

Domestic Design Projects

A guide to preparing for your domestic 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 be communicated effectively and efficiently with a good brief. However too often we hear stories of clients not having their needs heard, or misunderstandings between clients and contractors and the architect on what was the agreed scope, and how much was allowed for in the contract. We want your experience to be inspiring, efficient and ideally exceed your aspirations. So 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 identify 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).

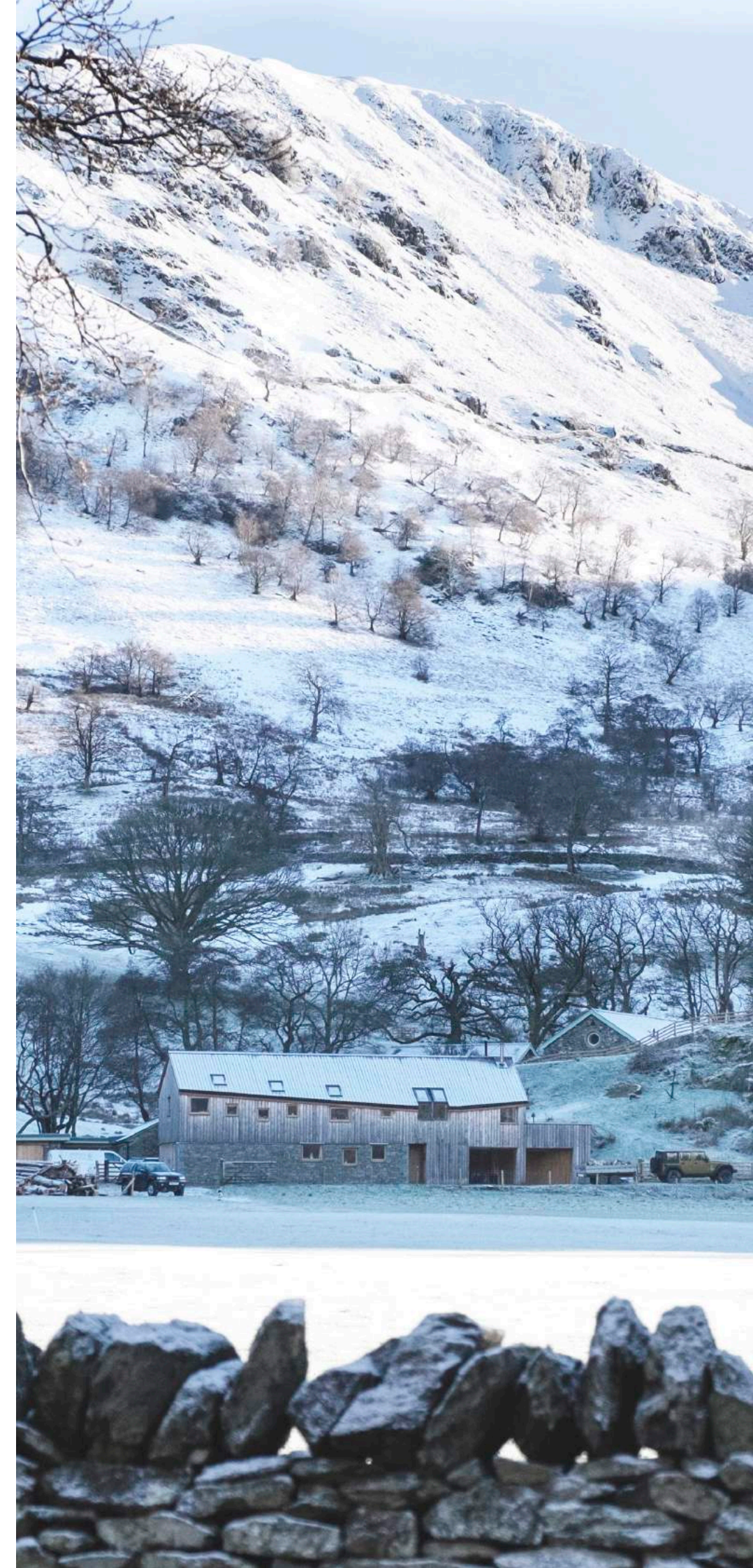
If you are working with an existing building, which you are renovating or extending, this process is still useful. Consider what is currently on the site: access arrangements, services, existing openings, and interrogate what works and what you would want to change.

