

Abode, Cambridge

Contributors: Countryside Properties
Proctor and Matthews Architects

Responding to Context

Abode forms part of Great Kneighton in Cambridge. This major mixed use community will ultimately comprise 2,550 homes in the city's Southern Fringe growth area.

The scheme was developed by Countryside Properties and designed by architects Proctor and Matthews.

Contemporary design drawing on historic vernacular

"This was the first major growth site in Cambridge for a long time. Cambridge City Council wanted a design to put the city on the map and we've risen to the challenge."

Associate Director – Development,
Countryside Properties

A masterplan for Great Kneighton was prepared by Countryside Properties. The 444 homes at Abode occupy a prime position in the scheme, within easy reach of community, transport, educational and work facilities. This component of the wider site was master-planned by Proctor and Matthews.

The design challenge for Abode was to deliver sustainable homes for 21st century living whilst also remaining sensitive to the local environment and architectural forms of historic Cambridge. The design skills to meet this challenge involved detailed research, local understanding and design flexibility – ultimately leading to award-winning success.

The importance of research and understanding local context

"Our unique value is being able to identify and unlock the real potential in a site."

Director, Proctor and Matthews

Designing new communities should begin with researching the history and character of a place, and understanding the site in its wider context. This research was particularly important at Abode, where Countryside Properties and architects Proctor and Matthews had the vision and skill to create a modern housing development that would meet Code for Sustainable Homes level 4, whilst drawing on historic and local housing types.





With some 40 per cent of the space at Abode being allocated for affordable (social) housing, the architect’s design cleverly created a mix of housing types across the site, appropriate for different markets. These begin with a formal courtyard and blending out sequentially to loose clusters of smaller buildings that are also sensitive to the surrounding countryside.

Design flexibility

A flexible design approach means being willing to adapt designs to respond to emerging issues and challenges. Mitigating these early avoids the risk of bigger problems later on, which can be harder to resolve after construction.

During the design of Abode, Countryside Properties identified that a new fleet of larger fire engines were being brought into service, making it important to design-in sufficiently large turning spaces. Another challenge was the need to maintain a large roundabout for a major connecting road at the entrance of the site, which could have led to significant noise problems for residents. Proctor and Matthews’ Director explained their design response:

“we designed a glass screen to be placed around the top level of the central court providing an acoustic buffer to private amenity terraces.”

Designing sustainable homes for current and future generations

“We worked with the architect to ensure the design would lead to real added value for the local community.”

Associate Director for Development, Countryside Properties

The properties were designed to the Lifetime Homes standard, which sets out sixteen design criteria intended to make them more easily adaptable for later living, at minimal cost.

The intelligent approach to design demonstrated on Abode contributed to the scheme winning several awards for design excellence, inclusivity for users and positive community impact.



Design-led customer focus groups

“We looked at how Cambridge developed over time, including a mix of monastic/collegiate courts, barns, courtyard features, village properties with gables and yards perpendicular to the high street”.

Director, Proctor and Matthews

“The design drew inspiration from Cambridge College Courts – a square at the heart of the scheme of a size similar to Trinity College court – as well as the ‘long houses’ which complement existing settlements throughout Cambridgeshire villages.”

Associate Director – Development, Countryside Properties