Gort Scott crowns St Hilda’s College, Oxford
Students make their point: President’s Medals
Carlos Moreno’s journey to the 15-minute city
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Photo: Ben Luxmoore
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1: Buildings

The new Al Dana Amphitheatre in Bahrain began with an Eric Clapton concert. Seven years ago, the 2000-person outdoor event sold out within minutes and the authorities saw potential for a permanent venue that would attract a local and international crowd.

A site was found beside the Bahrain International Circuit (home of the Grand Prix), and a semi-informal invited competition launched. At the time, Marwan Lockman was working as an architect mainly on luxury villas. A huge music enthusiast, he asked to submit a proposal. To his amazement, the organisers said yes.

The brief was a venue for 5000-10,000 visitors on virgin desert land to serve also as an attraction on the race track. Lockman knew the area and the F1 races well. ‘I had a thunderclap moment,’ he says, ‘One where you hear about a project, close your eyes and the design is clear almost immediately. I sketched it out before going to bed and the design hasn’t changed much since.’

While other entries built up, Lockman’s idea was to build down to create a huge open-air desert rock venue in the spirit of the greats: Red Rocks, Colorado, The Gorge, Washington and amphitheatres of ancient Greece/Rome. He wanted it low within the topography to accentuate the atmosphere. Everything fell into place; prevailing winds positioned the stage to the west, against the setting sun with Jabal al Dukhan, Bahrain’s highest point, behind.

Lockman set up SL Architects and the project opened last month, a once in a lifetime opportunity for a young architect to carry a logic through from concept to every detail, and make a building truly of its site, reusing limestone and other local hardwearing materials appropriate to this tough climatic site. The building is almost 100% wheelchair accessible and is driven by a concern for sustainability that is unusual in the region.
Woolwich gets a silver bullet

Woolwich is advancing from post-industrial garrison town to housing. Crossrail and Antony Gormley figures. Bennetts Associates’ Woolwich Works cultural centre will make the place whole.

Words: Hugh Pearman
Photographs: Timothy Soar

The RIBA Journal December 2021 ribaj.com

Woolwich: the place that was my introduction to full-time magazine journalism. Period: the first Elvis Costello and Kate Bush albums, Jim Callaghan prime minister. Today: surprise, there’s been some changes since then. All the usual ones – Marks and Sparks is now a Poundland, the two sumptuous neighbouring Deco cinemas (Odeon and Granada) are now competing evangelical churches – but also this. A new £40 million publicly-funded cultural quarter, Woolwich Works has arrived, in the former-Royal Arsenal Riverside as it is now known. It’s a silver bullet, a big rear wing, this is now dance studios and rehearsal rooms, events space and offices. Bennetts (in what was the last project directly supervised by founding partner Rab Bennetts, with associate Matthew Curtis) has completely transformed this with a new, broad, north-lit lobby added to the frontage of this iron-framed building. It links right across from east to west wings, big enough to act as lobby with bar for the auditorium as well as improving circulation. From the exterior (an austere courtyard for outdoor events) its vast-glass clad-cloister looks as if it is going to smash into the pediments of the flanking buildings. It stops a few feet short on both sides.

Building 40, slightly removed to the south, is the grade II* listed 1717 Board Room building, bricky Vanbrughian in feel though the architect is unknown. Doubling the size and working with Haworth Tompkins on the eastern side of the street (17, 18) have been repaired with minimal intervention – there the Punchdrunk immersive-theatre company is trying them out for scale. Meanwhile the Arsenal down by the river to the north made all the munitions the artillery officers could wish for, from bullets and mortars to huge cannon and howitzers, even commemorative medals. This huge military-industrial complex dates back to the 17th century and just went on growing, peaking during World War I. The factory’s closed in 1967; the sprawling eastern part with firing ranges mostly became housing (including Thamesmead) while the western part with the historic buildings closest to Woolwich town centre stayed in military research and administrative use until final closure in 1994. While so-to-riverside housing blocks began to appear here in the early 21st century, it was the planning of Crossrail that finally stimulated the more ambitious (if still generic) new mixed-use development we now find.

Such decluttered former industrial sites can’t help but feel strange, and the 88 acres of Royal Arsenal Riverside as it is now known has plenty of this oddness to it, as if there’s more space than the developers really know what to do with or are allowed to touch. The highest density of housing blocks is above and around the Crossrail station box but elsewhere relatively diminutive preserved old buildings find themselves rubbing shoulders with blocks up to seven storeys. The ‘Firepower’ Royal Artillery Museum that opened here in 2001 – too soon, perhaps – never attracted many visitors and moved out to Wiltshire in 2016. So there was a cultural hole in the complex, one that has now been filled with Bennetts Associates’ cultural masterplan for a cluster of five existing listed buildings either side of the broad avenue (Number One Street, to give it its prescient military title) leading to the Thames Path, riverboat pier and its attendant circle of Antony Gormley cast-iron figures.

The centrepiece of Woolwich Works is Building 41 (militarily numbering again) on the west side of the street. This contains a large adaptable performance space for music, theatre, comedy and the like, plus exhibition galleries, dance studios, rehearsal rooms, events space and offices. Bennetts (in what was the last project directly supervised by founding partner Rab Bennetts, with associate Matthew Curtis) has completely transformed this with a new, broad, north-lit lobby added to the frontage of this iron-framed building. It links right across from east to west wings, big enough to act as lobby with

## IN NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital cost</th>
<th>£2667 per m²</th>
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<td>Listed buildings</td>
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Firepower museum, slated for replacement in the Bennetts masterplan.
I visited Woolwich Works on an intermittently wet and windy Wednesday afternoon. Three somewhat Romanesque arches in solid profiled aluminium mark the entrance. The place is hardly buzzing - too early for performances. But enough people are based in the main building to provide a steady stream of customers for the café. The Chineke! multi-cultural orchestra, a big hit at this year’s Proms, is based here as is the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and the Protein dance company. With Punchdrunk here too, and a director who used to run Camden’s equally eclectic Roundhouse, this ought to provide the necessary critical mass – especially once Crossrail (the Elizabeth Line) opens. Crucially, the Lizzie Line station is on the north side of the main road that divides the town of Woolwich from the former Arsenal, so handily close to the venue. Bennetts’ approach is light-touch. Building 41 was not in especially bad shape but needed its zig-zag roofs insulating above the white-painted timber soffits – as much to contain sound as for thermal efficiency. Acoustically it’s pretty good. Services are run along the structural grid and in floor trenches. Masonry walls with all their patching are kept largely as they were. Stairs and lifts are inserted to the upper levels of the wings. The photos here show the spaces empty but I found the auditorium configured with raked bleacher seating arranged in a U around a stage set up for amplified music, café and bar fully equipped, dancers rehearsing upstairs. Across the street, fit-out continues in Punchdrunk’s domain. It feels intelligently planned, a real arts working and performing environment. The place needs this kind of focus. And with ever more housing blocks rising on the brownfield sites west of here, there’s a growing population to draw on – assuming these new arrivals can be persuaded to stay local, rather than just taking Crossrail to the West End.

Credits
Client Borough of Greenwich
Architect Bennetts Associates
Contractor (design and build) Mace
Conservation architect Consarc
Structural, services and sustainability engineer Buro Happold
Project manager and QS Turner and Townsend
Theatre consultant Sound Space Vision
Acoustic consultant Gillieron Scott Design
Fire consultant The Fire Surgery
Natural leader

Natural light, ventilation, landscape and a CLT structure are priorities at dRMM’s Wintringham primary school, which should set the tone for the identity of the new district to grow up around it.

Words: Pamela Buxton Photographs: Hufton+Crow

It’s clear that dRMM’s Wintringham Primary Academy is very much at the pioneering stage of the expansion of the Cambridgeshire town of St Neots. Visiting the site in early November, the £11 million primary school, now in its second year of operation, looks a little lonely amid the swathes of farmland turned building plots that will provide 2800 new homes – and a pipeline of pupils for the school. And while this will soon change – the first residents at Wintringham moved in last year and diggers were busy at work nearby when I visited – completion of the first phase is expected to take three years and the entire development another 15.

It’s encouraging that such a vital building has been prioritised so early in the new district’s development, which is being led by master developer Urban&Civic. The 205ha site expands St Neots to the east, beyond the East Coast mainline railway track and follows the recent major Love’s Farm expansion to the north.

Wintringham is just one of the many town expansions under way nationwide to provide new housing, and among several around Cambridgeshire – including the 6500-home Alconbury Weald north of Huntingdon, and the University’s own North West Cambridge Cambourne, a new town that was planned in the 1990s and is going through regular expansions, is just 10 miles away.

Mostly the developments have the same mass housebuilder aesthetic. Central to the success of these sensitive and often controversial new developments is a well-considered masterplan that creates the right supporting infrastructure and a mix of uses as well as housing, in the hope of not only complementing the existing town but seeding that all-important sense of place.

At Wintringham, the 3615m² school has a key role in creating this identity. Clad in colourful shades of terracotta, it is the first building to be completed on the civic square that will form the heart of the new district. This will be joined by commercial premises, a community hub, shops and a café.

‘There is a sense of pressure because the first building will set the tone, and with residential it has to set the values as well… and start to define the character of the area, and its success,’ says dRMM director Philip Marsh. He knows well from the practice’s previous education projects, such as Clapham Manor Primary School, how vital schools are in forming the social ‘glue’ in a community, and in a new district, this is even more the case.

dRMM’s first involvement at Wintringham was at the masterplan stage. Asked by Urban&Civic to test the principle of having simple, effective buildings to form the civic square, the practice delivered a low, flat-roofed structure set on the edge of a landscaped grove. This grove, now landscaped with an order of three terracotta colonnades, is the heart of the new district.

‘The grove is at the core of Wintringham’s civic square,’ says dRMM principal director Peter Cook. ‘It’s a place to gather with families, and sits at the heart of the civic square. It’s designed to be a place that is memorable and that can be loved and enjoyed by the community.’

The building that sits opposite is the primary school, designed to be the first building to be completed on the civic square, and the first to be completed on a new development. The school is clad in ‘sweet terracotta’, a material that is used throughout the district to create a sense of place and identity.

‘The school is at the heart of the civic square and sits on the edge of a grove, which is the green heart of the new district. It’s a place that is memorable and that can be loved and enjoyed by the community,’ says dRMM principal director Anthony Brown. ‘The school is designed to be a place that is memorable and that can be loved and enjoyed by the community.’

The school is designed to be a place that is memorable and that can be loved and enjoyed by the community. The ‘grove’ is at the core of Wintringham’s civic square, designed to be a place that is memorable and that can be loved and enjoyed by the community. The building that sits opposite is the primary school, designed to be the first building to be completed on the civic square, and the first to be completed on a new development. The school is clad in ‘sweet terracotta’, a material that is used throughout the district to create a sense of place and identity.
a primary school fronting directly onto the square, dRMM developed a concept school design to inform its optimum arrangement within a masterplan by JTP. By pushing the school perimeter back to the front of the school building, the hustle and bustle of drop-off and pick-up was conceived as naturally helping animate the square itself. dRMM was later appointed to design the two-storey school as part of a team led by contractor Morgan Sindall. The practice was able to work closely with school executive head teacher Tracy Bryden of Diamond Learning Partnership Trust to find out about her priorities and aspirations for the school in Birmingham grouped classrooms around a central sports hall. At Wintringham, putting the hall at the front of the building facing the square made it well-placed for community use out of hours. This arrangement freed up the centre for the grove, giving classrooms a second aspect of natural light to supplement that from the fully glazed corner that each has on the external elevation. Classrooms are arranged in year clusters of three, with children moving around the courtyard each year and then progressing to the upper floor at Year 3. By the time they reach their final destination of Year 6, the oldest cluster is positioned fittingly looking outward over the civic square and beyond. This is a school that feels generous and flowing in its common areas, helped by the pleasing in-the-round circulation of the courtyard, where full height curtain wall glazing brings light deep into the school plan.

