

Material Works

Guide to refurbishing and extending your home

Architecture that doesn't cost the earth

Material Works Architecture is an award-winning practice delivering elegant and innovative design.

Our work is rooted in sustainability and well-being, using natural materials and environmental design strategies to create efficient, healthy homes that uplift and inspire.

We've delivered a range of successful refurbishments, extensions, and adaptations for homeowners—enhancing layouts, adding space, and improving energy performance.

Every project is guided by clarity, care and craft—rooted in place, purpose, and the opportunity to do more with less.

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Design for Life

We create homes that are designed around the lives of the people who live in them. Our approach blends elegance and practicality, delivering contemporary spaces that feel both welcoming and enduring.

Every project begins with a simple principle: Artful pragmatism. We design creative homes that inspire and delight, while reflecting the needs of your everyday life and remaining adaptable for the future.

We focus on what truly matters—light, warmth, proportion, scale, comfort, acoustics, and colour—bringing these elements together to craft homes with character and vision. Working closely with skilled contractors and fabricators, we ensure every detail is considered, so your home is beautifully made, resilient, and built to last.

Sustainability sits at the heart of our work. We are committed to reducing environmental impact by designing energy-efficient spaces that feel healthy and natural to live in. Using regenerative, non-toxic, and reusable materials, we create homes that are as good for the planet as they are for the people who inhabit them.

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Process

Designing a home is a journey—one built on discussion and collaboration. It is an iterative process that benefits from care and thoughtfulness, ensuring the best outcome.

We begin by listening. By understanding our clients' priorities, ambitions, and way of life, we establish a strong foundation for design. From materials, colours, and textures to storage solutions and the flow of a kitchen, every detail is shaped through dialogue to reflect individual needs and preferences.

These insights are then developed into clear proposals. We use sketches, models, and visualisations to show not only the dimensions of a space but also its atmosphere—light, texture, shadow, and character—helping clients fully imagine how their home will look and feel.

As the design evolves, we maintain a transparent process, moving from early concepts to refined imagery and finally to fully detailed packages. Each stage invites feedback, ensuring the project aligns with aspirations.

A successful build relies on clarity. Our detailed design information is practical and carefully considered, enabling efficient, timely construction and delivering homes of enduring quality.

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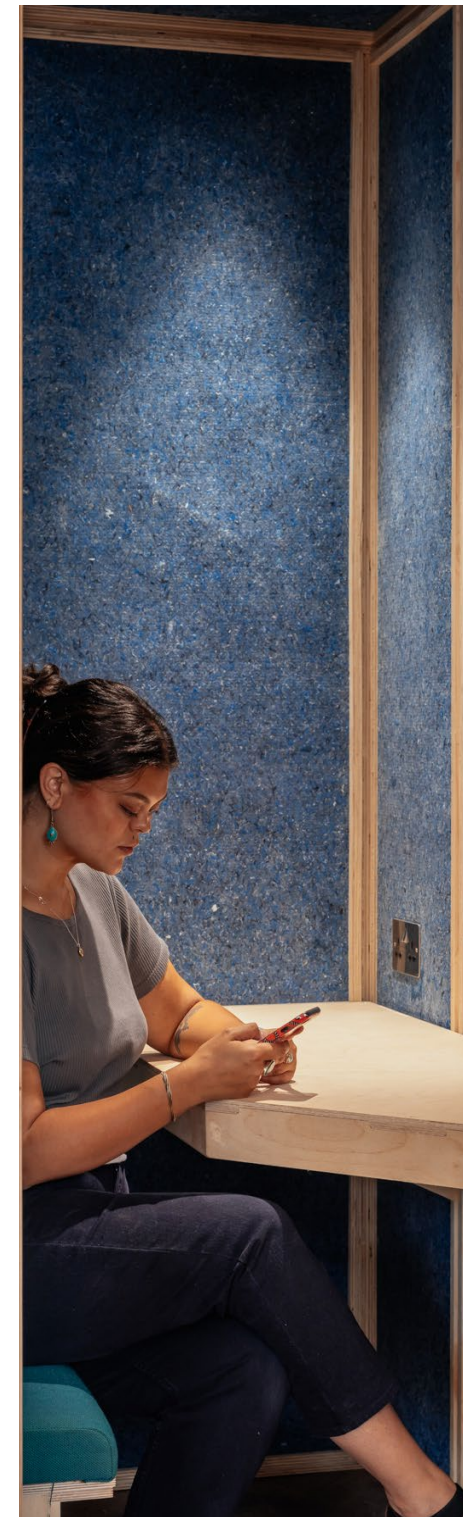


Natural Materials, re-use and Re-cycling

Our practice is founded on the belief that architecture carries both environmental and cultural responsibility. The materials and processes we choose shape not only the quality of life within a home but also its broader ecological impact.