Spaces: Indoor

A good design can transform the way that we live. 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. Make a note of features that you like eg dramatic roof lights, corner windows, wooden floors, colourful curtains. All of these help to communicate your preferences and feed into the design process.

Think hard about your family's current and future needs. Map out your daily routine. How many people live in the house? How old are they? Who does what, where? Don't forget your children's rapidly changing needs!

Spatially it can be useful to consider if you want to 'zone' spaces, in order to separate functions and activities?





Do you want to 'zone' spaces, separate family members, functions and/or pets? Consider the number of floors, rooms and other spaces and describe their use. Make a list of who needs rooms to sleep, work and relax in.

Where do you cook and eat? Is the kitchen like Charing Cross - a constant thoroughfare for teenagers and large family gatherings? Is your lifestyle formal, casual, relaxed or active? Do you need spaces to entertain at home - indoor and outdoor? What type of home entertainment do you want to include e.g. music, television, projector or areas for storage of equipment?

List any special requirements you have, e.g. accessibility, extra storage areas, garage loft space, built in furniture/shelving, lifts, home-office. What do other family members think about and want from the whole project?

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 your home running costs? Do you want to benefit from renewable energy?

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. What do you want to do outdoors? Would you use the space to Entertain? Relax? Play? Swim? Supervise children? Grow enough vegetables to be self-sufficient?

In relation to any grand pr planted areas consider if you want a high or low maintenance scheme? What features are important to you? Think about the indoor/outdoor flow of spaces, where the morning sun lands, where its exposed to and sheltered from the wind. Have you always dreamt of an exterior fireplace? Think of your external areas as outdoor rooms, and consider privacy and connections between spaces. Listing your requirements will help both you and your architect quickly understand your priorities.

