



Mountain Fold Architecture



# From Brief to Building

Your guide to creating sustainable, site-responsive architecture





Your home is more than just a building. It's where you live your life, reflecting your priorities and how you want to spend your time. For most people, it's also the biggest financial commitment they'll make.

So it's entirely natural to feel some uncertainty about the design and construction process, especially if you've not done it before.

Having worked on residential projects across the UK and abroad, I've put together this guide to help you understand what actually happens at each stage. It covers timescales, what to expect from me as your architect, and how we'll work together from initial ideas through to completion.

I hope this helps you move forward with confidence.

# Hello. I'm Matt, and I run Mountain Fold Architecture.



I started the practice in 2017 after working on projects ranging from London housing to luxury villas in the Caribbean. What struck me across all these projects was how buildings could either fight against their context or grow naturally from it.

**Mountain Fold** exists to design homes that feel inevitable to their place. Not pastiche of what came before, but contemporary buildings that understand their climate, materials, and traditions. Homes that will use minimal energy, age gracefully, and feel right in fifty years.

I work as a sole practitioner, which means you work directly with me throughout. No handoffs between team members, no dilution of ideas. From first conversation to final certificate, it's a consistent relationship with someone who knows your project intimately.

Whether your project is in Sussex, the Highlands of Scotland, or the Caribbean, the approach is the same: understand the place, design for how you actually live, and build something that belongs.



## Contemporary Vernacular Philosophy

Traditional buildings in places like the Sussex Weald or Caribbean coast survived because they responded intelligently to climate, materials, and craft. I apply that same intelligence to contemporary performance standards. The result feels both familiar and fresh, rooted in place but unmistakably of our time.

## Fabric-First, Always

I design every project with a fabric-first approach, whether you're aiming for Passivhaus certification or simply complying with building regulations. This means prioritising insulation, airtightness, and thermal bridge-free detailing from the start. The knowledge and rigour from Passivhaus principles improves every project, even when full certification isn't the goal.

That said, I'm passionate about high-performance buildings and would always encourage pushing further. Homes designed to Passivhaus standards use 60-75% less heating energy, stay comfortable year-round, and protect you from volatile energy prices. They're better buildings that cost surprisingly little more to achieve when designed properly from the outset.

## Caribbean + UK Experience

Working on luxury villas in Turks and Caicos Islands alongside UK residential projects gives me unusual breadth. I understand both tropical climate design and British changeable weather. This perspective helps me find pragmatic solutions that work.



*"We were introduced to Matt via another consultant that we had employed for our self build project. We were delighted with his work and his approach. Our project was a complex and technical build, and he was adept at solving any issues that we encountered along the way. Responsive, dedicated, trustworthy, and very personable, we cannot recommend him highly enough. He will be our first call for any future projects!"*

**Client, Firs Field**

*"We're using Mountain Fold to help us design extend our home. It's quite a big project, comprising two extensions and the remit includes 'modernising' a 1980's build. Matt's been great at listening to what we want (& don't want), coming up with a design we're happy with, and helping us with our discussions with our local planning dept, builders and suppliers. We're really excited about the project and now just need to get it built!"*

**Client, Pembury Extension**



# Three Ways We Can Work Together

Every project is different. Choose the service level that matches your needs.

## Foundation Service

*Perfect for experienced clients or straightforward projects.*

Takes your project from initial consultation through planning approval and technical information sufficient for Building Regulations. You'll have everything needed to obtain permissions and work with a builder, with flexibility to manage construction yourself or bring in specialists.

Stages: 

### Includes:

- Initial consultation and feasibility
- Concept design development
- Planning application (where required)
- Technical drawings suitable for tender and Building Regulations submission
- Consultant coordination

**Best for:** Clients with building experience, straightforward extensions

## Complete Service

*The full design journey, from conversation to completion.*

The full design journey from conversation to completion. I coordinate all consultants, manage tendering, administer the building contract, inspect construction regularly, and ensure quality throughout. Professional oversight every step of the way.

Stages: 

### Includes everything in Foundation, plus:

- Detailed technical design and specifications
- Contractor tendering support
- Contract administration during construction
- Regular site inspections and quality control
- Handover and post-completion review

**Best for:** Most clients, anyone wanting comprehensive professional support, projects requiring careful quality control

## Premium Service

*For projects where every detail matters.*

The Complete Service enhanced with additional design development and specification depth. Perfect for projects where interior architecture and material specification are as important as the building form.

