

BUILDING in **context**

New development in historic areas





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Foreword



Sir Stuart Lipton



Sir Neil Cossons

English Heritage and CABE are asked to advise on many development proposals in historic areas. We have commissioned this report to show the diversity of interesting recent projects, and to promote the lessons that can be drawn from them.

Thoughtless haste on the one hand and ill-considered imitation on the other have both over the years damaged the fabric of our historic towns and cities. But there is another way, in the form of buildings that are recognisably of our age while understanding and respecting history and context. The buildings shown here belong in that category. While firmly of today, they draw intelligent inspiration from what surrounds them and in that sense are rooted in the past. That is true confidence and assurance.

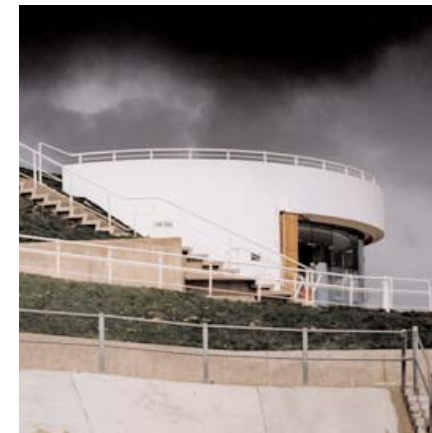
We have in Britain today an abundance of architectural skill and every reason to believe in our ability to add inspirationally to the built fabric we have inherited. As this book shows, that skill is not exclusively vested in household names. There is a wide variety of practices capable of responding imaginatively to the challenges posed by building anew in historic contexts.

To release those skills, we need vision and commitment on the part of clients and planners. Some of the schemes shown here came about only because the planning authority had the courage and conviction to reject inferior schemes and demand something better. Sometimes this brought delay and difficulty; but producing solutions that are lastingly satisfying does mean investing in time, effort and imagination. One of the heartening lessons of this book is that such an investment is, in the end, almost always thought to be worthwhile, even by those who started off as critics.

The examples here are not all perfect. But they do represent the kind of intelligent and imaginative approach that can enrich historic environments. We can pay respect to those places best by continuing the tradition of pace-setting and innovation that they themselves represent. As always, this is a question not of style but of quality. And quality, whatever its stylistic guise, can bring a whole range of benefits – not only aesthetic but economic, social and environmental. The regenerative capacity of good new design is apparent in many of the examples chosen here.

Sir Neil Cossons
Chairman, English Heritage

Sir Stuart Lipton
Chairman, CABE



Introduction

This publication has been commissioned by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage. Its purpose is to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. It aims to do this by example, showing a series of case studies in which achievement is far above the ordinary and trying to draw some lessons both about design and about the development and planning process. As a result, it is hoped that people will be encouraged to emulate the commitment and dedication shown by the clients, architects, planning officers and committee members involved in the projects illustrated and be able to learn from their experience.

The Need for Advice

What lies behind the decision to undertake this publication is a belief that conservation areas and other sensitive sites are not being well served by the development which is taking place within them and that there is a widespread misunderstanding about how to determine what is appropriate for such sites. In order to understand how this situation has arisen it is necessary to consider the history of development in towns and cities. In some places this happened over a brief period as a result of some profound economic or social change, but more often, until the 19th century, the typical story is of gradual development with occasional spurts of activity. This organic model of development produced a harmonious result, in which buildings of different periods co-existed happily because building methods, materials and scales remained consistent over the centuries and change was gradual. As the 20th century progressed, the increasing volume of motor traffic placed the infrastructure under ever greater strain. Together with the arrival of late 20th-century ambitions and the materials and methods that accompany them, this presented a considerable challenge to the organic model. The whole process of development has altered out of all recognition and is surrounded by a panoply of rules and controls

governing every aspect, from the siting of buildings and the design of roads and other infrastructure, through the design of details, to the use of materials.

Faced with this change, responses to the challenge of developing in historic areas have been variable. On the one hand there have been those who have wanted to mark a complete break with the past in terms of scale, materials and methods. On the other there have been those who have wanted to preserve at all costs. These two basic positions have existed for many years, the balance between them shifting from time to time in response to changing fashion and opinion and the gradual accumulation of experience.

In response to the perception that too much urban fabric of value was being lost, planning policy has developed in a way which has identified areas of architectural and historic interest and established special protection for them. In the present context it is enough to say that the law provides that development in such areas must preserve or enhance their character. The courts have decided that this means that they must not be made worse as a result of the development. The areas which have been protected by designation as conservation areas vary widely in character

and importance. They include not only the classic high streets of country towns which have grown organically over the centuries, but also areas with a strongly defined unitary character as a result of having been developed all in one go, often to the design of a single architect.

In all these areas, whatever their history, the design question raised by new development proposals relates to the architectural character which is now appropriate to the place concerned. The different attitudes to modern methods and materials mentioned above have led to two simplified positions and both these positions have led to unsatisfactory outcomes in many cases. On the one hand are those who believe that new development should simply 'reflect its own time' and that if it does this it is absolved from the need to defer or pay heed to its setting in any way. The argument often used in support of this position is that what shocks today no longer does so in twenty years' time and that past radical innovations now seem part of an organic whole. On the other hand there are those who believe that what is important is to preserve the character of the conservation area at all costs, and that this is best done by opposing all development and insisting that when it does take place it copies the architecture of existing buildings. They argue that it is the maintenance of historic character that is the reason for the designation of conservation areas and that their sole purpose should be that of preservation.

The former argument often leads to proposals or developments which show no regard for the context in which they sit and erode, rather than enrich, the character of the area as a result. The latter (a very different matter from authentic reconstruction) leads to a superficial echoing of historic features in new building, which itself erodes the character just as much.

Particularly unfortunate results often occur when the two opinions are forced to compromise, often as a result of an attempt to change the architecture of a proposal into a more contextual form. Signs that this has taken place include

- stepping down, when a tall building meets its lower neighbour at more or less the same height and then gets higher in steps as it moves away along the facade. Unless the change in height arises out of the requirements of the brief, this can produce a lop-sided appearance in the new building and merely emphasises the difference in height between the two. Unless it is done with great finesse it does the older building no favours at all;
- random application of historic elements. Triangular pediments unrelated to the rest of the front of the building are a common example of this, as are string courses or cornices out of scale with the building. Sometimes described as 'the lipstick on the gorilla', such embellishments are quite often seen in conjunction with stepping down;
- matching materials which don't match. If cheap, modern, machine-made bricks are not used structurally but in panels, complete with mastic expansion joints, they do not match hand-made historic brick-work. They simply emphasise the difference in materials and methods. The same is true with stone and render;
- scaling up. Detailing large modern buildings with models taken from small historic ones or attempting to sub-divide large volumes visually while retaining big floor-plates often does no more than emphasise just how large the new building is instead of making it look smaller, as is hoped.

A word often used to describe projects including elements of this kind is pastiche, which, when used correctly, implies the assembly of stylistic elements from different sources. Frequently, however, the term has come to be a generalised way of abusing architecture with any historic elements regardless of the skill or accuracy with which they are employed, and it is rarely of any use in reaching a decision on the merits of a particular proposal.

The Right Approach

The belief underlying this publication is that the right approach is to be found in examining the context for any proposed development in great detail and relating the new building to its surroundings through an informed character appraisal. This does not imply that any one architectural approach is, by its nature, more likely to succeed than any other. On the contrary, it means that as soon as the application of a simple formula is attempted a project is likely to fail, whether that formula consists of 'fitting in' or 'contrasting the new with the old'. A successful project will

- relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land
- sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it
- respect important views
- respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
- use materials and building methods which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings
- create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the setting.

The right approach involves a whole process in addition to the work of design, from deciding what is needed, through appointing the architect, to early discussions with and eventual approval by the planning authority. It may involve the preparation of a formal planning or development brief for the site in question and will certainly involve discussing the matters usually dealt with in such documents and coming to an agreement. Collaboration, mutual respect and a shared commitment to the vision embodied in the project will be needed if the outcome is to be successful. The best buildings arise from a creative dialogue between the planning authority, the client, the architect and the other key professionals involved.

The Case Studies

The case studies have been chosen to illuminate a number of different themes and aspects of development:

- a wide range of different uses;
- a wide range of locations;
- different architectural approaches;
- different processes by which success was achieved.

In every case the result achieved is far beyond the average quality for developments of the kind, though it is not suggested that they are beyond criticism.

An attempt has been made to avoid glamorous settings or uses. The hope is that all those who have responsibility for some aspect of development in conservation areas and other sensitive sites will find something here with which they can identify and which will help them to achieve excellence in their work, whether it is an aspect of the design, the development or the planning process. The lessons of each project are brought together at the end of the publication.

Abbots Cottages, Corfe Castle, Dorset

Careful exercise in local vernacular



The Project

The project, designed by Ken Morgan Architects, is for nine cottages to provide social housing on land at Corfe Castle, Dorset. The client was a local charity which wanted to provide affordable housing for local people who otherwise found it difficult to remain in the village. This well-preserved and attractive historic village is popular with week-enders and holiday-makers on account of its picturesque charm and proximity to the coast and this has pushed up property prices beyond the reach of local pockets.

The Site

The site lies on East Street, which is at this point leading towards the south out of the centre of the historic village of Corfe Castle. It comes at a point where there was previously a gap in the development along this side of the street, between the rows of cottages to the north and south. Behind the site lies the Halves, an area of common grazing notionally divided into strips for the use of members of the village community. The Halves extends a band of green undeveloped land into the centre of the village. At this point the built fabric is becoming slightly less uniform and tight-knit than it is at the centre of the village but the architecture is still homogeneous, with stone walls, small windows and stone slates or thatch on the roofs.

