



Cross Street South

location:
Cross Street South
Wolverhampton

Highly impressive design providing affordable houses and apartments, proving that a degraded local environment does not need to stifle style and ambition.



Despite its challenging location, Cross Street South demonstrates very high standards in design and achieves excellent environmental performance. Dwellings are well laid out and the shared space within the scheme is attractive and functional. The layout, orientation and massing of the built form has created proper street frontages.

Cross Street South begins to repair the damaged urban fabric of the area and should act as a catalyst for wider regeneration, helping to boost confidence for local people, businesses and investors. The stakeholders clearly understood that high quality, sustainable design is necessary to transform an area and residents are highly satisfied.

Cross Street South won a Building for Life Award in 2009.

Introduction

Cross Street South is on the edge of Wolverhampton city centre in an area that includes light industry, a pub, car parking areas, terraced housing and a high-rise housing block. Poor design, patchy maintenance and neglect has led to a degraded environment and poor quality public realm.



The new residential blocks of Cross Street South stand out against this context, creating attractive and well defined streets and demonstrating that the area can be a target for investment.

Cross Street South is a fairly low-key scheme which shows that design excellence can be achieved without making a particular statement. This has been done by paying careful attention to every element of construction and specification. Each aspect has been thought through to create an attractive and convenient living environment that contributes to safe and attractive streets and supports low-carbon living.

Cross Street South scored an exceptional 18.5/20 against the Building for Life criteria.

Design process

Preparing a brief and holding the competition

The local planning authority created an ambitious brief which clearly expressed their aspirations for a scheme that was very high quality in both design and environmental performance. A strong brief was essential to raise expectations and clearly define what was required as without this the site would have attracted a lower grade of development.

The choice of professional design team is crucial to achieving quality outcomes. The council held a design competition which, together with the ambitious brief, attracted architectural practices with a reputation for high-quality, sustainable design. The winning submission was one which closely followed the brief and provided the best solution.



Involving the community in design details

Community engagement, with a particular emphasis on involving local school children, was an important part of the design process,. Local knowledge and opinions influenced the detailed design stage of the scheme (basic form and layout were determined at the competition stage).

Raising construction standards

Construction required an open minded builder who could work with modern materials and techniques. The search for low embodied energy materials led to the use of pre-fabricated timber panels and structural elements, with minimal use of masonry.

Following completion, the developer stated that they wanted all future schemes to achieve similar standards. Cross Street South raised the bar for other schemes by that developer and for other future developers in the area.

Ensuring long term maintenance

A management and maintenance programme is in place and a caretaker is employed at the site. This ensures that the properties and spaces are maintained in the longer term.

Evaluation

Cross Street South was successful because Wolverhampton City Council had clear aspirations for the scheme from the start. Their brief aimed “to create sustainable developments where communities can live in high quality homes, in a safe and pleasant environment, where residents can enjoy an improved quality of life and economic opportunity”.

Cross Street South comprises 27 two bedroom flats and 3 four bedroom houses, all affordable and responding to local need as defined by the local authority and Housing Corporation. Sustainability and social inclusion are addressed by good range of community facilities and public transport in walking distance.



The brief specified low energy housing and contained considerable detail on how to achieve this. Cross Street South considers sustainability from many angles:

- Superior airtightness
- Natural lighting and ventilation
- A biomass boiler
- Use of low-embodied energy materials
- Green roofs
- Low-energy lighting
- Passive solar gain
- Sun tubes
- An eco park.

The biomass boiler uses wood chips, a waste product from the timber industry. The insulation is a paper-based product. This sustainable approach extended to the kitchen units, sourced from a local supplier with recycled materials in their construction. As a result, heating and hot water costs are 70% lower than in similar, conventional accommodation.

Cross Street South is surrounded by light industry, a pub, car parking areas, terraced housing and a high-rise housing block. Poor design, unsympathetic changes, patchy maintenance and neglect has created a poor quality built environment and public realm.

The new residential blocks help to repair the urban fabric by creating attractive and well defined streets and demonstrating that the area is ready for investment. This should be a catalyst for regeneration, boosting confidence for local people, businesses and investors.



Cross Street South has active frontages set back from the pavements behind shallow front-courts, with private space to the rear. The blocks help to define adjacent streets and the corner of the scheme has been modelled to give emphasis to the junction.

The architectural treatment, detailing, colouration of the walls and use of active frontages helps to create a distinctive scheme which is easy to recognise and find your way around. Rather than using a challenging urban context as an excuse for mediocre design, Cross Street South sets new standards for future development in the area.

Key design features to look out for

- A mix of affordable housing and apartments which responds to local needs

- Flexible and adaptable accommodation to ensure long-term suitability for residents
- Exceptional environmental performance, both in construction and for low carbon living
- A strong sense of place stemming from a rational layout with strong active frontages
- A pedestrian-friendly scheme with good surveillance, integration of parking and high quality shared space.

Link and downloads

- The Courtyard Centre for the Arts– www.courtyard.org.uk
- Glenn Howells Architects – www.glennhowellsarchitects.co.uk
- Herefordshire County Council – www.herefordshire.gov.uk
- TermoDeck website – www.termodeck.com/home.html
- Location map – www.courtyard.org.uk/howtofindus/map

Contact for further information

Lead architect/designer
Cole Thompson Anders (architects)

Lead developer
Bromford Group Housing Association (developer)

Project type
Residential development

Year completed
2008

Address
Cross Street South
Wolverhampton WV2 3JQ

Location type
Urban, edge of city centre

Client
Bromford Group
Planning authority
Wolverhampton City Council

Sources of funding

- Bromford Group
- Housing Corporation (now HCA)
- All Saints and Blakenhall Community Development (New Deal for Communities)
- Ecomenergy

Contract value
£3.45 million

Project team

Architects

Cole Thompson Anders

Contractor

E Manton Ltd

Engineers

Royston Jones