
- » Considered the planning and legal constraints.
- » Planned the likely timescales.
- » Advised on budgets and helped you to prioritise what is truly important to the project.

From the initial contact, we were asked questions we weren't expecting: how do we live and how do we want to change how we live, what do we want to achieve. It was very much those ideas shaping the design rather than us having a fixed idea or being pushed into a fixed idea about how it needed to look at the end. I think that really made a difference as to how the building looks and feels now and how it's affected us as a family and the way we live in the space.

Jenny and John





1

Stage One - Visualise Establishing the Design & Gaining Planning Consent

Stage One takes your project from an idea to the point where you have a design that meets your needs, you have a reasonably good idea of costs and timescales, and you have permission to carry out the work. It is a powerful, transformative and valuable journey.

This Stage involves:

- » Surveying the existing building to produce accurate measured drawings. On larger projects we tender this work to ensure that you gain absolute best value for money.
- » Preparing proposed design options based on your needs, wants and desires.
- » Considering views, light and flow.
- » Working with you to discuss the options and developing one of them to create a design that you are excited about.
- » Looking at precedents to inform the look and feel of the project.
- » Providing initial budget costings which seek to give you a ballpark level of investment required to deliver the project.
- » Considering the energy aspects, including location, size and orientation.
- » Submitting a Pre-planning Enquiry, negotiating on your behalf and applying for Planning Permission.
- » Overseeing the Application while it is in for planning and responding to any queries that need to be addressed.
- » Providing a Project Programme so you can make appropriate arrangements for planning the project.

2

Stage Two - Verbalise Designing the Details & Agreeing the Price

By the end of Stage Two, you will know exactly how your design looks and feels, how much it will cost to build, the company that is going to be building it and when they will be starting work. If you are happy with the level of investment involved, you will be in a position to start work on site.

This Stage involves:

- » Detailing the construction.
- » Agreeing the finishes for the project.
- » Appointing the specialists who will provide the technical expertise needed to bring your project to life.
- » Gaining specialist structural, electrical and mechanical engineering expertise for the project.
- » Undertaking strategic kitchen and bathroom designs.
- » Gaining Building Regulation Approval to ensure your building will comply with all legal requirements and construction standards.
- » Obtaining a competitive price so you can be confident the price you pay is the best market rate.
- » Selecting a 'preferred building contractor' who will build your project.
- » Undertaking a value engineering exercise to optimise and, if possible, reduce the costs of your project further.
- » Developing the contract information for the building work to give you significant legal protection as your project is constructed.
- » Producing the Pre-Construction Health and Safety Documentation to discharge your legal duties.





3 Stage Three - Materialise

Delivering the Project On Site & Handing it Over to You

Stage Three is the most significant part of the project because it takes your project from paper to a built reality that will transform your space and your life. It is exciting, dramatic, constructive and intense.

This Stage involves:

- » Establishing and administrating a contract between you and a contractor.
- » Inspecting the works regularly on-site to ensure quality and agree design details.
- » Providing financial reports and advising you on payments to the contractor.
- » Ensuring correct implementation of the agreed design on site.
- » Responding to regular construction queries.
- » Instructing additional works required to resolve unforeseen issues and valuing these against agreed contingency and previously agreed provisional sums.
- » Responding to any changes in design requested by you as you see your project brought to life.
- » Being on-hand to resolve any site issues.
- » Ensuring that all work is completed to a high standard before signing off a project.
- » Agreeing Extensions of Time for additional work or issuing Non-Completion Certificates if works are running over.
- » Issuing the Practical Completion Certificate, ensuring a successful handover to you, and

