

# BUILDING A BETTER COLLEGE: 1994 – 2005

When Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, opened the new Centre for Business, Arts and Technology on 24 May 2006, she said, “This college is an example of what it is possible to do”.

The opening of CBAT represented the final step in the transformation of the college's physical environment. The new buildings enabled each centre to have its work largely in one place supported by the full range of student support and services within each building for the first time. The centres were also transformed in terms of IT, classroom furniture and equipment, and the scale of communal spaces.



Education Secretary Ruth Kelly opens CBAT in 2006, with college Chair of Governors Jack Morris (left), Principal Frank McLoughlin (behind), MP for Islington South and Finsbury Emily Thornberry (right) and former student Lisa Hammond (front)

## 4

“The design of the building made it a welcoming and open place. You can see what is going on and meet people. The cafe run by people with disabilities is great.”

Former student, CLL

“One site made a huge difference. Staff and students feel they are in a good environment and student behaviour is better. The Angel is an excellent location which students like coming to,”

Keren Abse, Director, Sixth Form College



Centre for Applied Sciences completed 2004  
 Architects: Gollifer Langston Associates  
 Main contractor: Norwest Holst



Centre for Lifelong Learning completed 2004  
 Architects: Wilkinson Eyre  
 Main contractor: Geoffrey Osborne Ltd



Centre for Business, Arts and Technology completed 2005  
 Architects: Wilkinson Eyre, Main contractor: William Verry



Centre for Health, Social and Child Care,  
 the building is also the college administrative headquarters  
 Refurbished 1995 and partly refurbished 2004 and 2012



Sixth Form College completed 2003  
 Architects: van Heyningen and Haward  
 Main contractor: Norwest Holst

From 1993 the college pursued a vision of accommodation where young people and adults could learn in a high quality and inspirational environment. This was a radical vision compared with the reality in 1993, which encompassed leaking roofs, heating breakdowns and split sites for staff and students. The pursuit of this vision was a marathon of commitment, planning, skilled negotiating, project and financial management, and of good fortune. The 12 year journey required scaling several mountains of hard work, including communication with staff and students. Nearly all staff moved once and many moved two or three times over the whole 12 years of rearranging and rebuilding.

This was the most ambitious accommodation programme in the history of further education at that time. The overall size of the estate went from 38,000 square metres to 35,000 square metres whilst accommodating growth in student numbers. The final capital cost was about £64 million. This was largely paid for by the college itself (about 80%) with no burden of debt afterwards and no loss of quality and direction for students during the long period of redevelopment. This chapter tells the story of this radical period of change to which so many people contributed and which has benefitted students and staff ever since.

## 4. I WHAT THE COLLEGE INHERITED

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The new college inherited a generous but neglected estate, consisting of seven Victorian London School Board properties, three poorly built late 1950s school and college buildings and a listed early 19th century building in Pitfield Street, Shoreditch. The estate was valued at only £12 million in 1992, at the bottom of a property slump. In addition, there were two leased buildings costing the college £1 million a year in rent. See map of original sites on page 67.

The experience for students was poor. Buckets were used to catch drips from the roofs, rooms were the wrong size, windows were draughty and the heating broke down. The 1950s buildings had ventilation problems; lighting was often inadequate, drains flooded and many toilets were very unpleasant. Student common rooms were not used by the majority.

The cost of running the estate was high and the utilisation of space was very inefficient. On the other hand, the potential capital costs of redevelopment were enormous and the college had no capital reserves. Despite this, the Principal started looking for new buildings in 1993 and governors immediately set up a premises committee, chaired by Jack Morris, who was at that time Vice-Chair of the Corporation.



Pitfield Street, Shoreditch, sold 1998



Shepperton Arts Centre, sold 2003



Benwell Road, Holloway, sold 2006

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## PITFIELD STREET CLOSING DOWN OSCARS

by Jay Derrick, former Head of School, English and Basic Skills



Staff at Pitfield Street felt they were leaving a little oasis, a largely self governing entity, and they feared being swallowed up into a large corporate body. This was the way staff at The Chequer

Centre, Shepperton Arts Centre and Willen House also felt when the time came for their sites to close.

We wanted a memorable closing party and one of the staff had made six model Oscars – which may be where the idea came from. Staff suggested categories for the awards, like Fastest Mover, Snappiest Dresser, Best James Bond Lookalike, Best Customer at the George and Vulture, Least Calm User of the Photocopier. We held a vote and my job was to make sure no one won more than one award – feelings ran very high over some of them. There were about a dozen awards, and when we ran out of Oscar statues we used gold certificates.