Advances in sustainable construction, alongside the rediscovery of traditional methods, have expanded the range of materials available to us. We increasingly replace carbon-intensive systems with alternatives such as structural timber, wood fibre insulation, cork, hemp, and even cultivated mycelium—materials that reduce impact while enriching interiors with natural warmth and texture.

Equally central is the principle of circularity. We design with the full life cycle of a building in mind, considering how components can be reused, reconfigured, or returned to natural cycles. Wherever possible, we incorporate reclaimed elements—bricks, steel, doors, and fittings—embedding continuity and narrative within new architecture.



Craft and Detail

The distinction between an ordinary and an exceptional project often lies in the precision of construction details. Individually, a single detail may seem minor, but collectively, they define the quality and care of a home.

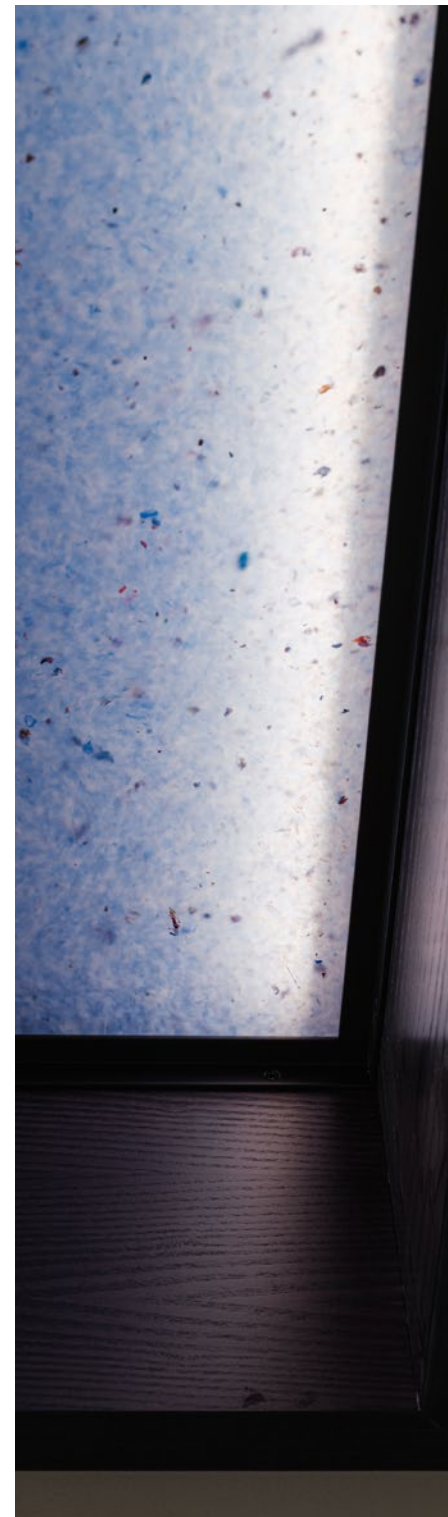
As designers, we attend closely to these nuances—how materials meet, how glazing is positioned to capture light and views, and how joists, shelves, or tiles are precisely aligned within the overall composition. We consider both the practical possibilities of construction and the intrinsic properties of the materials we select, ensuring that every element contributes to a coherent and elegant whole.

Collaboration is essential. Our experience working with contractors, joiners, and fabricators has taught us the value of clear communication and strong relationships. This allows us to integrate bespoke joinery, structural features, and fine details that are meticulously executed, harmonise with the architecture, and enhance the overall spatial experience.

The result is a home where craftsmanship, materiality, and design converge seamlessly, creating spaces that are considered, enduring, and rich in character.

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Environmental Performance

We consider energy efficiency as an integral part of our design process. Whether working with existing structures or creating new ones, we embed energy considerations at the earliest stages of a project, ensuring that ambition and practicality remain in balance.