The Problems

The first problem was to achieve permission to develop this site at all, since it was seen in the local plan as an 'important gap' in the development towards the edge of the village, marking the beginning of the transition to the surrounding countryside. In design terms the problem was to find an architectural language which would relate well to its surroundings in this exceptionally pretty and well-preserved historic village. It was also necessary to meet the requirements of the building regulations and the highway engineers, both of which presented difficulties in developing a site which has a narrow access from the street with low cottages on either side. It was also a challenge to plan the site in such a way as to accommodate the number of dwellings required and provide privacy and sunlight to each home. There were also awkward constraints arising from rights of access to the rear of the adjoining properties.

The Solutions

The architect's first decision was to attempt to design a scheme which would not be noticeable in the context of the village. This meant adopting the materials and methods and, as far as possible, the dimensions of the historic cottages and houses in the village. The intention was not to produce buildings which would appear to be older than they really were, but buildings which would be unsurprising in their context. There are a few details which are clearly not traditional as well as many which are taken directly from the vernacular tradition in the neighbourhood.

Except for a narrow entrance into the development, the street frontage is built up with two cottages, kept as low as possible by reducing the ceiling heights so as to minimise the change in height from the thatched cottage immediately to the south. A stone wall joins the new cottages to the existing one to maintain the building line on the street.

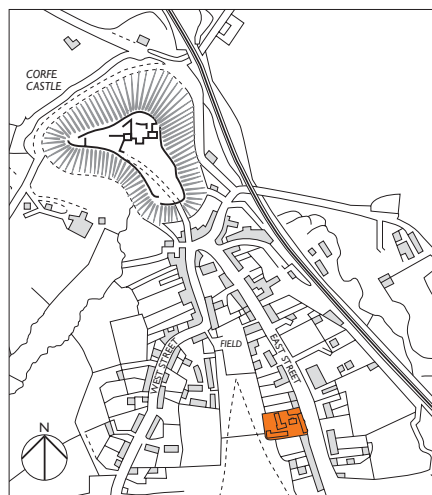
In order to improve visibility for vehicles using the narrow entrance, the cottages are pulled back slightly from the building line and the corner adjacent to the entrance is further pulled in a few inches at low level. Like all the others, these cottages are of two storeys, built in random stone with artificial stone tiles on the roofs and painted timber joinery. The appearance of the masonry is softened by the use of an element of grit in the mortar, and the joints having been brushed out with a stiff chum brush. This careful approach is brought to all the small details of the scheme; both architect and builder are experienced in the materials and methods of the locality.

One further cottage faces the access road into the development. Three more, one at right angles to the others, create a small courtyard at the heart of the scheme, and the access then turns right and left with a range of three cottages running east to west towards the rear of the site and the Halves. This tight planning achieves a high density of development, but the alignments are such that each cottage benefits from a private garden facing south or west.

The development was planned in two phases. Because the whole principle of developing the site was controversial in terms of the local plan, the negotiations with the planning authority were difficult and protracted. It seems likely that permission would not have been forthcoming if the social purpose had not been so widely supported. Following completion, however, the development has been widely praised and has won awards from the Rural Development Commission and Civic Trust.

The Lessons

This scheme demonstrates that a well thought-out proposal with a socially desirable purpose can justify departing from policies embodied in a local plan. It also shows that traditional materials can be used and detailed in such a way as to enable new buildings to fit unobtrusively into an historic setting provided that they are in the hands of people with adequate local skill and experience. It draws attention to the possibility of solving problems of access by ingenuity and compromise rather than the simple application of standard solutions. Similarly it shows that modern living accommodation can be provided in buildings which depart slightly from current standards in such matters as ceiling heights.



▲ In design, materials and quality, the new cottages (forming the middle terrace in picture below and the right hand range in the picture above) relate very closely to their older neighbours.



◀ The junction between new and old is subtle and carefully handled.



Century Court, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Contemporary high density housing for a volume housebuilder



The stuccoed elevations and regular fenestration of the Bath Road range offer echoes of a Regency terrace. The stucco matches that traditionally used on Cheltenham terraces but it is applied to a clearly contemporary building.

The Project

This scheme, designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley, consists of eighty-seven apartments and nine town houses, a communal garden and under-ground car parking. The clients were Beaufort Homes and the apartments and houses are for sale on long lease. The architects were appointed after another scheme was felt to be of insufficiently high architectural quality for this prominent site.

The Site

The site, which was formerly occupied by a 1960s office block, lies on the main Bath Road at the entrance to Cheltenham town centre. Its architectural surroundings are varied. Adjoining it on the Bath Road is a typical Cheltenham terrace. Directly opposite are Victorian Gothic college buildings, and behind the site on Montpellier Grove are semi-detached, 19th-century villas. Looming over the scene a little further away is the bulky Eagle Star building, which has been widely criticised for disrupting the scale of this part of the town.

The Problems

The central problem presented by this project was that of finding an architectural language suitable for the highly diverse surroundings of this site, in an historic town where the mistakes and excesses of the 1970s have led to a wide-spread distrust of anything appearing to be modern architecture. In site-planning terms, the problem was to provide the requisite density of accommodation within buildings that remain in scale with their surroundings.

In settings where the surrounding buildings are all of the same date, the local planning authority has demanded a careful reproduction of historic architecture using high quality materials. In this case, however, it took the view that a scheme which was historicist in character would be inappropriate, apart from anything else because the surroundings were so various that it was not possible to identify a style which might be suitable to copy. It therefore asked for a proposal which was contemporary in character but also contextual and of high quality.

The Solutions

The decision to locate all car parking underground improved the environment of the development and enabled adequate density to be achieved at the same time. Buildings occupy the edges of the site. Along the Bath Road, set back behind a landscaped area, is a five-storey range of apartments with the penthouse level set back below the roof. At the back of the site are four-storey villas and three-storey town houses in scale with their neighbours. The gaps between these ranges are occupied by two four-storey drums, each containing apartments, and at the centre of the site are small private gardens for the town houses and a communal landscaped

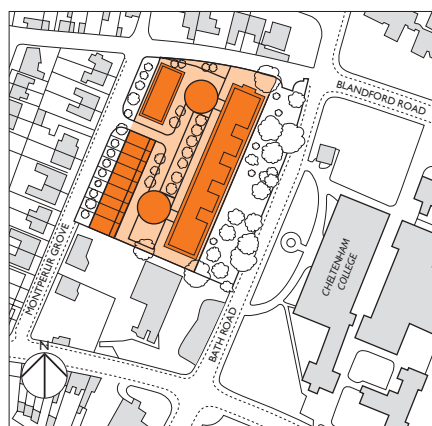
garden courtyard as well as access to the underground garage. As well as providing visual interest these drums help to allow light into the courtyard and the apartments facing onto them. The setting back of the penthouse storey keeps down the apparent height of the main range and improves its proportions and the breaks in the roofline of the penthouse windows adds rhythm to an elevation which is 100 m long but has no entrances because it faces a main road.

The buildings are clad in render, with plain window openings relieved by grooves incised into the surface. The balconies to each of the apartments are lined in hardwood, which is used more extensively on the courtyard elevations of each of the buildings.

The scheme was supported by English Heritage and by the Royal Fine Art Commission, which believed that it represented a skilful and refreshing reinterpretation of the Cheltenham architectural tradition. The render is a modern equivalent of stucco and the rhythm of the window openings and the use of incised lines harmonise with Regency detailing without imitating it. It was also supported by the local civic society and by the council's consultative architects' panel. The market supported the scheme to the extent that seventy per cent of the units were sold well before the scheme was completed.

The Lessons

This scheme demonstrates that it is possible to achieve a high density of residential development in an historic context without distorting the scale of the existing pattern of development. It also shows that it is possible to find an architectural expression which relates closely to historic models while being unequivocally modern in idiom. It illustrates that a local authority can achieve architecture of quality if it makes it clear that this is what it requires. It shows that a volume house builder can make a commercial success of a high density, well-designed scheme in places other than the centres of large cities. Finally, the scheme demonstrates that brave architecture is likely to remain controversial in some quarters; some local opinion has criticised the scheme as 'unsympathetic' although a civic society spokesman said 'There is a lot of subtlety to it. As a town we need to preserve the best of the old and complement it with the best of the new'.



The new building takes its place comfortably alongside a typical Cheltenham terrace.



Within the scheme, two rotundas, containing flats, provide visual interest.

The balconies successfully use unequivocally modern forms and materials, despite the historic setting.



Gwynne Road Housing, Battersea, London

Setting a new context in a fragmented neighbourhood



The detailing is thoughtful and responsive. The dry-stone wall at the front of the development provides visual interest and maintains the street frontage.

The Project

The scheme, designed by Walter Menteth Architects for the Ujima Housing Association, provides eight properties to rent, of which four are one-bedroom flats for people moving out of or back into the community from supported mental health care facilities. Two are ground floor flats designed for occupation by people with physical disabilities and the remaining two flats are for general occupation. The project is one of a number on which this architect has worked alongside the same client, a housing association with a tradition of seeking to achieve a high standard of design. Sue Belk of the Ujima Housing Association says 'Ujima has always taken pride in the quality of its new housing and there is real commitment to achieving excellence on the part of the committee'.

The Site

The cramped brownfield site was formerly occupied by a civil defence building. It lies at the junction of five roads and is adjoined by a large multi-storey housing estate, an industrial estate and a railway embankment, as well as by an Edwardian residential district of some architectural quality. Beyond the railway embankment Battersea High Street contains interesting historic buildings and has been undergoing a process of improvement and regeneration in recent years. The housing estate has disrupted the historic street pattern as well as the scale of development around the site, but elsewhere the street pattern remains, although the character of the neighbourhood has been seriously eroded. Despite the low quality of some of its neighbours, the site lies at a crucial point at the entrance to Battersea High Street and is prominent in views along Simpson Street, which has the best quality architecture in the immediate vicinity. It is also the site of a street market which provides valuable activity at street level.