We had our closing party at the end of the summer term that year and Oscars were presented by Mary Rimington – I wish I could remember who won them all! I can remember Barry Rowswell won the Fastest Mover, and actually came running into the hall to receive his award! Jerry Hadingham won the best Customer at the George and Vulture pub next door – this award wasn't voted for, it was decided by the landlady, and there was a fierce competition. Jerry won; he seemed to do a lot of his preparation there. I wish I could remember who won the snappiest dresser – all I can say is, it wasn't me.

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## 4.2 LANDMARKS ON THE JOURNEY

### PURCHASE OF THE MARLBOROUGH BUILDING AND ENDING OF THE ESSEX ROAD LEASE (1995)

The first step towards better accommodation was the purchase of the Marlborough Building from the University of North London (now London Met). The 1960s building had been erected on the site of the former Marlborough Theatre, hence its name. It was radically refurbished over a three month period and opened in September 1995. Marlborough offered accommodation for Child Care, in place of rented space in Essex Road, and for the Sixth Form Centre, enabling its Chillingworth Road site to be closed. Very importantly, the new building also provided one site for the senior management team and for college-wide services such as finance, human resources, facilities and marketing, which had been spread around different sites since being set up at incorporation in 1993.

Buying the Marlborough Building was complex. Finance was achieved through a bank loan and the whole deal nearly broke down at the last moment because the college's lawyers had failed to advise the college correctly on how to break the lease on Essex Road. A special governing body meeting was held at 8am in the Bunhill canteen, with bacon sandwiches, at which governors decided to go ahead with purchasing Marlborough despite the risks and extra costs likely to be incurred.

The Marlborough Building was ready on time and on budget and demonstrated a new standard of accommodation. The experience provided invaluable learning in terms of buying property, raising finance from the bank, being tough with lawyers and agents and tendering and managing major works within time and budget constraints.

Members of the premises committee offered invaluable support in this process, and Jack Morris was directly involved in concluding all the most difficult negotiations. Jack went on to support the whole rebuilding of the college with his time, advice and outstanding negotiating skills at every twist and turn of the long journey.

“The landlord had suckered the college, which had been acting in good faith. I was determined we would empty the building and give back the keys on the planned date. Then I told the agents, ‘if your client wants a fight, he's got one’. It's called walking the talk! The landlord negotiated and John Rosenheim, litigation lawyer, ensured that our solicitors had to pay for all the extra costs.” Jack Morris, then Vice-Chair of the Corporation

The college management came out of the Marlborough transaction confident that it could deliver new accommodation and impatient to do so. By 1997, the college had prepared a radical strategy to reduce to only five sites, but there was an enormous obstacle to the strategy – namely lack of capital funds.



PIGEON(HOLE) POST

by Adrian Whittaker

It's hard now to conceive of a working environment without email. Imagine, then, trying to communicate with staff on thirteen major sites, none of whom had mobiles and who counted themselves lucky if they had a shared desk phone – or even a desk if you worked in Adult Ed.

Individual wire baskets (and on the more upmarket sites, pigeonholes) were the preferred method. You would write a note to Manager X, put it in the internal post and after a day's delay being sorted at Marlborough, it would travel on to Manager X's basket. Manager X typically worked across several sites, so it was pot luck how quickly she or he would receive your missive. It could easily take up to a fortnight to resolve something as basic as ordering a flipchart, or new bobbin reels for the sewing machines.

Spare parts and bits of hardware would often be sent out through the internal post, sometimes with indecipherable or poorly attached labels, leaving Humanities Access tutors, for example, wondering why they'd been sent a new spindle for a potter's wheel.

Email put an end to all this, but we did miss the daily ritual of opening the post.



THE SALE OF THE BUNHILL ROW SITE AND CLOSURE OF OTHER SITES (1997 – 99)

In autumn 1997, Charles Sanderson, a partner at Savills, insisted on meeting Tom Jupp and Jack Morris. Charles proposed that the college should sell its Bunhill site as part of a joint sale with City University, which would provide an unusually large development block. This 'marriage' of the adjoining sites would greatly enhance the value of each part and the college could expect to receive £20 million.

Bunhill Row was one of the core sites around which the college had designed the new accommodation strategy. Over £1 million had already been invested in improvements there and the college had sold Rochelle Street, the Chequer Centre and Pitfield Street in 1998 and relocated work into Bunhill. Charles convinced others that the sale of Bunhill would at last enable the college to fulfil its vision for a radical overhaul of accommodation. Any doubts were overcome, existing plans were torn up and new risks accepted.

Whatever their defects, the old sites were liked by many of the staff who had worked in them for several years. Willen House was described as 'quiet and friendly' and Pitfield Street was 'like a family, albeit a dysfunctional one'. The Chequer Centre was held in great affection by staff and students who mounted a campaign to prevent its closure and sale as the only site with full disabled access. By 2006, every college site has had full disabled access.