Stages: 

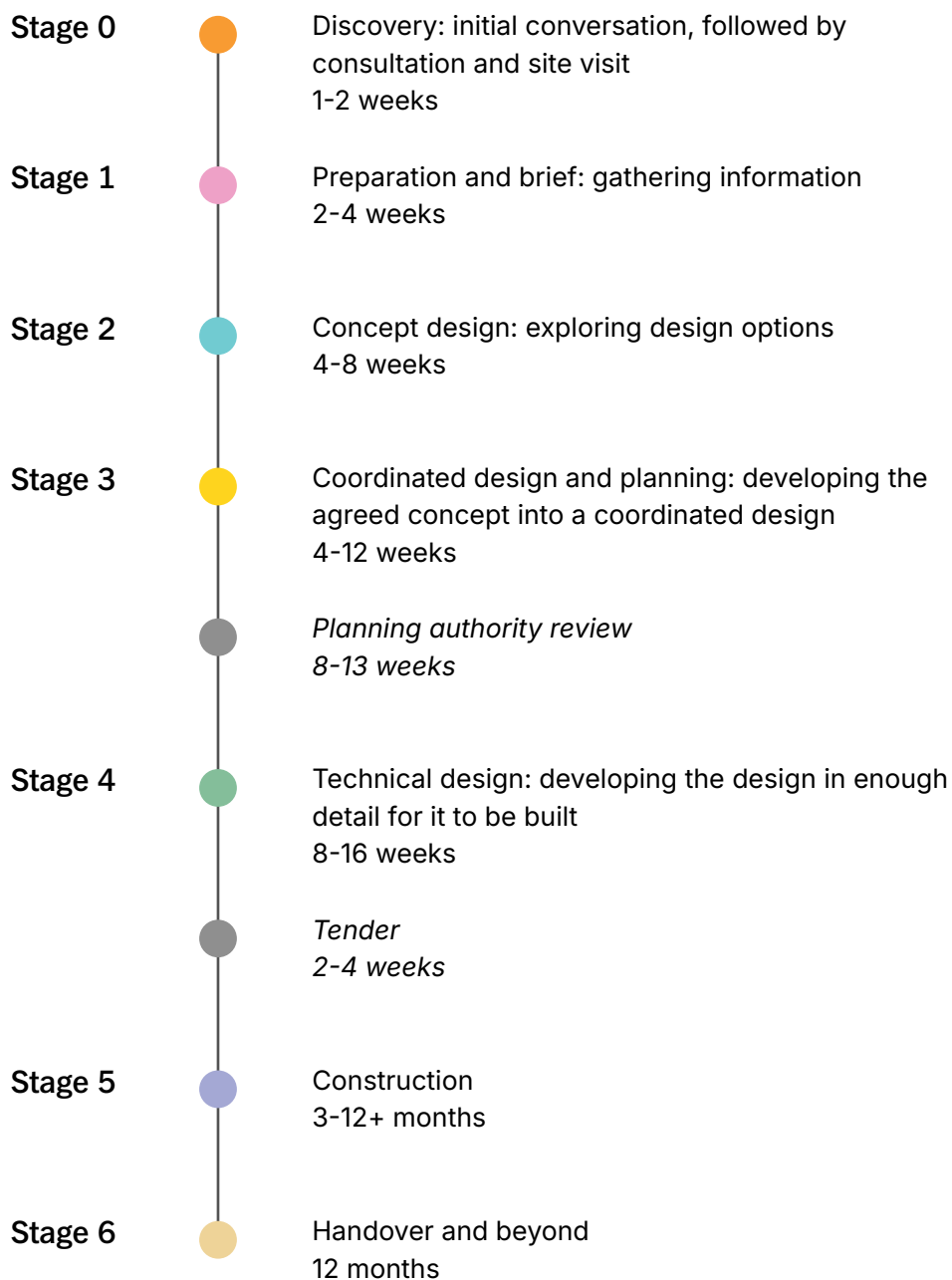
### Includes everything in Complete, plus:

- 3D visualisations and rendered views
- Detailed internal elevations showing joinery
- Custom kitchen, bathroom, storage design
- Lighting and sanitaryware specification
- Bespoke joinery and staircase detailing
- Enhanced material and finish specifications

**Best for:** Architecturally ambitious projects, homes where interior design integration is essential

# The Project Timeline

The architectural process follows the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Plan of Work, which breaks projects into seven stages from initial consultation through to completion. This framework ensures nothing gets missed and you always know what to expect next.