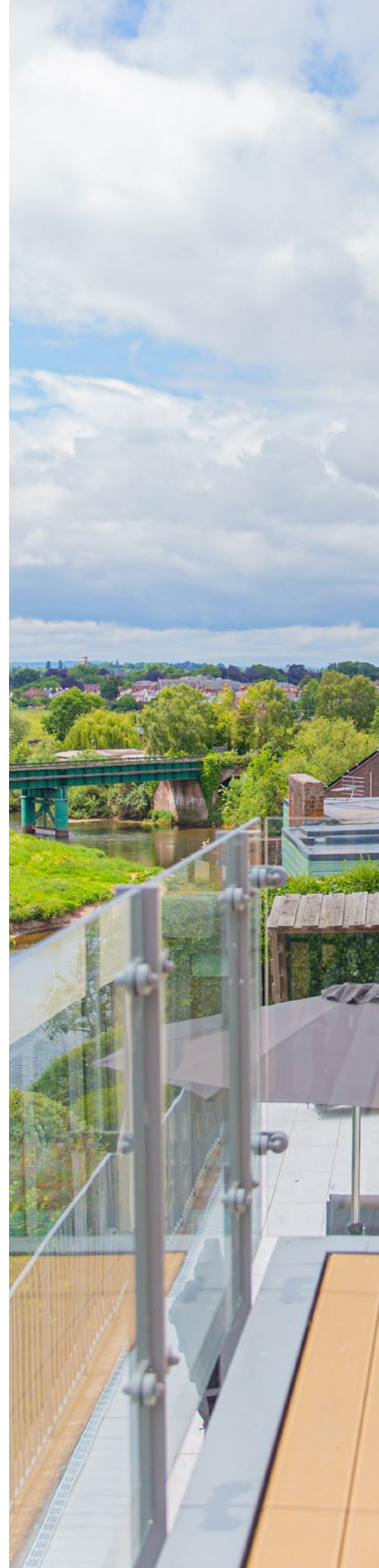
4 Stage Four - Utilise

Living the Life & Making Everything Good

The start of Stage Four is a momentous moment in the journey of your project because it is the point at which your building is ready for you to use. However, there are still a number of things that need to take place before your project can be considered fully completed.

This Stage involves:

- » Providing a complete Stage Three file that gives a complete record of the project including 'as built' drawings and key certificates.
- » Checking the building regularly to ensure everything is working correctly and actioning any necessary work.
- » Commissioning professional photographs to celebrate completion of the project.
- » Getting detailed feedback from you to help us continually learn and improve.
- » Returning to site after 12 months to carry out an inspection and make sure that any defects are 'made good' before finalising the final account.
- » Issuing the final certificate that confirms that all works are complete, any defects have been made good and all monies have been paid.
- » Commissioning a project story for the Communion Architects website and a coffee book for you to keep and enjoy.



Why Work with Communion Architects?

Choosing to work with an architect on a building project is a big decision. For anyone considering it, we have gathered together thoughts from some of our clients. They consider everything from the reasons they had for working with an architect, to the highs and lows of their journey through our Stages and their reflections on their joy in the finished result. We hope they will give you an insight into what it's like to work with an architect in general and Communion Architects in particular.

Why Work with an Architect?

“Having done quite a lot of projects in the past we thought this was a step far too far and started to look for an architect.”

An Edwardian House Reconfigured for the
21st Century

“We could have done it ourselves but we decided to get an architect in to see what was possible. Also, on previous projects we'd used a plan writing service rather than an architect, so someone prepared the plans for us to put through the planning process. This time, being new to the area, we thought we need an architect who knows Herefordshire, knows what the Herefordshire planning committee are going to allow and not allow. We also wanted somebody with a bit of vision.”

A Reconfiguration of a Modern
House with Extraordinary Views

“A huge amount of work was required because the original house was very small in proportion inside and we felt that one of the most important things

for us was to have a big family living space. It was a challenge to extend a Grade II listed building which had already been extended so part of the skill we needed from an architect was to design something and to negotiate with the planners to get it approved. We knew we needed a lot of help to get this right.”

A Re-imagining of an Eighteenth Century Timber
Framed House in the Malvern Hills

“We were coming a long way and we didn't know anyone in Herefordshire. So should we bring up an architect from the south east? Or should we source a local architect who would be able to source local suppliers? We went for the second option.”

Life-changing Business Premises in
Rural Herefordshire

“Seeking planning permission is not something it's worth taking a shortcut on so make sure you choose a team of people you feel give you the best chance of success. The return on investment is huge when compared to the costs involved in securing

1

Stage One - Visualise

Establishing the Design &
Gaining Planning Consent



permission. There's no point in skimping to try to save yourself a couple of hundred pounds at this stage because it could be a false economy."

