

# So you've decided to build an extension... what next?

**Architect Michelle Farrell looks how to choose the right professional for your project.**



Are you considering building an extension or embarking on a new-build project? A registered architect should be the first call you make for any complex construction project (that is any project that requires planning approval or a building warrant).

People often think approaching a builder is the best way forward, but this puts you in a position where you can't get competitive prices and you are not getting independent advice.

An architect can offer advice on the process you are about to undertake, your obligations, prepare a design with you, provide you with 3D drawings if required, apply for required statutory approvals and develop a full specification so you know exactly what is included in the prices you get back from builders. Doing this ensures you get the best value for your money.

If you choose, the architect can administer the contract which includes coordinating all parties involved, keeping records, make site inspections to check the quality and detail is as specified. They also can certify work before you make staged payments to the contractor. In addition architects can provide advice on grant applications, landscaping, conservation issues and sustainability amongst other subjects.

When choosing an architect you need to consider the best person or practice for the job, not which is the most expensive or cheapest. Generally it's a good idea to choose a practice whose size relates to the type of work that you are asking of them, for example being the most important client to a small office will ensure a far more consistent and considered service than being the smallest project in a large office.

Always ask who specifically will be carrying out your design. Do your homework as widely as possible on potential architects by asking friends and colleagues. Don't hesitate to ask the owners of properties that have had work done who did it, or to search The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland website <http://www.rias.org.uk/directory/> which can provide details of all your local registered architects.

Once you have drawn up a shortlist, check they are an officially registered architect by searching online at <http://architects-register.org.uk/> (please note this search is by the individual's name not by company). Then phone each practice to discuss the potential project as not all practices will be available or want to undertake all project types. Set up meetings at your property with at least three different practices, this should be free.



During the meeting it is imperative that you are comfortable and feel you can speak freely with the architect and that they are listening to your requirements. Ask them for examples of their work, contact details of previous clients you can speak with and check their professional indemnity insurance is up to date and covers the value of your project. Finally, confirm that the style of their work is what you are looking for and request a fee proposal in writing which details exactly what is included.

It is a good idea to enter into this professional relationship with formal appointment documents. Standard forms are available that outline the architect's responsibilities, the scope of the work and the fees. Building



contracts are also advisable to protect the client and contractor and to minimise risk. These documents can appear long, however a good contract will hopefully never need to be referred to once completed; they offer clarity and assurance to all parties and reduce the possibility of disputes.

These safeguards are sensible because unfortunately there are many people offering architectural services who have not completed the training required to become a registered architect and, while they may be cheaper, there is no assurance of quality. When undertaking probably one of the biggest investments you will ever make, it is a false economy to try to make savings upfront and accept a lower quality service.

An architect usually offers a client project savings by ensuring a well-designed building with suitable detailing and specification, a professionally run project, coordination between all parties involved and a competitive tender process to ensure the best price available from the building contractor.

Once you have appointed your architect the exciting design and procurement process begins, see the

next issue of Clyde Life for a simple client's guide of what to expect at all stages from initial design to completion on site and follow up after completion. There will be a sample timetable that outlines key moments and helps ensure a problem free project.

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