During Stage 1, I will create a timeline specific to your project. Please note the planning process may take longer than statutory minimums, especially in conservation areas or National Parks.



## Stage 0: Discovery

We begin with a free 30-minute phone or video conversation to discuss your project at high level. If we both think it's worth exploring further, I'll visit your site for a detailed consultation. This isn't a sales pitch – it's a proper exploration of possibilities, constraints, and whether my approach suits your ambitions. The consultation will take roughly 1-2 hours.

During the site visit, I'll look at orientation, views, existing buildings, access, topography, neighbouring properties. I'll ask about how you live, what frustrates you, what you dream about. Not just what you want to build, but why.

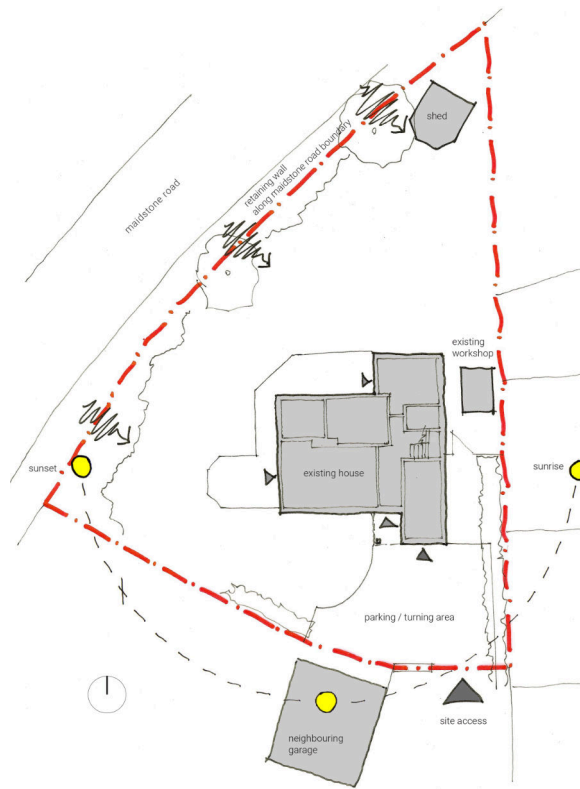
Typical duration: 1-2 weeks from initial contact to consultation completion.

My fee: Fixed £200 for detailed consultation including site visit within 20 miles of Eastbourne (travel costs will be charged for locations further afield).

### Why this matters:

Projects fail when architect and client misunderstand each other. This paid consultation ensures we both invest time properly, exploring whether we're the right fit before committing to full design work. If we're not aligned, you've spent £200 to find out early rather than thousands discovering it later.





## Stage 1: Preparation & Brief

Before drawing anything, we need to understand exactly what we're working with. I'll commission a measured survey, research planning constraints, analyse your site properly, and develop your brief into a clear design foundation that's deliverable within your budget and feasible on your site.

I'll also create a project-specific timeline showing realistic durations for each stage, so you can plan around the work and know when to expect completion.

Typical duration: 2-4 weeks, depending on survey availability.

My fee: Approximately 5% of total design services fee (all stages).

### Your additional costs:

- Measured survey (arranged by me, paid by you directly to surveyor)
- Topographical survey if required
- Other specialist surveys as needed (tree surveys, ecology, etc.)

### Why this stage matters:

Design without proper information leads to expensive surprises. This groundwork prevents those surprises.





## Stage 2 – Concept Design

This is the creative heart of the process. I'll develop the approaches discussed in Stage 1 into two or three design options exploring different approaches to your brief – how the building sits on the site, how spaces connect, how it will feel to live in. We'll explore how the building responds to sun, wind, and natural ventilation, establishing the sustainability strategy that carries through to detailed design.

You'll see sketches, drawings, 3D visuals or study models. We'll explore materials, proportions, performance strategies. This is iterative – I'll show options, you'll respond, we'll refine. Good design isn't right first time; it evolves through conversation.

By the end of this stage, the different design options will have been developed into a single concept so you'll know what you're building and roughly what it will cost.

Typical duration: 4-8 weeks including iterations.

My fee: Approximately 15% of total design services fee.