A New Home with Expansive Views over the Worcestershire Countryside

"We set about a series of meetings that firmed up the initial plans and our specific likes and dislikes. At each meeting we came away feeling we'd made great progress and we'd gone further towards something that was unique to us. Rather than Alex just putting forward a proposal it was always an interactive process."

A Reconfiguration of a Modern House with Extraordinary Views

"It was nice that you'd have a meeting and you'd float a few ideas about and then you'd have chance

to consider them. Living in the house at the same time was very good, I think, because you could consider how you actually use the space and how you'd like that to change."

A Handsome Georgian Residence in Herefordshire Re-imagined to Transform Family Life

"Our first plans were knocked back by the planners, but Alex was extremely calm and said 'this is not the end of the world, we will find a way'. That was one of the things we valued most about Alex and the way he worked with us: when problems arose, as they inevitably will in any building project, he was able to find solutions."

A Re-imagining of an Eighteenth Century Timber Framed House in the Malvern Hills

2

Stage Two - Verbalise

Designing the Details &
Agreeing the Price



“We chose Communion because by the time we’d got to Stage Two we’d built a relationship of trust. I was also aware that Communion had designed the building that we’d secured planning permission on so it made sense to continue working with them. The architect is the one person you don’t want to chop and change during a project. We put the project out to tender with six builders and in the end only three bid for the work, which I found surprising. We went with the one we trusted the most and felt was the most likely to deliver.”

A New Home with Expansive Views over the Worcestershire Countryside

“We decided we’d contract for a builder and we were quite selective in who we chose. I’d advise anyone to choose a builder they could talk to easily, wouldn’t

push them into things they didn’t want to be pushed into and had got a team of good skilled craftsmen who can be flexible because even when you’ve got a design there can still be opportunities to add value to what you’re doing.”

A Reconfiguration of a Modern House with Extraordinary Views

“I think it was useful to have an architect’s expertise during the build. That’s not to say the builder we had would have done anything underhand but I think Communion had an expectation of what would come up when and the likely discussions that we’d need to have.”

A Home Extension for a Family Home in Hereford

3

Stage Three - Materialise

Delivering the Project On Site &
Handing it Over to You



“We worked with Communion at this Stage because, even when you’ve got faith in your builder, you need someone who can put a structure in place and keep everything running, especially on a project of this scale. We came in roughly on time and we were on budget.”

A New Home with Expansive Views over the
Worcestershire Countryside

We were glad we used Communion at Stage Three because it helped keep things on price because there are always things that come up that you don’t expect. I’d recommend using them for all three Stages unless you’ve got a lot of previous experience or you’ve got a lot of time to do it yourself, especially when it comes to the last phase.

A Handsome Georgian Residence in Herefordshire
Re-imagined to Transform Family Life

“During the build we had regular monthly site meetings which I felt were essential. They helped to keep the lines of communication open between us, the contractor and Alex, something that was especially important because we weren’t living on site. We felt it was essential to work with an architect rather than going direct to a builder. The result would not be anything like what we have here. The expertise of an architect in terms of detailing and in terms of material choices just lift it. As a landscape architect I can probably also run a project, but I would not want to contract administer my own project. You need the intermediary between you and the contractor and you need a really clear contract and strong contract administration.”

A Re-imagining of an Eighteenth Century Timber
Framed House in the Malvern Hills

Thoughts on the Hardest Parts of the Process

“Stage Two went on a bit because there were always things that were coming up that hadn’t been thought of and lots of debate over this, that and the other. The quality of the work [the builders] did was good but it did take an awfully long time.”

An Edwardian House Reconfigured for the 21st Century

“[Stage One] was the longest stage and because we hadn’t done a project like this before we were a bit naïve about how long it would take. Again [at Stage Two], we were a bit naïve about how long it would take and what it would involve, which is why I think it’s so important that we did use Alex.”

A Handsome Georgian Residence in Herefordshire Re-imagined to Transform Family Life

“The project from inception to completion must have taken at least two or two and a half years. The first year was about getting planning permission and getting tenders out to secure the work. All that was done with us being both in Herefordshire and in London so it was quite complex, but Alex made that work really well.”