The Problems

The urban design problem involved designing a building which would relate effectively to its disparate and fragmented surroundings. It also needed to mark the entrance to Battersea High Street and bring forward the high quality of the buildings which are found to the north beyond the railway bridge. The architectural problem was to provide a building of a suitable standard which also met the requirements set out in the brief and high environmental performance standards and to do all this within the tight budget available. The need to provide separate access to the flats for those with mental health problems and to the other flats, and to deal with the noise from the railway line, presented particular additional problems.

The Solutions

The development is conceived of as a single, free-standing, flat-roofed pavilion, simply planned with the living rooms at the corners and the services grouped at the centre of the plan. Entrances at either end of the building provide separate access for the different categories of occupant, as required by the brief. It is constructed entirely of single sized metrical concrete blocks, laid both vertically and horizontally, and rendered on the outside. This gives excellent sound and heat insulation as well as durability, and produces a building with its own highly individual character.

The gardens, some of which are shared and some of which belong to individual flats, are surrounded by high dry-stone walls held securely in metal cages. These walls provide privacy for the occupants and a highly distinctive expression for the development. Money was saved because this method of construction does not need foundations; economies were such that it was possible to provide each apartment with storage space in an outdoor shed. The flat roofs of the sheds are covered with soil and planted.

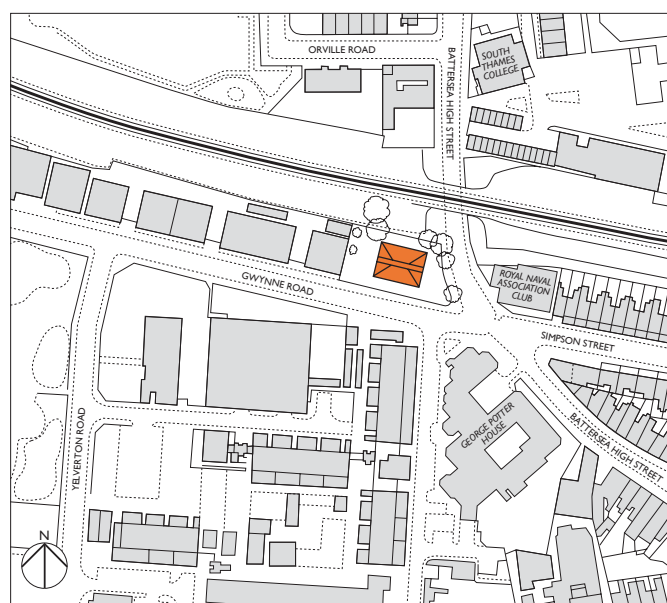
Careful setting out on the site means that the building sits happily in the centre of the view along Simpson Street.

The Lessons

This project shows that a restricted budget and an unpromising site need not prevent architectural excellence from being achieved. It shows that architecture of high quality can extend urban regeneration beyond its obvious boundaries and point the way forward for a neighbourhood where the historic pattern of development has been destroyed by the changes wrought in the late 20th century. It demonstrates that a quirky, distinctive, modern building can sit happily in the context of an historic street. It provides high density, low scale development which is not content simply to ape historic styles.



▲ The site at Gwynne Road lies between 19th century domestic terraces, a railway line, historic Battersea and high-rise housing. In these disparate surroundings, the new building manages to be robust enough to create its own context.



Headland Café, Bridlington, Yorkshire

Seafront regeneration encourages tourists back



The new headland café provides a clear focal point for seafront activity.

The Project

This project, designed by Bauman Lyons Architects with the artist Bruce McLean, is for a beach café at the end of the South Promenade in Bridlington.

The Site

The site is a low headland overlooking the beach about a mile south of Bridlington harbour. It lies a little way beyond the point at which the shore ceases to be developed with houses and commands extensive views to the south towards Spurn Head as well as northwards to the harbour and Flamborough Head. The character of the shore changes in this neighbourhood from that of a seaside resort to that of undeveloped unspoilt foreshore.

The Problems

The problems faced by this project were economic and social as much as physical. The café is one element in a project which originated in an attempt to reverse the decline in popularity of Bridlington as a holiday destination. This was understood to have come about at least in part as a result of the common perception of the British seaside town as an old-fashioned place whose gradual physical decay and progress downmarket makes it a less and less attractive place to visit. In order to combat this view as far as Bridlington is concerned, East Riding of Yorkshire Council decided that the collapsing North Promenade should be repaired with the involvement of the artist Chris Tipping in order to provide 'a stimulating environment, free and open to all as a truly open space.' Following the success of that scheme, the decision was taken to invest in the regeneration of the South Promenade with the involvement of artists, using high quality materials and a high standard of modern design. This meant that the architects were faced with the problem of finding a form and architectural expression which were both bold enough to demonstrate the commitment to quality and modernity and modest enough to sit happily in the unspoilt landscape.

The Solutions

The project as a whole was put together by a multi-disciplinary team who were appointed by the local authority to draw up a design strategy which was approved by the council and then implemented under the guidance of a special working group chaired by the leader of the council.

The café structure itself sits within the headland, its roof largely covered with turf, so that from above it is seen only as a railing at the edge of the drop to the terrace below. The building is in the form of a drum, covered in stucco and extensively glazed. This echoes the shape of the headland and provides a prospect to the north and the south. It is also highly reminiscent of that architecture of the 1930s which itself always appears associated with the seaside, without copying it directly.

The glazed screen which makes up the front of the building is etched by Bruce McLean and the use of glass and transparency extend to the counter inside the café. McLean is also responsible for the Jetty, the brightly coloured sculpture-cum-maze beyond the terrace in front of the building.

Because this is a venue for fine weather the seating occupies the terrace in front of the building, the seats and tables being stored inside the café when it is not in operation. From here there is a view back along the whole length of improved promenade, and further south to the row of beach huts by the same architects which are the final element in the whole project. Visually the continuous line of coloured and inscribed paving stretches away towards the harbour. Physically the café is tied into the project by the angled sitting refuge in the wall on the terrace, which provides shelter from the prevailing wind at all times, as do the other such spaces in the same series along the whole Promenade.

The implementation of the project as a whole, which involved the artist Mel Gooding as well as Bruce McLean and Chris Tipping, was dependent on obtaining outside funds in addition to those committed by the local authority. Support was obtained from the European Regional Development Fund and from the Arts Lottery Fund, whose monitor supported it on the basis that 'The plan is radical in that it proposes a standard of civic architecture that refuses to license mediocrity and architecturally bankrupt anomalies for the sake of short term speculative gain.... The scheme is concerned with changing public perception of place without didactic presentation, lumbering explanation or confrontational architectural design or public art'. These comments appear to have been justified by the completed scheme, which has been widely publicised in the national press, is popular with visitors and in its entirety has been credited with a twenty per cent increase in tourism in the year after it opened.

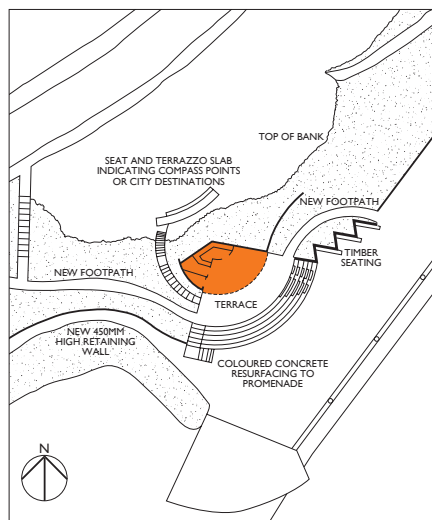
The Lessons

This project would not have come about without championship from officers and councillors organised specifically to carry it forward. It demonstrates the ability of such arrangements to achieve projects of unusual scope and cost against the odds. It also shows that high quality design and high aspirations can have popular appeal, as seen by the increase in tourism and by the popularity of the new beach chalets, described as 'stupendous' by one visitor.

The design of the café itself demonstrates that it is possible to combine modesty, boldness, modernity and popularity. The tenant, Mrs Kendal, says 'On a sunny day you couldn't possibly have a better place to work.'



As well as the café, new beach huts have been built and improvements made to the promenade.



Juniper House, King's Lynn, Norfolk

Local architectural patronage delivers sustainable and neighbourly office building



The Project

This scheme, designed by Jeremy Stacey Architects, combines a three-storey office building for King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council, two houses and three flats for a housing association and a public garden.

The Site

The site is a highly sensitive and difficult one. It lies in a conservation area, immediately to the south of the Grade I listed St Nicholas church. The wall of the churchyard provides one boundary to the site, which was formerly occupied by a 1960s office building that had come to the end of its useful life. Next to the churchyard on Chapel Lane, a corner is taken out of the site by a diminutive listed cottage. Along the opposite edge of the site on Chapel Street is a terrace of listed houses of two storeys and attics with dormer windows.

The Problems

The challenge faced in designing this scheme involved finding a way to incorporate on the site an office building of sufficient size without overwhelming the existing housing. It was also necessary to relate the new housing accommodation to its neighbours in a satisfactory way and to provide a suitable architectural expression for both the office and the housing. The office was also required to provide a good working environment and meet the environmental Agenda 21 objectives which lay at the heart of this project when it was envisaged.

The Solutions

The initial decision taken was to build around the perimeter of the site and leave a garden at the centre. This echoed the historic pattern of development on the site. It also enabled the garden to be used in conjunction with St Nicholas church, which houses concerts and

recitals, especially during the King's Lynn Festival, but lacks lavatory or refreshment facilities. A narrow gate in the churchyard wall enables concert-goers to use the garden and ground floor area of the office building.

