

MADE⁺

The Russells, Broadway

location: Worcestershire

Praised by the Building for Life judges as "a great piece of urbanism ... real town building", The Russells is a development respectful of its Cotswolds setting, with great character and a superb new public square.

The project has gained national recognition since winning a CABE Gold award for housing projects which was in recognition of the schemes exceptional design sensitivity in respect to harmonising into its World Heritage Status surroundings.

Introduction

The Russells is located behind the high street of Broadway village, a World Heritage site on the Northern edge of the Cotswolds. Built on the brownfield land of a former factory set up by 1920 Arts and Crafts style furniture maker Gordon Russell, it is now a mixed-use development of 77 private and affordable homes with mixed-use including a supermarket, a museum and a new public square.



The design of the scheme is not notable for its contemporary approach to design, rather it is interesting for the way the scheme successfully sits within the existing townscape. The scheme is in fact recognised for the successful way it reinforces and enhances the character of the existing town. The new buildings are traditional in the architectural qualities of their form and massing, and they are constructed in traditional brick/block, but they utilise finely detailed stonework as the external finish. A notable feature of the scheme is that the design of the houses are specific to the scheme, with over 50 new house types being developed by Chase Homes and the Lapworth Partnership.

Partners on the project were Rooftop Housing Association, Chase Homes, Wychavon District Council and the Lapworth Partnership.

Design process

When the Gordon Russell Furniture Company, an American owned company, decided to relocate to Worcester in the late 1990s, they wanted to ensure that the 4 ½ acre site they left offered something of a legacy to the town. They worked in collaboration with Wychavon District Council, who developed a design brief for a mixed use development that emphasised quality of design,

landscaping and layout. Twelve developer teams entered a design competition in 2001. The furniture company director was involved in the selection of the winning scheme, that by Chase Homes, who submitted a full planning application later in the same year.

There followed a long period of consultation with the local council, local residents and English Heritage, during which the detailed design and housing mix evolved and elements such as new office space, the refurbishing of listed buildings, the provision of a public open space, a supermarket and special needs housing were developed. The issue of access to the site via Back Lane, which was jointly owned by the council, a doctor's surgery and the Lygon Arms, was also resolved through inclusive consultation with all parties from the outset.

The site was acquired and full planning permission granted in August 2003, works started in September of the same year and the site was completed in the autumn of 2006.

Chase Homes has set up a site specific management company and employed a management agent to run the maintenance directly. Private residents all own a small portion of the company and pay an annual service charge to pay for maintenance. So the public access routes, spaces and planting should be well looked after in the long term.

The construction is largely traditional brick and block - buildings do not outperform Building Regulations in areas such as high thermal performance.

The section of the development leading from the high street to the town square is largely pedestrianised and has only limited access and parking via Back Lane for those using the supermarket and shops. What could have been a large car park is instead an excellent new public square, which is actively used for daytime public entertainment and events. The selection of materials and quality of workmanship utilised in the areas of public realm is also informed by the quality of the existing townscape.

The developer has refurbished nearby 16th century buildings into shops and an award winning restaurant along the high street and has created pedestrian links to a new supermarket and the new public square behind. Across the square an old barn has been converted into a new museum charting the history of the Gordon Russell Furniture Company. With housing for the elderly identified as a local priority, 24 special needs flats have been built beside the square and supermarket around a secure court.

Beyond the square a new access road leads to a mix of new apartments and terraced houses. The development provides a variety of quality homes, new public amenity and much needed mixed use, while remaining sensitive in design to the local historical building style.

Evaluation

The character of The Russells comes from the mix of uses provided, the sensitively refurbished existing buildings and the new homes, which are well crafted in the style of surrounding 16th century Broadway Village buildings.

Pedestrians are led into the site from the high street via two well lit alleys towards a Budgens supermarket and new pedestrian town square. A refurbished barn, which sits opposite the supermarket has been converted into a museum.

Beside the square is the block of 24 flats for the elderly run by Rooftop Housing Association. Flats are arranged over three floors within the entrance building and two floors surrounding a court car park with the upper units accessed via a lift and running deck. Garden space and a day room for residents are also provided.

Beyond this and across Back Lane is the private housing, predominantly built in terraces but with detached and semi detached units at the end of the site. Locally sourced Cotswold sandstone features heavily, as do stone window keystones and sills. Sandstone is mixed with timber boarding on garages to reflect existing outbuildings in the area.

Streets are defined by the building layout, so that buildings rather than roads dominate. The scheme is clearly navigable and inviting for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as being easily accessed for those with cars living in and around the development.

Key design features to look out for

- The way in which the development does not detract from the existing urban environment, the fact that buildings blend in with their surroundings and yet provide modern standards of construction and accommodation.
- The development of non-standard house types contributes to the sense that the scheme is a natural extension to the development typology of the existing town and helps to break down the usual mono-culture of many new housing schemes.
- The employment of stepped and fractured building lines within the layout. This also contributes to the sense that the development is a natural extension of the prevalent urban morphology of the existing townscape.

Link and downloads

Building For Life. Case Study.

<http://www.buildingforlife.org/case-studies/the-russells/introduction>

Rooftop Housing Association.

<http://www.rooftopgroup.org/>

Chase Homes. Website.

[http:// www.chasehomes.co.uk](http://www.chasehomes.co.uk)

Lapworth Architects Limited. Architects.
<http://www.lapwortharchitects.com/>

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