A Re-imagining of an Eighteenth Century Timber Framed House in the Malvern Hills



Thoughts on the Costs Involved

“We went out to four different builders and all of them came in with prices way over what we had expected. We were then in a situation of: what do we do? The decision was taken that we would revisit the whole plan. We had to take out a significant amount of cost and that meant taking out work that we’d have liked. We chose the lowest tender and then we took out about a quarter of the work to get the price down to what was affordable from our point of view.”

An Edwardian House Reconfigured for the 21st Century

“There were additional costs by the end but I think that’s not unusual. There was an amount to be played with and we needed it and a little bit more because we found we needed to replace the slab in the kitchen. But it wasn’t excessively over.”

A Home Extension for a Family Home in Hereford

“We went through a very painful learning process, the build cost at any level would be much more than we had expected. We were arbitrarily setting our own expectation on price for work to be done based on the money available, not the reality of known costs.”

A New Home with Expansive Views over the Worcestershire Countryside

“We told [Alex] at the beginning what our maximum budget was so all the way through he was working within those guidelines. The only time we actually went over our budget was when we decided to make use of the builder being on site and doing extra things.”

A Reconfiguration of a Modern House with Extraordinary Views

Reflections on the End Result

“There’s just so much space and light now. The communal area serves different purposes with a TV area and a kitchen. It means even though someone might be watching TV you can still have conversations together. There’s also still the lounge which we can use as a quiet area. There’s a lot more space to store the kids’ stuff and when they have friends round the space works so much better. We’re living together in a different way.”

A Home Extension for a Family Home in Hereford

“I love, love love, my house. We come in from the garden, sit at the kitchen island with all the beautiful sunlight and watch the sun setting through the windows, over an uninterrupted view. When people come they say: ‘this is amazing.’”

A New Home with Expansive Views over the Worcestershire Countryside

“We really looked forward to the build being finished and enjoying the house. What we didn’t realise was that we’d enjoy it quite as much as we do. One of the things that’s very important to both of us is a house that allows you live the way you want to live and this house really lends itself to social living. We do a lot of entertaining and it really is a very functional house and it flows. We’re more than delighted with what we’ve got and we very much feel that it’s a house that’s unique to us.”

A Reconfiguration of a Modern House with Extraordinary Views

“My office is at the front of the building and I’ve got a lovely big apex window looking out, so I can watch the children, see who’s coming and going and see what’s going on.”

Life-changing Business Premises in Rural Herefordshire

General Advice

“Spend as much time as you possibly can on the planning. Think ahead about how the property is going to be used in the years in the future. Think also how somebody else might use it because the house will probably be sold eventually.”

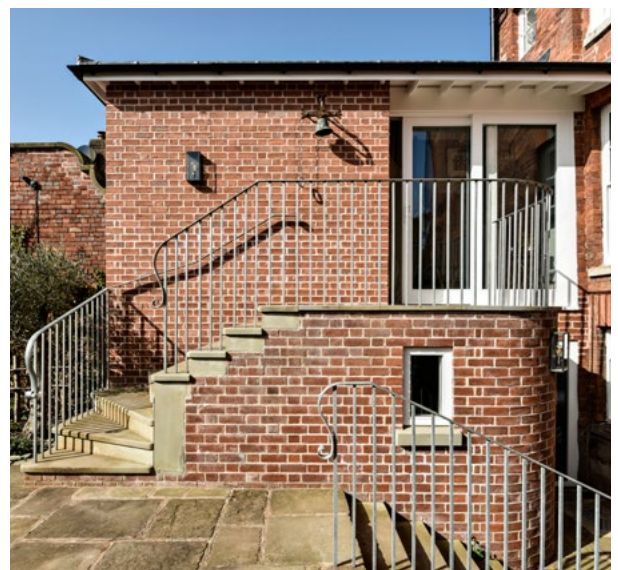
An Edwardian House Reconfigured for the 21st Century

“My first piece of advice would be to make sure your architect, your builder and your quantity surveyor can work together. My second piece of advice would be to try not to make any undue changes once a project gets to site because this will cost you time and money. Having said that, it’s important to remember that it’s your project and if something isn’t right, you have to shout if you need to.”

A New Home with Expansive Views over the Worcestershire Countryside

“Get an architect on board earlier rather than later, especially if you’re only doing work on part of a house because the idea that we went through with isn’t one that we’d have come up with on our own.”