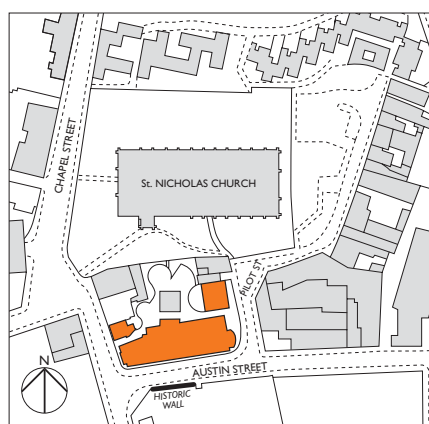
The housing parts of the scheme are situated in two-storey ranges adjoining the existing housing and echoing its form and materials though not attempting to reproduce it in detail. The walls are of high quality brick and the roofs are slate, but the detailing of windows and doors is simple and modern; the metal gutters and downspouts on the dormers, for example, provide visual interest in a novel way as well as serving a practical purpose.

The office building is a range of three storeys along Austin Street. It is also built of brick, but has a metal roof, within which are situated solar panels to help heat the hot water for the building. The south-facing top storey has a strip of windows running along its whole length. They provide excellent light for those working at this level, but are sheltered from excessive heat-gain by projecting eaves and by internal blinds within the triple-glazed windows. The main entrance in the centre of this range provides views through the open reception space to the garden behind. This garden will be accessible to the public during office hours via a footpath crossing the site from east to west.

The environmental strategy and construction methods adopted have enabled the office building to be naturally ventilated rather than air-conditioned. High insulation levels and the use of concrete decks to store and circulate heat and ventilation are employed to create a comfortable working environment with minimal energy needs, and great care has been taken with all aspects of energy use, including water-saving measures. This has produced predicted energy costs of £5,000 per year, rather than the £23,000 per year which would be expected for a conventional office building of this size, thus providing a considerable reduction in the life-time cost of the whole project.

The Lessons

This project demonstrates that difficult site constraints and a challenging environmental agenda can be the generators of good architecture. It shows that different uses can be accommodated on a constrained site in a way which enhances the quality of the site as a whole. It demonstrates that a local authority can take the lead as an enlightened client to meet its needs in an environmentally sustainable way. It is also note-worthy that the professional and construction team were all based within the locality.



▲ The housing in Chapel Street is clearly linked to the larger office range in colour and materials but at the same time responds to the scale of adjoining housing.



▲ A staircase detail in the inner courtyard.

▼ The scheme viewed across Austin Street, past a medieval gateway.



Left Bank Village Restaurants, Hereford

Modern design a less intrusive option than imitation warehouse



The riverside elevation of the restaurant reads as a small discrete building, so helping to break down the bulk and mass of the development.

The Project

The project, designed by Jamieson Associates, was for a single building which houses a restaurant, a brasserie, conference facilities and a bar in Hereford city centre.

The Site

The site is as sensitive a one as could be imagined, lying on the north bank of the River Wye, with a long frontage to the river and another frontage on Bridge Street next to the re-built medieval bridge. It is highly prominent in views towards the cathedral from the south bank of the river and in views from both the medieval bridge and from the new road bridge further to the west. The site was formerly occupied by a motorcycle garage and had been derelict for some time before this development took place.

The Problems

The central problem in this case was to find a form of architectural expression which was appropriate to the site. This involved designing a building with frontages which were suitable both for the narrow historic shopping street of Bridge Street and for the much more open environment of the river bank and the broad views from the bridges. Another constraint was presented by the fact that any tall building on the site would be prominent on the low sky-line of the city, which is still dominated by the cathedral. There were also environmental considerations arising from the fact that the site is on the bank of the river.

The Solutions

The architect was appointed following advice from the planning authority that an earlier scheme closely based on copying an historic warehouse was inappropriate. This was seen as stylistically wrong in the context of this particular site, where there had never been warehouses. In practical terms, it meant that only half the occupants could enjoy views of the river and it did not take advantage of the opportunity to provide terraces. It also led to a

bulky building which obtruded into the skyline and began to threaten the dominance of the cathedral in certain views. In light of this, the planning authority decided that a modern building which was sensitive to its site was the best solution.

The building has been designed in three main elements. On Bridge Street itself there is a block clad in Bath stone which maintains the street frontage and acts, with the building across the street, to mark the end of the bridge. It also provides a suitably dignified entrance to the whole building. Running east from this block along the river bank are three storeys of terraces cutting back as they rise, both from the river bank and from east to west. Within them are the main restaurant and bar spaces. The terraces are exposed concrete decks and the enclosing walls are of metal and glass. Finally, towards the back of the site there is a service block clad in terracotta-coloured render.

This strategy has produced a building which defers to the cathedral and the established skyline of Hereford because of the setting back of the terraces and the recessive colours of the materials used for them. At the same time it provides three open terraces with excellent views of the river. It makes its presence felt in a highly dignified way on the street and maintains the frontage and scale of development. To the rear of the restaurant there is a courtyard, where the rendered block sits in an appropriate relationship with other retail premises in the same ownership, which together with the restaurants are intended to bring about the commercial regeneration of this slightly forgotten part of the city centre.

Because of the involvement of the planning authority from an early stage, and support from English Heritage for the design approach being adopted, the proposal was not seen as controversial and had a smooth passage through the planning process. Environment Agency concerns relating to the river bank did, however, make it impossible to obtain permission to build a small jetty as had been hoped.

The Lessons

This project demonstrates that if all the parties, including the planning authority and the architect, are involved in discussions as a scheme develops then even a highly sensitive site can be uncontroversial when it comes to obtaining planning permission. It shows that a modern building can be less visually intrusive than a reproduction one, and that the constraints on a site, and the need to meet the requirements of the brief when it is difficult to do so, can act as generators of excellent architecture. Angus Jamieson, the architect, said 'You only get a site like this once in a lifetime and I am delighted to have designed a building for it that people seem to like'.

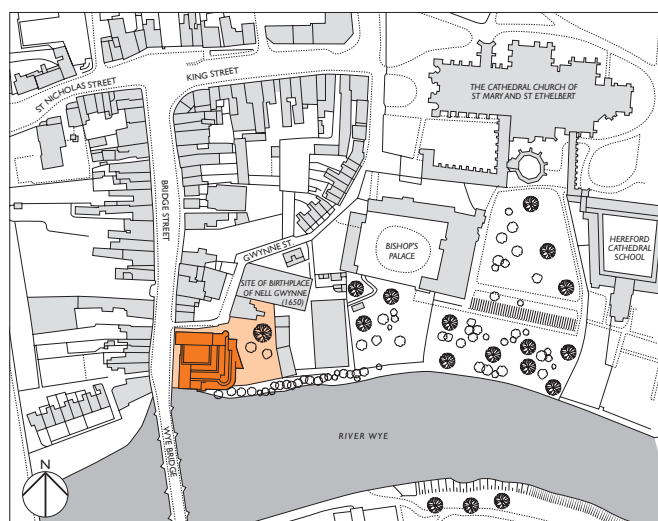


The elevation to Bridge Street is clad in bath stone.

The scale and verticality of the new building relate as much to the modest neighbouring buildings as to the Cathedral.



The device of cutting back the terraces defers to the Cathedral in views over the Wye Bridge and produces a building less intrusive than an imitation warehouse would have been.



Liberté House, St Helier, Jersey

Initial reservations about modern design give way to enthusiasm



The Project

This scheme, designed by Haworth Tompkins, is for a commercial office building of 19,000 sq ft in the centre of St Helier, Jersey.

The Site

The site lies on the corner of La Motte Street and Hilary Street, in the historic heart of St. Helier. It was formerly occupied by a tall tower and slab building. This had become obsolete in terms of the accommodation it offered and was of a kind of architecture that had become highly unpopular in Jersey. It rose far above the skyline of the city centre and bore little relationship to its setting. The immediate setting of the site does not include major historic buildings or monuments, but is characterised by modest domestic-scale buildings, with shops, an hotel, cottages and a garage amongst them.

The Problems

The architects were faced with the problem of designing a building which would provide office accommodation of a high modern standard and would be appropriate in its historic setting. It needed to establish a sufficient presence on the street to be attractive to a commercial tenant, without having the over-bearing character of its predecessor. It also needed to establish an appropriate architectural language for historic St Helier, where there are few modern buildings of quality and local distinctiveness. It was necessary to do this in a way which would achieve the approval of the planning authority, which was inclined to adopt somewhat conservative positions faced with some poor recent developments which were highly unpopular.

The Solutions

The first decision taken by the architects was to build up to the boundaries of the site. This was sensible in townscape terms, because it respected the historic building lines. It also enabled the required amount of accommodation to be provided on the site in a much lower building than the previous one. Further studies of the massing of the building led to a decision to build five storeys, of which the top one was considerably set back. This enabled the cornice lines of La Motte Street to be respected. The main gesture made by the design is a tower at the street corner. This provides a suitable marker for the building, and the glazed tower provides views of people going up and down the staircase, as well as giving them views out over the town. It also helps to resolve the awkward geometry of the site resulting from the fact that the corner between the two streets is not a right angle.

Glazing is also the most important element of the main entrance elevation on La Motte Street. Behind it lies an atrium space which rises the full height of the building. This is wedge-shaped in plan, giving rise to a rectangular office building although the wide angle of the corner site is fully built out. This

provides an interesting and impressive foyer and also provides environmental benefit by acting as a buffer between the offices within and the noise and bright sunlight of the street outside to the south. Transparent lifts and galleries within the atrium space enliven it and provide interest for those outside and in. Shading and special glazing diminish the heating effects of direct sunlight and the yellow blinds add further liveliness and interest to the streetscape.

