Celebrating 25 years
25
1996 – 2021

touchstone

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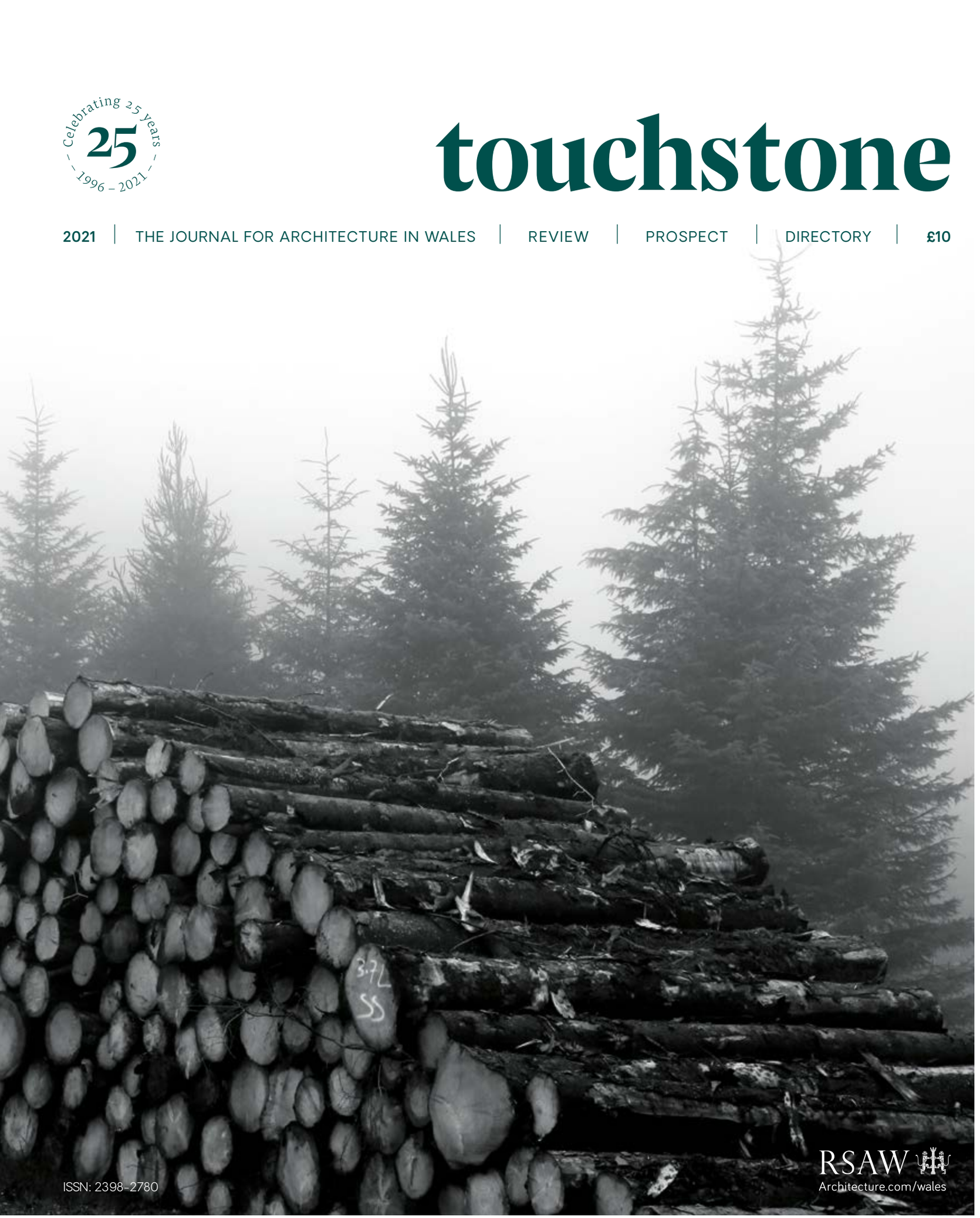

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The Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW) represents and supports around 600 Chartered Members of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in Wales. Through our members' expertise and our advocacy work in government, public and private sectors, we champion well-designed buildings and places across Wales.

Mae Cymdeithas Frenhinol Penseiri yng Nghymru (RSAW) yn cynrychioli ac yn cefnogi tua 600 o Aelodau Siartredig o Sefydliad Brenhinol Penseiri Prydain (RIBA) yng Nghymru. Trwy arbenigedd ein haelodau a'n gwaith eiriol ni gyda'r llywodraeth ac yn y sectorau cyhoeddus a phreifat, rydym yn hyrwyddo adeiladau a lleoedd sydd wedi'u dylunio'n dda ledled Cymru.

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Everything but architecture

It's difficult to get anything in proper perspective after fifteen months of intermittent lockdowns and the mounting climate emergency. 2020 feels sort of blank, numb, indeterminate.

At a pragmatic level, buildings couldn't be visited. You couldn't interview occupants. They weren't occupying. Accurate appraisals couldn't be made. Architectural journalism was suspended. It was out of the picture.

Nature as the central framework for all development: the garden around which is set the Parc Haddau housing scheme: see p. 62; landscape architect Farrer Huxley: CGI visual by icreate: kyle@icreate.co.uk

It was not as though there was a lack of potential architectural activity to report on. While other members of the public have had to cope with mental health/depression, loneliness, lack of exercise, and delays in attending to 'normal' health-care matters, the open-air construction sites allied to digital-design-anywhere, meant that, anecdotally at least, the small- to medium-sized practices that are the core of Welsh architectural activity, have been pleasantly or, in some cases, even manically busy. Architectural practice has not been felled by the virus like so many other sectors of work. There are sufficient people comfortably off who can use their enforced home-staying and money saving to commission home architecture. We should own up to that with some humility.

The lockdowns stripped us all back to focusing on essentials, adequate existing shelter, food, care for each other, and particularly care for those paid inadequately for caring for us all. It brutally exposed inequalities. The comfortably off were hopefully self-consciously humbled. It exposed the vacuousness of so much excess consumption. It starkly illustrated how so many have no immediate access to nature and utterly inadequate space for decent home-schooling and home-working conditions. The relative comfort of architectural practice, and of reporting on architecture, when set against those essentials, seems pretty peripheral.

In the climate debate, architecture has often over-claimed public attention. As buildings' carbon footprints were calculated to be so globally colossal, architects could surely thus be saviours. And then someone reminded us that over 90% of buildings in any one year already exist. Ah, retrofit, we thought; messy, complex, hardly architecture, and once fabric performance is secured isn't the real focus of action elsewhere, with heating engineers and on messy and challenging people processes, possibly aided by digital magic (p. 30)?

We could trumpet our important promotion of innovative off-site factory-assembled locally sourced timber housing (p.16) but then we had to face the crushing fact that the forest industries of Wales are so utterly ill-prepared for this. We can get all dewy-eyed about vast tree-planting projects, but Wales is so far behind the curve of where we need to be (p.12). Maybe new architecture is not where the focus of energy should be. It needs to be on social engagement, ensuring everyone has those critical essentials and can face the climate challenge honestly and with support, while making sure we never ignore our vital need for cultural conviviality.

We could still keep flashing glitzy CGIs to promote eye-grabbing master plans to regenerate left-behind communities, but we sort of know that the real energy should be invested in the social fabric of the master-planned place, not just the new architecture (p. 7). Not every broken economy in Wales is going to be rescued by the architectural glitz of tourism feeding on a museum of our derelict past.

In contrast, maybe modest architectural retro-fitting initiatives in existing rural farm buildings for agro-ecological skills of the future should demand more of our attention (p. 40). Back to the land may be a relevant future for a young generation exhausted by urbanism (p. 75).

Like so much post-devolution visionary policy making, Wales has its world-renowned *Well-being of Future Generations Act*; but in its five-year review it was the people-support skills of the Design Commission for Wales that received the biggest plaudits. Meanwhile, the hardware of local authority planning, it noted, was in disarray. The building regulations were utterly inadequate to face a climate emergency. And then one had to ask some hard questions of the act itself, pasted and copied into every design and planning report – but what was the act actually delivering (p. 4)?

Even when we finally get to new-build architecture, we instinctively know that landscape and 'place' should be the overarching design frameworks, vital to our well-being, within which the architecture sits (p. 62). But too often landscape is left to the back of the budget queue, stripped out, even in the critical area of health care (p. 25).

It is sort of an irony that one of the truly celebratory architectural moments in these socially distanced months is that Wales finally has its own branch of the UK's Twentieth Century Society, to promote proper social recognition to post-1914 architecture in Wales (p. 23). Within the pages of this journal over years we have pushed for that recognition. But then this is for an architecture of the recent past.

So, is everything **but** current architecture what needs to occupy our hearts and minds post-pandemic and in facing the climate emergency? It's not a comfortable proposition for an architectural journal to make, but it may be a necessary act of humility at this moment.

Jonathan Vining

Can we be good ancestors?

Wales had a head start on the rest of the world with the *Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015*, but is it being delivered with sufficient coherence on the ground? Gareth Jones scans the horizon. It's not a comfortable view.

'The world spends more on ice-cream than it does on its long-term future', says Oxford moral philosopher Toby Ord. In his latest book, *The Precipice*, he asks how we can improve life for ourselves, while securing the future of our descendants.

That same question motivated the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* (WBFGA). Gro Harlem Brundtland, former prime minister of Norway and herself a global thought-leader in this area, complimented this pioneering legislation and how 'Wales made into law the obligation for a country to pursue sustainable development on behalf of future generations'. It's a daring departure from conventional thinking on what constitutes 'progress', 'growth' and 'value'. It's been praised by environmental and poverty campaigners, including Green Party MP Caroline Lucas and Lord John Bird, founder of the *The Big Issue*, who are now campaigning for a future generations bill for the UK. The act created the world's first future generations' commissioner, Sophie Howe, whose job it is to keep on at Welsh politicians and officials about their duties under the legislation. In a recent BBC poll, Howe was placed at number five in a list of 100 women making the biggest contribution to the planet's environment and sustainability.

Full marks for ambition, then, but how are people assessing its first five years? The act clearly has potential but is that all it has? Andrew Davies, a former economic development minister, whose own government brought in the legislation, thinks it's too amorphous. 'The act is very well-meaning, but it's very much motherhood and apple pie. There's almost a house-style of legislation in Wales, which is very different from the Scots. It's [...] laudable, but it's so broadly based and so ambitious. It's largely permissive, because it doesn't place a duty on any public body to do anything specific, whereas in Scotland the legislation tends to be much more prescriptive and more often places a duty on public bodies to do things and puts an accountability framework around it.'

The WBFGA's 'accountability' is meant to come via a new set of bodies and instruments: 'public services boards' (PSBs), the core of each consisting of the local authority and health board, other local services and a representative from Natural Resources Wales; 'local well-being plans', drawn up by these PSBs; and an independent commissioner (Sophie Howe) whose job is to monitor and assess all this new activity. It is all meant to put into effect the act's new central organising principles for all Welsh Government and defined public bodies: 'sustainable development' (improving life for current generations without compromising the prospects of future ones), 'well-being' (people flourishing according to a wide range of indicators, not just economic ones) and new ways of working: thinking long-term; joined-up policy; collaborating across divisions to avoid 'silo mentality' – all very laudable.

But can public bodies deliver this new approach? It's a big ask, when the power and funding of local authorities, the PSBs core bodies, have been diminished by decades of neglect and years of austerity. During a recent discussion on the WBFGA held by Cardiff University's School of Geography and Planning, Professor Kevin Morgan said he thought the legislation was 'compelling but [...] difficult to implement even without austerity, COVID-19 and Brexit. Are PSBs up to the task? Do they have the capacity?'

It could also be argued that there is *too much* capacity. It's widely acknowledged that Wales is already over-governed and over-administered for a population of 3 million. There are 22 local authorities, for example, seven health boards and four city deals/regional partnerships for a population only slightly larger than Greater Manchester. Now we have another layer – the PSBs – to try and knock all these heads together plus a commissioner on high, although she has little actual leverage apart from moral suasion. So, should Wales have reformed and simplified its systems before bringing in the act? Huw Llewellyn, an NHS director with an interest in the legislation, thinks not. 'We shouldn't have waited to act.' He acknowledges, however, that collaboration is complex to achieve and the current situation needs significant coordination. 'The new organisations, the PSBs, are relatively new compared with the more established bodies contained within them – the health boards and local authorities – which have direct control over

It's widely acknowledged that Wales is already over-governed and over-administered for a population of 3 million... Now we have another layer – the PSBs.

what resources there are. There is little resource allocated to the PSBs and this can be a challenge.'

Others claim the local authorities themselves are dominated by forces that are not working in the spirit of the act and that PSBs don't have the muscle to change that.

Huw Llewellyn says another problem is how we fund the commissioner so that she can support and 'challenge all public bodies, including the PSBs and the Senedd's £18 billion annual spend'. According to its latest accounts, the commissioner's office receives around £1.5 million a year from the Welsh Government.

The legislation is also relatively permissive, issuing no guidance to the public bodies about how to make the hard choices involved in balancing the needs of today with those of the future. It also delegates to them the decisions on priorities and implementation. 'It's up to public bodies to determine how ambitious their objectives are. You can comply with the act without making radical change. Significant change requires commitment from individual decision makers, especially senior ones, to interpret and apply the legislation fully', says Huw Llewellyn.

In his research into the local well-being plans of the 19 PSBs and defined public bodies, Dr Alan Netherwood of Cardiff University has found that they also are falling far short of the WBFGA's demands to consider the well-being of *future* generations. 'They are focused on the here and now [they are] not considering the liveability of places for generations yet to be born and there are very vague long-term outputs. There's a predominant focus on process, parroting back of legal obligations in the corporate plans and documents.' This should be worrying.

A look at some of the well-being plans suggests the act is also creating a very patchy response even to the needs of people living today. Several urban areas in south Wales have some of the worst air quality in the entire UK, yet looking at the well-being plans of Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, you won't find a consistent approach. The plans don't mention specific targets for the reduction of levels of CO_2, NO_2 and dangerous particulates called PM2.5s. Only Cardiff gives detail about its sustainable transport aims, (indeed its latest plans have been commended both by Sophie Howe and the Senedd's cross-party group for the Active Travel Act), the others referring more vaguely to more 'sustainable travel' and 'green infrastructure'. Perhaps we will have to look to further action (a clean air bill is proposed) rather than the WBFGA, to actually do something about a problem that's causing the deaths of 1,400 people a year in Wales, and damaging the health of yet more, mostly in the poorest areas.

Veteran regeneration expert, Gordon Gibson of Urban Foundry, welcomes the act's vision but says he has seen multiple well-meaning initiatives ignored by those who have the whip hand in local authorities.

'You know who the good guys are [...] you have to find people who will run with it [...] The "green infrastructure" people in Swansea Council are great. But in the big departments of many councils, economic development and highways, do they pay anything more than lip service to these bits of legislation? I would argue that they don't.' He says councils need enlightened leaders at the top forcing change and looking to the long term. 'I'm interested in how things will work in 15 years' time. Politicians are thinking only about the next election.'

One of the tasks of the future generations commissioner is to get government to take that long view. Last year Sophie Howe issued her five-year review of the WBFGA's implementation and she's clearly not happy about progress. On environment, planning and architecture, for example, she is positive about the role of the Design Commission for Wales and recommends boosting its funding so it can give more advice to public bodies about aligning their schemes with the act's emphasis on creating places that boost well-being. However, she writes 'that planning authorities are not resilient enough to deliver long-term improvements and the challenge of managing a complex system'. This 'is truly concerning'. She identifies a lack of resources and skills in the planning system and expresses real concern over the quality of local development plans and the absence of more regional coordination.

