



Featured Project: Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College, Birmingham





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“Our new 40 million pound state-of-the-art building and garden opened its doors in September 2008. We think it’s one of the best college campuses in the UK and we are pleased that everyone that visits us says the same. It has been a joy to watch the response of our students, speechless for once, as they explore the spaces, protected by the handsome crescent and courtyard design”

Lynne Morris, College Principal

The Brief

JCC students are drawn from one of the most deprived areas in the country and so the new college needed to be welcoming, exciting and fun. As well as buzz and energy there was to be a pervading sense of “academic purposefulness” that would enhance aspiration through a concentration on the quality of the learning environment. This quality would be derived from a wide variety of adaptable, ICT rich learning spaces, and the tangible quality of the built environment. A specific requirement was for safe, external space that would be simply beautiful and enjoyable to use. The College has a strong commitment to its immediate community and the last part of their vision was to enhance this support and extend the range of facilities open to them.

Site and planning constraints

The site is very prominent - at the end of a long vista from central Birmingham and the building needed to be of sufficient presence and of landmark quality. Adjacent to a busy roundabout on an inner city ring road, the site is both noisy and polluted. The inner city location also meant that the personal safety of students and potential vandalism were serious concerns. The challenge was to create an open and welcoming building of urban significance that also safeguarded the students.

Architectural approach

The new buildings surround courtyards which provide both a calm and protected environment. They are inspirational too - deliberately bringing the feel of Oxbridge to the inner city. Each courtyard has a different character and degree of public accessibility which is reinforced by the nature of the spaces that surround it - making the building extremely legible. The tree-lined entrance boulevard is an extension of the street whilst access to the square court which is the focus for the social areas of the college, is controlled by the porter’s lodge. The final space in the sequence is the semi-circular garden enclosed by the academic areas – a place of quiet reflection presided over by the LRC. Internally the architect’s approach has been to create an abundance of natural light and this is reflected in the treatment of the circulation areas - the glazed walls to the courtyards and the lightwells associated with the break out areas - as well as in the principal learning spaces.





Materials and construction method

The walls facing outwards are of load-bearing brickwork and lime mortar with deep reveals to enhance the sense of solidity and provide a robust exterior appropriate to the immediate context. The inner courtyard-facing walls are much lighter – a combination of white render and generous glazing to maximize the sense of connection with the courtyards. Special elements like the LRC, the break out areas and the prayer room are clad in copper. The main college buildings have a largely exposed in-situ concrete frame that contributes to the environmental performance of the building. The sports centre is steel framed.

Programme and budget

The contract was 2 stage Design & Build with the architects, Nicholas Hare Architects, novated at the commencement of the construction phase. Maddisons were responsible for overall cost control and also project managed the construction phase. Construction began in January 2007, following an enabling works contract for pile testing etc which started in November 2006, and the project was handed over on programme in August 2008. The construction cost of £28.300,000 met the College budget and the current LSC funding criteria. The GIA of the new buildings is 14,300sqm



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