As well as metal and glass the architects made extensive use of local granite as a building material. The building sits on a plinth of this stone, which is also used for the pavement of the street and the floor of the atrium, which are a continuous surface. It is in the use of this stone and in its massing and the scale of the elements that Liberté House does most to relate itself to its historic context. It should also be noted that the aluminium which is the material making up much of the elevations has the same tone as the stucco of the neighbouring buildings and therefore blends with them visually. In the straightforward detailing of the metal components the architects were intending to produce an effect which was appropriate to a port city with utilitarian historic buildings.

This proposal did not achieve planning permission without controversy on account of what was seen as its uncompromisingly modern appearance. Once built, it appears to have been accepted very quickly as a good contribution to the townscape of the city and is now widely seen as a benchmark of quality.

The Lessons

This scheme shows that it is possible to design a modern office building which sits comfortably within a domestic-scaled context but which also makes its mark. It demonstrates that traditional materials used in a new way can relate a building to its historic surroundings and that a difficult site can generate interesting architecture. It also demonstrates that a controversial proposal can produce a popular building. Stuart Fell of the States of Jersey Planning Department says 'Although it was opposed by a considerable body of opinion at the planning stage, this building was widely popular even before it had been completed and has set a new quality standard for commercial buildings in Jersey'.



Although the floorplates are at an angle to the street, a glass outer skin maintains the building line.



The glass-fronted staircase is a feature of the building and provides a successful device for turning the corner.



Library and Administration Building, Central School of Speech and Drama, Swiss Cottage, London

Bridging the gap between domestic and institutional uses



The library provides a light and pleasant working environment and is planned so that domestic neighbours are not overlooked. Frosted window panes are also used to protect neighbours' privacy.

The Project

The building, designed by Cullum and Nightingale, houses a library, computer-based learning facilities, offices, student bar, common room and board room for the Central School of Speech and Drama. It represents the third phase of a master-plan prepared by these architects, who were appointed following competitive interview. When completed, the plan will rationalise all the school's currently scattered and fragmented facilities and accommodate them in appropriately designed buildings on one site.

The Site

The site immediately adjoins a conservation area and lies at the point where the residential area of Belsize Park meets Swiss Cottage, with its public buildings and main roads. Its narrow frontage is on Eton Avenue, between the 19th-century terrace of villas on Adamson Road and the existing Main Building of the School, which is of slightly later date. The houses are of stock brick with stone dressings. The Main Building is rendered and houses the entrance to the Embassy Theatre up a small flight of steps. The plot extends to include land to the rear, which adjoins the gardens of the Adamson Road houses and those of Buckland Crescent to the north west.

The Problems

In townscape terms, the problem at the front of the site was to create an appropriate visual link between the Main Building and the Adamson Road villas. At the rear it was to avoid producing a bulky structure which loomed over the adjacent gardens. In planning terms the problem was to produce a building on the narrow site which would accommodate all the uses specified in the brief in suitable, well-lit, congenial spaces. The library, in particular, required a large volume space for book stacks and work stations which would be attractive to readers and would provide appropriate levels of privacy. This building had to work both alone and as part of the eventual master-plan. Neighbouring occupiers had understandable concerns about noise and over-looking. The prospect of considerable new development in the immediate vicinity, including the building of new premises for the Hampstead Theatre opposite, meant that there was a changing context to anticipate and deal with.

The Solutions

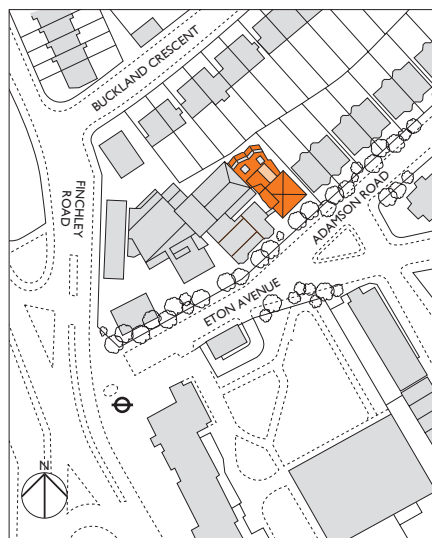
The building is of five storeys on the street. The floor levels are aligned with those of the neighbouring houses and the window openings are of the same scale, though without any decorative detailing. The student bar and common room in the basement are screened from view by a stone wall which is set away from the front of the building to allow light to enter behind it. This relates visually to the materials of the adjoining houses, but above that level the elevation is built of a rich, strongly-coloured red brick. Apart from a

stone cornice, this elevation is un-ornamented. The adoption of scale and rhythm from the neighbouring domestic buildings shows a good-mannered sensitivity to them. The use of a contrasting material, which is beautiful in its own right, demonstrates that this is an independent construction and acts as a foil to the Main Building on the other side.

The library runs from the front to the back of the building and sits as low down as possible at the rear of the site. It is largely top-lit, which provides plenty of light to desks and work stations without over-looking the neighbours. The shaping of the building to the irregular site produces a polygonal form which makes an exciting space. The offices make the best use of the available light at the front of the building and at the sides above library level, and the staff common room on the top floor has the advantage of a sunny terrace behind the cornice.

Lessons

This project is working well for the clients and is liked very much by them. Debbie Scully, the Deputy Principal of the School, says 'We are really happy with the building and are particularly pleased that there have been no complaints from our neighbours since it was completed'. The project demonstrates that it is possible to incorporate institutional, large-scale uses within a predominantly domestic context without causing disruption. It shows that careful discussions with neighbouring occupiers and the local planning authority and a willingness to compromise can lead to solutions that take account of external pressures and constraints but do not weaken a building's character. It shows that it is possible to combine sensitivity and due deference to historic surroundings with confident expression of individuality and a modern identity.



Fenestration at the rear of the building is designed to minimise overlooking of neighbouring gardens.



The absence of stucco marks the building out from its neighbours, but in scale it responds closely to the 19th century terrace in Adamson Road.

Parish Room, Aldbury, Hertfordshire

Sensitive extension to a Grade I listed church



The new extension is unobtrusively sited at the north of the church. The dark roof and facade of the new extension make it less conspicuous when viewed across the churchyard and prevent it from competing with the church or unbalancing its composition.

The Project

This project consists of the extension of the parish church of St John the Baptist, Aldbury, Hertfordshire, in order to provide a lavatory and a parish room in which to hold Sunday school, choir practice, meetings and social activities. The extension was designed by Atelier MLM Architects.

The Site

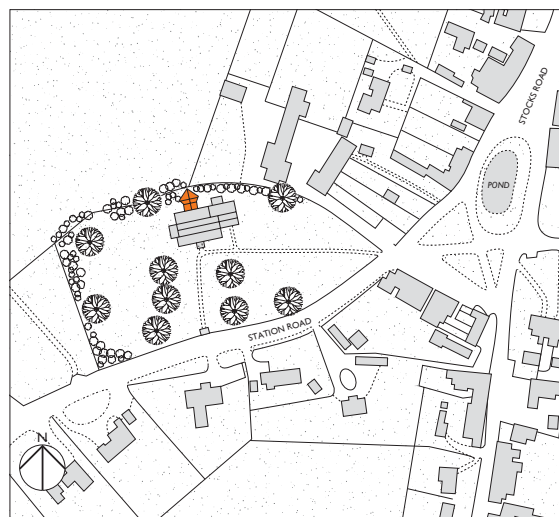
The church lies in the middle of a pretty, unspoiled Hertfordshire village. It is listed Grade I and occupies a site which has been occupied by a church since Saxon times, although the building itself has been altered and repaired many times over the centuries and was heavily restored in the 19th. The church sits towards the north of the extensive churchyard and is surrounded by a graveyard which is open in appearance, with trees and mown grass giving it a park-like character. The parish room itself lies to the north of the nave of the church at the edge of the churchyard and towards the west end of the building.

The Problems

Extending a Grade I listed building is always difficult and controversial, and the difficulties were compounded in this case by the need to respect the character of the conservation area of the village, which is so picturesque that it is frequently in demand for filming and advertising purposes. The problem was therefore to design a building which would be unequivocally modern in character without jarring with the historic church or the character of the village. English Heritage, as well as the local planning authority, needed to be convinced of the merits of the proposed scheme.

The Solutions

The precise site for the building was established as a result of the existence of a former doorway, now blocked, in the north wall of the church. Re-opening this door was a way of providing access to the extension without destroying important historic fabric. It was also helpful that the north side of the



church is largely invisible from the village, and that this position enabled the new room to take advantage of uninterrupted views across farmland. This suggested to the architect that he should design a room with large windows.

The room is rectangular in plan, but the rectangle is twisted so that its sides are not parallel with those of the church. This geometry is unmistakably modern, but it is not arbitrary, because the angles of the new walls relate to those of the buttresses of the historic building.

The extension stands next to the church, but retains the integrity of the historic building by barely touching it with the walls and roof of the lobby which links the two and contains the lavatory and a door from which to service the extension.

The structure of the extension takes the form of three levels. The lowest level is a plinth of flint walls with limestone dressings, which continue the materials and methods of the historic building as the base for the new one. Above this is a continuous band of glazing, interrupted by timber panels at the centres of the walls and timber-framed window openings beside them. Timber columns within this structure support a beam which itself supports the roof structure. This consists of trusses crossing from corner to corner of the room and sitting on the beam above the glazed corners. The pyramidal roof is covered in green slates.

Throughout the building the quality of workmanship is high. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the timber, which is particularly richly detailed in the area of the lobby, where the glazing in the door is subdivided into many small squares. This use of materials to produce square patterns is also found in the floor of the parish room, which is patterned in red and black tiles.

