

City and Islington – Building a Better College

Peter Marsh, (Deputy Principal of City & Islington College) explains the college's ambitious development plans

City and Islington College was formed in 1993 from four ILEA institutions. The new College inherited a talented set of staff and a desperate portfolio of 13 buildings spread across North London. For seven long years the Governing Body - led by Jack Morris - put together the jigsaw pieces of what has now become the largest investment in FE buildings in the United Kingdom.

Faced with exceptionally challenging cost constraints (determined by the FEFC/LSC funding quango) in the order of 25% less than schools and 40% less than Higher Education, the College decided to keep design high on their agenda. Both the previous Principal, Tom Jupp, and the current Deputy Principal, Peter Marsh, have continued to champion the importance of good design through membership of the RIBA Education Forum. With cost parameters fixed and timescales for completion predetermined by the academic calendar, the College embarked on an extensive physical building programme in 2000.

The Governing Body approved an ambitious programme involving three concurrent £10m building projects and appointed a dedicated in-house client team, headed by Ann Sutcliffe, to manage consultants and oversee the

briefing process. Key elements of the brief for each project included creative design, importance of natural light, sustainable low energy solutions, flexibility of design, and low cost solutions.

In 2002 our new Principal, Frank McLoughlin, introduced a 5 Centre model for curriculum delivery - creating 5 Centres of Excellence on 4 sites - all part of one amazing College. Using our new buildings to create individual communities of learning has helped to unite staff and learners at each Centre with a unique curriculum and learner focus united under a common mission and purpose.

The 'building a better college' programme is far more than just replacing old building with new ones - it has involved a complete rethink of how we organise and coordinate learning across our new campus and how excellent design can transform aspirations of staff and learners - even with the most limited of budgets.

The Further Education Sector is 'the but in the middle' where learners come to take their A levels and vocational equivalents at 16 before going onto University, or where adult learners come back to education to pick up new skills to equip them for work or expanded learning for life. With over 3,000 full time 16-18 year olds and more than 20,000 learners in total, City and Islington is now the largest FE College in London.

Our building projects consist of:

City and Islington Sixth Form College

– a brand new building designed by architects van Heyningen & Haward (VHH) appointed following a RIBA design competition. Located at the Angel Islington. Originally designated the Centre for Lifelong Learning, the brief changed midway and the FE budget didn't wholly cover the aspirations raised through the design competition. With the opening date looming ever closer the building was constructed under a design and build contract on detailed Stage E+ information. Constructed by Norwest Holst, the building opened in September 2003. The finished article reflects the quality of the design approach offered by VHH - using high ceilings and an exposed concrete frame to give space and coolth. Despite the long, tall, narrow nature of the site, the building retains an intimate feeling with vision panels throughout that let light, and wonderful urban views, through the Goswell Road classrooms into the corridor spaces. The cladding material 'Kalwall' has a translucent quality which is calming by day and glows at night.

City & Islington Centre for Applied Science

– a refurbishment and recladding of the old Dame Alice Owen Girls School. This project has been



overseen by Gollifer Langston Architects with works carried out in occupation. Completed in May 2004, the works have transformed the look and feel of the building with a new glass façade and lift that make the best of the panoramic views over Islington. As part of this contract the new Piazza, which brings our two Angel sites into one campus, has also been completed.

City & Islington Centre for Lifelong Learning – a New building on Blackstock Road which preserves the old Victorian School Board at its heart. It was opened in January 2004 together with a new public “N4 library” operated in partnership with the London Borough of Islington. The reviews speak for themselves: “a building of unusual spatial richness“

(Architecture Today), “who would have thought a further education college would get an avante guard design and Philippe Stark chairs ?”

(The Independent) “...you have to see it to believe it” (FX)

Together with art installations funded by the Finsbury Park Partnership this new building contributes substantially to the regeneration of the Finsbury Park area – raising hopes and aspirations and creating a safe place for learning that deliberately looks outwards and provides learning opportunities that reflect the cultural richness and diversity of this part of North London.

City & Islington Centre for Business Arts and Technology – a new build and refurbishment project that will add around 2500m² of modern Wilkinson Eyre design and breath new life into a 1960s secondary school structure located on Camden Road. Using

an environmental screen onto the Camden Road together with cut outs down through the structure to encourage natural ventilation, this project promises to be the most ambitious yet. The building is being constructed by William Verry Ltd under a design and build contract on detailed Stage E+ information. Work started on site in September 2003, and is scheduled for opening in Spring 2005.

As well as creating new buildings for our learners, the College has led the redevelopment of its old sites obtaining planning permission for alternative use. Following the sale of Pitfield St, Chequer and Rochelle the biggest sale followed with the sale of Bunhill Row which was swiftly replaced by the Cass Business School for City University. Both Annette Road and Shepperton Road have been sold to Crest Nicholson for residential conversion, under designs by Heber Percy Parker. The Annette Road – now known as Urban7 - scheme started on site the day after we left. Our last redundant free-hold site on Benwell Road is still in the development stage – we’ve worked with DTZ and Wilkinson Eyre to produce a residential scheme which preserves and restores this Pevsner listed structure to its former glory – complemented by modern new buildings to refill the streetscape along the Benwell and Hornsey Roads.

Our last site - **City & Islington Centre for Health Social and Childcare** – another early 1960s building is now coming under the spotlight. Would it be better to re-clad and replace all the services or

Opposite page :
left : Sixth form college, Goswell Road
right : Centre for Business Arts and Technology, Camden Road

*Centre for Lifelong Learning and N4 Library
Blackstock Road*

could a different – more interesting building be created to better fill this space on the A1 corridor. More to follow later.....

Once we leave our rented premises at Willen House (Bath Street) and Spring House (Holloway Road) we will finally be one college, five centres, four sites. With build cost budgets of circa £1000 per square metre and a desire to use good design to help raise aspirations of learners and staff and to open up doors to new learners, the College may have been asking for the impossible of our design teams ? The finished products, together with our client led furnishing and fit out demonstrates that the search for impossibility creates the possible – creating buildings “markedly superior to the norm” (Rab Bennetts in Building Design).

This set of projects would never have happened if it were not for the dedication of the Governors of the College and the continued support of the Local Authority. The planning department has also played a key role in raising aspirations and promoting good design. Our staff and learners have exhibited patience and enthusiasm in equal measures – many have moved four times in as many years!

I hope we have done them all justice.

PM