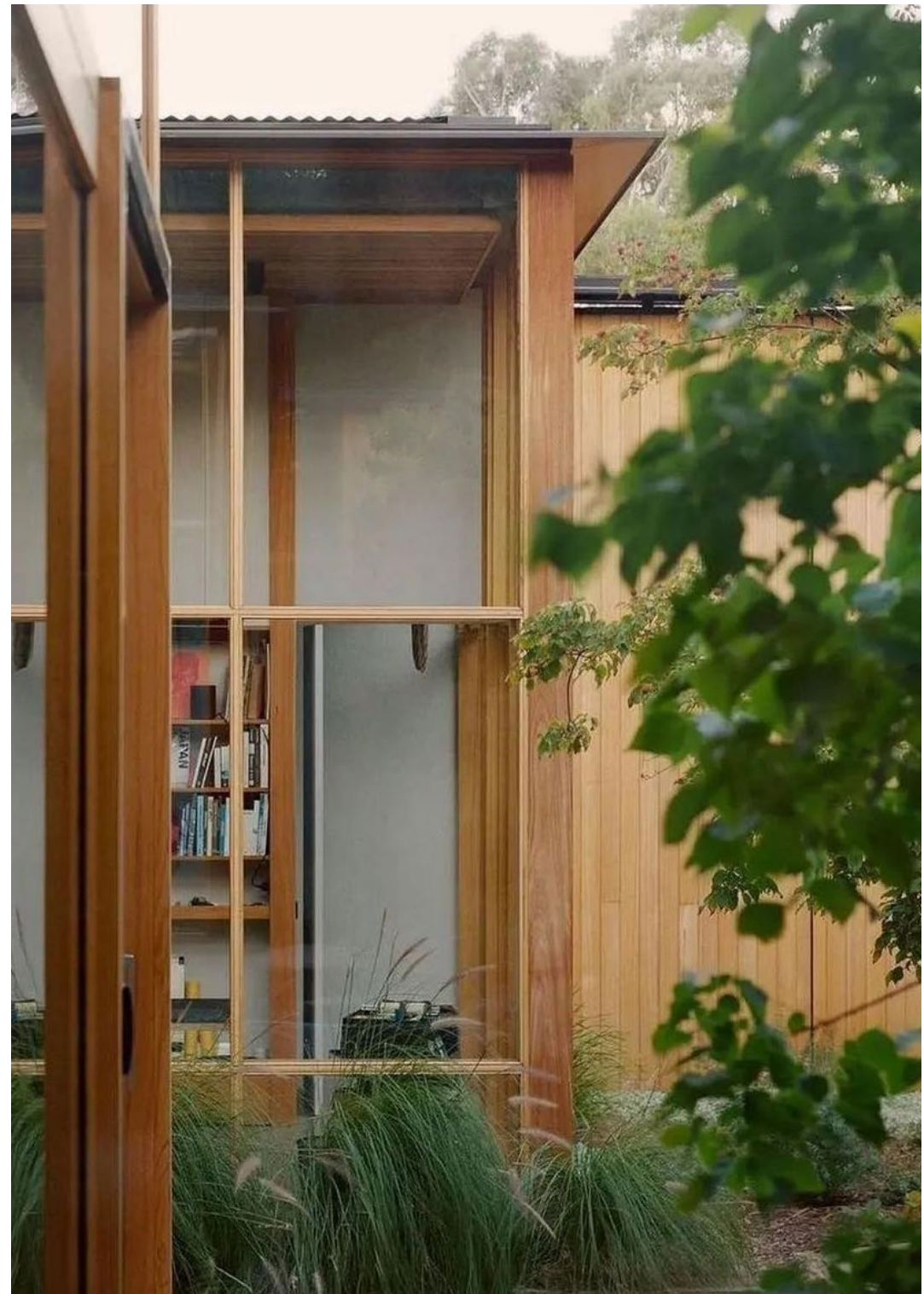
The extent of improvement achievable will always depend on context—on the fabric and condition of an existing building, the scope of works, and the resources available. Our role is to guide clients through these variables, establishing strategies that are both technically rigorous and proportionate to the project.

Our experience ranges from targeted interventions—such as high-performance glazing or additional roof insulation—to comprehensive building fabric upgrades. At the most ambitious level, we apply Passivhaus principles, employing highly insulated and airtight envelopes, heat-recovery ventilation, and low-energy heat-pump system. As certified Passivhaus* designers, we are able to work to the highest international standards of energy performance.