### **Your additional costs:**

- Structural Engineer initial input on feasibility
- Other consultants as project requires (for example a Quantity Surveyor for larger or more complex projects - £350,000 onwards)

### **Why this stage matters:**

Everything that follows builds on these foundations. Get the concept right and the rest flows smoothly. Rush this stage and you'll be fixing problems for years.



## Stage 3: Coordinated Design & Planning

I develop the agreed concept into a fully coordinated design ready for planning. This means bringing together structural strategy, services planning, material specifications, and presentation drawings that show planning officers exactly what you're proposing and why it deserves approval.

For straightforward projects, we submit and wait 8-13 weeks for decision. For complex sites (conservation areas, National Parks, difficult neighbours), I'll prepare robust Design & Access Statements justifying every decision.

Once submitted, I manage all planning officer queries and negotiate any requested amendments.

Typical duration: 4-12 weeks preparing application, 8-13 weeks planning authority review (can be longer for complex cases).

My fee: Approximately 15% of total design services fee, plus hourly rate for planning discussions after submission.

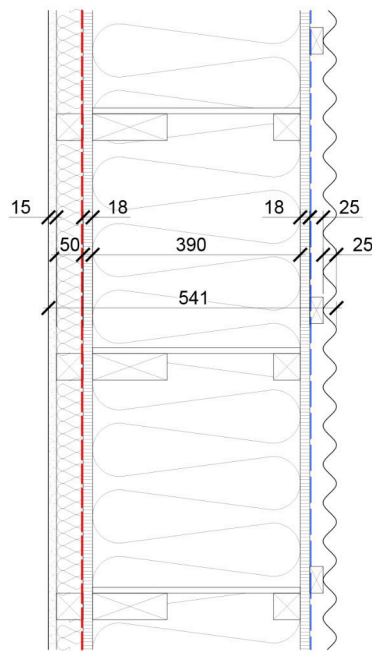
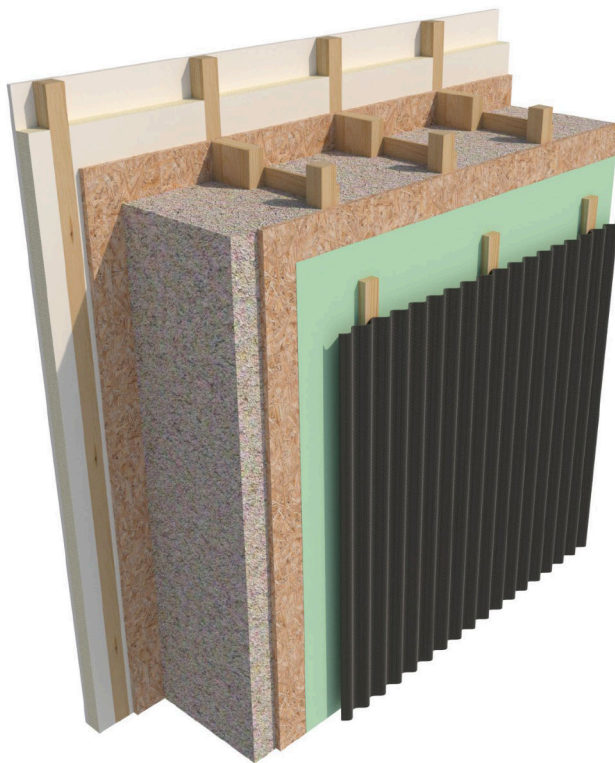
### Your additional costs:

- Planning application fee (paid to local authority)
- Consultant reports where required (structural, heritage, ecology, etc.)
- Planning consultant for particularly difficult cases

### Reality check:

Most well-prepared applications are approved. Some require minor amendments. Refusals are rare when design is good and groundwork thorough. But planning is subjective – I maximise chances, I can't guarantee outcomes.





## Stage 4: Technical Design

With planning approval secured, I develop every detail required for Building Regulations and construction. Wall build-ups, insulation specifications, window details, junction details, structural connections – this is where careful design becomes information builders can actually construct from.

I coordinate structural engineer, building control, and any other consultants needed. This stage is less visually exciting than concept design, but it's where buildings succeed or fail. Thermal bridges, airtightness, acoustic performance, water management – all the invisible stuff that makes homes comfortable gets resolved here.

For the Complete and Premium service levels, I will run a tender process inviting builders to price your project from the technical drawings. I'll analyse the tenders, check for anomalies, and help you select the right contractor (not always the cheapest).

Typical duration: 8-16 weeks depending on complexity.