English Heritage officers were closely involved in the design of the building and their initial concerns were addressed in the course of negotiations. The local planning authority was sympathetic throughout the process to the aims of the project and to the lines of the proposed solution.

The Lessons

This scheme demonstrates that a difficult site and the restrictions of dealing with a Grade I listed building can generate a successful architectural solution. It illustrates that traditional materials and methods can be used in modern ways. When this is done successfully, as here, it shows that this can provide a visual link between old and new, without the new copying the details of the old or pretending to be old. It also demonstrates that it is possible to obtain the necessary consents to extend a Grade I listed building in an exceptionally sensitive conservation area.



▲ The new parish room is distinct in form and materials from the church but does not challenge it.



◀ The frameless window offers an unimpeded view of the churchyard.



▲ The flint plinth of the new building provides a clear but understated visual link with the church.

Picture House, Exeter, Devon

Enhancing a varied historic context through confident modern design



The picture house provides a distinctively twentieth century addition to a high quality but also highly varied built context, which includes a Georgian chapel.

The Project

This scheme, designed by Burrell, Foley, Fischer, involved the creation of a two-screen cinema in the city centre of Exeter by adapting and extending a former 1930s bus garage that had been in use as a furniture warehouse. Because the building provides full disabled access, includes gallery space and runs an educational programme, it was eligible for Arts Lottery funding of almost seventy-five per cent of the capital cost.

The Site

The site of the cinema is on Bartholomew Street West, just inside the line of the Roman and Medieval wall of the city of Exeter. Its immediate neighbours include 1970s flats, a Victorian terrace of houses and modern sheltered housing, but within a very slightly wider context lie good 18th- and 19th-century houses, a fine late Georgian chapel and a public open space. Not only is the site prominent by virtue of being on a ridge, it is also within an area that has been developed continuously from Roman times, where recent architecture shows some of the draw-backs of adopting a 'fitting in' approach, drawing attention to itself by its poverty of detailing rather than blending unobtrusively into the historic fabric.

The Problems

The problems involved finding an open and welcoming form for a building containing two blind boxes. The building needed to create a suitable presence on the corner of Bartholomew Street and Fore Street. It needed to accommodate the slope up from the front to the rear of the site. In terms of architectural expression, the building needed to find a language which embodied the client's aspiration for stylish modern architecture without disrupting the historic setting. Where different kinds of planning consideration were concerned, it was also necessary to assuage the worries of neighbouring residents about possible noise nuisance. The physical constraints of adapting the building that already stood on the site also had to be coped with.

The Solutions

The architects decided to use the existing building to house the two cinemas called for by the brief, one seating about 170 people and one seating just over 200. They sit back to back with a shared projection room at first floor level.

To the south west of the cinema halls, the extension houses the foyer, lavatories, bar/restaurant and gallery space. The main entrance on Bartholomew Street gives access to a two-storey space, with a staircase leading up to the gallery and bar space clearly visible on the first floor. This can also be entered directly from a door at the back of the building, where the car park is situated. This gives a suitable sense of presence and drama

to arrival at the cinema, within what is quite a modest extension to the original building. The entrances at two levels mean that disabled people can reach all parts of the building without special arrangements being needed.

In townscape terms, these spaces are made visible externally by large areas of glazing within a simple white-rendered form. The main entrance, which is slightly recessed from the line of the building, has the appearance of a proscenium arch over a stage and is topped by the name of the cinema in neon lights. This gives a particularly welcoming impression at night, when the cinema is at its busiest.

The long western elevation of the building, diminishing in height towards the back of the site, has windows which reveal the activities going on behind them and relate in size to the scale of those spaces and activities. A glazed slit from top to bottom of this wall adds to the impression of the main entrance as a proscenium arch.

This combination of modest theatrical gestures and straightforward simple details means that the cinema has a strong presence which is suitable to its function without intruding aggressively into its surroundings.

The design was considered in some quarters to be too modern in style, but careful negotiations with the planning authority led to approval and also resolved the concerns of the neighbours about potential nuisance. There have been no problems or complaints about noise since the cinema opened.

The Lessons

The commercial success of the cinema since it opened has vindicated the cinema operator's belief in the contribution which architecture can make to commercial success. In the words of Lyn Goleby of City Screen 'The bricks and mortar are as important as the celluloid'.

Architecturally, the cinema demonstrates that it is possible to be theatrical and modern and restrained all at the same time. It illustrates that a difficult site can provide the solutions to design problems if it is approached imaginatively. It also shows that a use which is initially seen as threatening can come to be regarded as a socially highly desirable facility.



▲ The proscenium arch framing the entrance confidently proclaims the building, as well as inviting views through to the foyer and cafe.



◀ Nearby historic buildings: Church of St Mary Steps (left) and Bartholomew Street (right).



Retail Scheme, Davygate, York

Patient negotiation achieves approval for modern scheme



The new building is pulled back to reveal views of St Helen's Church along Davygate.

The Project

This project, designed by Panter Hudspith, is for a 4,500 sq m retail building containing four separate units.

The Site

The development sits on a prominent site next to St Helen's church in the middle of York. It replaces a 1960s concrete building designed by John Poulson and extends through to Little Stonegate at the rear of the site, where it incorporates a listed former Methodist chapel, which had been used as a printing works for many years. Apart from the church, the most dominant building in the immediate neighbourhood is the 1930s neo-Georgian building which curves along the opposite side of Davygate and houses the famous Betty's Tea Rooms.

The Problems

The problem for the architects was to design a building which would meet the requirements of modern retailing and would be acceptable on this sensitive site in a city which has often taken a conservative approach to design. At the same time, it was their ambition to produce a work of high quality modern architecture and avoid obvious borrowings from historic styles. Specifically, the building had to strike a suitable relationship with the adjacent church and with the widely differing listed and unlisted buildings in the immediate vicinity. The Poulson building had done this by echoing the colour of the church in the concrete from which it was constructed and by echoing its strong vertical emphasis in its expressed structure. It was admired by some people because of this, and previous proposals for the redevelopment of the site had been rejected by the planning authority as banal and of poor quality. The architects were appointed as a result of the interest aroused by the cinema building they had recently designed for York. At the same time there was an influential body of opinion which was uneasy with the concept of an avowedly modern building on the site and which favoured a brick building with a pitched slate roof.



The Solutions

The architects decided that their building should defer to its setting in three particular ways. They set it out on a shallow curve, which echoes the curve of the 1930s building on the other side of the street and slightly opens up views to the church along Davygate. They used the same stone that the church is built from as the chief component of the street elevation. They adopted a calm, low key approach with a strong horizontal emphasis. This was provided by the exposed frame of the building and the slightly projecting cornice at eaves level. At the same time, the non-structural nature of the stone is emphasised by holding it in the exposed metal frame of the building and stepping out the upper floors slightly over the street. This device also echoes the form of traditional timber-framed buildings and thus provides a visual continuity with historic precedents as well as emphasising modernity. The use of stone panels and glazing on the upper floors represents an innovative response to the retail emphasis on the need for blind windowless boxes at upper storeys. Control over the appearance of the whole building was maintained by providing a set of rules for the design of individual shop fronts laid down by the architects and imposed on all potential occupants.

The progress of the scheme to planning approval was not entirely smooth, partly because of the position of conservation interests as mentioned above. It was assisted by informal support from the Royal Fine Art Commission and by the willingness of the architects to respond positively to criticisms and suggestions from the planning committee. This was most noticeable at the rear of the building, where a more obviously contextual approach using brick and regular window openings was adopted in place of a variation on the main elevation of the building. Once these changes had been made the scheme was approved and has been widely admired since its completion.

The Lessons

This project demonstrates that it is possible to use traditional materials in conjunction with modern ones in order to create a building which is at once contextual and modern and of high architectural quality. It shows that an enlightened attitude on the part of a planning department, coupled with willingness to compromise on the part of architects and their clients, can achieve permission for a challenging scheme on a highly sensitive historic site. It demonstrates that good modern architecture is not incompatible with the needs of retailing. Tony Dennis of York City Council said 'This building is seen by many as a most encouraging development, showing that modern architecture can make a positive contribution to the development of the city, while at the same time being polite towards its neighbours'.



The predominantly stone elevations carry echoes of the neighbouring church.



At the rear of the site, on Little Stonegate, a former chapel has been carefully restored.



Supermarket, Ludlow, Shropshire

Accommodating a bulky use in an historic market town



The building continues the street frontage on Corve Street, where the bulk of the supermarket is hidden behind a two-storey building containing more intimate uses, such as staff accommodation and a café.

The Project

The project, designed by MacCormac, Jamieson, Prichard, is for a Tesco supermarket and car-park in the historic market town of Ludlow.

The Site

The site was formerly occupied by a cattle market, which had taken place there for many years but moved to an out-of-town location. It lies on Corve Street, one of the main streets in the town, just within the former gateway to the medieval town (Ludlow is unusual in that Corve Street continued beyond the town walls and still does so as an almost unspoilt historic street). To the east of Corve Street the site runs along the south of Station Drive to the railway station itself. Here the historic grain of the town breaks down and the only building of any significance is a large former mill, which itself is one of the most prominent buildings in the town after the castle and the church. From east to west there is a slight fall across the site. Because it lies at the foot of the hill on which the centre of Ludlow stands, and which rises from it towards the south, the site has considerable prominence in views from the north and from high land around the town.

The Problems

The central problem to be tackled in this project was that of designing a large modern building which would sit well on a prominent site in an unspoilt historic town where virtually all the other buildings are considerably smaller. The fall across the site also presented problems in achieving access both from Corve Street and from the other side of the building.

