

# Preparing to work with architects

A beginner's guide for community clients





Design and refurbishment projects in a building rarely start from a completely blank slate.

Often there has been a desire to make changes to the building for some time, for example to address a lack of space or storage, to accommodate a new function or simply to tackle longstanding maintenance issues. As well as providing design advice, your architect can help you shape some of the fundamentals of the project as a whole, but there are some things that are useful for you to think through before you approach them:

### Why?

What is the motivation for you making changes to your building? Why are changes needed, and how will they make things better for the people who use the building? It is always helpful to be able to articulate your motivations clearly, and to be able to demonstrate that the change is responding to real need and/or opportunity.

### When?

When would you like to start, and are there key dates you would like to target? How much flexibility is there in your timing? Are there any urgent repairs or other issues that need addressing that will influence your timeline?

### What?

Do you have a sense of what changes you would like to make? Some initial ideas about what changes you would like to make to the building can provide a helpful starting point for your project.

However, remember that an architect can help you explore different ways to change the building that you may not have considered. Know what you want to achieve in big picture terms, and your architect and design process can help you find the right approach and specific design solutions for your project.

### Who?

This is a complex question, as there are many different people and organisations to think about in connection to a project to reorder, refurbish or renovate a building.

### Who is on your team?

Do you have a designated working group that will act as the client and make decisions? A robust and committed core working group is essential to a successful project. Take the time to form this group, and talk through how you will work together to make decisions before you approach an architect.

### Who gives the necessary permissions and consents?

Depending on what kind of building you are in, and what activities and services you plan to offer, there may be different types of statutory or regulatory consents and permissions required before any changes are made to the building or activities and services are allowed to operate out of it. You will need to do some initial research to identify the key requirements linked to your building. It is useful to begin conversations with these advisors early to help you set your parameters for change.

### Who are the professionals and specialist advisors you will need to engage?

As well as an architect, there will be the other professionals and advisors you may need to engage with. As well as heritage, sustainability and other specialist advisors, a design team as a core of specialist consultants may need to be established to work with your architect.

### Who else will you need to engage in the design process?

Take time to map both current and potential users of the building and explore potential partner groups and organisations in the wider community. Knowing who they are, and how they might contribute to informing change, can enrich your project and help you build support.

Before you appoint an architect, it is useful to take a step back and make sure that you have as much in place as possible, bringing your knowledge and expertise, creative ideas and network of collaborators together.

Take the time to create a solid foundation for the project that builds on the past, understands the present and is ambitious about the future. This will help you get the best from your designer.

### Get to know your building

Gathering as much information about the building as possible is an excellent starting point for change. Do some initial research about the history of your building. When was it built, by whom and for what purpose? How has it changed over time? Try to find documentation of your building over time, whether it is photographs, architectural drawings, stories or anecdotes.

User experience and expertise is also crucial to informing the design of buildings. Take the time to explore and map how your building is being used now, what is working well, and what are the problem areas. The more people involved and perspectives gathered, the better starting point you can give your architect.



### Visit and explore other buildings

You can learn a lot by visiting other buildings like yours, or places that offer activities and services that you would like to introduce into your building. If possible, speak to people who both use and manage the building and explore their views of what works well or less so. Get inspired by what others have done, as they may have thought of ways to do things that had not occurred to you.

Remember, it is important to look at the places you are visiting with a critical eye, and consider how they are working, how they look and how they feel. The more other places you visit, the more you can build your understanding of what is possible, what is working well for others, and what are the pitfalls to avoid.

Take notes and photographs of the aspects and features that you like and don't like in other buildings that you visit. Take time to talk to others in your working groups about what you have seen and start to build a shared view of general direction of travel. This will help you articulate your ideas and preferences when in conversation with the architect you commission.

## Talk to people

Invite your community into the conversation as early as possible. This will mean thinking about community in broad terms, including: those who use the building now; those who might use it in the future; organisations and businesses nearby; people who live, work and play in the local area; and anyone who might have an interest in or might be affected by changes to your building.

Let people know that you are exploring changes to the building, and that you would like to hear their views. This can be done both informally and formally, but the moment that you are sure that you would like to go ahead with a project, it is useful to start putting your engagement strategy in place.

The architect you commission can help you plan how to link your engagement activities into decision-making along the design journey.

If you are aiming to cater for occasional or opportunistic visitors such as tourists, make sure that you start talking to those who visit your building now, and ask them their views on what would make your building a better visitor destination. If you do not yet attract this kind of visitor, go to places that do and observe and speak to visitors there.



You can refer to our *Tips for your engagement strategy* resource to help you think about how to approach this.



Our complementary resource *Testing ideas for your community building*, can offer some ideas on this.

## Identify potential collaborators and partners

If others have a stake in the future of the building, they can help you drive your project forward. Talk to both existing and potential users of the building, and explore how you might work with them to shape change and the future life of the building. Partnership can open up strategic opportunities for sustainability and help a building thrive in the future, but they may also require specific changes to the building to make work for all of the partners and uses being explored.

## Experiment with some of your ideas

You can use temporary interventions that explore what changes might mean before making any more significant or long-term decisions. Some examples of testing physical changes to your building could be marking out possible walls or other interventions onto the floor of your building to see how they would affect movement.

You might test different materials for flooring using temporary installations. You can also test different uses of a space, for example by organising an activity day with groups interested in hiring your space, or inviting a local business to run a month-long pop-up.

## Kick off your design thinking

Through establishing a core working group and embarking on a dialogue with your community, you can begin to articulate some shared priorities and objectives.

### Values

What are your core values as a group and what would you like to prioritise? Taking the time to set these out within your group and communicating them to your architect will establish an important shared framework against which you can test your project as it evolves.

### Views

Explore the existing space with both your core group and with users and stakeholders of your building. Gather a range of different perspectives on what is working well and what could be improved? Gathering different views on a building is crucial to ensuring that you are designing for the full spectrum of people connected with your building.

### Viability

How can changes to the building help ensure its future, in terms of what happens within the building, its management and maintenance, and its financial viability? Are there any urgent repairs required, and how could this be integrated into your wider vision for the future? Looking both at what is essential now and your aspirations for the future can help build both efficiency and long-term sustainability into any changes you make to your building.



Our resource *A Design Thinking Guide* can help you start to bring all of these things together in preparation for working with your architect.



## Developing a shared vision

One of the key milestones of this early stage of preparing to work with an architect is to develop a shared vision. Before you dive into the detail of what you hope to do during your design project, working together with your project team to develop your holistic vision will help set you on a more productive path for collaborative design.

### What is a project vision?

Your vision should set out the big picture narrative for your building and project. It should articulate why you are doing this project, what you hope it will achieve, and ultimately your ambition, or vision, for the future of the building.

Underpinning this vision should be the shared values and views of your group and the community that you engage, and what you have established as collectively important. A successful shared vision is one that everyone in your group can easily explain and champion, and that gives a sense of what you want your building to represent, to offer and to contribute to the well-being of your community.

A vision statement often begins with a very simple concept, such as “a place for connection” or “a quiet oasis in a busy city centre” and then goes on to articulate why this is important, who it will serve, and how both the design of the building and the activities and services that will take place there will help achieve this ambition.



