

## Creating an exceptional home.

Architecture, interiors and project delivery.  
From an initial idea to a considered home.



ST ELMO - EPSOM, SURREY

## A clear start. A considered journey.

A successful home begins with the way you want to live, then brings design, cost and delivery into one conversation.

This guide helps you prepare for that conversation. It is for clients considering a new home, a substantial renovation, an extension or work to a historic property in England.

You do not need a finished brief to begin. You do need a clear view of your priorities, the decisions ahead and the support required to make them well.

## Inside the guide

- 03 Define your brief
- 04 Understand the property
- 05 Budget and appointment
- 06 The design journey
- 07 Planning and permissions
- 08 Your professional team
- 09 Interiors and performance
- 10 Tender, construction and handover
- 11 Prepare for the first conversation
- 12 Exedra and further reading

The scope, responsibilities, fees and programme for your own project will be agreed in writing. This guide introduces the decisions; your project team will advise on the particular property and proposal.

## Begin with everyday life.

Describe the activities and relationships your home should support.

Think about arrival, family time, quiet work, entertaining, guests and the connection to the garden. Consider what needs to work now and what may change as your household evolves.

A useful brief explains priorities rather than simply listing rooms. Tell us what you enjoy about your present home, what frustrates you and where a different arrangement could make life easier.

## Questions worth asking

- Which spaces will you use most, and at what times of day?
- Where do you want openness, and where do you need privacy?
- How should working from home, storage and visitors be accommodated?
- What matters most: space, daylight, location, character or flexibility?
- Which ambitions are essential, and which are open to discussion?

Bring a short brief and a few references.

Use photographs or examples to explain atmosphere, proportion and material preferences. They are a starting point for discussion, rather than a design to copy.

A good brief can develop as ideas are tested. Record decisions and keep a clear distinction between agreed requirements and possibilities still under review.

## Understand the place.

The building, site and setting shape what can be achieved.

Gather existing drawings, photographs, sales particulars and any previous permissions or reports. An early review should distinguish what is known from what requires survey or specialist investigation.

## Information to bring

- The full address and any purchase or contractual deadline.
- Existing plans, surveys, condition reports and drainage information.
- Planning history and known heritage or conservation constraints.
- Information about access, trees, boundaries and neighbouring buildings.
- Any concerns about structure, damp, services or below-ground work.

If you are buying a property

An architectural review can test design possibilities and identify further investigations. Agree its scope and deadline alongside your solicitor's and surveyor's due diligence.



## Set a complete budget.

Construction is one part of the total commitment.

Agree what the budget includes before comparing options. Cost advice should identify assumptions, exclusions and the point in the design process to which it relates. An early estimate will need review as information develops.

### Allow for

- Main building works and site preliminaries.
- Surveys, investigations and professional fees.
- Applications, statutory charges and VAT where applicable.
- Interiors, furniture, landscaping and specialist systems.
- A project-specific contingency and temporary accommodation.

### Agree at appointment

- The purpose and stages of the commission.
- Deliverables, exclusions and consultant responsibilities.
- Fees, expenses, payment stages and changes in scope.
- Who approves design, costs and variations.
- The intended programme and key decision dates.

For a substantial project, a quantity surveyor can test the developing design against the budget. Investigations are especially valuable for existing buildings, historic fabric and basement construction.

Fees and construction costs depend on the agreed scope and project conditions. Discuss the basis of the proposal instead of relying on a universal percentage or cost per square metre.

## The design journey.

The RIBA Plan of Work provides a useful framework. Your appointment defines which stages and services are included.

0

Strategic definition

Clarify your needs, objectives and whether building work is the right response.

1

Preparation and briefing

Develop the brief, surveys, budget, programme and consultant requirements.

2

Concept design

Explore arrangements, scale, daylight and an initial architectural direction.

3

Spatial coordination

Coordinate the design with the team and resolve the information needed for relevant applications.

4

Technical design

Develop coordinated construction information, specifications and specialist interfaces.

5

Manufacturing and construction

Build the project, manage agreed contract processes and address site queries.