This approach is not an add-on but a core design principle. By integrating energy efficiency into the architecture itself, we create homes that are resilient, economical to run, and aligned with the transition to a low-carbon future.

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Refurbishing and extending your home

Adding an extension can transform your home immeasurably, creating not just valuable extra space but also an opportunity to transform the look and feel of your home. A well designed addition, that's suited to your lifestyle and a reflection of your taste, will not just add value to your home but can bring joy for years to come.

At Material Works we have developed a series of design stages and techniques that help clients to fully understand the possibilities and opportunities of their projects. We believe that the best construction projects are the ones where clients are fully involved and encourage close collaboration through the design journey. This may well be the biggest investment you make after the house itself, so take some time, talk to the right people and make sure you get it right.

The following pages outline the key stages of a project development in line with the RIBA stages of work 01-06. A more detailed description of the stages of work can be found [here](#)



Stage 01 - Exploring Ideas

Before we begin designing, it's important to understand exactly what you hope to achieve with your home. In our initial meeting, we take the time to talk through your goals, needs, and lifestyle so we can shape a clear brief. This conversation includes everything from practical requirements to early design ideas you might already have. We'll suggest ways to incorporate sustainability and show you precedent projects that could offer inspiration, alongside a curated mood board to help capture the overall tone of the project.

At this stage, we also introduce an early discussion about budget. While it may feel too soon, having a realistic understanding of costs is essential to guiding the design in the right direction. We provide informal advice on what similar work might cost so you can move forward with clarity.

By the end of this stage, you'll have a well-defined written brief, a collection of visual references to anchor the design vision, and an initial working budget to guide the next steps.

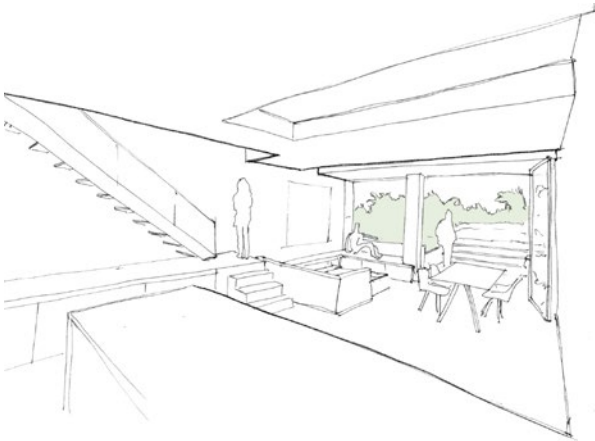
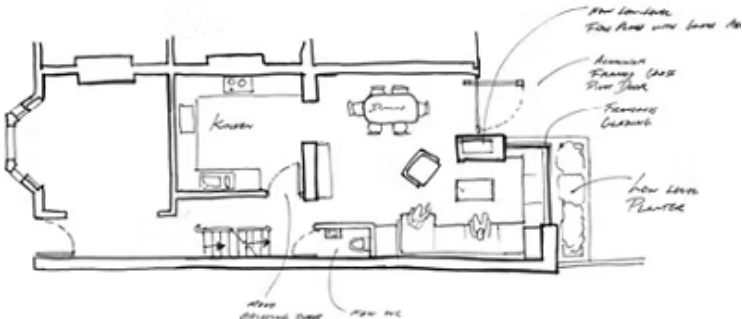
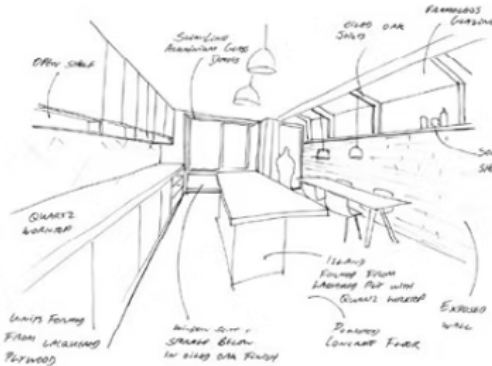


Stage 02 - Conversations & Sketches

Once the brief is agreed, we begin exploring how your ideas might take shape through sketch design. Every home presents its own set of opportunities and constraints, and we'll guide you through the possibilities to find the most effective solution. We develop simple sketch plans and basic models to communicate the ideas, giving you a clear sense of how the design could work.

