

Juniper House, King's Lynn, Norfolk

Local architectural patronage delivers sustainable and neighbourly office building



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

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

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

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

The Lessons

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

The Project

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

The Site

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

The Problems

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

The Solutions

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

