

MADE

Park central

location:
Attwood Green, Birmingham

Park Central is the first phase of a wider regeneration programme for what were five depressed council estates in the Attwood Green area of Birmingham. These estates were once notorious no go areas being cut off from each other and Birmingham city centre by hostile subways and major roads, but they are now being transformed into thriving and mixed inner city communities just 10 minutes walk from the city centre.

The design of Park Central is notable for its use of landscape as a heart to the scheme, and its urban and contemporary architectural style. Many features of the project are representative of current best practice in planning, architecture, landscape and urban design.

Introduction

Prior to 1940 Park Central was a network of back to back terraced housing, pubs, shops, businesses, and schools. Bomb damage incurred during WW2 led to much of the area being cleared by the late 50's, and this was replaced over the next 30 years with an irregular mix of low, medium and high-rise local authority properties set around a parkland setting. By the early 1990's the housing stock was in decline and social problems had led to the area becoming a dangerous no-go area for the public.



In response to the issues and problems in the Attwood Green area the local authority took the unusual approach of creating a new landlord, (The Optima Community Association) and transferred most of the housing stock to them, and coming up with a development framework that bypassed the traditional approach to planning. Around this time, the area gained some notoriety when rooftop protests were staged by residents of the estates, concerned at the progress and plans for the estates. Working closely with Birmingham City Council, Optima carried out tenant and public consultation and enabling works in the late 90's which subsequently led to the development of a regeneration framework strategy for the Attwood Green area as a whole.

Formed around two landscaped parks of about 3ha, Park Central will provide nine different residential neighbourhoods, four business quarters as well as shops, restaurants and a landmark hotel. The design of the development is urban and contemporary and brings a new and exciting character to an area

that has long been regarded as very undesirable, and there are now waiting lists for people to move into this rebranded area.

Design process

Prior to 1940 Park Central was a network of back to back terraced housing, pubs, shops, businesses, and schools. Bomb damage incurred during WW2 led to much of the area being cleared by the late 50's, and this was replaced over the next 30 years with an irregular mix of low, medium and high-rise local authority properties set around a parkland setting. By the early 1990's the housing stock was in decline and social problems had led to the area becoming a dangerous no-go area for the public.

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Evaluation

There are many aspects to this project that are highly successful. The scheme is visually and spatially engaging and provides an attractive and safe built environment for residents. The placing of a new linear park at the heart of the project creates a strong identity for the project. This testifies to the success of the architectural and landscape design approach of the design team.

Although not conceived as an 'eco' development, there are a number of design features that contribute to the projects sustainable credentials; the units currently run off a communal heating system but are designed to be linked to a central heating and power plant, the mix of units and range of tenures available, the proximity to the city centre.

The success of the project, and the way in which it has been progressed by the development partners, demonstrates the success of supporting an extended range of clients and partners on an ongoing basis in order to assist with process and decision making.

The scheme is an excellent example of good and innovative working relationships between the various project partners, not least the local authority who thought outside the box in respect to stock transfer and engagement with developers. It is also notable in respect of the involvement of the local community throughout the process.

Key design features to look out for

- The high quality parkland setting at the heart of the scheme, and the high levels of active built frontage that both helps to define the park spatially and helps to create a sense of safety.
- The way that the layout of the streets and buildings aid passive traffic control measures to ensure that pedestrian/vehicle conflicts are minimised.
- The layout of streets and buildings is very good in respect to permeability and legibility, and the use of varying scales of buildings and active frontage to create a natural sense of hierarchy across the overall scheme.
- The high levels of diversity in respect to architectural expression, form and massing to generate more complexity and interest within the overall character of the project.
- The design of buildings that respond in their form and scale to reinforce or create the appropriate character of the adjacent streetscapes and public spaces.
- Quirky architectural design features such as the projecting corner bay windows in the mews developments.

Link and downloads

CABE case study

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=214>

Gardner Stewart Architects

<http://www.gardnerstewartarchitects.com/>

Crest Nicholson Project Website

<http://www.parkcentral.co.uk/>

Optima Community Association

<http://www.optima.org.uk/main.cfm?type=PARKCENTRAL&ObjectId=21>

Contact for further information

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