### Exploded axonometric drawing

**Key**
- 1. Wintringham civic square
- 2. Entrance/reception area
- 3. Multi-use sports hall
- 4. Garden courtyard/grove
- 5. Classrooms
- 6. Landscaped playground
- 7. Arbor

---

**IN NUMBERS**

- **£3,040 GFA/m²**
- **£3,040 GFA**

This focal point element ensures instant easy orientation, as well as a pleasant view of the outside space that will be enhanced as the shrubs and trees grow. A feeling of spaciousness is also engendered by the inclusion of a flexible use area between the entrance and courtyard. Yet the design still manages to meet BB103 area guidelines, thanks in part to several such multi-use areas. The central grove itself — although slightly inclined to echo as it waits for the landscaping to mature — is used for teaching small groups.

For dRMM, as a long-time advocate of CLT, the use of the material for the school structure was something of a no-brainer. Nor was there any need to convince Urban&Civic, the school or contractor — all were swiftly on board from day one, says Marsh. Indeed the use of CLT in the Department of Education’s new GenZero research initiative into achieving ultra-low carbon schools suggests it is gaining increasing acceptance.

Building on the school’s low embodied carbon, low waste material, CLT contributed to the BREEAM Very Good design and helped reduce site time — the school building was up in just two and a half months. Exposed CLT soffits on the oversailing, monopitch roof give a hint of the nature of the structure from the outside, but the material’s aesthetic qualities really come to the fore inside. Here, expanses of exposed spruce provide a warm and friendly feel that seems particularly suitable for primary school use. In addition to sustainability, wellbeing and aesthetic considerations, dRMM also points to research findings that timber teaching spaces can help reduce stress levels. Use of CLT has not stopped dRMM addressing the need for built-in flexibility. With the exception of the Early Years and Reception clusters which operate as one space across three interlinked classrooms, the other years have cellular classrooms. To give the potential to reconfigure these spaces in the future, dRMM incorporated plasterboard-faced stud partition ‘soft spots’ within...
the CLT structure that can easily be opened up between the classrooms – without, as Marsh puts it, needing to take a chainsaw to the CLT. There is also the potential to harvest additional usable space from the upper level of double-height classrooms positioned at the rear of the school.

‘All school buildings need to be inherently flexible as education thinking changes and schools will want to manage spaces in different ways,’ he says. Drawing on research into optimum learning environments by Salford University, the classrooms deliberately limit visual distraction in the choice of colour and furniture, with storage joinery chosen to complement the CLT. Common areas are also fairly restrained, with the exposed structure providing warm tones alongside grey acoustic wall panels, and with different colours denoting areas for different year groups. With a full-height window at the end of the washrooms, the toilets look bright and pleasant.

Externally the school makes a colourful impact in customary dRMM style, with a ‘colour loop’ of terracotta panels running around the exterior ensuring that it will be a natural focal point in the area amid the duller hued housing. Inspired by the seasonal colour variations found in woodlands, these are another part of the building’s nature-based narrative. Marsh says the aim was to surprise and delight as you move around the outside of the building, and the effect is pleasing. Like the headteacher, he is delighted with the final result, although it will be many years before rolls are large enough to fully put the new building through its paces. Next September, it is still expected to have well below three figures of pupils across three years, compared with a maximum of 708 pupils when all years are in operation. It will certainly be interesting to see whether pandemic-led changes to working modes such as commuting will have an impact on the pace of house sales in Wintringham, and the timescale for future phases of the new area.

‘We are really lucky. I just wish we had some more pupils!’ says head Bryden. With the town extension clearly so far away from critical mass, it requires some effort to imagine Wintringham as a fully fledged district of St Neots. But when it is, there’s no doubt that this bright and appealing school will be ready and willing to play its central role in the new community.’

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WilkinsonEyre ‘accentuates the geometry’ of Lord’s iconic Media Centre with two new stands to seat 2,600 more fans

Words: Pamela Buxton Photograph: Peter Landers

Any consideration of WilkinsonEyre’s £53 million new stands at Lord’s cricket ground is entwined with Future Systems’ Media Centre, which still packs a punch more than two decades after its completion.

The practice won a competition to redesign the Edrich and Compton stands that flank the futuristic Stirling Prize-winning Media Centre back in 2017. It is certainly in very good company. The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) is a renowned patron of architecture, most notably commissioning Hopkins (Mound Stand, 1987) and Grimshaw (Grand Stand, 1998) at its Lord’s ground in St John’s Wood, London, as well as Future Systems. More projects are likely to follow, guided by a masterplan drawn up by Populous, which also designed the Warner Stand (2017).

The project presented WilkinsonEyre with many challenges. Aesthetically, the practice needed to find a suitable way for the adjacent new structures to respond to the powerful Media Centre, especially as they needed to be considerably taller than the stands they replaced in order to deliver the desired extra 2,600 seats. As well as greater capacity, the new seats needed better sightlines – many of those at lower level in the old stands had restricted views while the upper level was entirely exposed to the elements.

Located at the Nursery End, the new stands also needed improved toilet and catering facilities – along with lifts, these had been distinctly lacking in the rather basic previous stands – as well as including the hospitality facilities that are such an important part of any ground today.

Other significant factors were a 2m fall across the width of the site, the asymmetry of the two stands (Compton is significantly wider), the need to maintain views of the trees visible beyond the Media Centre, and careful consideration of the rear elevation facing the Nursery Ground.

According to WilkinsonEyre partner Jim Eyre, the stand redevelopment was ‘a real balancing act because the Media Centre has such a strong presence’. Commenting that it felt like ‘an alien thing that’s landed’, he said the challenge had been to make the new stands work better as a composition with the Media Centre, with the right sense of ‘breathing space’ between the two.

WilkinsonEyre director Sam Wright added that rather than ‘ape’ the aluminium-clad Media Centre with two new stands flanking the Lord’s Media Centre. Below The new stands as they overlook the ground. In the foreground is the nursery ground and indoor cricket centre.
materiality, the aim was to ‘really accentuate the geometry’. To maximise the seating, the architect used point cloud survey technology to determine the increased footprints of the stands, which are now double the depth of their predecessors. The practice also needed to increase the height, which at 24m offers the highest seating in the ground. Close attention to sightlines informed the arrangement of the seating and other facilities, and fortunately worked in harmony with the desired curved form. Wheelchair-accessible positions are located at the back of the first tier, with debs, hospitality lounges (also designed by WilkinsonEyre) at second level and the bulk of the seating in two curved upper stands, which swoop down lower where they flank the Media Centre in a respectful response to it. As the line of the stands rises, the back lifts over to form a canopy, giving some protection to those in the upper reaches. Here, the canopy’s exposed timber shell structure and steel ribs support a white fabric skin, a nod to the tensile fabric used elsewhere on the ground.

The new seating is now 1% wheelchair accessible with a further 2% for ambulant disabled access. Thanks to sightline analysis and the repositioning of some sightscreens, some 95% of the 11,600 seats now have ‘good’ views, up from 70% in the stands they replace and better than the 80% achieved in Warner. A steel frame was chosen for speed of construction, combined with precast concrete terracing. Half of the seats were re-used and the old stands’ concrete structure and terracing crushed and incorporated as the piling mat for the new.

Perhaps it’s a sign of the success of the composition that initially it’s easy to miss that the wider Compton stand doesn’t match the Edrich – the architect chose to maintain

Thanks to sightline analysis and the repositioning of some sightscreens, some 95% of the 11,600 seats now have ‘good’ views.
the mirror image curved contours that characterise the new stands but add an additional stretch of seating to the side. Perhaps this is a little awkward, but all eyes will be naturally drawn elsewhere by the curving forms, which funnel attention to the Media Centre.

One of the most practical elements, and one that narrowly avoided being engineered out, wasn’t part of the original brief. WilkinsonEyre included an elevated walkway behind the stands and Media Centre that provides high-level connectivity between all three. Not only is it a boon for staff moving between them, it offers a great vantage point looking over the Nursery Ground and of spectators milling about on big match days.

A great deal has been gained in terms of capacity, connectivity, facilities, and spectator experience – above all, these are splendid stands from which to view the game.

Yet there is no doubt that for all the many merits of the new stands, some of the Media Centre’s drama has been lost – no longer does it rise above the former low level stands in glorious isolation. Instead, it has been re-framed as the centrepiece of a new triptych. Has it been tamed in the process? Or do the new flanking stands present a worthy setting that better integrates it into the ground as a whole? Perhaps it’s a bit of both.

**IN NUMBERS**

- £52m total contract cost
- 11,500m² area
- £4521 cost /m²
- 11,500 spectators over two stands

**Very good**

BREEAM/ LEED/listing designation

**Credits**

Client: Marylebone Cricket Club
Architect: WilkinsonEyre Architects
Structural services engineer: Buro Happold
Main contractor: ISG
Project manager: Gardiner & Theobald
Landscape architect: GrossMax
Accessibility consultant: People Friendly
Heritage consultant: Ettwein Bridges Architects

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St Hilda’s College: Oxford has a new front, but it’s not the real ‘front’ – that’s at the back, where an eclectic string of buildings faces the city’s pricking roofscape across a swathe of green and the River Cherwell. Replacing a car park and a motley group of small buildings, Gort Scott’s substantial addition to the estate presents a rather plain face to the street, saving its more expressive features for the private interior of the campus. That runs counter to expectations in most places, but echoes a common arrangement at Oxford colleges. It’s one of many ways in which this thoughtful block of tutors’ offices and student bedrooms is tuned to its setting within the college and the city.

For a start, St Hilda’s has acquired its own dreaming spire – or rather, a lantern-topped tower. Rising from one end of the long, cranked Anniversary Building, it marks the repositioned main entrance. ‘Obviously a big thing in Oxford is the roofline, and the way buildings engage with the sky’, says architect Jay Gort, who leads the practice with co-director Fiona Scott. Cost constraints kept it quite short, but not so you’d notice. At the top, a double-height glass box is buttressed by slim concrete fins that lend vertical emphasis. Capped with a gilded halo of foliate metalwork, the tower dissolves into the air in a deliberate reference to the finials of other colleges.

Providing a distinctive landmark was important. St Hilda’s is one of the newer colleges – founded as a hall for women in 1893, it went co-educational in 2008 – and has a slightly out-of-the-way location, down a quiet lane on the ‘wrong’ side of Magdalen Bridge. From its first premises in the former home of 18th-century botanist Humphrey Sibthorp, St Hilda’s expanded into a series of newer buildings along one side of Cowley Place. There’s interesting stuff among them – including the Smithsons’ 1970 Garden Building – but nothing that might act as an emblem of the college.

The plain facades from which the tower rises are perhaps too austere, especially where the lane turns a corner towards the former entrance gate. A regular array of punched windows betraying cellular bedrooms is set into an expanse of yellow brick that is otherwise largely unrelieved. Waiting there to meet the architect my hopes for the building faltered, but they picked up again as soon as we entered the campus.

Passing through a short arcade at the north end of the Anniversary Building, we arrived in the middle of the long, lush garden that lies between St Hilda’s fluid ribbon of buildings and the river. From there, all Gort Scott’s major moves come simultaneously into view. Behind, the kinked west facade of the Anniversary Building is enlivened by pronounced depth and texture. ‘It was important that this felt like a carved building, grounded and earthy,’ says Gort. Panels of chevron brickwork – a pattern picked up from the neighbouring building – enhance the apparent size of windows. On the top storey, a heavy scalloped frill quotes a shell motif found in the college’s oldest building. Afternoon sun creates a powerful play of warm brick and strong shadows.