But can public bodies deliver... when the power and funding of local authorities, the PSBs core bodies, have been diminished by decades of neglect and years of austerity

Jane Davidson, former environment minister and chief architect of the WBFGA, has written an account ('FutureGen') of how it came into being and reading it you are made aware of the unglamorous 'hard yards' of politics, the sheer effort, determination, patience and alliance-building needed to achieve anything of significance. But there are those who say that it may all be in vain if the same energy isn't brought to its implementation from the top down and across multiple sectors. A name's been coined for this syndrome: 'policy attention deficit disorder.'

Underachievement on delivery has been a long-standing criticism of the Welsh Government. Take forestry. According to a report by Foundational Economy Research (see also p. 12), this sector has suffered 'a surfeit of visions and lack of coordination' from the Welsh Government. When it comes to addressing climate change and creating a productive Wales-based forestry industry 'co-ordinated action has not been brought into focus with clear timetables and milestones'. The authors say fragmentation is holding back the sector and while the Welsh Government itself has identified the need for its own leadership 'to facilitate collaboration by drawing stakeholders together [...] as a means of contributing to the well-being goals', the report's authors say they 'can find no evidence that the Welsh Government has acted purposively to create an alliance for change, for example, around off-site timber frame construction'. They even suggest the task should be given to 'some kind of [...] organisation which does not make policy but delivers policy'.

Despite the concerns and criticism, there is still plenty of goodwill towards the WBFGA, especially among activists in Welsh civil society. Professor Kevin Morgan, one of Wales's most respected academics, believes it's the most innovative thing our politicians have done since devolution. Huw Llewellyn believes the legislation has huge transformational potential. 'The challenge is how to create organisational change. More time and money are needed to train and support leaders at the top because they control the resources. But people at all levels need to be supported to see what this act means for them and what it can achieve. This is culture change.'

Money is one thing, but time is quite another. Wales – and the planet – are fast running out of that if we are to be good ancestors to the generations coming after us.

Gareth Jones is a freelance journalist. He has worked for several organisations including the BBC and various UN agencies.

Merthyr rising:

the master planning of ambition

Merthyr Tydfil and the ironmaster Crawshay once led the world in iron production. 200 years later it has another very different inspirational plan. The ambition will need to be driven by its people. Patrick Hannay reports on the process that has made the twenty-first-century Cyfarthfa Plan.

Architectural magazines have a poor record on headlining process. Pictures of meetings don't catch the eye; but the problem is deeper. Journalism of process takes vast amounts of research and time. Nobody is prepared to pay for that. Architectural understanding is the poorer for it. Clients of public architecture underestimate the time and money it takes for citizens to genuinely own a project. The flaws in so many schemes can be traced back to this undervaluing of early design process.

Clients of public architecture underestimate the time and money it takes for citizens to genuinely own a project. The flaws in so many schemes can be traced back to this undervaluing of early design process.

It's a similar challenge for urban 'master planning'. Too much eagerness to frontline the visual artefacts, the wow-factor CGIs, the press release headline pictures. They should de-gender the term, it's just 'planning', a messy vibrant community process when done well, but a story so difficult to tell.

If civic clients in Wales want to learn what it really takes, they should pay close attention to the Merthyr's Cyfarthfa Plan-process launched to the press and public in January 2021. Let's hope someone makes a film and book of it. One article cannot do it full justice.

Listening to the online launch it's tempting, yet again, to be carried away by the dazzling imagery. After all, this project involves top-rate internationally renowned design consultants, Ian Ritchie Architects, with Gustafson Porter + Bowman on landscape.

But, in that same launch press release and video film Lee Waters, deputy minister for economy and transport and chair of the Valleys Taskforce applauds the 'bottom-up, community-led, long-term approach to regeneration'. We are talking about a 20-year project here. The report sets out a menu of more than 70 possible projects split into 'must do', 'should do' and 'could do' categories, so this is a massive menu of community engaging processes. But then the press release moves on to describe 'renovating Cyfarthfa Castle', 'rescuing the 200 year-old Cyfarthfa furnaces, a scheduled ancient monument of world importance'. The pace quickens… a new 'iron way', 'a dramatic high-level walkway', a new 'glass way' entrance through the park to the east of the castle, a splendid new castle forecourt replacing the current car park, a 100-hectare industrial heritage park, redeveloping the Pandy Farm buildings, and even 'an eight-acre community vegetable garden'. The visuals are cracking, the consultants are impressive; but pause for a moment, recalibrate, remember, the real heart of this project is off camera. It lies in the process.

A long-lasting force

This burst into the public eye four years ago, October 2017, at a Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC), £25,000-funded charrette with 60 people from a range of disciplines and many segments of the community present. The breadth and depth of community links became the bedrock of the project. This charrette demanded months of behind-the-scenes preparation with the Merthyr community by the two constant presences in this four-year process, a small team from the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW) led by Carole-Anne Davies and the ever-energetic cultural driving force in Wales's politic, Geraint Talfan Davies (GTD). The charrette was held on the day of Hurricane Brian but another more long-lasting force was set in motion.

From this energy came the May 2018 *Crucible* report (see *TS*, 2018, p. 51) written by DCfW team members with GTD. They critically include international precedents. The benchmarks were set high. Why should Merthyr expect anything less? They became a thread that linked eventually to an international competition brief, March 2019, for a master plan and tender assessments, written by DCfW and GTD, working with key council officers. The brief, tender appointment and year-long master-planning process with the winning team had a £250,000 budget allocated to it by

1

Site plan key

1 Northern new public vehicular access
2 Wild swimming pond
3 Cyfarthfa glass-way new pedestrian access
4 Biodiversity meadows
5 Community vegetable gardens
6. The iron way: new bridge over River Taff
7 Cyfarthfa Castle
8 Castle forecourt gardens and display gardens
9 National confluence FE college
10 Entropic sculpture area
11 Mini-golf
12 Pandy Farm creative and community hub
13 Natural amphitheatre
14 Cyfarthfa furnaces landscape
15 Cyfarthfa industrial park-west section-relocation

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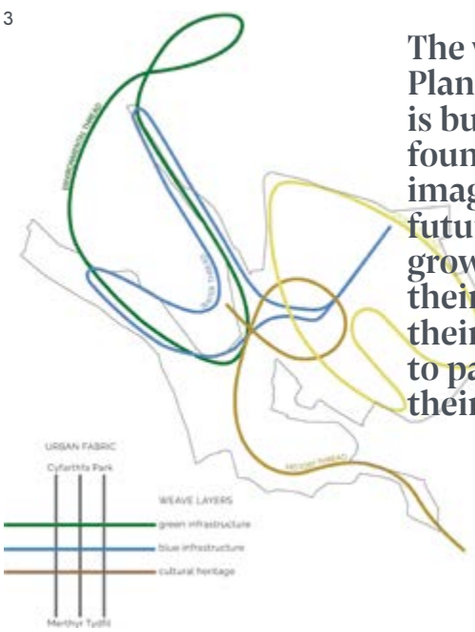

The whole Cyfarthfa Plan over 20 years is built on the foundation of imagining those future generations growing up and their visions for their future coming to pass. It has to be their plan".

the council, the formal client. DCfW, with council approval, built in three formal review stages chaired by DCfW; this mirrored the three-stage processes of the master plan: 'exploration and understanding', 'initial ideas' and 'development and refinement of ideas'.

The quality of that *Crucible* report had inspired unanimous approval from Merthyr's full council in June 2018. At a later stage a workshop with the entire council commenced with every service area present – an unheard-of attendance – it was an inspirational afternoon for the master-planning team. There was now a Cyfarthfa working group of three key council officers, a senior councillor and GTD. But it was recognised from the start that implementation would require the establishment of a special purpose vehicle to facilitate access to the funds of the Lottery and the big charitable foundations. In November 2020 this became the Cyfarthfa Foundation, with two council cabinet members on its board, two independent members and GTD in the chair. Client consistency is absolutely key, as the board will soon expand to 12 in number.

Over two days in June 2019 seven top-flight master-planning teams were interviewed in DCfW's offices with architect Peter Clegg of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios in the chair, and two key council officers plus DCfW review panellist Martin Knight, with Amanda Spence and Carole-Anne Davies of DCfW, and GTD present. Ian Ritchie Architects' multi-disciplinary team was appointed.

The ambition has to be owned

Of course, the pandemic was to disrupt everything in what was going to be a remarkable community engagement process.

The ambition has to be built, to be harnessed, to be owned. The winning team had to listen and learn intently. The multi-disciplinary team with Ian Ritchie's Jonathan Shaw as the coordinating force undertook the following engagement programme: four public workshop 'story-building' events at three different locations; thirteen consultations with MTCBC departments, two with Welsh Government departments, five with national organisations, eleven with key stakeholders; eight discussions with schools and colleges in their places of learning, five

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with community organisations; six creative workshops with primary- and high-school learners, Merthyr Tydfil College and youth clubs; three focus groups of older adults, young adults and families; and finally one 'collaborative story' workshop with the key stakeholders. Those in the educational and youth group settings, like all the gatherings, were intensively and creatively choreographed. The younger generations were asked what they loved about Merthyr, what they would avoid; thinking big, they were encouraged to draw and imagine facilities on huge maps of the heritage site area. The whole Cyfarthfa plan over 20 years is built on the foundation of imagining those future generations growing up and their visions for their future coming to pass. It has to be their plan.

Client support work

In the five-year review of the visionary *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, one of commissioner Sophie Howe's most positive affirmations was for the client support work of the DCfW. Howe called for a considerable upscaling of its contribution to Wales's public life. This Cyfarthfa four-year plan process offers bucket loads of evidence to substantiate that well-judged vote of approval by Howe. Unlike the rest of the UK, which has lost DCfW's equivalent public design support service, DCfW has had nearly 20 years of observing how patrons, politicians and clients of vital projects so often underestimate the required amount of time, cost and investment in design judgement, how getting the early parts of the design properly funded and focused is so crucial to any project's eventual success. Even with Merthyr council's unanimous support for the plan, even with every council department signed up and on board, and a palpable enthusiasm from Merthyr people's responses and inputs, surely everybody who has experienced the Cyfarthfa Plan-making process to date can see that without DCfW's many layers of inputs and guidance, attached to the consistent focus and energy of GTD, Merthyr would be rising very differently. (Neither DCfW nor GTD ever seeks the limelight – but that needs saying). Equally without all that intensive bottom-up listening and creativity, all that DCfW strategic advice and guidance would be hollow. Both are needed.

1 The sites of some of the projects 2020 to 2040.

2 The 20-year master plan for the 100-hectare greater Cyfarthfa park project.

3 Weaving a social, cultural and physical fabric.

4 The new 'iron way' connecting Crawshay's castle to the furnaces crossing the River Taff.

5 The cars removed; a new forecourt by Gustafson Porter Bowman.

6 The 'glass way', a pedestrian entrance from the new car parks to the north.

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It was common practice in French new towns of the 1970s, before any architects or planners were involved, that the government funded the activities of 'animateur sociales'. They set up the cornerstones of social and cultural life in the existing communities with events and workshops, theatre and endless social choreography. It seemed an intelligent foundational act. The people need to have a story they believe and share in. In the European architectural competition system, where most public projects are put to competition, it is commonplace that process-expert teams guide the whole process from start to finish. The Cyfarthfa Plan for Merthyr is European in ambition. It should command worldwide attention.

How great we once were

There are inevitably hidden unresolved tensions buried beneath this hugely impressive collective process of ambitions, energies, and dreams of Merthyr's future generations. Like so much of south Wales, decimated by brutal industrial collapse, the politicians and the regeneration consultants understandably are tempted to frontline the 'jobs' potential and equally critically how tourism visitors' money will rescue their economy. It is tempting to suggest that Merthyr's supposed only asset is to remind the world how great they once were, but are no more, but could be again, if they told their story with a fanfare. As a catalytic inspiration, that storytelling can inspire existing community ambitions. Telling the world how Merthyr once led the world may be admirable, but leaning a whole future economy on those visitors learning that fact, is maybe dangerous territory – even if it has been one of the noble lifelong missions of GTD that has driven his colossal personal commitment to Merthyr's future.

One of the greatest lessons from this project comes from Dan Anderson, Fourth Street's destination business analyst. (He was on Ritchie's team.) It is said quietly. It is born of wise experience of the last few decades of overselling the tourist economy card. Beware making it too great a keystone of any plan. The future has to be rebuilt by the future generations of Merthyr's current youth aided by all the community wisdom and pride of this remarkable town. In GTD's most recent e-mail to me, he suggested the creation of the eight-acre community vegetable garden needs to be brought forward into the first phase of action. 'I am very conscious that Cyfarthfa Park is located cheek by jowl with the Gurnos estate. We need to be partners', he wrote. He's already held meetings with the Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil. The urgent task is to map fully the range of community organisations throughout Merthyr to build on all the community engagement that has occurred to date.

It was also Dan Anderson who brought on board at an early stage the vital services of Julia Holberry Associates, public community engagement facilitators, and Lily Pender of The Whole Story. Their vital skills, allied to Ian Ritchie's project architect Jonathan Shaw's boundless energy, and all the Merthyr council officers and voluntary groups and schoolchildren's enthusiasms, led to the plan now having an impressive portfolio of social ambitions that could make it truly *their* place. The community's creative hunger, prompted by the consultants, is for a circular foundational economy that feeds off their interactions, their willingness to engage all their fellow citizens, to lift their lives up. They don't need to wait for the tourists to save them. Tourists will, of course, be essential as Cyfarthfa will not be a free-entry museum like our National Museum's chain of sites, but they are not the spiritual bedrock of the plan. Yes, there will need

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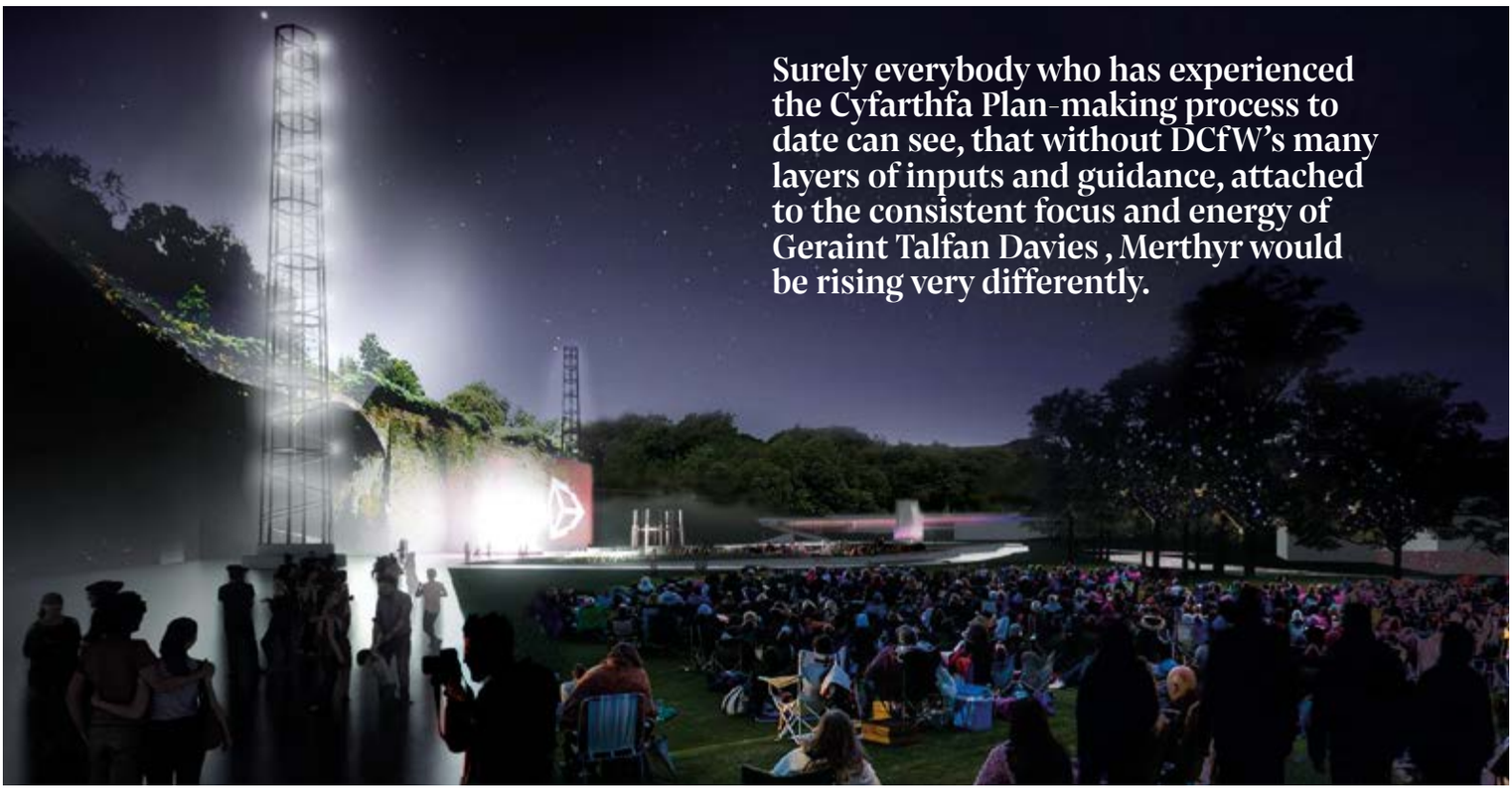

Surely everybody who has experienced the Cyfarthfa Plan-making process to date can see, that without DCfW's many layers of inputs and guidance, attached to the consistent focus and energy of Geraint Talfan Davies , Merthyr would be rising very differently.

to be seed-funding grants to kick-start so many of these events, voluntary initiatives, forums, creative gatherings. But these have to be the lifeblood of the plan, the everyday urgent driving force.

