



Working with an Architect:

a client guide

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Produced by:

Pip Phillips
Architecture & Design

Parkside, Frome Park Road, Stroud, GL5 3LF

e studio@pipphillips.com

w pipphillips.com



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About the Author

Pip Phillips BA (hons) MArch PGDipArch ARB RIBA

Pip trained in London achieving his Architect qualification at the University of Westminster's on their prestigious RIBA accredited part 3 post-graduate diploma programme. He has worked for multi-award winning practices including Foster + Partners, lead by Norman Foster, and Granit Architecture & Interiors. His work has taken him from designing libraries, hospitals and art galleries across the globe, from New York to Helsinki, to bespoke homes for private clients in London, the Cotswolds and the Home Counties.

Pip Phillips Architecture & Design (PPAD)

The practice is a multi-disciplinary architecture and design studio, specialising in residential developments, with a focus on sustainability and environmental design. Working within architecture and interior design, we are comfortable with any scale of project, from a single room to a complete new build development, from foundations to roof and everything in-between.

As a design studio, we work with private domestic and developer clients throughout the UK and pride ourselves on our bespoke approach to each project we embark on.

We are led by design, and believe that detail is key. Every aspect of everything we do is considered through a holistic process of design development. Whether designing a piece of furniture or one-off house our attention to detail is what sets us apart.

Why use an Architect

This is a question you may well be asking yourself as you approach the start of your project. It is an important question to ask, as the decision to appoint an Architect is potentially one of the biggest to make and could determine the outcome of your project. It is important to understand what value an Architect will bring to your endeavour and how they will help you to achieve your vision.

A good Architect will bring such value to your project that their expertise and design skills will pay for themselves by helping you to focus the budget on key design areas, whilst guiding you along the most efficient path through the planning and construction process. An Architect's input can be an invaluable asset, key to the success of your project.

*A good architect actually pays for themselves - more than once.
You will reap the reward and the building will be hugely better and
deliver much better value for it. - Kevin McCloud, Grand Designs*

How to choose an Architect

The most important thing to remember when deciding to appoint an Architect is that you must be confident you will be able to maintain a good relationship with them. It will be your Architect's responsibility to guide you through the design and construction processes, as well as the statutory environment, and you will be placing a considerable amount of trust in their skills and knowledge.

You will likely be working very closely with your Architect, and it is vital that you feel comfortable with them and have confidence in their ability to understand your requirements and answer your questions clearly.

What to look out for

...when choosing an Architect.

Firstly, it is important to understand what it means to be an Architect. The title of Architect is protected under Section 20 of the Architects Act 1997, which means that only individuals who have successfully achieved the educational and professional requirements set out by the relevant governing body can call themselves an Architect.

Anyone can call themselves an architectural designer as this is not a protected title, which means that these individuals may not be regulated by any governing bodies and aren't required to abide by their strict codes of professional conduct, intended to ensure quality standards are maintained.

Architects are required by law to register with the Architects Registration Board (ARB), in order to practice in the UK. With this comes the right to use the title 'Architect'. The ARB is an independent statutory regulator that regulates the profession in the UK and is the body responsible for ensuring standards are maintained. It is important to ensure that your Architect is a registered member of the ARB and you can search the register [here](#).

As well as being registered with the ARB, many Architects will also be a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Membership of the RIBA is voluntary for Architects practising in the UK, and as well as being an incredibly useful resource helping Architects carry out their work effectively, the RIBA also adds another layer of professional standards, on top of those already required by the ARB.

The RIBA Code of Professional Conduct sets to standards based on honesty, integrity and competence, as well as a focus on concern for others and for the environment.

The Process

All Architects have their own way of working, and most will follow a fairly typical process of project development based on the RIBA Plan of Work, which can be viewed [here](#)*. This system was developed to be the definitive model for the process of building design the UK, and continues to guide the industry at every scale of project.

Your Architect should clearly explain the project process to you at the very early stages of appointment and ensure that you understand the route your project is likely to take in its journey to completion.

