

Commercial Design Projects

A guide to preparing for your commercial building project

2030 Architects



How to create a design brief before engaging an architect

Designing, renovating or extending a building can and should be really exciting. The ideas you've been thinking about for months, or maybe years, can come to life. However too often we hear stories of clients not having their needs heard, or misunderstandings between clients and contractors. Indeed misunderstandings between the client and the architect on what was the agreed scope, and how much was allowed for in the contract. These are all too common issues for building projects, but we want your experience to be inspiring and meet your dreams and needs. We have decided to do something about it.

It all comes down to the brief

A good working relationship with your architect is based on open, honest communication. This starts with a good brief that helps architects understand your expectations, preferences, wants, needs, aspirations and lifestyle. 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 and realisation of your project

The key is to really interrogate your brief and consider all aspects of it, which this guide will help you to do. The construction of a new building or extension is a huge commitment. By spending time at the earliest stage of a project, deciding your priorities and investigating alternatives, you will reap rewards later in the design and construction stages.

This document will help you cover critical aspects of a design brief. Towards the end of this document, you will find two worksheets that will help you outline your design brief. Right then, let's get started!

Your Site

Any design project starts with the location - your site. The first step of building the brief is to scrutinise your site and any existing buildings.

Where are the access points? Where are the services? Where is the sun - in summer and winter? Where are any physical restrictions, barriers or fencing? Which parts of the site are most/least noisy? Does the site slope? Where are the surrounding houses, other buildings and trees you may or may not want to see? Put in a file to share with your architect all the information you have about the site (legal paperwork/covenants, existing plans or previous site information).

If you are working with an existing building, which you are renovating or extending, this process is still useful. Consider what is currently on the site: access arrangements, services, existing openings, and interrogate what works and what you would want to change. If there are staff members who will be affected by the improvements consider getting their input into the workings of the building so you can target your improvements to make the spaces efficient and striking.

Spaces: Indoor

A good design can transform the way that we live and work. We will work with you to ensure that our designs support the brand you have created or are creating. To start with it's useful to get an idea of how you imagine the indoor spaces will look, feel and flow. You can start by developing a pinterest board or collecting images for a mood board. These can be a really inspiring starting point for design discussions and often influence the overall look and feel of the spaces considerably. Knowing how the indoor spaces will look and feel helps to develop the architectural design. Practically, to make the most of the briefing process, think about your businesses current and future needs. Map out your daily routine. How many people work in the building? Who does what, where and at what time? Don't forget the rapidly changing needs of your business!

Spatially it can be useful to consider if you want to 'zone' spaces, in order to separate functions and activities? Consider the number of floors, rooms and other spaces and describe their use, current and future. Don't worry if you can't do all of this before meeting with the design team - this is all part of the process. But if you have ideas at an early stage it's always useful to make those known.

Another useful task is to make a list of what activities are carried out in the building and external spaces.

If you are unsure how your business will develop do you want flexible accommodation to cater for future needs? Do you need an easily adaptable building?

If the business is already running then it's likely that you will have critical timescales for new operational spaces? Are there areas of the building that need to be kept running during the works?

List any special requirements you have, e.g. security, fire protection, hazardous chemical storage, storage access, machinery operation, built in equipment.

We will work with you to ensure your building is sustainable and low impact, and can advise on methods of heating/lighting/ventilation: think about how we can target this advice for you - Do you want to reduce running costs? Do you want to benefit from renewable energy? What do other staff think about and want from the whole project?

Spaces: Outdoor

The outdoor space can have as much of an impact as the indoor, and tying the architecture, interiors and landscaping together can really make a project sing. At briefing stage it is useful to consider how you want the external space to look, feel and flow, as with the interiors.

On a practical level think about how you want to manage external space.

Do you need safe access at night-time? Are there areas which need screening: for instance around bins? Do you need external staff areas? Will you want to locate signage and branding at particular points? Are there any concerns about security? How do you envisage visitor access?

Practical concerns such as access for deliveries and refuse trucks is useful to consider early on.

In relation to any ground planted areas consider if you want a high or low maintenance scheme? What features are important to you? Think about the indoor/outdoor connection, how to staff and activities move between and around the buildings. Think of your external areas as outdoor rooms, and consider privacy and connections between spaces. Listing your requirements will help both you and us to quickly understand your priorities.