The people process is all

The process of the Cyfarthfa Plan so far has thrown up the possibility of a large basket of community-oriented social projects, a climate forum, a community forum, a living-histories programme, a youth design review panel, environmental and creative competitions, a conservation education programme and a creative arts review forum, to name but a few. This is complex, messy, demanding stuff but it is core to the plan being constantly alive.

The other hidden tension to balance is between software and hardware – growing the numbers of people and events versus making architecture and landscape. It will be tough, because not only is this focus on process not glamorous and difficult to capture in a headline, but there are very real fund-raising pressures to tackle the key architectural challenges of the plan. These will require massive sums. Some parts of the fabric require urgent action, if they are not to collapse. Other bits of architecture and landscape are vital to ensure the valley's connectivity and new access to the castle. The sums to make them happen will make big headlines. The pictures will be glamorous, the landscape and architecture may be stunning but, never forget, the people process is all, that's where the lifeblood of the Cyfarthfa Plan lies.

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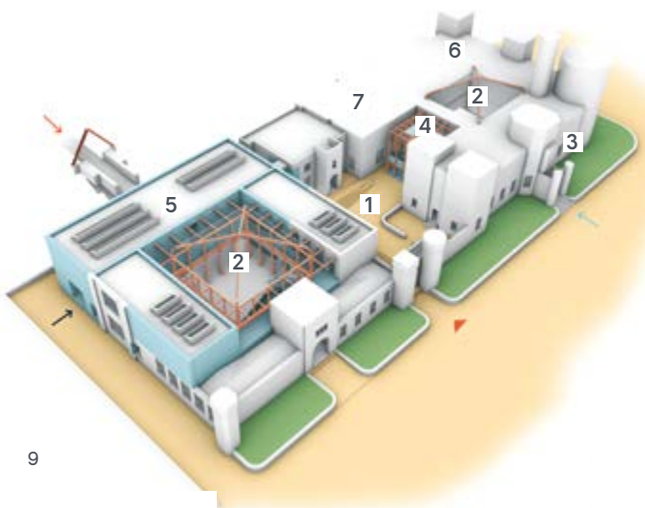

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7 The furnaces revived as a major events' space.

8, 9 Retrofitting and repurposing parts of the castle.

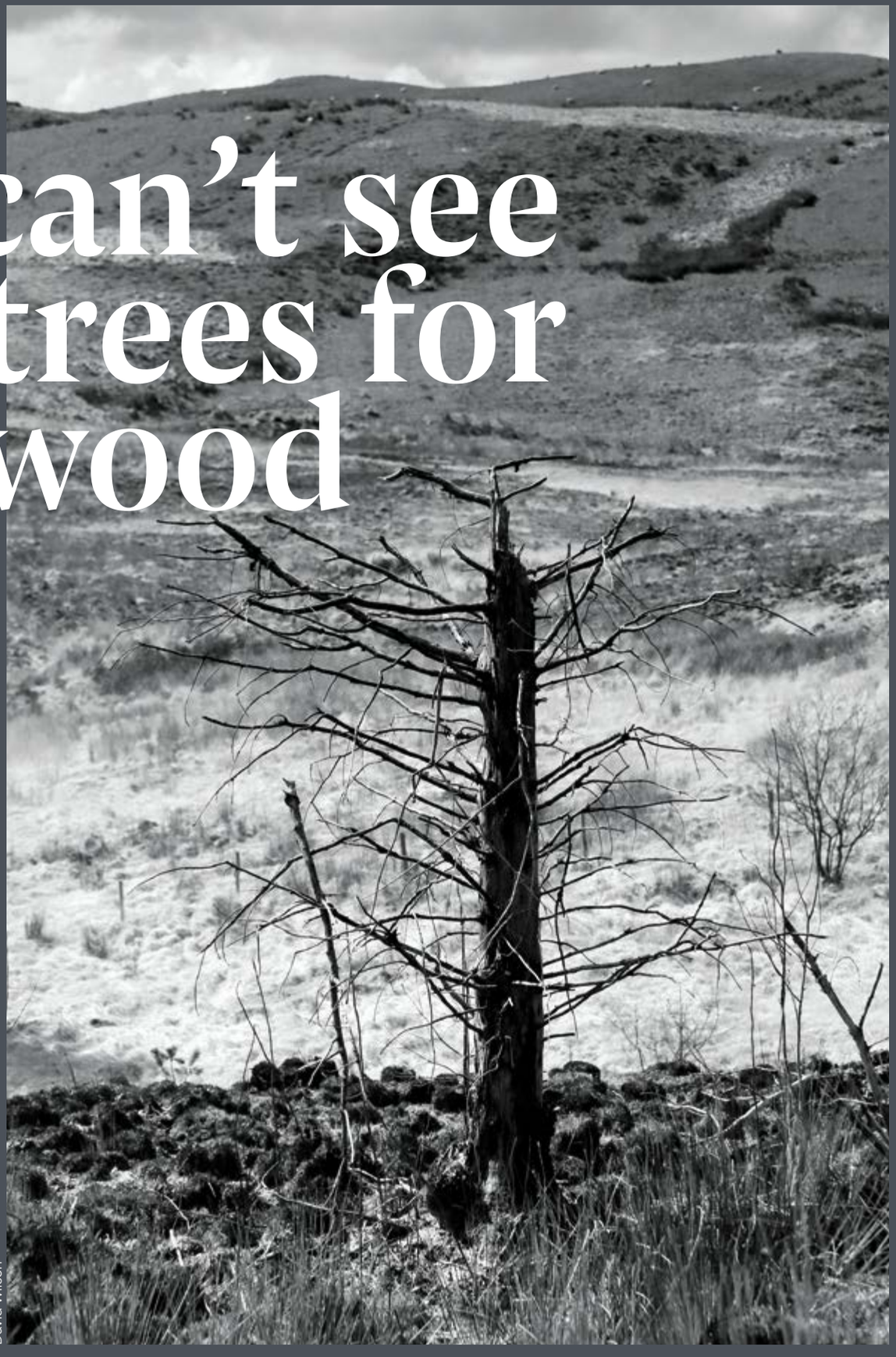
Key Cyfarthfa Castle future options

1 Castle side (restoration)
2 School side (reuse)
3 School side (area considered for reconfiguration, rebuild or new build)
4 New glass-way pedestrian access
5 Car parking removed from forecourt

Key spaces

1 Centre courtyard
2 Internal courtyard
3 Function rooms
4 Main circulation
5 Exhibition galleries
6 Cyfarthfa museum
7 Co-creation Centre

We can't see the trees for the wood



David Wilson

'*Wales is not a forest nation. Wales is a sheep, beef and dairy nation. Wales is a steel nation.*' This was the somewhat barbed, stark opener to a press release by Woodknowledge Wales in December 2020, announcing its commissioned analysis of why Wales was urgently in need of some truth telling about its failure to reach its potential as a country with a substantial timber building industry. **Tim Graham** looks over the findings.

Steve Coombs

Richard Kieley

Not a day goes by without another announcement of some sizeable tree-planting initiative that is seemingly going to save the planet. The first I remember in Wales was reported on by John Osmond, that indefatigable campaigner of the Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA), promoting a new national forest in 2012. There was an IWA report launch, *Growing our woodlands in Wales: the 100,000 hectare challenge*. The Welsh Government wanted to increase the woodland cover of Wales from 14% to 20% by 2030. This would entail planting an average of 5,000 hectares of woodland a year, a rate that had been achieved only once since the second world war – in 1960. It never happened. Another case of vision and ambition winning out over the sorted mechanics of delivery?

How come Wales still has only 15% of its land area as forest cover when the average in Europe is 37%. Over the past 20 years Scotland has added an area equivalent to half of the total area of woodland in Wales. The Republic of Ireland has more than doubled its forest area since the 1970s and yet in Wales, over that same period, the total area of woodland has remained at roughly 0.3 million hectares. 'Over the nine-year period 2009-2018, £262 million was available from a Scottish scheme for woodland creation and management. By way of contrast, only £35 million was spent on grants in support of forestry in Wales over the same period.' Even when the Welsh Government set a much more modest recent target, offering grant funding for 2,000 hectares per annum of new woodland, the reality was, according to a BBC report, that owing to oversubscription in 2019–20 just 80 acres of new woodland were planted and that only 1% of that was on private land. We still have a long, long way to go.

And yet 20 years after Osmond's ambition, some of the figures for new tree planting across the UK are still eye-watering in their ambition. The UK government committed itself to planting 11 million trees by 2022. Funding for this scheme was announced by HM Treasury in the 2018 autumn budget. We are now only a year away from that goal. Is anyone already counting the likely shortfall? Are we just fooling ourselves that it will be all right on the night?

Everyone loves a tree

These great visions of course garner lots of public attention. Politicians love them. All the public can be involved. They are good for our soul and that phrase on everyone's lips, 'well-being'. It's so obviously green and a good thing. They are equally a wonderful distraction from the harder task of facing up to the big beasts of the fossil-fuel industry and all its dependents, and the banking and pension fund system that fuels them. They avoid us all facing up to 'de-growth' and all the carbon produced elsewhere in the world to meet our obsessional levels of consumption. We all get a warm glow from planting a tree particularly when we know they speak to each other, as Peter Wohlleben writes in his spectacularly influential *The Hidden life of Trees*.

Understandably, the tree-planting passion is finding new advocates all over Wales. In the world of agro-ecology the interweaving of small-scale tree-planting and horticulture, in a sort of large-scale permaculture thinking, is receiving lots of interest from the worlds of the Land Workers Alliance Cymru and its links with the worldwide small farmers movement, the Via Campesina.

Valleys communities such as the Skyline project at Treherbert (see p. 16) aim to take over the ownership and management of their local valley woodlands for a multiplicity of recreational and income-creating projects. Some of that may include ambitions for generating income from timber for buildings. New pocket parks and micro-woodlands in urban areas – these are all the rage. The enthusiasm is infectious, but these don't really get us any nearer to a serious locally sourced timber building industry for Wales.

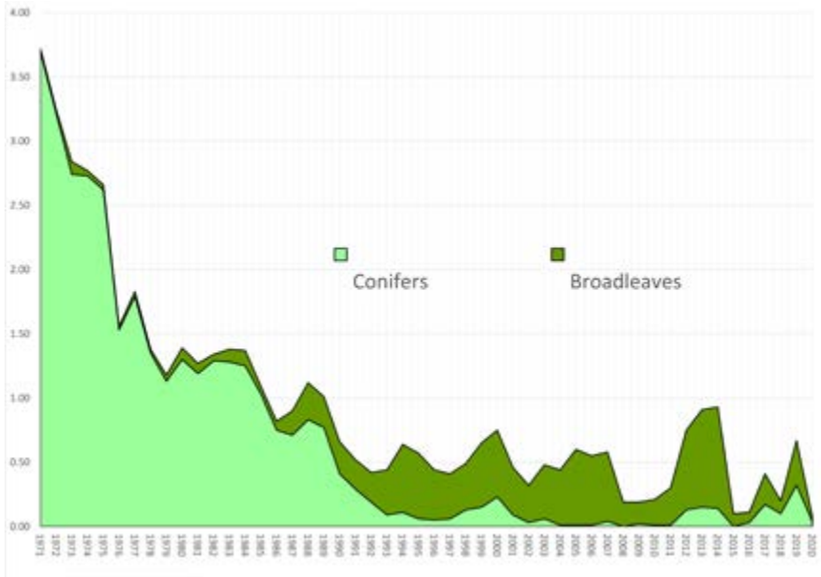
The carbon truth

The Welsh Government's Innovation Housing Programme (IHP), launched with much fanfare in February 2019, called for the adoption of low-carbon, off-site construction methods (one assumes timber) especially for social housing. But, this would need to be sponsored by government

with encouragement from consortia of housing associations and councils to place orders with capable producers. Those just aren't available in Wales and anyway the momentum on that programme is already diverted into a massive government-backed retrofit housing programme (see p. 30) for those same consortia and councils. This is much needed, of course, but the outcome is that the push for timber house production has been forced to take a back seat yet again.

Maybe the tree-planting visions and excitements distract us from some brutal realities about current tree cover, tree felling, and replacement planting in Wales. The published graphs show a terrible collapse in tree planting numbers since 1970. The only good news is that the initially very low broadleaf planting graph line is rising to meet the dramatically descending conifers.

Wales new planting – thousands of hectares 1971–2020



Growing trees takes time and we need to leave a lot of them up for carbon capture, biodiversity, and flood management. We need to get not too carried away about the carbon capture of trees themselves. In broadleaf woodlands, as DEFRA research demonstrates, it's the soil that actually captures 72% of the carbon. The branches and leaves only account for 17%, and 11% is hoarded by tree roots and deadwood. In pine forests, Sitka spruce, so useful for locally sourcing building industry softwood, is not so good for biodiversity and carbon soil capture. When they are clear felled (as the conifers do not coppice or grow again after felling – unlike broadleaf trees), this probably results in more carbon being released than the amount we think is stored in our buildings made from the timber of those trees. It's a tricky challenge. We'll need Sitka spruce for some parts of a timber building industry. So getting the right number of the right type of trees in the right places is crucial if we are to create an opportunity for a serious local timber construction industry in Wales.

What's holding us back

There has been an ever-present architectural excitement, over a decade old now in Wales, that was generated by the prospect of locally sourced carbon-friendly timber homes, taking over from concrete, steel and masonry. Since 2006 Steve Coombs, Wayne Forster and colleagues from the Welsh School of Architecture, with Coed Cymru and the ever-innovative Phil Roberts, furiously worked to promote an all-timber 'Tŷ Unnos' house-building method. After years of frustration and some successes too, it has to be said that it didn't make the breakthrough it should have done. The heft from government and the industry was missing. As Coombs notes 'the political disconnect with woodland management, the timber industry and construction meant that we were often passed from AM to AM whose portfolios it did not quite fall under. On this basis you are correct in saying it needed someone to bang heads together'.