A Handsome Georgian Residence in Herefordshire Re-imagined to Transform Family Life





Next Steps

We hope you've found this guide useful.

If you would like to find out more about working with us on your project, please complete our new project form which is available via the Contact Us page on our website.

We really value all the enquiries we are privileged to receive and in all cases we look to help as much as we can. We also look to make sure that there is the best possible fit between our clients' needs and what we can provide.

If we think a project is a good fit, we will arrange a telephone conversation. After this conversation, if we both agree, we will arrange a visit to your site and talk through your project 'on the ground'.

For most projects, by the end of this meeting, we will have a strategy for your project and know that it is broadly feasible for the budget available. Afterwards, we will write up our discussions and send it to you as a formal document. The site visit and document are both free of charge and without obligation.

On larger more complex projects, we undertake what we call, Testing the Principle. This is a separate, chargeable piece of work that assesses the strength of the project and allows you to make an informed decision about how to take it to the next stage.

Additional Resources

One of the hardest things to do when working on a building project is to bridge the gap between ideas and reality. You'll find several resources on our website that aim to help you do just that.



Podcasts

Our Podcasts feature interviews with our clients and open up the creative and construction process involved in architecture.



Projects

The projects section of our website takes an in-depth look at the stories of our clients.







On Site Gallery

So often when we look at architecture we only see the pristine final project. Our site gallery aims to lift the curtain and reveal the creative and construction process behind the finished buildings.



YouTube

We post 3d model animations of client projects on our YouTube channel. These videos bring our 2d drawings to life and give a completely different perspective.



We have developed two further guides that we give to all our clients to help you along the way.



Making it Happen

This is the project guide we give to all our clients. It outlines all the Stages of their project with us so they know what to expect and when.



Materials

This guide introduces materials we have found useful in creating successful spaces. We show how these materials have been combined into distinctive palettes on some of the projects we have worked on.

Move or Extend: Which is Right for You?

Whether it's better to move home or to build an extension is a question many homeowners face. The right answer depends on a multitude of factors that reflect the financial and emotional realities of owning a home.

The Financial Considerations

The first issue to resolve is whether moving home is a better option than extending. This is relatively straightforward and can be illustrated with a couple of simple scenarios.

Let's say a great alternative home in the right area would cost you an additional £200,000 (factoring in the cost of the property and the cost of the move). However, for £100,000 you could build an extension that would give you everything you need in your current home. In this case, from a financial perspective, it makes better sense to build the home extension.

On the other hand, let's say a great alternative home in the right area would cost you an additional £50,000 (factoring in the cost of the property and the cost of the move). An extension to your current home that would give you everything you need would cost £100,000. In this case, from a financial perspective, it makes better sense to move.

The Emotional Considerations

However, the reality is that for many people, even given the amount of available housing stock, there really isn't that much choice. Perhaps you can't find anything in the right location. Maybe other properties lack the years of family history that you associate with your current home and you can't imagine living anywhere else.

Selling and buying a house is also stressful and time-consuming. If you have had one or two attempts fall through, building an extension can start to look like the better option. Indeed, some clients come to us after trying to sell, but then

realising it would be a win-win situation to stay where they are and make their existing home work for them.

You should also consider any work that might need to be done on any new home you purchase. If you've already completed this work once on your existing home, it can feel frustrating to undertake it again on your new home. The advantage of building an extension is that it gives you the opportunity to design something specifically for you and that is centred around your needs, wants and desires.

Balance Your Options

In general terms, we advise you to look carefully at your options before committing to a construction project. There are costs and opportunities on both sides, and you need to take time to decide which side of the balance is right for you.

Building an extension is undoubtedly disruptive and expensive. If there is a cheaper, easier option in moving home, you really should consider this seriously.

On the other hand, you should also consider the opportunities a home extension could give you. Most of the UK's homes are built to a standard template of one sort or another. When you take the time to think through what you need from your home and consider factors such as where the sun rises and sets and how you access your garden, you get a much better designed space that works for you perfectly. In doing so, you create something very special and give your home a wow factor you won't find anywhere else.



Thinking About the Relative Cost and Value

When we work with our clients, we aim to create a project that helps them achieve their aims with the minimum amount of expenditure. Yet, even when we keep the investment to a minimum, the amount is unlike any other expenditure that we will ever encounter.