We also revisit the budget in more detail, considering all aspects — not just the building works, but also finishes, fittings, and furnishings. We believe in presenting a realistic picture of total costs, helping you avoid unexpected expenses later on. It's common to hear rough 'rules of thumb' for construction pricing, but in our experience, costs can vary greatly depending on design choices, specifications, and the existing condition of your home. At this stage, our goal is to help you understand what's possible and what it might cost in real terms.

At the end of this stage we will deliver a sketch design along with an initial high level cost estimate and early ideas on materials and features.



Stage 03 - Developing the Design

With your agreement on the sketch design and outline budget, we move forward to develop the proposals in more detail. We produce architectural drawings, explore models and collages, and begin to bring the spaces to life. To help you fully understand how your home will feel, we use digital tools to create visualisations, including animations and virtual 3D models that you can explore on a phone or tablet.

These visual techniques are more than just presentation tools — they help uncover opportunities within the design, like a better view from a repositioned window, a perfect spot for a window seat, or thoughtful storage tucked into unused corners.

At this point, we also bring in an independent Quantity Surveyor to create a detailed cost plan. This gives us an up-to-date picture of how your design aligns with current market rates. While our early-stage estimates are often very close, this cost plan provides a helpful cross-check and, if needed, allows us to make adjustments to keep things on track before applying for permissions or beginning construction.

At the end of this stage we will deliver a full set of Architectural drawings for the project, along with initial schedules of materials, rendered images / models and an independent cost plan. The drawings produced will be to the level of detail required to apply for planning permission.



Planning Permission

At the end of stage 03 we prepare and submit the planning application. The planning system can be complex, especially with the growing number of permission types and specific conditions relating to different properties, areas, and local authority policies.

We have extensive experience working across various planning contexts, including conservation areas and with listed buildings. We will advise you on the best route forward, whether through a full planning application or permitted development, and ensure the design responds to your home's specific setting. We'll then handle the submission, liaise with the council, and guide the application through to decision.



