

Kingston Mills, Bradford on Avon



Redevelopment: decaying mill site brought back to life with conservation at fore

Kingston Mills is a 2.5ha site in the centre of the Wiltshire market town of Bradford on Avon. Redundant since the closure of the Avon Rubber factory in 1992, the site was scarred by decaying and seemingly undevelopable historic buildings within the town's conservation area.

A sequence of failed development schemes of mainly inappropriate design had been unable to meet the local plan's requirement for an economically viable mix of uses. Nash Partnership was assigned to prepare a new vision for the former mills.

"By 2003 the site had become notorious as a regeneration prospect," recalls the firm's senior partner, Edward Nash. "The most successful aspect of our project has been the consultation and flexible design process that has enabled so many conflicting expectations to be reconciled."

At the heart of the Nash Partnership consultation strategy was the application of techniques of frontloading and community engagement as advocated in PPS1. Local people pressed for development in keeping with the nearby medieval town bridge and Nash sought the views of a complete range of community and stakeholder groups.

A statement of common ground mediated by the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment was agreed, setting down key aspects of the design. A public

exhibition incorporating a scale model led to the creation of a project financially flexible enough to allow it to survive even the recession.

All the main older structures were set off effectively against the new buildings. Heritage features were conserved despite the difficulties posed by access and transportation issues and a feasible traffic circulation within the site was worked out. The new retail provision was effectively married to the existing town centre.

Further constraints on the site arose from it being almost entirely located on the River Avon flood plain, where important riverside flora and fauna needed protection. Impacts on a number of bat species were also mitigated through bespoke design approaches.

An important condition negotiated in the Kingston Mills planning permission was the provision of a hydro scheme using a turbine worked by an Archimedes screw in the historic mill leat. Solar thermal and photovoltaic panels for renewable energy will help residential development to reach level 3 of the code for sustainable homes.

The physical and aesthetic regeneration of this undervalued and problematic site is already enhancing civic pride and empowering the local community to realise a sustainable future on their own terms.

KEY PARTICIPANTS

Nash Partnership

Edward Nash, senior partner; Mel Clinton MRTPI, director of planning and regeneration; Duncan Powell, associate planner; Robert Locke, technical director

Linden Homes

Simon Gait, land director

Bradford on Avon and District Community Development Trust

Gerald Milward-Oliver, chief executive

Wiltshire Council

Mike Kilmister MRTPI, principal planning officer

JUDGES' COMMENTS

"The development will enhance the physical environment of this long-derelict site in the heart of historic Bradford on Avon, adding to the quality of the local townscape and increasing the attractiveness of the town centre for residents and visitors. The flood protection and energy generation proposals respond to climate change. In redeveloping a brownfield site and providing residential and business accommodation in the heart of the town, the development addresses important sustainable development issues. The approach to site planning and design is excellent, being both sensitive and creative in its response to the constraints of the site and its surroundings."