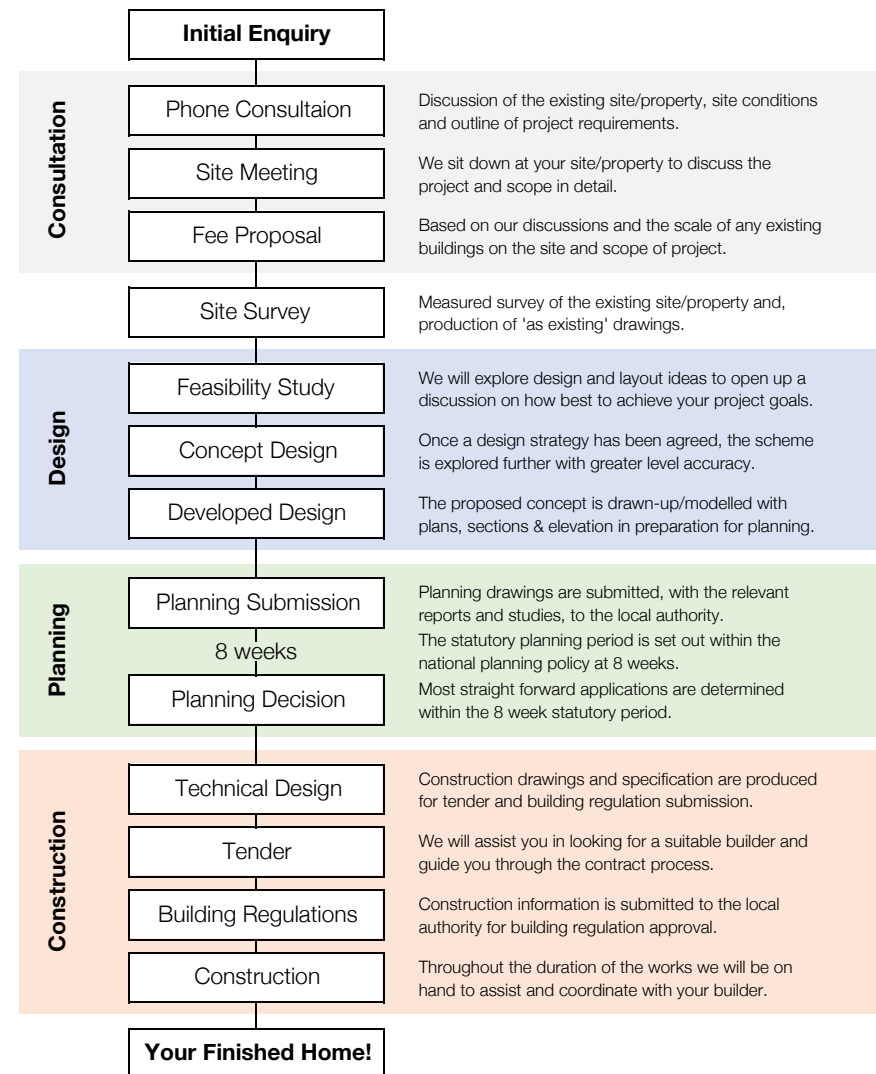
A project programme is a very useful tool to help you understand the process and monitor progress. Your Architect should be able to provide you with this before the design work even begins and it is likely to require regular updates as the project progresses.

Pip Phillips Architecture and Design pride themselves on their client focused approach and transparency of services and fees. Flexibility is at the heart of our process and we endeavour to tailor each project we embark upon around the requirements of the client and their goals.

We will guide you through all stages of the process from initial consultation, through design and planning to construction and completion.

The diagram to the right outlines our approach to the project process, and the following sections detail how each stage of the process works and what support and guidance we provide.

*<https://www.ribaplanofwork.com>



Consultation

Initial Consultation

The initial introduction and consultation between an Architect and a prospective client is intended to acquaint you with the Architect's services, and to ascertain your project's requirements and possibilities. This process allows you to get to know your potential Architect and help you to gauge their suitability for your project.

At Pip Phillips Architecture & Design, we understand the importance of enjoying a good relationship with your Architect so we offer this initial consultation process as a complimentary service. This starts with a phone conversation to discuss the basic details of your project, and is usually followed up with a meeting at your property to review your requirements in more detail with an initial exploration of design ideas.

Fees

There are many ways in which Architects calculate and present their fees and when reviewing fee proposals, it is important to ensure you fully understand what is included at each stage and what further fees might apply. A good fee proposal should be set out in a format that is easy to interpret. If you have any uncertainty, make sure you ask for clarity before signing up.

