

## Glancy Nicholls Uses SketchUp to Enhance Client Understanding of Project Direction, and Enable Participation in its Evolution



**“SketchUp has greatly enhanced our conceptual visualisation process and the way we explore and present concept designs to clients in 3D. It enables us to communicate efficiently and effectively with clients at a much earlier stage and with greater comprehension on their part. This greater understanding allows strategic decisions to be agreed at a much earlier stage in the design process.”**

Paul Hutt, Director, Glancy Nicholls Architects

### Meet Glancy Nicholls Architects

Founded by Lyndon Glancy RIBA and Patrick Nicholls RIBA in June 2004, Glancy Nicholls Architects (GNA) Ltd. is a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Chartered Practice. GNA is continuously involved in high profile public and private sector developments, working with many repeat clients, including blue chip organisations, across many sectors.

GNA is active in education, student accommodation, residential, healthcare, leisure, industrial, offices, and numerous master planning projects. For more than ten years, GNA has had a close working relationship with Excitech, expanding the practice’s ability to respond to new opportunities presented by new technologies as they become available or as they refresh.

Excitech consultants, for example, worked alongside the GNA team to migrate over to Revit as the platform of choice, helping the practice to establish a BIM platform in pursuance of BIM Level 2 accreditation.

“They come in regularly just to update us on developments in architectural software, design tools and related areas that they feel it’s to our benefit to at least take a look at,” says Neil Carter, BIM Lead at GNA. “More often than not, we follow Excitech’s recommendations not just because we know they are familiar with the environment we operate in, but also because they take time to explore our business and match their suggested solutions to our identified needs.”

One instance of this proactive approach has been in GNA’s expanding use of SketchUp as a conceptual modelling tool for early stage design. GNA had already started using SketchUp prior to working with Excitech, but both companies have explored its deeper capabilities with the goal of increasing the sophistication of how GNA presents concepts to its clients.

### The challenge – how to portray conceptual ideas in a way that clients understand

“SketchUp has helped us address a fundamental requirement in how we communicate ideas to our clients,” explains Paul Hutt, Director at GNA. “This notion of communication – getting the concept across to the client in a way that’s so detailed and ‘lifelike’ that they can share the vision you have about how the project can end up – is something all architects have to contend with.”

Hutt looks back at how concepts were traditionally presented not so long ago and suggests that the approaches once used now look archaic. Handmade models, 2D drawings, artist’s impressions, materials samples, and reference photographs of other projects using similar materials, were put together at considerable expense to demonstrate how the final project would look.

## Picture this, if you can ...

Changes at the initial design stage would lead to the whole conceptual visualisation process starting over; or at least parts of it. "It was a lot of effort", says Hutt. "It involved numerous skills and disciplines, and even then, would not necessarily convey the vision with complete and reliable accuracy or much of a realistic feel. Clients had to exercise a degree of imagination to view the potential outcome and architects had to tell the story to make it come alive. It was more 'talk-through' than 'walk-through'."

## The solution – easier, faster, higher quality, 'walk-through' models achieved with SketchUp

### Taking clients on a journey: SketchUp and Virtual Reality

The GNA team have become committed users of SketchUp for design concepts. In the intervening period since they first adopted the software they have observed that clients expect models to be presented in the far more customer-friendly fashion that SketchUp makes possible.

It's easy to learn and easy to use. It's also a flexible platform; offering an 'Extension Warehouse' that contains over 400 plug-ins that can layer additional tools and features on top of SketchUp. One of the additional tools that has proved of great value in driving greater client understanding of the model at the conceptual stage is Enscape; allowing real-time 3D walk-throughs with live integration.

Different design options can be called up in a meeting, on the spot. "We can offer an immersive experience in one of our conference rooms. On a very large screen we can guide clients on a tour round the project, simply by using an X-box controller. We conduct the fly-through and they watch everything either on the screen or through HTC VR headsets. This truly is the 'wow' factor in action," says Hutt.

He points to the advantages SketchUp brings, in showing not just single buildings and similar structures, but also large scale master planning of development proposals. GNA can now send models produced in SketchUp to 3D printers to create 3D models, a process that used to involve external skills and outsourcing of processes. "You just send it to the printer overnight and when you come in the next day the model is ready and waiting," says Hutt.

### New ways of seeing and believing

Carter says that the ability to change features of the design (shadowing, materiality, size, shape, literally any

aspect of the design or how it is presented to make it come alive) in real time, dynamically, in response to client requests and suggestions, does more than simply expedite the project:

"It adds a dimension to our relationship with clients too. Technology of this nature fulfils a multiplicity of functional needs for sure, but it also delivers a huge emotional benefit for all parties. Clients feel far more involved. They see that we can take their ideas on board and adapt the design to more closely meet their requirements. They feel part of the process. We all become more of a team."

### The shape of the future

"When we started using SketchUp, about ten years ago, it was a new idea; it was out in front as an innovative way to present early stage design. Now clients expect it," says Hutt.

"Equally influential in our adoption of SketchUp, however, has been the fact that new starters at GNA expect it too. Graduates learn about SketchUp at university so they arrive knowing how to use it. Even if they didn't, it's easy to learn in a short space of time. I'd suggest that SketchUp hasn't just changed the culture of GNA, it has changed the culture of the architectural profession."

### Keeping out in front

When asked about the role that Excitech play in GNA's evolving use of technology solutions, Carter says: "With Excitech we're moving forward all the time, keeping one step ahead of changes in the industry. This is the value that Excitech add to our business; constant awareness of what's going on in the technology sphere, what changes we need to know about and what tools will keep us out in front competitively.

They are always interested in what we're doing. They look closely at our workflows, and where improvements can be made they advise us, drawing on their deep insight across the industry. As a company, we are always keen to explore and use new technology and Excitech get that. It's what makes the relationship so fruitful and mutually beneficial.

With regards to SketchUp, from our perspective it enables us to make the client a part of the process. This is regardless of skills or experience levels on the client team; nobody has to be a design expert to see the final result. Any team member has a say. This inclusiveness enriches the design process and brings us closer to our clients."