### Why a shared vision is important?

Shaping your vision is fundamental to establishing strong roots from which your project will grow. It sets down your values, guiding principles and what you are hoping to achieve in a way that those you engage with, be it your community, project partners, paid consultant or funders, can not only understand what you are trying to do, but also how they might contribute.

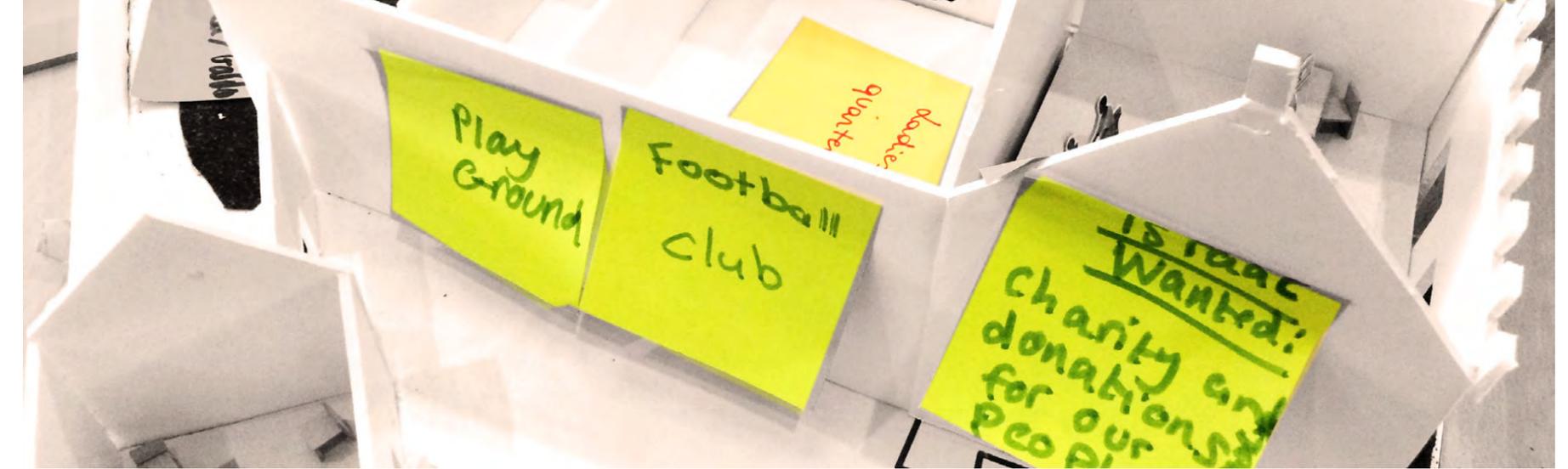
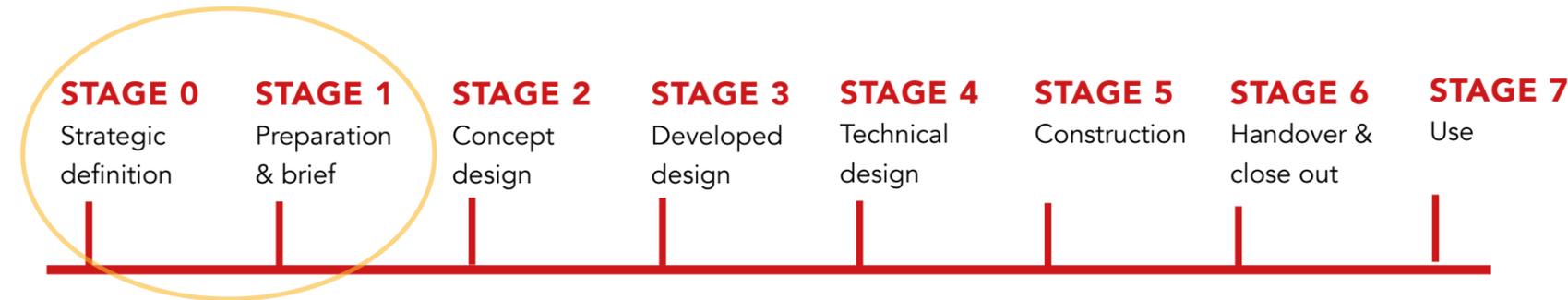
Your vision also serves as a frame of reference to help inform decisions along the way and to test every stage of your project.

For the design team you appoint, the vision will provide a clear starting point for their creative journey with you, and help them be both more responsive and more efficient throughout the project.

## Navigating the early design stages

An architect is usually commissioned after the client has made decisions about the strategic direction of their project and have created a design brief; however an architect can provide valuable advice during these early stages too. As seen in the diagram below, the design process can be thought as comprising 7 stages, from strategy development to completion. These stages are based on the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) guidelines for architects and clients.

We are focusing on early-stage support, Stage 0 and Stage 1, to help you develop a considered approach to your project. Take the time to get this right in order to be an informed client and get the most from the architect you appoint.



### RIBA Stage 0

This is the stage in which you strategically appraise and define the project before a detailed brief is created. In this stage, for example, you would explore your general approach to the project, exploring issues such as sustainability, heritage and whether a refurbishment, extension or new build will offer the best route to achieving your goals.

### RIBA Stage 1

This stage covers the time where you prepare an initial project brief and related feasibility studies to lead the way to your concept design.

It is also the time when you begin assembling your project team and define roles and responsibilities.

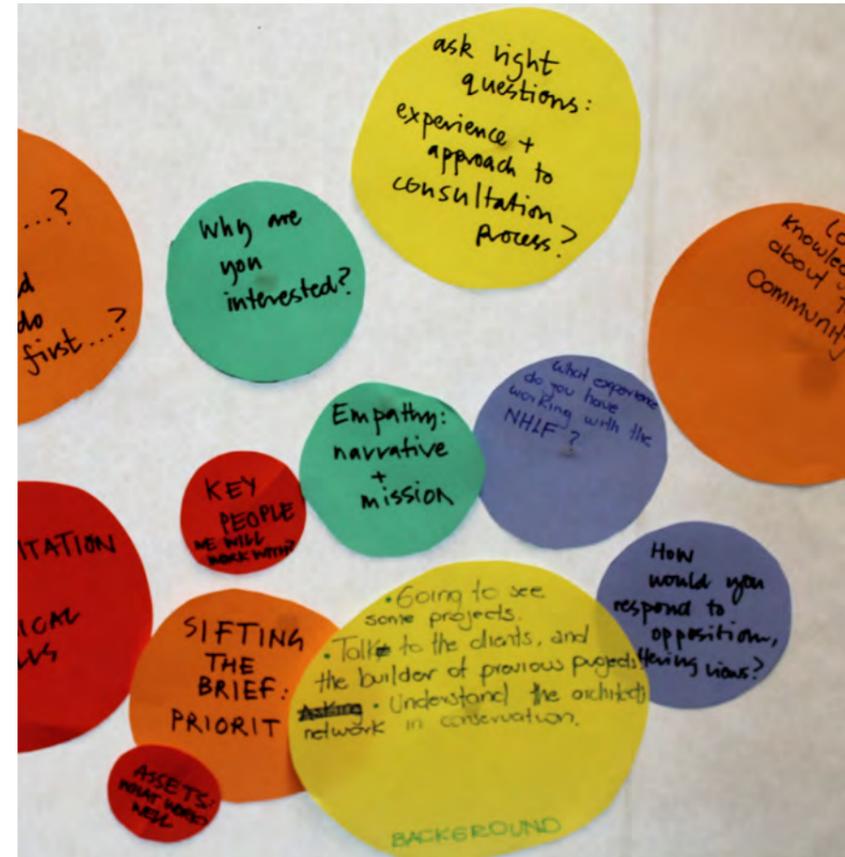
There is no one single path for getting started with an architect, or for determining the level or duration of commitment in terms of fees and programme.