Expectations

It's why we work very hard to set expectations from the very first conversations we have with people. We don't want to risk embarking on a project that won't achieve the desired objective within the budget. It's also why we consider everything with our clients carefully and work through our Stages to make sure we achieve the maximum results within the budget available.

Projects that we help people deliver typically involve a minimum investment of £100,000. Most projects will cost in the region of £200,000 to £400,000.

Apart, perhaps, from the initial purchase of a house, this is unlike any other amount of money we spend.

In comparison, we have our day-to-day expenditure that takes care of food, heating, lighting and so on.

Then there are the exceptional budgets. For example, we might save up to go somewhere beautiful or exciting on holiday.

Going up another level, we might invest in a new car. A new electric car might cost upwards of £30,000. It isn't a sum we can easily find. But financing options mean we can roll the costs into our monthly budgets, which makes them affordable over a period of time.

The cost of an architecture project is an order of magnitude higher than any of these things. The question is, why should we spend this much money on our homes? Let's explore this...

The Cost of Time and Material

The first reason is simply that buildings are expensive because the act of building is expensive. Day after day, for months on end, skilled tradespeople work on a site. Holes are dug in the ground. Bricks, concrete, timber, steel and insulation are all used to construct the space. There's fitting out as heating and electrical systems are installed. Kitchens, bathrooms and flooring go in. Finally, they are painted and decorated and finished to the last detail.

Yet a building is about so much more than the labour and materials that go into it - and this is where the true value of architecture becomes apparent.

The Value of What Our homes Give us

Let's think back to our concept of budgets and consider return on investment.

Our day-to-day budget for food, light, heat and power is needed for us to survive. Of course, there is much enjoyment to be had in a warm home and good food, but there is no financial return on investment.

Our holidays give us a vital chance to relax, spend time with the people we love and create lasting memories but there's no financial return on investment here either.

We need our cars to get us out and about. In some cases, they're a status symbol we use to project our identities. They retain some element

of their value over a longer period of time, but depreciation is steep.

At the most basic level, our homes are necessary for our security and survival and, unlike the other ways we spend our money, they will also deliver a tangible financial return on investment. It's likely that you'll have created additional space that will be reflected in a higher sale price. If you're planning to stay in your home for the next 10 or 15 years, the money you invest now will be more than recouped when you sell because property prices will have increased due to inflation. If you choose to work with an architect it's likely that you'll create something unique that delivers a wow factor. This means it will attract a price premium over and above the value that's in its location or the number of bedrooms it has.

However, we also value our homes in so many other ways and, although the asset base of the house does allow you to invest with confidence, these other factors are the real reasons we love our homes so much.

Our Homes are Expressions of Ourselves

Our homes are the places where we raise family and welcome friends and loved ones, places we come back to every evening, places where we make memories we treasure forever. They are the essential elements of our lives that our homes support and make possible.

In previous years, we might have escaped our homes to enjoy two weeks on a beautiful holiday. Recent times have shown us how important it is that our homes are also places of relaxation, refreshment and enjoyment – places that give us joy on a day-to-day basis.

At the same time, our homes may be places where we spend more time than ever as they become places of work as well as rest.

While our cars may reflect who we are to some degree, our homes are the ultimate expression of ourselves. Few things are more essential than where and how we choose to live, our space and the arrangement of our day-to-day lives within it.

The Value of Architecture

Over the long term our homes provide us with a tangible financial reward and perhaps even form part of an inheritance for our children. They are places that offer us shelter, warmth and comfort. They are spaces we share with loved ones and celebrate life's milestones. They are places that reflect who we are and how we want to live.

It's for these reasons that investment in architecture has so much value.

What we invariably hear from a client after their project is completed is how much they enjoy the space and how surprised they are by the emotional value they gain from it.

As one of our clients, Simon, said: "We love the place – it's fantastic. Every morning, you come down and you think, 'This is lovely'. We are very happy to be here."

Another client, Tim, commented: "It's changed our lives in terms of how we can entertain people and how we can interact as a family."

There's also the 'wow' factor when people come to visit. As another client said: "As soon as I come up the drive I think "wow" – and so do many visitors."

It's why we're so proud to work on exceptional projects that transform spaces and transform people's lives.

