

14 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START YOUR CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

1: What do you need to take into consideration when planning to build?

If you are planning to embark on a building project - whatever it's size - then it makes sense to consult a professional. An architect will guide you through the building process, will share your concerns and will help you translate your vision into reality.

2: How do you find what you need to know?

An architect can help you in any respect with what you need to know; you can select all or part of an architect's service. If you want only an hour's general advice then that is all you will pay for (initial consultations are often 'free'). If you need just the detailed drawings or want the scheme to be guided to the planning permission stage and no further, then that is fine too. The RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) has standard appointment documents from which you can select the precise services you need.

3: What should you watch out for?

Architects are not only 'designers'; they are trouble-shooters. They will guide you through the complex procedures of planning permission and building regulations. They will attend to detail and monitor the builder's programme of works through to completion. Throughout your project, you will have protection under your architects' indemnity insurance, which effectively guarantees the integrity of the design.

4: What is good, beneficial and worthwhile?

To any building project, no matter how small, an architect will bring three essential qualities: imagination, value for money and freedom from worry.

5: How do you evaluate whether or not you have realistic chances of pulling it off?

There is a misplaced sense of mystique about what architects do - a fear, even, that they will impose their own tastes at the expense of your own. Nothing could be further from the truth. Step by step, by consultation and agreement, your architect will lead you through the entire process from the first germ of an idea to the finished building.

6: Which regulations do I need to know about?

An important part of an architect's service is to smooth the path with the local authority and act as an ambassador on your behalf. For instance, your architect will, more than likely, discuss the plans with council officials before applying for planning permission and building regulation clearance, and greatly reduce the risk of planning refusal. Clearly-presented, professionally-drawn plans can save you a great deal of time *and* significantly improve your chance of success.

7: How do I find out about permits, licences, Conservation Areas, Tree Preservation Orders and all those things?

An architect will understand, and know how to apply, a complex web of building regulations and other rules which govern such things as structural integrity, ventilation, ceiling height, sanitation, insulation and fire safety, party wall agreements, rights of light and listed building consents.





8: How do I balance my wishes with my budget?

Whether you are looking for tradition or innovation, boldness or understatement, an architect can lift your project out of the ordinary. Anyone can alter a building. It takes a professional to do it with flair, imagination, style and value for money.

9: How can I achieve unique qualities for the building with minimum expense?

Architects' professional training and experience means that they can interpret and respond to any realistic brief they are given. At your initial meeting you will discuss your intentions and ideas. Only after you have seen and approved initial sketches will the ideas be translated into detailed designs. At an early stage your architect can help you define a range of costs for your project.



10: Which spaces or parts of the structure are those that would give me the best overall image and quality for the building?

An architect will find the extra light and space you didn't know you had, suggest materials you hadn't thought of, make sure you find the right builder at the right price.



11: How do I plan for changing needs that the future may bring?

Your architect will listen carefully to what you have to say, and will take and develop a brief which covers not only design aesthetics but also the function of the building, running costs, budget and timing.

12: How do I ensure low costs for maintenance and heating / cooling of the building?

Not only will architects provide value for money, in many instances they will save their clients at least the equivalent of their fees. Professional attention to detail will save money both immediately, through the most efficient use of space and the careful selection of materials and finishes, and in the long term through environmental sensitivity, energy efficiency, low running and maintenance costs.



13: What factors influence the resale (and collateral) value of my building?

An architect will be able to reduce building costs, decrease your building's energy needs, and increase its future resale value through good design.



14: What experiences have others in a similar situation had?

A minimum of seven years is required to train as an architect. Architects complete a five-year full-time degree course, usually divided into two parts: a three-year course followed by a further two-year course. At least two years must also be spent working in an architect's office. Students then take the Professional Practice Examination, known as 'Part 3', in order to become qualified architects; therefore even a newly qualified architect will have gained a significant amount of experience in their field. Most architects will, however, have spent many years amassing valuable experience and they will help you find and brief any other consultants you may need - a structural engineer or a quantity surveyor, for example. With planning approval in place your architect will prepare working drawings with technical specifications for builders to tender, and will ask a number of firms to estimate costs and timings. When you have chosen a builder, your architect can recommend a form of contract that will set out the terms, the timetable and what will happen if the builder overruns.

