

WORKING WITHIN A DESIGN TEAM

There are many consultants required to successfully deliver a building project. Invariably they all bring their own agenda and focus on their own area of expertise. Decision making within the team involves balancing different priorities and arriving at an agreed conclusion. This, of course, results in a compromise for many of the members of the team. Balancing cost with quality is often the most challenging expectation for the design team to meet - ideally the client provides input that informs the team of their priorities. Clear objectives and good communication between client and the team can help to minimise problems and misunderstandings.

For most projects the architect is the lead consultant and is best placed to communicate the client's expectations to the team. Gandy & Roberts is part of the team, and in most instances, take direction from the architect. There are safety and code compliance issues which are non-negotiable, however less important issues can be compromised upon to achieve a balanced outcome. We use our experience with similar projects and professional judgement to decide whether the compromise is capable of achieving a satisfactory outcome.

For example, a floor can be designed to be strong enough (thereby meeting its statutory safety requirement) yet be quite flexible due to not enough structural depth to increase its stiffness (which is a more subjective criteria). In this example, the structural engineer may have had to compromise on the depth of their structure to accommodate mechanical services, to enable the architect's desired ceiling height or to help meet a planning height limit. If we are unable to achieve a result that we feel will be acceptable to most end-users we will advise the architect, and recommend an alternative. Similarly the hydraulic or civil engineer may not have been able to arrive at the most economical drainage solution due to geometrical constraints imposed by the site, architectural layout, or a planning permit condition imposed by the local authority.

If they so choose, there is a role for the client in this decision making process. If a desired ceiling height is of more importance to a client than a bouncy floor, then that might not accord with our opinion, but it is the client's prerogative. What is important is that we understand what the most important issue is for the client, and advise accordingly.

Time is an important consideration when planning a project - "fast tracking" or compressing the program builds additional risk into the project. In our

experience, ensuring that there is sufficient time and opportunity for communication helps to minimise risk and potential problems.

It is difficult for any of the design team to develop and properly assess and communicate options when there is simply not enough time to do so. It is tempting to conclude that modern computer aided design and documentation methods allow work to be undertaken much faster, but computers don't make smart decisions - people do.

Whilst it is good for the client to thoroughly plan the project with their architect, the earlier key sub-consultants are involved, the more opportunity they have to offer advice and help to guide the project. Examples include the structural engineer advising a sensible structural grid which offers future flexibility and affordable construction or the civil/hydraulic engineer advising that suitable allowance be made for efficient servicing of the site. This avoids rework for the architect, and a far more cohesive working environment by the time detailed design is underway.

At Gandy & Roberts we encourage direct communication with the client, and we are happy to explain the various aspects of the decisions that we make. We understand that much of the work we do is not of particular interest to a client, however the performance and cost of the building generally is. We routinely make decisions that affect both, and welcome the opportunity to understand the client's priorities and discuss the ways in which we can contribute.