



# THE BRIEF: THE APPROACH

**Debbie Roberts MSGD** of Acres Wild looks at what you need to know when designing a driveway, front garden or arrival space

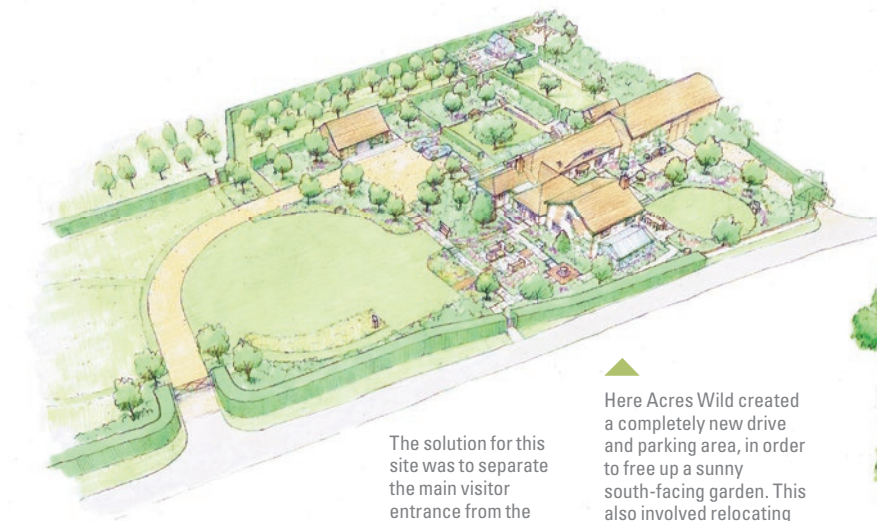
**I**t doesn't occur to most clients that the drive is part of the garden design, and indeed you rarely see driveways feature in lifestyle magazines. Arrival spaces and the approach to the house are, however, fundamental in creating a good first impression and making the homeowner and visitors feel welcome and at ease. Furthermore, the front garden is used every day in entering and leaving the house, so it needs not only to have year-round appeal, but to function perfectly, as if it couldn't have been designed in any other way.

**ABOVE** A 3.6m-wide drive snakes its way down to the gate – the planting is bold and rhythmic with a good proportion of evergreens to provide year-round interest

## Considering space

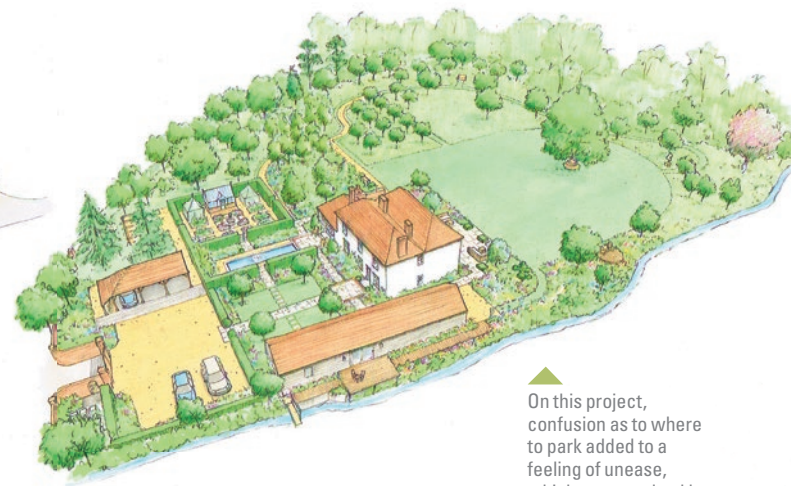
The first practical consideration to address when designing an arrival space is whether it needs to accommodate cars, and if so, how many on a daily basis for family, staff and/or visitors. Is a drop-off space required for unloading shopping etc? Room for future expansion →





The solution for this site was to separate the main visitor entrance from the family entrance and organise parking to enhance the view along the drive to and from the front door

Here Acres Wild created a completely new drive and parking area, in order to free up a sunny south-facing garden. This also involved relocating the front door



On this project, confusion as to where to park added to a feeling of unease, which was resolved by completely separating the car parking from the front of the house to create a car-free arrival garden



Here a former garage was converted to a games room/annexe and a car-free courtyard was created between house and drive

should be discussed – for instance, when the children start driving lessons, and where any overflow parking might be located for the occasional large gathering.

It may not always be possible for a car to enter and leave forwards, but if space allows, it is better to plan for this, especially to avoid the need to reverse out onto a busy road. Standard requirements for a car parking space are 2.4m x 4.8m, but these dimensions are tight and don't take into account accessibility, manoeuvrability and loading/unloading. If space allows, plan for at least 3m x 5m per car, with a minimum of 6m behind to reverse and turn. For larger properties where space is not such an issue, tree-lined driveways can be considered. A width of 3m should be regarded as the minimum dimension to allow for an average-sized car, but 3.6m is a better working dimension, if space allows. For two cars to pass, a drive width of 6m is

required, but this is rarely necessary, and for long drives, passing places are a better option. Consideration should also be given to commercial vehicles requiring space to park and turn, and if it's a new-build property, there will likely be planning requirements for fire access.