Like the rest of the UK, Wales imports two thirds of its sawn wood and this increases to 100% of cross-laminated timber, the product so loved by progressive architects all signed up to Architects Declare. And yet there is supposedly all this potential. Wales has so much more poor-quality agricultural land that is suitable for more tree planting. Welsh farmers on that difficult land have been struggling for decades. Post-Brexit exporting challenges are likely to make any farming purely based on sheep and cattle financially unviable. So, with payment for 'public goods' on the table surely growing more woodland has to be a winner. But what's holding us back? The matter is urgent if we have targets of reaching net zero carbon by 2030 or even 2050. Why doesn't the Welsh Government give a lead in turbocharging a local woodland industry for timber house construction?

A gloomy prospect

This and most of the facts quoted above are part of the stark messages so clearly conveyed and so very well researched in the October 2020 report commissioned by Woodknowledge Wales from Foundational Economy Research, somewhat curiously entitled *Serious About Green?*

What prompted its clarion call for action is this sort of summary from the report:

'The Welsh Climate Change Strategy included the 'aspiration' of an increase in new planting of 100,000 hectares between 2010 and 2030, which would mean identifying less than 1% of current upland grazing land for planting. This would require an additional 5,000 hectares of planting per annum, which is higher than the planting levels achieved even during the large-scale activity in the 1950s and 1960s. A slow start led to a new, much lower, interim target being set of 10,000 hectares (2,000 hectares per annum) from 2010–2020. Unfortunately, also, this lower target has not been met in recent years. As a result, plausible timber projections forecast a future shortage of softwood, which will reinforce Welsh dependence on imports.'

A part of the tree felling contracts are put out and managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), which absorbed the former Wales arm of the Forestry Commission in a bonfire of quangos in April 2013. Through its contracts, NRW is felling forests faster than it's replacing them. NRW 'owns or manages a total of 114,829 hectares of woodland, which equates to 38% of the total mapped woodland in Wales. This leaves 188,744 – 62% – in other forms of ownership [...] more than half (59%) is on agricultural holdings'. So, even if you turn the NRW tanker around and shift its core current task of regulation towards a more commercial forestry focus, it needs to be acknowledged that timber sales currently only account for 25% of its total income, and how then are you going to focus on the private woodland owners? Again, a long way to go with 'the spend on private forestry [government] grants is roughly 10 times greater in Scotland than in Wales' Glastir Woodland scheme'.

In early 2020 the Welsh Government announced its ambition to create a National Forest for Wales seeking to link up existing forests from north to south and east to west with new planting, so that one almost gets forest corridors across the country, like tendrils spreading out into all communities. The ambition, like Osmond's IWA push in 2012, is as ever laudable but is it again realistic on delivery or on a believable timescale? Does it include a vision for a local timber building industry? That's not listed in its ambitions in any meaningful way. There is no plan.

We have a climate emergency. Many political institutions in Wales have signed up to a 2030 deadline. New saplings planted now will be only nine years old by then. Pine forests take a minimum of 15 years to mature for use, and broadleaved woodlands even longer, 35 years, and we already have such a shortfall on tree coverage from where we need to be. We needed to start ages ago to join up the fractured, competitive, fragmented bits of Wales's timber industry. Have we just left it too late?

Is anyone listening?

There are 19 sawmills across the country, but only one particle board manufacturer making chipboard, MDF and OSB. This is in Chirk. There are no plywood producers anywhere in Wales. We need to focus some of them on an intelligent off-site timber structural panel house-building industry. That sort of thing doesn't appear overnight, but we could at least make a leap by knocking heads together led from the top or front or side by decisive Welsh Government management putting in place a lead body.

We are so far behind the curve from where we should be. The Welsh timber product suppliers we do have, understandably, if left to the interests of their own shareholders or owners, have taken the most straightforward profit-making option by turning two thirds of sawn Welsh timber into agricultural fencing and pallets. This is a product meeting a vital demand, so we need to build on that solid income stream, and government needs to encourage and support innovation to create a timber building industry alongside that.

Nobody in Wales is following Ireland's lead of a government coordinated body the 'Coillte' bringing the industry together, talking to each other, finding small subsidies, ensuring innovation is disseminated, so that the start of a local timber house-building industry becomes at least visible. Although, even there, the fact that the major product success has been an MDF equivalent, Medite, this suggests we should not simply mirror every part of Ireland's model in Wales.

'Wales lacks a national centre for silviculture and timber technologies which could consolidate and develop the expertise that exists in the University of Bangor and elsewhere', the report advises. Is anybody listening?

All this multi-faceted movement on tree planting at all scales and all over is admirable, but it's clearly bonkers, in a country where the urban built area only covers 4.2% of the land mass, that we do not have as yet anything approaching a proper strategy and action plan to create a locally sourced timber house-building industry. It's time to grow one at speed with sound roots and stout branches.

Tim Graham is a Wales-based architectural journalist and regular contributor to Touchstone.

David Wilson

Pat Borer

Notes

In the Foundational Economy Report *Serious about Green?* published October 2020 and commissioned by Woodknowledge Wales, Luca Calafati, Julie Froud, Colin Haslam, Sukhdev Johal, Karel Williams assert their copyright right to be identified as the authors of this work.

The report can be downloaded via https://woodknowledge.wales/news/serious-about-green-report

I am also grateful to Pat Borer for his patient support on researching aspect of this subject.

The Scottish Government has done a lot of work on integrating forestry with existing farm businesses to make them more productive and climate-resilient, which Wales could build on: for example see https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/farm-woodlands

The land question

From the moment of its birth in 2018, Project Skyline around Treherbert in the south Wales valleys excited a lot of interest. *Touchstone* covered the promotion of its first phase of work at a sizeable Cardiff gathering of press, community members and cultural activists in 2019. The community's visionary ambitions for a takeover of their woodlands and valley environment was exhilarating. The Scottish bard/poet Alastair McIntosh, a major player in recent Scottish land reforms, was on hand to lend heft and a hand of Celtic brotherhood. All that was needed was for Natural Resources Wales and the Coal Authority to be generous and hand over some of their land to the community.

At the March 2021 Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly (BGCA), the first of its kind in Wales (see p. 54), Project Skyline was still offering inspiration to other communities as Ian Thomas of Welcome to our Woods waxed lyrical yet again about Treherbert's ambitions and plans. Blaenau Gwent residents in the BGCA online were intrigued. Would those public bodies really hand over their land assets in a way that would allow the project to take off? Could they learn a trick or two?

The land question is always the stumbling block. For those of an eager young generation who are pursuing two-hectare plots of land for progressive regenerative farming and horticulture projects in Wales, the land costs are the greatest barrier to progress. So, is Project Skyline the breakthrough moment? It would seem not, at least for 2021.

There was almost an outline agreement for the community to manage 84 hectares of the forests around Treherbert, but the Wales Audit Office said this subsidy would not be acceptable. The audit office doesn't seem to have heard of foundational economics. But then the virus impact on public budgets will be understandably weighing heavily on its concerns for the future of the Welsh public purse.

So, is there a way out of this impasse? Could an agreement be entered into that would at least allow the community to co-design the wider landscape and at least benefit indirectly from timber harvesting and the recreational opportunities the woods offer. Surely the social value of community management cannot be ignored? The dream of full community control and a future independent of grants may have to wait a little longer, but it is hopefully still on the Welsh Government's horizon.

Licensed to deliver

It seemed all too appropriate that a first encounter with Cartrefi Conwy's innovative project to respond to an initial homeless accommodation challenge should have been at the 2019 Llanrwst Eisteddfod. Modular accommodation, arriving on the back of lorries, flying factories – it all seemed to fit in with the peripatetic Eisteddfod spirit.

The programme is impressive on many fronts. It ticks so many of the Welsh Government's boxes. Those running Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Programme would likely be approving. The modular timber homes are certified Passivhaus in performance. They are assembled off-site in factories or, for large projects, by a flying factory (one set up on-site). Cartrefi Conwy's subsidiary, Creu Menter/Creating Enterprise, is a social enterprise that's delivering the product on licence from Beattie Passive based in Norwich, and ploughs its profits back into training. It has offered mentoring joinery skills training for those unemployed and seeking work and new skills. There are five full-time employees working on the units in Conwy.

Beattie Passive claims its units are 80% cheaper to run than conventional homes. Each unit can be assembled in a couple of days once site works and services are in place (*see right*).

Cartrefi Conwy took on Conwy County Borough Council's housing stock of 3,800 homes in 2008. Over 200 households are currently living in emergency or temporary accommodation.

A scheme of 8 units at Sefton Road in Old Colwyn was the first off the blocks. These were primarily for those who were homeless (see bottom right). Further projects will cater for all types of Cartrefi Conwy's housing need. Creu Menter has

Beattie Passive claims its units are 80% cheaper to run than conventional homes; each can be assembled in a couple of days...

completed 20 units to date on other sites with a further 60 in contract by the end of 2021. Under an exclusive four-year licence with Beattie Passive, Creu Menter will be operating over the whole of north Wales, not just in Conwy county. There are 350 units in the business plan for the next five years.

Creu Menter states that it works with Welsh sawmill providers through its supply chain with Travis Perkins. So maybe this enterprise offers a glimmer of hope on the long road to establish a timber house-building industry using welsh timber across the whole country, (see p. 12). We need to upscale rapidly if meeting climate emergency targets are to have any meaning at all.

There're trunks and there're no trunks

Jessica Hannay

What is it with trunk roads and trees in Wales? Everywhere you go there are chain saws screeching in every valley accompanied by the new very efficient heavy-duty timber-shredders and vast tree-grappling machines. Yes, there is the serious impact of ash die-back, Carmarthenshire alone predicted the felling of 2,500 roadside trees, and no doubt somewhere in the bowels of the Welsh trunk toad agencies, SWTRA and its parent in the north NMWTRA, there will be well-argued papers submitted to Natural Resources Wales for swathes of tree-cutting licences. But is anyone anywhere keeping an accurate tally? They are at it everywhere. While children and families fervently, with much well-being, are planting saplings as fast as they can, down the road the high-vis orange-fluorescent-suited men are hacking more down. Might we be even slipping backwards in Wales's tally on tree cover? (see p. 12)

The building of HS2 and its destruction of ancient woodlands are understandably now a cause célèbre. It's a battle of time perspectives. A few minutes off a train journey as against hundreds of years growth of a vital carbon resource and places of inestimable beauty. The battles between activists and contractors have been furious. In contrast there seems to be utter silence around the dualling of the final section of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road from Dowlais Top to Hirwaun. Maybe at the 1998 public inquiry voices of objection were raised but no doubt at that time there seemed bigger issues to worry about than tree felling.

Like the Clydach Gorge section currently nearing completion, these are the two sections of the A465 that descend from the tree-less moorlands and plunge down into the forested valley bottoms. The felling numbers executed this year are devastating. There is desolation everywhere you look.

A few more minutes off a journey, a supposed economic boost (is anyone doing post-construction economic assessment?) and a lowering of road accident numbers will all be familiar arguments. Having invested billons from the public purse in this 30-mile piece of road infrastructure, it would seem maybe madness not to finish the final section. The trees have already gone anyway. Ironically, the Welsh Government has appointed the Future Valleys consortium (FCC, Roadbridge, Meridiam, Alun Griffiths (Contractors) and Atkins) for the work. What future exactly, one might ask?

Maybe in a world not so very far away from now of electric-vehicle car sharing and Zoom cutting commuting volumes allied to de-growth and purchasing less stuff, we will reflect on all this madness with a wry smile at our human folly?

A new normal

Jonathan Vining

If there was ever a chapter of modernism that the general public seemed incapable of coming to love, value or understand, it was Brutalism. Ignored by the historic listings of Wales and so often facing the unthinking demolition hammer, Jonathan Vining argues there are important lessons to learn from it for our minimal-carbon, retrofit future.

Britain was a different country – one transformed for the better – after Suez and the coming of rock-and-roll in the mid-1950s.[1] We are indebted to the renowned historian Eric Hobsbawm that we tend now to think about our history by decades, epochs or eras, rather than by the reigns of monarchs. He identified this time as one of the two watersheds in post-war Britain – the other being the 1979 Thatcher government that ended the post-war consensus of social democracy through pursuing a polarising domestic policy programme based on free-market economics with the aim of reducing the role of government and increasing self-reliance. The architectural style of Brutalism broadly spanned between these two turning points – starting in the mid-1950s at a time of collectivism and ending in a society transforming into individualism.

Sweetness into light

The years immediately following the second world war were a time of economic slump. Food and clothes were rationed more severely than during the final years of the war and there was a scarcity of building materials such as steel. But it was also a time warmed by a unity of purpose and one of great change: by 1948 the railways, coal mines, steel industry and the Bank of England had all been nationalised; a programme of social welfare recommended by the Beveridge report had been put in place, including the creation of the National Health Service; and legislation on town and country planning, green belts and new towns had been enacted.

Sweden was the dominant architectural influence on Britain in these years because of its social democratic model and strong architectural

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1 A memorable image: the elemental forms of the great hall/Theatr Ardudwy and the students' hall of residence 'bookend' the buildings of Plas Wern Fawr and resonate with Harlech Castle beyond (photo: Jonathan Vining).

culture of building in a romantic modernist manner, sensitive to landscape and nature. The predominant architectural style of the new housing, schools and the first embodiment of the welfare state in the UK, built with speed and the economic use of hard-pressed resources, was termed New Empiricism by the *Architectural Review* – and 'New Brutalism' emerged as an avant-garde response to a decade of this bland, polite modernism derived from Scandinavia.

Defining the brut

The origin of the label for this new, more 'direct' kind of architecture is disputed but it's a common misconception that it derives from the word 'brutal'. Rather, its potential sources range from the Swedish architect Hans Asplund's use in 1950 of *nybrutalism* to characterise a masonry house being built at that time in Uppsala, through Le Corbusier's use of *béton brut* – French for raw concrete – during the construction of the Marseille Unité d'habitation, to the *art brut* movement created by Jean Dubuffet. It was the architectural critic and historian, Reyner Banham, who sought to champion the new movement, placing the pioneering ideas of Alison and Peter Smithson at the centre of it. In his seminal essay of 1955 – which focused on the Smithsons' Hunstanton Secondary Modern School with its steel, concrete and brickwork expressed clearly within its Palladian proportions and symmetry – he concluded that the attributes of the New Brutalism were '1, Memorability as an image; 2, Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3, Valuation of Materials [for their inherent qualities] "as found"'.[2] For the Smithsons, though, the New Brutalism was also an ethical proposition that combined a reverence for materials and clarity of structural expression – establishing an affinity between the building and its users – with the social integrity of an architecture particular to its time and cultural context, in the service of society.

By the end of the 1950s, Brutalism had extended beyond the UK and acquired an international currency. The greatest impetus to this was the late work of Le Corbusier (such as the Maisons-Jaoul, Paris and the Unité d'habitation, Marseille) in which he reinterpreted (and monumentalised) a Mediterranean vernacular, abandoning the machine aesthetic of smooth surfaces and volumes in favour of an expressive vocabulary of exposed coarse-textured materials like brick, stone and concrete. The Brutalism that appeared worldwide in the 1960s had little to do with the Smithsons' radical ideas and ethical framework, though, and faded into a pursuit of stylistic and visual traits of bold, sculptural forms and tough, unfinished materials. Brutalism became the architectural idiom in which our post-war cities, and the progressive virtues of the welfare state, were made; viewed later as being ambitious, bold and utopian on the one hand, or inhuman, monstrous or dystopian on the other.