Immediately ahead, on the river’s edge, lies Gort Scott’s second, smaller building – a pentagonal pavilion used for lectures, dinners and concerts. It has a more elegant, lightweight character, with a shallow-pitched zinc roof and lots of glass framed by acid-etched and polished concrete piers.
The repositioned entrance brings visitors through a short colonnade into the heart of the campus. Above: View from the South Lawn towards the Pavilion and gardens beyond. Right: Diagrams show the new (top) and previous arrangement of the centre of the campus.

Buildings
University

Ground floor plan
First floor plan
Section AA

1. Entrance vestibule
2. Porters’ lodge
3. Atrium
4. Administrative office
5. Study room
6. Laundry room
7. Multi-faith space
8. Shared kitchen
9. Plant
10. Function suite
11. Foyer
12. Servery
13. Tutorial space
14. IT suite
15. Study bedroom
16. Break-out area

IN NUMBERS
£18.5m
total cost
£5422
cost per square metre
3137m²
gross internal area, Anniversary Building
275m²
gross internal area, Pavilion

but is tied to its larger neighbour by a few details. Dark bronze metalwork recurs in two rooftop ‘pavilions’ on the Anniversary Building, and leaf-patterned sunscreens recall the tower crown, as well as botanical ornament in Fitibhoroy’s house.

Making space for both new buildings involved removing a residential block that bisected the gardens. That option was identified by a feasibility study ahead of the competition for the project, but the college’s client group was nervous about losing a building with sentimental value. They were reassured when all five shortlisted entries endorsed demolition. From a strong field, Gort Scott’s proposal was chosen for the ‘intuitive and natural’ way in which buildings are integrated into the organic complex. And that’s the real strength of the completed scheme: the twisting and tapering Anniversary Building bridges between ranges at either end to make a firm, continuous boundary to the street, and pulls back enough on the river side to open long uninterrupted views through the campus. ‘We understood that the project would give us a new relationship with the riverfront’, says acting principal Georgina Paul, ‘but it has also given us the garden’.

The landscape of lawns, planted beds and ancient trees now flows around the pavilion like a stream around a stone. Built off the stone plinth of the demolished building, it perches high above the Cherwell, with a narrow deck that ties into a riverside walk. That elevation keeps the building out of the flood zone and allows it to be cooled by river water flowing through a labyrinth beneath. It also reflects the project’s accessibility agenda: on a sloping site, step-free landscaping allows wheelchair-users to reach all parts of the new buildings. (Chemistry professor Lorna Smith, who led on that aspect, makes an arresting observation: the growing number of wheelchair-users at Oxford follows improvements to provision in secondary schools; accessibility has ramifications beyond any individual institution). Inside, the gardens feel very present. Big windows frame close-up views of giant ferns and a spreading Cedar of Lebanon, while the brises-soleil cast plant-like shadows on the walls and oak floor. ‘It has become the most cherished space in the college’, says Paul.

Interiors of the Anniversary Building are, for the most part, more utilitarian. It is in effect two buildings of different heights.
Buildings
University

that meet at an angle, invisibly conjoined by clever adjustments to the facades. At the three-storey northern end, offices wrap around a central ventilating atrium. The initial intention was that rooms should be fronted by timber ‘furniture screens’, but after value engineering that was supplanted by white plasterboard. To the south, where the site falls and the block narrows, four floors of study-bedrooms are arranged on double-loaded corridors, and have similar finishes. Painted concrete soffits and round polished concrete columns add some visual weight as well as thermal mass. Jay Gort estimates that the square-metre cost of the £18.5 million design and build project was perhaps half that of similar buildings at richer colleges, and resources have been concentrated in special areas. They include the ground-floor porter’s lodge, a light-filled eyrie at the top of the tower and a serene seminar room in a rooftop pavilion, surrounded by a planted terrace with views over Christ Church meadow. Standing up there with several of the college fellows who formed the 38-strong client group, it’s clear that they have been closely involved in all parts of the process and remain surprised and delighted by the outcome. There is a feeling that with this project – completed exactly 100 years after women were first allowed to receive degrees – St Hilda’s has grown into itself. The buildings and landscape reflect the inclusive and informal atmosphere that the college aims to foster, while claiming its place in the city. ‘We’ve always looked out on medieval towers, and now we are recognisable from the other side of the river’, says development director Bronwyn Travers. ‘When I first saw golden light falling on the crown, I just thought “Yes – we’ve arrived.”’ •

Credits
Client
St Hilda’s College, Oxford
Architect
Gort Scott Architects
Main contractor
Beard Construction
Civil and structural engineer
SOLID Structures & Infrastructure
M&E, acoustics and lighting
Skelly & Couch
Project manager, quantity surveyor
Austin Newport Group
Heritage consultant
Marcus Beale Architects

Left The Pavilion can accommodate diverse uses, including commercial hire for weddings and events.
Below Dark stocks are mixed with yellow brick to make a sympathetic response to St Hilda’s setting in a conservation area.

The RIBA Journal December 2021
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Compact security with a huge impact

Boon Edam is unlocking the future of customisable security doors and entryways

The modern entrance challenge
The importance of seamless entrance and security solutions simply cannot be underestimated. Rather a lot hinges on those first impressions; those moments in the foyer, and the ease with which one is able to move through a building.

The flow of traffic is a vital consideration when designing the entrances and gateways in and through a building – especially in a Covid-19 world.

With people returning to their offices and places of work reopening around the globe, many building owners are considering the ways in which they can improve their security and entrances after so much time away.

How can they infuse their brand into their entryways? How can they breathe life into the foyers and corridors? How can architects and designers source a functional aesthetic? How can entrance solutions be worked into works for visitors and staff members alike. A challenge here – while doing it in a way that ease-of-use, efficiency and style is the order of the day.

The importance of seamless entrance management with quiet confidence.

The newest addition to the Boon Edam product line is the Speedlane compact security gate. With a small footprint and smooth, sliding motion glass barriers that blend seamlessly with existing or planned decor, and its short cabinet length optimises the use of valuable real estate.

In short, the Speedlane Compact is more than just a pretty face.

Customisable security
At Boon Edam, we know that business needs evolve over time, which is why all of our entrance solutions are scalable and tailor-made. With the Speedlane Compact, a number of categories can be customised: throughput, security, safety, aesthetics, technology, comfort, and service. For example, the passage width can be anything from 615mm to 915mm, with the wider option making it accessible for wheelchair users.

Buyers can also choose to integrate their own access control systems, prevent unauthorised access, or to use one of the Boon Edam’s own solutions.

Introducing the Speedlane compact
The newest addition to the Boon Edam premium range of speed gates, the Speedlane Compact, delivers security and throughput management with quiet confidence.

“We developed this ‘no-nonsense’ solution with ease of use at the forefront – it’s easily integrated, easily customised, and easily used.

Speed gates have gained a huge amount of traction over the last few years, becoming popular in both work and public spaces due to the essential balance of security and visitor management that they bring. They provide a visual deterrent against intrusion and are coupled with access control systems, prevent unauthorised access.

And what of the Speedlane Compact? This innovative device is intuitive to use, its directional LED lights guiding the user through with ease. Its minimalist design with sophisticated contours is not to be mistaken for a lack of functionality, however.

Tailgating, safety, and object detection sensors are fitted as standard with the Speedlane Compact, relieving the pressure on security and reception staff and lending peace of mind to users of the building. It has a small footprint and smooth, quiet operation, as well as a huge range of<style>application-specific features can be applied to it – and on enhancing technology innovation.

The capacity of our products to be customised and updated ensures optimal performance and minimises carbon footprint along the way.

Boon Edam’s global reach
With over 140 years of experience in manufacturing premium security entrances and gateways in The Netherlands, the US and China, we confidently cover every corner of the globe. Our global export division works in partnership with our distributors and offers direct sales and services to every territory.

Historically, we have worked with a range of unique entry requirements to provide the perfect solution. We pride ourselves on creating the curve – neither trying to get ahead of it nor responding to it – and on centring technology and innovation.

For more information, head to our website or give us a call:

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What is the purpose of the Architects Declare Practice Guide?

DD Architects Declare was founded in 2019 to say that we need significant change to address the climate and biodiversity emergency, and we now have more than 1,100 signatories in UK, and over 7,000 worldwide. A survey showed that they wanted the movement to be more than a declaration, and need support to understand how to achieve the ambitious declaration goals.

For Realtime Raytracing

The carbon footprints of architectural practices are quite small, but improving them sets the right culture and is a great way to build understanding of the decisions clients face. We also encourage practices to consider ethical finance and structures that promote transparency, which helps when making significant changes.

You say the impact of practice operations is likely to be dwarfed by those of architects’ projects. Why focus on it?

The guide calls for regenerative design. How does that differ from the common understanding of sustainability?

The guide includes goals unrelated to energy. Is climate linked to a broader obligation to design for social good?

There’s a strong emphasis on sharing knowledge. Are practices ready to disclose what didn’t work?

2: Intelligence

Diana Dina

Alasdair Ben Dixon

Architects Declare has issued a Practice Guide to help convert good intentions into action. Co-ordinators Diana Dina and Alasdair Ben Dixon discuss its objectives.

Amy D copyrighted, follow all advice in this article, and do not utilise algorithms that promote transparency, which helps when making significant changes.

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Power generated from urine in the bricks is used to capture data and run pulsating LEDs and animations based on bacterial foraging algorithms.

Waste not, want not: Stephen Cousins on energy from human pee: ribaj.com/energy-from-pee

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President’s Medals 2021

Grassroots rebellion makes its voice heard in the President’s Medals for students this year, with a radical reimagining of the data centre to combat ‘surveillance capitalism’ and a disintegrating ‘courthouse’ for ecological justice taking the silver and bronze awards, while the dissertation accolade goes to a celebration of west African Lobi culture.

Pamela Buxton

The Cloud Cooperative
University of Strathclyde
Tutors: Ewan Imrie, Lizzie Smith

The Cloud Cooperative seeks to reinvent the data centre typology as part of an overhaul of the internet to counter the growing power of surveillance capitalism. Sparked by a television programme on the power of leading internet data companies, Tiia Partanen’s ambitious project first considers how individuals often sign away rights to their personal data thanks to the ‘purposeful obscurity’ of complex terms and conditions. This lack of transparency is reflected in the deliberately anonymous architecture of the data centre.

‘Through their inscrutable facades, their physical distance from our daily lives, and their architectural camouflage, the typology of the data centre is used to enforce the power imbalances created by surveillance capitalism,’ she says.

After researching current initiatives to promote a more positive, decentralised internet, she proposed a pilot project in Edinburgh as the first steps towards a more sustainable, transparent and democratic internet.

Partanen’s project explores this in three phases over successive decades. In the first phase, servers of traditional hard-disk data storage are connected to a city-wide renewable and district heating scheme to offset their carbon footprint. The second phase recycles obsolete oil rigs as maintenance platforms for tanks of server racks submerged in the Firth of Forth, which provides passive cooling. The third phase is a design for a visitable, subterranean data archive on Cradmond Island. This makes use of emerging 3D optical data storage technology that doesn’t require cooling to engrave information into nano-scale grooves on quartz glass blocks.

A pilot project in Edinburgh offers the first steps towards a more sustainable, transparent and democratic internet.
Ben Foulkes

Seeding Swanscombe Marshes: A Regenerative and Resistant Courthouse

Ben Foulkes’ interest in landscapes, especially those with some element of contentious regard- ing authority and agency, drove his President’s Medal-winning project for an environmentally regenerative and resistant courthouse.

His chosen site on Swanscombe Marshes in north Kent is the subject of plans for a huge new theme park, The London Resort. Foulkes envisaged a ‘courthouse’ that would assist the campaign to save the peninsula site by actively enriching the habitat through its biodegradable development.

The courthouse was almost an allegorical idea, which I proposed would in some way correlate with ecological justice,’ he says.

He envisages three distinct stages of occupancy for the building. First, its foundations are laid to form a platform for protestors against the theme park.

Channels are excavated to draw water from the Thames into the surrounding marshes to aid regeneration. Displaced soil and clay are used to create cob cornerstones for the building’s construction.

