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Dyana Songi dodges the big feet in Nantes: https://is.gd/Machinesdelile
Staying fit and healthy whilst having some fun can be a recipe for a long, healthy life. Happily, many local councils UK nationwide have embraced this doctrine. The council-run Eastern Leisure Centre in Cardiff had more than 250,000 users last year, but was in urgent need of modernisation. New features would include an open reception area, improved changing rooms, gym and soft play facilities; a new dance studio and spin room. Councillor Peter Bradbury, cabinet member for community development, Co-operatives and social enterprise, said at the time, “The modernisation of Eastern Leisure Centre has enjoyed strong support from both the community and elected councillors so this multi-million-pound investment will be welcome news.”

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To untrained eyes, this photo might seem somewhat muddled, but for Alastair Wiper, it’s about as close as it comes to perfection. He came to photography long after university and a stint as an itinerant surfer dude, a sous chef in France and a wannabe T-shirt designer. When he moved to Copenhagen and began working at a design firm, the photography just came out of the lack of anyone there to do it; Wiper only knew he was hooked when he realised he’d built a darkroom in his flat.

It’s this sense of pleasing randomness that draws Wiper to his image of engineer Felix Trombe’s 1949 solar furnace, sited in Mont Louis’ clear mountain air. It too was a pet project turned obsession, that spawned the nine-storey solar furnace further down the road in Odeille; whose pure, concentrated heat is still used by NASA to check the resistance of its satellites to atmospheric re-entry.

At first the image just poses questions: about the steel structure, the box, the big mirror in the copse, who the man in the mask is and the reason for that plastic chair. But the answer evaporates the very centre of the image, the effect pointed at by the guy with the stick. The collector’s focus generates temperatures in excess of 3,500˚C,’ Wiper says non-chalantly. ‘It’s about the size of a saucepan.’
Buildings
Theatre
Earlsfield in south-west London is undergoing a mini architecture building boom. The Stirling Prize winning Burntwood School by AHMM completed in 2014, Allies and Morrison’s new RIBA Award-winning Banham security head office and showroom opened in 2015 beside the river Wandle, and now the redesigned and doubled in size Tara Theatre on Garratt Lane has joined the mix. For a reasonably dense suburban place, there’s quite a lot of other building work taking place too: supermarkets, flats, restaurants and bars.

Designed by large architectural firm Aedas – which absorbed theatre specialist RHWL Arts Team in 2015 – Tara Theatre is a small architectural project packed with character. It is the home of Tara Arts, a multicultural theatre company – and the only one of its kind in the UK – founded by Jatinder Verma in response to the racist murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar, a 17-year old Sikh boy living in Southall, in 1976.

Tara’s inaugural production was Sacrifice, an anti-war play written by poet Rabindranath Tagore, and the group has been producing contemporary and reworked plays since 1977 for both its own theatre and touring productions. The theatre moved to its current site, an end of terrace on a Victorian shopping parade by the station and railway.

Character act

Using a rich palette of natural materials and warm colours and textures, Aedas creates an intimate scene at London’s expanded Tara Theatre

Words: Isabelle Priest

IN NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100 seat auditorium</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>493m² gross internal area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.9 kg CO₂/m² emission rate</td>
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</table>

Visitors enter through ornate Indian double doors into an unexpected cosy theatre of exposed brick, oak panelling, red seats, natural light and a rammed earth stage.

Below Aedas’ Arts Team has inserted a mini rendered tower in the centre of the site, behind the Victorian shop fronts, to accommodate the extra office and rehearsal room.
TOPS ON TOP

Cindy Crawford on Silestone Countertop

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Buildings
Theatre

The building was long overdue,’ says Verma. ‘In the theatre world, small creates big. This is the only multiculturalism theatre in the UK: it needed to be better enshrined in bricks and mortar.’

The organisation secured 70% funding from the Arts Council’s capital programme, the remaining 30% coming from fundraising. The client put together a shortlist and invited the architect to meet at an interview, before asking it to put together a brief.

‘Julian Middleton and his team at Aedas were extremely responsive to our ideas,’ says Verma. ‘They were tremendously silent and reflective. We liked that.’

The resulting building keeps the memory of the original alive by retaining its 1896 brick facades, complete with broken pediment and second floor gabled window. In contrast, a square four-storey rendered tower behind in

The RIBA Journal May 2017
The first rammed earth stage in the UK takes after those found in India. A sliding shutter can be pulled across the external clerestory window during performances.

The centre of the site juxtaposes new and old, and, with its mustard colour ‘banyan’ tree parapet facade, brings together east and west.

Inside, this piecing together of old and new, east and west continues. As the feasibility study revealed that British Rail needed access to the land between its line and the building, the theatre had to go upwards – a case helped by a mixed use building on the opposite side of the railway line. The small cellar is excavated into a full basement to include a green room with separate access to the stage and WCs. On the first floor are a large rehearsal room towards the street and a control room with clear lines of sight to the stage. The second floor has been transformed into a charming head office for Tara Arts’ permanent staff, while a new storey on the top, reached by a tiny spiral stair in the main office, has been added to accommodate a quiet meeting room with 360-degree views over London and a small outdoor terrace.

The pièce de résistance, though, is of course the theatre itself, which leads off the box office/theatre café at ground level and has been extended upwards and marginally outwards.

“We wanted natural materials, even natural light,” explains Middleton.

The architecture moves away from the concept of a black box theatre, to include both internal and external windows, exposed brick walls (reclaimed from the original building), oak panelling and even the UK’s first rammed earth stage, made from red Jurassic Devon soil. The double-height space has room for a two-storey stage; actors swing in from a balcony window on the first floor and the low front row of seating practically becomes part of the stage. The timber and red velvet seats themselves – some narrow, some lounging, some raised – are characterful too, having been rescued from Ian Ritchie Architects’ temporary Royal Shakespeare Company theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

This space speaks of the rest of the building too where salvaged highly decorative and colourful Indian timber doors have been combined into the architecture, alongside shutters, panels and windows. The artfully distressed sits comfortably next to coloured walls, modern plaster and floors. It’s fun and full of idiosyncrasies, and has been improved in terms of building performance too – there are 16 solar panels, sedum roofs and better acoustics, a crucial factor with the railway line next door. The only testing point is how the taller auditorium has reduced access to light for the small row of workers’ cottages behind.

Yet the success of the redesign is beyond just attracting large audiences. It’s also about extending the theatre’s reach in spreading its message in favour of multiculturalism. Early indicators suggest that on average 58% of the audience now comes from outside the local area, up by 13%. The entrance foyer/office café is open during the day, and the theatre is gaining extra revenue by letting out the rehearsal room to local community groups and businesses. Tara’s long-term future has been secured. What’s more, people like it, and it has become a destination of interest for local history tours, which it wasn’t before.

‘It feels like my chest has expanded,’ says Verma. ‘We had once chance and couldn’t get it wrong’.

It seems they haven’t. •
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Precious stones

When the Cotswold village of Burford decided to treat itself to a rationalised community centre, Acanthus Clews relied on the famous local stone to keep the historic and aesthetic faith.

Words: Eleanor Young  Photographs: Andy Marshall

Burford plays up to the chocolate box image of the Cotswold village – even its fire station has more than a bit of the medieval threshing barn about it. But what was once a prosperous hub of the wool trade sank into economic decline when the trains were routed miles away from its sunny Cotswold stone and merchants’ houses – until another sort of prosperity arrived with the day-trippers and coach parties, come to visit its intact heritage, ungrubbied by decades of development and change.

One of their stopping off points is the church of St John the Baptist, a parish church started in 1175 that has grown with Burford itself: 12th century, 15th century, Victorian. It has 100,000 visitors a year. And the quiet church, as it was, has been reinvigorated with new mission over the last two decades. When the long lease for the Church-owned Warwick Hall ended, the proselytising desire to engage with the wider community – and need to find space for the activities in which the church already engaged – came together into a brief for a refurbishment and extension. The hall had long been used for exercise classes and baby groups but the space, added to over time, was awkwardly chopped up with the normal problems of level changes and inadequate loos and kitchens.

Enter Banbury-based conservation architect Acanthus Clews. Already engaged for St John the Baptist’s quinquennial inspections, its relationship with the church surely made it the right firm to tend to this hall, which along with a row of almshouses lines the...
The new building steps happily away from the orthodoxy of glass and steel delineating the new from the old, to be part of the continuum of the place.

entrance to the churchyard. But this practice is entering its second generation with an unexpected expertise and gentle ambition. Its director since 2008 is David Finlay, whose experience includes Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne while at Rick Mather Architects, and BBC Scotland and Barcelona Law Courts for David Chipperfield. His expertise is demonstrated in this project which is more than a tending to a historic building, or painstakingly precise restoration. It takes the original Warwick Hall and its congested hinterland of accretions to create a bigger, spacious, easy-to-navigate centre that has internal lightness and simplicity and a grounded but unassuming presence alongside the church.

An unassuming presence is hardly surprising for a project that incorporates a grade II-listed hall alongside a grade I-listed church, attracting close scrutiny from Historic England and the Church of England’s own Oxfordshire Diocesan Advisory Committee. But there is a real compositional skill in the way the new section, flanked delicately with more recessive glass, ducks down behind the perimeter walls to offer a gable end to the churchyard. The long roof of this second hall settles in comfortably with its hummock of graduated Cotswold limestone tiles. A roof light along its length is concealed on the ridge by the angles of asymmetry in the double pitched roof (an asymmetry shared with the original Warwick Hall). It maintains a domestic scale externally that fits its precious surroundings. While it is a design that would satisfy those who prefer new architecture – or at least new elevations – to remain invisible, it steps happily away from the orthodoxy of glass and steel delineating the new from the old, to be part of the continuum of the place.
In a large part that is due to the stone-work which grounds the whole building. On the outside a seamless repair has raised the churchyard wall, the aged stone of an anomalous and crumbling range behind it repurposed to avoid the glaring brightness of new stone. On the gable ends Finlay drew each course (not such a chore in a practice used to colour coding each stone of a cathedral facade by its state of repair). Different depths draw attention to the horizontality and craftsmanship, and align beautifully to frame a first floor picture window above the dry stone wall. Originally, the rough sawn finish of the ashlar of the churchyard wall suggested a way of finishing the new stone that would be in keeping with its surroundings. But when Finlay saw the vagaries of every joint exposed in the unevenness he asked the masons to sand it down as normal.

Inside, two strong arms of the rubble stone walls – one edging the churchyard and the other Warwick Hall – lend solid character to the space. The first runs the length of the churchyard entrance and café and out into the garden overlooking a smooth flowing mill race of the River Windrush. The second wall is alongside the stair, its leaded panes and a doorway which was bricked up before living memory imparting a sense of the tall Warwick Hall that many locals have known and loved over the years. This texture offsets
the spaciously plain interior. There are no frills to the internal specifications, which reflects both a humility in the design compared to its ecclesiastical neighbour, and the fact that a third of the budget went on stone, the basement and ground source heat pumps. There is an airiness and simplicity that welcomes wheelchairs, pushchairs and exploring toddlers, and tells you the youth club can operate here. Despite the rich carvings and memorials of the church, this is determinedly a modern working space. The café is a clear demonstration of this: it is light even though a plan to knock a window through the churchyard wall was prevented. It is lit by rooflights – two circular and one running the building’s length – and end windows that look onto the garden. Hard surfaces and large tables – buzzing by 11am – contrast with the tight spaces and froufrou decorations of Burford high street cafés (though sadly also absent here is the local lardy cake they offer).

The second hall carries on this theme of good light (a slim clerestory as well as a rooflight) and restraint, with grey finishes. There is none of the timber or structural play that many such halls use to grace a utilitarian space. But the cleanness of the lines, the generous top light and garden views make this a pleasant, usable space – perhaps more so than the original Warwick Hall itself. There, the dimensions feel rather awkward despite interesting historic detail: it is a narrow room with high ceilings and high schoolroom.

Below You could call this a parish hall but despite the plainness it is something a little grander. Alongside is the café.

The cleanness of the lines, generous top light and garden views make this a pleasant, usable space.
Buildings
Community centre

The second hall is deliberately multi-purpose, although precisely what that meant changed over its 10 year gestation. Windows that limit the views and natural light. The second hall is also deliberately multi-purpose, although precisely what that meant changed over its 10 year gestation. So it can be blacked out with blinds and sliding acoustic partitions across ground floor door and windows, cutting out noise and the views into the café and garden. Or it can be opened up to them, say during Burford Festival, so almost an entire corner of the hall is part of a larger space. It can also be air conditioned so late lettings behind closed doors don’t disturb almshouse residents next door.

The ambitions and remit for these halls are wider than even a church of an evangelical bent. Burford is has always lacked a spacious hall – although Warwick Hall filled in for many years – and there was a fund set aside some years ago to build one. This was rolled into the project and brought with it accommodation for the needs of daycare users, laundry facilities and a disability-friendly toilet. It no doubt also helped fund the large basement which provides storage for both the church and regular users. That might mean large print scrabble and a table cloth for those running the regular elderly daycare sessions, extra chairs and learning materials for the Sunday School or largescale toys for the toddler group.

Visiting Burford on a sunny summer day, chock a block with day trippers and tour groups, you wonder how it can exist as a local centre. The calm space that Acanthus Clews and the church have created in the community centre feels like it can serve local residents as a haven and a meeting place, as well as having the capacity to open up to visitors and bring the two groups together.

Left The café sits alongside the historic churchyard wall, primarily lit from above.

Below The rounded gable end of the new hall looks out over the mill race of the River Windrush.

Credits
Client St John the Baptist Church, Burford
Architect Acanthus Clews Architects
Quantity surveyor Baquz Sworn King
Structural engineer Price & Myers
M&E engineer Environmental Engineering Partnership
Landscape architect Clews Landscape Architects
Audio visual consultant Smart Sense
Lighting designer Firefly Lighting Design
Acoustic engineer Arup Acoustic
Main contractor Edgar Taylor
Stone subcontractor OG Stonemasonry
Structural glazing IQ Glass
Roofing subcontractor Everest Roofing

The RIBA Journal May 2017
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Welcome home

The first 38 homes in the 993-dwelling Alma Estate regeneration in Enfield look lovely, but there are Faustian aspects to its deal to raise design standards

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek

What’s in a name? In its own PR, Karavusvic Carson refers to it as Academy Street, while Enfield Council calls it Dujardin Mews. Co-architect Maccenor Lavington accords it no name at all on its website – perhaps it’s too busy doing its 725-home bit on the huge Meridian Water site at nearby Lockwood reservoir, to update a webpage. But while laying out this feature on the first tranche of housing – part of the redevelopment of the 1960s Alma Estate in Ponders End – our art editor gives it the working title of ‘Coronation Street’, and I can see where she’s coming from.

I mean, Dujardin Mews is just a Franco-English iteration of that post-modern condition cited in Joel Garreau’s ‘Edge City’, where housing developments get named after all the things that got destroyed to create them. Think of all the ‘Brookfields’, ‘Orchard Groves’ and ‘Meadowcrofts’ out there. When ‘Of-the-garden Mews’ went up, one assumes it was adieu to the wild industrial backland behind – here we go again – ‘Falcon Crescent’. But ‘Academy Street’ gives too much credit to the new £21 million, 1,000-pupil Oasis Academy, next to the sliver of a site handed to the architect by Enfield Council in 2013. While the school is a John McAslan one – it’s hardly a mirage worth marking for posterity.

No; visiting the project with the architects one bright, cold morning, harsh sunlight throwing the recessed entrances of its otherwise flat facades into sharp relief, there’s a distinct sense of Coronation Street stage-set about it; a single, ordered street of strangely crisp and well-detailed brick terraces bearing little relationship to anything around it; not the timber-clad school or the slightly down at heel suburban semis to the west; and certainly not the four 23-storey 1960s council blocks...
Clever, wide terraces make optimum use of a narrow strip of land next to the Academy; each has a garage with a terrace above it.
**Ground floor plan**

1. 1-bed apartment
2. 4-bed terraced houses
3. 3-bed terraced houses
4. 3-bed terraced house with parking
5. 2-bed maisonettes
6. 6 x 2-bed apartments
7. Public square to South Street and Alma estate
8. Link to Gardiner-St
9. Rear gardens of Falcon Crescent
10. Oasis Academy
11. School playground
12. Existing community centre
13. On-plot parking garage with terrace above
14. Double height living space
15. Bedroom
16. Recessed entrances
17. Freshfield Lane brickwork facades
18. Defensible space and bin store
19. Granite sett shared space, rain gardens and seating
20. Kitchen/dining room

**First floor plan**

**Sectional axonometric**

**IN NUMBERS**

3,650m² total area
48 dwellings/hectare
£2,117 cost per m²
4 units rated Code 5
The houses look lovely. I'd move in tomorrow – so would the art editor.

to the north, due to be replaced by the rest of the Countryside Properties development.

The art director has picked up on this artifice without even being there. Without access to any of the homes, my physical experience will be distinctly two-dimensional. Later, on the phone, Enfield’s deputy head of regeneration and housing Peter George will describe the Alma masterplan as one of the borough’s ‘flagship projects’ and Dujardin Mews, 38 homes for social rent and shared ownership as its figurehead. If it is, it feels as wooden at first glance.