Budget is an important factor of any domestic residential project, and this is reflected in how we structure our fee proposals at Pip Phillips Architecture & Design. Flexibility is at the core of our process, and options are offered at varying levels of service and cost. We will always do our best to fit in with your budget wherever possible.

The Brief

■ RIBA Stage 0+

Perhaps one of the most important parts of the process of any project is the development of a clear brief. Project objectives are agreed and design programme outlined. The brief will evolve as the project progresses and informs each stage of the design.

We will discuss what you like about your house, and what you feel could be improved. The brief will inform the initial design stages and regular updates to it will ensure that there are clear and relevant goals to work towards.

Site Survey

Each Architect has their own way of carrying out measured surveys, with some appointing an external contractor and others undertaking the task themselves. The latter tends to be the most common approach for smaller projects, with specialist survey companies appointed for more complex and topographical information.

We manage all of our measured surveys in house to ensure accuracy and coordination of information. We will carry out a full laser survey and produce a set of CAD* information of your existing property. This can consist of either 2D drawings or a fully detailed 3D computer model, depending on the service level selected at appointment. This will form the canvas on which the design will develop.

*CAD (Computer Aided Design) is a tool used by designers to produce digital drawings and models.

Design

Feasibility Study

RIBA Stage 1

The first stage of the design process involves a comprehensive study of the project goals and how these might be achieved within the parameters of the site. The intention of this study is to open up a discussion between the design team and the client regarding the feasibility of development on the site.

Our design process starts with a feasibility study made up of a series of sketch proposals, with research exploring the the potential of development on the site. We will examine how to maximise on potential, whilst regularly referring back to the requirements outlined in the project brief.

We use this stage as a tool for exploration of possibility and we will sit down with you to discuss the outcome of the feasibility study to decide what elements to carry through to the next stage of design.

The feasibility study can sometimes form the basis of an application for pre-planning advice from the local authority planning department.

Concept Design

RIBA Stage 2

An initial Concept Design is developed, following the discussions from the Feasibility Study. At this stage, the project starts to evolve into a single coherent proposal, with outline drawings clearly setting out the design intent.

As well as defining the design proposal, we also use this stage to revisit the brief to update the core project goals in line with the findings from the feasibility study. This phase of the design work remains relatively fluid as we continue to determine a design strategy.

Developed Design

RIBA Stage 3

The Concept Design is developed further with integration of key building services and consultant information, and a spacial strategy is illustrated with enough detail that the design can be signed off by the client.

Your Architect should also be looking at an overall structural strategy, and in some cases, coordinating with a structural engineer and other relevant consultants.

Planning applications are generally submitted with information produced during this stage and your Architect will be able to talk you through the planning process and what will be required.

Our intention at this stage is to firm up the overall parameters of the design and ensure it meets the requirements of the brief, addressing the challenges provided by the relevant planning policy and key building regulations.

If necessary, we will advise you on the appointment of any consultants required at this stage, and coordinate with them directly to ensure you have the correct information to proceed.

The drawings produced at this stage will form the basis of an application for planning permission, so it is important that you are happy with the design. There will be some flexibility later on in the design process, but it's is considerably easier to make changes to drawings prior to planning.

Planning

The Planning Process can be tricky to navigate and policy at both a national and local level, is not always the easiest to interpret. There are various levels of permission to consider, from Householder Applications to Full Planning and Permitted Development.

An experienced Architect will be able to guide you through this process and advise on what approach to take. The most appropriate route will depend on the complexity of project and the specific details of the proposal as well as the type of site or building to which the development is proposed.

Pre-Application Advice

■ RIBA Stage 1

Pre-application advice can be sought from the local authority planning department, usually at a fee. This can be a useful service to help ascertain whether a planning application is likely to be supported before you commit to appointing an Architect for a full design service.

Each local authority will have their own systems for handling pre-application requests and an experienced Architect will be able to talk you through your options, advise on whether pre-application advice would suit your project and put together a proposal for submission.

We have considerable experience with the pre-application processes of various local authorities around the country and can advise on the suitability of such a service based on your project requirements.

A pre-app is not always useful for every type of project and we tend to approach this route carefully as feedback from such applications can often be vague and err on the side of caution. Time can often be more effectively spent on a planning application, with proper research and production of a proposal which responds to the relevant policy requirements.