There are many options for the types of service that an architect can provide for you, ranging from light-touch involvement to in-depth support. It may be helpful to think of these key stages when you initially approach an architect/(s):

### Exploratory conversations

Before you appoint, invite several architects to visit your project and get to know them. Explain the kind of ideas you have been having around the project so you can begin a dialogue and take feedback on how you will set your basic terms of engagement.

When you do approach architects, it is important to be able to articulate where you are in your project, and what it is that you are hoping your architect will do for you.



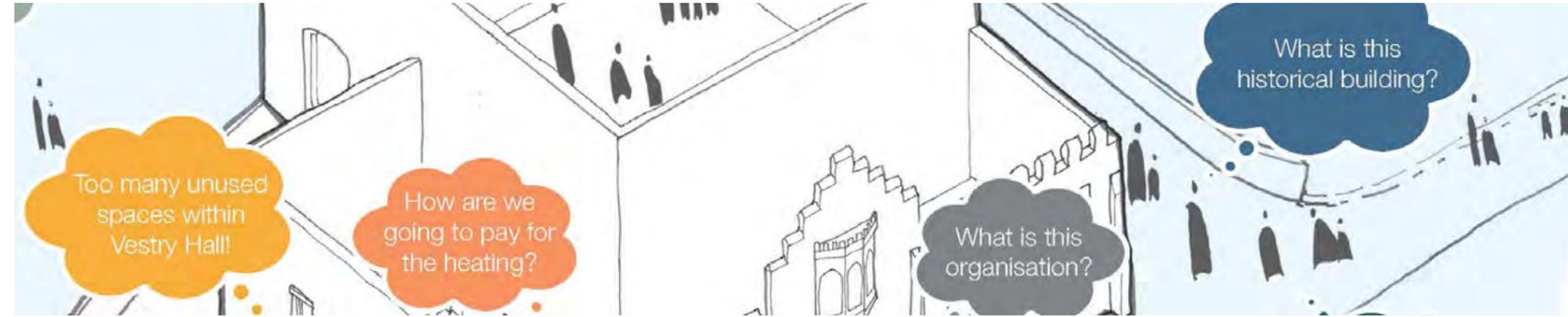
### Exploratory design support

Prior to starting RIBA Stage 0, it is useful to invest in some time to work with an architect to explore basic design ideas and help prepare you for embarking on a more formal commission with a design team. This could be a short, self-contained piece of consultation work to help set you on your project path.

The opportunities and constraints of your building and project should be explored at this stage. This is a stage to be bold; test and challenge preconceptions and be open to discussion and to exploring different design ideas and approaches. Your architect can also work with you to help structure your project stages.

It is useful at this stage to continue to build your skills and confidence as a client. Your architect and other support organisations can help you to build a greater understanding of the design process ahead, the language used, the various roles involved, and what architects will need from your group in terms of information and interaction to do their best work.

You should expect your architect to develop some basic design outputs. This should include initial visual materials, such as sketches, site strategies, diagrams to help with engaging your community, and clarify what you would like to do. By the end of this stage you should have an outline design brief in place.



### Strategic Definition

For this work, the architect should be working to RIBA Stage 0 guidelines.

Often the first stage of work once the architect has been appointed is a period of meetings and design to shape the brief and vision of the project towards some design options. This is a short piece of preliminary work to help you refine your brief and better define your project goals.

By asking the right questions, the architect, assisted by consultants and in collaboration with the client, can help to define the scope for a project; the preparation and briefing process can then be developed. This should be linked to a business plan and/or fundraising strategy.

You may need to ask for specialist advice on certain aspects of the project such as heritage advice, and essential repair scoping with specialist sub-contractors, engineers, cost consultants and a project manager.

Your architect will develop designs for a number of alternative options based on your brief, and in the case of a Historic Place of Worship or Listed Building, your Statement of Need and Statement of Significance.

This section should include descriptions of options appraisals, an outline programme that defines key milestones and also periods when a standstill may be required such as for funding submissions. Even at this early stage, the parameters and targets for sustainability and energy use should also be discussed and reviewed.



### Feasibility Study

For this work, the architect should be working to RIBA Stage 1 guidelines.

Once you have a clearer sense of the direction of travel, your architect can help you develop a design scenario through a feasibility study. This will create a more formal exploration of your design ideas, and help you test whether they are appropriate and feasible. It will also provide a useful document to help you start building support and attract funding.

The feasibility study report should capture specific aspects and considerations of your building, such as heritage and sustainability, and be informed by survey work, which is usually based on both research and exploratory works.

It is essential to consider your group's values, long-term vision and business plan alongside the feasibility study, as these should make reference to each other. Remember that if the design of the building is to improve what it offers people, all of these things need to be looked at holistically and should constantly be used to inform and test design decisions.

Some pre-application planning advice should be included in this stage either from your local Planning Department, or in the case of a Place of Worship the appropriate consultee to make changes, such as the local DAC.

*A note of caution:*

*Many groups make the mistake of rushing into a feasibility study without having spent enough time on developing a clear vision and brief or on exploring options. It is advisable to ensure that you are ready for this stage before commissioning it, as it requires a considerable investment of time and resources.*

## Choosing the right architect for your project

Some research and preparation can help you choose an architect who is the right fit for your project. Here are three initial considerations to help you begin the selection process:

### Track Record

Look for examples of projects that you like, and ask people for recommendations. If you identify the work of an architect or practice that you think could be a good fit for your project, take a look at the spectrum of projects that they have done previously to get a sense of their body of work.

If possible, visit those places and speak to the client groups about how the place is working. Defining what you like and having assurance of quality of service are key to a successful project.

### Ways of working

Taking references is vital in establishing how a practice will work with you; on previous projects, has the architect brought the necessary energy and skills to inspire, direct and deliver a great project that their client is happy with?

### Expertise

If you are working with a heritage building you will need an architect that has conservation skills. Likewise, for a place of worship, it is beneficial if there is a working knowledge of the requirements of the approving authorities, and organisations such as the Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association are a useful reference point. Every project has its specific needs and challenges, so make sure that the architect you choose has the right expertise and experience for yours.

### Approach to your project

When asking an architect to become involved, you might want to ask them to set out how they would structure the whole design process. This will give you a strategic overview and help understand the level of service they can provide and associated outline cost, from design through to construction.

## Appointment Terms

When you do choose and appoint your architect, you should agree 'Terms of Appointment' with your architect. These should define scope, fee, programme, personnel and other basic terms.

