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Design Stages

The complexity of the work will depend on the client's vision, the potential of the site, planning issues and the budget available. Occasionally, a brief consultation will be all that is required. More often, however, we deal with the entire project. There are a number of distinct steps. For convenience, projects are divided into stages which correspond with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stages of work. These are as follows:

Stages 1-2: Inception to final plan

These stages deal with the development of the project up to an agreed final plan and comprise:

- Assessing the client's needs and aspirations functionally and aesthetically
- Assessing timescale, proposed spend and fees
- Checking site restraints and obligations where appropriate
- Advising on consultants' services, specialist contractors or suppliers
- Commissioning a land and building survey where appropriate
- Surveying site environment and vegetation
- Checking historical background and commissioning specialist research if appropriate
- Analysing site and brief, including constraints and opportunities
- Evaluating existing garden/planting/structures
- Drafting preliminary studies of objectives and possible layouts
- Meetings with client and consultants to develop preferred options and achieve an interim plan
- Drafting final plan and explanatory sketches, together with a report where required
- Drafting preliminary estimates of costs in conjunction with the quantity surveyor where appointed
- Where appropriate, consulting with Planning and other statutory authorities and submitting for necessary approvals
- Advice and action under the CDM regulations where appropriate

The plan at the end of Stages 1-2 gives an overall view of the project and serves as a blueprint for the long term development of the site.

Stages 3-4: Production Information

These stages develop the project to a point where a Contract for the Works can be agreed with a contractor and comprise:

- Detailed proposals of materials, techniques and standards of workmanship for client's approval
- Co-ordination of proposals by other consultants, specialist contractors or suppliers
- Obtaining quotations and other information in relation to specialist work
- Cost checks and advice on changes to the estimated costs and programme
- Detailed applications for approvals under planning and building legislation
- Preparation of all production drawings, schedules and specification of materials and workmanship, sufficient for a contract to be negotiated or for competitive tenders to be invited
- Advice on suitable contractors
- Obtaining tenders or negotiating the contract in conjunction with the quantity surveyor where appointed
- Preparation of contract and advice on terms and obligations

The importance of precise working drawings and specifications for construction and planting should not be underestimated. With them contractors can produce accurate prices with confidence, free from the need to build in wide margins to cope with the unknown, and the works can be carried out successfully. They also allow the client to retain control through the design team thus safeguarding the integrity of the project and some of the potential pitfalls of "design and build" schemes.

Stage 5: Operations on site

This stage covers the period while the works are on site and any contractual maintenance period after and comprises:

- Administration of the contract
- Periodic site visits to inspect progress and quality
- Certification of the accounts in conjunction with the quantity surveyor and identification of any changes to costs and programme
- Guidance on maintenance activities after completion of the works

For the proper execution of the design, it is important that we are involved at this stage. As designers, we have a thorough understanding of the scheme and we are best placed to weigh up the implications of any possible changes.

Stage 6: Planting

This stage deals with the design and execution of the planting and comprises:

- Detailed planting plans and specification
- Planting schedules
- Sourcing of plants
- Placement of critical plants if required and final site adjustments
- Site visits and contract issues as in Stages 3-5

Stage 7: Management

Our original concept is realised as the garden and landscape matures. However, not all plants perform as expected and adjustments may be required if the spirit of the basic design remains a priority. Preparation of management manuals may be carried out at this stage.

Stage 8: Miscellaneous works

This stage covers additional works to the basic contract. Areas such as cost estimating if a quantity surveyor is not employed, land surveying, planning meetings, etc. are dealt with here, as well as works resulting from changes in the brief, or unforeseen circumstances encountered on site.