



VOID:
ARCHITECT

Briefing Guide



The image is a collection of architectural sketches. At the top right, there is a detailed drawing of a two-story house with a gabled roof and a smaller structure in front. Below this, the text 'Starting to think about your plans?' is centered. The rest of the page is filled with various conceptual sketches: a large, abstract, circular structure on the left; several small, triangular and diamond-shaped structures; a large, curved, shell-like structure; and a long, low building with a curved roofline at the bottom. The sketches are drawn with light, expressive lines, suggesting early-stage conceptual work.

*Starting to think about
your plans?*

Too often we hear stories of clients not having their needs heard, misunderstandings between the contractor, the client and the architect on what was the agreed scope, and how much was allowed for in the contract. No one likes this, and whilst you can never anticipate or avoid issues arising in the future, you have to start somewhere.

It all comes down to the brief...

If the brief is not clear, the architect and the follow on through to the contractor and all his associated trades people will be compromised. They will struggle to understand what it is they need to allow for in the pricing of your project.

Really think about your brief and consider all aspects of it.

So, where to begin?

First Contact – Why?

Too often the first contact from prospective clients is along the lines of:

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“We have a 3 bedroom house. How much will it cost to design an extension?”

Where do I begin? Much more useful was this recent enquiry: -

“We have recently moved XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and are hoping to carry out an extension on the property.

I have seen your email address on several of the planning applications made for properties on our street and was impressed with your designs. We have a budget of £XX000 for everything and hope to be able to do a side extension incorporating a kitchen diner, downstairs toilet, utility and a second floor fourth bedroom and bathroom. There was planning permission on the property in 2001 but feels it needs updating for more modern living.

I have not ever employed an architect and I would be grateful for an idea of the costs of your services, the process and what the next steps are.”

This we can work with. Immediately I know where the property is, what they are hoping to achieve and some useful background information about both the property and what they know of me. We have things we can usefully discuss, and I know how much I need to explain and what I can assume they know.

But this is just the start of the questions.

- *Why extend at all?*
- *You’ve got a bathroom – do you want 2, or just a bigger one?*
- *Do you need a Utility separate from the Kitchen?*
- *Do you need to reach the new toilet from the hall, or is through the kitchen and Utility OK?*
- *How do use your garden, and how do you want to reach it?*
- *How tight is that budget – can it stretch?*
- *If not what is essential and what is more optional?*

And so on.

In this case, there was a very good overlap between their aims, the budget and the practicality of the site.

But building more is not always a good answer – some of my most successful projects have involved quite small amounts of building, but combined with careful reorganisation have had a huge effect.

It's often the case that 'we want an extension' means 'there's something wrong, we're not sure quite what, but more space will probably fix it and we've seen something on Grand Designs'.

Building is expensive. But if you're going to spend money, asking 'how much' is the wrong question - you want to know 'why' to be sure you're spending it where it will have the right effect.

So have a conversation with yourself and keep asking why you want what it is you say you want. That way you are slowly elaborating your brief into more detail. Don't forget how you feel about the house – it's location, aspect, odd quirks of style - since this is often the deeper reasoning behind what you want to change about your house.

I want to renovate / extend / build a house, why?

The Nuts & Bolts

So now you're thinking about all that, it is time to look at the nuts and bolts. The following series of questions which start to go beyond your initial brief.

- *Who will live in your home or be using your building now and in the future?*
- *What different new activities will you need to accommodate?*
- *How do you want it to fit with the existing environment?*
- *Are there any health and safety issues you need to take account of?*
- *What would you really like to live in?*
- *What do you want the interior to look like?*
- *What colours will it have?*
- *What facilities for cooling and heating do you want?*
- *Do you want to install or upgrade existing security and or audio systems?*
- *Are you wanting a total make-over or a staged process?*
- *Will any Party Walls be affected?*
- *Will it need to be occupied during the works?*
- *What is your budget?*
- *Does your budget allow for consent and consultant fees and GST?*
- *What level of involvement do you want in the management of your renovation?*

By now you should be getting a good idea of what you're aiming at, but what about the time you need, and how sure are you about that budget?

How long will my project take?

Building projects take time.

Understanding this process better will allow you to estimate the timing for your intended project. These are some *general* guidelines , but if you want the receive a more accurate estimate – do contact us to arrange the Initial Briefing.

Initial Briefing - A meeting to go through your plans and ideas. If you've read this far you already have a good idea of what will be involved, but this will enable us to prepare a report specific to you on your project.

The meeting will generally need around 1-1 ½ hours; our report usually around 3 days to produce.

Concept Design and Development - Most projects need a detailed survey and at least 2 meetings to review the brief and later to discuss a concept design. But projects often need several options revisions drawn up to get to a final concept. Discussion can be by phone, email or face to face – whatever suits best.

Typically a survey will take a week to measure and draw up; an 'average' extension much the same for a concept design; additional options and revisions may only need a day or so.

Planning Design stage – even if you don't need permission, you are still likely to need the concept scheme drawing up to make sure and to finalise it.

This will need 1-2 weeks to draw up; if you do need permission most projects will also need a Design and Access Statement; it will need around 2-4 days to draft and agree the application details.