See RIBA website for further details  
<https://www.architecture.com>



There are a number of different tools used by architects that can be helpful to your process and decision-making, as well as being a way to help invite others into the conversation.

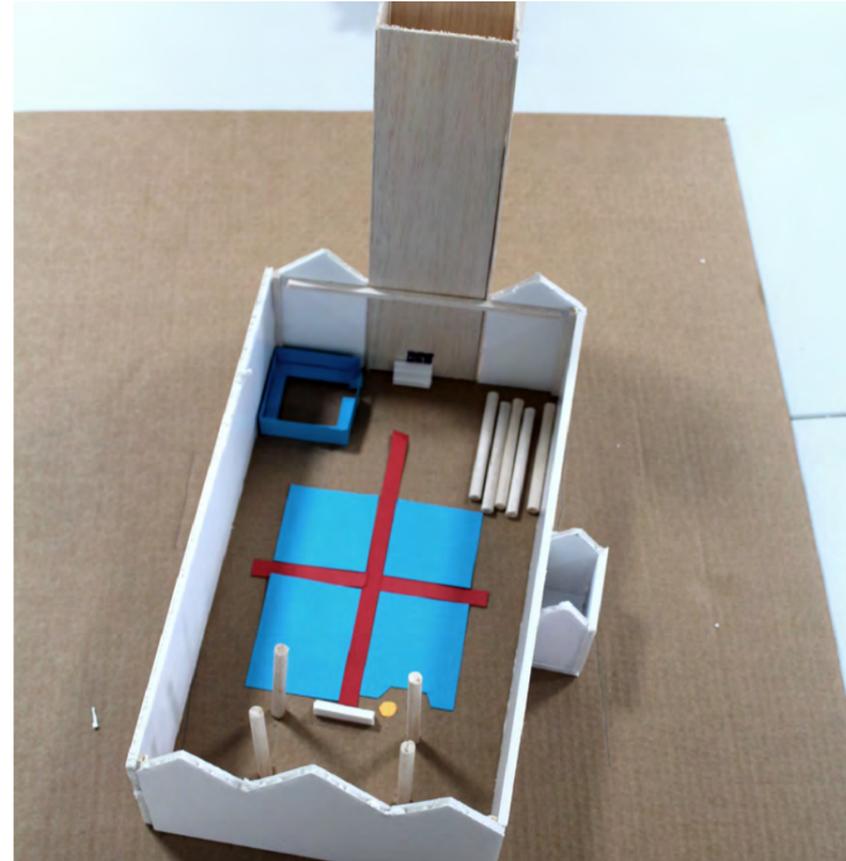
### Brief

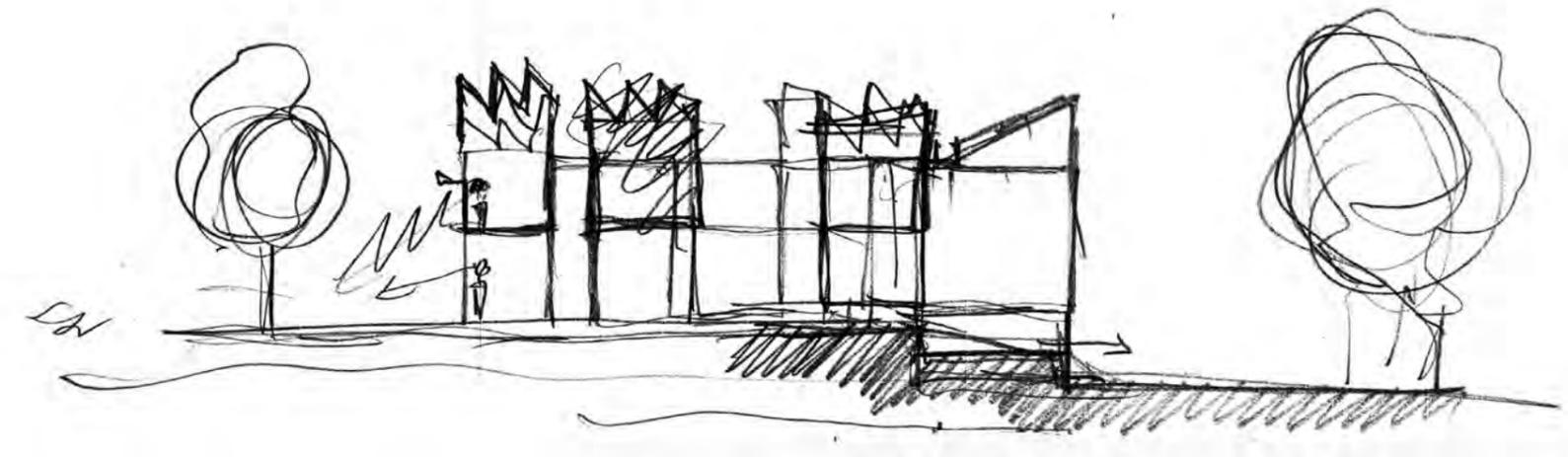
While you may have already drafted a design brief, working with your architect to test and further develop the brief will be required. Sharing and testing the brief with others can help you: build support; test your understanding of local needs and aspirations; and build partnership opportunities.

### Models

There is nothing like a rough scale model of your project to help start design discussions as a group. For example, where does the sun come in? How do people enter and navigate the building and does everyone feel welcome? Could new openings be made to improve access, flow and legibility?

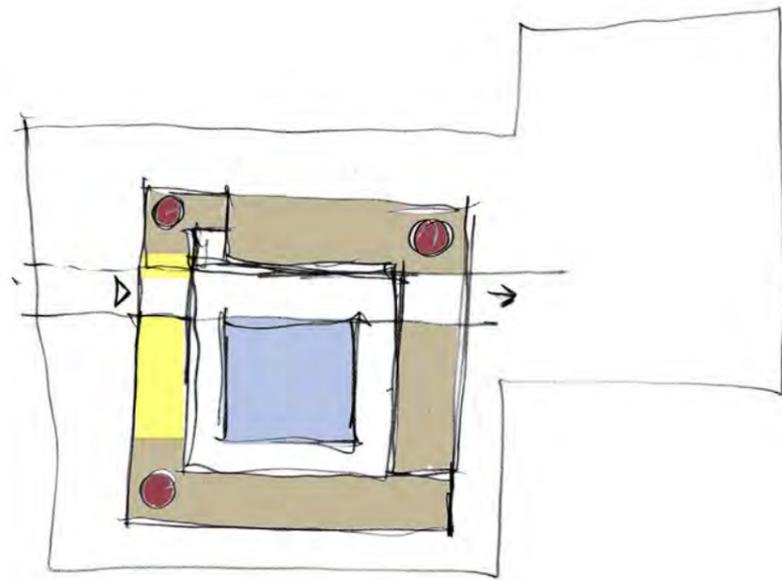
Don't be afraid to experiment with very basic models of your building yourselves to gain a better understanding of how the different elements of your building fit together and to explore design ideas within your group.





