

How do I use an architect? Frequently Asked Questions

Some of the most frequently asked questions about finding, appointing and working with an architect.

Do I need an architect?

Unless your project is very simple it makes sense to at least talk to an architect for advice before you get going.

Generally architects begin to offer a full service for projects with a budget of £50,000 or more, but for a smaller fee an architect can help you get the best out of your project in the early stages, regardless of size and whether they are needed later on.

Most architects offer one-off consultations and these can be incredibly useful. They will give you guidance on all aspects of your project from design and cost through to planning and construction. In a short space of time you can gain valuable insight to help you realise your project.

If you need planning permission it is likely that you will need an architect.

How do I know if someone is an architect?

The title 'architect' is protected by law (Architects Act 1997), so that only those who have undergone rigorous training, and fully qualified, can rightly use it. Watch out for companies styling themselves as 'architectural' designers or similar wording as this is generally an indication that they are not eligible.

All architects must be registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB), with most taking up RIBA membership also. If an individual is without either credential then they may be operating unregulated, providing you with no guarantees of their ability to deliver the service you require.

You can check if a person is a RIBA member on our directory.

<https://members.architecture.com/directory/default.asp?dir=3>

Why should I choose a RIBA Chartered Practice?

Only architectural practices that meet a strict eligibility criteria can register as a RIBA Chartered Practice.

All RIBA accredited Chartered Practices:

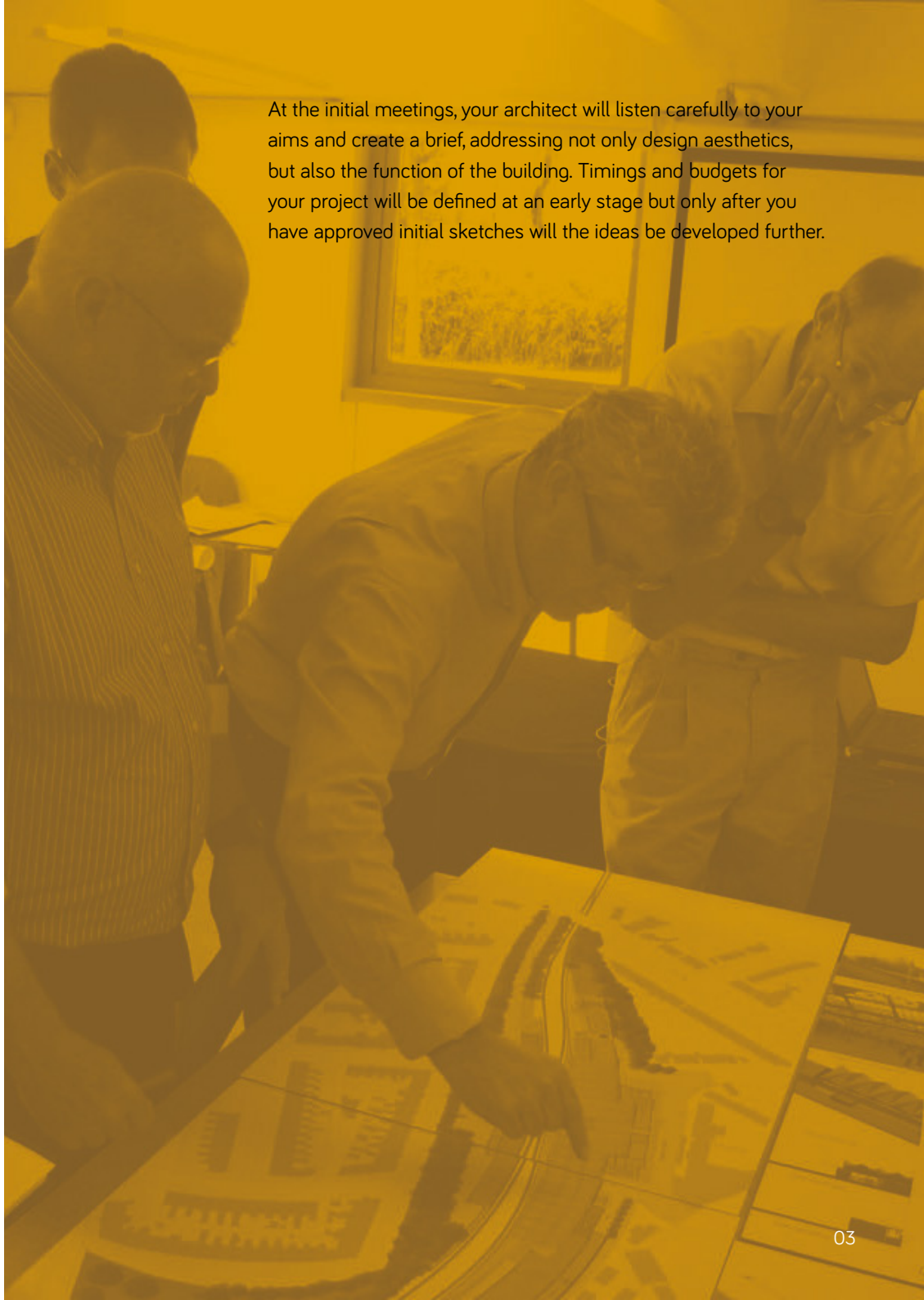
- employ a required number of individual RIBA Chartered Architects
- have appropriate Professional Indemnity Insurance
- have an effective Quality Management system
- have comprehensive Health and Safety and Environmental policies in place
- are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with a Code of Practice in a manner appropriate to their status. View the full Code of Practice.