Documentation Phase –Do we need to change the scheme? Are there complex structural considerations, kitchens, bathrooms or other servicing? Consultation can be by phone, email or face to face, needing 3–8 sessions to cover all aspects of the developed, detailed and building consent drawings for our ‘average’ extension. New builds will add to the consents and compliance required.

A typical documentation package will generally require 15-25 working days to produce the different stages.

Tendering and Contract – You may be lucky enough to have a reliable builder lined up, but you will normally want to get at least 3 competitive prices; be confident that they have all covered everything asked, meet them, agree a start date and make a formal contract.

Allow 3-4 weeks for tendering to builders and 1-2 weeks to arrange meetings and check details. Workloads vary; you may have to wait from 2 to 15 or 16 weeks before they can start.

Construction – For an approximate guideline on construction start here:

<£50,000 budget –	8-12 weeks on site
£50 – 150,000 budget –	10-16 weeks on site
>£150,000 budget –	14-20 weeks on site

Note - a larger building firm or a spacious site will be quicker than a one man band or a tight space; stairs, kitchens and bathrooms can all add to the time.

So how long will all this take?

When can your project be complete?

Work Stage				Days
Briefing	Meeting and Report preparation			3
	Anticipated time for client feedback			
			Total	
Concept	Survey and design package			
	Estimate number of meetings / consultations	X		
	Anticipated time for client feedback			
			Total	
Planning	Final Design package			
	Planning documents			
	Processing time with Council			40
			Total	
Documentation	Detailed design package			
	Estimate number of meetings / consultations	X		
	Anticipated time for client feedback			
			Total	
Tender, Contract	Tendering period with builders			
	Decision and appointment			
	Lead time to start			
			Total	
Construction	Allowance based on budget			
	Adjustment for complexity or extra items			
			Total	
	Estimated working days for project (divide by 5 for a rough number of weeks)			

What will my Project Cost?

For a rough idea, simply select which option best describes your scheme.

A B C

KITCHEN

- A Standard cabinetry and laminate worktops.
- B Custom manufactured cabinetry, solid surface worktops.
- C Custom joinery made hardwood cabinetry, special finishes, stainless steel/granite/quartz worktops.

BATHROOM

- A Standard bathroom fittings, tiled shower, vinyl Flooring.
- B Mid range fittings. Half tiled, Luxury vinyl plank flooring.
- C Top range fittings and fixtures. Fully tiled, in-built furniture. Underfloor heating and ceramic or stone floors.

AGE & STATUS

- A Modern or post 1960s; No protection
- B Early 20th Century Conservation area
- C Victorian or earlier Grade 2 listed

EXTERIOR FEATURES

- A Keep existing. Standard facing brick, concrete tiles or artificial slates or matched to existing. uPVC doors and windows.
- B Keep existing with repairs. Mid range bricks, render, softwood claddings, plain tiles or slates, wood windows and doors.
- C Existing overclad or replaced. Handmade brick, stone, flexible renders, cedar or metal cladding, clay tiles or lead roofing, composite windows or doors.

INTERIOR FEATURES

- A Minimal alteration; plaster, standard architraves and skirting, painted finish.
- B Normal level of alteration; plaster or wall cladding, non-standard joinery; paint and wall paper.
- C **Extensive alteration;** Custom made joinery, top range wall paper or custom finishes.

SOUND/LIGHTING/TV/DATA

- A** Standard white plastic fittings. 1–2 outlets for TV/DATA. Pendant fittings generally, downlights in kitchen and bathrooms
- B** Coloured plastic/ metal fittings, dimmers. Basic security system. 3–4 outlets for TV/DATA. Spots / pendants, some wall and external security lighting.
- C** Lighting/heating, full security, Surround sound in all rooms, all remote linked to iPhone/iPad. All rooms wired for TV/DATA. Inbuilt feature wall lights. □□□

HARD LANDSCAPING

- A** Existing kept; new pavings in standard flags, wood fencing. Security lighting.
- B** Existing lifted and relaid; new block paving / imported stone flags, steps. Simple amenity light
- C** Paved areas in terracotta or similar. Custom made fencing, gates and period features such as arbour. Outdoor fireplace or fire pit with pergola structure or garden room. Covered spa bath with custom made fencing. □□□

SOFT LANDSCAPING

- A** Basic making good to topsoil and grass seed; I will do the rest myself as I have time for it.
- B** Include main garden elements such as trees and hedging.
- C** Include full landscaping by professionals. □□□

Now see what sort of cost level your answers suggest: -

	New Work	Alterations	Landscaping
Mainly A	approx £1800 m ²	approx £600 m ²	approx £50 m ²
Mainly B	approx £2200 m ²	approx £1200 m ²	approx £150 m ²
Mainly C	approx £2800 m ²	approx £1800 m ²	approx £500 m ²

Work out the equation for your project

New work:m² x £..... = approx cost £.....

Alterations:m² x £..... = approx cost £.....

Landscapingm² x £..... = approx cost £.....

Estimated total building cost of my project £.....

Allow an additional 30% for VAT, consultancy and local authority fees £.....

If you've got this far you should have a pretty good idea of what to expect from your plans.

But it is still just a rough guide – if it's still looking as promising and exciting as you hoped, then now might be the time to talk to us about taking it a bit further.....

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