It says as much about me as the new resident that I can, on a cursory glance, identify a four-pack of beer through the white plastic bag he’s carrying back at 11am in the morning. He’s making himself at home, I think, and why wouldn’t he? I imagine walking back with him, putting my feet up, cracking a can open and watching the latest ‘Homes under the Hammer.’ Because the houses look lovely. I’d move in tomorrow – so would the art editor.

Peter George says he feels vindicated by this, as the project is the first social housing to be built directly by the borough in 40 years. They are the first homes in the redevelopment of the estate – the rest will be done in three phases by Countryside’s other architect, Pollard Thomas Edwards. The £600 million Alma Estate regeneration is one of three major schemes in the borough, where market failure has led the council to attract private partners through aggressive incentivisation, such as at the £46 million Electric Quarter project in Enfield town centre. Both this and Alma are dwarfed in scale by the £6 billion Meridian Water, with developers Barratt and SEGRO; aiming to provide over 10,000 homes and 6,000 permanent jobs.

In exchange for all this inward investment, Enfield is making developers an offer they can’t refuse. The deal, says George, involves actively de-risking projects by packaging land into parcels for development, remediating sites and smoothing the passage of consents. In exchange, Enfield wants higher levels of design quality and lower profit margins, increasing its home provision and making affordable homes affordable. At the 85ha Meridian Water site for example, this has involved a £100 million investment by the borough to purchase and remediate over 23ha of land.

After a 55% overall vote by Alma residents for regeneration, including abstentions, this will mean the demolition of 717 homes, 547 of which are council and 170 leaseholder owned, to create a new estate of 993 homes. The deal is not without its Faustian aspects; part of it involves the council securing vacant possession, which means, as a last resort, Compulsory Purchase Orders on leaseholder homes; and it seems some of the 45% minority are
The three-bed pitched roof homes on the west terrace are like a meme of a child’s drawing of a house.

proving resistant. There will also be an overall net reduction in the social housing component; at completion, of the total number of new homes, only 200 will be social rented and 200 shared ownership. Dujardin Mews, with its 50% split of 19 social rent and 19 shared ownership homes is as good as it gets; and, as the first manifestation of Enfield’s brave new world, has to be seen to be working. For Peter George, as well as for those looking down from the 23rd floor; this one street, looking like a new patch on an old coat, is more than just another brick terrace – it’s a form of covenant.

You get a sense from speaking to both architects that they felt this burden of responsibility when coming up with their design for the narrow strip of land. The council’s initial feasibility study, using planning guidance of a minimum 18m width between the back of the existing homes and any new ones, had only considered a single run of homes facing out over the school. It was the architects who felt that a greater sense of community would be engendered with a street of two terraces back into the existing layout.

After all, over 250 social rent homes are being lost, and with that the collective memory of the community is dissipated. George talks about the principle of choice – tenants can choose to stay or leave. Whole-sale regeneration can be a blunt instrument, driving through collective will: what if its economic model forces residents out of Alma?

But while Enfield’s George talks of the resident-led design approaches and the fact that homes are 10-15% bigger, the demolition is an erasure of memory – and perhaps of tenants too. George talks about the principle of choice – tenants can choose to stay or leave. Whole-sale regeneration can be a blunt instrument, driving through collective will: what if its economic model forces residents out of Alma?

After all, over 250 social rent homes are being lost, and with that the collective memory of the community is dissipated.

Dujardin Mews’ terraces embody this new business model and are the very best of what the Alma Estate will offer. A telling detail appears on the walls of Maccreanor Lavington’s east terrace; projecting brick headers casting strong shadows and window-sized blind recesses alluding to some past window tax; a history that never was.
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Expanding universe

The Ogden Centre for Fundamental Physics, Studio Libeskind’s contribution to Durham University’s science faculties, is dedicated to increasing our knowledge of the universe. It’s not a bad building, either

Words: Hugh Pearman Photographs: Hufton+Crow
Saints Cuthbert and Bede, buried one each end of Durham’s peerless Norman cathedral, are watching. This place is precious, shining as a beacon of enlightenment since the so-called Dark Ages. Its ancient centre with its pairing of castle and cathedral, perched high on a rocky peninsula round which the River Wear flows in a wooded gorge, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site commanding views from near and far. What the university gets up to here is important – historically, academically and aesthetically. Now Studio Libeskind has contributed a building dedicated to our understanding of the entire universe. Context, then, really IS everything.

It sits in the middle of the newer university area called Lower Mountjoy, established postwar in the lands running south and uphill, away from the centre. Here Durham established new science faculties in the 1950s, several by the young Sir William Whitfield, and beyond them a variety of new colleges set in generous landscaping in various styles by various hands including E.Vincent Harris, Sir Basil Spence, Stillman & Eastwick-Field, Sheppard Robson and James Burland, then of Arup Asso-
With form-driven architects you have to judge the building within their oeuvre rather wishing it was something else.

Right Admired by Libeskind but under threat, ACP’s nearby 1960s Dunelm House steps down the hill in masterful fashion.

Below right The view between the departmental levels.

With form-driven architects you have to judge the building within their oeuvre rather wishing it was something else.

Back in the centre, the best possible pedestrian route was made in the mid-1960s from the old colleges on the peninsula across the Wear gorge to the expanded university: Ove Arup’s high-level Kingsgate Bridge, a listed concrete masterpiece that leads straight past another masterpiece that should be listed: Dunelm House, the brutalist students union building by Richard Raine of Architects Co-Partnership.

Tragically – given that it is the best postwar building in the city – it is being considered for demolition by the university because of the cost of the concrete repairs it needs. It is a building that Libeskind himself admires and as a composition it blows his new faculty out of the water, but we are not comparing like with like: Dunelm House has an absolute gift of a sloping central riverside site which it exploits to the full, while the Ogden Centre for Fundamental Physics is on a former surface car park on the road out of town. But a broad pedestrian route, avoiding the road, passes right by it, thronged with students. And it enjoys a view right across to the central tower of the cathedral.

From that, Libeskind spun a Fibonacci spiral leading back to his site. The resulting building of characteristically spiralling forms and abruptly sliced outward-leaning ends, clad in timber and set against the wooded background of the hill behind, takes on something of the character of a gatehouse or bastion, mediating between the tight knot of faculty buildings and the sylvan setting of the residential colleges beyond.

You might say that all Libeskind buildings look like this and though this is by no means the case, it’s true that his style is very recognisable. But I take the view that with such a form-driven architect – as with the late Zaha Hadid – you really just have to accept that this is what they do, this is their approach, and you have to judge the building within the rest of their oeuvre rather than wish...
it was something else. After all, the dining hall of Spence’s St Aidan’s College up the hill is a dead ringer for parts of his contemporaneous Sussex University, so it’s not as if modern architects revisiting ideas is a new thing. And – despite the fact that it has been value-engineered, with some good features removed such as a proposed rooftop observation deck to make the most of the view – this is a good Libeskind building. Outside, what at first seems random shapeism gradually resolves itself as you walk around it, view it from all angles and distances, see how it responds to its immediate neighbours, the busy road and the lie of the land. Inside it is a sophisticated stacked sequence of three differently shaped floorplans with staggered vertical visual connections – no banal atrium here.

Where the horizontal planes overlap, the opportunity is taken to make outside terraces. There is a nice sheltered outdoor courtyard dug into the hillside at the south end.

The Ogden Centre is headed by the very engaging Professor Carlos Frenk, astrophysicist and computational cosmologist. Frenk has masterminded the establishment and now expansion of the Ogden Centre (named after its principal donor Sir Peter Ogden, a Durham physics graduate whose great wealth derives from merchant banking and computer services). Frenk is the very model of the engaged client: the way the building has emerged is as much his doing as Libeskind’s.

Such are his communication skills that – at a symposium on the day I visited – he managed to explain mankind’s entire knowledge of the universe so far in just half an hour, with total clarity, considerable wit and vital honesty. He knows what he – we – do NOT yet know, but nonetheless can theorise, give names to and test. In his department, they have mighty computers in which they cook up alternative universes. He showed a timelapse of one of these developing. ‘We open the computer and galaxies come out – don’t try this at home,’ he advises, and I’m still not absolutely sure he was joking. How rough is this magic?

Such wonders appeal greatly to Daniel Libeskind, of course, whose architecture always reaches beyond the merely functional, aspiring to the symbolic and the universal. And also to the cosmologically inclined critic, patron and landscape artist Charles Jencks whom I find in the building taking copious notes and talking to

Above The boss’s office: Prof Carlos Frenk sits in the prow with the cathedral in view.

Looking back the other way, the building forms a bastion or gatehouse on the road south out of town.
Above Daylit from a triangular incision and upstand in the roof slab, the spaces combine intense study with areas for relaxation and chat.
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Frenk. Then the Libeskind entourage arrives – Daniel, wife Nina and son Noam. Noam turns out to be an astrophysicist himself who did his PhD under Frenk in this very department. Things start to come into focus. The Libeskinds know this city, its buildings, its topography. Noam persuaded his dad to enter the competition. It was independently judged but really – given all this, how could he NOT win?

There’s context and context. There are one or two modern timber-clad buildings in Durham but it’s hardly a regional speciality. The neighbouring buildings mostly feature brick, copper, glass and stone. Ask Libeskind why he chose timber (in this case a Scottish larch rainscreen) and he simply replies that he loves it, referring to his first completed building, the Felix Nussbaum museum, and the recent MICX congress centre in Mons, Belgium (RIBAJ March 2016). But where at Mons one sensed a certain vacuity to the swirling spiral, a touch of designing by numbers, here it is obvious what the focus is: there is the cathedral tower, the building is angled to face it, Frenk’s office is up there in the prow. He only sees it when the leaves are off the trees, but it’s there. In the other direction it faces south up the hill.

The programme of the £11.5m building is straightforward enough. Inside it’s a simple arrangement of perimeter offices (scientists need privacy) and meeting rooms opening onto central, well daylit, communal spaces. There are three departments, one per floor. On the ground floor is a rather good 100-seat small lecture theatre, the ends of which are formed of glass cases displaying the maquettes of sculptor John Robinson, cosmological in feel, whose work Frenk collects.

Why did Frenk want such a building? As always, he makes it seem very simple. ‘I wanted people to come in here and feel that what they are doing is important,’ he says. ‘An exciting, bold building that encourages them to find areas for interaction.’ For Libeskind, with his invisible Golden Section diagram laid across the city, ‘the building is like a cosmic moment’. Jencks is talking of ‘cosmic collisions’ and the constructivism of El Lissitzky. And Cuthbert and Bede? I went to see them and they were giving nothing away. But then Cuthbert’s shrine was built there because the saint’s relics, accompanied by monks, magically chose of their own accord to follow a brown cow to the place. Choose your own personal science or magic.

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First things first: they have not transferred the original revolving triangular ‘New Scotland Yard’ sign from the previous Metropolitan Police HQ in Victoria to this newly refurbished building on Victoria Embankment, as it appears. That sign was apparently knackered. Instead they have made a new one which is practically the same but actually a bit smarter, with an enhanced back-illuminated typeface. It says everything about the character of the Met’s previous home that the famous spinning sign was all anyone remembered of that featureless 60s slab.

It may well be that it is all most people will register of this one too, since the point of it is to be an instantly recognisable totem for TV cameras. But that would be a shame because the block behind the sign, and what has been done to it, is worth looking at. It is one of those rare buildings to be named after its original architect – the Curtis Green Building. And it is next door to another rare pair, the stripy-brick be-chimneyed edifices known as Norman Shaw 1 and 2. Housing MPs offices today, those were built as the Yard’s second home, the first ‘New Scotland Yard’. The original version in 1829 set up by Robert Peel was, confusingly, in a house on Whitehall Place. But it backed onto the street known as Great Scotland Yard, which is where the journey from actual place to metonym began. Still with me? The Curtis Green building, then, is the fourth home of the Peelers in 188 years, although – to add to the complication – it was also part of the second, having been built in 1937 and joined to the Shaw buildings as an extension. So we could call this the New New New (New) Scotland Yard. I hope that’s clear.

The point is, the Met has downsized its HQ. This is due not so much to a reduction in overall numbers as to a reorganisation into 10 centres with different specialisms dotted across London, and to new technology. Indeed, by selling off its prime-site block in Victoria, the Met released enough money to pay for this £60 million building and help finance

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In full command

The Metropolitan Police’s new HQ is smaller than the last New Scotland Yard, but AHMM’s refurbished classical building sits at the centre of a power axis

Words: Hugh Pearman

Above Keeping watch: the attic pavilion of the Met’s new centre overlooks Westminster’s power bases.

The Curtis Green building is the fourth home of the Peelers in 188 years, so we could call it the New New New (New) Scotland Yard
It comes complete with a new rooftop pavilion lit up in blue at night: the famous Blue Lamp reimagined.

a considerable upgrade of its tech, especially ‘wearable tech’ for its officers. The Curtis Green Building, as adapted by AHMM, is the actual and symbolic headquarters of the service, where new commissioner Cressida Dick has her office. It comes complete with a new rooftop pavilion lit up in blue at night: the famous Blue Lamp reimagined.

Looking at the Portland stone building from Westminster Bridge or from across the river, you see how William Curtis Green (1875-1960) pointedly ignored the Arts and Crafts precedent of Norman Shaw on the left and instead threw in his aesthetic lot with his neoclassical contemporary E Vincent Harris (1876-1971), architect of the War Office buildings on the right which were in design at broadly the same time – though not finally completed until as late as 1959. Green might have been a less progressive architect than his exact contemporary Charles Holden, say, but was arguably more inventive than the better known Harris. Whatever, Green
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kept this building relatively understated. Restrained in its modelling and decoration, its mass is nonetheless subtly articulated in the classic tripartite way plus attic storey.

You soon notice the extensions – on the front, where AHMM has added an oval glass-walled secure reception, out the back and sides, where it now bursts into colourful aluminium fins as well as matching stone; and on top, where it has put a long pavilion on top of Green’s attic. Compositionally this looks somewhat uncomfortable from afar, even though they have given it Portland stone bookends in deference to Green. He didn’t intend his building to go any higher and it shows. Despite all this, a surprising amount of the structure of the original steel-framed building remains. It is by no means just a facade job even though its overall usable area has grown by 38%, from

Credits
Client Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
Architect/lead consultant: Allford Hall Monaghan Morris
Space planning Haverstock
Landscape architect Gillespies
Project manager Arcadis
Principal designer BAM
Structural/civil engineer Arup
Cost consultant Arcadis
MEP engineer Arup/BAMSE
Planning consultant DP9
Main contractor BAM
8,700m² to 12,000m². ‘The columns are well spaced for desks,’ says partner in charge Paul Monaghan. ‘This isn’t a City dealing floor’.

Although the office floors are conventional enough, things get rather more vivid in the toilets, where colour schemes based on the liveries of police cars are employed.

New cores have been punched through the structure, with glazed walls to the lift shafts. There is no atrium. New services have typically been threaded through the circulation corridors, where the ceiling can comfortably be lower than in the high-ceilinged working areas. The facade has been strengthened, the timber sliding sash windows replaced with bronze-framed blast-resistant fenestration.

The need for the presence of the police HQ in this area was underlined by the terrorist attack in March on Westminster Bridge and the Palace of Westminster which – despite deaths and serious injuries – was ended by the police after just 82 seconds. For all the horror, it could have been so much worse. From the roof of the Curtis Green Building you see the relationship of power and protection, looking south to Parliament and west to Downing Street.

Part of the competition-winning AHMM design took on a sombre relevance after that attack. Just south of its new entrance pavilion an eternal flame set in a pool burns in memory of officers killed in the line of duty. Inside the pavilion is a book of remembrance. Westminster Bridge is directly in your line of sight.

The fact that such a literally transparent front door to the police service can be made as secure as all such public buildings must now be is a testament to the design team (structural engineer Arup), along with the fact that the building will be efficient in use, targeting BREEAM Excellent. Taken as a whole, this is a very tidy example of re-use, adaptation and extension. And outside, that crisply reworked rotating sign is curiously reassuring.
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Eye Line: the deadline’s coming

It’s a mid-June deadline for the drawings that could see you crowned this year’s Eye Line winner.

Already an annual tradition, our Eye Line drawing competition is now in its fifth year and is once again partnered by architectural visualisation expert AVR. This is the prize that celebrates the art of the architectural drawing, not the project. This isn’t a crit. We just want to see amazing drawings – originating in any medium or combination of media, anywhere in the world. And so do our readers – this is one of the most popular things we do. Enter now and get your best work out on view!

We particularly want to see entries from practitioners as well as students, because the skill of communicating architecture to client and the wider public through drawings is so vital to the design thinking and character of the practice. Consider the watercolour concept drawings of Steven Holl or Sheila O’Donnell, or the almost fairytale-like renderings of Grafton Architects. Remember the incredible draughtsmanship of Sir Peter Cook and his Archigram colleagues, bringing us into their imagined worlds and leading eventually to real, extraordinary buildings.

Today narrative plays an increasing part, with the techniques of graphic novels and manga cartoons increasingly in evidence. Recent years have seen an explosion of colour after a period of dystopian darkness. We don’t mind how the image is produced – we want you to imagine worlds we want to inhabit. This year our judges include Neil Spiller, head of architecture at the University of Greenwich; previous winners Amelia Hunter of Studio Weave, and Sandra Youkhana and Luke Caspar Pearson of You+Pea; RIBAJ editor Hugh Pearman; and Joe Robson, MD of AVR.