My fee: Approximately 40% of total design services fee.

### Your additional costs:

- Structural Engineer detailed design
- M&E Engineer for complex services
- Quantity Surveyor for mid- to large-projects
- Other consultants as needed
- Building Regulations approval fee
- SAP energy assessment

### Why this stage matters:

Builders price what they see in drawings. Vague details mean inflated prices and arguments later. Thorough technical design means accurate tenders and smooth construction. This is where Passivhaus principles, thermal bridge-free detailing, and fabric-first performance get properly built in.





## Stage 5: Construction

I will arrange for an appropriate building contract to be signed between you and the chosen contractor, and once construction starts act as contract administrator. I will make regular site inspections to check quality and progress, and certify payments. I assess any variations, answer builder queries, and solve problems as they arise.

Construction is messy, noisy, and stressful. Things go wrong. Materials arrive late. Weather delays work. Hidden problems emerge. My job is helping you navigate this without panic.

Typical duration: 3-12+ months depending on project scale.

My fee: Approximately 23% of the total design services fee.

### Your additional costs:

- Builder/contractor (the largest cost)
- Structural Engineer site inspections
- Building Control inspections
- Other consultants as required

### Important note:

I'm not on site daily – that's neither feasible nor necessary. Monthly inspections catch problems early. Urgent issues get immediate visits. You can contact me when worried. I can't prevent every site issue, but I can help you manage them effectively.





## Stage 6: Handover & Beyond

Once construction finishes, you get to enjoy your new, renovated, or extended home! A 12-month defects liability period begins, during which the builder remains responsible for fixing any defects that appear – paint cracks, doors sticking, heating not working as expected.

I'll check the work has been done to the right standards at practical completion, and help agree the final account due to the contractor. During the defects period I'll inspect further to compile snagging lists.

I will ensure the contractor provides you with the relevant documents, manuals, and warranties required for building maintenance, and give you a printed set of the last issued drawings.

Typically 6-12 months after moving in, I'll arrange a post-occupancy visit – not for defects, but to understand how the building is working for you, whether performance matches predictions, and what I can learn for future projects. Where possible I will also arrange for the completed project to be photographed.

My fee: Approximately 2% of total design services fee.

### Your additional costs:

- Builder/contractor

After the defects period my formal involvement ends, but good relationships don't. Call if you need advice on maintenance, future alterations, or just want to show me how you've made the space your own. The best part of this job is seeing buildings properly lived in.





# Recent Projects



Beeches 1



Firs Field



Hesperides House



Turtle Cove Townhouses



Beeches 2



Pembury Extension



# What Will You Receive At Each Stage?

Here's what you can expect to receive at each stage of the design and construction process:

Stage	What You'll Receive (dependent on service level)
0	At the end of this initial consultation, I will provide a comprehensive feasibility report. This includes my assessment of your site's potential, initial sketches exploring possible solutions, and a detailed fee proposal for taking the project forward through the design and construction stages.
1	At the end of Stage 1, I will provide a written project brief documenting your spatial requirements, priorities, quality aspirations, and sustainability goals. Alongside this, you'll receive initial design options, an outline project programme, and a budget estimate based on floor area.
2	<p>At the mid-point of Stage 2, I will provide a report presenting concept design options for your review, exploring different approaches to the layout of spaces, the building's massing and form, and material use.</p> <p>At the end of Stage 2, I will provide a report showing the agreed concept layout, form and materials ready to develop into detailed planning drawings.</p>
3	At the end of Stage 3, I will provide a complete set of planning application drawings showing the proposed site and building layout, window positions, and materials. This will include supporting documents such as a Design and Access Statement and visualisations as required by your local planning authority.
4	At the end of Stage 4, I will provide a co-ordinated set of technical drawings, schedules, and specifications suitable for contractor tendering and Building Regulations approval. These documents show precisely how the project is to be built.
5	Before construction starts, I will prepare the formal contract documents to be signed between you and your contractor. During the construction period, I will provide regular site inspection reports, meeting minutes, interim payment certificates and valuation recommendations, and additional technical information as required to enable construction.
6	At the end of construction, I will provide the Practical Completion certificate and snagging schedule, a final inspection report, and the last issued drawings to be included with your contractor's handover pack.