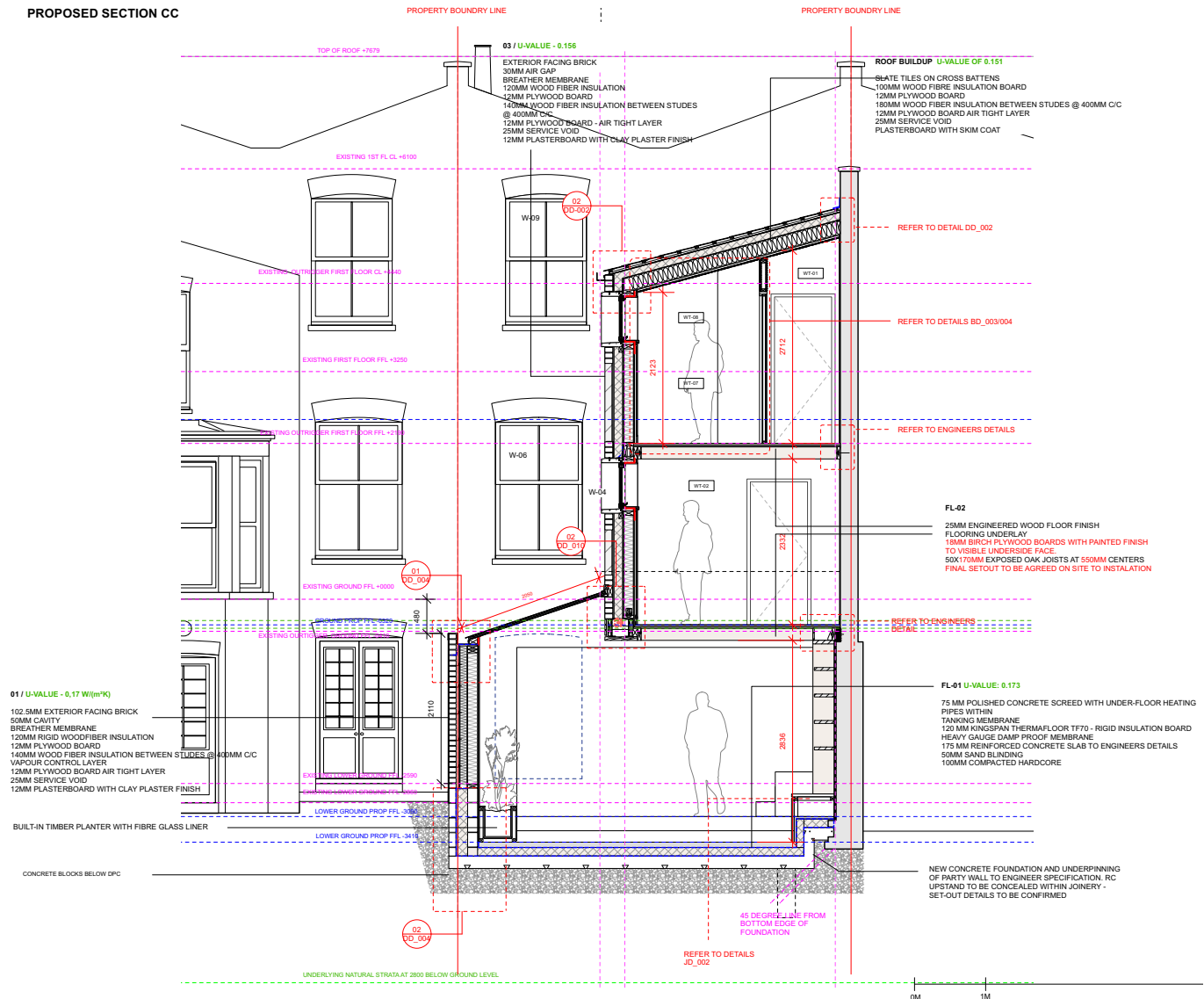
Stage 04 - Detailed Design & tender

At this stage, we move into the technical side of the design. This is where the finer details are resolved — from the exact positioning of windows to the precise height of shelves or width of joinery. It's a stage that can often be overlooked or rushed, but it's critical to the success of the finished project. Careful detailing is what elevates a project from ordinary to truly refined.

We produce a full set of construction drawings and specifications that can be priced accurately by contractors. We then invite a selection of trusted builders to tender for the work. These are contractors we know to be reliable and skilled, and who have expressed interest in your specific project. Once prices are returned, we review the submissions with you in detail, clarify any queries, and support you in selecting the right team for the build.

Building Control - At the end of this stage, we will submit the necessary information for Building Regulations approval. This process ensures that the proposed work complies with national standards for safety, structure, insulation, drainage, and more.