We are especially happy to partner again with AVR, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. Working with the best architects internationally on creating fully immersive virtual environments, they also have a knowledge and love of drawing in all its forms.

Practice directors! Encourage your best colleagues to enter, not forgetting yourself. Teachers! By now you know your students with the best drawing skills – make sure they enter. Winning entries will be published in the RIBAJ August issue and exhibited in London’s Anise Gallery, and winners will be invited to take part in a congenial celebration of the art of architectural drawing there, courtesy of AVR. •

RULES
We want to find the best representations of a building design or concept through visual means. Any medium is allowed – hand-drawn or via keyboard, collage or any combination or overlay of methods. It can be ultra-detailed, close to abstraction or photo-realistic, whatever: it’s up to you.

The work must have been produced within the three years up to the closing date of Monday 12 June 2017, and must not previously have been entered for Eye Line. Individual and joint entries are equally allowed, from practitioners, students and teachers.

Entries should be two-dimensional artworks – we will not consider movies or photographs of models – but within that constraint we will judge all methods and media equally.

There is a maximum of three individual pieces per entry, to be sent as medium-resolution JPEGs via a file-sharing service. They can be all from the same project, or different projects.

Information required
Title of work (if applicable)
A short description of the author(s)
Size of the original work
Date it was done
Organisation where you work or study
Email, postal address and phone number

Deadlines
Monday 12 June: Deadline for entries
Thursday 29 June: Judging and shortlisting
August: Winners and commendations announced in special issue of the RIBAJ
September: Exhibition and Celebration party at the Anise Gallery

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Ellie Manwell

The Serpentine Gallery’s summer pavilion, long the doyen of London’s social scene, has a rookie rival supplied by Dulwich Picture Gallery. Ellie Manwell, its head of audience development, says its new pavilion, opening in June in the shadow of Soane’s architecture, deserves its day in the sun.

Why a pavilion, and why now?

This June marks the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Soane’s design for the building was highly innovative then and all about how the architecture was intrinsic to the viewing of the art inside it. We wanted to apply that same thinking to what architecture might be able to do now for contemporary audiences with different needs.

And how did you bring the programme about?

That way of thinking about problems differently tends to come from young practices, so with this pavilion commission, we wanted to support emerging architects who were keen to do more with less. We teamed up with the London Festival of Architecture to run the competition. Our main sponsor for the project is Almacantar which has enabled the scheme – it wouldn’t have been possible at all without them.

And how much is it going to cost?

I can’t really say, but it is going to be a lot less than certain pavilions we might mention! But we imagine it will be a six-figure sum to build it. The sponsorship is going to fund a summer programme of talks and events, including our Friday Night Lates, when the Picture Gallery will be free to enter. The contest was won by young practice IF_DO, and come the end of the summer we will be looking into either selling the pavilion or transferring it to a community site or school. But that’s still up in the air.

And what attracted the judges to IF_DO’s proposal?

The LFA’s theme this year was ‘Memory’, which seemed quite apt, given our wish to use Soane’s gallery as inspiration. We felt that IF_DO really addressed the brief, creating a sensitive, contextual timber structure of moveable, mirrored panels that reflected the gallery and its siting. There was something elegant and poetic about it. And with its choice of materials like timber and mesh we felt the firm really had a grasp of the budget.

So what happens now?

Now? The pavilion is already well under construction! But a lot of it is being pre-fabricated offsite and brought in. Construction started in the last week of April and it should take five weeks. The public opening is going to be on 2 June – we can hardly wait!
The advent of six new metro mayors in England in May has big implications for the built environment

Eleanor Young

Voters in six areas of England chose ‘metro mayors’ for the first time in the local elections on 4 May. Each mayor will head a combined structure bringing together the various local authorities in their area.

These are the first bodies with significant power on strategic planning, and budgets from central government, since the abolition of regional development agencies.

The directly elected mayors and their combined authorities will wield their power in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, the West Midlands and the West of England. A seventh city region, Sheffield, is on track to elect a metro mayor in 2018. Some of the new authorities are flexing their muscles even before they have the new mandate. Greater Manchester has been leading the devolution charge since 2011. A nascent spatial plan could bring some order to the fragmented decision-making across its 2.8 million population. It also has central government’s agreement to £900m of investment over the next 30 years.

Some voters, as in Bristol, will end up with three mayors: a lord mayor, a city mayor and a metro mayor. The latter may seem a superfluous layer, but as the cherry on the cake of a series of devolution deals between groups of local authorities and government, metro mayors could be a powerful force for joined up planning. Government wants the mayors to ensure direct accountability for combined authorities with greater powers. Others like the idea of the ‘focus’ and drive such mayors should bring to a combined authority. They will also have a wider electoral mandate. Current councillors, even council leaders, are only elected by one ward. They are not eligible to stand as metro mayors; instead the role has attracted candidates from national politicians such as Andy Burnham MP in Manchester to local business figures.

Coverage across England is patchy. Many local authorities eventually decided the process was not for them – the geographic oddity of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, for example, started as part of a wider East Anglia devolution bid. Some authorities have only partially opted in as ‘non-constituents’. RDAs were also bigger beasts and left their traces in big visions such Will Alsop’s urban renaissance visions for Barnsley, in capital contributions to community buildings and business parks in their areas and the design advice.

Powers from above and below

So what defines metro mayors? They and their combined authorities are taking powers from central government above and their constituent local authorities below, and could negotiate more powers in the longer term – such as those covering skills, health, infrastructure and planning.

Edward Clarke is an analyst at the Centre for Cities, which works with cities as part think tank and part advisor. He describes the metro mayors as a cross between the London mayor and combined authorities (some of which will continue without mayors). So let’s look at those examples. London mayor Sadiq Khan still has vestiges of the authority of the London Development Agency, an RDA that was an arm of the Greater London Authority. Khan’s document A City for All Londoners is the first stage in his new London Plan, which could be hugely influential in setting the culture and strategic priorities of development in the capital like those of his predecessors Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone. The GLA has been a voice for London at home and abroad and has won other powers from central government, starting with bringing transport under the umbrella of Transport for London, imposing a congestion charge zone, and, more recently, taking on the Homes and Communities’ Agency’s responsibilities including spend and land ownership.

The other models of combined authorities are what they say on the tin and have been operating in some areas, such as Greater Manchester, since 2011. Here 10 local authorities, including Bolton, Stockport and Wigan, have worked together on transport, health and social care and housing and planning. Howard Bernstein, as chief executive of the combined authority, led the way to negotiating the most powers of all the city regions. It already has a staff of its own and plus secondments from the constituent local authorities to work on strategy. It is working through consultation comments on the Greater Manchester spatial framework including plans to build on some sites currently designated as green belt, as it looks for housing and land to build on up to 2035. The plan is expected to be published this year and adopted in 2018. It seems to have won a high level of engagement: there have been 50,000 downloads of the draft plan and nearly 30,000 comments received.

Spatial plans will be an essential instrument for the metro mayors, but achieving them can be slow. Peter Studdert, director of joint planning for Cambridge Growth Areas to 2011, points to the requirement for combined authorities to each have a strategic and economic production plan within a year but says the spatial plans that would flow from them are ‘at least a two year job’. And they would require strategic planning units, which have been pared to the bone by local authority budget cuts. Agreement on the
Metro mayors

City regions and their constituent local authorities

Tees Valley
Constituent: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-On-Tees

Greater Manchester
Constituent: Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan

West Midlands
Constituent: Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall
Non-constituent: Cannock Chase, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Redditch, Tamworth, Telford and Wrekin

Liverpool City Region
Constituent: Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley, Wirral and Halton
Non-constituent: Warrington, West Lancashire

West of England
Constituent: Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Constituent: Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, Peterborough City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council

Source: Centre for Cities

The RIBA Journal May 2017
spatial plans needs to be unanimous. With mayoral cabinets composed of leaders of the constituent councils that may be a difficult ask. Unless the metro mayor is elected on a manifesto pledge on controversial issues – such as building on the greenbelt – it may be hard to put them into action.

This is certainly something that has raised concerns. The RIBA recently supported a report, Closer to Home, by IPPR North looking at how devolution might affect housing. While recognising that ‘England is not one housing market but many’, so mayors should be well placed to understand their area’s strategic needs, it recommended a special negotiation on housing. ‘Mayors lack powers to build more homes,’ it said and suggested that they needed to be able to decide on key policies such as whether to build on regional green belts.

RIBA president Jane Duncan comments: ‘City devolution offers the opportunity for the first time to link housing, transport and infrastructure together to create sustainable, thriving healthy and happy communities. It is crucial that, as part of the developing devolution agenda, they are also equipped with the tools to drive up both housing supply and the quality of new homes.’

A quicker, more focused instrument is the mayoral development corporation. Simon Bedford, who leads Deloitte’s local government development team from Manchester, recommends this for areas that need to be looked at more speedily than a spatial plan would allow, such as north Liverpool or Bristol city centre. ‘I can see mayors picking up on this for more impact, more quickly,’ he says. With development corporations come compulsory purchase powers and possibly powers to determine planning applications. And here, of course, for architects, lie masterplanning opportunities as well as eventually buildings and public spaces to design.

There are other ways that mayors and authorities may influence the built environment in their areas. Bedford points to the Manchester Residential Quality Guidance, worked on by Deloitte, RIBA past president Stephen Hodder and architect CallisonRTKL. Similar guides could come from other city regions. Working out how to influence permitted development rights around office changes of use to residential is already a battle in the city that the incoming metro mayor will no doubt want to take up.

In most areas mayors will also be on the board of the local enterprise partnership with its existing plans and powers. Moves towards more coordinated land disposal plans across public bodies such as local authorities, the Ministry of Defence, hospital trusts, police authorities and the HCA could be localised, as they have been in the London Land Commission – and this would link them more closely to the need to deliver housing and development.

**Infrastructure and growth**

Bringing together infrastructure and growth will be an essential part of the metro mayor’s remit. For city regions, many of which naturally group themselves as commute to work areas, that could be difficult without mega investment in, say, trams. Bus franchising has to be high on the list though will require extra powers explains Clarke of Centre for Cities. ‘In Greater Manchester there are 40 different bus operators and many different ticket types,’ he says. Through ticketing and coordination between areas and routes could make a huge difference.

Deloitte’s Bedford sees existing rail networks as a focus for both improved service and densification – the latter will require ‘imaginative housing solutions’ both in suburban locations and regional centres where retail is shrinking and housing could take the freed-up space. In each of the six city regions there are different needs, different deals and there will be different characters taking the reins as mayor for the next four years.

Progress is likely to be a little slow at first – especially in complex, wide-ranging groupings such as the West Midlands – as mayors get to grips with their briefs, overlapping levels of responsibility and new teams. But in the next few years it will be interesting to see the directions they are taking their city regions. If their efforts are successful we may see more metro mayors in years to come.
When converting a Listed C19th gym into a restaurant for the King’s Cross Central Limited Partnership, architect Allies and Morrison found that the Janisol Arte steel renovation window from Schueco Jansen delivered the perfect combination of appearance and performance. With narrow face-widths of just 25 mm or 40 mm, a wide range of opening types, multi-point locking and $U_w$ values from 0.8 W/m²K, Janisol Arte is also soon to be available in stainless steel and Corten steel.  

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This is the life

New Ground cohousing development is an example not only of how we might live as we get older, but of how to live in cities at all.

Photographs Tim Crocker

Georgie Day

Some might describe High Barnet as a little down at heel. Its traditional village features – a green, a church and a high street – are mixed with scruffy looking take-away outlets, nail bars and charity shops. But I love this urban condition, one that typifies much of the London periphery. On the high street, and what’s happening off and behind it, there is space – in the slack between buildings, the utilitarian aspects and soft ambiguities – for a little architectural imagination.

It is no surprise that London’s few realised experiments in ‘the way we live’ are all to be found in this periphery: Y-Cube, RUSS and BedZed to name a few. So it’s to High Barnet that I have come hunting on a blue, blue morning for New Ground, the UK’s first completed senior cohousing project.

New Ground is a cohousing scheme for older women dreamt up by Older Women’s Co-Housing (OWCH), and realised by architect Pollard Thomas Edwards (PTE) and contractor Quinn, with co-partner Housing for Women, developer Hanover Housing Association and funder the Tudor Trust. There are 25 flats at New Ground, eight socially rented and managed by Housing for Women, and 17 owner occupied, with a few shared facilities and a very large shared garden.

Given its radically different programme, the development is surprisingly difficult to spot, its form and materiality blending into the terraced street. There are clues though: the new brickwork (tumbled, mixed stock to try and disguise/ blend/ camouflage itself), the subtly different facade rhythm and the fact that there is only one, shared, front door.

And you enter not through a hall, or a porch, but into a cohouse. What seemed to be six plots from the outside has become inside, stretching out and terminating in a fully glazed, retractable back wall that opens onto the large shared garden.

It is here that I meet two of the residents, Rachel Douglas and Hilary Vernon Smith, who are to show me round. For me, architec-
ture is always defined as the relationship between people and space, but this is especially true at New Ground – the OWCH women I meet on our tour infuse the building. They have joined OWCH for many reasons. Some have become widowers or divorced, some never married or their children have flown the nest. They are a mixed bunch in age (50-85), wealth and ethnicity, but they are uniformly warm and colourful.

Cohousing is when a group of people comes together to create and manage a community, living in loosely knit proximity often with some element of shared living or facilities. Since the 1960s, it has been a common housing typology in Northern Europe, and has recently begun to gain traction in the UK. Though taking a longer view, Ilena E Strauss points out in an excellent article entitled The Hot New Millennial Trend is a Repeat of the Middle Ages that this is no new thing; it’s how humans have lived for most of our history.

As I am shown around, I am drawn to the way that the ideas behind cohousing are realised in spatial form. Broadly the scheme is organised around the idea of a collection of houses: a mix of two and three storey houses with differently pitched roofs. Internally they are divided into a complex web of apartments. Most have balconies large enough to accommodate a dining table and, facing out into the shared garden, are intrinsically sociable.

A cohouse is central to the masterplan and hosts a weekly meal. Other shared facilities are dispersed through the building – a launderette, large circulation spaces that become almost like rooms as they fill up with furniture, and a luxurious guest bedroom for when people come to stay. This approach generously scatters the moments of sociability. Sometimes these areas have a slight institutional feel – blue carpets, ultra-white walls, matching furniture – but time and hard wear will probably transform them into something more domestic.

One of the great achievements of New Ground is in its relationship to the street. Cohousing academic Lucy Sargisson has written about the tendency of more recent cohousing to be inward looking – middle class enclaves that turn their backs on their communities. These buildings resist this as much as their inhabitants seem to – brick walls come into the building through large streetside windows, and the cohose kitchen sink is by a large window overlooking the street.

The apartments themselves are generous spaces filled with light, that have already acquired the feel of their occupants. In the careful balance between the individual and the collective, cohousing has typically done a good job of guarding privacy, and New Ground stands in this tradition. The apartments feel very sheltered and personal, and while balconies and other garden-facing spaces connect them to communal areas, re-
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Intelligence
Cohousing

Concept diagram mapping out public and private routes with cohous at the centre.

It’s how humans have lived for most of our history

treats are provided by the kitchens, studies and bedrooms.

The architects of New Ground, Tom Reynolds and Patrick Devlin from PTE, who are visiting too, have a visibly good relationship with OWCH. Cohousing briefs are famously challenging because of the multiple clients, but their structured series of workshops were an exercise in collaborative design that enabled decisions to be taken consensually. Importantly for a scheme like this, the architects knew not only what to design, but also where to stop. The invasion of plant pots and other forms of personalisation were greeted by the architects with pleasure – as Devlin pointed out, ‘it’s good to see our design is robust enough to take cat flaps’.

Naturally, this way of living is not for everyone. Cohousing rubs hard up against some of the core tenets of the British sensibility: our guarded privacy and our net curtains. But for many urbanites (using the term in the political-sociological sense that has become so pressingly urgent in Western countries of late) this would be a micro-utopia.

Cities, despite their bountiful pleasures, can be lonely places that lack a human scale and rob their inhabitants of control. Cohousing offers some tidy solutions, particularly for older people. As someone who has always ‘cohoused’ knows, daily contact with people you know, shared rituals of gardening or cooking, shared burdens and shared pleasures, is greatly enriching. I probe my hosts for the details of how this all came to pass, hoping that they’ll outline some replicable model that anyone who wants to live in this way might be able to emulate...

Deflatingly, it transpires that New Ground is the product of two remarkable forces that are particular rather than generalisable. The first is the immense energy and commitment of the OWCH women, who have worked for 20 years over tireless weekends and evenings, and for the past six and a half years, with the committed stewardship of PTE. A rigid planning system, a brutal free market for development sites and a conserv-
The RIBA Journal May 2017

Intelligence

Cohousing

Theative legal context makes the challenges for potential cohousers vast and plentiful. Tragically Madeleine Levius, one of the instigators of OWCH, never saw it completed.

