

# MADE<sup>•</sup>

## **Newcastle-under-Lyme College** **A strikingly modern further education campus**

In order to understand the reason for the relocation of the college it is necessary to briefly explain the chain of events that preceded its development. Newcastle-under-Lyme College was previously housed in old and increasingly unsuitable accommodation located on the A34 on the edge of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Sainsbury's foodstore on a constrained site within the town centre. The college needed new larger premises and Sainsbury's identified the college site, itself only 200m from the existing store as a suitable location for a new supermarket. In turn, Newcastle College identified a large site with sports field attached on nearby Knutton Lane. The new college is the first link in this chain and was completed in early 2010.

### **Introduction**

In 2007 Ellis Williams Architects, a practice with a considerable track record in designing education buildings, were invited to submit design ideas for the construction of a new campus building for Newcastle-under-Lyme College. It was clear from the outset that 'design excellence' should be at the top on the agenda and the process to ensure this was suitably robust.



This process included the submission of both Outline and Reserved Matters Planning Applications and prior to the submission of these there was an ongoing constructive dialogue with the College, the Local Authority and their appointed consultants to ensure the design closely reflected the expectations and requirements of all parties. As part of this process the emerging design was presented to the design review panel at Urban Vision at key stages.

The result of this intense level of engagement ensured the proposals were constantly reviewed and benchmarked against the original brief to ensure the integrity of the original concept was both respected and realised. As a result the new building closely mirrors the original ideas and captures the spirit, ethos and vision of the college.

### **Design process**

#### **The Main Campus Building**

The architecture is unashamedly modern but the form of the new College building embraces the traditional collegiate-type quad - a simple plan-form

that creates an external secure space in the heart of the new College - to be used for social and educational purpose. Wrapped around this space are teaching bases, offices and a learning resource centre. The location of the refectory and a social space at either end of the quad creates greater visual interest and life both to this space and the areas beyond.



A key decision, and one that was very much influenced by comments made by Urban Vision's design review panel, was to maximise the amount of glazing, to break down the barriers between inside and outside. The suggestion was adopted in the detailed design and has created a wonderful synergy between the internal and external environments that has captured both the spirit of the College and the imagination of the students; this is illustrated well by the attached images. A comprehensive landscaping scheme by Planit Intelligent Environments has helped bring this space to life and bring a sense of place to the quad as well as a visual point of reference.



Throughout the building, the spaces are not generic and have been designed to reflect the precise requirements of each of the College departments. Circulation routes connecting each Department have been carefully considered to provide interest and areas of active learning in order to deinstitutionalise space. This concept is further echoed in the external appearance of the new building, whereby bold, simple lines seek to convey a forward-looking, technology driven college, one that embodies the dynamics of teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

In support of this approach, a small palette of materials is utilised comprising of lightweight rendered panels, grey terracotta cladding tiles and large areas of glazing. The use of grey powder coated aluminium windows seeks to reinforce the simplicity of the architectural language in the form of ribbon windows in strong contrast to the white rendered panels that are predominant. Where possible, glazing is introduced to maximise daylight within the building and enable the use of natural ventilation and atria and rooflights are used to further reinforce this concept.

Urban Vision were instrumental in shaping the external appearance of the building providing clear support for the contemporary approach adopted and the clarity of the composition as a whole. The suggestion to increase the glazing to the principle façade to increase the transparency of the building resulted in the IT Seminar rooms being located in this area despite it being south facing. A large curtain walling system thus fills the principle façade but

this is behind an external brise soleil which provides a depth and layering to the building that was not evident in the early design sketches.

### **The Sports Hall and Construction Centre**

In addition to the main campus building a Sports Hall and Construction Centre complete the College's masterplan. Although designed as an adjunct to the main building, the sports hall was from the outset seen as an intrinsic part of the overall scheme. However, the Construction Centre was added to the project at a later date, as a result of additional funding that had been secured after the contractor had been on site for some 6 months. As a result, this element of the scheme was designed and constructed including the securing of detailed planning within a period of 18 months.

From a design perspective, the Sports Hall and Construction Centre take their cues from the main building. Dialogue with Urban Vision during the early design stages of this element of the project helped obtain both useful feedback on the emerging design as well as give the planner's confidence that the proposals respected and addressed critical masterplanning issues.

### **Sustainability**

The college has a 'very good' BREEAM rating and has achieved this by using; a concrete frame and in-situ reinforced slabs seek to aid the thermal performance of the building, naturally ventilated spaces to all areas (excluding the large and highly populated IT space), a biomass boiler, rainwater harvesting and a SUDS drainage system. In addition there is a building management system incorporating energy savings controls such as movement sensors. From an educational perspective, glazed panels within the internal walls of the main plant room enable students to see the services underpinning the College and LED panels located adjacent to the plant room and in the foyer of the Construction Centre provide general information on energy consumption.

Developer: Newcastle-under-Lyme College  
Partners: Learning and Skills Council  
Advantage West Midlands  
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
Architect: Ellis Williams Architects  
Landscape: Planit Intelligent Environments  
Contractor: BAM Construct UK  
Project Value: £60 million

### **Evaluation**

Newcastle-under-Lyme College is a bold and uncompromising statement that has managed to stick closely to the original aspirations of the client group. It can be seen clearly that the vision of creating a thoroughly modern building, designed to embody 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning methods, as well as acting as a beacon of design excellence in the town has been attained.

It is suggested that this is primarily as a result of a skilled design team but is also in no small part due to the robust processes described above, the ongoing dialogue between all partners and the 'check' role performed by Urban Vision. Interestingly, such was the recognition of the role played by design review that the project architect Julian Baker is now a valued member of the Urban Vision Design Review Panel, using his experience gained here and elsewhere to improve design quality across the sub region.

### **Key design features to look out for**

- The strength of the composition and the simplicity of the built form along with the deliberately limited and carefully selected materials palette
- The design and use of the circulation space – the death of the corridor
- The openness of the central courtyard and the way it provides a link between the building elements
- The relationship between the main campus building and the neighbouring sports and construction centre

### **Link and downloads**

Newcastle-under-Lyme College

[www.nulc.ac.uk/pages/new\\_college/virtual\\_tour.aspx#m0](http://www.nulc.ac.uk/pages/new_college/virtual_tour.aspx#m0)

Ellis Williams Architects [www.ewa.co.uk/website](http://www.ewa.co.uk/website)

Planit Intelligent Environments [www.planit-ie.com](http://www.planit-ie.com)

BAM Construct UK [www.bam.co.uk](http://www.bam.co.uk)

Urban Vision North Staffordshire [www.uvns.org](http://www.uvns.org)

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