Back in vogue

Inevitably, as generations pass, a reassessment or reinterpretation of earlier ambitions heaves into view. The revival of interest in post-war architecture over the last ten years or so in the UK, following decades of demonisation, is palpable – and Brutalism itself has become much more in vogue not least through the proliferation of photographs on social-media accounts. Jonathan Meades, the writer and film maker, who was in the van advocating the 'concrete poetry' of Brutalism, believes that 'worthwhile architecture is always ahead of popular taste' and that it can take decades for the public appreciation to turn in its favour.[3] Accordingly, over the last decade, there has been a profusion of books published on the subject although, with one or two exceptions, it's the usual story of disregard as far as Wales is concerned. For example, there's nothing from Wales in Barnabas Calder's *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism*, 'a personal selection rather than an attempt at an objective UK top ten';[4] nothing in John Grindrod's *How to Love Brutalism*[5] or his *Concretopia*;[6] and nothing either in Owen Hopkins's *Lost Futures*.[7]

Of course, like much of architectural modernism in Wales, you can count on the fingers of one hand the Brutalist buildings in Wales that have been listed (Little Orchard, Dinas Powys is the best known example, see *Touchstone*, 2016, p. 12) and that is emblematic of the overall inadequacy of Cadw's listing of the post-war period, about which I have written before in these pages (see *Touchstone*: 2016, pp. 8–15; 2017, p. 67; 2018, p. 38; and 2019, p. 56). Not to mention the others that we have lost in recent years such as Newport Comprehensive School, Bettws (see *Touchstone*, 2016, p. 15) or the police headquarters in Wrexham (see *Touchstone*, 2019, p. 56), which was demolished on 1 November last year. But, there are still some strikingly good examples of Brutalist architecture surviving in Wales, and perhaps the most startling omission from all these recent books is the apogee of the style in Wales, Theatr Ardudwy at Coleg Harlech in Gwynedd (*see 1–7*).

A striking shift

Built originally as a replacement great hall (the first was destroyed by fire during the night of 6 May 1968) of a now defunct residential college for adults, it followed on from an earlier commission for a students' hall of residence at the college. The two buildings are situated south-west of Harlech Castle on a steeply sloping site overlooking Tremadog Bay. They visually 'bookend' the rock-faced classical buildings of Plas Wern Fawr by the Scottish architect George Walton in which the college was founded in 1927 – the hall of residence (1968) to the south and the great hall/Theatr Ardudwy (1973) to the north.

Both buildings were designed by the same architect, Colwyn Foulkes & Partners, the practice founded in Colwyn Bay in 1910 by Sidney Colwyn Foulkes (1884–1971) and which is now in its third generation and based in London. Foulkes worked in a number of styles, with an

2 The reinforced concrete structure of the great hall/Theatr Ardudwy is clearly expressed on the roadside; the curtain-walled lift tower element is an early 21st-century addition.

3 The part semi-circular auditorium has classical Greek precedents and is renowned for its excellent sight lines and unique acoustic.

4 The inherent qualities of ribbed and fair-faced concrete, and of sheet copper, are all valued in this apogee of Brutalism in Wales.

5 Gerald Latter at 90 in December 2018, the project architect of the theatre and student accommodation tower (photo: Jonathan Vining).

6 The dramatic raking concrete supports to the auditorium. Distinct function expressed forcefully.

7 The bridge link from the college's courtyard level alights half way up the student tower at a principal storey of common rooms from which there are extensive views over Tremadog Bay.

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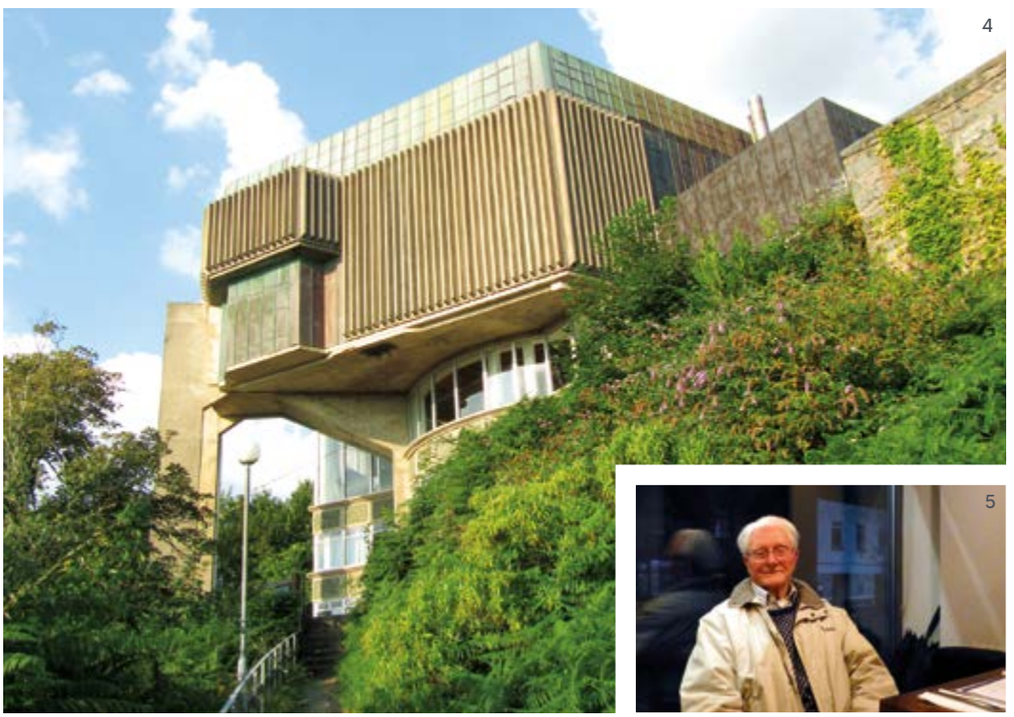

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inclination towards classicism, but always with an excellent understanding and use of materials. He left a legacy of 'early modern' architecture of cinemas designed in the 1920s and 1930s, and several well-regarded public housing schemes built after the war in an arts-and-crafts manner, such as Cae Bricks, Beaumaris (*Touchstone*, 2016, p. 12). But, what is striking is how completely different in style the two Brutalist buildings at Coleg Harlech are from those for which the practice was hitherto renowned.

Gerald Latter, who joined the practice in 1962 and became a partner in the early 1970s, led the design of both buildings. He had trained at Liverpool in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and worked for Farmer & Dark in London before winning a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania School of Fine Arts where he studied for a master's degree in city planning, graduating early in 1958. Latter was 90 when I interviewed him in December 2018: he remembered Louis Kahn being in the studio at Penn (although he wasn't taught by him) and of making two tours of the USA during his time there – to the west coast in 1957 and the east coast the following year (where Paul Rudolph was reinventing the use of concrete) – absorbing a built environment different from what he had previously known. Whether or not these influences rubbed off on Latter is moot but, like many architects at the time, he didn't subscribe to the label Brutalism (understandable given the negative connotations with the English meaning of the word brutal as savagely violent). Rather, he thought of his designs for Coleg Harlech in terms of their individual programmes and how the buildings might respond to their dramatic setting.

For the hall of residence, Latter proposed a narrow, 12-storey tower on flat land at the south end of the college, having been inspired by Gollins,

Melvin & Ward's student towers at Loughborough University, which he had visited.[8] The hall of residence is accessed via a bridge from approximately the level of Coleg Harlech's library and courtyard, in order to 'unify the college'. It alights at the sixth floor – a high, principal storey of common rooms from which there are magnificent views over the bay. The student bedrooms are on the floors above and below. Underneath the bridge, on the hillside, a natural waterfall runs over projecting rocks: a Romantic gesture. The concrete structure of the tower was slip formed, and the use of repetitive, exposed-aggregate concrete panels for the external cladding was a direct response to the 'robust context'.[9]

Latter's concept for the great hall was based on a part semi-circular auditorium with a raked floor and flat stage, fitting centrally over three levels of classrooms. Facilities were built in so that the auditorium could be used for concerts, film projection and drama and the design allowed also for the auditorium to be adapted into a fully equipped theatre, which it later became, and for the building to have public use independent of the running of the college. The angled supports of the raking floor of the auditorium are of fair-faced concrete and expressed externally; the lecture theatre is clad in vertically ribbed concrete and sheet copper; and the precast concrete panels around the classrooms have exposed Cruggion aggregate like the hall of residence. The building's generally cylindrical form is not only a memorable image in its own right but also resonates with the castle; together with the hall of residence and the original college buildings, they form a well-orchestrated architectural group in relation to Harlech Castle.

Although, in 2016, Cadw confirmed the inclusion of Theatr Ardudwy in the overall Grade II* listing of Coleg Harlech, bafflingly, the hall of residence was not. Now, both of these exceptional buildings are disused and under threat. I understand that Plas Wern Fawr and Theatr Ardudwy were sold at auction last August and that other buildings on the estate were to be offered as separate lots. Coleg Harlech was set up originally as a 'second chance' college for people who never had a first chance: will these striking works of architecture be given a second chance through creative reuse or will they be lost and contribute to the ever-growing void being manufactured in Wales's architectural history?

Face the brutal truth

In Hobsbawm's terms we might well be at another watershed moment now with the Covid-19 pandemic, which has not only resulted in the early death of thousands of people in the UK but has highlighted how 'each of us is only as healthy as our neighbour, as the person we sit next to on the bus, and as the strangers we shop with in the supermarket'.[10] Dare we hope that in a post-Covid-19 'new normal' we'll focus less on individual self-interest and instead start to think and act collectively again – critically with an accelerated response to anthropogenic climate change?

In our attempts to limit escalating temperatures, man-made greenhouse gas emissions in the built environment must be reduced significantly – both in terms of energy use of built assets and emissions embodied in the construction and maintenance of buildings. Constructing a building is a carbon-hungry activity. Research by the RICS has estimated that over a third of the lifetime carbon emissions from a speculative office building occur during the construction process; for a typical residential block it's over a half.[11] Why waste existing buildings that embody so much carbon unnecessarily, particularly those in which much of the construction is made of such a high-embodied energy material such as concrete? At this time of climate-change crisis, the default and responsible position should be to imaginatively reuse buildings – not to demolish them, build new ones instead and incur the carbon cost in doing so.

Through its RetroFirst campaign *The Architects' Journal* is promoting the reuse of existing buildings as a neglected opportunity for reducing the consumption of resources. It has lobbied the UK government for reforms in tax (cutting VAT on refurbishment, repair and maintenance), policy (promoting the reuse of existing buildings through the town planning and building regulation systems) and procurement (retrofit solutions first for publicly funded projects). However, at the time of writing, the *AJ* had not contacted the Welsh Government, where reforms in connection with the last two would fall within its competency. So, isn't it time for the Welsh Government to introduce in the planning system in Wales a presumption in favour of the reuse of existing buildings, unless there is compelling evidence to support their redevelopment?

Notwithstanding the greater interest these days in post-war architecture, it can still be vigorously unpopular with the general public, and the misapprehension that a building can't be changed once it has been listed is widespread. With post-war heritage assets – particularly those built during the period of energy wealth before the 1970s' oil crisis that have minimal insulation and rely heavily on mechanical systems to provide a comfortable internal environment and electricity for lighting – we may have to accept a different, less precious attitude from the keep-the-original-historic-fabric-at-all-costs philosophy of conservation. Rather, we should allow greater intervention in their refurbishment or conversion to new uses, while protecting the overall architectural ideas and significance of the buildings as far as possible.

Not a style but a sensibility

Of all the recent books published about Brutalism, the most purposeful and thought provoking is Simon Henley's *Redefining Brutalism*. In this, he argues that Brutalism is not just a *style* but primarily a *sensibility*, and one that has long roots and endures in the work of some architects today. The legacy of Brutalism's high period 'is not a troubling and hostile style, but a realisation that buildings can be made a certain way. Today, architects are in retreat. Components are manufactured and buildings assembled, rarely constructed'.[12] Where is today's sense of craft that was evident in the best of these buildings? Although, we cannot, and should not, build in the same manner that we did 50 years ago, we could in the 'new normal' start to reclaim the values of an architecture committed to social values and a strong public life.

Jonathan Vining is an architect and urban designer. He is a commissioner of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

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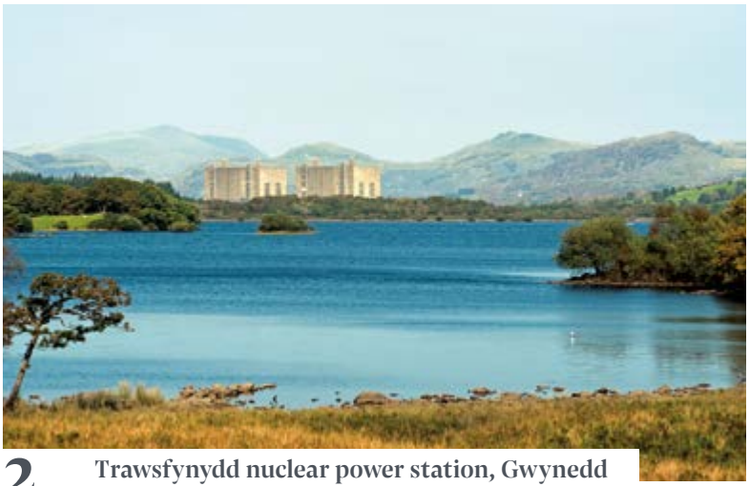
Six more Brutalist survivors

Photos: Jonathan Vining

1 St David's Lutheran Church, Fairwater, Cardiff

T Alwyn Lloyd and Gordon, 1960–61

A distinguished building with honestly expressed construction and materials – mainly brickwork and rough, board-finished concrete – and a clear plan influenced by the Liturgical Movement. The roof, which is a folded concrete slab roof on two deep parallel beams, allows daylight to enter along the sides of the church, and at the east end to illuminate the altar. The building won the RIBA Bronze Medal for Wales in 1961 and is listed Grade II.



2 Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, Gwynedd

Basil Spence & Partners with CEA architects and engineers and Sylvia Crowe, landscape consultant, 1959–63

The towering, sculptural form of the reactor buildings juxtaposed with the rugged Moelwyn mountains make a magnificent sight driving north along the A470 in the Snowdonia National Park. The station closed in 1993 and is now in the process of being decommissioned; originally this involved an ill-judged notion of reducing the height of the reactor buildings by more than a half to 'improve' their visual appearance. The latest proposal is even worse: complete demolition and the construction of a new radioactive waste store.

3 Zoology laboratories, University College of North Wales, Bangor

Sir Percy Thomas and Son, 1969

This 5/6-storey Brutalist pavilion houses teaching and research facilities with a library and zoological museum, and is now known as Bangor University's Brambell Building. The top two storeys project over a four-storey colonnade of bush-hammered concrete giving the principal elevation an almost temple-like presence looming over Deiniol Road – albeit the elevational expression of the accommodation behind the colonnade is asymmetric. The idiosyncratic main stair is formed in board-marked concrete with rounded, triangular openings through its structural core.

4 Cefn Isaf, Cefncoedycymer

J R Gammon, H O Williams & Associates, 1966–69

Cefn Isaf consists of 34 dwellings in two parallel blocks, linked by three footbridges over the open space between. The design was inspired by Swiss precedents, which the architects had visited, and warranted a 16-page building study in *The Architects' Journal* of 25 March 1970. Exposed concrete and light-grey silicate brickwork predominate, although the later replacement roofs and the glazing-in of the terraces now compromise the original appearance. The practice's slightly later Tŷ-dawel housing for older people in Tonyrefail, which was similarly acclaimed in its day, was redeveloped in 2008–09.

5 **Tâf Fechan Water Board headquarters, Nelson**

J R Gammon, H O Williams & Associates, 1971

Now the headquarters of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, the facility is in a rural location on sloping land atop mine workings. To prevent possible subsidence, this admirable building was designed as four flat-roofed pavilions of restricted plan area, with varying levels of transparency, linked by bridges. One block is enclosed and modelled with ribbed concrete; two have close-set concrete mullions with infill glazing; while, the canteen and dining room is encircled with full-height curtain walling. All are carefully and consistently detailed. A fifth block for – technical services – was added in 1986 by the same architect. A good candidate for listing, surely?