The second exceptional factor is the enabling hand of Hanover Housing Association. Hanover is a leading not for profit organisation providing affordable homes and related services exclusively for older people. It front-funded the entire development at New Ground, from buying the land on the open market through change of use and planning consent to the entirety of the construction contract, valued at about £4.6m. This served as a no-interest loan, which would be impossible to get from any commercial lender, and Hanover was repaid as the housing was sold on pre-agreed terms to OWCH via the individual purchases of the owner occupier apartments and the block purchase by Housing for Women. Not only are there not many NGOs as willing to experiment as Hanover has done, but the sting in the tail is that Hanover has no plans to do this again. In addition, OWCH received a sizeable research grant from the Tudor Trust, adding up to a financial formula that makes New Ground a bit of a one-off.

It’s such great shame that government and local councils aren’t doing more to create space for these kinds of project. What if local councils could take low-interest loans on behalf of cohousers? Or use the self-build and custom-build legislation to safeguard plots for cohousing schemes?

Then – imagine the experimentation! Though it’s impressive what PTE did with the brief, continental examples suggest the architectural playground that a co-housing brief might become in the future. At R-50 in Berlin, continuous balconies become an activated, social and inhabited facade for the whole building. At Sargfabrik in Vienna, avoiding rectilinear lines in plan means boundaries can be delineated more organically and less aggressively. At Silodam in Amsterdam, a playful facade demonstrates practically and metaphorically how individual needs can be harmonised within a collective whole.

I applaud OWCH and PTE for the positive sketch they have provided not only how we might get old(er) but also for how we might live in cities at all – if only more architects could put their pens to this task too.

Georgie Day is co-founder of the architectural practice facTOTUM and the housing co-operative Donkey Work

A cohous is central to the plan and hosts a weekly meal.
Inspiring a Vision

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You can say one thing about Brexit, it’s brought back nostalgia with a vengeance. Endless misty-eyed pub chats about how the UK, freed of Europe’s yoke, might reclaim some of its imperial glory – a future perhaps where we again see products stamped ‘Made in Britain’ ubiquitous around the globe.

Oh to be British in 1872, when the UK claimed 46% of all world exports of manufactured goods, not the miserable 3% or so we see today.

Such romantic notions may seem harmless, but they create an unhelpful slant that hinders sensible debate about Britain’s trading place in the world. It’s a slant that sees Dover or cranes appear as the default backdrop to any news reports on international trade.

Yes, it would be nice to reclaim some of our former manufacturing prowess, if it was limited to high-end goods. A lot of merchandise trade is in low-cost goods, cheap because the makers pay low wages.

Britain’s power in global trade today is firmly rooted in services. In this its exports are second only to the USA’s. On the basis of doing more of what you’re good at, services rather than goods should be hogging attention in the trade debate around Brexit, publicly and behind closed doors.

Chart 1 shows just how important services are to the UK’s trade balance, and have been for many years, particularly the past 20 as cheaper manufactured goods flowed more freely from low-cost labour markets in Asia.

Within this story of the services that Britain sells abroad, architecture is a blossoming success, along with other construction-related services. Chart 2 shows just how much ground architecture has gained in the international market in recent years. And in Chart 3 we see where this work is being picked up.

One thing is clear: being in Europe has not held back UK architectural expertise from spreading across the globe. Most overseas earnings come from outside Europe. This shouldn’t be a surprise given that growth in construction activity is far greater in the developing world than the developed.

Were we to look at UK exports from the broader technical and other business services sector (which includes construction-related activities as a large element) the proportion of exports to Europe is larger than for architecture on its own, showing commercial interaction in services within Europe is strong. But two thirds of work is still sold to countries outside the EU.

Put bluntly, selling brainpower not stuff seems to be the big winner for the UK. And the UK seems pretty unrestrained in where it sells its brainpower.

Without going into the complexities of international trade, there is a real prize being won by the wider construction sector based in the UK, trading professional services such as engineering and architecture. One driver of expansion is likely to be information technology which allows these services to be traded much more easily. They can be delivered pretty much to anywhere from anywhere. The critical part seems to be in assembling, connecting and coordinating the brainpower and design talent.

A quick read of this might lead to the view that there is a fantastic opportunity ahead for the UK, freed from EU shackles, to negotiate tailor-made trade deals with emerging nations. Yet despite these shackles, if they exist, UK exports of construction-related professional services have taken off in recent years.

If the EU has not been a hindrance, has it been a benefit when it comes to the UK’s trade in services? If so, will leaving create issues and how might these be mitigated?

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If the EU has not been a hindrance, has it been a benefit when it comes to the UK’s trade in services? If so, will leaving create issues and how might these be mitigated?
That is a thesis in itself, but there are a few things worth considering that might shed some light. UK architectural practices have become much larger and more international in recent years. How might or might not this have influenced exports? What is the mix of nationalities within the sector? It’s not easy to get accurate data, but we can get pretty firm clues.

Figures from the third quarter Labour Force Survey of 2016, kindly permitted by UK Data Archive, show the spread of non-UK-born people within UK construction professions. These suggest 27% of architects were born outside the UK; 17% from the EU and 10% elsewhere. The sample is not great, but it provides a reasonable order of scale.

Looking at the people employed rather than at professions, we can widen the sample to include architectural firms and firms in related engineering and technical activities. This slice of the data gives us a clue to the age profile of those born outside the UK.

Chart 4 clearly shows a heavy weighting towards younger age groups. This tells us a large group among the up and coming youth within architectural and construction firms is from abroad. Any loss to this contingent will hit firms hard in the years ahead.

It is important to consider what these foreign-born professionals add to the mix that UK-born professionals cannot. Do they add greater cultural understanding that supports overseas trade? Do they make the UK appear more ‘international’ and so more acceptable abroad? Do these incomers represent the cream of international talent?

If the answers to these questions turn out to be yes or even maybe, the industry faces a stiff challenge if it is to remain as competitive in the global market as it has been. How can it maintain the influx of foreign nationals in the face of a decision that was largely prompted by a desire to restrict migration?

In this light, the RIBA Brexit survey finding that 40% of UK-based non-British EU nationals are now considering leaving the country is a big concern economically, leaving aside morals and emotion.

While the mix of employees has changed, so has the structure of the businesses working in architecture. One big shift is the growth in the number of bigger firms. Not only are firms bigger, there are more multi-disciplinary firms and more multi-national firms. This provides a far stronger platform for expansion abroad. Such firms can exploit scale and a stronger track record. They can tap into a wider range of local and international contacts and into connections with other disciplines within the family of services that cover the development of the built environment. They are also more familiar with and able to engage in a wider range of business relationships – entering joint ventures for example. This makes them more attractive in many international markets where ‘skin in the game’ is seen as an incentive.

The growth of UK overseas trade in architecture and the growth in the scale of businesses do not seem unrelated. But do big international firms locate in the UK for a reason? Is it that the UK has been seen as an attractive place for international talent to congregate? The answer is probably yes.

Will this continue? Leaving the EU and the single market has profound implications for the emerging international strength of UK-based architectural firms, without even considering the potential impact on the UK home market or on access to the EU market – or the influence it might or might not have in setting strong international standards.

Britain is a great trading nation, but that trade is in services. Its influence in the design and provision of the international built environment has been growing. The facts suggest the UK’s ability to grab opportunities outside the EU in this critical sector have not been limited by its EU membership.

The worry is whether the opportunities will be limited by its non-membership. Leaving the EU need not be a disaster to international trade in built environment-related services, but it might create some unwelcome effects. The industry must ensure the focus on trade among policy-makers and the public is not skewed towards ‘Made in Britain’ products.

‘Designed and delivered by UK-based talent’ may not be as snappy, but it is almost certainly worth more when it comes to the nation’s balance of payments.

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27% of architects were born outside the UK, with 17% from the EU and 10% elsewhere.

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Source: Labour Force Survey 2016 Q3, ONS, NISRA, retrieved via UK Data Archive

Notes: The data are from Creative Industries: Focus on Exports of Services, Headline tables 2011 - 2015. The latest data are for 2014.
Timber gains in stature

Engineered timber structures are growing taller and bolder as technology adds strength to lightness – and the economics are adding up too. Industry experts gathered to assess progress.

Timber is having its moment. For timber engineers working today such is the pace of innovation and change in the sector that excitement compares to that of steel engineers in downtown Chicago at the turn of the 20th century. Timber engineering is gaining momentum – tall buildings are being erected at speed worldwide using engineered timber products, many prefabricated off-site and modular.

Recently we’ve seen the eight-storey pure engineered timber Puukkuokka Housing by O0PEAA in Finland, and UK trailblazers like Waugh Thistleton’s Murray Grove. And what of PLP Architecture’s 300m timber ‘Toothpick’ for Barbican? Cross laminated timber (CLT) can reach 13 storeys, and more when used with steel, concrete or laminated veneer lumber (LVL). In fact, pure LVL can go higher. These are not dizzying heights, but there are other innovations – such as the double-curvature Lister Mills rooftop extension in Bradford by Jennifer Juritz at David Morley Architects, made possible by the material’s relative light weight.

Finnish timber manufacturer Metsä Wood teamed up with RIBA Journal at the end of March to discuss with the industry’s experts engineered timber’s progress and evolving possibilities.

So where is engineered timber now? Over the past couple of decades technology has transformed timber from a one-to-four storey stick-build structural product into one that can be used for tall buildings. Yet, as ever, with a large array of experts around the table, there was some dispute about how far it had come and what could be achieved.

‘Beyond 13 storeys we need a structural frame,’ said Nick Milestone of B & K Structures. ‘Either steel, concrete or glulam to stop the risk of the building blowing away. But there’s potential with Metsä to put the stronger LVL in the centre of CLT to give the additional storeys.’

Anthony Thistleton, however, thought designers could use crafty design – like flaring buildings out at the bottom to give natural stability, or using massive steel anchors such as at Dalston Lane – to make engineered timber reach 20 storeys. At Dalston Lane, the building needed to be light as it was above the Eurostar tracks. ‘An engineered timber frame is typically one-fifth the weight of a concrete one,’ he said.

Opportunities are apparent in all buildings, with LVL and CLT considered a
great product for floorplates, wall panels, service risers and a host of other things. Hawkins\Brown’s Wenlock Cross in London was cited as a building that could have been unlimited in height because of its steel structure with engineered timber floors and walls. And Linda Thiel of Sweden’s White Arkitekter said timber there is being used for commercial and public buildings as well as houses, but wouldn’t have been in the past.

All agreed the potential was enormous, with Tim Lucas of Price & Myers convinced that once engineers find better ways to finely glue timber materials together it would really fly.

‘It’s very early days for this technology: LVL, CLT and all the others are really very young,’ said Mike Kane, director of KMK Architects and senior lecturer at South Bank University. ‘Students in universities are getting to grips with it, and see it as an opportunity to do something different from the old guys. People call it the new concrete, but that’s kind of an understatement.’

The problem for many around the table in terms of design was that too often engineered timber is being used simply to replace concrete. Once designers see it as a different material, design will flourish and create a new architecture. Thiel thought part of that process required designers to start with how to put buildings together, rather than working from a design and then trying to figure out how to build it.

Yet, while the use of engineered timber products is growing, it is not widespread, with the rest of the industry slower to take up the products than architects are. Frank Werling of Metsä Wood said: ‘Architects have no problem designing in timber but it is difficult to find enough structural engineers that can do it. There are firms – Ingenuity, Ramboll, Price Myers – but the wider market reverts to steel as soon as something doesn’t work in standard CLS beam size.’

This affects the whole industry and has led to specialisation, pricing-in risk (making it more expensive), and sceptical developers. As Rory Bergin of HTA Design explained: ‘We find there is still a lot of anxiety and lack of knowledge, particularly on cost.’

Although not all participants agreed that building engineered timber buildings was more expensive – with Thistleton saying that Dalston Lane’s CLT frame cost £185/m², on a par with concrete at £175/m², – cost was the defining deterrent. Participations mostly saw this as blinkered.

Once designers see engineered timber as a different material, design will flourish and create a new architecture.
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agreeing that it was not that they needed convincing but that the methods of measuring the total cost of a building have not yet adapted to take into account the broader benefits of timber products. These are currently invisible in the industry’s short-termist measurements, especially in terms of the health and wellbeing of occupants after delivery, or just the simple procurement and time savings.

Overwhelmingly the panel felt there was a need to promote the topic more and gather intelligence. It’s happening, but slowly.

‘The people we need to convince,’ suggested Milestone, ‘are quantity surveyors. I’m starting to see that now with firms like Gardiner & Theobold which is measuring the costs of engineered timber against traditional construction and going to developers saying they can now build it quicker, lighter and cheaper. It is now a competitive solution. Reinforce Concrete frame is becoming very expensive.’

In the meanwhile, Bergin at HTA believed the way to further innovation was to ‘push at the sweet spots’ where the benefits are indisputable to the client: those in a hurry doing hotels or student and rental accommodation.

‘There’s an economic benefit to these types of clients. They can go from delivering three projects to five over a 10-year period. At that point the question of whether engineered timber is more expensive simply disappears.’ In the long run, ensuring a reasonable uptake among such clients will create economies of scale for architects to then go after, for example, the housebuilders. On the other hand, Alex Smith of Hawkins\' Brown saw engineered timber as a great structural product for schools because of the bigger spaces it permits.

The green, speed and light advantages, on top of creating a new environmental agenda to architecture, overcome fire and waterproofing concerns. There are simple solutions too – for example that services are kept separate from structure. It was not felt Building Regulations had kept engineered timber niche, quite the opposite: Werling believes ‘they are some of the most liberal’. Rather, it is about generating knowledge and information – and convincing insurers there is less risk than they think.

What architects want from the sector is standard detailing and tools provided by manufacturers (started recently with the Structural Timber Association guide), consistent information tackling life carbon measurements, and more joined up professional bodies promoting timber products. Right now the timber industry is fragmented as compared with steel and concrete. That automatically makes competing more challenging, with different members in different groups that don’t necessarily talk. ‘Ultimately they will get together,’ summarised Milestone, who is also chairman of the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA). Inspiration could come from Sweden, where academia has teamed up with housebuilders and architects contribute to external R&D budgets, as well as from Germany which is dominated by prefab timber frame. But that takes time, and we are only at the beginning.

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The way to further innovation is to ‘push at the sweet spots’ where the benefits are indisputable to the client.
Opportunities in custom building

By moving beyond being just designers for hire, architects could engage with a potentially huge new market

Craig White

Architects should sit up and take notice of an emerging £31.25bn market for prefabrication solutions, custom build and community-led housing. The demand is for a quarter of a million new homes a year, average price £250,000, and half of these will have to be delivered by new models such as custom build using 'modern methods of construction'.

As architects, we should be looking at new business models for engaging with this market, undertaking the relevant consultative processes, and developing new prefabricated construction systems with innovative players in the construction industry.

In 2013 the government discovered that a total of 15,000 houses in the UK had been ‘self-built’ rather than produced by major housing developers, making this the predominant category of housing construction in the UK. As self-building is generally a one-off project for individual households it cannot be easily scaled up, but there are versions of it that can be. One is plot-led development that allows individuals or groups to build their own homes without having to be the developer of the infrastructure of the site itself. Now the government wants to push a new model of development called custom build.

The 2015 Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act requires local authorities to produce a register of land in their ownership which they consider suitable for individual or small-scale housing development using custom build. Local authorities are obliged to market this land for purchase only by custom-builders – meaning that individuals or groups or agencies (but not volume housebuilders) are invited to come forward with specific, rather than speculative, proposals. In my view, this represents the biggest shift in land availability and potential housing supply since World War II.

The problem is that while self-builders have been inspired by Channel 4’s Grand Designs television series, they rarely begin with a realistic business plan, legal models and financial systems already in place. I believe it is unreasonable to expect communities to intuitively become developers; that would demand an unrealistically high set of skills and competencies to emerge from any given community group.

The Lilac (Low Impact Living Affordable Community) cohousing scheme in Leeds, which we worked on, succeeded because of the extraordinary intellectual power behind the initiative. It was led by co-founders Paul Chatterton, Tash Gordon, Alan Thornton and Kirsty Hughes, who shared a community activism background and a strong understanding of how communities need to work around a clear system for decision making. The skills required are not necessarily an architect’s core skills but involve reconciling or mediating the strongly held views of many people into a coherent and deliverable brief. It can be very hard work and stressful.

We now realise that we cannot wait for communities to imagine themselves as developers. We need to bring forward site development models that communities could use. These will need to include ‘hardware’ solutions to build with, as well as the ‘software’ of legal, financial societal models. These can then be combined into toolkits that can go a long way to help predefine pathways for community-led housing, without reinventing the wheel every time.

Good architecture can be an enabler for better community outcomes, but architecture alone cannot make a good community. The design of social and economic models is as important as good design. People sometimes amplify the importance of design to the point of not being able to take any decisions at all, and it can distract from the essential, but drier, economic and legal design needed to take a project to completion. The Lilac scheme took about seven years to deliver, but I believe this sort of project could take three
or four years only: any longer and a community’s energy can often dissipate. I have seen this happen with other cohousing groups and it is not good enough for architects simply to shrug and be happy to have been paid a fee. We need to bring forward replicable solutions that enable community-led housing to be delivered at scale again and again, and not just see them as one-off exemplar projects.

There is considerable latent demand for cohousing. Architects could operate as a new kind of agency for this sort of initiative: we need to move beyond being just designers to becoming facilitators or enablers, bringing build-systems and development model solutions with us. This means architects should not be offering people anything they would like, but instead could operate in partnership with innovative construction companies to provide pre-considered solutions that embed the values communities aspire to.