THE BATTLE FOR THE DAME ALICE OWEN SITE AT THE ANGEL (1998 – 99)

The race was on to find a new site to replace Bunhill Row which would give access to central London transport for Applied Optics and would serve the south of the borough. Only one excellent place was available, which was the site of the former Dame Alice Owen's Girls' School at the Angel, owned by the Foundation run by the Brewers Livery Company.

The college's bid was rejected in favour of a Whitbread Premier Inn and a residential development, and so the fight for the Angel site started.

Islington Council and the local MP, Chris Smith, backed the college and a lot of publicity was engineered. The land had been donated four hundred years earlier to benefit local people and had been the site of a school for centuries. Charity lawyers were briefed to challenge the Brewers and after some months the college won. It paid £8 million for a 125 year lease on the site.



Chequer Centre campaigners

LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON COUNCIL MEETING - 24 JUNE 1998 URGENT MOTION

**DAME ALICE OWEN SCHOOL SITE - NEW COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Motion to be moved by Councillor Rupert Perry, seconded by Councillor Jenny Rathbone:

"That this Council deplores the initial decision of the Brewers Company, trustees of the Dame Alice Owen Foundation's estate at the Angel to deny Islington residents the opportunity of a new community college at this key location

That the Council's leader with the Chair of City and Islington's College Governors seeks an urgent meeting with the Trustees.

That as the UDP seeks to safeguard sites for educational purposes, the Environment, Leisure and Transport Committee instructs officers to prepare a report reviewing all current proposals on the Foundation's estate and exploring the use of CPO powers to assist the development of a community college.

“I became aware of an agenda between my Islington based ex ILEA Minister, Tessa Blackstone and the Downing Street special advisor, Andrew Adonis. I found myself putting pressure on the college to change its building plans and put the SFC at the Angel, where teenagers wanted to go. At the same time, Andrew Adonis brokered a partnership between the college and University College London.”

David Forrester

## COLLEGE FINANCE DIRECTORS 1994 – 2006

The college Finance Director from 1994 to 2000, Andrew Grice, had undertaken impressive analytical work on the college estate. He also managed all the early improvements and much legal work and detailed negotiation on the sale and purchase of sites.



Peter Marsh, who was Finance Director from 2000–06, took on the task of planning and managing the whole rebuilding programme.

Peter combined financial and management skills with a passionate understanding of and commitment to the role accommodation could play in the college's educational mission.

## FINAL PLANS TAKE SHAPE (2000-01)

The accommodation strategy now envisaged three new centres: Lifelong Learning in a new building, Applied Sciences in the old school building at the Angel Site and the Sixth Form Centre in a new building at the existing Finsbury Park site. The Camden Road and Marlborough sites would remain as they were.

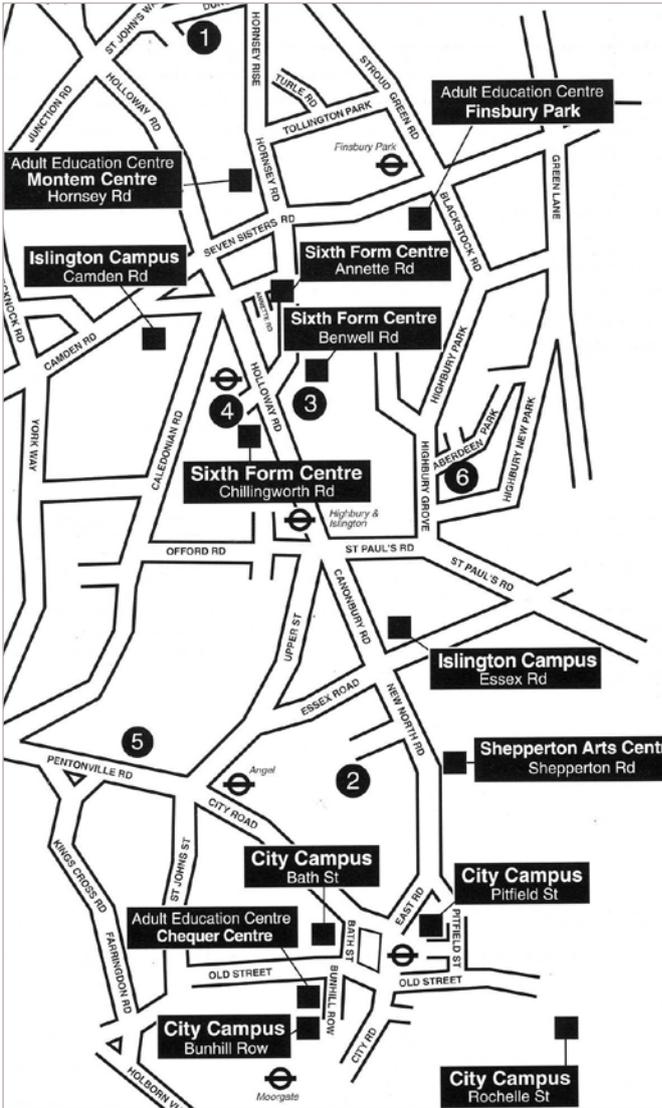
There had been debate as to whether the SFC should be at Finsbury Park or the Angel. The decision was influenced by wanting to keep the City Campus work in the south. Sir Peter Newsam, a governor at the time and someone who had contributed a lot to the accommodation developments, had great reservations about Finsbury Park as a suitable environment to attract a cross-section of young people.