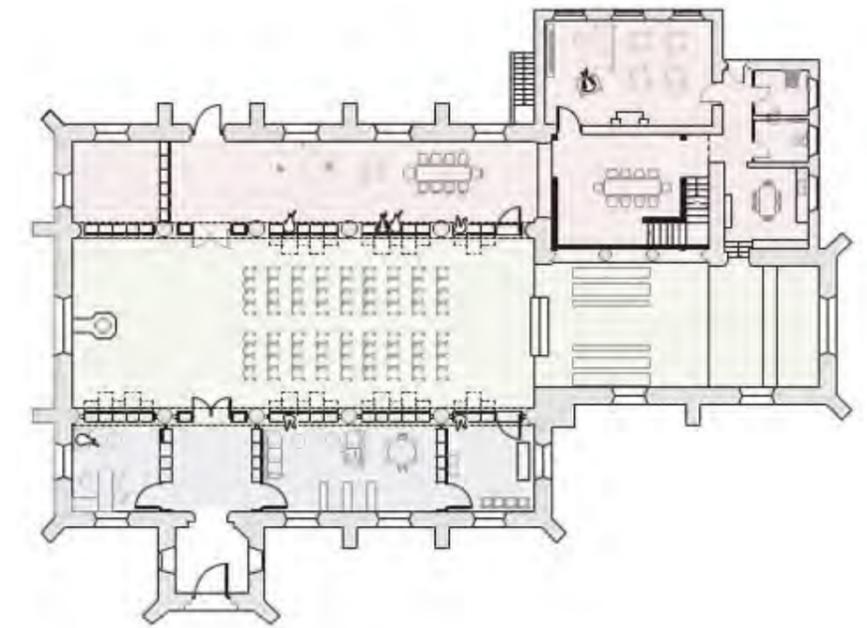
### Sketches

Before your architect starts converting design ideas as 'hard-line', you should be working together on diagrams and sketches that capture the key design ideas and decisions. This can help you to visualise complex themes in ways that your whole community can understand and can help you explore a number of different approaches to the same element of change you are exploring.



### Plans

Once the sketches and diagrams have captured the vision and brief, you will see a set of plans starting to emerge. Plans drawn to scale will help you further test design ideas and the feasibility of how the different elements fit together. More developed plans can also help your dialogue with others, be they users, partners, funders or the wider community.



Working on designs behind closed doors may seem preferable in the earlier stages of a project, but opening up a wider conversation with your community (people who use or have a stake or interest in the building) early on in the process can be incredibly valuable.

Here are some tips on why this matters and how it can be achieved:

### Open up the conversation

Hold an open day to explain what you might be doing and why you want to do it. This can help you test initial design ideas with your community and also bring a greater understanding of the local context into your architect's work to create more place-specific ideas and solutions. This ultimately will lead to higher quality design that is relevant to those who will use your building

### Invite people in

As the community becomes more attached to the project, individuals, groups and organisations might offer help, champion the project, volunteer or even provide expertise to your working group. This brings vital energy and support to your project, and can help you constantly test and evolve design ideas, as well as potentially enlarging and strengthening the working group.

*You can refer to our [Designing Places with People](#) resources to help you with this.*

### Keep connections open

If a regular and vibrant engagement strategy developed with your architect can be embedded in the project, it can help build support, widen participation and set up long-term partnerships and friendships that often remain long after the project is completed and can contribute to the sustainability of your building.



## Magdalen College Library: working around a concept for a vision

While this case study is of a project of a different scale and budget from those that most communities embark on, it does offer some really valuable lessons on a number of aspects of any commissioning client working with an architect.

### Their situation

Magdalen College's main campus in central Oxford, is a collection of Grade I, II and II\* Listed Buildings, with spaces that provide many different kinds of uses including teaching, dining, and residences. The Library was housed in a Grade II\* Listed building that was originally a school hall, but had been converted into a Library in the 1930s. As the number of students grew, the library had become too small and the historic fabric was in need of urgent repair.

### Defining the brief

The College had a clear need: to provide more space for the library, and to carry out essential repairs. There were concerns around making the right long-term decision: whether to repair or to build a new facility - a decision that would be influenced by the complications of gaining permission in a highly significant site, and worries around disrupting the day-to-day use of the library, an essential part of College life.

### Starting the conversation

In the knowledge of the need for the urgent repairs, the College began discussions around some fundamental questions that a building project could help to shape: What is the role of the Library in the life of the College? How is technology shaping the way that we study and access information? How can the use of natural light and fresh air stimulate study and enhance well being?

### Testing and shaping the brief

A feasibility study was commissioned, with two key areas of enquiry:

1. How might the existing building be repaired, restored and converted to either a library or other uses?
2. What kind of space is desirable? - Visits to similar libraries were undertaken to explore contemporary ways of working, while shaping the brief for the number of readers and books housed.



## Developing a Vision

Having established the overall strategy, the vision and core values were revisited and developed by the team. This led to a consensus for a highly sustainable approach to energy by enhancing and repairing the existing fabric; using natural light and ventilation to improve the quality of spaces for the students; and fostering a welcoming and nurturing environment by having a very open and accessible entrance sequence.

## Developing a design concept

Inspired by a painting in the National Gallery, a design concept emerged to have the stone shell of the old library restored and made more energy efficient. Within this large volume, three new floors of study spaces would be inserted, in the form of a timber box, protecting the readers, and providing views out to the city and the garden.

This simple diagram informed key design decisions like choice of materials, lighting, as well as heating and ventilation paths.

## Practical considerations

From the vision, practical considerations emerged through discussion and consultation: the need for adequate storage, the need for flexible spaces that could be adapted for different events, and the need for low maintenance options.

## Working in an Historic Environment

At the feasibility stage of the project, alternative sites were also explored, as a larger footprint could be achieved by building a new library. Having engaged with Heritage consultees in the planning department, a plan emerged that a sustainable re-use of the existing building, with a new extended footprint was the best balance in terms of heritage. Building on a new site was deemed too harmful to historic views and relationships.



### Enhancing energy performance

Early in the discussion, the design team engineers prepared options for heating and cooling. A principle was agreed that extra money would be spent on insulation to create well-sealed windows and doors so that future energy bills and costly heating and cooling equipment could be omitted. Making these budgetary decisions is one of the values of having input from a range of experienced professionals.

