

Referrals don't happen by accident

How project experience drives repeat work and client recommendations



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A significant proportion of residential work comes from **referrals and repeat clients** – 33% according to RIBA survey.

These referrals are rarely driven by marketing, branding, or even design quality alone.

Clients recommend architects based on **how the project felt to run** — how confident, informed and in control they felt throughout the process.

Client satisfaction is shaped by many factors: design quality, communication, responsiveness, programme, and delivery.

Cost certainty is only one part of that picture — but it is one of the most emotionally charged and commercially damaging when it breaks down.

This guide focuses specifically on **cost clarity and expectation management**, not because it is the only factor in client satisfaction, but because it is the area where uncertainty most quickly erodes trust.

Clients rarely separate design quality from delivery experience when they decide whether to recommend an architect.

Client experience is a delivery issue, not a marketing one

Referrals are created during the project,
not after it.

They are shaped by hundreds of small moments:

- **how early expectations are set**
- **how confidently decisions are made**
- **how predictable outcomes feel**
- **how often surprises arise**

While design quality matters, clients most often lose confidence when **uncertainty creeps into cost and scope.**

This is not a criticism of architectural process. It is a reflection of how residential projects are typically structured and resourced.

Why cost uncertainty has a disproportionate impact on trust

Cost is where uncertainty becomes personal for clients.

Late financial surprises feel different from other project issues:

- **they reduce a client's sense of control**
- **they undermine confidence in earlier decisions**
- **they create tension between project team members**

Even when cost increases are explained or managed, they still affect how clients **remember the experience**.

Clients can accept change — they struggle with surprise.



Common moments where client confidence is lost

Across residential projects, client confidence is most often damaged at predictable points:

- ▶ **Early budgets set without sufficient testing**
- ▶ **Scope growth that is not formally acknowledged**
- ▶ **Redesign triggered by cost late in the design process**
- ▶ **Tender returns that contradict earlier expectations**
- ▶ **Construction-stage negotiations and variations**

These moments are rarely caused by a single error.

They usually result from **cost clarity being introduced too late, or not carried forward consistently.**

Cost clarity as a support for better client experience

Cost certainty does not replace good design, communication, or leadership.

What it does is **support them**.

When cost assumptions are clear and tested early:

- **client conversations become more confident**
- **decisions feel deliberate rather than reactive**
- **projects feel calmer, even when change is required**

Cost clarity acts as **a stabilising force** within a complex process.



Where cost clarity fits within the wider project process

Without describing how architects should run projects, it is helpful to understand where cost clarity typically supports client confidence:

- **a clear brief and aligned budget at the outset**
- **design decisions tested against cost early**
- **assumptions revisited as design develops**
- **procurement that avoids late shocks**
- **clear tender information and expectations**
- **fewer surprises during construction**

When these elements are missing or diluted, **client experience suffers** — even where design quality is high.



Why cost uncertainty has a disproportionate impact on trust

For architects, the impact of cost uncertainty is rarely limited to the final account.

It often leads to:

- **repeated redesign work that cannot be fully recovered in fees**
- **emotionally draining client conversations**
- **fee pressure, write-offs, and scope creep**
- **disputes between project team members**
- **reputational damage that affects referrals and repeat work**

Much of this pressure lands during **Stage 4 and Stage 5**, when influence is lowest but consequences are highest.

One difficult project can quietly undo several successful ones.



Staying in our lane – what Multiproject advises on

Architects lead design, planning, and client relationships.

Multiproject does not replace that expertise.

Our role sits specifically within **cost clarity and expectation management**, supporting architects at decision-critical moments where uncertainty is most likely to affect client confidence.

We focus on:

- **early-stage cost clarity**
- **proportionate input aligned to project stage**
- **collaborative working alongside design teams**

This support is designed to **protect client confidence**, not add administration.

Final thought

Referrals are not created by a single moment or deliverable.

They are earned through a project experience that feels **controlled, transparent and considered.**

Cost certainty is not the only contributor to that experience — but it is one of the few elements that can be tested, stabilised and carried forward deliberately.

Early clarity reduces late friction.

About Multiproject

Multiproject supports UK residential architects at the early and decision-critical stages of projects, focusing on budgets, scope and risk before problems appear.

Our approach is:

- **fixed-fee and transparent**
- **proportionate to project stage**
- **designed to work collaboratively alongside design teams**

The aim is early clarity — not added admin.