6

Handover

Arrange completion, records, operating information and the agreed aftercare process.

7

Use

Review the home in occupation and its continuing maintenance and performance.

Stages can overlap. The timing of planning, tendering and specialist design depends on the project and procurement route. Decisions, approvals and cost reviews should be coordinated with the programme.

## Resolve the consent strategy.

Architectural potential and permission to build are separate questions.

### Planning and heritage

Establish the planning history, relevant policies and designations before assuming what can be built. Some work may fall within permitted development rights, but the property and proposal must meet the applicable conditions.

For a listed building, alterations affecting its special architectural or historic character need listed building consent. Planning permission may also be required. Interior work can be relevant to listed building controls.

### Building regulations and other matters

Building regulations approval is distinct from planning. Depending on the work, the team may also need to address party wall procedures, freeholder consent, trees, drainage, ecology or highway matters.

For a basement or sensitive property

Agree the investigation strategy early. Structure, ground conditions, groundwater, neighbouring buildings and heritage significance can affect the design, cost and approvals.

Ask which applications and evidence are needed, who prepares them and when decisions are expected. Allow for consultation, further information and conditions that must be addressed before work begins.

Your professional team should confirm the route for your project. A pre-application discussion or initial review does not guarantee an approval.

## Assemble the right team.

Clear appointments make collaboration practical.

A project may need a structural engineer, services engineer, quantity surveyor, planning or heritage adviser, landscape designer and other specialists. Appoint them when their input can inform the design rather than arrive after major decisions are settled.

## Agree the interfaces

Establish who leads coordination, provides cost advice, administers the building contract and manages specialist design. Interior architecture, decoration, furniture and procurement may be separate services; agree where the responsibilities meet.

## Two principal designer roles

The principal designer under CDM 2015 coordinates health and safety during the pre-construction phase. The principal designer under the Building Regulations coordinates design compliance. These are separate roles with different competence requirements; the same organisation may carry out both if appropriately appointed and competent.

For domestic projects, some client duties pass to others under the relevant regulations. You still need to cooperate, share available building information and allow adequate time and resources. Confirm the appointments and duties with your team at the outset.

### Ask explicitly

Who will perform each statutory role? What does the appointment include? Who manages changes, reports progress and records the client's decisions?

## Bring the whole home together.

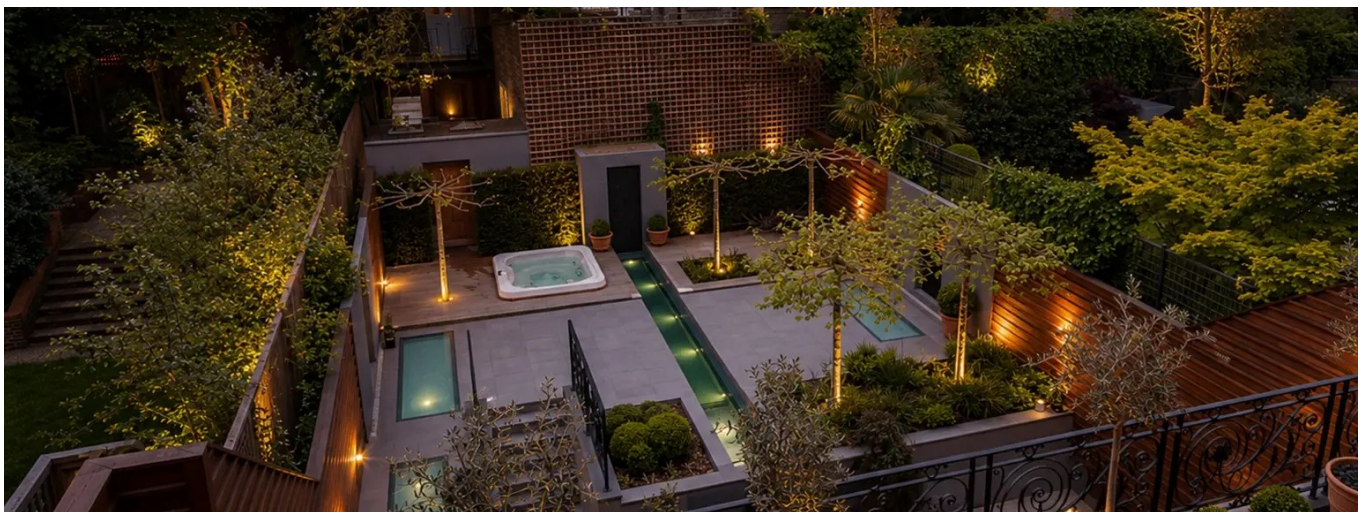
Architecture, interiors and environmental design work best as one conversation.