# What Will This Actually Cost?

## Construction cost guidance (East Sussex, 2026)

For new-build elements, such as a new house or an extension, you should budget £2,000 - £3,500 per square metre for a 'standard' level of performance, and £2,300 - £4,500 per square metre for a higher performing building, such as a Passivhaus. The wide range for each performance level reflects the quality specification choices - basic finishes at the lower end, and premium materials and complex designs at the upper end. The performance ranges overlap because performance and specification are different considerations - a modest Passivhaus can cost less than a high-spec conventional build.

Example: a 40m<sup>2</sup> extension at "Good" quality = £80,000-£110,000 construction cost

Don't forget additional costs, such as fixtures and fittings (kitchens, bathrooms, built-in cabinetry) Planning and Building Control fees, necessary consultants such as a Structural Engineer, VAT for extensions and renovations, and a contingency to cover the unexpected - ground conditions, hidden structural issues, material price fluctuations.

## My fees

Typically 8-12% of construction cost for Complete Service, varying with:

- Project complexity (simple extension vs challenging site)
- Sustainability ambitions (Passivhaus requires more rigour)
- Planning challenges (conservation areas, appeals, etc.)
- Site conditions (steep slopes, remote locations, poor access)

*Example breakdown for £150,000 construction project at 10% fee:*

Stage	Fee
0	£200 fixed
1	£750
2	£2,250
3	£2,250
4	£6,000
5	£3,450
6	£300
Total	£15,000

The Foundation service is typically 60-70% of Complete Service fee, and the Premium service typically 120-140% of Complete Service fee.

## Why professional fees add value

Planning success – I can't guarantee approval, but thorough preparation, robust justification, and professional presentation maximise your chances. Poor applications get refused for avoidable design flaws.

**Build quality:** Comprehensive drawings prevent costly construction mistakes and disputes. Unclear drawings lead to builder guesswork and expensive fixes.

**Performance:** Thoughtful fabric-first design reduces energy bills for decades. Poor design costs you every month forever.

**Value:** Good design increases property value significantly more than its cost. Architectural quality commands premium prices.

**Time:** Professional project management saves months compared to direct client coordination. Your time has value too.

The real question isn't "Can I afford an architect?" but "Can I afford the consequences of not having one?"



# Preparing for Your Consultation

## What to bring

- Any existing drawings, planning history, surveys you have
- Rough budget range (even if uncertain)
- Timeline aspirations ("we'd like to start building autumn 2026")
- Your project wishlist (even unrealistic ideas help me understand priorities)
- Photos of spaces/buildings you like (Pinterest, Instagram, magazines)
- Photos of your site from different angles
- Measurements if you've taken them
- List of frustrations with current home
- Notes on how you actually use spaces