6 **Argoed High School, Bryn-y-baal, Mold**

K J Denley, Clwyd county architect
(J Brian Davies, assistant-in-charge), 1977–81

In the idiom of the Greater London Council's now-demolished Pimlico School, London, Argoed High School is principally constructed of exposed, board-marked concrete and glass, with obligatory Corbusian gargoyles. Slate hanging – a nod to contextualism – relieves the sloping, glazed facades to the north-east. The school celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2019 and is a clear candidate for sensitive refurbishment and reuse, and of listing, not the demolition and redevelopment that is currently on the cards.

Never too late for the twentieth century

St David's Day was particularly special this year. With an encyclopaedic online lecture on Welsh modernism by Jonathan Vining (*left*), the new Welsh arm of the UK's Twentieth Century Society – C20 Cymru – was suddenly made very public. The evidence was laid out with startling clarity. Wales did twentieth-century architecture and some of it was very fine and deserved proper public recognition. More than recognition was the need for public appreciation. As of October 2020, C20 Cymru had been ratified as the latest part of the C20 Society family, for which much of the kudos must go to the chair, Susan Fielding of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), for all the effort and commitment she put into the group's establishment.

As her article in the latest edition of the C20 Society's magazine, C20, notes:

'Wales has a rich and distinctive variety of twentieth century buildings, structures and landscapes, but little of this has been recorded or researched *(despite Vining's gargantuan efforts: Ed)* and levels of public appreciation or statutory protection of twentieth century assets are low. There have been major losses: Brynmawr Rubber Factory, built 1945–1951 by Architects Co-Partnership and Ove Arup & Partners was demolished in in 2001 despite its Grade II* listing (the first post-war building to be listed in the UK) and campaigning by the C20 Society, Bettws High School, Newport, by Eldred Evans and David Shalev 1969-1972, was demolished in 2009 after recommendation for listing was declined, while most recently the iconic tower of the North Wales Police Headquarters (Eric Langford Lewis & Stuart Brown, Flintshire Architects department, 1975) at Wrexham was toppled to accommodate a Lidl store. We are soon to see BBC Broadcasting House Llandaff face the same fate, making way for a housing estate, again despite campaigning by the C20 Society and recommendation for listing from Cadw: Welsh Government Historic Environment Service.'

With the pen of Jonathan Vining, *Touchstone* has been campaigning for years to shift cultural perceptions of Wales's post-1914 built heritage. There has been stubborn resistance in some quarters.

It was the good services of C20 that Vining called on to add to the substantial case to Cadw for the listing of Theatr Ardudwy at Harlech by Colwyn Foulkes. That time Cadw relented and included it in the overall listing of Coleg Harlech – but not the student tower (*see photos 1, pp. 18,19 and 7, p. 20*).

Even before the millennium, working with the then head of the Welsh School of Architecture, Malcom Parry, Vining had been travelling the country photographing and archiving the historical pedigree of the many remarkable twentieth-century buildings across Wales. Since Parry retired, Vining has continued almost single-handed. In 2019 he was appointed as a commissioner of the RCAHMW, a body that has a sympathetic eye for all centuries of architecture and which is now embarking on a major project to record and understand Wales's twentieth-century built heritage. Vining has a book on the iconic modernist work in Wales of architect Bill Davies in the pipeline and has been quietly relentless in his championing of the best of twentieth-century architecture in Wales. This was a public outing on St David's Day that he well deserved. We owe him.

Note: C20 Cymru will be organising an accessible and engaging programme of talks, tours, day-schools and weekend visits, in both English and Welsh once lockdown restrictions are lifted. C20 Cymru can be followed on both Twitter and Instagram at @C20Cymru, and details of future events will be posted across its social media accounts in addition to the C20 Society website. If you would like to get involved in the work, please email Susan Fielding at C20Cymru@outlook.com. She would love to hear from you!

Jonathan Vining's lecture is available to view free of charge on the Twentieth Century Society's YouTube channel.

1

Health on a hill

1 Single-bed rooms have generous windows to long distance views to the landscape.

2 Set into the brow of an existing hill looking north, the new landforms have been sculpted to present a gradual opening up of a view to the overall scale of the facility for visitors as they approach.

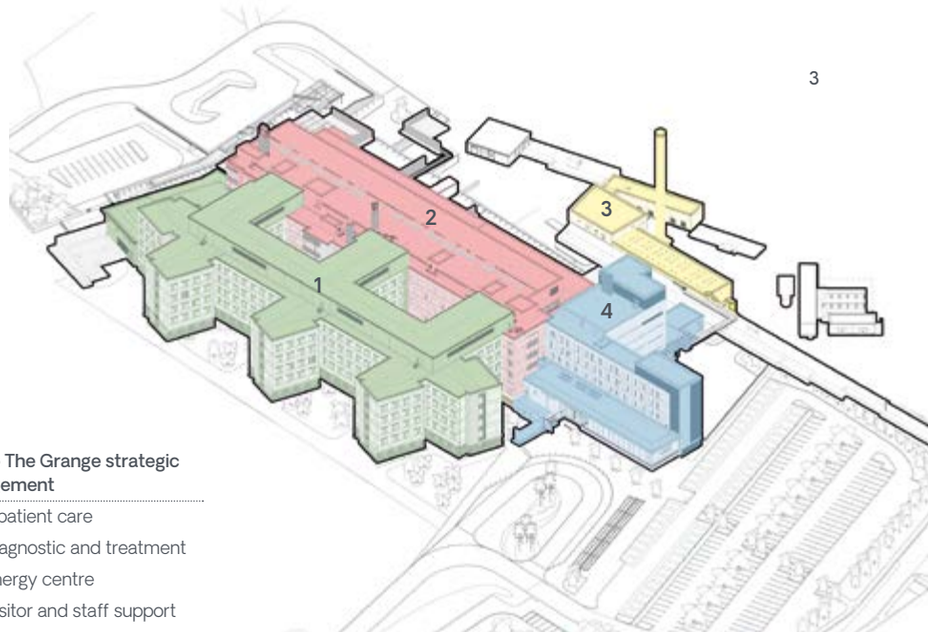
3 Key components of the critical care provision.

4 Organising axis and landscape concepts for the courtyards.

5 The pedestrian approach on the axis from the walled garden.

6 Site plan. There are now further car parks to the right of the plan.

3



2

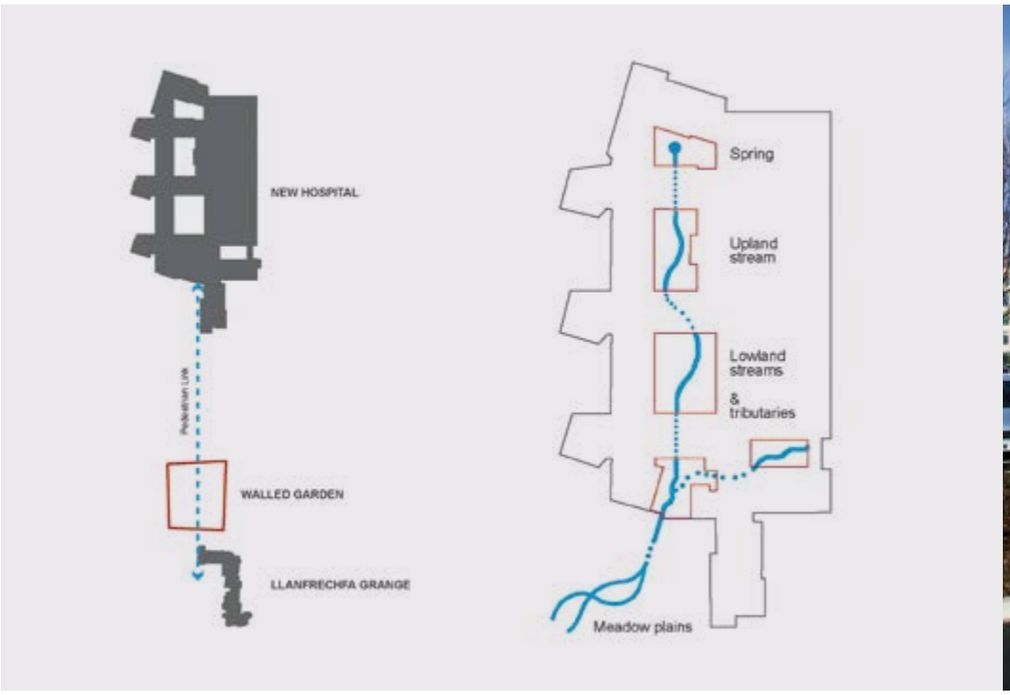
Key to The Grange strategic arrangement

1 Inpatient care

2 Diagnostic and treatment

3 Energy centre

4 Visitor and staff support



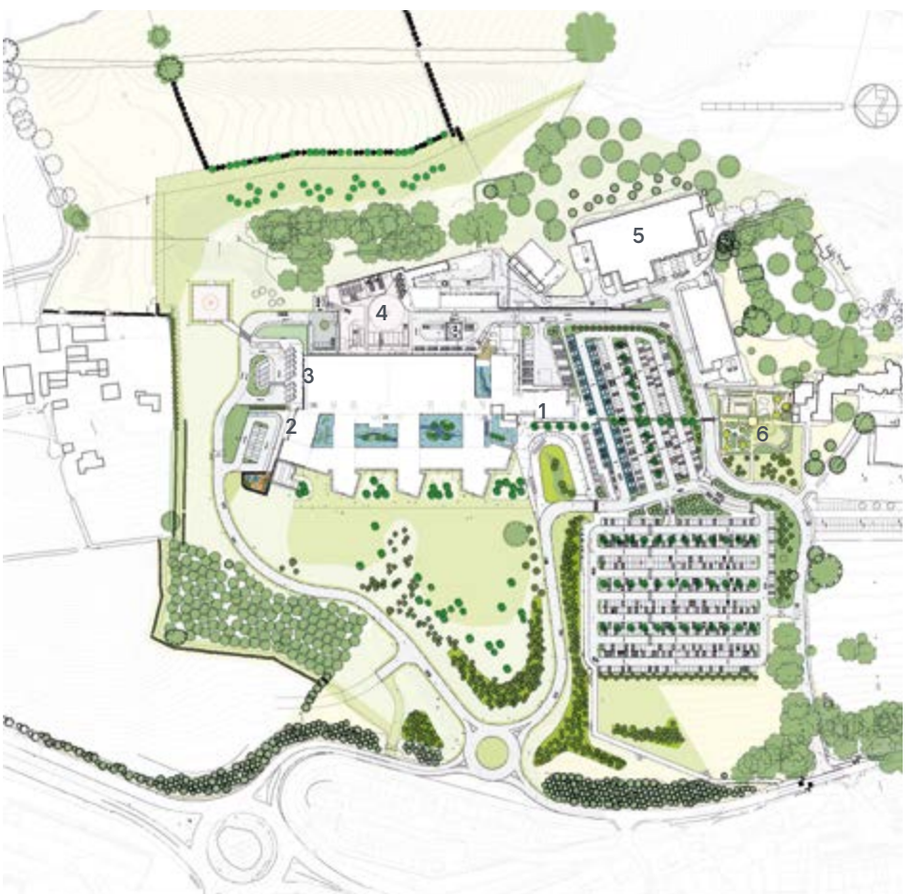
4

5

strategic diagrams & site plan

Key to site plan

1 Staff and visitor entrance
2 Children's emergency
3 Emergency arrivals
4 Services delivery
5 Existing laundry
6 Existing walled garden to The Grange house



6

Wales is leading the UK again on commissioning progressive, leading hospital architecture. *Touchstone* takes a socially distanced overview of this groundbreaking facility.

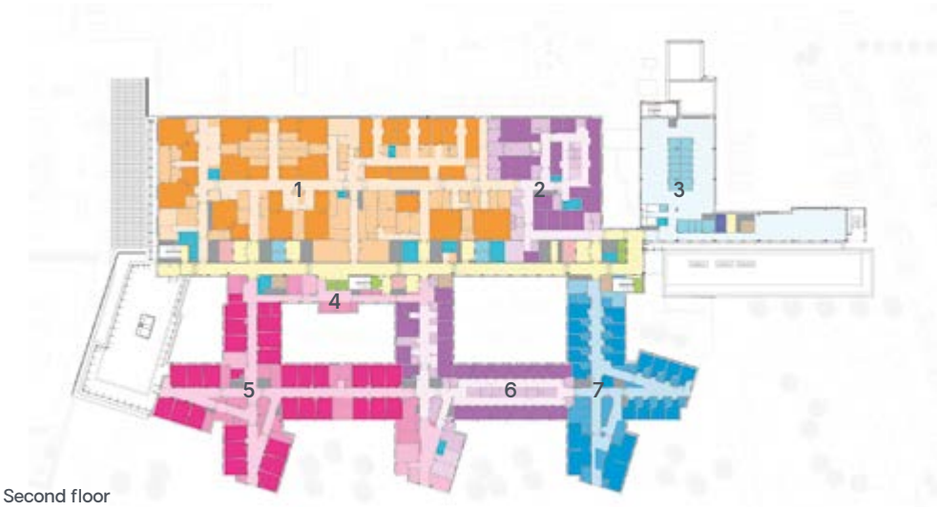
Some might think it's just mere coincidence that Wales's Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) in the former area of Gwent has been at the leading edge of health and care provision innovation in the UK for more than a decade. Of course the history books remind us that the NHS owes it origins to pre-second world war Tredegar in Gwent and that extraordinary socialist post-war-firebrand-politician, Aneurin Bevan.

The Ebbw Vale hospital that opened in December 2010 took his actual name. It started on site in the sixtieth anniversary year of the NHS. Another facility, Ystrad Fawr, followed on, opening in March 2012. They were both groundbreaking because they pursued a policy of providing single-bed en-suite rooms as the dominant mode of accommodation, to offer dignity, privacy and it was hoped better and safer care. Feedback and learning has been constant, and this has fed into the next leap of this innovatory health board, the Special Critical Care Centre at The Grange University Hospital, Llanfrechfa.

While other similar facilities may be following in the UK and in other parts of Wales, this is the leader, opening in November 2020, four months ahead of its expected completion date.

For the region served by the health board it concentrates specialist surgical expertise and

Floor plans



Second floor

First floor

Ground floor

technology in one hub or 'mother ship'. It aims to cancel out the logjams historically experienced in former emergency departments spread across the region. It's a 'hub-and-spokes' approach where patients requiring serious emergency treatment come to The Grange's focus of best expertise providing a 24/7 service. A patient's stay could be for just three days of intense treatment and care before being returned to the local community hospital or even to home to fully recover and be near relatives and friends.

Important lessons have been learnt from Ebbw Vale and Ystrad Fawr. The two-storey, lengthy, single-sided circulation routes around generous landscaped courtyards at Ebbw Vale have been dramatically shortened. The number of storeys has been raised to four. Single beds with in-board en-suites, as opposed to nested or back-to-back arrangements at Ebbw Vale, are now grouped in eights, some inevitably around courtyards, but a considerable number with magnificent long distant views over Cwmbran to the landscape beyond. Windows to rooms are generous. More nursing care is closer to hand. The whole floor-planning template has been compacted, some around courtyards, others in wings projecting into the landscape with a cunning skew-in-floor plan form that means no dead-end corridors, a chance to have short routes with vistas, and avoiding the need for too many escape stairs.

You don't have a large central nursing station serving a series of wards. The stations are much smaller and decentralised, each to serve only eight single-patient rooms. Most critical of all is a break away from that experience, so familiar to so many of us visiting hospitals, where patients, visitors, doctors, support staff and nurses collide in the same circulation system. It always seemed crazy, so inefficient, so dangerous. Security concerns, potential for cross infection, constant interruptions to nursing and medical staff distracting them from the critical care they were administering, were always headaches. Shared staff and patient lifts had constantly to be evacuated of visitors to allow bed patients to be conveyed to surgery. All this is avoided at The Grange; after all this is 'critical care' – and it is really critical – and of course now there is the pandemic. The single-bedroom solution was very prescient, in that regard.