Design Priorities

Think about the 'feel' of your project, do you want it to be bold, low-key, industrial, traditional, minimalist, contemporary or organic? Think about your business objectives and how the architecture can support the growth of the business. For example, what is your projected growth over the next 5 years? What's the motivation for the project? Is your aim to significantly grow your customer base, or change it? Do you want to provide better working conditions for staff? Do you want a more efficient working environment? Do you want to reduce running costs and maintenance?

Describe spaces, design features and styles that appeal to you and those that don't. Create a Pinterest board, 'mood board' or scrapbook of ideas, photographs, magazine clippings and anything else that can help us to understand the business what you to build.





The Details

It's useful to make a list of furniture, machinery and equipment you already own or are considering buying and any preferences you have about where you want to locate them. Do you need specialised storage systems? Does equipment require special services or access? Do you need controlled environments for work activities? Is work activity 24 hours or restricted? These details can make a big difference to the way your building is planned. Note major pieces of equipment so that we can provide spaces and services for them in the new plans. Better to include it in your planning from day one, than to move in and wonder how you are going to organise the space!

Sketching

Sketch out your thoughts if that process appeals to you - but don't get too wedded to them! If the work involves altering an existing building you'll be constrained by existing structures and services and if it's a listed building, there will be lots of limitations on what you can change. If it's a new building, let your imagination flow, but be prepared for your architect to suggest other approaches. That is, after all, why you are hiring one!

Materials

List materials you like and dislike (inside and out), and keep in mind that your budget may be a determining factor in your final choice. Do you have any specific wall, ceiling and floor finishes in mind? Do you like stone, render, timber cladding? Slate, green roofs, glass,... the list is endless! Begin with a mood board, get inspired! Consider if you would prefer timber windows or aluminum? Much will depend on the style of building, but there are choices to be made that will determine how much you spend upfront, and how much you spend on maintenance in the longer term.

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

Regulation and rising energy costs are making sustainable 'green' design an essential consideration rather than a 'nice to have'. There are now minimum requirements laid down by national and local government. Your architect will know all about these and will discuss with you how 'green' you want to and can be. There are lots of renewable energy solutions - solar panels, ground source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting to name but a few. Although these add costs upfront, they can save you money in the longer-term. Much will depend on your budget and how long you plan to be in the building after the work has been done.

Timetable

Think about and share with your architect key target dates that are important to you. When do you want to start and finish the project? Bear in mind that, as a rule of thumb, it takes at least 4-6 months to agree the design, obtain planning permission and prepare construction drawings before building work can commence. You are less likely to be disappointed if you allow at least 6-12 months for work on existing buildings and about 18 months for new buildings.

Budget

We have prepared several typical cost plans for different types of project and these are available on request. Be realistic about your budget and allow for a 10-15% contingency on top of the figure you reach. Remember that VAT will be added onto building projects.

Lastly, keep asking why you are embarking on this project, and exactly what you hope to achieve. How will it change the way your business works? What change do you imagine it creating? By continuing to delve into your motivations you can elaborate your brief into more detail. Use the checklists provided below to help you get a deeper understanding of what you want and why you want it.

The reasons I/we want to extend/build new business premises:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

The nuts and bolts

Having listed the 'whys', we've dealt with the big elephant in the room. Now it is time to dwell on the nuts and bolts. The following questions that will help you further elaborate on your brief.

Who will work in your facility now and in the future?

What different new activities will you need to accommodate?

How do you want your building to fit with the existing environment?

What building would you really like to work in?

What operational requirements do you have?

Do you want to install or upgrade existing security and/safety systems?

Do you want a single construction phase or a staged process?

Are there any critical approvals required for funding/construction apart from Planning Consent?

Does your budget allow for consents and consultant fees and VAT?

What level of involvement do you want in the management of your project?

Whatever project you have in mind, we hope this guide has helped you to delve a little deeper into your brief. With a well resolved brief anything is possible! We offer a needs and options appraisal where we can help you further with this process, and begin to sketch out ideas with you. To book an appointment just give us a call or drop us an email:

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