They are committed to excellence in design and customer service. That's why the RIBA only promotes accredited Chartered Practices to clients.

How do I write a brief?

The ultimate success of your project depends on the quality of your brief, i.e. your ability to describe clearly to your architect the requirements and functions of your building, and proposed methods of operation and management. It is wise to ask your architect to assist you in preparing a final brief. Your architect will need to know:

- your aims
- your budget
- your design style: are you looking for a design in keeping with the existing building? Do you want a contemporary or high-tech design? Are you concerned about having a sustainable or ecological design?
- your reasons for embarking on this building project: what activities are intended for it?
- your authority: who will make the decisions about the designs, costs and construction when the project is underway?
- your overall expectations: what do you hope to achieve by this project - more space, more light, variety of uses, greater flexibility?

A group of people in a meeting room looking at architectural plans on a table. The image is overlaid with a yellow tint. The people are gathered around a table, looking at large sheets of paper that appear to be architectural drawings or plans. One person is pointing at a specific area on the plan. The room has a window in the background, and the overall atmosphere is professional and collaborative.

At the initial meetings, your architect will listen carefully to your aims and create a brief, addressing not only design aesthetics, but also the function of the building. Timings and budgets for your project will be defined at an early stage but only after you have approved initial sketches will the ideas be developed further.

How do I pick the right architect?

Clients often appoint an architect who is known to them or who has been recommended, or whose work they admire. This can be a sensible approach, unless you need a range of particular skills and services to match your requirements more precisely, in which case a more structured process of selection is recommended.

Look for a practice with experience of your type of project or one that shares your aspirations. Check how many similar projects they have built, their contacts with the local planning department and their track record of approvals. Follow up their references to find out about how well they communicated, how responsive they were to changes, and how effective they were at managing the budget.

Speak to each firm on your shortlist, describe your project and ask if they have the capacity to take it on. If so, request literature that outlines the firm's qualifications and experience. Visit their website. Ask to see a portfolio of work, or to visit finished buildings. Above all, get to know your intended architect. It is important to ensure that you are compatible. Your architects must convince you of their creative thinking and their ability to get things done.

Should I expect to pay for the first meeting?

Architects are not obliged to offer their time for free, but generally don't charge for an initial conversation. This will take the form of a short meeting to discuss the project and the architect's ability to deliver it. Anything more than this - i.e. detailed design advice - you should expect to pay for.

What's offered in initial meetings may differ from architect to architect, so it's best to ask if there is a charge before arranging a meeting.





How much does it cost?

Architects' fees will vary depending on the location and complexity of the project and level of service expected from them. Some architects will base their charges on a percentage of a total project cost, others as a fixed price lump sum or on a time charge basis.

How much or how little you commission an architect is up to you - from an initial design discussion through to the final delivery of the project on site.

How do I employ an architect?

A good working relationship between architect and client is crucial to the success of any project. You and your architect should discuss and agree the scope and cost of architectural services before the project begins and ensure that the agreement is in writing.

To help clients who are embarking on smaller building projects the RIBA publishes the Domestic Project Agreement which is suitable for use where work is required on your home.

If you are acting for a business or commercial purposes, the RIBA Concise Agreement is more suitable for your needs.

The RIBA Standard Agreement is suitable for larger projects where detailed contract terms are necessary. It can be applied to most procurement methods, including design & build.

How do I know if I need planning permission?

Your architect will advise you on all the approvals needed, but if you would like to find out more then you can visit the Government's Planning Portal website.

www.planningportal.co.uk

What are my health and safety obligations?

The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (CDM 2015) are the regulations for managing the health, safety and welfare of construction projects. The regulations changed in April 2015 and apply to both domestic and commercial clients.

These place a duty on the client to make suitable arrangements for managing a project, principally making sure duty holders are appointed (ie a Principal Designer and a Principal Contractor).

- The HSE provides guidance for domestic clients
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/cdm/2015/domestic-clients.htm>
- The CITB provides guidance for commercial clients
<http://www.citb.co.uk/national-construction-college/health-and-safety-courses/cdm-for-clients1/>

What form of building contract should I use?

With planning approval in place, your architect can recommend an appropriate form of building contract and will prepare drawings with technical specifications that describe your agreed proposals, for selected builders to cost.

The RIBA publishes a number of contracts suitable for domestic and commercial projects. Find out more at www.ribacontracts.com

How do I maintain control over the quality of the build?

The contract administrator is the individual responsible for administering the construction contract. Unless you appoint someone to this role, this will become your responsibility.

Appointing an architect as your contract administrator provides quality control over the build. They can carry out regular inspections, deal with queries, instruct any additional work required, monitor progress on site, keep track of cost, value works and certify payments due to the builder.

What is the project process I will go through?

All projects go through more or less the same process, starting with the initial briefing; through to design development; preparing documentation for planning permission where required; producing the technical drawings for building regulations and construction purposes; tendering and finally construction and handover.

The RIBA Plan of Work 2013 sets out these stages and is used by the industry as standard. You can find out more at www.ribaplanofwork.com

What do I do if I'm in a dispute?

Construction projects can be complex and unfortunately contract disputes sometimes happen. See further information on our guidance and resolution services on www.architecture.com

What do I do if I have a question?

The RIBA Client Services team is here to help you with your project.

If you have any questions please contact us on **+44(0)207 307 3700**
or email clientservices@riba.org





Royal Institute of British Architects
66 Portland Place
London W1B 1AD

0207 307 3700
clientservices@riba.org

www.architecture.com

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Architecture.com