In addition, there was a long and contentious planning history behind this proposal. Before the appointment of the current architects this had led to two planning inquiries which failed to achieve approved schemes. The first of these inquiries established the use of the site for a supermarket and required that the building should be at the Corve Street side of the site rather than the railway station side. It rejected the idea of an out-of-town supermarket for Ludlow. The second inquiry rejected, on design grounds, three alternative schemes, two prepared by architects

appointed by Tesco and one prepared by the planning authority itself. This led to the appointment of the architects of the current scheme after a small informal competition by invitation, during which various official bodies were consulted.

Another element of difficulty was provided by the fact that Ludlow has an active and articulate civic society devoted to the protection of its historic character, and the long-drawn-out battle over the site naturally led to a hardening and polarisation of attitudes. A significant body of opinion in the town was never reconciled to the idea of a supermarket at all.

The Solutions

The dominant feature of the building is a curving metal roof which follows the contours of the town by rising from north to south. In addition to relating well to the site visually, this structurally inventive roof has led directly to the creation of a building which has no columns to interrupt the shopping area and which is highly efficient in its use of energy. The only element of the building to sit directly on the Corve Street frontage is a low tower which houses staff accommodation and acts as a marker for the store; the remainder of the frontage sits behind a low terrace and wall. As well as two entrances to the store, it is largely occupied by a café which provides activity on the street. The long frontage on Station Drive is low and is broken by a courtyard which is planted with a tree and provides a view into the store.

The main building material used is a hand-made local brick, laid in Flemish garden wall bond. This was the subject of extensive consultation with the local planning authority, which also specified that the architect of the scheme should be retained to supervise its construction. The roof is of stainless steel, coated so that it resembles lead.

The completed building has won over most of the local opinion which was opposed to the earlier schemes for the site and even to the idea of a supermarket on the site at all.

The Lessons

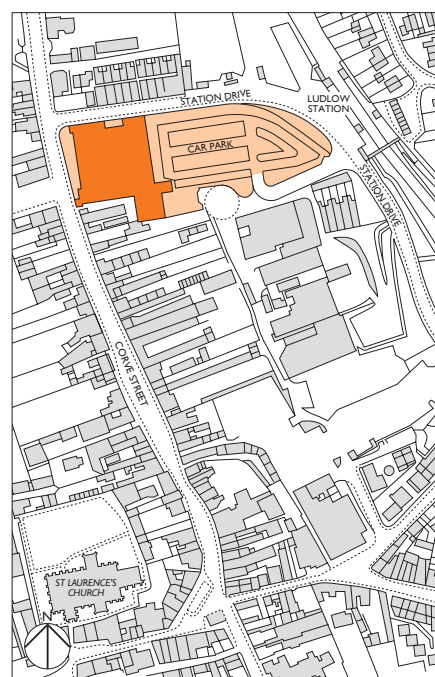
The history of this project demonstrates that perseverance in the face of many obstacles can result in architectural excellence, even in a type of building which usually has no design merits at all. It demonstrates that a large modern building can be designed so as to sit comfortably in an historic town. It shows that site difficulties and demanding uses can actually generate good architecture, and that a local authority, which is determined to do so, can ensure that a building is constructed as designed with high quality materials and detailing. James Caird of South Shropshire District Council says 'We believe that after many years of frustration and indecision the outcome has been a building which fits well into Ludlow and which we can be proud of.'



The frontage to Corve Street is composed of hand-made local brick.



The supermarket roof follows the form of the land so that it blends well into the townscape.



The Bars, Chester

Reinterpretation of local vernacular for a volume housebuilder on a complex inner city site



The open gables overlooking Grosvenor Park offer a modern reinterpretation of architectural details familiar from Chester's famous Rows.

The Project

This project, designed by Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall, consists of 248 flats for Wimpey Homes.

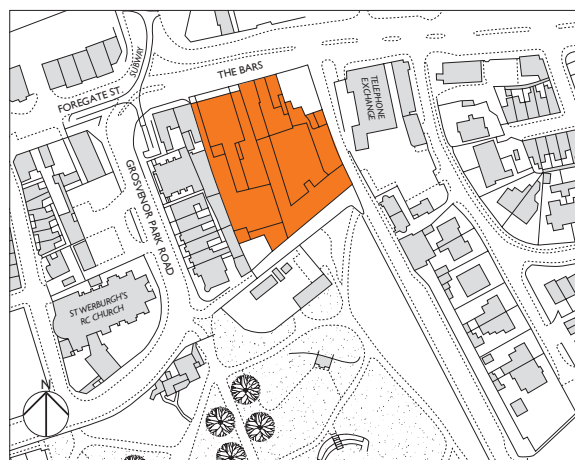
The Site

The site is a difficult one. It lies on Foregate Street, a busy main road at the entrance to the historic city centre of Chester. At one corner is a two-storey listed building, the façade of which was moved when the road was widened in the 1930s, but which still contains timbers from the 16th century. Behind the site, across which there is a considerable drop in level, lies an historic municipal park running down to the River Dee. Bordering one edge of the site is a row of late 19th-century listed buildings, comprising a church and a terrace of houses by the interesting Chester architect John Douglas. Below the site there are believed to be valuable archaeological deposits needing to remain undisturbed.

Before the appointment of the architects of the current scheme there were two proposals for commercial buildings on the site, both of which were rejected on design grounds by the local authority, after critical comment from the Royal Fine Art Commission.

The Problems

The problems of this scheme were those of designing a building which would provide attractive and marketable housing accommodation at the same time as dealing with the site constraints. The noise at the front of the site made it difficult to contemplate living rooms on that side. The listed building on the corner of the site needed not to be overwhelmed by the new development. The John Douglas buildings needed a visually sympathetic neighbour which did not overlook them from the back. The park required a building which did not spoil the views out of it and it was necessary to build in a way which did not disturb the archaeological deposits. A method had to be found of resolving the problem of the change in levels across the site. Car parking was also required.



The Solutions

Three basic decisions generated the architecture of this scheme. The first was to set back from the frontage on Foregate Street. This helped with the noise from that road. It also deferred to the listed building on that frontage, created a garden courtyard onto the street and avoided any possibility of overlooking from the street into the flats (the decision to put kitchens and bathrooms on this side of the building also helped with the noise problem). The second major decision was to house car parking beneath the building but above the level of the archaeology, with an entrance at the eastern corner of the site on the Headland, the only feasible point from a traffic management point of view. This made it possible to accommodate the change in levels across the site. It also pointed the way to the final decision, to develop around a garden courtyard at the centre of the scheme, with a lower range to the east in order not to overlook the rear of the John Douglas buildings. The flats in the northern range have their living rooms overlooking this courtyard and gaining light from the southern aspect.

By using dark red brick as the basic building material, with some stone dressings and more extensive use of dark stained timber, the architects have harked back to the traditional materials and details employed in Chester, without producing a building which could be mistaken for an historic one. The open gables overlooking the park, for example, echo the historic language of Chester and are reminiscent of the famous Rows, but their form and use to cover and shade balconies are quite novel. Seen from the park they provide a varied romantic skyline which keeps generally below the height of the tallest trees.

The Lessons

This scheme shows that it is possible to achieve a building of quality on a site which is constrained by a large number of apparently intractable problems, and that those difficulties themselves can generate good architecture. It demonstrates that decisions to refuse schemes on design grounds rather than being swayed by considerations of the difficulty of achieving anything in such places may be justified. It also shows that historic materials and detailing can be adopted in ways which at the same time serve current purposes and sit happily in an historic context provided that they are carefully considered. In this case the local authority was involved in the choice of brick along with the development team. Finally, it demonstrates that an architecturally distinguished project can make excellent business for a volume house-builder.

Graham Hughes of Wimpey Homes said 'Jane Darbyshire's excellent design has helped us to exceed all our commercial targets'.



The relationship of the new housing to the listed buildings by John Douglas.

Another listed building forms the corner of the site on the Bars.



14 Thorp Architectural Model-Makers' Studio, Sunningdale, Berkshire

Imaginative insertion enhances a village setting



The Project

This scheme, designed by Corrigan, Soundy, Kilaiditi Architects, involves the provision of a new studio for a firm of architectural model-makers who were already based in Sunningdale but wished to expand and rationalise their accommodation following the acquisition of another business.

The Site

The site is a strip of land, formerly occupied by a garage and motorcar show room, directly opposite Sunningdale church at the centre of the village and conservation area. It runs between Sunningdale High Street and Whitmore Lane, just to the north of the point where these two streets merge. The listed church is a 19th-century, Venetian gothic brick building with a spire. It and the public house are now the only two non-residential uses in the village high street. Except for the church, the neighbourhood consists entirely of two-storey buildings of modest domestic scale and the site is at the edge of the built-up area of the village.

The Problems

The design problem involved producing a building which would satisfy the clients' need for premises which would appeal to their architect clients and promote their business as an architecture-related one, and at the same time integrate satisfactorily into the village in terms of scale and style. There was also a need to re-establish the edges of the site, which had been eroded by the former uses and was crossed by an informal foot-path. There were technical environmental problems to overcome within the building in the management of noise and fumes from the model-making activities and from the fact that the site faces south east and is therefore prone to solar gain through any highly-glazed elevation.

The Solutions

Immediately opposite the church, the edge of the site was re-established by creating two houses, one formed by converting the car show-room and one newly designed in a conventional, sub-vernacular style, not by the architects of the studio. The entrance to the site on Whitmore Lane is flanked by a red brick wall which relates the site to the neighbouring houses. Past the wall is a courtyard, with the entrance block clad in render straight ahead and the glazed main studio to the right. The use of over-hanging eaves, grey glass and blinds enables the problem of heat gain from sunlight to be dealt with and adds interest to the architecture. The integration of services and ventilation within the structure of the building also helps both with efficiency and visual interest. An impressive height is achieved at the front of the building without over-shadowing the nearby houses by adopting a roof form that curves up from the back of the site. This, too, produces interest in the architecture by responding to the constraints of the site and helps the flow of air through the naturally ventilated building.

