

## Royal Town Planning Institute, North East Region Regional Awards Scheme 2011

### Judges' Report

The RTPI North East Regional Awards Scheme takes place annually in order to recognise, celebrate and publicise good planning practice in the North East of England.

For several years the North East Regional Awards Scheme has been run in close association with the RTPI's national planning awards. Entrants now choose whether to enter direct for a regional award, or to enter both for a national award and a regional award simultaneously. Entrants who this year enter only for a regional award, and do well, are encouraged to consider entering next year's national awards scheme.

In 2011 10 entries were considered by the NE regional judges, one less than in 2010. 6 of the entries considered this year were direct regional entries and 4 were submitted through the national route. (An additional 2011 national entry – Distinctly Darlington – won the main Regional Award in 2010, so was not considered again by the regional judges in 2011.)

RTPI North East would like to thank all those who entered. The entries were varied, and came from most parts of the region. This year it was particularly pleasing to see an increased number of entries from Tees Valley. We are well aware that many planners and other construction professionals have had a difficult time over the last twelve months, and we are particularly pleased to be able to celebrate success with the winners of this year's awards and commendations.

In different ways, all the entries display the positive benefits of good planning: developments which would not have taken place without the intervention of planning and regeneration officers; developments which have been improved by the contribution of planning officers; and planning documents which will encourage new and better development in future.

### The Judges

The entries were appraised by present and previous members of the Region's Member and Public Relations Sub-Committee: Steve France, Chris Clarke, Martin Marsh, Ian Cansfield, Emma Walker and David Stovell. All entries were appraised separately by at least two judges, to avoid unintentional bias. No entry was individually appraised by anyone who had a personal or professional interest in it. The final results were agreed by the group as a whole. RTPI NE would like to thank all the volunteer judges, without whose efforts the awards scheme would not take place.

It was a particularly difficult year for the judges, with no entries that stood out head and shoulders above everything else, nor any entries which fell well behind the others. Given the economic situation and other distractions of the last year it seemed particularly praiseworthy that so many excellent schemes and plans were completed.

The 2011 Chair's Award was made to the entry which best illustrated the principles of Good Urban Design. The main criteria for the award were that the scheme should be successfully designed, and that it should have a sense of place, demonstrating that its design thoroughly understood, and was informed by, its context within the surrounding area.

More detail of all the entries is provided below, with summaries of the judges' views.

### **Regional Award Winner 2011**

**Boho One and Bohouse, Bridge Street West, Middlesbrough**  
(entered by Middlesbrough Council)

These two bold and innovative developments comprise a Digital Enterprise Centre (Boho One) and 20 LiveWork units (Bohouse), part of the regeneration of the St Hilda's area in Central Middlesbrough, and situated close to Middlesbrough station.

Boho 1 is the flagship building for the Digital City initiative, set back behind a small pedestrian square. The adjacent Bohouse was developed by Erimus Housing, funded by the Homes and Communities Agency. Both projects were designed by Exsite architecture, drawing on the Masterplan for Greater Middlehaven, by Alsop Architects for Tees Valley Regeneration, Middlesbrough Council and English Partnerships.

Both buildings display key principles of sustainability (Boho 1 utilises a ground source heat pump and wind turbines, natural daylighting and ventilation) and their striking contemporary design sets a new quality standard for the area.

The Digital City initiative has been developed with extensive involvement from potential users and representatives from the University of Teesside and Digital City Business. Planning officers were central to bringing all partners together. The schemes both have a regional significance as sustainable business initiatives, helping to make the Boho Zone and Greater Middlehaven a leading example of good practice for regeneration professionals to visit.

### **Winner of the 2011 Chair's Award , for the entry which best illustrates the principles of Good Urban Design**

**St Nicholas Square, Newcastle upon Tyne**  
(entered by Robinson Landscape Design Ltd)

This project comprises the complete redesign and renewal of the "pocket park" immediately in front of St Nicholas Cathedral in the historic heart of Newcastle. Designed by Robinson Landscape Design in collaboration with the planning and engineering departments of Newcastle City Council and built by the Council's Direct Works section, the scheme was coordinated by the Business Improvement District Company NE1 Ltd and co-funded by NE 1, the City Council and the Cathedral.

While comparatively small, the square occupies a key location and is well used by the cathedral community, visitors and city centre office workers. It is the home of an imposing statue of Queen Victoria.

The revived space seems deceptively simple, but manages to relate well to adjacent historic buildings, provide a much better context for Queen Victoria, shelter users from the adjacent busy traffic light junction, and cater both for pedestrian routes and people wanting to sit and enjoy the space. The well thought out design is brilliantly held together by a starburst pattern in the new paving, and "greened" by an element of new planting. The design of the bench seats, which serve as small retaining walls, is also very clever.

Overall the previously tired square is now very attractive, simple, elegant and yet also highly functional: and provides a contemporary complement to its historic neighbours.

## Commendations

This year the judges gave three Commendations – two housing developments in contrasting locations and the regeneration of one of the artist L. S. Lowry's favourite seaside resorts.

### The Courtyard and Hay Barn, Preston Farm, Eaglescliffe

(entered by PF Developments)

The development is the last stage of a farmstead redevelopment situated in a Green Wedge between the built up areas of Stockton on Tees and Eaglescliffe. Previous phases involved the conversion of traditional farm buildings to housing: The Courtyard is a new development replacing modern farm buildings of no architectural interest with seven affordable and market homes, built to high standards of sustainability, including underfloor heating, high levels of insulation and wood burning stoves, and provided with "home offices" with broad band connections.