The government is also interested in pre-fabrication and the systemisation of supply: can we not also systemise the delivery of community-led housing? The solution proposed for custom build is to create new entities called ‘home manufacturers’, consisting of designer/supplier partnerships bringing forward ideas that will represent a financially secure model of housebuilding that people can safely invest in. This requires the ready availability of self-build mortgages, and low-risk investment opportunities, eliminating the kinds of financial stress that usually are beyond the ability of individual self-builders to navigate. Some banks are also seeing opportunities to support community-led housing. For example, in accordance with its ethical objectives, the Triodos Bank is keen to provide development finance for community-led construction projects but not mortgage-lenders on individual properties.

Apart from our company, BaleHaus Custom Homes, several other ‘home manufacturers’ in the UK now offer customisable self-build house-types – Fairgrove Homes, Buildstore, Keepmoat and Potton. Developers such as Igloo Regeneration and HAB Housing have started to engage with new custom-build models. The Connolly and Callaghan Group, via its Bristol-based development company, Sustainable Britain, has submitted two planning applications integrating the potential for cohousing as part of the development, but with no specific community groups for these projects yet identified. The ambition is to help catalyse cohousing groups around specific sites, not wait for them to form organically. You can easily find 100 people who would express an interest in cohousing, but then you find that few will have a particular site in mind, let alone the development model to pursue. It would be more effective for designer/developer teams to identify a site, submit an outline planning application and then invite a community to coalesce around that site.

The largest private-sector custom-build development in the UK is currently the government-supported Pathfinder project Homemade @ Heartlands being delivered by Carillion Igloo in partnership with the HCA. The site is a former tin-mining complex in central Cornwall, where land for 54 custom-designed houses is to be sold to help meet local housing need. Igloo and Cornwall County Council even took the project to judicial review, in order to establish a precedent for this type of development (as the UK planning system works on the basis of precedents).

Igloo and Cornwall imagined that objections to their outline planning application proposals would be on the grounds that people would not know what the proposed development would look like until it was built – bypassing the customary ‘approval of reserved matters’ process through which local authority planning officers grant consent for the detailed appearance of a building. Instead, the development proceeds and is discharged in detail through compliance with a design code which every home manufacturer has to comply with.

Traditionally, architects have maintained a risk-averse position in the development chain, only ever spending other people’s money via their designs and specifications. In the future, I believe architects will need to deploy new skill-sets, taking on more risk through the co-development of housing solutions with the construction supply chain. Just being an architect as a designer for hire isn’t going to be enough.

Chris White is co-founder of White Design, Bristol. This article is based on an interview with Chris Heuvel, conducted for his DArch research into how engagement in community-led design can be compatible with practitioners’ business objectives.
So you want to redevelop?

You’ll be surprised by how far and how flexible you can go with permitted development

Robin Phillips

When we launched Conibere Phillips Architects in 2015, we embraced domestic residential projects as a sector of work that forms the bedrock of many a new practice. Being relatively unfamiliar with the sector we sought advice from friends and former colleagues.

A particularly sage recommendation was to get to know The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. This is often referred to as GPDO by planners, and the rules defined within it commonly known as permitted development (PD). Broadly speaking, PD rights describe what development is allowable without the need to apply for planning permission. In the context of housing some rules only apply to single dwellings built before 1945, the first GPDO act being introduced in 1948, and don’t generally apply to listed buildings or those in conservation areas.

The requirements of PD are mostly prescriptive, and it can be deduced with relative certainty whether a proposed development is allowable not. This is in marked contrast to the planning process where, through reference to numerous policy documents, decision making is often open to broad interpretation, often creating the impression that policy is interpreted to suit a preconceived view.

Through our work we have developed a complex attitude towards PD. On one hand, it allows a lot of things to be built that are unquestionably a blight on the environment. As such, PD development is at odds with planning policies and initiatives to raise the quality of design in the built environment. But it is a quick, reliable and low risk approach to extending homes, which cuts out the bureaucracy of seeking planning permission. And it is possible to deliver high quality PD development, although this is rare. It also has the potential to enable development by removing power from planning departments, though this comes with risks.

Through one of our projects we have explored what can be achieved with PD, and it has led to some surprising outcomes. In the refurbishment of a late Victorian, mid-terrace house, we have demonstrated, and have a certificate of lawful development to confirm that it is possible to significantly rebuild a house to a new design using PD.

We are rebuilding the front elevation, achieving a new aesthetic through changed window openings and a removed bay window. This is allowable under PD Class A, being an ‘improvement’ that does not extend beyond the existing front elevation, and is to be built using similar materials to the original.

The house is also to be re-roofed, replacing inappropriate concrete tiles with a metal standing seam roof. Under PD Class C, a roof finish can be changed if it does not extend beyond the existing roof alignment. If you also wanted to replace some internal structure you could find yourself essentially rebuilding an entirely new house. This becomes an interesting proposition where poor building stock might be renewed with long term sustainable benefits. Building such a planning case is also potentially significant in that the VAT advantages of a new build project could apply, and go some way to offset the cost of the increased scope of construction.

The scope of what can be achieved under PD has surprised both us and planning departments we have worked with. Working creatively within the ‘gaps’ of the rules could lead to interesting opportunities, but also very dubious outcomes. The inadequacies of the current act, and the conflict between this and planning policy, suggest a complete rethink of both, and their relationship, is required.

On a fundamental level, we must remember that our aims as architects are broadly aligned with those of the planners to ensure the improvement of our built environment.

We believe planning departments should recognise, in the face of PD, the impotence of much of their policy when it comes to much of our housing stock. Then, their policy might be reformed in such a way as to encourage householders to engage an architect to deliver something better for all involved. Judging by our experience, clients are frequently unsatisfied with what a PD scheme might deliver, but are wary of an unpredictable planning process that takes time and money to navigate.

A more sophisticated planning service for householder applications, potentially with a higher fee commensurate with a better level of service, might encourage householders to pursue bolder, and higher quality, ambitions than a PD scheme. Such an approach might encourage planning departments to amend their policy to facilitate such applications. A reformed policy allowing for a slight increase in volume or height compared to PD, making the cost/benefit of the planning application route more attractive to homeowners, could encourage adoption of the new service.

While an individual roof extension is a small project, the collective impact of countless thousands, perhaps millions, of these across the country is highly significant. A debate on PD and the effectiveness of planning policy may not attract the same passion as that on tall buildings, say, but the subject affects most of society. As a ‘grassroots’ issue it may do much to encourage the culture of improvement in design quality and concern for the built environment.

We strongly believe this is not a zero-sum game. It can be that everyone wins, but for that we need reform.

Robin Phillips is a co-founder of Conibere Phillips Architects
Making light work of the IoT

It’s the humble light bulb that promises us the intelligent objects of the Internet of Things

Jocelyn Brown

The Internet of Things, or IoT, has been generating a lot of buzz lately, and for good reason. The ability to connect everyday devices to one another, and to collect, process and analyse data from those devices, has the potential to change our lives in myriad ways.

A big part of the IoT technological revolution includes LED lighting. Some of the first IoT applications in widespread use include so-called ‘smart homes’ in which security, lighting, temperature, and other household applications can be integrated. LED lightbulbs form the basis of many of these functions.

How smart are LED bulbs?

Smart LED bulbs have integrated controllers so that they can communicate with a virtual assistant, a smartphone or a WiFi network. But today, LED bulbs go far beyond the ability to be remotely adjusted for varying levels of light.

These bulbs can report themselves when they need to be replaced. If LED lighting is connected to a home security system, it can be programmed to detect sound. The system can then illuminate the premises at the sound of breaking glass or a gunshot, for example, allowing the cause of the sound to be captured by the home’s security camera. Smart LEDs can even contact police to report the incident.

Elderly people who have LED lights in their homes can use them for voice activation and motion detection. Suppose an older person falls in their bathroom during the night. They can use the technology in these smart LED lights to call for help and to illuminate the path to the bathroom so that they can be located quickly. Motion sensitive lights can even detect whether the person is unconscious, and can notify emergency services or family members.

Tracking capabilities

In addition to tracking people, the sensors used by smart LEDs can track objects. These sensors can instantly track a specific item in a warehouse of millions of items, or a specialised piece of equipment in an enormous hospital or factory. They can track the movement of people and objects inside buildings and tunnels, and even underground, where GPS cannot.

LED lighting can be used in commercial applications, such as shopping centres and blocks of flats, to control energy costs. There are also convenience applications. At shopping centres, for example, LED lights could illuminate available parking spaces, helping speed the process for shoppers.

The IoT, combined with the bandwidth and storage capacity of the cloud, will make smart lighting possible for private homes, commercial buildings, even entire smart cities.

Belleds of Cambridge, Massachusetts, has created LED fixtures that include a Bluetooth chip that allows users to control the lighting wirelessly. These LEDs also use a beacon to broadcast the object’s location, enabling users with a smartphone to get within a metre or two. They can use the lighting capability or the tracking capability, or both. And the Bluetooth device can be paired with more than one smartphone so that multiple people can access the lighting in a single building, such as a hotel or an apartment block.

Farming benefits

In the UK, greenhouse farmers are also harnessing the advantages of IoT and LED bulbs. The technology provides the foundations for dealing effectively with disease management. They can also extend their growing seasons by activating the lighting on overcast days.

These applications may be just the tip of the iceberg. The ability of LEDs to gather, process, and analyse this information will lead to many more exciting applications as the Internet of Things gains traction and becomes the standard for homes and businesses.

The ultimate goal of the Internet of Things is to enable everyday objects to interact with humans in an intelligent way. Having energy-dependent objects that monitor and adjust themselves is the first step in this complex but exciting process.

Could LEDs and the Internet of Things make a difference to farming?

Jocelyn Brown is a technology writer
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memories

The architectural joys of Belarusian churches and how to conserve with limited resources raise questions of our relationships with objects

Tswai So

Over the last three decades, many rural settlements in Belarus have been lost as residents have had to abandon them following contamination by fallout from the Chernobyl disaster. The razing of entire villages is all too familiar in Belarusian history.

I first visited Belarus in 2012, after my practice won the commission to design a church for the Belarusian diaspora community in London. The brief stated that the church needed to be designed ‘to reflect the spirit and identity of Belarus and the Belarusian people’, so I organised a field trip to understand the culture first-hand. Concentrating on the countryside, I was struck by the numerous vernacular churches. In a globalised world, these handmade indigenous structures built from local materials are rare. Sketching them forced me to slow down and observe details I would otherwise miss.

One of those I sketched was the nationally significant 16th century building in Murovanka in the Hrodna region. This is a brick Gothic fortified structure, a rare exception in a country where wood has been the usual building material. In the 13th century, Belarus became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which in 1569 united with Poland to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Many of the Duchy’s Orthodox inhabitants became Uniates – they worshipped according to the Orthodox rite but were in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. Yet their wooden churches were different from the log-built Russian churches, based on centralised plans, or with steeply pitched, low, shingled roofs that come down low, like those in Lesser Poland and the Carpathians. Sheer walls clad in distinctive vertical planking characterise those of Belarus.

The Counter-Reformation was very strong in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which adopted the baroque style with great enthusiasm. In the mid-18th century it developed Vilnius baroque. Its great genius was the architect Johann Glaubitz. Though buildings in this style sometimes lack the ornate sumptuousness and colour of Central European or Italian baroque, their forms are highly sculptural and vividly expressive. Echoes of this influence can be felt in the wooden churches, but it is confined to their single or twin-towered, pedimented facades and intricate, bulbous outlines of their cupolas and delicate iron crosses. The contrast between these austere exteriors with their sparse fenestration and the busy interiors proliferating with icons and other devotional objects, as one might expect of a Baroque church, is striking.

Yet few of these churches survive in their original form. In the late 18th century partitions of the Commonwealth, Belarus was brought entirely under Russian rule and the Uniate Church abolished. This programme of Russification affected the wooden churches, many of which lost Baroque features which were regarded as too Catholic. They acquired spires, cupolas and ornament based on the 16th and 17th century architecture of ancient Russian cities, the official style of the Tsarist Empire. More recently, the few that somehow survived the upheavals of last century have been gaudily repainted, re-clad in plastic imitation weatherboarding or acquired garish roofs and gutters of shiny sheet metal. At the Church of Protection of Our Lady in Hanchary, Belarus, for example, its Baroque cupolas have been replaced by Russian Orthodox onion domes, external walls painted blue and new metal roofings installed. Such work is the result of the inconstant endeavours to save these churches by reverent villagers who had little to work with.

Despite all this, these tranquil wooden churches retain a simple beauty. For centuries they have formed the nuclei of Belarusian rural life, and the focus of peasants’ daily devotions. Dignified and unpretentious, they have renewed my understanding of craft – it is not something just for the well-to-do, but is about applying love and care even to things made from limited resources. The feelings invoked by a seductive image generated by expensive software are very different to those prompted by a sincere hand-drawn sketch that cost next to nothing to produce. It was this heartfelt emotion, triggered by these churches, that captured my imagination.

As Deyan Sudjic has observed, our relationship with objects does not have the leisure to mature when new technology and materials appear in rapid succession. Things were once made to hold memories and grow old, but we have commodified everything, including buildings, in the relentless search for the next new thing. The wooden churches of Belarus might become more relevant – should the age of excess ever end. Unlike the Arts and Crafts movement in the 19th century, which was largely seen as anti-industrial and expensive, perhaps it is still possible to reconcile the vernacular approach to building and the market economy; and a different attitude to appreciating buildings might emerge.

To find out more about RIBAJ Rising Stars, a scheme to reward up and coming construction professionals, visit ribaj.com/rising-stars-2016

Rising Stars 2017 opens for entries in June.
Page of consents

Windmills, Scout huts and prisons liven up the latest planning approvals

Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Perhaps it’s all that clement weather recently but the emphasis seems to be on the south west of the country, with the lion’s share of permissions this time. The smallest and most decadent, it turns out, will have to be the most robust, sitting on a cliff on Devon’s Burgh Island, but Millar Howard Workshop’s Scout hut in Stroud will also need to be prepared to be scuffed and bruised by its boisterous young users. A different kind of institution altogether gets residential makeovers in Dorchester and Shepton Mallet. Meantime, back in the capital, London’s only working windmill gets a new space for community bake-offs; while those with enough dough will be soon able to rise purposefully above the Greenwich Meridian near the Thames’ banks.

DORCHESTER AND SHEPTON MALLET PRISON REDEVELOPMENTS

Client City & Country
Architect Purcell
Area Dorchester 21,700m², Shepton Mallet 15,700m²
Planning authority West Dorset District Council & Mendip District Council
Planning ref Dorchester WD/D/16/002697, Shepton Mallet 2016/2485/FUL

Doing bird in the hand is worth two in the bush in the south west, where consents have been gained by architect Purcell for the conversion of grade II and grade II* prisons in Dorchester and Shepton Mallet. Both closed in 2013, and each has a colourful history. Dorchester, on the site of a Norman castle, has an 18th century gatehouse and was the scene of the county’s last public hanging of a woman – which might account for its stated associations with Thomas Hardy (Tess of the d’Urbervilles perhaps?). Shepton Mallet was the oldest working prison in the UK and once housed the infamous Kray twins.

Shepton Mallet’s heritage block will provide 96 apartments and Dorchester’s 60. Both prisons will provide heritage space for the public and development of ancillary areas will, in the case of Dorchester, generate a total of 185 homes.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT, HORSHAM, SUSSEX

Client Reef Estates & Arcus-PCD
Architect Holder Mathias
Total area 8,355m²
Planning authority Horsham District Council
Planning ref DC/16/2506

In genteel society everyone deserves an Everyman and now Horsham in Sussex has joined the hallowed ranks of the independent cinema chain’s inner circle with its proposed mixed-use development adjacent to the Horsham Conservation Area.

People will also be able to work, eat and even sleep there as the proposal includes a 92-bed Premier Inn.

The three-screen cinema will act as the anchor for the £35 million development, with new shops and offices extending around the existing Piries Place, which will have its public realm upgraded as part of the proposal.

The architectural expression picks up on the town’s Carfax area, with a restrained, contemporary language of two tones of brick, bronze coloured metalwork and terracotta tiles which aims to blend in with the vernacular of this upmarket Sussex market town.

GREENWICH PENINSULA TOWERS, LONDON

Client Knight Dragon Developments
Architect Alison Brooks Architects
Total area 26,505m² GIA
Planning authority Royal Borough of Greenwich
Planning ref 16/1787/R

The Greenwich Meridian might run through the site at 90° but the lines on Alison Brooks Architects’ 400-unit residential development for Knight Dragon are definitely more acute, one elevation on each of the four blocks tapering away noticeably as they ascend. The two towers, at 17 and 28 storeys on the south west of the site, face directly onto Central Park, a proposed community green space, designed, the PR states, in the ‘great tradition of London garden squares’.

The metal lattice expression of the towers and tapering forms are inspired by ‘the industrial heritage of the local area, the gas holders and cast iron clad chimneys of Greenwich Power station’. Blocks radiate in plan around a central landscaped area and are connected by a colonnaded plinth.