Central roundabouts (ideally without the obligatory tiered fountain) should only be considered if space allows, as they can be a hazard to manoeuvring. Likewise 'in-out' drives are space inefficient and often require everyone to leave at the same time with the inevitable stress of having to undertake multiple small manoeuvres in a tight space, often with an audience. One potential client once recalled to me how a recent coffee morning started badly with her guests complaining that 'there was nowhere to park' as they circled the roundabout in her drive – and not all in the same direction!

Drives and front gardens also invariably

**ABOVE** These four sketches show proposals for solutions to arrival issues on four different projects

need space to accommodate bins, and sometimes other storage facilities for logs and bicycles etc. Bins don't necessarily need to be hidden from view if contained within a smart bin store, and preference dictates whether this is located close to the house or at the entrance to the property. These days you might also be asked to include an electric vehicle charging point.

### Creating a sense of arrival

To create a welcoming sense of ease in the arrival experience, the view of, and approach to, the front door should be clear and attractive. The front door should not be obscured by vehicles, and no-one should have to squeeze past a parked car, so try to keep cars in their place by organising their movements and locating the parking area away from that all-important sightline between property entrance and front door. Likewise, no-one wants to look at



**THIS PAGE** Before photo and proposed solution sketches for a site where the cars used to park right up to the house, creating a poor first impression. The car park was relocated and replaced with a generous tree-lined path



Illustrations: Ian Smith MSGD/Acres Wild





cars through a key window in the house if it can be avoided. Often visitors will intuitively park outside a garage or car port, but where none exists, it's a good idea to design car-sized spaces to help guide parking.

Another issue you may have to address is the ambiguity of how to enter the house, caused by the family/boot-room entrance being more prominent than the front door, especially if the former is the first door a visitor sees when entering a property. Although your client might use the 'muddy' boot room entrance on a day-to-day basis, if pressed, most people would prefer their guests to enter via the front door, so finding a way to downplay and sometimes even screen the family entrance, whilst at the same time upgrading the front door, is an important design issue that should be addressed.

The front garden/drive should be regarded as a semi-public space, even if visitors are invited in by means of a buzzer at the gate. Measures should be taken to separate the private rear garden from the semi-public front garden with a hedge, fence or wall. Being able to see vehicles whilst enjoying time in the garden does not engender relaxation – no-one wants the Amazon delivery driver to see them lounging by the pool!

Lighting a drive will improve security, but well-designed lighting can also aid access and parking, and heighten the arrival experience at night.

Once the spatial requirements for cars, pedestrians and storage have been met, the need for privacy and security resolved and the focus on the front door addressed, the remainder of the arrival space can be

**“BEING ABLE TO SEE VEHICLES WHILST ENJOYING TIME IN THE GARDEN DOES NOT ENGENDER RELAXATION”**



planted. A design approach of carving out the space from an otherwise planted garden removes that wall-to-wall hard landscape look favoured by some driveway contractors, and maximises the areas of soft landscape, which will aid drainage, improve the microclimate and generally enhance the arrival experience.

Driveways and front gardens are generally 'move through' rather than 'spend time in' spaces, so the planting should be bold and unfussy with plenty of evergreens to provide year-round structure. A border around the base of a house (and indeed along the base of a boundary wall or fence) known as 'foundation planting' helps settle a building into its location and obscures that hard line between horizontal and vertical surfaces. A 1.2m-wide strip, for instance, allows space for Hydrangea-sized shrubs to grow unrestricted, and for any necessary paths to be located more generously away from the house – there's nothing worse than sidling along the side of a wall or building if you don't have to.

Sometimes after taking the brief and undertaking the site analysis, you might decide that the best solution to addressing all the arrival issues lies in actually relocating the drive entrance. Permission will be required of course, and you may experience some initial reluctance, but improving that 'kerb appeal', to use ugly estate-agent terminology, can certainly add value to a property. Creating a good first impression and a welcoming arrival experience is an important aspect of garden design that is often overlooked and should always be included in the design brief. After all, if a space can welcome you in and send you on your way with a smile on your face and a spring in your step, that's got to be good for everyone. ○

**ABOVE** Before (left) and after (right) photos of an arrival courtyard. Cars no longer enter the space, drive up and park right in front of the door. Four ornamental pear trees reduce the visual impact of the dominant roofline of the house and frame the view to the front, whilst still allowing vehicular access for bulky deliveries

## POINTS ON PLANNING

- Since 2008, planning permission is required to pave more than 5m<sup>2</sup> of a front garden unless with a SuDS-compliant material that allows water to drain through, eg gravel, permeable block paving or porous (resin-bound) asphalt laid over an open graded, aggregate sub-base, either 4/20 or MOT Type 3.

- However, it is also permitted to direct rainwater into a lawn, border, rain garden (a planted depression or trench, often gravel filled) or soakaway to drain naturally. It's also worth noting that a gravel surface is more forgiving to accidental damage such as oil spills or abrasion from deliveries, and as it crunches underfoot, it can help improve security.

- If gates are to be fitted across a vehicular entrance, they must only open inwards and be set back at least 5m from the edge of the carriageway to allow the driver to park clear of the road whilst opening the gates.

- Making or relocating a new entrance and dropping a kerb (crossover) will require planning permission as the kerb may need strengthening to protect any buried services.

- The proposed crossing should be no closer than 10m to a road junction.