But there was a major defect in the whole plan. The college did not have the money for redeveloping the Camden Road site, which was in a poor state, so 16–19 students not studying A levels would be in second class accommodation compared with the new Sixth Form Centre – a very inequitable solution.

Then came a message that the Minister for Further Education, Baroness Tessa Blackstone, was unhappy about the SFC being at Finsbury Park. She wanted it at the Angel and, what's more, she wanted it called a 'college'. This offered a great opportunity – the college would offer to rethink its plans if they were given the money for the redevelopment of Camden Road. Persuading the college to agree with the Minister was in the hands of David Forrester; the senior civil servant leading on FE, who, coincidentally, was also an Islington resident. David became a college governor after he retired from the Department in 2001.

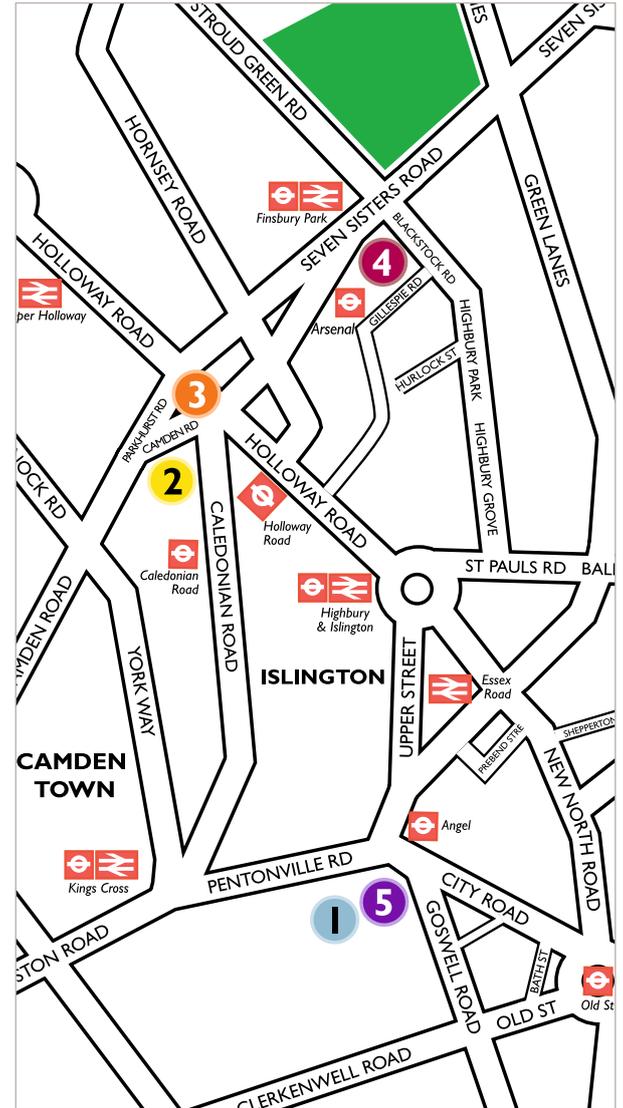
The new Learning and Skills Council agreed a grant of £11 million in 2000, raised to £14 million in 2001, to enable Camden Road to be redeveloped. The definitive accommodation plan, named 'Building a Better College', was in place with the full finance required. This plan was costed at £50 million in 2001 and the final £64 million spend was made possible because of rapidly rising property values reflected in the disposal of the old sites. The extra money paid for all sorts of further improvements, particularly in ICT and equipment, and for developments at the Marlborough Building.

Everything had come together – the vision and skills of governors and senior managers, local support from all parties, professional advisors who caught the spirit of a once-in-generation opportunity and, decisively, the property market and government support. But it was down to the college alone to make it happen and to manage the myriad of logistical and financial risks.



Map of sites 1996

- ① Archway Centre
- ② Islington Green School
- ③ Sixth Form Centre
- ④ Ringcross Centre
- ⑤ Elizabeth Garrett Anderson
- ⑥ Highbury Grove School



Map of sites 2013

- ① Centre for Applied Sciences
- ② Centre for Business, Arts and Technology
- ③ Centre for Health, Social and Child Care
- ④ Centre for Lifelong Learning
- ⑤ Sixth Form College