“One of the things that's very important to both of us is a house that allows you to live the way you want to live. We do a lot of entertaining and it really is a very functional house and it flows. We're more than delighted with what we've got and we very much feel that it's a house that's unique to us.”

Jenny

What is a Realistic Budget for a Building Project?

Budget is fundamental to every project. We always ask about our clients' budgets in our first conversations so we understand the constraints. Once a project gets underway, we also work in a very particular way so we can help our clients keep to their budget.

Where to Start

At the very early stages, it's impossible to give a precise figure for the cost of a project, simply because not enough detail is available. It is our view, however, that you have to start somewhere.

In our initial conversations with clients, we simply call upon our current experience of similar projects. There are, of course, considerable differences between projects, but this has proved to be the most sensible place to start. Knowing the cost of a comparable project gives everyone involved a degree of confidence that the current project is achievable with the budget available before any work starts.

Once you have appointed us and we've done a first drawing of the scheme, we do a more formal assessment at Stage One of our process. This involves measuring the size of the proposed works and then providing a cost based on a square metre rate.

We tend to advise that the building projects we work on cost in the region of £2,000 per square metre + professional fees + VAT.

The £2,000 per square metre covers materials and labour.

Professional fees include our fees and also the fees of any other specialists we need to consult such as planning consultants, structural engineers, environmental engineers and so on. It also includes planning and building control fees.

The amount of VAT that's charged depends on the type of project. VAT is charged at 20% on home extensions. It is 5% on barn conversions. New builds are VAT exempt.

Making Strategic Budget Decisions

While £2,000 + VAT per square for materials and labour is a useful rule of thumb for estimating the total cost of a building project, it lacks the transparency you need to make strategic decisions as your project progresses.

To help make these strategic decisions, we advise appointing a quantity surveyor to give an element by element forecast. This is a much more accurate method of providing a budget.

It involves taking every element of the build, including the length of the walls, the number of windows, the kitchen, bathrooms, external works, heating, lighting, power installations and so on, and puts a cost against each one. This gives you a much more transparent price.

It helps you make strategic decisions because, for example, when you see how much one element of the build will cost, you may decide you don't want it as much as you thought you did. On the other hand, you may decide it's absolutely worth it.

Once we have got enough certainty to allow us to proceed, we design the building in detail and draw up a schedule of works. This is Stage Two of our process.

When the project goes out to tender to building contractors, we send the schedule of works so we can be certain that each of them is pricing exactly the same project. This means there's less room for misinterpretation of the requirements and gives a very good indication of what the final investment is likely to be once the project is completed. It also allows very accurate

projections to be made when the project reaches the on site stage.

On site at Stage Three of our process, the project will be run against the prices offered. This ensures that the risk of time overruns or material increases are not passed on to you but carried by the contractor.

There are always variations required but we allow a budget for these. If there are additional costs it tends to be when clients change their requirements on site. This can easily add cost to the project, although we can estimate these to a good degree of accuracy. We can also advise on this before the additional works are undertaken. This gives you a good overview of the final cost of the project all the way through.

The Value of Engaging an Architect

Architecture is about creativity. It is also about discipline. When you engage an architect you are engaging their creativity and vision. You are also engaging the expertise needed to take a project from an idea to a finished building as smoothly and safely as possible.

For projects of a certain size and complexity, working with an architect is an investment that our clients tell us provides tremendous value.

As a guideline, the projects we work on tend to start from around £100,000. This is a significant sum – and twice the amount people typically have in mind when they think about extending their home.

On a sum of £100,000, there'll be about £16,700 of VAT on all the elements involved. If a new kitchen is involved, this tends to be in the region of £10,000. Our fees for a complete project involving all our Stages will typically be around £15,000. So an initial budget of £100,000 has become a budget of £58,300. This has to cover every other element of materials and labour in the project.

The Importance of a Realistic Budget

Conversations about money can be difficult but they are also essential. We believe it is better for clients if we start work on a project with an understanding of the costs involved. It means you can feel much more in control of the journey and have greater confidence in the success of the outcome.

We told Alex at the beginning what our maximum budget was so all the way through he was working within those guidelines. The only time we actually went over our budget was when we decided to make use of the builder being on site and doing extra things.

Susan



Transforming Space, Transforming Lives

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