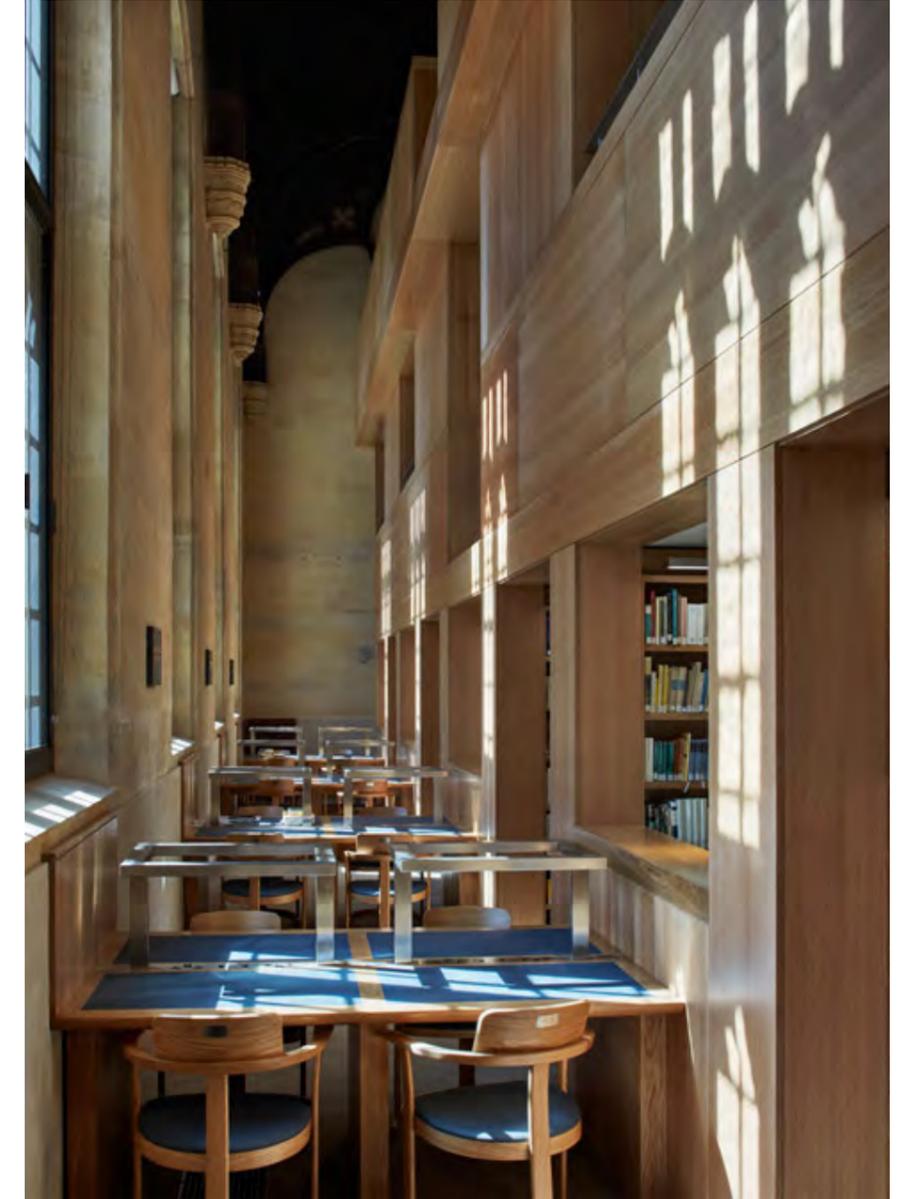


### Designing a place with and for people

The design team had conversations with both library staff and students, which helped inform the design of the space with particular consideration of light, temperature space and storage. Alongside this, engagement revealed a desire to protect and respect the historic fabric of the building. The decision to insert practical modern elements into the historic shell and to add new elements onto the historic building, allowed the architects to satisfy what might have at first seemed conflicting interests.

The design that emerged, above all, had to create a place where students could go to study within a comfortable and healthy environment. The design team was particularly keen to also bring delight into the conversation, and created spaces that were not only practical, but also beautiful.

This case study was provided by Wright & Wright Architects.



These three scenarios are designed to help you explore how you would approach working with an architect in three different situations. While they may be quite different from your situation, common themes should emerge and help you think about how you would like to work with your architect.

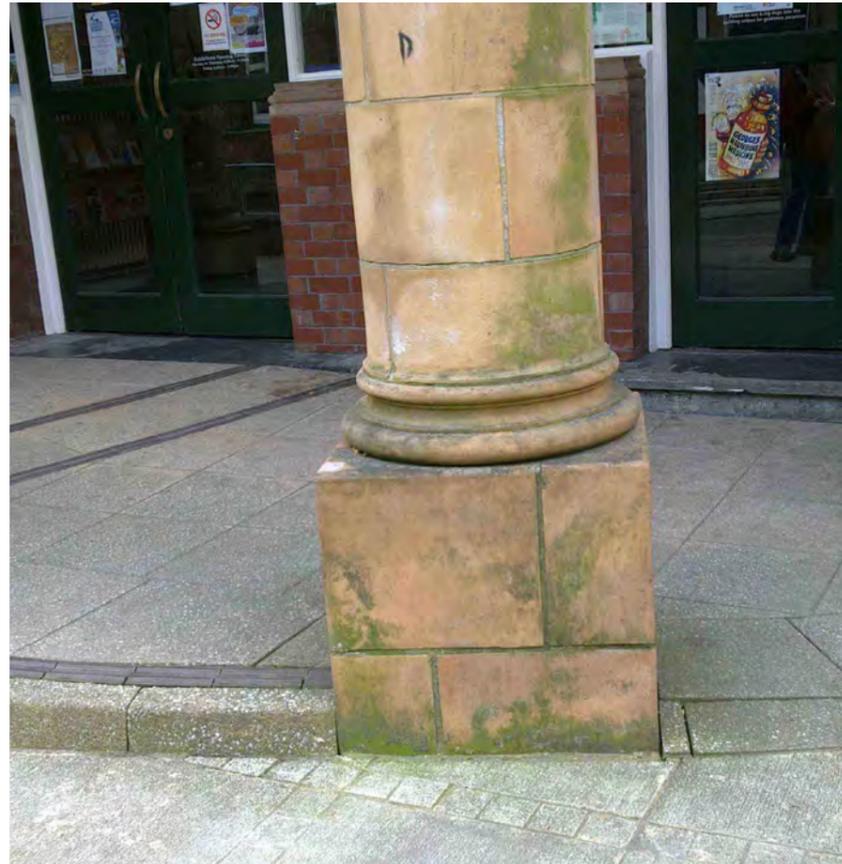
### Setting the scene

You are looking after a grade II listed community building, which is well used, but due to its main entrance being up a number of steep steps, it is difficult for people with buggies or any specific mobility requirements to access. The main entrance is a beautiful feature of the building and offers an important presence on, and connection with, the high street on which it sits.

Your building sits on a corner plot on a slope, and one side does sit level with the pavement from the secondary street, but currently there is no access into the building from this street and side of the building.

### Setting objectives

You would like to explore how you can reimagine the main entrance so that it is welcoming and accessible to everyone. You would like to see everyone enter through the same door, as you feel strongly about not wanting to have a separate entrance for people with varying degrees of mobility.



## How an architect could help

### Explore Options

There may not be one easy answer to resolving the access issue. It is often a good idea to set out a number of scenarios and talk through the strengths and weaknesses of each. This can also set a useful framework for a heritage consultee to understand that options have been tested.

### Measure and understand the site

The expertise of the architect includes knowledge of the regulations that need to be met for the size, gradient and protection of a ramp and stepped access. Don't forget that a set of steps with a very good handrail are better for some mobility impairments than a long ramp. Understanding how these standards and principles can be applied is a very good principle to work to.

### Research and build a justification

The entrance to a building is one of the most common features of a building that may have changed over time. Building up your research of historic drawings and photographs of the building may show where changes were made in the past; and this can form the basis for future changes.

## How engagement could help

### With existing users of the building

Engagement activities that invite people to reflect on how they use the building and how they think it is working for them can help you consider access throughout the building, not just at the main entrance. It can also help you to better understand the different access needs of specific user groups, and to explore how the needs of some might conflict with those of others. This is essential to setting a clear brief on access for your design team.