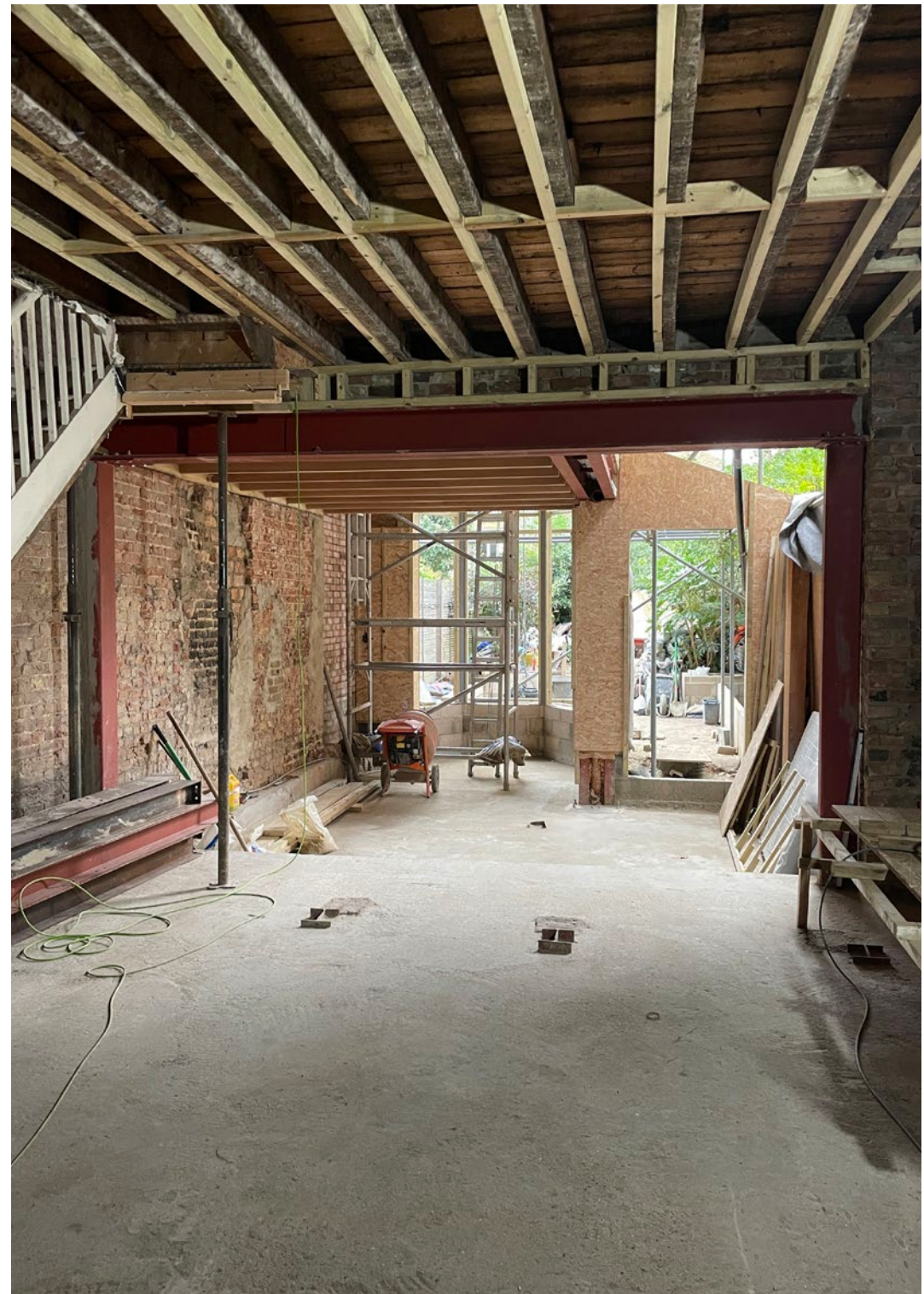
We handle the entire submission on your behalf and liaise directly with Building Control to address any queries. Throughout the construction phase, we also coordinate with the contractor to make sure all required inspections take place at the right times, helping to ensure the work is fully compliant and properly certified.



Stage 05 - Construction

When construction begins, we act as your contract administrator — overseeing the project, protecting your interests, and ensuring the build matches the agreed design. We typically recommend using a traditional building contract, which provides a clear legal framework and allows us to manage the work, time-line, and payments.

We visit the site regularly — weekly or fortnightly, depending on the stage — to inspect progress and quality. We also issue regular reports, highlight any decisions that need to be made, and make sure you stay fully informed. A key part of our role is certifying monthly payments to the contractor, ensuring you only pay for work completed to a satisfactory standard. The contract also includes a completion date and penalties for delays, helping to keep the project moving efficiently.



Stage 06 - Completion & After-care

As your project nears completion, we stay closely involved to ensure the final details are properly finished. We work with the contractor to identify and resolve any snags or incomplete elements, and we don't consider the job done until everything is to the standard we agreed.

At handover, you'll receive a comprehensive pack with information on any systems installed, along with notes on maintenance and materials for future reference. But our involvement doesn't end there. Building contracts include a 'defects period' — usually six to twelve months — during which a portion of the contractor's payment is held back. This ensures that any issues that arise post-completion are addressed properly.

We continue to support you during this time, coordinating any necessary follow-up work, and issuing the final completion certificate once everything has been resolved. Your project ends not just with a finished space, but with the confidence that it has been thoughtfully and professionally delivered from start to finish.



Budget

Budgets vary on refurbishment / extension projects depending on the project size, the level of specification desired and also the extent of any repair work required to the existing house. A simple kitchen extension will cost considerably less than a full house restoration and upgrade. We can provide initial cost estimates in the early stages to develop budgets and then suggest the designs are independently costed at stage 03 to clarify assumptions. Construction costs have fluctuated significantly over recent years, and while the market is more stable now we still find it useful to confirm our estimates with external advice.

On residential projects we often help source some of the large elements - i.e. the glazing or specialist finishes as buying these directly rather than through a contractor can save you money and give you more choice. We expect to do this and allow for it in any proposed fee

Fees

Projects involving existing homes can be time-intensive, and we believe in producing fully detailed information to ensure accurate pricing, smooth construction, and a well-managed process from start to finish. To keep things clear and manageable, we typically structure our fees across three stages.