Lower blocks are to the north east of the site; all will have 360° views, roof gardens and co-working spaces as well as a variety of flat type and tenures. The development is part of Greenwich Peninsula, which consists of seven new neighbourhoods, masterplanned by Allies and Morrison.

Jan-Carlos Kucharek

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Jan-Carlos Kucharek
More literary and even penitentiary references here just off Devon’s south coast, with Carmody Groarke’s remote new addition for the Art Deco Burgh Island Hotel – notably where Agatha Christie wrote ‘Ten Little Indians’ and the Poirot mystery ‘Evil Under the Sun’. A large tricorn-shaped stone clad form creates a luxurious independent suite spanning from cliff to promontory with a small textured granular concrete arch structure. At 90m², there’s plenty of room to dispatch Colonel Mustard with the lead pipe, although fewer places to hide – the three corners terminate with large glazed openings facing south to open sea, east to the mainland and west back across the isle.

Burgh Island isn’t Capri and this isn’t the uncompromising yet stunning Casa Malaparte; but with its Yennadon stone walls and grass roof, there’s an understated, deferential quality to the design that belies what will doubtless be the indulgent luxury of the interiors. Can’t wait for the press trip…
It’s great news that BIM adoption is set to increase rapidly over the next few years. However, we must be careful that it isn’t adopted as a ‘tick box’ exercise, but is seen as an important tool for collaboration and delivering tangible benefits for designers, owners and occupiers.

Collaboration and the sharing of data is vital to the success of BIM. At its heart, BIM is a collaborative tool that reduces waste and risk of error, and facilitates the sharing of detailed information that leads to more efficient buildings, throughout the design, construction and operational phases of the building’s life cycle.

After all, every aspect of a building contributes to its performance. When you consider the volume of doorsets that can be used and the impact of, for example, the door width on its overall dimensions and flow of people through it, it is easy to see how if positioned correctly BIM doorset objects do have a role to play in energy savings.

The frequency of a door’s use, the need for it to be open over longer periods, and its own thermal capacity all contribute to a building’s overall energy performance.

We work closely with design consultants and energy assessors to arrange ironmongery schedules that enhance the design and performance of a building. By attending to energy savings, operation and the intended foot flow of traffic we can help to manage energy efficiency, and improve the circulation of air and a building’s thermal performance.

By understanding the intended use of a doorset throughout a building and its own physical attributes – such as closing speed and thermal rating – specifiers and architects can supply doorset solutions that help maintain and manage a building’s energy.

That’s why ASSA ABLOY UK Specification, a UK division of ASSA ABLOY, the global leader in door opening solutions, has launched Openings Studio, a BIM-enabled product specification tool, and BIM Door Solutions, a selection of BIM-ready openings packages, to help streamline the specification process, encourage collaboration, and reduce costs throughout the project lifecycle.

Tim Checketts is specification director of UK Specification, a UK division of ASSA ABLOY
Copyright after sale

Your drawings won the planning consent but the site has since been sold. Can the new developer use them?

Angus Dawson

Sale of a site and ceasing to be involved in a project can lead to concerns for architects about copyright issues and the ongoing use of their drawings.

A recent case is a good example of how the courts will look to protect the commercial interests of architects where drawings are exploited by a third party without an appropriate licence. In Signature Realty v Fortis Developments, Signature obtained planning permission for a block of student flats in Sheffield on the basis of drawings prepared by its architect, C&W. The permission required the development to be carried out in accordance with C&W’s drawings.

Copies of C&W’s drawings were made available to the public via the planning portal, which made it clear that the drawings could only be downloaded and/or printed for the purposes of comparing the application with previous schemes and in order to check whether developments had been completed in accordance with the approved plans.

C&W’s drawings included a notice that copyright vested in the architect and that the drawings should not be copied or reproduced without C&W’s consent.

Signature was unable to secure funding to buy the site and complete the development, and the site was eventually bought by Fortis.

Fortis carried out the development in accordance with the planning permission using a design & build contractor, Beaumont, it had worked with on other projects. It appears that Beaumont’s own architect visited the site, took measurements and prepared AutoCAD drawings (taking into account C&W’s designs) which were used to carry out the development.

Aggrieved that it had lost out on the site, Signature took an assignment of copyright from C&W and brought a breach of copyright claim against Fortis and Beaumont. The court was asked to decide whether there was a breach of copyright and, if so, to order an enquiry into damages and additional damages and to grant injunctive relief to prevent any continuing breach.

The judge held that the works Fortis and the contractor had carried out were an infringement of copyright. In reaching that decision, the judge found that the drawings produced by C&W were sufficiently original to attract copyright and that Beaumont’s drawings were sufficiently similar to C&W’s for there to be an infringement. This was almost inevitable as the project had to be built in accordance with the planning consent.

Entitlement to compensation

While the judge refused to grant an injunction to prevent continuing use of the drawings (as the building had been sold and neither party had a continuing interest in them), and was not willing to grant ‘additional’ damages which can, in some circumstances, be awarded under the Copyright Designs and Patents Act, he was willing to make an order ‘...for an enquiry or account in the usual way’ in order to deal with damages, meaning there would in all likelihood be an entitlement to compensation for the copyright infringement.

The take away point from the case is that provided that planning drawings are marked as being subject to the copyright of the architect and not to be reproduced without the consent of the architect, a third party who does not have a licence or sub-licence to use the design will not be entitled to use the drawings without the architect’s consent.

Angus Dawson is partner at Macfarlanes

The planning portal made it clear that the drawings could only be used for comparison and to check against the approved plans.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH:

REASONABLE SKILL AND CARE

The other class of obligation most commonly found in architects’ appointment documents is the obligation to use reasonable skill and care. This is the standard of care most commonly applied to the performance of services by professional consultants. The basic nature of this obligation is set out in the 1950s case of Bolam: ‘The law requires of a professional man that he live up in practice to the standard of the ordinary skilled man exercising and professing to have his special professional skills. He need not possess the highest expert skills; it is enough if he exercises the ordinary skill of an ordinary competent man exercising his particular art.’

Often architect’s appointment documents will include a slightly more detailed obligation, providing that the architect is to use the reasonable skill and care to be expected of an architect experienced in performing the agreed services in respect of projects of a similar size, scope and complexity and in a similar location to the project in question.

In assessing whether an architect has complied with its obligations, the courts will look at whether the architect’s conduct falls below the standard of the ordinary competent professional and whether there is a substantial body of opinion within the profession which would support the actions taken by the architect.
Save our species

Architects’ individualism is all very well. Better interoperability is what the profession needs to survive

The ability of things to operate with each other is known as interoperability. As an ever smaller number of bigger and bigger businesses dominate the marketplace, and the workings of technology become ever more obscure to ordinary people, a lack of interoperability becomes an ever more sinister threat.

Big businesses get bigger for all sorts of reasons: from clever deployments of purchasing power to evil payment plans that prey on innumeracy. As every town centre regeneration brief written in the last couple of decades will tell you, department stores, supermarkets and chains have put independent butchers and bakers out of business by being cheaper and more convenient. Crudely, economies of scale allow big businesses to provide their offer more cheaply to their customers. Compound this with a perception of reliability and brand recognition fuelled by big marketing budgets and these behemoths wield enormous power — even enough to buy out any pesky competitors that do nibble at their ankles.

Now add in that bullish move of an exclusive interface. From Filofax to Sony’s Memory Stick Duo to Apple’s lighting connector, many companies, with varying levels of success, have developed products exclusively compatible with their own range. Just as two snails of different species physically can’t fit their bits together to make a baby snail, you can’t charge your iPhone with a micro USB. The trend towards subscription services that hoard custom intensifies things even further. Whereas once you might have bought CDs from HMV and Woolworths and supermarkets and petrol stations, now that you’ve signed up to Spotify or Tidal, you spend pretty much all your music money in one place.

The dominance of big players rings true in architecture too. We all know the safe pair of hands rhetoric. My question is, is this partly due to challenges of interoperability? And if so what should we do about it? What is interoperability with respect to architecture? Is it that alluring conceit of designing a complete system? From Archigram’s Plug-in City to William McDonough’s Cradle to Cradle ICE-house, a system dangles a tantalising promise of something smelling like utopia.

Is it about co-ordination? Are BIM families and clash detection software evidence of our industry combating isolation in this mad complicated world? Or is it about project management? Is it our failure to recognise the threat of clunky interoperability across project management systems that’s contributed to our losing ground on this front?

Big architectural practices, with the benefits brought by economies of scale, tend to have systems that ensure a consistent service is offered. This is an essential string to their bow and they’ve little incentive to share these systems: they’re hardly likely to make it easier for an opportunistic sole practitioner to offer a service the customer can reasonably expect to be comparable.

In UK architecture, ARB and RIBA are arguably our ‘kitemarks’ of quality. They claim to offer consumer protection and confidence, and the prevalence of red signboards up and down the country is testament to this. But should they be doing more towards interoperability? What might this look like? A library of templates? An app version of a project manager? The love child of Amazon Alexa and Which Contract? A viral video that engenders a dramatic shift in attitude towards competition?

Architects tend to be individualistic. Despite the challenges, a high proportion of us want to set up on our own and find new and better ways of doing things. The down side is that if we were snails, we’d all have incompatible bits and nobody could mate and we’d die out. Get any architect started on fees and you’d be forgiven for concluding that this process was well on its way

If we were snails, nobody could mate and we’d die out. Get any architect started on fees and you might conclude this process was well on its way

Maria Smith is director of architecture and engineering at Interrobang

If Romeo and Juliet and loads of other depressing stories illustrate, endlessly extrapolating protectionism comes at a great cost. It was this fundamental wisdom that led to the development of British Standards in the 1900s: to allow different manufacturers to make parts that would fit together, to ‘facilitate trade, provide a framework for achieving economies, efficiencies and interoperability, [and] enhance consumer protection and confidence’ as the British Standards Institution (BSI) website puts it.

The RIBA Journal February 2017
As market leaders in digital technology, Schueco have used their technical expertise to produce a Parametric 3D Façade that can be designed as a straightforward system solution, delivering the affordability and cost certainty of a series product. Highly insulated with U values down to 0.5 W/m²K, the surface elements can be transparent or opaque. Planning tools include ‘intelligent’ façade modules for CAD programs that deliver a 99% reduction in detailing time. For German engineering made in Britain, there’s only one name.  

www.schueco.co.uk
Design aspiration becomes reality

Marley Eternit tiles helped realise the design vision for a unique rural home
A striking and seamless curving roof is one of the standout features of Quintain House, a unique two-bedroom house in rural Gloucestershire. Its flowing lines disguise a complex roofing substructure that was achieved through the patience, diligence and flexibility of the entire project team.

To cope with the extreme rises and falls of the roof the team had to devise a satisfactory battening solution and then securely fix almost 60,000 Marley Eternit Acme Double Camber clay plain tiles. Along with flowing lines, the project’s architectural consultant was keen to deliver a highly textured appearance. With its longitudinal and latitudinal camber, the Acme Double Camber clay plain tile’s unique double curve was the ideal choice to create the desired roofscape.

At 820m², the roof was a significant area; to achieve the design vision, each of the 60,000 tiles had to be individually marked and cut by hand to match the space requirements of all the roof sections. With some areas having pitches of just 21°, the team was mindful of adhering to the latest roof fixing standard (BS 5534), as not only did the roof have to be stunning to look at, it also had to be waterproof, secure and built to last.

Quintain House has another claim to fame: it is one of fewer than 100 homes over the past 15 years to have met the stringent standards for the National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 55, which allows for construction of buildings of “exceptional quality or innovative nature in design”.

Marley Eternit’s Acme Double Camber tiles are also accredited to the BES 6001 framework standard for responsible sourcing, which means projects using them, such as Quintain House, can now achieve extra credits under BREEAM.
Kicking up a stink: Climate change and pollution denial are burning issues

In the best-known words of Alfred Pennyworth, as played by Michael Caine in the 2008 Batman movie The Dark Knight, ‘Some men just want to watch the world burn’. It’s quoted all the time, for all kinds of reasons. Especially now, especially given that the person Pennyworth had in mind was The Joker. Imagine someone with enormous power and limitless weaponry but no sense of responsibility!

On a recent sunny, breezy Sunday, with our wind turbines spinning and solar farms soaking up the rays, the UK hit a moment when 40% of all the electricity being used came from just those two sources. Coal-fired power stations were turned off, as were many gas-powered stations and wood-pellet burners. Even our reduced and ageing nuclear power stations, which normally run at full pitch continuously, took some maintenance downtime.

In the right conditions, that percentage can increase and with more solar and wind-generating capacity still being added despite the reduction or removal of tax incentives, it will any way. We have a way to go before we hit the situation that Germany now occasionally finds itself in – of having more renewable power than it needs. Of course such cheerful figures need context – on such a warm spring weekend, demand for power is low. Crunch time for power generation is a gloomy, windless day in the deep mid-winter. Even so, hurrah!

I thought of Pennyworth’s line because of the obvious thing now back on the agenda – climate change denial, and the raft of political anti-environmental moves associated with that, especially in the US but increasingly in the UK too. We are in the world of utter short-termism. Pump the oil, frack the gas, burn the gasoline, clear the rainforests, and to hell with tomorrow. This is a world where a contrarian dogma can count for more than the findings of most of the world’s climate scientists. For these people, the more CO₂, the better. Look! Those Pacific coral atolls haven’t submerged yet! It still snows sometimes! Where’s the problem? There is no problem!

Along with climate change denial, comes its yet more sinister sibling: pollution denial. Here political dogma starts to verge on actual evil. In this ideology all industry is good, and if it pollutes the air we breathe with a cocktail of toxins, that’s fine too. While climate change deniers dismiss majority scientific findings because they don’t suit them, pollution deniers question the methodologies used to calculate the numbers of deaths caused by filthy, particulate-laden air. Because it is hard to conclusively prove exact correlations (‘air pollution’ is never a cause on a death certificate), the whole evidence base is casually rejected.

It is said of the four days of the great London smog of 1952 that 12,000 people died as a consequence. I remember my father saying how truly terrible it was: the feel, taste, colour of it, the sensation of choking. That smog led to the Clean Air Act of 1956 and its successors. But if today’s pollution deniers had been around back then, they’d have found a perverted reason to glory in that smog. Some men (and they mostly seem to be men) just want to watch the world burn. Do not believe them.

Hugh Pearman
Editor

Imagine someone with enormous power and limitless weaponry but no sense of responsibility!
Help us live in harmony

Propose a creative solution for multi-generational living using SterlingOSB for the chance to win £2500

Deadline for entries: 20 June

How will society be living in the decades to come? Will the unaffordability of land make independent home ownership untenable? Will there be more imaginative ways for families to make best use of their property assets by proposing novel solutions for how they might be used or adapted?

Those are the questions being asked of architects in SterlingOSB/RIBAJ's MultiGen competition.

We're asking architects to take on the structural potential of SterlingOSB and to propose new modes of adapting a home to make multi-generational living viable on one site. It might be anything from a home you're extending or appending to, out or up; or a new structure in a suburban garden connected by a subterranean passage to the existing home – a 'granny' or even student annexe.

We're looking for unfettered, imaginative proposals for how future generations might be able to live together on the same footprint, at higher density, while allowing for the independence that three or four generations might crave; not just a return to real, shared, multi-generational living, driven by modern economic realities and innovative, fresh thinking.

With cash prizes for the award winner and commended entries, they will also appear in a special supplement published in the October 2017 issue of the RIBAJ.

Criteria
The family property or housing can be of your choosing. You will be looking to increasing the usable area of any family property by up to 35m² to create an additional independent unit. The design could provide a home for a young adult, student, worker, or middle-aged or elderly individual using the intrinsic structural properties of SterlingOSB.

norbord.co.uk

How you choose to extend or append to that property is up to you, but any proposal should allow for separate access to the new structure – either internal or external. As this is blue sky thinking, proposals will not need to accord with current planning guidance or regulation; but they should aim to be accessible, sustainable, healthy and viable.

Judging
Chaired by the RIBAJ, judges will be looking for imaginative uses of SterlingOSB and innovative spatial propositions as key criteria of the judging process. Any proposal should consider structural, acoustic and thermal demands of higher density living. Prefabrication, panels or CNC fabrication can all be considered. Other materials may be used to both clad and fit-out the proposal but structural integrity is to be predicated on the use of SterlingOSB.

The winning proposal will be the one that, in the minds of the judges, produces a solution on the chosen site that is spatially innovative and which best accommodates the various demands of intergenerational living while making best use of SterlingOSB’s properties.

Entry Form
Please go to ribaj.com/multigen-comp

Submissions
Entries must be include the following and be laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as pdfs:

- Plans, including north point
- Sections explaining space and function
- Elevations showing the look of the intervention
- 3D axonometric showing construction methodology
- Any optional supplementary images you consider helpful

Notes
- The jury’s decision is final
- First prize: £2,500, three commended submissions: £250
- No correspondence will be entered into by the organisers or the judges regarding feedback on entries
- Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing
- Shortlisted entries will be invited to the prize giving event on 28 September 2017

Deadline for entry: 20 June, 2017
Accidental New York

Manhattan is losing its threatening charisma

Phallicism is over-diagnosed in skyscrapers, but in the case of the Kushnerdrome on Fifth, it’s hard to evade.

It’s not exactly social cleansing. But hotels are public space in a way that apartment buildings are not, even if that space is subject to stringent proscriptions.

