The refurbishment of a practice is a significant event, in terms of time, money and organisation, so it is important to get it right first time.

Whether you’re considering a home refurbishment or extension or undertaking similar work in your place of employment, it’s fair to say it will be a significant decision, and therefore not one you will take without due consideration.

You’ll only have one chance to get it right, but if you do, not only will you feel an immense sense of achievement, you’ll get all the benefits of transforming your working environment. Stephen Denny and Eoin Smart’s practice, the Benfleet Dental Studio, is one such success story, and Stephen willingly told us about the project.

“The history of the practice goes back to 2000, in a converted hairdressing salon. It’s come a long way since then! We grew rapidly, to 12,000 patients within four years, so naturally we needed to expand. The new premises were originally residential, before being converted to an eye hospital in 2004; we purchased them in 2007. Although the building had been used for medical and surgical functions, it was still clear that it wasn’t really ‘fit for purpose’ for us. Nevertheless the location was perfect, being near to our client base. We had built up a good reputation locally and obviously it was also convenient for our staff; furthermore we had the vision for its future state!”

“Planning permission was a lengthy process, around two years in all. The next stage for us was to select a builder with whom we were happy; and to do so we travelled the length of the country looking at practice conversions. It’s important to work with people you can trust, and whose output is of a high quality, so I’m pleased we took the time to get this stage right. It goes without saying that budgetary constraints are important too and we

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worked hard to stay within the limits we set ourselves; after due consideration we decided to install air conditioning, but this was the only addition to our initial budget.

“The work itself broke down into two parts, the construction work and then the ‘fitting out’ of the new building with new dental equipment. The former saw the whole building being gutted, with a new roof, entrance, individual surgeries and boundary walls being constructed. The last naturally required our careful input and planning and it was a great help to have suppliers such as Dental Directory and Takara Belmont on our side, we really felt they were part of the team. Darren Hare from The Dental Directory and Barry Knapp from Takara Belmont both went out of their way to find the right solution for us and not once did I feel that I was being pressured or ‘sold to’. Our builders were also brilliant. Speakmans Construction specialised in dental conversion and it certainly helped having people around us who understood the logistics of our business. All the way we were up against some quite challenging deadlines (we had patients booked in for mid-January!), so it was vital that our suppliers worked well with our builders and that’s exactly what happened. All were faultless.

“We chose Clesta II treatment centres, with intra-oral cameras and monitors in front of the patients along with the Belmont Belmax 996 digital x-ray machines in each surgery. We also have the Gendex Orthoralex (9200-D) digital OPG/Cephal machine with a VistaScan developer.

“Naturally we’re delighted with the new surgery. Looking back on what we’ve learnt, I can’t emphasise enough how important the planning stages are, particularly choosing the right builders, equipment suppliers and ensuring you keep to budget. Although we were anxious to get underway, it really paid off in the long run to plan thoroughly first.

“The new environment has finally allowed us to take some of the pressure off our first site and enabled us to take on more patients for the first time in over three years. In addition we’ve expanded the team to 35 now, with ten dentists. We rotate the staff across our sites so everyone can enjoy the luxurious new surroundings. All the team had input and ‘ownership’ at some stage of the project, and they all shared our excitement when we could open the doors on our brand new surgery. The other added benefit the new site has offered us that we can maintain, and indeed increase, our commitment to providing broader services to our patients. For example, we now accommodate four trainee hygienists and have expanded our oral surgery, domiciliary, orthodontic and sedation services. All in all a challenging but rewarding project."