

Anglian angles

King's Lynn is a town in Norfolk that enjoys an immense legacy of sustainable architecture. Not just churches and civic jewels, but assemblies of mundane buildings that have proved worthy of conservation and re-use. The town centre is layered with sturdy examples from the twelfth to the nineteenth century following and forming streets, alleys, squares and harbour side. The pattern was assaulted in the 1960s as planners set buildings back from the street and fringed them with 'green ground cover' or car parking. Suddenly very ordinary buildings were offered isolated settings previously limited to churches with graveyards.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk occupied a typical 1960s office building on a site to the north of the town centre on Chapel Street. By the late 1980s the authority faced capacity problems and turned its eyes to the neighbouring site across Austin Street, where Raynham House, a two-storey building housing a job centre, had become redundant and structurally unsound.

The council commissioned a study as to how best it could be developed and in 1997 invited six local architects to submit responses to the brief, which led to the selection of Jeremy Stacey Architects to carry out an options appraisal. Four options were explored: offices only, housing only, a walled garden and a combination of the three. The borough included UDP sustainability criteria and reference to Agenda 21 in its briefing and Stacey responded by including a developed environmental strategy for the offices.

The initial feasibility study established the main criteria for the project. Historical study showed the local street plan from the thirteenth century to date, with perimeter buildings and garden at its heart. The immediate urban context ranges in scale from a tiny two-storey cottage via three-storey Georgian terraces, the four-storey council offices and a grade one listed church. Highway and access options were systematically explored, including the exclusion of car parking from the site. Given the extensive surface car parking nearby, this radical option