One of the highest compliments which can be paid to the scheme is that, whilst building work was still being completed, The Courtyard already looks like a traditional, vernacular cluster of buildings. This is partly the result of the extensive use of reclaimed building materials, but also the cleverly varied design of the dwellings, and the overall built form, which keeps all the entrances within the sheltered courtyard and severely limits the clutter which might otherwise be evident when the development is seen across adjacent fields.

The development company responsible for the scheme has clearly regarded it as a labour of love, and have benefitted from the inputs of the architect, SM Design, and the responsible planner at Stockton on Tees Borough Council, who worked together in a development team approach which has resulted in a development of which all parties can be proud.

### Durham Road Eco Homes, Gateshead

(entered by Gateshead Council)

The project is a further success resulting from the former NewcastleGateshead Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, which was commended in last year's RTPI NE Awards, for Avondale Park. It also links back to a Planning Aid North project with local residents, which was commended in the 2008 RTPI NE Regional Awards and resulted in the involvement of a group of local residents in the evolution of this scheme. It is somewhat ironic that both the Pathfinder and Planning Aid North have now come to an end, as a result of Government funding restraints. Moreover the development itself has been delayed by the economic problems besetting the construction industry, which forced the building company who started the development into administration. Fortunately a new investor (Gateshead Bayis Ltd) has now taken over the scheme, which is nearing completion at the time this report was written.

Built on the site of a former petrol filling station, on a prominent approach into Gateshead, the Durham Road development (now called 1-9 Camborne Park) comprises the construction of a terrace of nine dwellings built to very high standards of sustainability (Level 4 in the Code for Sustainable Homes). Each of the two house types is relatively large (4 or 5 bedrooms), to respond to local housing need, and the largest units contain a home-office, forming an upper floor above the rear garage. The

contemporary design of the development responds to the scale of nearby housing, but does not ape its appearance.

The appearance of the development from the front may not be to everyone's taste, but it is a radical improvement on what was there before, and will, when complete, make a valuable contribution to the renewal of the Saltwell community.

### Sunderland Seafront Regeneration Project

(entered by Sunderland City Council)

Sunderland's Seafront is still one of Sunderland's most valuable and best loved assets, but Roker and Seaburn have certainly fallen on somewhat hard times in recent years. Its revival is being led and managed by the Planning Implementation Team at the City Council, driven forward by a multi-disciplinary project group of officers from across the Council, and steered by a Seafront Members' Steering Group, with cross party membership from across the City.

The entry is notable for the well-presented suite of planning documents which are being used to provide statutory backing and inspiration for the implementation of an ambitious regeneration programme which has been kick-started with a number of environmental schemes along the promenade, but will only come to a successful conclusion when private sector developments in Seaburn come to fruition.

The Seafront Regeneration Strategy, published in January 2010 provides the overarching context for the regeneration programme, backed up by the Marine Walk Masterplan, also January 2010 (a Supplementary Planning Document which provides the detailed context for a series of environmental improvements which have now commenced in the southern section of the seafront) and the Seaburn Masterplan and Design Code (July 2011) (which provides guidance and a policy context for the proposed redevelopment of the area around the Seaburn Centre).

The first stages of the environmental works along the promenade, carried out this summer, make a promising start, with some attractive marine-themed features.

### **Other entries considered**

#### Temenos, Middlesbrough Dock

(Middlesbrough Council)

A huge and dramatic landmark sculpture, by Anish Kapoor, a modern complement to the historic Middlesbrough Transporter Bridge and a nearby crane, and to modern regeneration projects sited around the dock, including Middlesbrough Football Ground, the dramatic new building of Middlesbrough College, and the Community in a Cube (an apartment building now under construction).

#### Residential Design Supplementary Planning Document

(Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council)

A thoughtful and comprehensive design guide, which will be of interest to many other local authorities contemplating the preparation of a similar document. The SPD is part of the local authority's extensive suite of Local Development Framework documents, and takes explicit note of the challenges of climate change (including making provision for electric vehicle charging infrastructure).

### Jubilee Court, Kenton

(Newcastle City Council and Your Homes Newcastle)

Newcastle's first supported housing scheme for vulnerable young families, constructed on an unoccupied cleared site at a busy road junction, and forming part of the city's Developer Framework Agreement, the development comprises 19 two bedroom apartments, a communal lounge, internal and external play areas, office and training rooms. The scheme benefitted from the prior preparation of both a Design and Access Statement and a Design and Development Guidance Note and has been constructed to Level Three of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

### The Heritage Strategy

(Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council)

This is a beautifully illustrated and well written booklet, which deserves to be widely read in Stockton and by many others with an interest in heritage. Unlike many planning documents, reading it is likely to prove a pleasure for many general readers, as well as those with a professional interest in the subject! It contains sections on all Stockton's separate communities, on local personalities, and on the area's industrial past.

### St Andrew's Way, Eldon Square, Newcastle upon Tyne

(NLP Planning, on behalf of Capital Shopping Centres, Leslie Jones Architects, Tweeds, Cundall and Sir Robert McAlpine)

The third and final phase of an ambitious redevelopment of the Eldon Square shopping centre, St Andrew's Way completely replaces a previous multi-storey car park, covered market and shopping mall with a new mall accommodating larger retail units, including a Debenhams department store. The development decisively moves the retail core of the city towards the previously marginal southern retail area, improves its appearance from Newgate Street, and is clearly a huge commercial success (welcoming 1.58 million visitors within its first two weeks of trading).

**Chris Clarke**

**Member and Public Relations Officer**

**RTPI North East**

**September 2011**