Then, as the timber-structured enclosure takes shape, the courthouse serves as a forum for wider ecological activity and debate beyond the immediate site. During this phase of human habitation, the building gradually begins to ‘seed’ itself into the landscape and start regenerating it. In doing so, it becomes intrinsic to the marshes and too ecologically valuable to remove. The building envelope is designed to be deliberately compromised, questioning ideas of comfort. Birds are encouraged to nest in the thatched roof, while timber lattice walls provide a habitat for invertebrates and plant life, and nutrients are returned to the soil.

Finally, rather than being compelled to support human habitation, the building ‘mantles itself’ over time as it biodegrades. The floor will flood to create inter-tidal estuarine habitats as sea levels rise, eventually ‘mantling itself’ over time as it biodegrades. The floor will flood to create inter-tidal estuarine habitats as sea levels rise, eventually degrading the walls. During this process, the courthouse’s legacy will increase beyond the immediate site. During this phase of human habitation, the building gradually begins to ‘seed’ itself into the landscape and start regenerating it. In doing so, it becomes intrinsic to the marshes and too ecologically valuable to remove. The building envelope is designed to be deliberately compromised, questioning ideas of comfort. Birds are encouraged to nest in the thatched roof, while timber lattice walls provide a habitat for invertebrates and plant life, and nutrients are returned to the soil.

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The courthouse in its habitable phase for people, when it will be a venue for ecological discussions. Over time it will biodegrade, and in doing so enhance the ecology by providing habitats and enriching the marshland landscape.

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Above The courthouse roof and walls are envisaged as habitats for birds and invertebrates, while the floor will eventually flood to create inter-tidal and estuarine habitats.

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Ben Foulkes proposes a biodegradable courthouse that will actively regenerate the surrounding landscape of Swanscombe Marshes, and in doing so will defend it from development.

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Above The courthouse roof and walls are envisaged as habitats for birds and invertebrates, while the floor will eventually flood to create inter-tidal and estuarine habitats.
Richard Aina’s long-held interest in furniture making, and in particular the Lobi reclining chair from West Africa, was the spring point for his dissertation, A Culture of Craft: West Africa UNObjectified.

Researching the chair led him to discover the Bateba spiritual figures produced by Lobi peoples, who live in the area where Burkina Faso, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire intersect. His dissertation explores the important role of Bateba in Lobi culture, their popularity with colonial administrators, museums and art collectors, and more recently their commodification for the tourist market. He considers how the figures came to be presented as art rather than spiritual objects, and the prospects for their restitution.

‘It is clear that Lobi craft and production is exceedingly complex. What one recognises is that sacred objects sustain tradition and maintain cultural identity,’ he writes in the dissertation.

This research drove the architectural proposition for the “Vessel” – a building connected to the spiritual heritage that would serve as a destination to receive Bateba figures that are being returned to Lobi peoples through restitution, and to house the seven diviners that work with them.

The site is alongside a hill at Gaona in Burkina Faso. After studying the context, climate and local architecture, Aina proposed a combination of Lobi vernacular construction involving timber and banco (mud brick) with a new earthwork technique. These may become domestic shrines for new homes that are built around them in the traditional Lobi manner, and in doing so may, over time, seed a new community.

The Bateba are delivered to the Vessel and interrogated by the diviners, who decide the most appropriate next step for them according to their characteristics and nature. Some are restored to shrines within the Vessel, some are deemed ‘in flux’ and housed on earthen plinths, some are restored to shrines within the Vessel, some are deemed ‘in flux’ and housed on earthen plinths, some are restored to shrines within the Vessel, some are deemed ‘in flux’ and housed on earthen plinths.

His dissertation explores the important role of Bateba in Lobi culture, and their popularity with colonial administrators, museums and art collectors.
There is more opportunity to design something which encourages people to interact more intimately with the building.
Intelligence
Climate action

It’s technical: deep retrofit hits Stage 4

As the Cambridge Institute for Sustainable Leadership reaches Stage 4 in its retrofit, the team finds itself juggling conflicting pressures.

It was a knife-edge balancing act to meet the combined challenges of airtightness, internal insulation of solid masonry wall, thermal performance and moisture risk. Cambridge-based Gwilym Still of Max Fordham, an engineer and expert in EnerPHit and Passivhaus, calculated and re-calculated as Read of Feilden+Mawson was drawing details, dealing with the many varied interfaces. Between the two is an ease and mutual respect: Read a little quieter and committed, Still with keen attention and flashes of brilliance once he has turned his attention to a problem. With the challenge of EnerPHit, Still’s experience and expertise proved invaluable. Feilden+Mawson had previously done only a far smaller, residential, Passivhaus refit – and new rules bring steep learning curves.

Different underlying wall types drove different approaches to build ups in this complex insulation job:
- Solid wall: Diathonite, Gutex and dry lining
- Basement: tanking, cavity, Gutex, air tightness membrane, cavity (to protect membrane), stud lining and Fermacell
- Cavity walls: Diathonite, Gutex and dry lining
- Timber frame to extension: Space therm or Gutex, air tightness membrane, battens and Fermacell.

In the basement the windows and doors were one focus for detailing. Once the space was tanked and insulated, how would the surfaces work with the existing reveals? On the fire encasements for the steel columns how would air tightness be achieved, and would Blowerproof seal do the trick by meeting the Diathonite on the wall next to it?

Those who have been following the story of the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership’s deep retrofit of an old telephone exchange will have read the exacting interrogation of the early stage designs by the contractor’s architect and services engineer, Feilden+Mawson and Max Fordham. That continued through RIBA Plan of Works stage 4 – technical design. The soft skills of negotiation shifted to a detailed juggling to optimise conflicting requirements.

The team worked with a thoroughness born of the knowledge that the buck stopped there, and in terms of detailing, with Feilden+Mawson. Senior architect Chris Read is clear about that: ‘The responsibility and liability for detailing is with Feilden+Mawson.’ And detailing is really something when you are working to an air tightness of just one air change per hour at 50 Pa (approximately 1.8m³/m².h at 50Pa).

It was during stage 4 – shortly after delayed planning approval gave the OK to proceed – that Covid hit. And everything slowed down. In the early days of 2020 there had been a contractor’s site manager, who could make the odd hole to see what was hidden behind the existing linings and lift a ceiling tile here and there to see what was beneath. There were regular site visits as the team worked through each tender package. But all this stopped with the March lockdown.

Law of diminishing returns
Perhaps the biggest single challenge for Read was when the initial strip-out, at the end of stage 4, revealed a perimeter services trench under the raised access floor. The detail (pictured) was the team’s answer to this additional complexity. As Still says: ‘It looks like it makes sense, it is just some rectangles… but there was a lot of backwords and forwards and detailing to limit the thermal

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bridging on the existing floor.’

Software package Therm was used to model the thermal bridges and help work out how far it was worth extending the insulation into the building, above and below the soffit – and when the law of diminishing returns kicked in. It was painstaking, says Read. ‘Each cold bridge had to be identified and a solution for insulating it developed. The detail would then be thermally modelled to understand the impact on heating demand in order to maintain a comfortable margin within Passivhaus requirements.’

In-use energy

Keeping the total in-use energy in line with EnerPHit’s complex total energy metric (PER) required working with the client, agreeing low flow showers, and as much detail as possible on copiers, printers and IT equipment. With all those big ticket items it seems surprising that tea-making took the biscuit for complexity. There was a guessing game where the numbers were trumped by estimations of human behaviour. Would a sustainably committed workforce fill the kettle just enough and not too much? ‘Parsimonious kettle filling is more honoured in the breach than the observance,’ says Still, diplomatic but hinting that while criticism might be abundant compliance is harder to reach. A Zip tap has been installed – a familiar technology from the institute’s existing building. Meanwhile the costs were coming in, the bulk negotiated under lockdown. No one working in construction then will be surprised to learn that they were going up and scheme exceeded its original budget. Alongside value engineering a strong case had to be made to funders, particularly the European Regional Development Fund, which luckily did increase its grants. At the same time the project lost its passionate and experienced client champion, John French, after the sign-off of stage 3, and head of the Institute, Polly Courtice, who was taking over as lead, was getting herself up to speed. Still, there was barely anything to show for all the investigating, strategising and detailing on the abandoned offices of the old telephone exchange. But as stage 4 moved to stage 5 there was action on the ground.

External wall detail section

1. Existing solid masonry wall
2. 40mm Diasen Diathonite lime, sand and clay-based insulating plaster as breathable, insulating, air tight layer
3. 40mm Gutex wood fibre insulation
4. 80mm fibre-framed independent dry lining
5. Retained mixed access floor, insulation to floor and soffit to building perimeter to reduce cold bridging through existing wall and floor slab interface
6. Breath proof liquid applied air tight membrane
7. Existing sheet frame ensuined in concrete
8. Cesar Acoustic Screengroove 150 acoustic spray
9. Service trench stripped out, filled and sealed with liquid air tightness membrane
10. Compactram 200 insulation at interface to mitigate thermal bridging
11. Iso-Chemie Top Weldframe insulated window support frame installed internally to position windows within the insulation plan and mitigate cold bridging associated with traditional metal brackets or straps
12. Air tightness line
13. White aluminium window surrounds to finish existing reveals and reflect daylight into the building.

Above: Feilden+Mawson’s detail showing layers from external wall across the service trench and on to the floor slab.
Right: The wall build up modelled.

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Strength you can build on
The CPA aims to bring clarity to construction product marketing through accurate, accessible information. Will it make buildings safer, and will manufacturers sign up to it?

Stephen Coosae

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry brought to light deeply disturbing allegations of malpractice and flaws in product testing. With unsafe materials still in place, and leaseholders facing crippling remediation bills, pressure on suppliers and the industry in general, to prevent the same mistakes from reoccurring has never been greater.

The Code for Construction Product Information (CCPI) comes alongside a range of new measures and provisions to strengthen and extend the regulation of products, including a construction products regulator, building and fire safety bills and a fire safety order. Part of the Construction Products Association’s Marketing Integrity Group (MIG), which was tasked to respond to issues raised by the Grenfell disaster, the code is being managed by independent not-for-profit organisation Construction Product Information (CPi).

Product makers who sign up to the CPPI agree to abide by 11 clauses conceived to ensure product information meets the acid test of being accurate, reliable, unambiguous, up-to-date and accessible.

“This is not on voluntary, but the aim is for organisations, including architects, contractors and clients, to work only with compliant manufacturers. Individuals from over 170 organisations, including major clients and contractors, have registered interest so far and the first manufacturers can register to verify their products at the end of 2021. Main contractors and house builders, which have direct control over supply chains so can enforce it as a requirement, have a powerful role to play in driving uptake.

 Architects need to get away from a ‘cut and paste’ approach to specification, he says, and establish specific performance criteria based on CCPI data at the outset, so that if the contractor later needs to make a product substitution, it can ensure it meets or exceeds those criteria – holding the golden thread together. 

Clauses 1-3 of the CCPI require manufacturers to put in place a clear process for how product information is created and managed throughout its life, including ongoing responsibility when in the hands of third parties. Named individuals/roles must be nominated as responsible for creating the information from the outset and a competent person must sign off the final version. There must be an audit trail of procedures carried out and documentation reviewed, including input from internal and external third parties.

Paul Owen, technical delivery lead BDP, says the practice has been following the issue for some time. “We need to be receiving information from people who are suitably qualified and competent to make an assessment. Building fire safety has been the most high profile issue in recent years, but we are getting to a point where we need to see suppliers assessing their competence to provide information on carbon and other issues.”