So, medical staff and patients access all critical-care facilities and procedures by dedicated lifts that deliver them after surgery direct to wings and courtyard groupings of single bedrooms. The master plan concentrates the whole zone of a deep-plan longditudinal medical area that then allows areas of specialist surgical care to be related to dedicated zones of single en-suite bedrooms, but the zone planning and circulation to those rooms intelligently also allows those numbers

of dedicated rooms to expand and contract as demand fluctuates. Long-life, loose-fit has been well understood here.

The visiting public only circulate horizontally on the ground floor and use one of two colour-coded public lift systems to deliver them to visitor holding spaces above on each floor, so that staff can then greet and guide them efficiently to the right room, thus avoiding all the creative chaos that has been the experience of so many hospital interiors.

There are no day out-patient services here. Visitors are coming to be with their relatives in single generous bedrooms. So, there are no vast ground-floor waiting areas with public restaurants and other facilities serving them. The entrance experience is more intimate, coming into an open, airy, daylight-filled two-storey volume with café and rest area facilities above for staff and medical students and a relatively intimate small reception desk just inside the entrance. The first public access lift is immediately in view. The other is further down a single-axis corridor, avoiding those previous experiences of endless corridor turns and being lost in the bowels of the machine. Simplicity de-stresses.

Since the days of Florence Nightingale and the Crimean war, off-site factory prefabrication has been a familiar part of hospital construction procurement. Enthusiasm for it has waxed and waned over the generations; the resulting architecture has varied in quality but here at The Grange, all those involved in the project have recognised the massive commitment of contractor Laing O'Rourke and all the consultants to maximising off-site fabrication. This has meant colossal investment in research and prefabrication technology by the contractor. (Another architect team at BDP with Laing O' Rourke have executed the new Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, which opened in October 2015, with similar commitments to off-site fabrication, but the end aesthetic result of the exterior architecture there suggests that the deadening, limiting hand of earlier stabs at prefabrication, standardisation and modularisation have been thankfully bypassed.) This allied to the use of BIM throughout the procurement team has clearly been a major component of finishing the project ahead of time but, equally importantly, allowing all parts of the commissioning client and its prospective user-clinicians and support staff to comprehensively engage in developing easily visualised design proposals. Adjustments, radical changes, all can be immediately communicated to all the design team with their design and cost implications speedily understood using the BIM system. Everyone is on board instantly with what is at stake and all current adjustments. This is smart procurement.

Grange hospital floor plans

Second floor plan key (facing page, top)

1 Interventional services
2 Cardiac services
3 Clinical offices
4 Visitor lift and waiting area
5 Critical care
6 Cardiac services
7 Inpatient unit

First floor plan key (facing page, middle)

1 Emergency department
2 Radiology
3 Clinical offices
4 Restaurant
5 Visitor lift and waiting area
6 Children's assessment unit
7 Children's inpatient unit
8 Inpatient unit

Ground floor plan key (facing page, bottom)

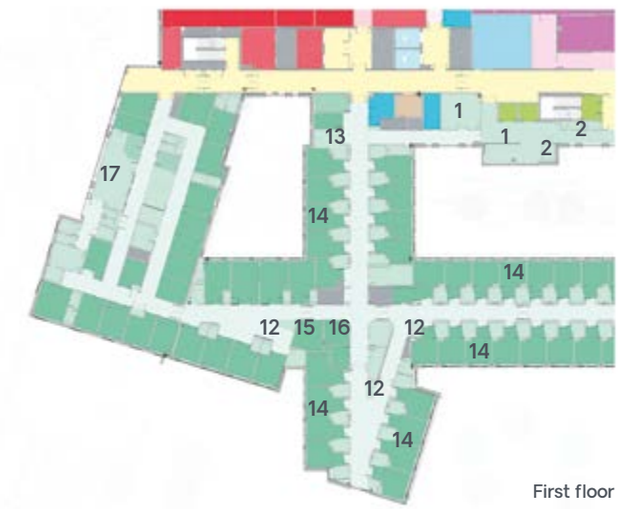
1 Mortuary
2 Pharmacy
3 Facilities management reception and distribution
4 Pathology
5 Discharge lounge
6 Visitor lifts
7 Adult inpatient unit
8 Main staff and visitor entrance
9 Staff changing

Key to second and first floor partial ward plans (right)

1 Public lifts and waiting/holding area
2 WC
3 Reception
4 Relatives' lounge
5 Disposal hold (waste)
6 Interview/counselling rooms
7 Bedroom (inpatient care unit)
8 As above with hoist
9 Staff perch for data entry
10 Utility (clean)
11 Toilet and shower
12 Staff base
13 Patients' quiet room
14 Children's bedroom en suite
15 Sensory room
16 Treatment room
17 Children's emergency and treatment

Ward plan template variations

Second floor



First floor

7 Each floor has a waiting/holding area as you come directly out of the public visitor-only lift, with adjacent counselling/interview rooms. You are invited by staff to the individual en-suite room of the patient. The glass screens are by Catrin Jones.

8

9

En-suite room

10

Design criteria for the single bedroom/en-suite:

Identical single bedrooms provide consistency for nursing staff.

En-suite (yellow) located on bedhead wall with handrail to allow patient access without crossing the room – reduces risk of patient falls.

Spayed bedroom entrance allows staff to monitor patient from the circulation space

Interlocking plan form designed to minimise nursing travel between patients.

Distinct nursing zone (pink) and zones for relatives (light blue).

Optimum bedhead to window relationship for patient views out.

Clinical handwash convenient for nursing staff.

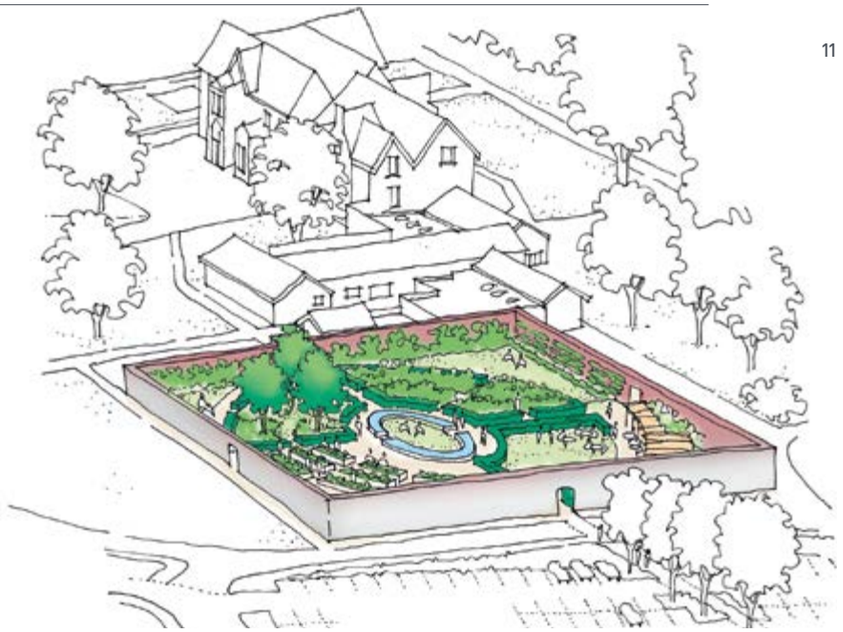
En-suite generous accessibility for nursing care.

Landscape is where health and well-being starts. Daylight, fresh air, moving water, a closeness to nature and plant life, sunlight on the skin, a distant prospect to changing weather patterns, seeing the dawn and the setting day, all these are therapy. Architects Kieren Morgan and Colin Hockley, whose deep involvement in Ebbw Vale and Ystrad Fawr and countless other health provision across Wales, have fought for those healing qualities in project after project. It has been a constant battle. Installation costs, maintenance costs, and a peculiar obsession with patient safety are what frequently defeat them. All architecture and master planning should start with a landscape vision, particularly places of healing.

The landscape prospect for The Grange was potentially magnificent. The chance to revive a neglected, sizeable walled garden close by and integrate it as a major organising movement axis of the site plan; a hill-top prospect to distant landscapes; shelter belts of existing trees; a chance to bring that landscape right up to the bedroom windows; a series of courtyards picking up on that landscape organising approach and movement axis; all these seemed in prospect. Some even waxed lyrical about the karmic qualities for stressed staff of commune with a natural retreat in the walled garden. Procurement of locally sourced horticulture with involvement of staff or local volunteers was imagined.

The final siting of the building agreed with the local community and planning authority meant sizeable re-sculpting of existing landforms and contours was needed to link the building into existing road infrastructure. The building's sections and plan would be aided by cutting a lower level of vital and well-organised back-of-house servicing out of sight, at the same time allowing accident and emergency services and all ambulance arrivals to enter one level up. The upside of all this remoulding of contours has meant that the public approach from the entrance roundabout to the extending two-storey arms of glazed reception building, bears

walled garden



11

8 The generous space of a single en-suite room. Rooms connect visually laterally but can be made private.

9 The main entrance space with reception desk. Unlike a more traditional hospital with day-care facilities and thus large numbers of the public visiting and waiting, there is no day care here, so an opportunity for more intimate and more tranquil public spaces on arrival.

10 En-suite room isometric and plans.

11 An outline arrangement for a redesigned existing walled garden to act as a vital breathing and relaxing space for staff and visitors with also potential for some locally procured horticulture.

12 Spectacular outlook from the first-floor staff and visitor restaurant above the main entrance.

13 The emergency/resuscitation bays.

12

13

Credits

Client: Aneurin Bevan University Health Board; contact Nicola Prygodzicz, Nicola.Prygodzicz@wales.nhs.uk

Client adviser: Gleeds, Arup

Architect, landscape architect, interior design: BDP; contact Adrian Hitchcock, Adrian.hitchcock@bdp.com

Civil, structural, transport and highways engineer: WSP; contact Stuart Renshaw, Stuart.Renshaw@wsp.com

MEPH installation: Crown House Technologies; contact Geoffrey Say, GSay@laingorourke.com

Environmental engineer: AECOM; contact Sarah Gealy, sarah.gealy@aecom.com

Contractor: Laing O'Rourke; contact David Leverton, daleverton@laingorourke.com

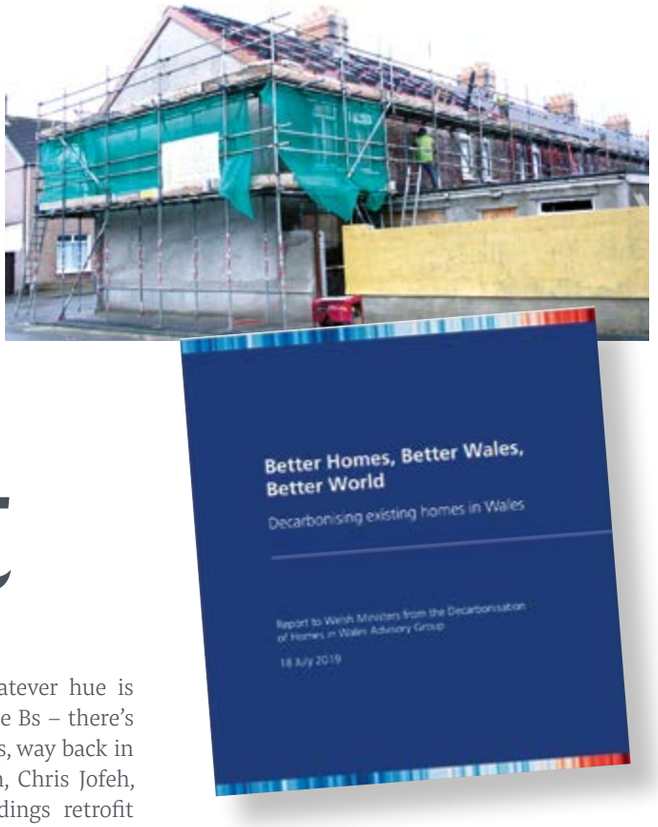
Glass architecture: Catrin Jones, www.catrinjones.co.uk

Photography: Michael Whitestone

all the hallmarks of those skilfully controlled and gradually revealing landscapes of country house architecture. It's a colossal facility but you are not aware of it on the approach as you sweep up to the front-door drop-off. This attached to the clarity of internal planning all adds to a wonderful offsetting of inevitable stress normally experienced in such a facility.

But such a centralised facility for a whole county, even with a railway station two kilometres away and a bus service to the door, will inevitably have an ocean of parked cars to handle. A landscape idea that delivers you beautifully from your car to the hospital entrance surely must start with that recognition?

The walled garden organising axis linked to new internal courtyard landscapes, and this axis being a linking route to the inevitable sizeable car parks out in the landscape, all of that has occurred. But following it through to detailed execution suggests again that the hospital world still undervalues nature's healing properties. The re-contouring of the site inevitably meant a loss of existing planting and trees yet to be fully replaced. The design team's proposals for the walled garden have not been taken on board. Moving water as a theme connecting the landscaped courtyards was refused on safety grounds. The execution in detail of it all, does not, it would seem, live up to the intense care in detail of every aspect of the design team's internal architecture. But one imagines that it could be exhilarating, a tonic for the spirit, those light filled single rooms with their generous windows giving a glorious western and southern prospect to the sky and distant horizons. The patients won't be there for long, the vast majority hopefully will be out soon. The view is of hope and coming home. Bevan would be proud of that. *Patrick Hannay*



A better, smarter fit

'Retrofit' is such an ugly word. Why don't we rename it 'responsible architecture'? But then when it comes to our current carbon-leaking housing stock in Wales, it maybe everything but architecture that will deliver the upgrade so urgently needed. Janet Marshall surveys current actions.

Everybody is at it – 'building back better', but those focused on the climate emergency ask – 'what's all this obsession with *new building*'? Just ponder the issue of embodied energy and surely you go retrofit first, use what you've already got; and before you start ogling at the latest clever new zero-carbon pilot house project, what about the leaky, hopelessly inefficient homes we already have with their fossil-fuel burning gas heating systems. We've ignored them for decades. We can't go on like this.

Despite it being what a lot of architects actually do, re-working existing buildings has always been unsexy. That's why they call it 'rehabilitation', 'retrofit', 'remodelling' – it sounds dull. The Architectural Press and *The Architects' Journal* may have published the *Redundant Industrial Buildings Handbook* at the end of the 1970s, but then we all went on a 40-year carbon binge until we woke up again in a burning world. Now *The Architects' Journal's* sole campaign in 2020 and ongoing is for the carbon benefits of retrofit and especially ones that should be VAT free

Post-covid, every politician of whatever hue is 'building back better' – it's the three Bs – there's a comforting ring to it, but in Wales, way back in 2018 with no virus on the horizon, Chris Jofeh, Arup Cardiff's former global buildings retrofit leader was invited by Julie James, the Welsh Government housing and local government minister, to lead a Decarbonisation of Homes in Wales Advisory Group. Registered social landlords, housing associations, academics, professional and commercial institutions, all their expertise was called upon. Fifteen months later, on 18 July 2019, Jofeh delivered *Better Homes, Better Wales, Better World*, three more Bs but, thankfully, no 'building', at least in the title. The challenge is far bigger than architecture or even building.

A sizeable headache

Within the advisory group's scope was all of the existing 1.4 million homes in Wales, responsible for 27% of energy consumed in Wales, 15% of all demand-side greenhouse gas emissions, 80% of them privately owned or in the hands of private landlords. How do you galvanise them to act? Each house requires a tidy sum and even when England flung money at it under its Green Homes Grant initiative, the public quickly discovered the current scale of the housing retrofit industry skilled-up to deliver serious carbon savings just wasn't there in sufficient accredited quantities. They scrapped it after six months. This is a sizeable headache. Jofeh was astute to acknowledge the contribution of the Centre for Behaviour Change at UCL to his report. That social change is considerable, and Wales will equally need all the inventive financing innovation of the UK's Green Finance Institute. Most households won't currently have the private savings required.

