**Identifying the ‘design gap’**

*For Dan Grimshaw time away from the construction site during lockdown gave him pause for thought and a realisation that what he has christened the ‘design gap’ is putting a drain on resources and diverting energy from the efficient running of his business*

Having an enforced stoppage due to the first lockdown gave me the head space to notice things about the business that had become habitual and were just accepted as a cost. I kept coming back to something which I christened the ‘design gap’; where the client, for whatever reason, tries to save money by simply giving architects drawings to the builder and asking for it to be built.

While these drawings are the principal output from the briefing, sketching, designing, and developing stages, detailed drawings will go further and specify how a building is to be constructed and the fit-out of the project. Yet, too often to save on costs or because they have simply failed to understand the whole construction process, clients opt to do without them. Almost always disputes, misunderstandings and problems could have been avoided had the drawings been in place.

Detailed drawings will include plans for wall build ups, roof build ups and insulation, alongside information on insulation levels, kitchen units, critical junctions, weatherproofing, electrical socket positions, and bathroom layout. They are vital in a complicated build where unusual materials are being used, or where work of a very high standard is being undertaken.

The distinction between the two types of drawing is, however, often not clear cut. I am not seeking to apportion blame; architects are not always paid to design at this level of detail, and clients, particularly those on more modest budgets, may not even be aware there is a ‘design gap’ at all. But there is a gap nonetheless and unless this is addressed before work commences, it will put a drain on resources and divert energy from the efficient running of the site.

The more detail provided at the start, the fewer the headaches further down the line. Bathrooms are a case in point. A client may have commissioned a design for a bathroom in principle, without appreciating a fully designed bathroom is a huge amount of work, and detailed information is needed before rather than after the start of any construction work. For instance, the client might want a niche in their shower room, or for the shower to be at a certain height; or for the valves to line up with the tiles. However, none of these may possible because the structure might be in the way. All this can be designed-in quite simply, but opportunities fall off one by one as the building work progresses and the opportunity to do things easily is lost, meaning materials may end up being installed where they work rather than where they are necessarily wanted.

Meanwhile, from the client’s point of view, speccing-as-you-go is likely to be overwhelming – the whole construction timespan involving hundreds of decisions, both big and small, from flooring choices to bedroom storage, to picture lights. Inevitably this will involve frequent consultations with the site manager, taking up time which the construction firm is not being paid for.

As a design and construction company, we are interested in design and have always prided ourselves on filling the ‘gap’, but the realisation that this is a drain on resources and that diverts funds from the efficient running of the site cannot be ignored. From our own perspective, it is not that we cannot do it, just that time has not been allowed for it in the initial plans, and there is the rub.

So, what can be done? For a start, construction companies could bring attention to the design gap at the tender stage and either provide costings should they wish to carry out that work themselves, or else volunteer their own recommended architect or interior designer. If the client is unwilling to pay for that work, then maybe they are not prepared to pay for your time, in which case it might be better to pass on the work. The key is to identify the gap in the first place.

For further information visit: [www.beamdevelopment.co.uk](http://www.beamdevelopment.co.uk)

**ENDS**

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