

## Horsebridge Development, Whitstable

Project:	Horsebridge Development, Whitstable
Project type:	High density 215 Units/ Ha (34 dwellings, 0.28 ha (0.158ha residential) Parking ratio: 1:1 for houses; 0 for apartments
Year:	2002
Client:	Canterbury City Council transferred the sites to Banbury Estates in return for providing a community building, now leased to a not-for-profit company, and a new public square, which remain the property of the Council.
Architect:	Clague Architects
Location:	Whitstable, Kent
Context:	Urban, town centre, mixed use
Sector:	Public/Private



From CABE website: <http://www.cabe.org.uk/case-studies/horsebridge-development?photos=true&viewing=4333>

### Case Study Detail:

This is a mixed land use development comprising shops, flats, houses and an arts centre.

The Horsebridge housing development incorporates winding streets and narrow alleys that reflect Whitstable's distinctive character.

Within a conservation area and surrounded by buildings of historic importance, the scheme provides a remarkably wide range of uses in a small area, including a performance space and exhibition centre, five shops, and a new town square with a restaurant. Built on two prominent sites associated with the historic sources of Whitstable's wealth - shipping and its oyster beds - the project has revitalized a

neglected quarter which previously included a mix of housing, public community and arts venues and a public park, all in a poor state of repair.

The scheme shows a careful concern for Whitstable's qualities and vernacular architecture.

### **Building for Life Evaluation:**

#### *Character*

Mixed use is not often realized in such a comprehensive way on such a constricted site. The Horsebridge site consisting of a whole block, and Brown's Yard covering about one half of the adjacent block, taken together measure a total of 0.24 hectares. The way the relationship between the different uses is managed across the interior of the blocks is an object lesson in good urban design practice.

Horsebridge Square provides a fresh context for significant old buildings for which Whitstable is well known, particularly Pearsons Crab and Oyster House, the Royal Native Oyster Store and the Prince Albert public house.

The scheme carefully reinterprets the character of Whitstable both in the winding streets and narrow alleys which provide shelter against the wind, and in the close juxtaposition of housing with larger buildings, previously warehouses but now leisure or retail buildings.

#### *Roads, parking and pedestrianisation*

Parking is provided for the houses in two small gated brick paved courtyards, but flats have no on site provision, which may be a problem since surrounding streets do not allow parking. To maintain the character of Whitstable's narrow winding streets and alleys, access to parking areas ignores the usual geometric highway engineering requirements. This sometimes makes manoeuvring difficult but also acts as an effective traffic calming measure. The support of the planning and highway authorities was fundamental in allowing the local street character to be realized in the scheme.

#### *Design and construction*

The housing is designed to satisfy current building regulations. In harmony with neighbouring houses, most units and the restaurant with flats above are clad with traditional timber shiplap boarding with its inherent irregularities. This is despite traditional boarding requiring more maintenance than cheaper artificial boards which have been used successfully by the architects elsewhere in Kent.

The roofs are natural slate or plain clay tiles and these, together with white timber elevations, allow the houses to fit in easily to the overall street scene. On a prominent corner of Horsebridge Road, shops and flats are clad in facing brick, and those adjoining are clad in vertical natural coloured timber boarding and dark shiplap. Lead covered dormers and balconies are features of the scheme.

The housing at Whitstable is close to existing buildings whose habitable rooms were carefully surveyed to avoid overlooking, even though this was not considered to be crucial by the planners. To allow views of water and boats from upper floors and provide flexibility of use, some rooms are not restricted by function. In some three storey houses top floor rooms with a view of the Thames Estuary could be used as bedroom, study or living room.

#### *Environment and community*

The rotunda on one corner of the Square provides a seating area giving views beyond the Sea Wall to the Thames Estuary. The rotunda is also an ingenious solution to providing access to the 40 sq.m

cleaning plant chamber below. Low level ground contamination, discovered early in the building process could have halted work for at least two years, causing additional expense, serious delays to the Square and restaurant, and disruption to adjoining properties. However, construction of the chamber under the Square allowed building to continue alongside cleaning. When decontamination is completed the rotunda will remain in place, and a new community use will be found for the chamber.

A local bus stop has been retained, helping to bring activity to the main street. The bus stop also encourages people to linger in front of the new businesses. Given the history of their location it is appropriate that these two historic sites should be used for facilities of significance for the whole town as well as providing town centre housing. The scheme has also provided an estimated 25 jobs within the development itself.

**Links:**

<http://www.buildingforlife.org/case-studies/horsebridge-development/introduction>

**Submitted by:**

Clive Alexander  
Heritage Manager and Urban Designer  
Dover District Council  
Council Offices, White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield, Dover CT16 3PJ  
Tel: 01304 872480  
Fax: 01304 872351  
Email: [clive.alexander@dover.gov.uk](mailto:clive.alexander@dover.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.dover.gov.uk](http://www.dover.gov.uk)