Planning Application

■ RIBA Stage 3

If your project requires planning permission, an application will need to be submitted to the local authority planning department. There are various types of planning permission and the route required will depend on the scale of project as well as certain planning constraints including conservation and property ownership status.

There is a basic level of information, determined at a national level, needed for any application to be considered, with each local authority producing their own additional requirements. These requirements vary depending on the type of permission applied for.

With most projects, we can usually determine what type of application might be required at the initial consultation stage, and if needed we can tailor your project to navigate the most straightforward route through planning.

Pip Phillips Architecture & Design can act on your behalf during the planning process and will handle all applications for permission, as well as any communication with the planning department. We can provide all the information required for any application type, submit your application and coordinate directly with the planners to help achieve a smooth process. We will also maintain regular contact with the appointed officer to discuss and address any concerns before they become an issue.

Many smaller projects, such as rear extensions and loft conversions, can be carried out under permitted development rights. The options available to you will depend on the location of your property and whether there are any specific restrictions, such as listed building status. We can advise you on this and whether this route would be appropriate for your project.

Construction

The construction phase of any project can be the most demanding on the client and requires considerable organisation and ensure that it runs smoothly and free from any major issues.

The first key to success is the level and quality of drawings and information you have on entering this stage. The more information you are able provide a prospective builder with, the more accurate their quote will be. As a minimum you should have a basic Technical Design package including outline construction information and structural drawings/calculations.

Technical Design

■ RIBA Stage 4

Technical drawings and information will be required for you to gather accurate quotes from builders, as well as submitting an application for building control sign-off. They will also form the basis of the construction package from which your contractor will work.

Technical design drawings go into much greater depth of detail than the previous stages, as the information provided within will set out how the proposal will be constructed. They often include structural setting out, service plans and construction details, as well as a detailed building specification and itemised schedules of doors, windows and fixtures & fittings.

We try to be as flexible as possible at this stage. We will provide you with a menu of services with associated fees, and give guidance as to what level of information would suit your specific project requirements.

We will tailor our service as we progress, to ensure you have the relevant information required to allow your contractor effectively build to the standard and quality required.

Building Control

Most building projects, beyond basic maintenance, will require approval from the local authority building control department. This is to ensure that the standards set out in the Building Regulation Approved Documents are achieved.

We ensure that building regulation requirements are considered and integrated at every stage of design in order to avoid unnecessary changes being enforced on application for building control approval.

All applications and communications with building control will be handled by us prior to works commencing on site, after which your contractor will be responsible for notifying the building control officer of key stages of the construction process. We will remain on hand to coordinate information exchange and advise on any potential actions required.

Tender

The tender process involves approaching prospective builders and requesting quotations based on the information provided at the Technical Design stage.

Selecting a builder to work with is an important decision to get right. You are likely to be working closely with your builder, so it is important that you feel confident in their abilities and communication skills.

We can help you manage this process, and although deciding on a builder will ultimately be down to you, we can advise you on the suitability of protective builders for your project, as well as comment on any quotes and proposals provided.

Construction cont.

Contracts

A contract in this context is the written agreement between you and your builder that they will carry out the specified works, and you will pay them the sum agreed as per the terms of the contract. It is vital that you have a contact with your builder to ensure the smooth running of your project and to protect your interests.

The terms of the contract will vary depending on the type used. Standard form contracts are available to purchase and many builders will offer their own contract documents.

We always recommend a standard form contract, as opposed to a contractor's bespoke document. Although a contractor's contract may provide you with the protection you need, it can be difficult to determine the level of protection to you, the client, without considerable interrogation.

Standard form contracts are widely used throughout the industry and if the correct one is selected, will be guaranteed to include the necessary protections required. Many also include a provision for a Contract Administrator to be appointed. We have considerable experience in this role, which allows us to monitor progress on site and ensure that any payments to the contractor are in line with the work carried out.

Site Support

With any scale of project, site support will be required to some degree and your builder is likely to need a certain amount guidance once work begins on site. There will also be a lot of questions requiring discussion, particularly when it comes to the later stages of finishing.

The support you have available can have a significant impact on the success of your development, and having experienced professionals at your side to coordinate with contractors and consultants will be an invaluable asset, which will benefit your project considerably.

We can provide as much support as you require, whether that involves attending weekly site meetings and maintaining regular contact with your builder, or just being on hand to assist where necessary, we aim to be as flexible as possible in order to work around you.