In place of the shadow-sculpted spectres of Hugh Ferriss’s ideal skyscraper forms, and the civic grunt of Raymond Hood’s Rockefeller Center, the latest proposals for the Manhattan skyline are the skinny and shiny brigade. Kushner Companies, the property firm of President (at time of writing) Trump’s son-in-law, unveiled plans for a tower on Fifth Avenue, a Zaha Hadid Architects-designed rectal thermometer. Phallicism is over-diagnosed in writing about skyscrapers. Most towers do not look anything like that, unless there’s something seriously medically wrong. But in the case of the Kushnerdrome on Fifth, it’s hard to evade. Would Ferriss be pleased? Would Hood?

The second most eye-catching idea of early 2017 was no less wince-inducing: Oiio’s scheme for a ‘paperclip’ tower, really two slim towers, connected at the top. This was more sardonic provocation than genuine proposal, intended to highlight the abuse of New York’s ‘air rights’ regulations that has led to the crop of super-slender condo spikes. It belongs in the same tradition as Ferriss’s smoky zigzrags, even if it lacks the sinister mass.

There’s a sense that Manhattan has lost some of the threatening charisma that has made it so magnetic to architects, either as inspiration (Koolhaas) or foil (Corbusier and Lloyd Wright). Like London, it is suffering the effects of being a favoured sump for the globe-sloshing super-rich. The city has in recent years sought to restore and even build anew some of the infrastructure that characterised its golden age: the High Line elevated railway has been turned into a hugely successful public park, and the much-maligned Penn Station is being given an airy extension. But these are proper and purposeful urban interventions. In Delirious New York, it was the accidental genius of the city that Koolhaas sought to capture, the bizarre misbreeds of infrastructure and regulation that shaped the city without anyone’s specific say-so. You can’t do accident on purpose. And so it might be that Delirious marked the end of one kind of Manhattan – that as soon as its specialness was so well captured, it went from a time of production to an age of preservation.

Will Wiles is a journalist and author. Read him here every other month and at ribaj.com

Phallicism is over-diagnosed in skyscrapers, but in the case of the Kushnerdrome on Fifth, it’s hard to evade.

Will Wiles has been on my mind lately. Port, the style magazine where I keep the architecture and design brief, made its spring/summer 2017 issue a New York special, and I wrote about Manhattan’s curiously industrial, Gothic – Gothamic – feel. The island is as much defined by accidental features of the urban scene as it is by landmarks: the iron fire escapes, the water tanks, the steaming manhole covers. Other cities make street furniture part of their image, such as the art nouveau Metro entrances of Paris, or Hull’s white telephone boxes. But those are consciously decorative; and although New York has a few very fine decorative fire escapes, the ones that form the mental picture are the utilitarian black zigzags that still seem to be half of the built form of some parts of the city.

It’s impossible to think about Manhattan’s distinctiveness without remembering Rem Koolhaas’s Delirious New York. The ‘retroactive manifesto for Manhattan’ is, incredibly, nearing its 40th birthday, its powers undiminished. But it was a melancholy couple of months to reconsider the text. The Waldorf Astoria hotel, subject of my favourite chapter of Delirious New York, has closed. Koolhaas presented the Waldorf Astoria as an early 20th century megastructure, a cybernetic city-within-a-city that prefigured the utopian speculations of later decades.

Now it is to be turned into apartments for the wealthy. Of course, the building was very much for the wealthy before its conversion.

Epic Space, a just-released collection of Ian Martin’s magnificent satirical columns for the Architects’ Journal, has the following tribute to the profession in its acknowledgements:

‘Architects are such a lovely bunch of people. Clever and resilient, game for a laugh. I have worked alongside you and mocked your world relentlessly. In return you have been stoical and forgiving. Thank you.’

I couldn’t agree more. Do check out the book. Christmas is (always) coming.

Read Hugh Pearman’s review of Epic Space at www.ribaj.com /integrity /epic-space-by-ian-martin
Preserves and jams

Don’t get bogged down in the debate over conservation, reuse and newbuild

How will we know it’s us without our past? – John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath

Buildings have always been altered to suit changing needs. Delve deeper into ‘adaptive reuse’ and you’ll meet controversy over the benefits of renovation vs façadism or an uneasy compromise between preservation and demolition. But retention and reuse of older buildings can play a pivotal role in the sustainable use and enjoyment of a city.

All our cities have unprotected buildings which have artistic, cultural, architectural or local historic merit. Many are well-constructed and remain fit for further use; and contribute to the character of a place. In Dublin, the City Heritage Plan put this into practice by ‘promoting environmental, economic and cultural sustainability’, including an economic review with case-study buildings, where the cost of demolition and rebuilding was compared to the cost of retention and re-use, in relation to building costs, environmental analysis and whole life costs.

Demolition and new build are often still seen as a more straightforward way to develop, and there is a misconception that new build is always more economical than adaptation. Energy efficiency is often cited for new build, but the reasons for keeping, maintaining and reusing buildings are manifold.

A study by the Empty Homes Agency however found that a refurbished house gave off 15 tonnes of embodied CO₂, compared to the 50 tonnes given off by a new one. The BRE found that for offices, refurbishment is always environmentally more beneficial and cheaper than demolition and rebuilding, as long as air conditioning is not used.

The Dublin study was clear: re-use of buildings is ‘a viable alternative to demolition and new construction, with additional environmental and cultural benefits that translate to more profitable buildings in the long term’ except where a very high degree of repair and refurbishment is required. A study on UK rental returns for listed buildings also showed that they consistently outperformed new build structures for the last five years.

Regeneration includes change, and conservation is the management of that change, but a building’s survival must rely on its being suitable for a relevant new use. Existing structures offer exciting opportunities for architects’ creative thinking. Imaginative interdisciplinary interventions are needed.

The knowledge, principles and philosophy of conservation are thus not just relevant to very special historic or listed buildings, but to most of our urban and rural fabric, with about 50% of all architects’ work including repair, maintenance, adaptation and conservation of built heritage in all its diverse forms. With its Conservation Register, and hugely popular Conservation Course, the RIBA continues to support both members and the wider industry to gain and develop vital skills for both reuse and conservation.

It’s not possible or even desirable to re-use all older buildings, so part of the renewal process must include new buildings. Despite wonderful award winning examples, public debate continues about the appropriateness of contemporary architectural insertions into historic urban areas. Change in our cities is however inevitable, and necessary if we are to avoid living in a museum. Contemporary buildings will play a role in creating the heritage of the future.

We’ll be remembered more for what we destroy than what we create – Chuck Palahniuk, Invisible Monsters

This article was written using 100% recycled words. (With apologies to Terry Pratchett, Wyrd Sisters)

@JaneDuncan/PRIBA

Jane Duncan

HOLLY EXLEY

DORIC CLUB LUNCH, 3 JULY

New Doric Club chair, Richard Saxon, invites all RIBA members who are retired or over the age of 65 to join us for the annual Doric Club lunch this summer. The lunch offers an opportunity to remain in contact with the Institute and come together in the Florence Hall among friends, former colleagues and contemporaries to celebrate the past, present and future of architecture.

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creating better environments
A pragmatic ‘we can do it’ approach to clients with a tight budget has given the directors of Manchester practice Sixtwo Architects early and seemingly unstoppable success

Words: Isabelle Priest  Portrait: Ivan Jones

High flyers

‘Budget – we say that word a lot,’ realises Nick Moss, one half of Sixtwo Architects with practice co-founder Andrew Edmunds.

We’re a couple of hours into what turns out to be a five-hour meeting to get to know this relatively new practice, which although still mainly confined to Manchester and the North West, is rumbling long-established existing firms.

RIBAJ has come here more or less by necessity hearing the name Sixtwo Architects again and again. The recommendations came from respected peers who might sometimes offer up suggestions of other firms reluctantly. But with so many leads, we had to find out more.

The word ‘budget’ is persistent.

‘It’s hard for Manchester as a city compared with the South East,’ says Moss, ‘there just aren’t the same values at the end. Even Ian Simpson might be on one-sixth of the budget for a facade here as he is in London. It’s almost impossible not to cheapen buildings.’

Yet of course that isn’t their aim. When Moss and Edmunds started out in 2012, Manchester was ‘the only place they wanted to do it’. They felt there was room in the city for a new design-led firm and wanted to fill that gap – a move bolstered by the well-known practices that have just opened second offices there: Hawkins\Brown, Levitt Bernstein and Mecanoo.

‘There’s an optimism here compared to Leeds and Liverpool,’ says Moss. ‘The place seems forward-thinking and buoyant.’

In fact, though Moss and Edmunds seem so culturally and professionally embedded here, Manchester is their adopted city. They arrived 13 and 14 years ago, meeting later at Stephenson Bell where they worked for nine and eight years respectively.

The pair are spa town boys; from Harrogate and Cheltenham – something that you might not guess from their crisp, self-conscious jeans and blazers appearance, nor from their northern-ish but non-descript accents. Their similarities are uncanny. Both six foot two – hence the name of the practice
Nick Moss (left) and Andrew Edmunds on the atrium of their refurbishment project Stubbs Mills in New Islington, Manchester. The bobbin inspired lamp hangs to the left.
‘We’re greater together than the sum of our parts. And we’ve learned not to settle on the first draft as a result’

gone we come back to budgets – more specifically, tight, hyper commercial ones. This is epitomised by Sixtwo’s nearly complete Stubbs Mills in New Islington, Manchester. It’s the former machine-making factory of Joseph Stubbs, who pioneered the single-flanged bobbin that helped bring the North West its 19th century wealth. The project was born to reignite Urban Splash’s redevelopment in the area after the company got severely burned by the 2008 financial crisis. Consequently, the refurb is resourceful – a constraint under which Sixtwo Architects has flourished. Opting for a cool aesthetic on a budget, it has left brickwork partially revealed, SIPPS panels exposed, specified polycarbonate roofing over glazing, painted standard radiators black to smarten them up and left the galvanised raised floors uncovered. Put off by the price of pendant lights for the triple-storey entrance, Sixtwo commissioned its own bobbin-inspired design from a local metalworker instead for just £2,000 (a motorised wire drops to ground level to change the bulb). It’s an accomplished refurbishment in a part of the city that needs it.

As the afternoon progresses, it’s clear Moss and Edmunds are very pro-development guys. They are commercially minded, eager to be creative and to get things done. They’re entrepreneurial too. It’s an approach that feels practical and work hungry. At the Foundry, a new two-industrial-shed scheme on the edge of the river overlooking Manchester in Salford, you don’t get the sense that taking an interest in light industrial warehouses is an intellectual position, say in the manner of Venturi, but a pragmatic one. They want projects with potential that ‘carry on what they had been doing before’ as salaried architects, and are prepared to rethink any type of building to get them. It works though: for the Foundry they convinced Capital & Centric (a new developer ‘like Urban Splash 25 years ago’) that a shed could be made into architecture for not much more than the usual cost by wrapping it with brick and punching chamfered window reveals into it, at £3 million for 40,000ft². Likewise, they are ‘uplifting’ the hostel opposite Manchester Town Hall, redeveloping the university’s listed Hollings Campus known as the ‘Toast Rack’, and designing a ‘more conservative’ 800ft² house in Hale, as well as numerous housing projects, including one for Trafford Housing Trust to venture into the private market. It is has the possibility of a 25-storey tower for an unnamed developer in central Manchester too.

‘People are surprised we are only five people in the office. They expect more like 15 or 20,’ says Moss.

So how has Sixtwo got this far this fast? Like many five-year-old practices, most of its projects exist as cleanly rendered drawings or behind contractor hoardings. One answer lies in the method of pursuing work which both are disappointed by Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation – tick, both enjoyed MIPIM – tick, both completed their entire studies in one place – tick (Moss at Liverpool and Edmunds at Cardiff). You can imagine that in a hurry out of the office one of them might grab the other’s jacket – and not notice.

These are identikit partners that, effortlessly and impressively, take their positions as the new kids on the block with the ease of teenage models posing for an ASOS lookbook. No shy awkwardness here. Both seem reluctant to discuss their lives before Sixtwo, and any attempt to pinpoint differences – what projects or tasks each favours, for example – gets the same answer from both: student accommodation, hotels, offices, and both do bits of everything. Yet most obviously, Edmunds is quiet, Moss is chatty, but clearly they complement each other in unknowing ways. ‘We’re greater together than the sum of our parts,’ says Moss. ‘And we’ve learned not to settle on the first draft as a result.’

So to discover what gets this practice going we come back to budgets – more specifically, tight, hyper commercial ones. This is epitomised by Sixtwo’s nearly complete Stubbs Mills in New Islington, Manchester. It’s the former machine-making factory of Joseph Stubbs, who pioneered the single-flanged bobbin that helped bring the North West its 19th century wealth. The project was born to reignite Urban Splash’s redevelopment in the area after the company got severely burned by the 2008 financial crisis.

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So how has Sixtwo got this far this fast? Like many five-year-old practices, most of its projects exist as cleanly rendered drawings or behind contractor hoardings. One answer lies in the method of pursuing work which is determined, carried out with efficiency
and smiles. It’s meant having to work hard at getting out and stay true to original values; not compromising. The practice refused, for example, to do any domestic work in its first year for fear – like Acme (RIBAJ March 2017) – of being pigeonholed while it was ‘striving for much more’. Another answer is Sixtwo’s role in pushing the Manchester Architecture Awards by organising the parties and redesigning the trophies. It’s only entered one open competition – for Preston Bus Station.

What Moss and Edmunds talk about is how strong architectural identity can be part of a developer’s offer, as well as turning mundane briefs into exciting proposals: at their Tempest office refurb in Liverpool they persuaded the client to add beehives to the roof to produce ‘office honey’.

“We do a lot of speculative work to generate leads,” says Moss. “It has become more difficult as we get busier, but clients expect architects to do that now.”

“We worked hard. We fitted 10 years into four. Only now is it getting easier.”

You could argue that all this makes Sixtwo the perfect developer architect. What’s more our spa town boys believe unconditionally in the power of the market – the ‘jury’s out’ for example on how the new metro may or (see page 48) might help Manchester. And when we discuss the lack of trees in the city, that seems totally fine, continuing the city’s ever-known grittiness and commercial-ness: ‘Civic pride is more the domain of Liverpool.’

Yet, at times, Moss and Edmunds’ pro-development stance is rattling. They insist the Gary Neville’s and Ryan Giggs’ controversial towers ‘only need a slight redesign at ground level’, and say they don’t imagine that the 1980s housing next door to Stubbs Mills that sells for £60,000 ‘will stay long’ when new housing, also metres away, sells for £250,000 and more.

The pair admit to ‘being in bed with developers’ – and they meet developer client needs so successfully that others are now adversely calling them ‘fancy architects’, which misses the point.

‘Everything is bottom-line commercialism,’ repeats Moss. ‘Our main aim is to make our clients money. So many architects seem to forget that. Architects can’t be two-dimensional anymore.’

The thing is, they do this work apparently uncritically. Building on green belt land in the area ‘needs to happen’, and even when pushed they don’t see why any development could be considered wrong, whether pushing out the less wealthy from long-time homes, or not understanding historical buildings as part of a previous iteration of a city that they continue to culturally inhabit. Moss brushed off questioning about the demolition controversy surrounding the Neville-Giggs skyscrapers with: ‘That’s how Manchester has been redeveloping for 20 years’. Then again, Stubbs itself is only one quarter of its original size.

Moss and Edmunds like shiny and new. Stubbs Mills is tokenistic to Manchester’s interesting history in the circumstances. It’s not Sixtwo’s fault, but it is involved in dressing places up, adding hipster-esque quirks and passing it on for a small fortune; although to get the project, Moss and Edmunds apparently critiqued previous Urban Splash projects in the interview, so maybe there’s more they’re not letting on.

Nevertheless, as the images show, Sixtwo’s individual buildings are robust and steely. They aren’t ground-breaking – they say that – verging on trendy tweaks to an existing formula. The slightly brave parking space graphics and flaky paint brick walls they talk about at Stubbs are welcome variations, but not quite enough to warrant so much praise. The firm seems good at working within frameworks, so it’s something else that’s rumbling architects in town. It’s Moss and Edmunds’ attitude to make things work for what they are offered. Anyone willing to fit 10 years into four must be annoying others trying to compete.

And here we come back again to budgets. Moss and Edmunds talk of wanting bigger, London-sized ones – and it seems that would be the practice’s real test. Used to their lean, work-hungry context, would Sixtwo’s architecture sink or swim with more money?
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Mission accepted?

Architects were thin on the ground at the UN’s Habitat III conference but they will engage with its agenda at the RIBA’s International Week in July.

Tom Dyckhoff

I have a guilty pleasure: disaster films. Every time I watch a movie about Armageddon, alien invasion or an asteroid about to whack Earth into oblivion I wonder, what would I do? What could this middle-aged architectural historian – with his lack of Bear Grylls skills and a B in O-level physics – bring to the table besides an sensitive understanding of cultural meaning of ruins, a cursory knowledge of Heinrich Wölfflin and a dab hand with a mushroom risotto, none of which are particularly relevant when little green men are about to unleash their mega-weapon?