Design Mood and Feeling

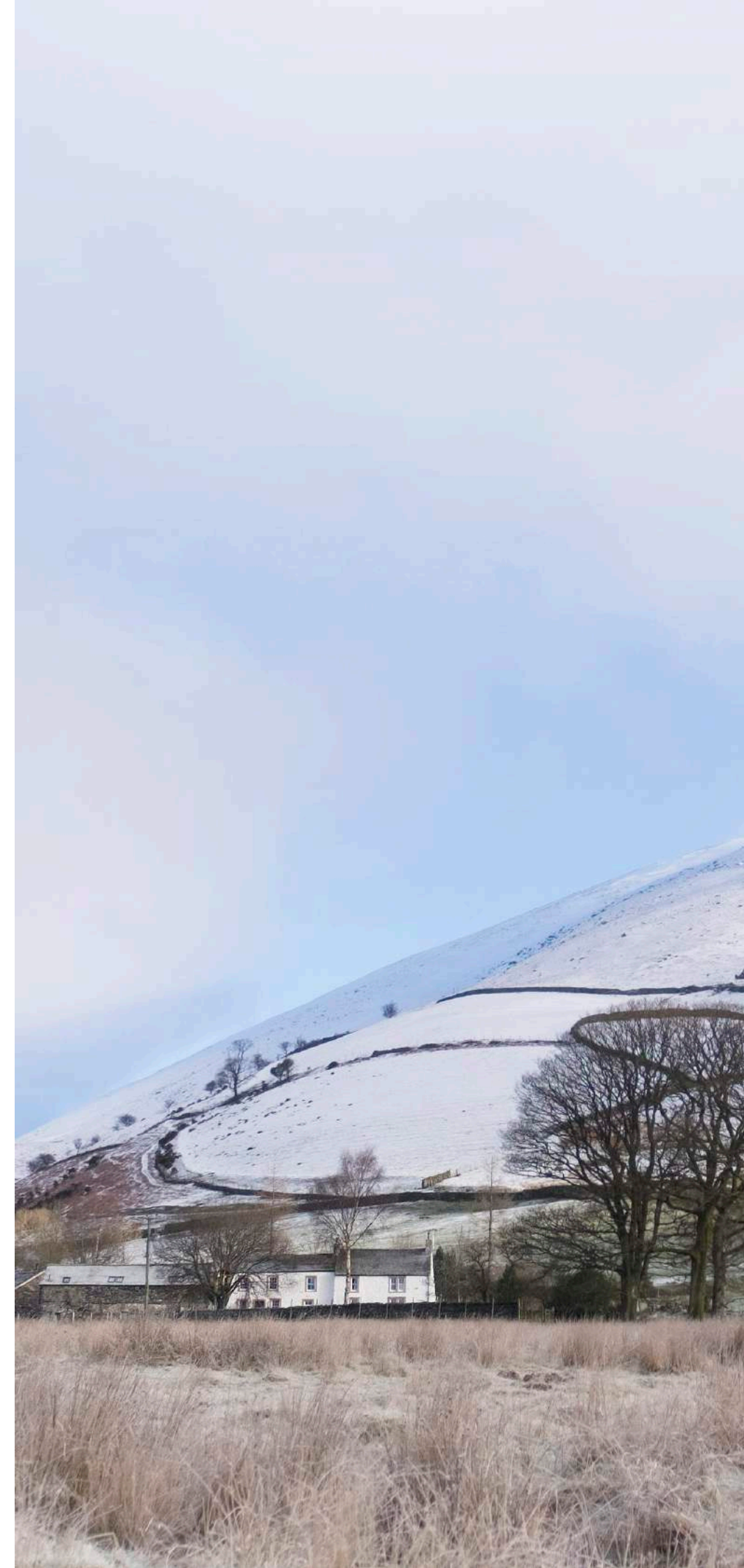
Think about the 'feel' of your project, do you want it to be bold, low-key, industrial, traditional, minimalist, contemporary or organic? If the house will be for you to live in think about your feelings - yes really! For example, what is your favourite time of day? Do you worry about shutting the curtains to protect the furniture from the sun, or do you like to enjoy coffee on the terrace? Is curling up with a good book your favourite hobby, or is it taking the dog for a walk no matter what the weather? Describe spaces, design features and styles that appeal to you and those that don't.

If the project is a holiday home or investment, these are still useful processes: try to imagine how people will use the spaces, what you would want the house to be remembered for. Remember that good design can really add value to a project.

Create a 'mood board' or scrapbook of fabric swatches, photographs, magazine clippings and anything else that can help your architect understand who you are, how you live and what you want from your project. Use web-based photo sites, like Pinterest, to assemble and share your ideas.

The Details

List major appliances you already own or are considering buying and any preferences you have about where you want to put them. Do you really want that American fridge next to your double steam oven? Do you have lots of gadgets that need sockets in your island unit? Is your washing machine on 24/7 and do you want your drying and ironing space right next to it? These details can make a big difference to the way your kitchen and utility space is planned. Note major pieces of furniture or artwork you want to showcase so your architect can provide spaces and sockets for them in the new plans. Better to include it in your planning from day one, than to move in and wonder where you are going to hang your Picasso.





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 live 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.

Include the emotional aspects, as this is the overriding deeper reasoning behind what you want to change about your house. 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 our house:

- 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 live in the home now and in the future?
- What different new activities will you need to accommodate?
- How do you really want to live?
- How do you want to feel about your home?
- What sort of spaces do you like?
- What sort of materials do you like?
- What sort of colours do you like?
- What do you like most about your current home?
- What do you like least about your current home?
- What quality of finishes would you like?
- What sort of furniture do you like?
- What is your favourite room?
- What is your favourite time of day?
- What is your favourite time of year?

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! If you would like help in developing a strategic brief and consider the options for your project we offer a low cost* Needs and Options Appraisal Meeting which we develop into a detailed strategic brief report based upon a structured discussion with you on site.

To book an appointment just give us a call or drop us an email:

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* N+O Appraisal rate 2019 £400 + VAT