### With your wider community

Engaging with your wider community can help you identify potential users and partners and inform a design brief which unleashes potential in your building. This is an essential part of making the business case for investment in your project, particularly if large-scale changes are required.

Opening up the conversation can also help you identify and mobilise local champions, resources and support for your project.

### Setting the scene

Your village hall is struggling to keep up with the demand from local groups wanting to hold activities there. It has only one large usable space, which is appropriate for some of the activities, but feels too big for others. Currently, the hall can only accommodate one activity at any time. There are also limited services available in the building, with a very small kitchenette and only one toilet, which is not fully accessible.

### Setting objectives

You would like to explore how best to approach making changes to the building: for example, whether it would be a better idea to divide the large room into smaller units, perhaps put in a mezzanine floor, or explore adding an extension to the building. You would like your architect to help you look at different ways to approach this and to decide which is the best way forward.



### How an architect could help

#### Make a model

This is a problem best explored in three dimensions. A quick, rough model, accurately scaled, is very useful to test inserting a new floor or walls and can help you explore likely questions: how does the quality of light change when a floor is added, what is the optimum number of sub-divisions that can be made, is it easier to extend than sub-divide.

#### Site Information

Your architect will be familiar with the service networks linked to the site: power, water, drainage, and how to access this kind of information. It may not be the most obvious thing to think to begin with, but knowing how and where you can connect the new kitchen services to is a key strategic decision to understand.

#### Test with a wider group

Once you have thought through and started to set out some basic options, why not invite a wider audience to comment on them, to broaden the range of feedback? When overlap of different uses is being discussed, some potential help might come from those who bring fresh ideas, thinking through longer term flexibility, and practical issues such as storage.

### How engagement could help

#### With existing users of the building

As this building already has a number of existing user groups with varying needs, it is useful to do a mapping exercise which considers the specific needs of each group, including the space they require (for the activities themselves and for any related storage) and what other amenities and facilities within or outside the building would improve the experience for them and their participants.

It is also useful to map when the various activities currently take place over the day and week, and the ideal scenarios for each of the user groups, as well as what each group currently pays, or is willing to pay, for use of the building. This will ensure your design brief aligns with your business plan.

#### With your wider community

Extending the conversation to your wider community can help you explore the potential and long-term sustainability of the building as it is now, and with any potential changes. Understanding whether need for the building is likely to grow further, and what other projects or facilities in the area might complement or compete with yours, will help you “future-proof” your building. Engagement can also help you build more interest and support for your project.

### Setting the scene

Your faith community looks after a church and a number of auxiliary buildings on the same site. The church is well attended by a thriving congregation, and also runs a number of social activities and community services out of the church building.

However, the church building is in need of urgent repairs, and some members of your congregation are complaining that the building no longer feels like a place of worship because it is full of equipment being used by those running other activities and services from the building. There are two empty buildings on the site, which are not in use because they are in a poor state of repair. You do have some funds available to carry out repairs, but they are not sure if they are sufficient to do work on all three buildings.

### Setting objectives

You would like to explore whether some or all of the social activities and community services currently running in the church would be better suited to the other buildings, and how viable and flexible each of the different buildings is in its own right. You would like to consider the potential future uses of all of the buildings before you invest in making changes or repairs to any of them.



### How an architect could help

#### Costing Strategy

It may sound unusual to begin from a consideration of costs, but the direction of the design work should follow some planning around costs - both in terms of how much benefit each of the various buildings would bring and how they compare, but also whether the sell-on value of one could be used to pay for the new work.

#### Sustainability

Assessing future energy costs and how to sustainably develop an existing building should be a criterion in any strategy. Some early questions may be whether you can invest in improvements to insulation, air-tightness and quality of windows and doors. Are there opportunities to use green forms of on-site renewable energy? Might this even be a possibility for joint benefit across several buildings?

#### Options appraisal

The architect will help to test the site, exploring key considerations such as: the condition and potential of each of the buildings; accessibility; flexibility for future uses; and the quality that can be achieved in each building. There is also a question of significance. What are the important historic and social values, and how do these influence the strategy?

### How engagement could help

#### With existing users of the building

Given that there is already some tension between worshipping and some of the other uses of the church, it is useful to think about engaging with your worshipping community and other users both in isolation and by bringing them together to better understand each other's needs and any concerns. Exploring the future of the church and other buildings in this way can provide a wonderful opportunity to bring the different elements of your community together and play an essential role in informing design decisions.

#### With your wider community

In a situation like this, it is hugely useful to explore how the local community perceives your site as a whole, and whether there is any interest from others to share, occupy or purchase one of the vacant buildings. This can help you take a holistic approach to the site and consider a range of options for its future and your management of it.

## Practical tips

### Seek advice and consents

Any significant changes to a building and how it relates to the street around it require planning consent. Your planning authority can help you navigate this. If the building is a place of worship, you will need to seek consent from the relevant regulatory body.

It is essential to speak to heritage advisors regarding any changes to a listed building. They can advise you on what level of change is possible and where the heritage value lies. Contacting Historic England for support is a good start here. Seek additional specialist advice where needed. Most practices are well connected into a network of technical and specialist advisors and can help direct you to them.

### Invest in engagement

Engaging with current and potential users of your building, neighbours, partners and the wider community early on, and consistently throughout your project, can help you make the most of the opportunities the project offers.

Take the time to map out how and why you want to engage, and how engagement will feed into your decision-making.

### Align your design brief and business plan

Make sure that these strategic processes and documents are developed at the same time and closely linked with each other. Your business plan is essential to setting out a clear and effective design brief, and at the same time, your design process can help you develop and evolve your business plan by helping you explore what is possible as well as what is needed.

### Energy use and sustainability

It is our shared responsibility as clients and design professionals to think long term about how a building project will impact on the environment over the course of its lifetime, not just the construction stage. A clear set of targets in relation to energy use, sustainable re-use of existing fabric and ethical sourcing of new materials should be written into a project brief.

### Develop a clear vision for your building

An architect works best when there is a clear vision for a building in place. This is the big picture narrative around your building, what it is there to do, who it is for and why it is important. If you are struggling to formulate or capture your vision, your architect can help you do this.

## Glossary

### Appointment

You and your architect should agree on the scope and cost of the work to be undertaken, this should be linked to a programme, with outcomes clearly defined. It is important that the agreement is in writing, setting out the obligations of both parties.

### Commissioning brief

This is a brief, that may take the form of a letter that sets out the scope of services, the programme and the estimated value of the work if known. This may also take the form of a tender where you ask the architects to provide evidence of their track record, CVs of key personnel and financial standing.

### Design brief

This is usually appended to the Commissioning brief or letter. It sets out the details of the project, the vision and brief that you are trying to achieve. It is usual to include information of the site that you have collated, which may include photographs, drawings, Statement of Need and Statement of Significance, Listing entry and description.

### Work stages

The RIBA has defined a clear set of work stages which span from early stage design and feasibility through to construction and handover. There are clearly defined outputs and requirements that should be completed before progressing to the next stage.