This section of the code requires manufacturers to have a formal version control process, referenced back to a valid dated test or specification, and that we see all aspects of performance criteria closely: ‘We need to ensure we are getting to a point where we need to sign up because of limitations in their IT, or the need a documented process to ensure revised information meets the acid test of being accurate, reliable, unambiguous, up-to-date and accessible. This is the core of the code. We may make structural changes to the code’s requirements in line with manufacturers’ capabilities over the coming years. We want it to be a step at a time: one, make sure you can trust information; two, put it in a standardised format; three, improve accessibility so manufacturers can easily find the information they need; and four, make sure you can verify that information is correct.”

The ability to standardise and harmonise manufacturers’ product data etc is the holy grail necessary, to ensure small manufacturers can access and conform to the Code.”

Access to trustworthy information is a positive move, but the CCPI makes no mention of standardisation, including the use of common data formats, or digitisation, considered vital by many to ensure a consistent approach, and in line with the UKNI guidance.

Crocrook says: “The ability to standardise and harmonise manufacturers’ product data etc is the holy grail. And there is no reason why manufacturers, or so everyone works to the same format and structure, is the holy grail,” while Owen adds: “We need to get to a point where everyone can see products have been tested to the same standard, that performance results for similar products include the same data, not slightly different, information and that we see all aspects of performance, not just some.”

It is intended to review and update the code’s requirements in line with manufacturers’ capabilities over the coming years. We want it to be a step at a time: one, make sure you can trust information; two, put it in a standardised format; three, improve accessibility so manufacturers can easily find the information they need; and four, make sure you can verify that information is correct.”

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How green is my pension?

Pension power should not be overlooked in tackling the climate crisis – but how do architectural practices and their staff know when a pension fund aligns with their values?

From reducing the carbon footprint of buildings to cycling everywhere, the battle for net zero takes many forms for architects. But one avenue that is not considered as often as it could be is how they invest for their old age to promote the good of the planet.

Investing in pension funds that align with the values that many architects espouse in their professional and personal lives can make a difference. Recently, the particularly small scheme run by RIBA founder was joined by celebrities, activists and screenwriter and director Richard Curtis has been pushing the message as the founder of the Comic Relief, one of the fund’s biggest investors. Curtis’s Make My Money Matter group, which suggested that making your pension ‘green’ is 21 times more effective than the combined effects of going vegetarian, stopping flying and switching to a green energy provider.

Growing trend

There is already a notable trend in this direction. Globally, funds invested along ESG principles – environmental, social and governance – reached $5.5 trillion last year, compared with $4.6 trillion in 2020, according to research by the investment analyst Morningstar. The Financial Times has reported that net assets held in UK-domiciled ESG funds went from £9.2 billion at the beginning of 2017 to £41 billion by the end of 2020, including active and passive funds.

That’s potentially good news for the architectural practices wanting to provide a pension scheme for their employees that invest along ESG principles. Since 2008 even the smallest practices have been obliged to auto-enrol most of their staff into a company pension scheme. But ensuring that the choice of pension meets these ESG criteria can be a challenging proposition – even for the financially savvy.

Making your pension ‘green’ is 21 times more effective than the combined effects of going vegetarian, stopping flying and switching to a green energy provider.

Ensuring the choice of pension meets these ESG criteria can be a challenging proposition – even for the financially savvy.

Pension power should not be overlooked in tackling the climate crisis – but how do architectural practices and their staff know when a pension fund aligns with their values?

Pension power should not be overlooked in tackling the climate crisis – but how do architectural practices and their staff know when a pension fund aligns with their values?
Progressive thinking marks out planning approvals in Sheffield, Nottingham and Wales

Will Jennings

We can’t be accused of London-centrism in this update of planning news. We visit Nottingham and Sheffield for major new university projects, stay in the steel city for a novel approach to the city’s industrial heritage, and Hawkins\Brown are making a towering investment on the site of their first project together in 2021.

Nottingham Trent University

The tower is intended to bring together the university’s more traditional courses in design practice, including fine art, graphics and illustration, alongside newer creative technology studies including film, animation and games design, with space for up to 1,100 students to work at any one time. To provide room for such a variety of analogue and digital practices, the architect has planned a mix of different sizes spaces across the 10 floors, with many of the specialist studios – including greenscreen and photography studios – requiring specific lighting requirements.

This has had a direct impact on the external appearance of the building, with elevations broken into solid and glazed blocks depending on internal uses. Solid parts of the facade include ceramic cladding drawing from local material and colour precedents, with the glazed areas allowing views to the facade. The landscaping is designed around efficiency and daylight, expressing greenscreen and photography studios – with many of the specialist studios – requiring specific lighting requirements.

A new form of construction industry procurement is behind a scheme to deliver three new buildings and a green public space for Sheffield Hallam University. The university has formed The Hallam Alliance with BDP, Arup leading on design, BAM heading up construction, and CBRE taking the lead on facilities management. This is the latest example of the ground floors. The landscaping and social spaces set among wildflowers, a design initiative including a dining terrace to encourage students to use it as an extension of the ground floors. The landscaping approach extends to the rooftops; all three blocks feature roof terraces with a range of design initiatives including a dining terrace and social spaces set among wildflowers, a meadow, green wall and nature-dense biodiversity planting schemes.

Sheffield Hallam

Staying in Sheffield, a new approach to the city’s industrial heritage expresses the structure at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, expressed at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, with customisable ‘live walls’. A building app will help all the residents manage bookings of the amenity spaces and their social interaction with other members. The external material palette speaks to the city’s industrial heritage, weathered steel expresses the structure at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, expressed at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, with customisable ‘live walls’. A building app will help all the residents manage bookings of the amenity spaces and their social interaction with other members. The external material palette speaks to the city’s industrial heritage, weathered steel expresses the structure at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, expressed at ground level, with weathered steel paneling as the main facade, with customisable ‘live walls’. A building app will help all the residents manage bookings of the amenity spaces and their social interaction with other members.

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AFAN VALLEY

Local councillors have signed off again with conditional outline planning on a vast eco-resort for South Wales. The 132ha scheme achieved planning consent in early 2019, though the project collapsed just a few months later when The Guardian and ITV launched a joint investigation into Gavin Woodhouse, the businessman behind the funding of the scheme through his Northern Powerhouse Developments organisation. There are ongoing Serious Fraud Office investigations into Woodhouse.

However, the scheme, which comprises eco-lodges for family holidays for around £815 per three nights stay with leisure activities, didn’t quite disappear. Former director Peter Moore, who had no connection to Woodhouse’s funding strategy, continued discussions with the council, and has now formed an entirely new delivery team, Wildfox, which is backed by the Salamanca Group, to deliver the £250 million project.

Architecturally, Powell Dobson looks set to be busy developing its plans ahead of new detailed planning consent, which is hoped for by June 2022. Across four villages – Alpine, Forest, X-Sports and Trax N Trails – themed activities such as off-road biking, surfing, survival training and surfing will be arranged running over the site’s topography with 600 lodges and a 100-room hotel dispersed among the trees and hills. The plaza will be at the centre of the site, a linear-formed building which would step up the shallow hillside, forming a central socialising, eating and drinking space which – if all progresses as planned – the first guests will be enjoying in 2024.

For regular updates on planning permissions www.riba.com and sign up to our newsletter
Time to reflect on what’s just happened

Winner of the Americas region category in the RIBA’s 2021 Global Architecture Photography competition, architect Joel Rodríguez’s drone shot adds a sense of distance to an image already displaying the veneer of abstraction. His subject is a narrow bridge in Ecuador’s Cotopaxi National Park around 50km south of the capital Quito. Renowned for its eponymous active volcano, sitting almost 6000m high above sea level, Rodríguez looked to the plains and not the peaks; the shallow, reedy lakes at the base of the sibling Rumiñahui at the Laguna de Llimpiopungo.

A frequent visitor to ‘volcanoes avenue,’ Rodríguez has become well acquainted with the landscape and on one of his treks came upon this bridge of Eucalyptus wood, delicately spanning the shallow lakeside marshes where exotic llamas and alpacas might lazily graze. As someone fascinated by the works of Peter Zumthor, it was this anonymous bridge’s simplicity that first caught his attention – but then the use of material that, he says, reminded him of the idiosyncratic and crafted constructional techniques of Chilean architect Alberto Mouíz. Rodríguez’s interest in architecture as a tool to address social welfare and equitable distribution of wealth, extends here to rational use of resources and the bridge’s perceived desire to touch the ground lightly. ‘My composition attempts to transmit to the public the delicate intervention on the site, which beyond solving the problem of connection between both banks, allows a more intimate relationship with the context,’ he wrote in his competition submission.

Head of the competition jury Iwan Baan agreed: ‘This image shows for me the fragility of that landscape and how a lightweight architectural structure can connect the place – and the minimal impact it tries to have on that landscape.’

See this year’s winners at: https://bit.ly/3H4h4ij

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Find out where are you are on the conservation spectrum by taking this test. Circle your preferred option for each of the three choices:

- Re-paint and preserve the window profile (score 1) or double glaze (score 2);
- Reapply plaster with horsehair (score 1) or add insulation (score 2);
- Maintain an empty building (score 1) or knock a hole in the wall for better retail access (score 2).

If you score three or below you are a conservation fascist. Four and above make you a desecrator of the old. You can’t win.

In the UK we have a thing for history. It doesn’t have to be genuine – think Netflix costume dramas and ‘Victorian’ front doors on bungalows – but it is valued. We have our castles and great houses to preserve but also rows of darling streets in this town or that, where encroaching PVC is held off by a conservation area. At the front line of protection are conservation officers and Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland and CADW in Wales with concerns ranging from the colour of your downpipes to the viewing corridors to St Paul’s Cathedral.

My guess is that far more time goes into reactive preservation at a small scale than larger scale proactive conservation (despite the demand for a ‘positive strategy’ for heritage in local plans). Listing and our planning system set the grain for interrogation of proposed change, one planning application at a time. Proactive exceptions are the Heritage Action Zones which are based on high streets and other areas around England, like Kirkham in Lancashire and South Norwood in London, where strategies and cash can make a difference.

At the international scale the lacklustre of the places that pull together to recognise and promote their history secure a Unesco World Heritage Site listing. They use it as an economic driver; an exclusive club that operates a little like Landmark Trust’s lush catalogue of houses to rent, a mark of quality, a promise of interest. It works as badge for tourism and for inward investment. Clashes do come: Edinburgh has been warned of losing its status over bins and Liverpool actually did, thanks to the incursion of Liverpool Waters development into its heritage bubble.

Dig around further on the Unesco list and you find an expanding scale; newly crowned World Heritage Sites over the summer included the many public spaces and institutions designed by Jože Plečnik in Slovenian capital Ljubljana. Closer to home, the dramatic Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales (official title) stretches across the mountains of Snowdonia to the coast, celebrating extraction for construction. Another inscription puts 11 spa towns from across Europe on the map. We need more of this scale of thinking about built heritage to put arguments over detail and development into perspective. It should be possible to celebrate and enjoy our built history without preserving it in aspic.

Look at your test score again. Three or below and you are a guardian of history. Four or above then you are an architect. We just need to work out that tension and everybody wins.

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The dramatic Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales celebrates extraction for construction

Culture Leader

Fascism, desecration and architecture: Eleanor Young tries to balance the tensions of heritage

Living history

Left: Jože Plečnik’

MUSEUM AND GALLERIES OF LJUBLJANA

Obituary of Margaret Finch (1925–2021): ribaj.com/margaret-finch

Or disadvantaged group when creating the new village of Accra, that combined modernism with courtyard dwellings. Margaret was site architect supervising the construction of Margaret Finch was site architect supervising the construction of a new village on the outskirts of Accra that combined modernism with courtyard dwellings. Margaret was site architect supervising the construction of a new village on the outskirts of Accra that combined modernism with courtyard dwellings. Margaret was site architect supervising the construction of a new village on the outskirts of Accra that combined modernism with courtyard dwellings.
I’ve been reflecting on architectural education, or as it is often referred to by our institutions ‘The Pathway to Qualification’. This framing is significant – we do study architecture to qualify or do we study it because we want to contribute something to the built environment? Both can be true, but what do we do when the process of qualification impedes our ability to contribute meaningfully. Architectural practice is increasingly subject to the whims of capital investment, which is felt most keenly by those at the bottom of the professional hierarchy. Graduates face choosing between becoming an architect despite the overwhelming influence of private interests, or leaving the profession. To regain relevance and value, the title of architect must be diversified.