These clients are members of the local community and are local employers, and the architects are also local and known for their work in sensitive historic settings. This doubtless helped to achieve a favourable reception for the proposal, but this was not taken for granted by the client or by the architect. They organised a careful programme of consultation meetings with neighbours and the local community in which the proposal was explained on site. This assisted public understanding of the scheme and helped its acceptance. Now that it is completed it is popular locally. The local authority was supportive of the approach adopted throughout the planning process.

The Lessons

This project demonstrates that it is possible to achieve high architectural standards in cases where a boring industrial shed would be the most likely outcome. It shows that site constraints can generate architectural quality and it demonstrates that local consultation and an enlightened planning authority can achieve acceptance for a strong modern architectural idiom in unusual circumstances.



The use of brick and the downward curving roof help the new building to relate to its surroundings.

Services such as vents are integrated and clearly expressed in the structure of the building.



Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

Picking up cues without resorting to imitation



The junction between old and new is handled sensitively and with a light touch.

The Project

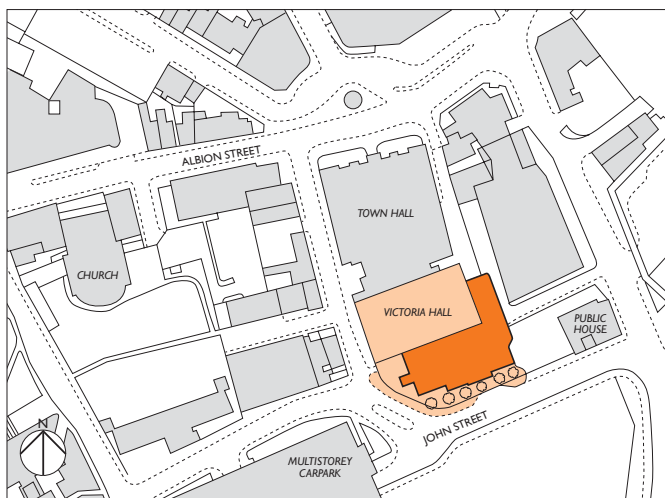
The project, designed by Levitt Bernstein, consists of the extension and adaptation of a Grade II listed Victorian concert hall in order to provide better facilities for audiences and performers. These include bars, office accommodation, ticket office, meeting and function rooms and lavatories. There was also a need to provide disabled access to all parts of the house.

The Site

The site is immediately adjacent to the existing Victoria Hall, a classical building of the 1880s in brick and terracotta, and lies within the Albion Square conservation area. Its other immediate neighbour, however, is a poor example of a recent post-modern multi-storey carpark. Opposite the site of the extension is a potential development site now in use as a surface carpark, and beyond the Victoria Hall is Hanley town hall, like the Victoria Hall a listed late 19th-century classical building.

The Problems

The large problem presented by Hanley town centre was that of regenerating a tired and run-down area where life and commercial activity had been sucked into a new shopping centre and the maintenance of both buildings and public realm had been largely neglected. Within that context the Victoria Hall, which was operating fairly successfully as a touring venue for various sorts of performing arts, including both popular and classical music, was seen as a potential catalyst for wider regeneration. Hence the local authority's 'cultural quarter' initiative, of which this project is an important part. The problems presented by the project itself were those of finding an appropriate architectural language to sit alongside the historic building; of joining the new and old fabric to one another in an acceptable way; and of striking a balance between deference on the one hand and the need to celebrate the improvement in facilities and new life for the hall on the other.



The Solutions

The new facilities are provided in a range of building alongside the original concert hall. At roof level the two buildings are joined by a glazed skylight running the length of the range and sitting as lightly as possible on the eaves of the original hall. Across the narrow atrium beneath this skylight a series of bridges provide access into the performance space, which itself has been refurbished.

The space within the new building is conceived of as one, with a staircase and lift shaft rising through it and the various facilities disposed in separate pods within the space. Maximum use is made of the staircase, landings and bridges to provide interesting and exciting views through and out of the building, and the lift provides convenient access for disabled people to all parts of the building.

The exterior of the building pays homage to the listed building in two ways in particular. In the first place its main elevation is set back from that of the listed building. This not only increases the sense of separation between the two elements, but also serves the practical purpose of creating a small courtyard in front of the main entrance to the hall. Secondly, in addition to the overtly modern materials of metal and glass, considerable use is made of terracotta panels as a material to clad the new building. This relates it in colour as well as material to the listed building, and of course it has an added resonance as the material of the Potteries.

In its proportions and detailing, however, the new building makes no concessions to its neighbour and is entirely of its own time. Elements within the building are expressed on the exterior, the terracotta panels are hung from the façade in a way that underlines their non-structural nature, the composition is of rectangular planes and projections and the flat roof and projecting sunshading are supported on slender metal columns rising the full height of the building.

Since it re-opened in 1998 the Victoria Hall has exceeded all its visitor targets. The cultural quarter initiative, which also includes the conversion by the same architects of a Grade II* listed cinema to provide a theatre, has brought about considerable changes in the appearance and atmosphere of this part of the city centre.

The Lessons

The project demonstrates that it is possible to extend an historic building in a way that respects it and at the same time makes a positive contemporary architectural statement. It shows that as a result of such an initiative new life can be given to the building itself and to its neighbourhood. In the words of Dave Chetwyn of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 'The building is considered to be a major success in terms of its functioning... In architectural history terms it may be considered the most significant work in North Staffordshire for three and a half decades'.



The setting back of the extension ensures that it defers to Victoria Hall.

At the same time as deferring to Victoria Hall, the new building has to be assertive enough hold its own in a fractured context.



Materials traditional to Stoke-on-Trent are extensively used but in an unequivocally modern way.





Conclusions

The case studies demonstrate a number of ways in which good architecture can be achieved on sensitive sites. Equally importantly, they show that most of the excuses offered for failing to achieve high design standards in such places are not valid. The general, most important lesson from all the studies is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and careful character appraisal of the context. This lesson is of universal application. For example, what is appropriate in an area made up of buildings of varied types and scales will be different from what can be permitted in the context of formally laid out streets and squares or an area with a strong unified character.

The studies also lead to a number of more specific conclusions.

- The best buildings result from a creative dialogue between the architect, client, local planning authority and others; pre-application discussions are essential
- The local planning authority and other consultees can insist on good architecture and help to achieve it.
- Difficult sites should generate good architecture, and are not an excuse for not achieving it.
- With skill and care, it is possible to accommodate large modern uses within the grain of historic settings.
- High environmental standards can help generate good architecture.
- Sensitivity to context and the use of traditional materials are not incompatible with contemporary architecture.
- Good design does not stop at the front door, but extends into public areas beyond the building
- High-density housing does not necessarily involve building high or disrupting the urban grain and it can be commercially highly successful.
- Successful architecture can be produced either by following historic precedents closely, by adapting them or by contrasting with them.
- In a diverse context a contemporary building may be less visually intrusive than one making a failed attempt to follow historic precedents.

Appraising a Proposal

The case studies and the conclusions arising from them point to certain lessons for everyone involved in appraising planning applications. Any such proposal will need to be considered from a number of different aspects. Design quality should be one of the most important of these, particularly if the site lies in a conservation area or is sensitive in some other way. In the final analysis it is true that there is a subjective element in judgements about design quality and people often disagree about what they like. For example, in this publication everyone will have favourites amongst the case studies and those they like less. But such differences of opinion and matters of personal taste should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it is possible to arrive at opinions about design quality that are based on objective criteria. There are many ways of doing this, but any such process is likely to include asking the following questions. They encompass both the quality of the building itself and its quality as a contribution to the urban design of the neighbourhood in which it is situated:

- How does the proposed building relate to its specific site? Is there a positive and imaginative response to any problems and constraints? Have the physical aspects of the site been considered, such as any changes in level within or beyond it? Are access arrangements convenient and existing routes respected? Can the amount of accommodation required be fitted on the site in an elegant way?
 - Is the quality as high? Are there interesting comparisons or contrasts in the use of materials? How will the colours work together?
- Is the architecture of the building suitable for the uses it contains? Is it trying to be too grand or pretending to be more modest than it really is?
- How does the architecture present itself to the viewer? Is there a strong composition in the pattern of solid to opening in the façade? Does the detailing of the materials show signs of careful thought or originality in the way the building is put together?
- What contribution, if any, does the proposal make to the public realm? If new open space is created, is it clear that it will provide a positive benefit and have a genuine use?
- In the wider setting, has the impact of the building in views and vistas been considered? Does it make a positive or negative impact? Does it form an harmonious group or composition with existing buildings or features in the landscape? Does it distract the eye from the focus of the view and if so does it provide something better to look at?
- How does the proposal relate to its wider setting? Are the street pattern and grain of the surroundings respected? Are there changes in height between the existing and new development and if so how are they managed? Will the result enhance or damage the quality of the townscape?
- How is the density of the proposal related to that of existing and neighbouring uses? If there are differences, are they acceptable?
- Has the impact of the building in close views been assessed? Is it either weak or overpowering? Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?
- What materials are used? How do they relate to those of the surrounding buildings?

Further Reading

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- What Makes a Good Building?*, Royal Fine Art Commission 1994
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This publication aims to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. It aims to do this by example, showing a series of case studies in which achievement is far above the ordinary and trying to draw some lessons both about design and about the development and planning process. As a result, it is hoped that people will be encouraged to emulate the commitment and dedication shown by the clients, architects, planning officers and committee members involved in the projects illustrated and be able to learn from their experience.