Stages 01 and 02 – Brief and Sketch Design

We understand that deciding to renovate or extend your home is a significant step, and it can be helpful to explore your options before committing to a full architectural service. That's why we offer an initial package at cost for a fixed fee. This includes early sketch designs, a written project brief, and an outline budget. It's a chance to develop ideas, clarify what's possible, and get a feel for how we work — all without a large upfront commitment.

Stages 03 and 04 – Developed Design, Planning, Detailed Design, and Tender

Once you're ready to move forward, we charge a fee of 8% of the defined project budget. This figure is based on the total cost of all building works and materials (excluding VAT and other professional fees). Charging a percentage allows our fee to scale with the size and complexity of the project — offering flexibility without the need for constant renegotiation.

The final payment at this stage is adjusted to reflect the confirmed construction cost before work begins on site, ensuring everything remains fair and transparent.

Stages 05 and 06 – Construction and Completion

During the construction phase, we charge a weekly fixed fee to cover our ongoing involvement on site. This includes regular visits, managing progress, resolving day-to-day issues, and issuing payment certificates to keep the contract running smoothly. This structure ensures you have continuous support through to completion without hidden or unexpected costs.

Sustainability

We are acutely aware of the contributing factors of both building construction and building energy consumption to Global Warming and other environmental concerns. On each of our projects we assess sustainability from the out-set, and develop clear, achievable strategies to minimise environmental impact.

Our aspiration is always to design to the efficiency standards commensurate with a low carbon future using a combination of passive and active design methods. This may include proposing insulation levels above minimum requirements, the careful consideration of details to eliminate 'cold bridges' and exploring efficient services including the use of heat-pumps where appropriate and low energy lighting.

Where new construction is proposed, materials will be specified from certified sustainable sources. All new structure will be formed from materials chosen to provide minimum 'A' ratings as listed in the BRE's Green Guide to Specification. Where possible the proposed design will use reclaimed materials, or materials with low levels of embodied carbon. The use of materials with high levels of embodied carbon such as concrete or insulations formed from petrochemicals will be avoided where possible.

Our designs always consider end of life considerations, with an emphasis on designing and specifying works that can either be re-used or safely disposed of at end of life. This in turn encourages a use of natural and regenerative materials wherever possible.

Wellness

The use of natural based materials is also proven to benefit building occupants due to their lower levels of toxins such as VOCs that can be harmful both during and after use. Recent developments in natural construction materials have led to the development of high performance products that avoid these toxins and we advocate their use wherever appropriate.

Further design considerations including the provision of suitable daylighting, considered lighting, considered acoustics and reverberation, interaction with internal and external biophilia and an encouragement of bio-diversity are also recognised as contributing positively to occupiers health and well-being. We explore these considerations throughout our design work to ensure our projects provide a comfortable and healthy environment for all building users.

Consultants

You'll likely need to appoint a structural engineer and a party wall surveyor depending on the extent of works. We can recommend people for these roles and help you get them appointed. Typically, an engineers fee would be up to £1-2,500 and a party-wall surveyor to be about £1,500 assuming only two neighbours need to be consulted. As mentioned above we would recommend a quantity surveyor provide an initial cost plan at stage 03 - this would normally incur a fee of around £500.

Building Control

You will need to either appoint the local council or an approved inspector to inspect and sign off the works in relation to Building Regulations. Approved Inspectors cost a bit more but are generally much easier to work with than the council - expect a fee of around £2,000. Following the introduction of the Building Safety Act in 2023 it is now also required for you to appoint a suitably qualified Principal Designer to manage the building control application. Material Works can act as Principal Designer and will include for this in any quoted fees.

Contractors

We have a few contractors who we've worked with successfully in the past and would be keen to work with again. We also have a longer list of recommended names from other professionals that we are keen to work with. We would suggest tendering to 3 or 4 contractors to get a good price. Costs can vary quite considerably depending on who is busy etc. so going to a few with a fully detailed design gives you the best option for getting good value.

CDM Regulations

The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 will apply to the proposed works to encourage the use of best practice health and safety procedures. Clients have specific duties they are required to perform under this act. Material Works will advise you of these duties and act as Principal Designer as defined by the regulations.