I and many peers have abandoned hopes of becoming qualified architects; we’re not disillusioned with the value of architecture, but find we could better contribute to it by not becoming architects. One close friend realised that to improve equity in the profession – ARB’s recent reform proposals – do not address its root cause. As an architect I still believe that to improve equity, diversity, and inclusivity.

The ARB consultation titled ‘Modernising architectural education and training’ will be open until 10 January 2022. Contributions to the open survey through ARB.org.uk

Community schemes adds a colour to life

SterlingOSB Zero lies behind the cheerful charm of a Westminster housing and retail community project

Sanjatine Architects’ (SJA) Ebury Edge is a colourful, temporary development for Westminster City Council. It opened last December and will be used for five years. The scheme was conceived and built to give the soon-to-be-displaced residents of the 1950s Ebury Bridge Estate, in Pimlico, London, an immediate, tangible experience of the regeneration process while providing a focus and hub for the community ahead of the estate’s demolition and renewal.

The cluster of wooden buildings includes a terrace of two-storey affordable retail and workspace units within a single-storey structure housing a café and community centre, a community garden raised above the scheme on a cantilevered platform, and an illuminated scaffold tower at the site’s leading corner to enhance the scheme’s civic presence.

It is not the tower but the colourful, timber-clad facades of two-storey retail and workspace units that give the scheme its charm. Beneath a distinctive sawtooth roof, the units provide an affordable foothold for small local businesses by providing micro-shops at street level and larger workspace units upstairs. The project creates an active edge to the estate and brings economic activity, says Gabriel Warschafsky, director of projects at SJA. ‘Units are quite narrow so each can have a shop front on what is quite a busy street to gain exposure and visibility’. For particular to the terraces, and equally cheerful beneath its cladding of teal-coloured timber shingles, is the single-storey cafe and community hall building. This is designed to be flexible with the two spaces sharing a common core to allow events and functions to flow between the two. Hidden behind the terrace and community buildings is a shuttered courtyard linked to an existing great hall and seating space. The scheme’s temporary nature means SJA wanted to reduce the carbon embodied in materials used in its construction. This was achieved through the use of a timber-framed building which is prefabricated and can be dismantled for reuse. Its shallow mass concrete foundations are vital. Obstructions in the ground and a limited budget meant the ground beams support modular, prefabricated timber framed buildings which form the roofs of both buildings. SterlingOSB Zero sheathing gives the structures their strength and provides a surface on which to lay floor coverings. The naturally ventilated cavity beneath the externally cladding the timber-framed timber cereaux helps to improve the possibilities of the means of fire and smoke spread.

Within architectural education there is little consensus on the role of architecture. Concerning our interest in understanding the role of architecture, we have had the profession in the 20th century context of fixed fees and public practice, it appears that this approach has only led to a decline in 21st century professional relevance. It’s time to support radical reform and build a new professional body grounded on equity, diversity, and inclusivity.”

Charlie Edmonds is co-founder of Future Architects Front and a designer at Civic Square

MAKE YOUR POINT

The ARB consultation titled ‘Modernising architectural education and training’ will be open until 10 January 2022. Contributions to the open survey through ARB.org.uk

SterlingOSB Zero is lightweight, economical and provides the rigidity we need to make the panels work structurally, said Jan Kattein.

The building’s exterior cladding of timber shingles and feather-edged timber boards were also supplied. It is a facade that will weather and patinate to react with its surroundings, he noted. The scheme’s temporary nature meant SJA wanted to reduce the carbon embodied in materials used in its construction. That really speaks in favour of timber products to me,” says Warschafsky. “Timber also has the benefit of being relatively lightweight: ‘We wanted to work with timber to reduce the weight of the buildings and therefore the load on the foundations,’ he adds.

Despite the building’s short lifespan, solid foundations are vital. Obstructions in the ground and a limited budget meant that shallow mass concrete foundations are used here. The timber structures stand on the ARB’s recent reform proposals. The intention is that in future the timber structures could be removed and the pilings reused for the main scheme.

The ground beams support modular, prefabricated timber framed buildings which form the roofs of both buildings. SterlingOSB Zero sheathing gives the structures their strength and provides a surface on which to lay floor coverings. The naturally ventilated cavity beneath the externally cladding the timber-framed timber cereaux helps to improve the possibilities of the means of fire and smoke spread.

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Charlie Edmonds is co-founder of Future Architects Front and a designer at Civic Square
Art gallery brings the chickens home to roost

What was once a home for poultry is now a refined contemporary art gallery thanks to an imaginative architect and SterlingOSB Zero.

An abandoned and partially collapsed chicken shed in rural Suffolk has been salvaged and cleverly reworked by James Grayley Architects (JGA) to create a bright, thoughtfully and carefully detailed to create a refined, contemporary building that references the local vernacular.

This is the building’s third incarnation. It started life as an aircraft repair workshop on the nearby Parham Airfield. After World War II it was dismantled, relocated and rebuilt in “a rudimentary way” on its current site, where it functioned as a chicken shed for many years.

When JGA first became involved with the project, the shed’s days as a home for chickens were long over. The building had no roof, its walls had all but disappeared and, apart from the remains of a giant rusty feed-hopper, the only element of the building still standing was a row of 10 triangular timber roof trusses, each supported on a pair of timber posts.

Unsurprisingly, the client’s initial brief was to knock the shed down and replace it with a contemporary structure the same size and shape. But Grayley had other ideas: “We realised we could use what was still standing and build the new gallery around it,” he says. “Our starting point was to take something that had been deemed worthless and, by placing a mute building around it, bring out the beauty inherent in the original structure.”

However, the old structure’s instability and its lack of height were a major challenge to its reuse. Despite being quite a long building, it was only 2.5m from the floor to the underside of the trusses. To avoid additional structural bracing impinging further on the interior, Grayley has enclosed the entire superstructure in a rigid exoskeleton of 18mm thick SterlingOSB Zero. “We realised that if we covered the building in a carefully cut skin of OSB, it would provide the sheathing and structure needed to keep the building standing while being both visually and structurally lightweight,” he explains.

For the building’s insulated timber walls, the inner layer of SterlingOSB Zero provides both structural rigidity and has the additional benefit of allowing the depth of the timber frame to be reduced. A layer of plasterboard conceals the OSB to provide a neutral background for the gallery art works. “There is nothing superfluous in the structure – everything has to be there to perform a function so we could build simply and economically,” explains Grayley.

By contrast, the SterlingOSB Zero shell has been left exposed on the underside of the roof. It has, however, been given a wash of milky-white flame retardant to prevent the spread of flame. The board’s oriented strands are still partially visible through the semi-translucent finish. Grayley says the benefit of exposing the OSB is that it provides a contrast with the white walls to help “lift the ceiling while, at the same time, preventing the interior being a completely white box which might have been ‘visually overbearing’.”

Grayley describes the Printroom Gallery of the building’s previous function. Above left: The steel feed-hopper is the sole reminder as ‘a simple building, built well for the long term’. He says the use of SterlingOSB Zero made that possible in a way that might not have been realistic with plywood. “I think that where we’ve used one skin of OSB, we might have had to use two skins of plywood boards, all of which would have to be overlapped, so using OSB has saved us time and money as well as making for a more efficient structure,” he explains.

Now that the transformation of the collapsed chicken shed is complete, Grayley is convinced that the decision to reuse the existing structure was the right one. “I think the client has got a better building than she would have done if she had just taken the view to knock the thing down and replace it with a building using an off-the-shelf frame,” he says. “The character of the space is much better than it would have been had we done that.”

What’s more, because the building has been designed and built to a good technical standard, if its function as a print gallery were to end, it could easily be adapted for other functions – a fourth reincarnation perhaps?
OSB and straw hide connects with wildlife

Student-designed hide on a local nature reserve proves a hit with local schoolchildren

A nature hide designed and built by postgraduate students from Kingston School of Art using straw bales and SterlingOSB Zero supplied by West Fraser, formally known as Norbord, will help neighbourhood school children connect with wildlife. The project is part of the March course run by Takeshi Hayatsu, principal of Hayatsu Architects, which is involved in many local community projects in the West London area.

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The winning design was a wooden hide based on two interconnecting vertical cylinders. The bales are prefabricated at the School of Art for assembly on site. Prefabrication included assembly of window frames of West Fraser-donated SterlingOSB Zero, which are the same size as a straw bale. Students assembled the hide on the nature reserve over the summer. The precise location of the window openings was determined on site once the walls were in place and the best viewing positions had been established.

Window openings were created by simply replacing a straw bale with a window frame. Externally the building is clad in larch panels. These have been created in nature motifs by local school children using paint made from clay recovered from a local building site, linseed oil and flour.

The design is successful and the hide has proved popular with local schools. Although, with hindsight, Hayatsu admits that leaving the straw bale exposed inside may have been a mistake as the children take home stalks as a souvenir of their visit. •

Left: It might be clad in larch panels but SterlingOSB Zero form both the structural ring beam as well as the sheathing for the softwood timber cassette floor. Below: Window frames were fabricated to fit into the module of the straw bale construction.
Carlos Moreno has combined an active social conscience and scientific expertise to create the 15-minute city for the good of people and the planet.

Words: Jan Carlos Kucharek Portrait: Julie Ansiau

There cannot be many people claiming a positive outcome from the Covid-19 pandemic, but Carlos Moreno – the mind behind the ‘15-minute city’, is convinced by one. ‘Were it not for Covid-19, I think that the conditions for deploying the 15-minute city concept would have been very hard to instigate,’ he tells me remotely from his home-office in central Paris. ‘But the catastrophe of the pandemic has seen us drastically change how we live – it has forced us to reassess the nature and quality of our urban lifestyles.’

The judges of the third Obel Award, a €100,000 international prize for architectural achievement, thought so too. Presenting the award in October to Colombian-born Moreno in his adopted home, the jury chair, US landscape architect Martha Schwartz, declared them all ‘convinced that the 15-minute city is the right project at the right moment’ to win the award. As convinced indeed as Anne Hidalgo, mayor of Paris, who also attended. She has championed the ‘ville du quart d’heure’ and made it one of her key campaign promises, helping secure her second term in office. Moreno, a professor at the Panthéon-Sorbonne specialising in complex systems and innovation, is now working alongside Hidalgo to implement the 15-minute city in the French capital – one more challenge in a life that has been a string of them.

First coined in 2015 at the Paris COP21 conference, Moreno’s idea for a human-centric, environmentally sustainable model of urban development has a simple premise at its heart: that a city’s residents, regardless of age, background or ability, should be able to access their daily needs – housing, work, food, health, education, culture and leisure – within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. Adaptable to new or existing cities, the model is for a decentralised, polycentric city, moving away from car ownership, freeing up urban space and reducing fossil fuel use. It promotes diversity, innovation, citizenship and technology for common good. It seems a like a no-brainer, so why is Moreno’s idea even a ‘thing’?

Perhaps it’s because this urban ‘theory of everything’ has taken him more than 40 years to piece together and he’s pushing the concept with a messianic zeal borne out of his own experience. He might now be living on the Left Bank but it wasn’t always so. Born in 1959 in Tunja, two hours’ drive from Bogotá, Colombia, Moreno was the child of rural farmers. His father was illiterate, but wanted to ensure that he, and his seven siblings, received an education. Moreno still remembers the taste of pure Andean air. But the innocence of childhood wasn’t to last. Soon after Pinochet’s 1973 fascist putsch in Chile, the US backed Condor Plan was propping up right wing regimes in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil – and Colombia. ‘It was a dark period for South American democracy,’ he recalls, and in the political struggle that ensued, it was the people who suffered. ‘Small farmers fell victim to powerful landowners carrying out violent sequestration of land, and my father was one of them. He became an urban dweller against his will, like millions of others.’ Moreno lived through the rapid urbanisation that he’s now seeking to resolve, ‘because as a family, we were part of this accelerated city creation all over Latin America.’