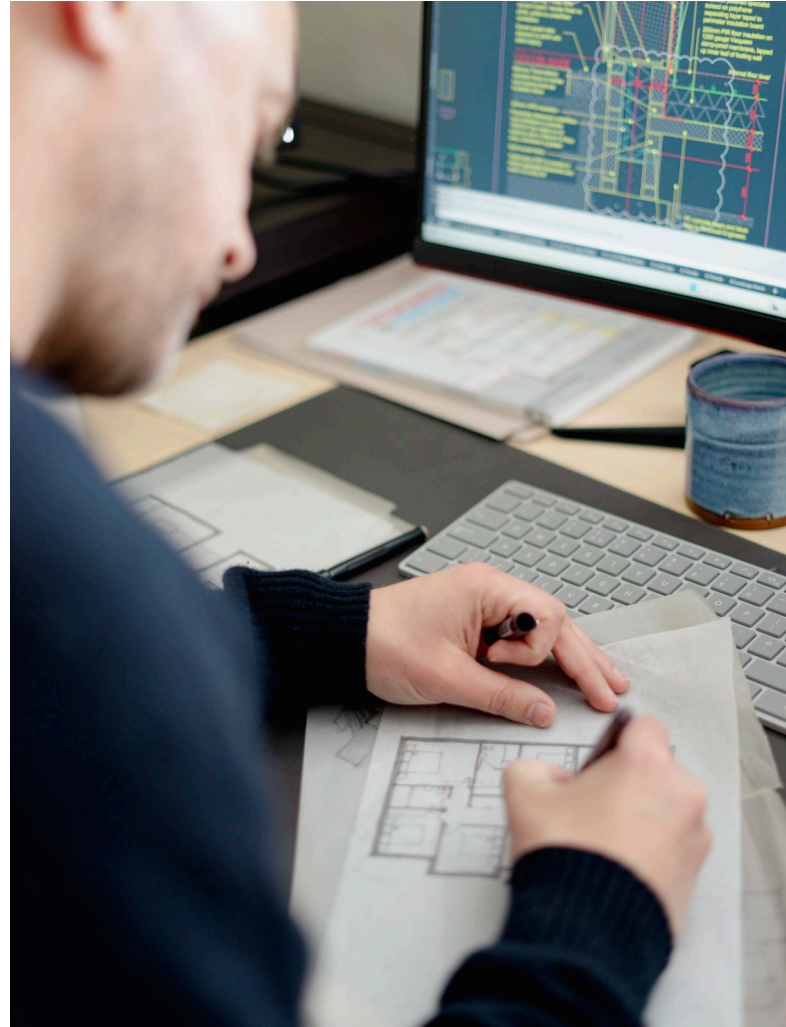
## Questions I'll ask you

Not just what you want to build, but how you live. How you use spaces. What time of day you're home. Whether you cook together. If you work from home. Whether you value views or privacy. What frustrates you about your current home. The best design emerges from understanding your life, not just your wishlist.

I'll also ask about sustainability priorities. If low running costs matter, tell me now – Passivhaus principles get designed in from the start, not retrofitted later.

## What you can ask me

- How many similar projects have you completed?
- Can I see recent examples and speak to past clients?
- What's your approach to sustainability?
- What happens if we go over budget?
- How do you handle planning challenges?
- What's your construction inspection frequency?
- What happens if I'm not happy with initial designs?
- Why should I choose you over other architects?



## After the consultation

I'll send a fee proposal within one week. It'll outline what I understood from our conversation, suggest next steps, confirm service level and fees for Stages 1-6. No pressure – this is your decision, made with clear information.

If we're not the right fit for each other, I'll tell you honestly and suggest alternatives.

**Ready to start?**

# Common Questions

## *"Why Does Planning Take So Long?"*

Planning authorities need 8-13 weeks to review applications – this is statutory, nobody can speed it up. Conservation areas, National Parks, or contested applications can take 3-12 months. I can't control planning timescales, but thorough preparation reduces delays and maximises approval chances.

## *"Can It Be Faster?"*

Sometimes. Permitted development skips planning (saves 2-3 months). Simpler projects have shorter design periods. But rushing early design stages is false economy – an extra month getting the concept right saves weeks of expensive changes during construction.

## *"When Should I Start?"*

Work backwards from when you need to move in:

- 6-12 months construction
- 3-4 months technical design & tender
- 4-6 months planning
- 2-3 months concept design

= Start planning 18-24 months before you need the keys

## *"What If Budget Changes?"*

We establish realistic budgets at Stage 1 and refine them through Stage 2. By Stage 4, we know construction costs accurately. If budget becomes tight, we adjust scope or specification before tendering – much cheaper than changes during construction.

## *"How many design options do you provide?"*

The design of a building is a conversation, and is iterative in nature. During stage 1 and 2 I will initially create two or three different design options for review. By the end of Stage 2, these will have been refined to a single agreed layout. That doesn't mean amendments can't be made later, but future changes may incur additional design and construction costs.

## *"What Happens If We Don't Get Planning?"*

I prepare applications to maximise approval chances, but I can't guarantee outcomes. If refused, we assess reasons together and decide whether to revise and resubmit or appeal. Where a design is contentious, it is often better to engage a planning consultant to assist with the initial application.

## *"When do you invoice?"*

Invoices are sent out monthly, when work has been undertaken in the previous month.

## *"How often will we have meetings?"*

Generally (after the initial consultation) we would have a meeting at the end of stage 1, and mid-way through stages 2, 3, and 4. A further meeting will take place at the end of the tender period, and then regular monthly site inspections / meetings through the construction process.



Building, extending, or renovating your home is one of the biggest decisions you'll make. It's exciting, sometimes daunting, and always personal.

I hope this guide gives you a clearer sense of what the process actually involves, whatever direction you decide to take.

### Ready to start a conversation?

If you think Mountain Fold might be right for your project, I'd love to hear from you. The best way to begin is to fill in a brief project questionnaire so I can understand what you're planning. There's no charge and no obligation.

→ [Complete the questionnaire at tally.so/r/Xx5XOj](https://tally.so/r/Xx5XOj)

Once I've reviewed your responses, I'll be in touch to arrange an initial phone call. We'll discuss your project and whether we're a good fit for each other.

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