Armageddon might be a year or two off yet, but dip your toe into Twitter or the news these days and you’re likely to come away a little dispirited, such are the legion of disasters and problems (or that modern-day euphemism, ‘challenges’) piling up in humanity’s in-tray. The UN’s New Urban Agenda is full of them. Reading the 30-page document, one can’t help reciting its text in your head with the voice of fictional leaders of the free world from those movies – Morgan Freeman, perhaps, from Deep Impact, or Bill Pullman in Independence Day. Chiselled jaw. Serious voice. Concerned look into the middle distance. Resolute acceptance of the rocky road ahead. Where to begin: slums, favelas, climate change, mass-migration, disease, segregation, ever-widening inequalities, pollution, housing crises in even advanced economies... and on and on.

Our real-life stand-in for Morgan Freeman is Joan Clos, former mayor of Barcelona,
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that poster-boy for modern-day urban nirvana, and now executive director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat), which last year gathered 193 countries in Quito, Ecuador for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, or Habitat III.

The UN has met like this every 20 years since 1976, when worries of imminent Armageddon were equally in the air, if less numerous in cause. After the 1973 oil crisis, energy poverty was high on the agenda of Habitat I, along with nuclear annihilation and environmental degradation (remember ‘acid rain’?), issues that stubbornly remain in humanity’s in-tray under a deep stack of other problems that also require immediate attention.

The result of Habitat III – the New Urban Agenda – is, as Clos describes, a ‘common roadmap for the 20 years to come’. Having to secure the agreement of 193 nations is no mean feat, the consequence being that the Agenda is designed to please all of the people, all of the time. There is nothing in it anybody but international drug cartels and the most rabid member of the Alt-Right could disagree with. Problems are identified, and solutions fixed upon in the most nebulous and intangible of shapes. Every other paragraph sings with those buzz words du jour: ‘sustainable’, ‘inclusive’, ‘resilient’ and that particular hate of RIBA Journal’s editor – ‘vibrant’, words with which everybody agrees, but nobody seems able to precisely define.

Clos’s roadmap, therefore, describes a destination which sounds adorable, if rather fuzzy around the edges, a lovely place, bursting with ‘prosperity and quality of life for all’. One might call it a 2016 vision of utopia, written, purely coincidentally, I think, on the 500th anniversary of Thomas More’s original. ‘The New Urban Agenda will help to end poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions,’ it declares, ‘reduce inequalities; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in order to fully harness their vital contribution to sustainable development; improve human health and well-being; foster resilience; and protect the environment...’

Fabulous. Show me the way. If only we could focus on where we’re going a little better. It’s all gone blurry. Is that the way? Or that? Or will 2016’s utopia be as intangible as 1516’s: ‘utopos’, literally ‘no place’.

By 2050, 70% of the population will be in cities, where the problems will be most acute. Conversely, if solutions are to be found, it is likely to be in cities.

And there’s the rub. One thing, though, is clear. If we do manage to avoid Armageddon during Clos’s 20-year journey, the many problems facing the world are likely to be at their most acute in cities. On current trends, by 2050, 70% of the Earth’s population will be living in them. Conversely, if solutions are to be found, they are likely to be found in cities. The built environment is both cause and cure.

It makes perfect sense, then, that the RIBA has chosen to make the New Urban Agenda the focus of this year’s International Week in July. ‘As soon as I heard about the Agenda,’ says RIBA President Jane Duncan, ‘I was determined this should be at the heart of everything we [the RIBA] want to be.’

However, she adds, ‘architects are almost unaware of it’. No wonder. There were few architects at Habitat III, and, perhaps as a consequence, the New Urban Agenda document mentions neither ‘architects’ nor ‘architecture’. This is a distinct shift from both Habitat
I and II in 1976 and 1996, and a particularly telling one from that other agenda-setting document, the Athens Charter of 1933, whose own roadmap to utopia was written by the most influential architects of the day, setting us off towards a destination of freeways and high-rises, a condition most of us around the world have now reached in our cities, even if it looks rather less enticing in reality than our utopians had led us to believe.

One could read the absence of architects and architecture in the New Urban Agenda in many ways, but at the very least it marks a slip in the status of architects in recent decades, a slip that should profoundly concern the profession. Rightly, wrongly, for whatever reason, nobody – at the most influential meeting about the future of the built environment for two decades – thought to involve architects. That speaks volumes.

As a result, Duncan believes, ‘architects have been on the back foot with it’. ‘Architects are not part of the picture right now, and that HAS to change,’ she says – both for the profession and – cue Morgan Freeman voice – for global humanity. If architects do not engage with the Agenda everyone suffers. The profession effectively confirms its irrelevance, and ‘global humanity’ misses out on the creative solutions that architects might come up with to deal with the problems facing cities.

‘The world is going to need architects to engage with this,’ says Duncan. The question is, how?

The week’s centrepiece is a day-long conference specifically addressing this question, with experts from both inside and outside the profession including architects Ma Yansong, Francis Kéré, Sir David Chipperfield and Urban Think-Tank, sociologist Saskia Sassen, urbanist and digital expert at Arup Dan Hill and, of course, Joan Clos himself. In the morning, Clos will explain the implications of the Agenda, followed by sessions identifying and analysing the potential roles for architects in making his roadmap a little less fuzzy, giving it form and shape. In the afternoon, Duncan has plucked out three areas in the Agenda of particular relevance to architects – housing, social inclusion and cultural identity and heritage.

For all its grim reading, the Agenda is essentially an optimistic text. In this it shares a sensibility with the architectural profession. Architects are nothing if not positive in their thinking. Give them a problem and they will wrestle out a solution, even from an in-tray of problems as high as the Agenda’s. Problems such as mass migration to cities or climate change might not appear as dramatic as an imminent asteroid or alien invasion, but they could prove just as disastrous. The question is, architects, what will you do?

The day-long RIBA International Conference Change in the city: opportunities for architects, exploring the expertise that architects can offer in the creation of 21st-century cities, is the centrepiece of RIBA International Week, 3-7 July 2017. See architecture.com/internationalweek

Below How can new pieces of city be sustainable and create much needed homes? MAD’s design for Chaoyang Park Plaza, Beijing could hold some answers.

Right Ma Yansong of Beijing-based MAD will be speaking at the RIBA’s international conference.

For all its grim reading, the New Urban Agenda is essentially an optimistic text. In this it shares a sensibility with architects.
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This is Paolozzi

More than just the king of pop art, Eduardo Paolozzi and his infinite variety get a full airing at the Whitechapel Gallery’s exhibition

Pamela Buxton

There’s a famous photograph of Eduardo Paolozzi, taken with Alison and Peter Smithson and Nigel Henderson and used on the poster for the 1956 exhibition This is Tomorrow. In it, the artist looms large over the others as they pose dourly in a mundane London street.

What a contrast with the sheer exuberance of much of Paolozzi’s work, from his pop art collages in the 1940s and 50s to later larger scale public work such as the Tottenham Court Road tube station mosaics. All this, and much more (including three heads of Richard Rogers), are in the Whitechapel Gallery’s exhilarating retrospective on Paolozzi’s hard-to-define oeuvre.

The son of Italian immigrant ice-cream makers in Edinburgh, Paolozzi (1924-2005) studied in London and lived briefly in Paris before returning to England to settle back in the capital. Here he experimented with his innovative collage works with their lively combinations of imagery from adverts for everything from baked beans to cars, to science fiction magazines and pin-ups of the day. The exhibition makes a good case for establishing Paolozzi as the godfather of pop art, a genre that the artist came to parody in later work.

What a shame there’s no original footage of his famous Bunk! lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1952, in which he bombarded his scant audience with these eclectic images without any commentary except, according to Henderson, the occasional grunts, sighs and heavy breathing. We learn how his work questioned issues of authorship and experimented with different methods of presentation. For the seminal This is Paolozzi’s screen prints displayed dizzying plays of form and colour, as in Wittgenstein in New York (1965).
Tomorrow group show, he collaborated with the Smithsons and Nigel Henderson to create Patio and Pavilion, a semi enclosed structure filled with found objects.

Paolozzi’s 1950s print designs – created with Henderson for their design and home furnishings company Hammer Prints – are a revelation, ranging from abstract townscapes to dense Pollock-esque swirls.

He later published limited edition collections of images such as General Dynamic F.U.N. (1965-70), an experimental portfolio packaged in a bespoke Perspex case with an introduction by his friend and novelist J G Ballard. This was intended as an interactive artwork where the viewer took out the sheets to create their own arrangements and connections between the often baffling images, and generally ‘marvel at their variety and weirdness’, according to exhibition curator Daniel F Herrmann.

By this time Paolozzi was producing vibrant and intricate abstract screenprints, a dizzying play of colour and form that veered towards the psychedelic by the end of the decade. Titles such as The Tortured Life of an Influential Modern Philosopher and Wittgenstein at the Cinema Admires Betty Grable hint at the meanings behind the work but primarily these can be enjoyed for the joy of their composition. It was a style that worked well across various media and scales – from tapestries to Lanvin fashions, from public art to Wedgwood pottery, all of which make an appearance in the show.

Paolozzi became best known for his bronzes, and these are well represented throughout the exhibition from St Sebastian (1957), cast from collaged wax-plates to create crusted surfaces of technological components, to more architectonic pieces such as Tyrannical Tower Crowned with Thorns of Violence (1961). We also see the influence of his interest in robots and science fiction in the part-human, part-machine aesthetic that he explores in work for portraits, their modified heads prompting associations with Cyborg-like baddies out of Dr Who.

While Paolozzi kept working until the end of the century, it is his intense period of diverse creativity in the 50s and 60s that most captivates in this exhibition. I don’t feel we ever really get to know Paolozzi the man – but his vivid work speaks volumes.

Eduardo Paolozzi until 14 May 2017, Whitechapel Gallery, 77-82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, whitechapelgallery.org

He bombarded his scant audience with eclectic images without any commentary except occasional grunts, sighs and heavy breathing.
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Leonard Manasseh
1916 – 2017

Leonard Manasseh, who died in March aged 100, was an architect with an intuitive sense of design that meant that he anticipated some aspects of postmodernism long before this became a recognised movement. When in his presidential address to the AA in 1964, he spoke of the division in the profession between the one-off ‘art boys’ and the ‘system’ boys, there was no doubt he was one of the former, although he favoured the merger of the AA with Imperial College. He had failed maths at school certificate and chose the AA as the only school where this didn’t matter. His student career spanned from the rebellious ‘Focus’ generation to the evacuation to Hadley Wood at the beginning of the Second World War.

After service in the Fleet Air Arm, Manasseh worked for Hertfordshire County Council (then systems central) and Stevenage Borough Council before designing two small buildings for the Festival of Britain and launching a practice, in which he was soon joined by Ian Baker in a harmonious and long-lasting collaboration. They survived some lean years, tried a joint venture in Singapore (Manasseh’s birthplace) with James Cubitt, and settled down to work in London on a varied group of commissions, including the Rutherford School in Marylebone (now King Solomon Academy) with its pyramid roof-scape, and Furzedown College in Tooting. A significant client was the inventor Jeremy Fry, who brought Manasseh to Bath to design new factory and administrative buildings for his company, Rotork.

Manasseh’s most famous and in some ways characteristic project was the development of the National Motor Museum and other attractions for Lord Montagu at Beaulieu, from 1965 onwards. The job began with the architect-planner Elizabeth Chesterton, who operated independently from Manasseh’s office, and created a model of efficient but sensitive reorganisation of a previously chaotic site. Baker led on the museum building, while Manasseh designed the Brabazon restaurant. The same team went on to develop the Wellington Country Park at Stratfield Saye, while Manasseh contributed the design for new law courts at King’s Lynn as part of Chesterton’s conservation-led plan for regenerating the town, although these were not built until 1981. His proposed Law Courts for Bath, on the other hand, encountered local opposition and the scheme was abandoned.

If Manasseh was a proto-postmodernist, it was apparent in his increasing willingness to adopt elements of traditional architectural language, such as pyramid roofs, clearly marked entrances and bright colours that were shared with high tech. He was not ashamed of having fun, as his own house in Highgate demonstrated in the late 1950s, with its unequal pitched roof, touches of decoration pressed into concrete, and living room floor made of salvaged Victorian marble washtub tops. He drew fluently and painted in bright colours, enjoying the company of artists, and serving as the first architect president of the Royal West of England Academy, as well as being an RA. In 1979, he and John Partridge stood for election to the RIBA Council as the ‘Hurrah for Architecture Group’ and achieved almost as many votes as the next three candidates combined. Those who seek his monument can read Timothy Brittain-Catlin’s monograph of 2011, in the series published jointly by the RIBA, Twentieth Century Society and (then) English Heritage. The practice continued until 1990 as LMP Architects, based in Bath.

In his 1964 AA address, Manasseh expressed his belief that architecture of art would always come out on top after periods of technological change, but that it was, in fact, a false dichotomy and both aspects needed to be integrated. He is survived by three sons: Zachary, Amos and Phineas.

Alan Powers
Exchange

Please welcome our new RIBAJ Litmus Group

Hugh Pearman

We’re delighted to announce the launch of the RIBAJ Litmus Group – a panel of readers from all over the UK and overseas who, responding to our invitation, have kindly agreed to crit what we do. It’s a very diverse and thoroughly interesting group.

Every magazine craves feedback from its readers, and we are no exception. Of course we meet lots of you face to face. We also know from our previous reader research that there is broad support for our ‘head and heart’ approach, in which practical guidance sits alongside accounts of inspirational buildings, people and events. Social media is also valuable for assessing reactions to what we publish. But we have long felt the need for a regular conversation with a group of engaged readers so as to test the relevance and interest of what we do, in print and online. Hence the Litmus Group.

Members range from solo practitioners to directors of large practices. They are from all round the country and abroad – including the USA, France, Australia and Canada.

There are urban and market town and rural practitioners, recently (or not yet) qualified, older – including retired – architects, practice chairs and directors; from emerging and established firms engaged in all manner of work. There are architects on the client side and one who is a local authority chief executive. We have representatives from academia, from traditionalist and conservation practices as well as the multi-discipline, the modernist and the experimental.

We’ll converse online via surveys and emails. The group will be refreshed at intervals to bring in new voices and can expand if necessary to a workable maximum of around 50 members – so do let me know if you would like to join at hugh.pearman@ribaj.com. For the launch, we aimed for 40 and have 41. Our thanks to them – we’re looking forward to this. So here they all are:

- Phil Allsopp Arizona State University, USA
- Kelly Bednarczyk Hall + Bednarczyk, Chepstow
- Robert Blundell Saltaire, West Yorkshire
- Barbara Bochna ITOLab, London
- Tim Browne Blainey North and Associates, Sydney, Australia
- Mick Brundle Arup Associates, London
- Sarah Castle IF, DO, London
- Richard Crowson Watson Batty Architects, Loughborough
- Kate Darby Kate Darby Architects, Leominster
- Hannah Durham Cullinan Studio, London
- Sue Emms BDP Manchester
- Nila Feldmann Feldmann Architects, Leicester
- Roger FitzGerald ADP Architecture, London
- Emma Flanagan PH + Architects, London
- Chris Harties Squire and Partners, London
- Stuart Hatcher Rogate, West Sussex
- Wayne Head Cull La Tourelle Head Architecture, London
- Duncan Higgins Diamond Schmitt Architects, Toronto, Canada
- Paul Iddon Agency Spring, Manchester
- Peter Jacob Chafford, Gloucestershire
- Dipa Joshi Assael Architecture, London
- Soraya Khan Theis+Khan, Tunbridge Wells
- Laura Kinnaird Reiach & Hall, Edinburgh
- Hana Loftus HAT Projects, Colchester
- Tania Love FaulknerBrowns, Newcastle Upon Tyne
- Paul McGrath Coetoo Architecture, Swansea
- Neil MacWilliams Rick Mather Architects, London
- Justin Nicholls Fatlom Architects, London
- Catherine Pease vPPR Architects, London
- Wendy Perring PAD Studio, Lymington Hants
- Carolyn Ouwehand Glenn Howells Architects, London/Birmingham
- Louise Priestman Purcell, Canterbury
- Rahim Rahemtulla Boon Brown, London/Yeovil
- Austen Redman Francis Johnson and Partners, Bridlington
- Karen Rogers Canary Wharf Contractors, London
- Hazel Rounding Sheckley, Liverpool/London
- Nita Sharma MZ Architecture, Antibes, France
- Sumita Singha Ecologic Architects, London
- Dhruv Sookhoo Newcastle University school of architecture
- Magali Thomson Marks Barfield Architects, London
- Ian Vincent Chief executive, Daventry District Council

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Best Products showroom
Sacramento, California, 1977

This showroom for Best Products at the Arden Fair Shopping Centre in Sacramento, California, was one of a series designed by the multi-disciplinary architecture and environmental art practice SITE (Sculpture in the Environment) during the 1970s.

Best was founded by a pair of philanthropists and keen art collectors whose creative passion prompted the architectural collaboration. The seven imaginative and unorthodox retail outlets aimed to transcend the boundaries between art and architecture and involved the shopper in a theatrical commerce experience.

The Notch Building, completed in 1977, was perhaps their most structurally ambitious project. A 45 ton corner of the otherwise fortress-like brick building was mounted on a rail embedded in the pavement, allowing it to separate itself from the rest of the structure like a medieval drawbridge in order to let customers in and out – or to release a cloud of balloons.

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