But the move to Colombia’s third city, Cali, on
The 15-minute city idea is founded not on vague sociological constructs but the mathematics he so excelled at. Graduating from Paris 1 Sorbonne University in 1983 and influenced by its Silicon Valley scene, pionering the nascent computer industry, Moreno’s specialisations in robotics and artificial intelligence saw him trying to resolve complex real-life scenarios for industry. A PhD at the University d’Evry had him lead a team of researchers creating software platforms for genome research among other things. By 2006, the development of his ‘sustainable digital city’ concept brought him to the attention of French multinational utilities company GDF Suez. It acquired Sinovia in 2010, made him scientific advisor to the CEO and put him in charge of strategy for its Smart Cities programme – a stellar career trajectory for a displaced farmer’s son.

But how can a man with a background in highly specialised modes of subliminal state control now be promoting the virtues of open democracy in his 15-minute city? How does he reconcile a past in power infrastructures, surveillance and defence logistics – and he’s spot on, says Moreno: ‘In modern cities, distance overrides everything and any concept of “platforms” has completely disappeared. Chronic urbanism factors in new ideas about the rhythm of the city, re-calibrating it for a different kind of production. So to the father of post-functionalism, Aldo Rossi: “He posited the powerful concept of “typology”, about city order and how its spaces can be appropriated and re-appropriated – “chrono-topia”, he explains. This is crucial to Moreno’s 15-minute city – all spaces must, by necessity, be multi-functional. And it creates a scenario that would have intrigued Rossi: if a supermarket can be an art gallery, or a church can be a healthcare centre, what does that mean for civic form in architecture?

When Moreno explains the idea its obviousness is its radical and revolutionary. His ‘social circularity’ for living is an ‘urban and territorial ontology’ based on six essential functions: to live in good housing, to work without crossing distance, to get to school, to access healthcare, education and ‘cultural entitlement’ locally, with a reduced perimeter, accessed by low-carbon mobility, in 15 minutes on foot or bike in a compact, high-density zone. Critics argue that the low-density of US cities confounds Moreno’s “Euro-centric... colonial” city model, but Moreno says: “The 30-minute territory is not the same as the 15-minute...” – and he’s right, says Moreno: “We need regulatory mechanisms to act on the local economy,” he explains.

The time seems ripe for the 15-minute city, with our urban lives fundamentally re-calibrated in the wake of Covid-19. Five years after Paris’ COP21 we’ve all woken up to another reality; that climate change needs to be urgently addressed and CO2 emissions cut, that working from home does work, that people want the stress of a commute, that work, life balance has become more important, that people recognise the value of their local community. And power to pedestrianise the Champs Élysées as that’s a federal issue,” he says. But it’s also due to private interests at the heart of global cities. ‘Emirati investors own that boulevard,’ he adds. ‘And Qatar probably owns more of it than the Queen.’ Nobel Prize winner Klimo Ostrom’s idea of ‘governance by commons’ comes into play here, because without a tangible benefit for citizens, the 15-minute city cannot be realised: ‘Governatisation is a common example because it’s a way for private interests to be obstructive in parts of the city where you need to be enacting social circularity.’ He won’t be drawn on whether he’s supporting nationalisation of private property, but rampant speculation is completely problematic for his polycentric city idea, but he does proffer examples of active democracy in his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ idea, which he says allows for a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno says, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects the environment, who accepts the unacceptable because the old reality never gave us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity. In his Obel acceptance speech, Moreno said he can’t help but consider the outcome of the current situation due to the new reality never given us the choice,” says Moreno, speaking of his nascent topophilic ‘urban creature’ who respects not only his work home, but also his business, who acknowledges his neighbours and develops social links in his community. He sees this not as a ‘nice to have’ but a necessity.
Account of incompetence and indifference leaves feelings of shock and anger, writes Pamela Buxton

Grenfell: Value Engineering – Scenes from the Inquiry is, quite rightly, a heavy weight. This verbatim play has been crafted by journalist Richard Norton-Taylor out of the inquest of the inquiry into the tragedy on 14 June 2017, and is directed by Nicolas Kent. The two have developed something of a niche for tribunal plays, having tackled the Scott Arms to Iraq and Stephen Lawrence inquiries among others.

Staged at the Tabernacle less than a mile from Grenfell Tower, this one manages to evoke emotional load. Norton-Taylor hopes it will provide ‘a feeling of greater understanding of not only how the fire spread so quickly but why’, and expects that those seeing it will be shocked and angry. It certainly achieves both these results.

It is compelling, despite the inevitably dry wording and technical complexity, relentlessly and deeply disturbing. Key characters are dropped in to provide context and witnesses each reveal yet another missed chance, oversight, incompetence, buck-passing or worse. What’s startling is the lack of expertise throughout, whether through inexperience, incompetence or indifference, and in particular the lack of knowledge and attention to Building Regulations.

The play concludes rather quickly with the words of Michael Mansfeld QC, representing the BSR Group. In this role, actor David Robb cites a widely-circulated dossier put together by resident and leaseholder Shahm Ahmed after a fire at the tower in 2010, outlining the building’s vulnerabilities to fire and lack of evacuation procedures: ‘That letter has everything in it. That letter is warning, seven years before, to the same chief executive officer, the same TM0, that there will be an inferno’.

The inquiry is still ongoing, with much to be in. What’s startling is the lack of the Fitness of the Building Regulations, the role of government and what can be done to avoid such events happening again.

The end of the play is fitting. There is no curtain call for the actors, just a projection of the 72 names of those who died in the fire.


From left to right Derek Elroy as Leslie Thomas QC (BSR Group barrister), Poly Kemp as Claire Williams (TM0), project manager, Tim Lewis as Bruce Souven (design, Studio E).

King of ladies’ hairdressing salons who was not afraid to pitch for projects in unfashionable sectors, resulting in some of brutalism’s highlights

The secret of life is being ahead of the game’, said Owen Luder, who has died aged 93. In practice he proved adept at spotting social and economic change, and showed flair for the business of architecture which he sought to share in his work for the profession – including two terms as president of the RIBA.

Harold Owen Mason was fostered until the age of three when his mother Ellen married Edward Luder. From the late 1930s home was the Old Kent Road, south London. ‘It was rough and tough – villains’ country’, Luder later recalled, but made him streetwise. A technical scholarship won at 13- a three-year general course at the Brixton School of Building. ‘Within three months’, he later recalled, ‘I knew I was going to be an architect’. Getting there took initiative and determination. Posting a ‘situation wanted’ ad secured the first of several jobs in practice, which combined with night school – and interrupted by army service – led to qualification, and his own firm at 28.

He thrived in evolving sectors overlooked by others, first as ‘king of ladies’ hairdressing salons’, then in larger commercial jobs for clients who appreciated his ability to conceive a viable business case as well as his design skills. ‘The so-called elite in the profession were too posh to get involved with, dusty, developing the latest. In working fast and claiming considerable creative freedom, the Owen Luder Partnership put up offices and shopping centres from Bromley to Leicester during the 1960s, and opened studios in Harrogate and Newcastle.

In that fertile period, with Rodney Gordon as head of building, David Davies as architectural director and Jonathan Meades has called ‘the three finest works of British brutalism’. At Eros House in London, an external steel and glass podium bristling with projecting balconies. Portsmouth’s Tricorn Centre combined shopping and parking in an exhilarating megastructure of chunky decks and spiralling ramps, but fell victim to competition and decay and was demolished in 2004. Gateshead’s Trinity Square, another cagggy shopping centre and car park, was immortalised in the film Get Carter but demolished in 2010. Other losses include the Dunston Rocket, a landmark residential kayak, but Luder remained sanguine about membership of the ‘Bubble Club’. Notable survivors include Consort House on London’s Queenway, a red brick tower and pond bristling with projecting balconies.

Scenting a downturn in the 1970s, Luder switched tack, absorbing the venerable firm of Young & Hall, which led to work in prisons and coal mines. After the 1973 oil crisis he landed projects in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria’s National Stadium in Abuja.

With success came a growing profile as an advocate for change in a profession he regarded as hidebound, snobbish and in thrall to local authority architects. He set up the Association of Private Architects, wrote columns calling for controversial reforms that have mostly come to pass, and in 1967 was elected to the RIBA Council. By the end of the ’70s he wanted the presidency. Lacking the support of Council grandees who usually put forward candidates Luder took his campaign directly to the members, winning in 1983. He broke the old boys’ network, recalls Maxwell Hutchinson, who assisted the bid, ‘and helped to open up both the Institute and the profession’. With a ready smile and easy manner he was the bow-tied president was a charismatic and distinctive front man, but also a firm negotiator with his colleagues. With a ready smile and easy manner he was a consummate politician.

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From left to right Derek Elroy as Leslie Thomas QC (BSR Group barrister), Poly Kemp as Claire Williams (TM0), project manager, Tim Lewis as Bruce Souven (design, Studio E).

Owen Luder 1928–2021

Obituary

IN MEMORIAM

John Frederick Norman Collins
ELECTED 1981, CHESTER

Colin John Collins
ELECTED 1982, YORK

Nicholas Wood
ELECTED 1986, LONDON

John Raymond Hadland How
ELECTED 1989, GLASGOW

Peter Michael Parkinson
Griffins
ELECTED 1990, BIRMINGHAM

John Raygatt
ELECTED 1994, HERTFORD

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The RIBA Journal December 2021
...listen in

Conversations with leading architects, talking about their work, their clients, themselves.

Their obsessions, how they operate and where it goes right (and wrong)

Coming up next

Jo Wright, Nick Jackson and Christina Cox of Arup on getting out there with clients, masterplanning fine grain into Battersea, delivering for Herzog & de Meuron, and setting the pace on retrofit. Plus the blisters of site visits and starting your career with a baked bean factory.

Eric Parry and Lee Higson of Eric Parry Architects on material innovation, avoiding wallpaper and why Parry gets sore knuckles when he visits site. And the glamorous side of toilet specifications.
The RIBA Journal December 2021

Thrilled by the variety and originality of entries

Intangible yet fundamentally important as a building material, light dramatically affects our perception of space, our emotional response to it, and our behaviour within it. Roofs that admit daylight can heighten our appreciation of space, and of light itself. ‘The sun never knew how wonderful it was until it fell on to the wall of a building’, as Louis Kahn said, quoted in Junichiro Tanizaki’s In Praise of Shadows. Natural daylight is also intrinsic to mental and physical wellbeing – a key concern when designing homes in dense urban environments with ever-restricted space.

The provision of adequate illumination is a basic requirement in architecture: the real challenge lies in creating designs that – despite physical limitations – are able to manipulate and utilize natural daylight to unexpected, atmospheric, even joyful effect. In conjunction with Keylite Roof Windows, RIBA Journal launched the ideas competition Light Roof, which asked entrants to design a generous family home for a compact site, enclosed on all sides, where the only access to daylight comes from directly above. Emphasis was not simply on providing adequate illumination for all parts of domestic life, but rather, introducing light and handling it in ways that would alter the experience of the occupants for the better, enriching their day-to-day activities within the home. The building could be heavily overshadowed by another building, situated on a backland plot, within the grounds of an existing property, or below ground; it must be at least two storeys and should use a variety of methods

of bringing light into the house beyond the straightforward application of atria and lightwells, which could not account for more than 20 per cent of the sites area.