### Agreement

The RIBA has a Standard Form of Agreement that sets out terms. This includes details of both parties and their roles and responsibilities. It includes a checklist of services that you can opt in and out of.

### Fees

A fee is typically structured as a percentage of the construction cost of the project, following industry standards, and relative to the scale, historic significance and nature of the work. However, this may not be known until the early work stages are complete, so these are often defined on a lump sum basis to a set scope and programme

## Useful resources

### Historic England

Website available at:  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/>

### Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) guidance

Website available at:  
[www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com)

### CABE guide to Creating Excellent Buildings

This guide for clients was created in 2003, but still provides an extremely useful overview of the design process, from preparation, design, construction & use.

PDF available at:  
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118110750/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/creating-excellent-buildings.pdf>

### Crossing the Threshold

Crossing the Threshold: a Step by Step Guide to Developing your Place of Worship for Wider Community Use and Managing a Successful Building Project

Website available at:  
<https://www.hereford.anglican.org/Crossingthethresholdtoolkit/>

### Diocese of London (CofE)

Guidance on opening up your place of worship building.

Website available at:  
<https://www.london.anglican.org/support/buildings-and-property/open-churches-toolkit/>

### National Churches Trust

Website available at:  
<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/working-what-you-have-things-do-now/opening-visitors>

### Churchcare

Making Changes to your church building: Rediscover the role your building can play in your mission.

Website available at:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/making-changes-your-building-and-churchyard>

### Working with historic buildings

Appointing Architects and other Professionals for work on Historic Buildings

Website available at:  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/conservation-listed-buildings/listed-building-guidance-notes/balmforthj-methodistchurchorguk/>

## Empowering Design Practices resources

The Empowering Design Practices (EDP) project has produced a number of resources drawing on research in community led-design combined with the experience of working with over 45 groups around the country looking after historic places of worship.

### Inspiring design stories from historic places of worship

These resources aim to provide inspiration to those thinking about making changes to their historic building. They will help you explore a variety of potential design outcomes and the role of community engagement in a design project.

Design project stories: Explore the cases studies around the UK

Community engagement stories: Films telling the stories of St Luke's Church, Oxford and Graylingwell Chapel, Chichester.

### How to think about making changes to historic places of worship

Design Thinking Guide: This guide provides a framework and a set of resources to help you think about making changes to historic places of worship and to develop a design rationale.

### Explore design and how to approach key design tasks

This series of resources aim to help you understand design and engage in key design tasks.

Explore Design website: Site that explains key design themes through which to understand community buildings.

Design Training film: an introduction to the design process and its value in unearthing the potential of buildings.

Developing a shared purpose film: how to develop a shared purpose for your building project.

### How to engage communities in design

This set of resources aims to provide guidance on the development of strategies and activities for community engagement in design.

Design places with people: three booklets introducing the basics of community engagement

Engaging communities in design decision-making film: explore the meaning and value of community engagement in design

Please go to the Empowerment Design website to find the above resources: [www.empoweringdesign.net](http://www.empoweringdesign.net).

# Acknowledgements

Photo credits

Front cover: Modelling during Design Training workshop, Empowering Design Practice research project

Inside front cover: Design Training workshop, Empowering Design Practice research project

p. 4 Sharing information at Design Training, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 5 Study Visit, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 6 Bow Moves event at Bow Church, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 7 Bow Moves event at Bow Church, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 9 Visioning at Design Training, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 11 Visioning at Reconfiguring Place: High Streets, The Glass-House Community Led Design

p. 12 Student work from Sheffield University Live Project with Israac Community Association, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 14 Brainstorming at Training for Architects, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 16 Student work from Sheffield University Live Project with Israac Community Association, Empowering Design Practices research project

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p. 32 Berslem School of Art front step & ramp, The Glass-House Community Led Design

p. 34 All Saints Hanley Church Hall, Empowering Design Practices research project

p. 36 Engagement activity at Newlyn Fish Festival, Empowering Design Practices research project

Inside back cover: Design Training workshop, Empowering Design Practice research project

Back cover: Student work from Sheffield University Live Project with Israac Community Association, Empowering Design Practices research project

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Empowering Design Practices is a research project exploring how community-led design can help empower those who look after historic places of worship to create more open, vibrant and sustainable places that respect and enhance their heritage. Working within this context, the project aims to develop insights and mechanisms (approaches, resources, training) to support community-led design and the development of places that connect and serve their communities.

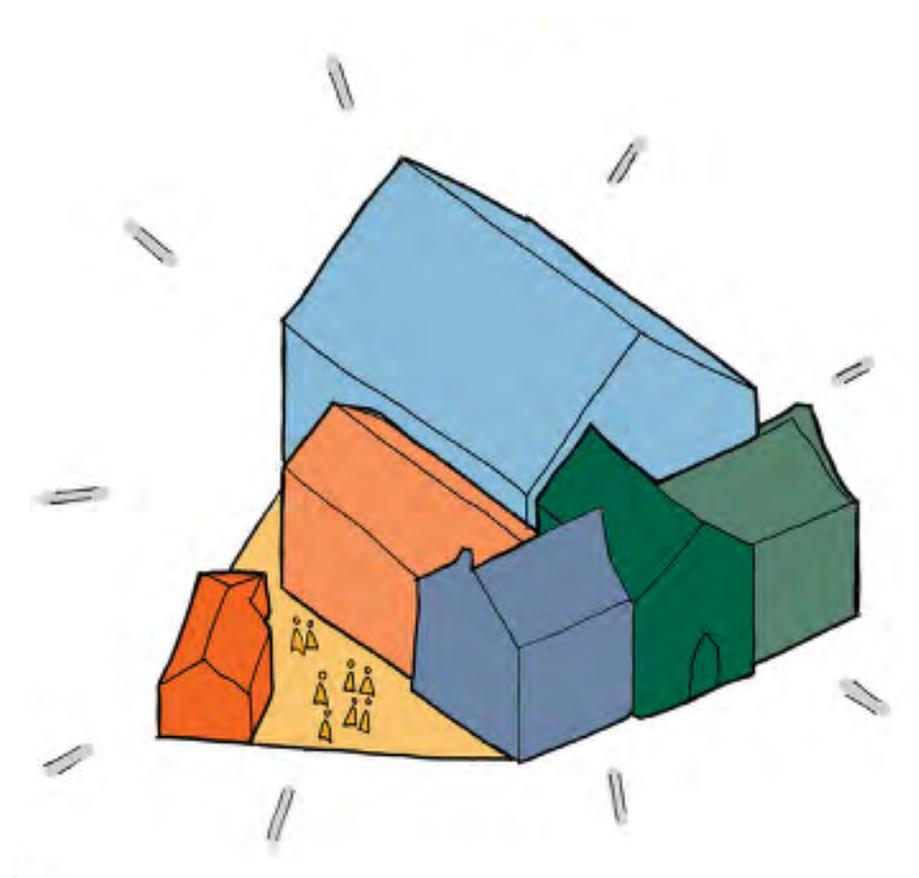
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Empowering Design Practices  
The Glass-House Community Led Design  
Wright & Wright Architects  
The Open University

[www.empoweringdesign.net](http://www.empoweringdesign.net)  
[www.theglasshouse.org.uk](http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk)  
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