

# How to... find the right property

Before



After



**Gary Bettis** kicks off a new series of 'how to...' guides on building your perfect practice

## Location, location, location

Choosing the right premises is a key business decision. Your premises should help you to operate effectively without excessive costs. At the same time, you should avoid being tied to premises that might not suit you in the future.

By taking into account all the relevant factors, you can identify suitable premises at a location that meets the needs of your practice and your patients.

Some patients may be deterred by an inconvenient or difficult journey, but the majority are happy to travel up to five miles and up to 25 miles if it is for specialist reconstructive treatment. Ideally you should locate yourself close to your patient base.

If you find a property close to an existing practice, don't be put off by this, particularly if it is in a better location with greater visibility. Competition is not necessarily a bad thing so long as you develop and maintain a strong marketing strategy and create an environment that appeals to your target audience. The building that you occupy must suit your particular needs. For example, a practice within a converted house offering off-street parking will attract families. A high street shop unit would be more preferable to a cosmetic clinic.

The property must tick some personal boxes too – after all, you will never love your place of work if it is anything less than perfect. Any niggling doubts about the property can ultimately lead to expensive and time-consuming renovations. If in doubt, move on, there are hundreds of properties available and one of them will be the right choice.

## Property types

### An existing practice

Taking over an existing practice is often less costly than starting from scratch. The advantage is that you are purchasing an operational dental practice with an immediate patient base and revenue stream, therefore you don't have to sacrifice as much income. It means a shorter timeline to your future, as the first few steps are already done for you. The downside may be that you have to give the practice an overhaul if the interior is dated and/or your aim is to target a newer or different patient base.

### Residential property

If you are planning to convert a residential property your practice layout will be defined by the existing spatial arrangement of rooms. Houses normally offer the best scope for extension as they allow the options of expanding both sideways and into the rear. They also allow for expansions onto the first floor and sometimes roof voids.

### Vacant office/shop

Sometimes ex-office accommodation is suitable if you are targeting local businesses. For business professionals time is money and many are prepared to pay for the convenience of not having to travel far for an appointment.

Vacant office/shops tend to be large open-plan spaces giving you greater scope to design your practice exactly how you want it.

### Unusual premises

If the building is in the right location but on first viewing appears inappropriate, it may still be worth considering. Pubs, warehouses, and dilapidated buildings like public conveniences, factory buildings, mews buildings, church halls and repair workshops can make lovely practices. The limit is only your imagination. The images above show the before and after of a ground floor WC block that we converted into a two-storey dental practice.

### New build

You may be lucky enough to acquire land or a vacant site. In this case the entire building would be designed and built from scratch to suit your exact requirements including services, accommodation and, most significantly, its appearance.

The most obvious benefit is the opportunity for you to create a practice that is totally bespoke and suits your exact needs from day one.

The project must be designed and managed well as costs can escalate, especially if the design has not been finalised and accurately costed for.

### Within a new development

Another popular location is within a new building, such as a

new healthcare centre. You may have the opportunity to acquire a lease or purchase the premises directly from the developer prior to construction. This enables you to pre-determine your layout and positions for incoming services – including gas, water, electricity and waste services – prior to the build, saving you time and money.

### Words of caution

If the property doesn't have the correct class use order 'D1' you will need to apply for Change of Use. This usually takes four to eight weeks to obtain. Although rare, it can take longer, so be prepared for this. One strong piece of advice: always ensure that you have obtained the necessary 'D1' use before making any financial commitment.

Certain properties should be avoided for example, first floor premises above shops accessible only by a single tight staircase. This gives you no street presence to advertise your services and you may find yourself on the wrong side of the Equality Act 2010 (previously the Disabled Discrimination Act 2005).

Listed buildings often carry difficulties particularly when it comes to conversion works under the building regulations. Professional advice from dental designer should be sought prior to making a commitment to any kind of property.

### Feasibility study

It is advisable to undertake a feasibility study in order to determine the suitability of a premises prior to making a financial commitment, especially if planning permission is required. A feasibility study can be sent to the local planning officer for their informal opinion as to its likelihood of obtaining planning permission for 'Change of Use'. A dental designer will assist you with this.

A feasibility study will:

- Define the most appropriate layout for your practice in terms of space, patient flow, equipment location and emergency escape, according to your specific needs
- Help you to identify the approximate project cost
- Enable you to assess the extent of the building work and the impact on neighbours and landlords (if applicable)
- Consider the potential for future expansion. There may be the possibility of a rear or side extension, subject to the boundaries of the existing site and planning permission. **PD**

### Comments to [pd@fmc.co.uk](mailto:pd@fmc.co.uk)

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**Gary Bettis** is director of Designclinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from private housing, commercial, retail and healthcare. Visit [www.designclinic.uk.com](http://www.designclinic.uk.com) for further information.