Judging the contest were architects Gianni Botsford and vPPR’s Tatiana von Preussen, both RIBA Award-winners and the architects of notable houses in similar situations: Light House and Vaulted House respectively. They were joined by Debbie Phillips, Keylite’s national business development manager, along with competition chair, RIBA Journal contributing editor Chris Fuges. While the entries were diverse in scale and appearance, it became clear that those for tighter plots generally produced more imaginative responses. Blink House by Stephen Macbean emerged as the winner. With its characterful technological solution of perisopic mirrors in Corten cowls and mechanised baffles, it was “far out yet strangely plausible”. It offered inhabitants flexibility, control over the interior environment and privacy: a perfect ‘house for a mad scientist’, said Phillips. Those entries highly commended and receive £500 prizes, Soraya Somarathne’s brick-domed Cloister – described as ‘outstanding’ by Botsford – was original in its ability to successfully marry the religious context of its location (the grounds of Lambeth Palace) with a traditional Indian building technique. The judges agreed could be implemented in real-life scenarios and would make for pleasant living environments.

Judges

Gianni Botsford
Director and head of design at Gianni Botsford Architects

Tatiana von Preussen
Co-founder and director of vPPR

Debbie Phillips
National business development manager, Keylite Roof Windows

Chris Fuges
Chief contributing editor, The RIBA Journal

The real challenge lies in creating designs which are able to manipulate and utilise natural daylight to unexpected, atmospheric, even joyful effect

Shedding fresh light on designing homes
Obscured on all sides by a high brick wall, a busy road, a narrow lane and a park, Stephen Macbean’s winning entry, Blink House, uses ingenious rooflights to direct its occupants’ vision skyward.

Macbean’s proposal, for which he receives £2,000, involves excavating the basement, providing two linear, top-lit gardens at the east and west and creating a grid structure on the roof at 2.4m centres. This grid forms part of Blink House’s ‘fantastical’ lighting solution: a combination of skylights, reflective baffles and ‘windowscopes’ – sculptural periscopes acting in lieu of windows to provide horizontal views.

At the lower levels, the perisopic effect is created by large, angled mirrors placed within the linear gardens, offering curated views outwards. On the roof, to the edges of the system of skylights, are mirrors housed in Corten steel-clad insulated covers.

Above and below the roof openings containing the circular skylights are the mechanised white aluminium baffle discs, which are able to rotate and tilt. These offer residents a degree of control over how light enters and acts within the interior spaces. Within the rim of each internal baffle, circular LED strips provide additional direct or indirect lighting options and create a ‘visually rhythmic’ ceiling plane.

Macbean’s design had a ‘confidence about technology’, noted the judges. Unusually, Macbean also presented photos of a physical model to prove the idea’s efficacy. He also gave thought to the street elevation – the roof appears to ‘float’ above the perimeter wall, mediated by louvres which provide further lighting control and ventilation.

The judges praised its ‘wow factor’, its flexibility, its privacy and its willingness to embrace and control the constantly changing sky views and attendant interior light conditions. As Chris Foyes summarised: ‘Blink House is in the spirit of the competition, which is to say don’t dismiss difficult sites as impossible, as ingenuity and imagination can find a way.’}

Macbean’s design had a ‘confidence about technology’, noted the judges.

Left: Corten-clad periscopes animate the roofscape. Below: View of lightwell showing windowscopes at each level; windowscope test model. Bottom: Diagrammatic sections through a typical skylight in summer, winter and evening.
Influenced by its location in the grounds of Lambeth Palace, Soraya Somarathne’s top-lit Cloister offers a meditative and contemplative space for its occupants. The secluded, subterranean residence was admired by the judges for its ‘different sensibility’ and ‘celestial atmosphere’. Brick is the primary material, tying in with the historic surrounding architecture. Somarathne also incorporates building techniques derived from the ‘Rohtak dome’, a self-supporting shallow brick dome found in the Indian villages of Rohtak, topped by a central skylight. ‘The mounded roof gives the design a certain presence,’ said Foges. ‘In some ways it recalls the Pantheon with its central oculus – there is no outlook but it does not feel claustrophobic’.

The Cloister’s domed ceiling and curved internal walls disperse light throughout the space. Light-tubes within the perforated brickwork around the skylight supplement natural daylighting, taking advantage of the position of the sun throughout the day; the master bedroom enjoys morning sunlight, the kitchen receives midday sun, and the children’s bedroom is warmed by evening light. During the summer, light is centralised within the house, allowing more of the interior to benefit from cooling shade. Oblique winter sunlight has the opposite effect. ‘Unlike some entries, this one carefully considers the movement of the sun, the seasons, and the changing elements of light,’ said Botsford. ‘These considerations are fundamental, and create different opportunities’.

Sustainability considerations include the use of flexible, cost-effective and eco-friendly clay brick, capable of being recycled at the end of its life. The holes within the structural bricks have been adapted to function as planters, the soil and grass providing additional insulation. ‘There is no outlook but it does not feel claustrophobic’.
The competition brief points to the scarcity of straightforward sites in densifying cities,’ noted Matthew Bate’s project statement. ‘We suggest that history has met this challenge before in the form of the terrace house and, following this, the back-to-back house of the industrial revolution.’

His proposition takes a landlocked and overlooked site ‘which does not lend itself to traditional building typologies’ and turns it into an opportunity to generate affordable housing provision. Bate updates the problematic 1800s back-to-back format. He addresses issues of poor lighting and ventilation through the use of a long, triangular roof lantern and another large rooflight, positioned above interconnecting multi-level spaces inspired by the Loosian ‘raumplan’, which challenged the hierarchy of rooms in stacked floors.

Bate’s design sinks a glazed cube into the floorplate, positioning a triangular lightwell at ground-floor level askance to the cuboid above it. The central lightwell can be both inhabited or empty. The device permits views at unexpected angles, encourages fluid movement around it and produces a pleasing cascading, pooling effect with light. ‘It is surprising how the triangular lightwell brings light into the room,’ observed Tatiana von Preussen.

The ‘simple and calm’ interior is a counterpoint to the austere facade, devoid of details. The judges also praised the ‘well-worked-out plan’, its provision of privacy within a dense plot, and its attempt to offer a response to volume housing in constrained conditions.

The range of materials and unique solutions impressed the judges. ‘The nice thing about this is that there are a lot of different and unusual methods making a play of light, not just lighting the rooms,’ said Tatiana von Preussen. The context of an existing project appealed to Debbie Phillips, who observed that ‘it feels real, and could be applied as a solution to many sites’. 
For judge Tatiana von Preussen, Julija Dubovik’s entry ‘looks among the most real and convincing’.

Two internal courtyards – and long skylights arranged in strips across a flat roof – illuminate and ventilate a rectangular house set below ground.

The double-height central living room is open and airy. Either side, on the lower-ground floor, are bedrooms which open to the slender courtyards. Directly above these, the dining area and study overlook the living room from opposite ends of the house.

The placement of the courtyards ‘gives a sense of a view to something beyond’, said Gianni Botsford. The way the bedrooms ‘turn their backs’ on the rest of the house ‘works very well in terms of privacy … the spaces feel perfectly pleasant’.

Phillips praised the inclusion of living walls, pointing out that ‘it would feel interactive and would give a sense of a change of seasons’.

The judges praised the straightforwardness and presentation of the design, which included hand-drawn plans and sections. ‘It works, it is light and airy; I like the way it has been illustrated,’ said Gianni Botsford.

John Coward

John Coward’s Box House is arranged around a sunken courtyard in a city-centre converted mill complex, accessed via a shared yard.

A lack of views or visual contact with the outside world could make for a claustrophobic existence, however Coward’s design counteracts this with extensive natural daylighting – via fully and partly glazed roofs – and an open-plan design arranged around the central courtyard.

Considerable emphasis is given to biodiversity (soft landscaping, living walls and water features) and sustainability, using photovoltaic panels, air source heat pumps, a rotating wind catcher and rainwater harvesting to meet Passivhaus standards. ‘I like the thoughts around biodiversity – that makes for a nice story,’ said Debbie Phillips.

Courtyard windows, atrium lanterns and rooflights, mirrored lightwells and tubes illuminate the interior. The judges praised the design’s straightforwardness and presentation, which included hand-drawn plans and sections. ‘It works, it is light and airy; I like the way it has been illustrated,’ said Gianni Botsford.

Considerable emphasis is given to biodiversity and sustainability.
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Where are the carbon details?
There is a lack of clarity about embodied carbon provided in October’s RIBA Journal.

On one hand we have Mae’s Agar Grove housing, where a decision was made to allow the contractor to change the proposed timber structure to concrete. It is hard to imagine more concrete being used in the construction of these buildings. No figure is given for the embodied carbon, but it must be high. Surely this matter could have been dealt with at tender interview stage and the requirement for a timber structure upheld. It is not correct for the writer of the article to infer that the Agar Grove development is ‘truly low-carbon architecture’.

Grafton Architects’ Town House, is another concrete-framed building – with an improbably low rate of embodied carbon (372kgCO2e/m²). It would be good to know how this low rate was achieved. Was it by offsetting, or perhaps by excluding the external concrete frame? We would like to know the details.

Alice Brown
For updated details on upfront carbon of the Town House (A1-3) see ribaj.com/sustainable-stirling – Ed

On/off message
I was inspired by Simon Allford’s comments about the Angel building (RIBAJ September 2021). ‘It was pragmatic,’ he says, rather than claiming a grand plan. ‘If you think carefully you can adapt or extend... I think architects are great problem solvers... they can advise on what architecture can be, revising, changing a building, seeing how it can be used in a different way... We can help people think differently about the environment.’

This is positive. But then the Journal mentions controlling the carbon content of concrete. Reducing carbon emissions to control global warming is radically important, a cause taken up by Al Gore. But the huge number of cars on English roads is a far more dangerous contributor to carbon emissions than anything in the built environment.

You also print two articles that are quite pathetic. Eleanor Young wastes a whole page with nonsense about the detritus that collects behind buildings. Surely this should be corrected rather than applauded! Then Will Wiles’ article about Swindon’s Oasis Centre loses its impetus by rambling on about his childhood experiences. Surely the realities of the harsh adult world and finding a way to reduce them would be more important to concentrate on.

Andrew R Simpson

Build in an energy audit?
Given that all ‘operational’ development (mainly roads and buildings) contributes roughly 50% to overall global warming, it seems incumbent on both architects and planners jointly to work to minimise the adverse effects of almost all forms of future urban expansion. By this I mean that individual and groups of buildings should always be designed and disposed to minimise their consumption of energy (insulation) and maximise their solar energy (insolation) capture.

In my extensive professional experience, this is best done at the two critical stages of building regulation and planning approval. Ideally, these would be integrated as they are in Continental Europe, but such integration might well be achieved without primary legislation.

John MacBryde, Highgate

Retired principal planning inspector DETR

Something to get off your chest?
We welcome letters but retain the right to edit them.
Sezincote, The Cotswolds
1805

Architect Samuel Pepys Cockerell designed Sezincote in the early 19th century for his brothers, first for Colonel John and, upon his death, the younger Sir Charles. Both had made fortunes working with the East India Company and so Cockerell wanted to create for them a vision of India in the Cotswolds. Cockerell hadn’t visited the country himself, but worked with his friends Thomas and William Daniell who had an extensive knowledge of Indian architecture, having spent 10 years there making topographical pictures.

The resulting house was planned like an English villa, with neoclassical interiors, but the exterior was pure Mughal, or Indian Islamic, architecture. The onion-shaped dome, minarets and peacock-tail windows wrought in Cotswold stone inspired the Prince Regent’s Brighton Pavilion after he visited Sezincote in 1807.

Sezincote is a monument to the power and wealth acquired by the East India Company. ‘Nabobs’ such as the Cockerells, and their near neighbour Warren Hastings, first governor general of India, for whom Samuel Cockerell designed the similarly exotic Daylesford House, wanted glittering palaces built back at home that celebrated the fortunes they had obtained from the exploitation of the sub-continent.

Justine Simbrook
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