Resolve stairs, kitchens, bathrooms, joinery, lighting and storage while the plan, structure and services are still being developed. Samples and visual studies help test materials, proportions and the atmosphere of different rooms.

## Design for comfort and performance

Consider orientation, daylight, shading and the building envelope before selecting systems. Heating, cooling, ventilation and controls should be coordinated with specialist advice, including maintenance access, noise and everyday usability.

Discuss how the team will assess success. Predicted energy performance, installed specifications and measured performance in occupation provide different forms of evidence. A considered strategy includes durable materials and manageable maintenance.



GILSTON ROAD - CHELSEA

## Build with a clear basis.

The route to construction should support the design, budget and programme.

## Tender and contract

Compare contractor proposals against a consistent scope. Review exclusions, provisional allowances, programme, relevant experience and responsibility for specialist design. Agree an appropriate building contract and the arrangements for insurance before starting work.

## During construction

Use agreed channels for instructions and decisions. Record the effect of changes on cost and programme before they proceed. Site visits and contract administration follow the agreed appointment; they do not replace the contractor's responsibility for the works or constitute continuous supervision.

## Handover and aftercare

- Agree the completion and defects procedures under the contract.
- Collect the relevant approvals, certificates, warranties and record information.
- Arrange demonstrations for services, controls and specialist installations.
- Establish maintenance requirements and the agreed follow-up visits.

Review how the home performs in use. Early feedback can help fine-tune systems and identify practical adjustments, while preserving a clear record of matters for the contractor to address.

### Tell us what you have in mind.

A location, a few priorities and an outline of the project are enough to begin.

### The place

Address or area, property type and whether you own it or are considering a purchase.

### The ambition

What you want to change, the spaces you need and what would make the project successful.

### The budget

An indicative total budget, what it should include and any financing constraints.

### The timing

Purchase deadlines, intended start, occupation requirements and other fixed dates.

### The information

Plans, photographs, surveys, permissions or reports already available.

Start a project

[exedra-architects.co.uk/index.php/start-a-project](https://exedra-architects.co.uk/index.php/start-a-project)

Or email [enquiries@exedra-architects.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@exedra-architects.co.uk) or call 020 8546 2115.

Please send drawings or photographs by email after your initial enquiry. We will discuss an appropriate next step and agree the scope before professional work begins.

## Personal from first sketch to final detail.

Chartered architects. Interior designers. Project managers.

Exedra Architects is a RIBA Chartered Practice founded in 2001. We bring architecture, interiors and project leadership together for individual new homes, renovations and sensitive existing buildings.

Daren Drage is a RIBA-qualified, ARB-registered architect with a postgraduate diploma in Urban Design from Oxford Brookes University.

Studio 5, Bakersgate Courtyard

Pirbright, Surrey GU24 0NJ

[exedra-architects.co.uk](https://exedra-architects.co.uk)

[enquiries@exedra-architects.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@exedra-architects.co.uk) | 020 8546 2115



## Further reading

[RIBA - Plan of Work](#)

[Planning Portal - listed building consent](#)

[GOV.UK - building requirements and dutyholders](#)

[HSE - domestic clients under CDM 2015](#)

Edition: October 2026. General guidance for residential projects in England. Requirements and circumstances can change; confirm project-specific advice, responsibilities and permissions with your professional team.