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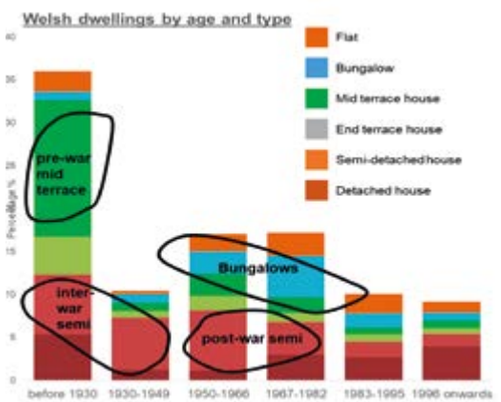
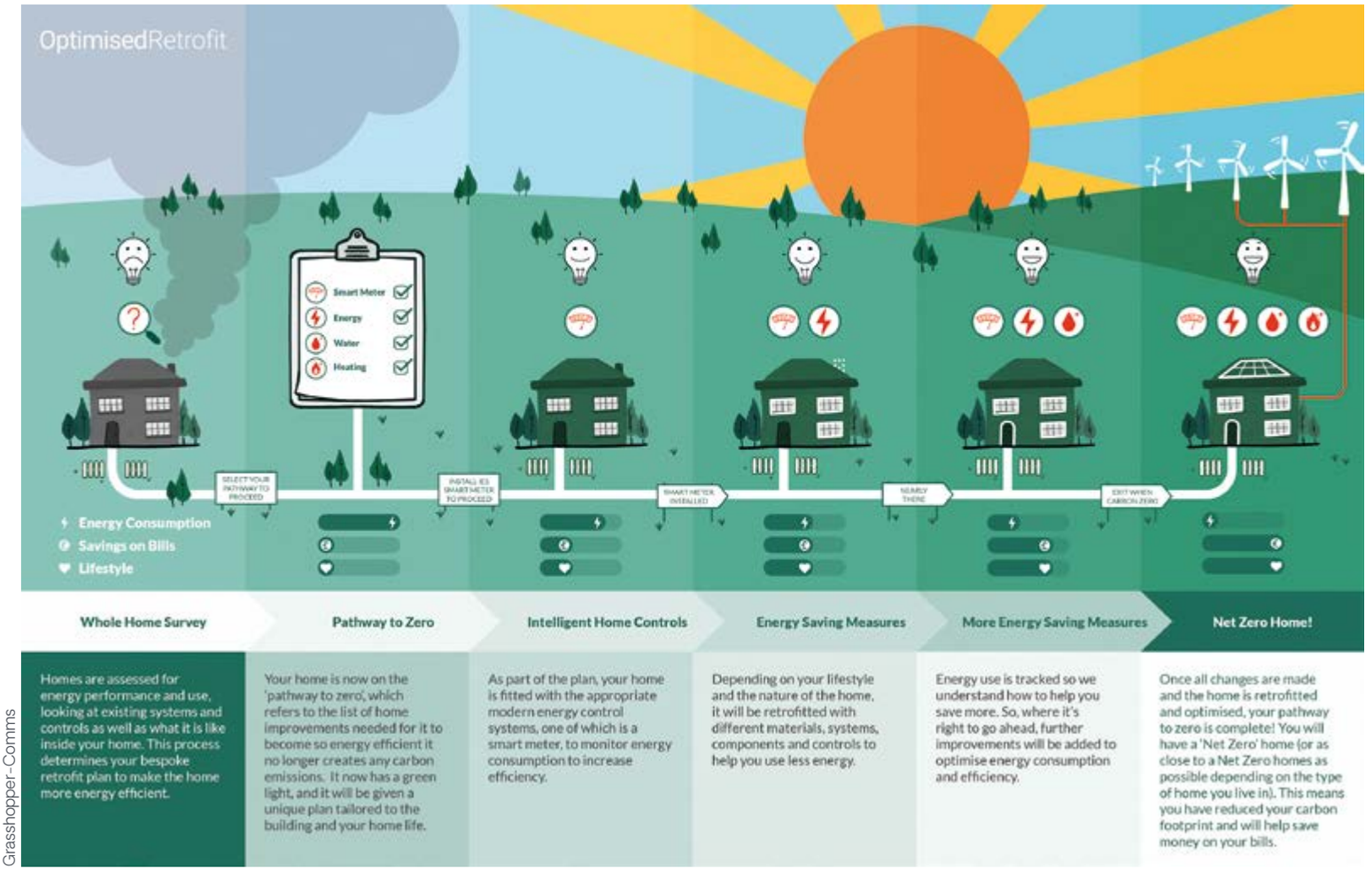


Source:
Better Homes Better Wales Better World: July 2019. p. 12



Grasshopper-Comms

A handbrake turn

In February 2017, the ever-energetic Julie James had launched the Innovative Housing Programme (IHP) seeking to turbocharge changes in new housing construction towards more off-site factory prefabrication. Ed Green and colleagues from the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA) did a lot of the heavy intellectual lifting on that policy. A profusion of IHP pilot projects, all fronted by housing associations and RSLs followed (see Touchstone, 2017, p. 22 and also this issue p. 68). Many are still being completed, but then in 2018 a handbrake turn and the focus of Welsh Government funding was no longer on just on the 'new', it altered radically towards prioritising retrofit.

Ed Green and Simon Lannon of the WSA had been busy in the background again. In September 2020 they published *Decarbonising Welsh Housing between 2020 and 2050: Stage 3: Decarbonising social housing*, a very thorough performance analysis of all the fabric-first options currently existing. (Green and Lannon had also contributed to the Jofeh report.) They used an overarching title that resonated back to equally visionary times, *Homes of today for tomorrow*.

Two months later, on 6 November 2020, James launched the £19.5 million Optimised Retrofit Programme. Also on board were ministers Kirsty Williams (education) and Ken Skates (economy, transport and north Wales). This isn't after all just a building and homes challenge. There were to be a whole series of pilot retrofit projects: four local authorities, The Vale of Glamorgan, Carmarthen, Denbighshire and Anglesey offered up pilot projects, but the real big-hitter was what Welsh Government was calling the Pathfinder Homes project managed by Sero Homes.

> What about the leaky, hopelessly inefficient homes we already have with their fossil-fuel burning gas heating systems. We've ignored them for decades. We can't go on like this.

Andy Sutton and David Williams, the two principal directors of Sero Homes, sitting alongside Colin King the former truth-teller of BRE Wales, had enlisted over 28 RSLs. Among the 70 partners they had research teams of five universities signed up, many of the main building professions and institutions, energy-systems and digital-systems companies, and of course the Green Finance Institute. They planned to undertake nearly 1,724 homes across Wales, and these schemes had to be completed by March 2021!

You might think sign-up logos are easily assembled, a digital click of the mouse, but they signalled here a comprehensive vision of what it really takes, if you are not going to make the same mistakes of the past or those of your friends over the border.

The building fabric solutions are known. Without those done well every other bit of the process is pointless. But in some ways fabric first is the easy bit, although managing the homes' inhabitants' part of retrofit is a massive headache, as those with long memories of the social disasters of the 1980s local authority 'enveloping' schemes will know all too well.

Besides the fabric, there is also mastering the appropriate selection of heating technologies, renewables and power storage technologies that will work within each household's budget, and all this has to come alongside sophisticating the energy supply grids so that the occupants can fit their consumption to the grid fluctuations of demand – no small task that, either. Sero Homes nor Welsh Government are able to control progress on that.

Jofeh told us that 80% of Welsh homes are either privately or landlord owned. The mistake is to think that the market will take care of them, and that they have the funds.

Software before and after

But it's possible that the real game changer has nothing to do with architectural and building skills or hardware. As ever, to make the massive shift requires digital magic, right at the outset, and after the building work is complete. You need a massive uplift in digital-energy surveying technology allied to clearly defined and costed option read-outs for residents, and then you need 100% commitment to the smartest of energy monitoring technology in the house, and from the incoming grid supply once it is all installed. Then you need to inculcate responsible use of the smart meters by the residents. Without all that it could all be pointless. The people bit is the massive challenge. The last bit of technology Sero has been installing in some of its new-build projects at Parc Haddau, Pontardawe (see p. 62) and Parc Eirin, Tonyrefail.

To avoid the giant top-down blunders of former waves of retrofit, that tended to standardise solutions regardless of all context, Sero's non-negotiable mantra is that every home and its occupants are potentially in a unique context. The retrofit prescription must be unique to them and thought about individually. The retrofit proposition, or at least the prioritised parts of it, maximising the biggest energy savings if possible up front, can be implemented over time, as funds are available. This is intelligent. At the other end of the process comes the responsible and committed smart monitoring of their energy usage and flows, so that residents can take responsibility for their carbon budget. Hitting everything with one big hammer blow as they did in the past, is fatal. So, Sero Homes with several industry partners are developing digital boxes of tricks and training programmes for an army of accredited surveyors and training programmes for residents.

It's difficult to believe all this will be done in the time frame set by minister James. But then this really is an investment for the long term. Setting the ducks up in the correct row at the outset. When you hear Sutton's presentations, it all seems so smooth, so coherent, so well thought out, so do-able, at least in the medium term. The education minister meanwhile is busy encouraging Welsh colleges to gear up to providing retrofit academies. There are massive employment opportunities in this programme.

Retrofit for all?

But one can't help casting one's mind back to Jofeh's bullet-point strategic summary in July 2019. Bullet point two said 'the Welsh Government should set ambitious housing targets to meet its ambition of achieving net zero carbon by 2050'. We still await Welsh building regulations grasping the nettle of that. Without it there can be no convincing enforcement of the waverers. More critically bullet point four said 'the Welsh Government, working with others, should develop a holistic package of support *across all tenures* to motivate and facilitate action' (*my emphasis*).

It is in the Welsh Government's bloodstream, it is in Wales's political bloodstream, more so than ever after the shocking inequalities revealed so brazenly by the pandemic, that those most in need, those experiencing the greatest social injustices must be prioritised. Those still in excruciating fuel poverty, despite years of various ARBED programmes, must come first in the queue. Inevitably, the political values shared between ministers such as James, and the RSL's and so many innovative housing associations will chime. In many case they depend also on Welsh Government part-funding. So, as in so many Welsh Government policies, the public funding arms that are outstretched to selected communities determine where the action is, are all in the public sector.

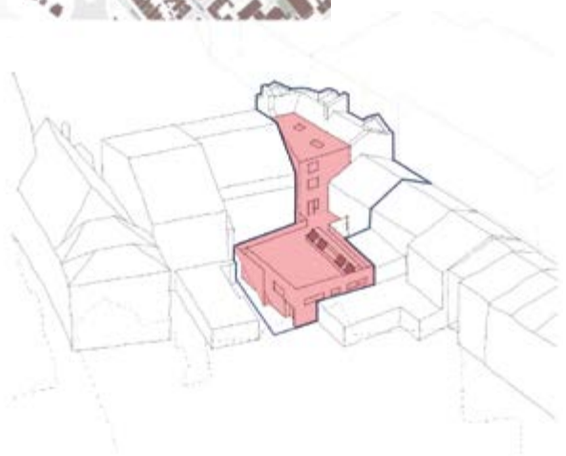
But Jofeh told us that 80% of Welsh homes are either privately or landlord owned. The mistake is to think that the market will take care of them, they have the funds.

When Catapult, a trendy energy systems company, says 'the energy digitalisation sector alone will be worth £45bn by 2025 and over £20bn will need to be invested in electricity networks over the next 15 years to upgrade infrastructure to meet the changing energy system', you are tempted to think, that the opportunity will simply be seized by the markets and its investors. All the digital magic created by Sero Homes, all the accredited surveyors and accredited installer training, will just be rolled out across all housing sectors – surely. Prices will come tumbling down as systems gear up.

But then you just stop and consider that it's currently between £4,000 and £6,000 for an air-source heat pump or £20,000 to £25,000 for a ground-source heat pump, and to make those work and be worthwhile you need to super-insulate and seal your fabric and maybe change all the radiators – just that alone will send many landlords and home owners into a massive spin. Is anyone in government thinking this through?

Just as the colossal mistake is made, all the time assuming that those in regular employment can get by when in fact sizeable percentages are utterly dependent on state handouts and universal credit, so we must focus at least on part of that 80%. We can't simply leave them just to sink or swim. We'll never reach the carbon targets we have all signed up to if we do.

Jofeh said 'all tenures', and he meant it. We will need all the ingenuity of the Green Finance Institute's monetary intelligence, as set out in its illuminating report of May 2020 *Financing energy efficient buildings: the path to retrofit at scale* to crack this one. Sero Homes is a member of the institute. Let's hope Sero and all those linked in with this bold and well-intended Welsh retrofit housing surge can find a way to encompass us all.



BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

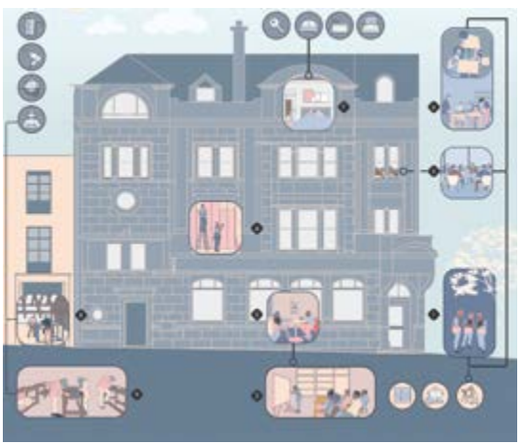
12 out of 17 of the 2021 final year projects at the Centre for Alternative Technology's postgrad MArch course are retrofit. Not surprising really; CAT has always been an early adopter of progressive environmental initiatives.

The retrofit focus starts early. In the first year of the MArch course, three students set out a hard-hitting analysis of Wales as an energy generator, in contrast to its current position as an 'energy colony' of the UK's electricity grid. They argued that once the current 11 marine-source (tidal and wave) projects and the major offshore wind-farm projects all come on stream Wales could be above Norway as the fifth largest exporter of electricity in Europe. No surprise then that since 2017 Plaid Cymru has advocated a Welsh-owned energy company, Ynni Cymru, with the aim of monetising those assets. That would certainly begin to give legs to a fast-growing independence movement.

This energy analysis was part of a whole-year-group project based in Caernarfon, Gwynedd where, through locally based architect Elinor Gray-Williams and her links with community activists Sian Tomos and Menna Machraeth, students were brought face to face with powerful community groups fighting those exploiting them for control of their assets.

The students reported that houses in Gwynedd and Anglesey are some of the oldest and coldest in Europe, with 21% of Gwynedd households in fuel poverty (the average figure for Wales is 14%). Average heating costs over the last ten years in Gwynedd were £966 per annum, which is £315 more than the average for England and Wales. When the UK government floated the Green Deal a whole load of cowboy operators carried out incompetent retrofit work in the area. Local campaigner Pauline Saunders of Cavity Wall Insulation Victims Alliance has brought 90 cases on behalf of residents over the last five years, also working alongside the Waliau Du (Black Walls) campaigner and Plaid Cymru MP for Arfon, Hywel Williams.

From the Caernarfon town analysis, each student formed an individual project. Unsurprisingly, one of the energy group, Katrina Austen, proposed a retrofit scheme on the vacant NatWest bank on the corner of the recently refurbished Maes at the heart of the town. Combining the bank with an adjacent shop unit giving access to a backland single-storey workshop, Austen designed a housing retrofit training facility devoted to upskilling and educating local people to carry out directly much of their own home retrofit. Entitled Teach Yourself For Us, (TYFU) the scheme would be linked with the Association for Environmentally Conscious Building's CarbonLite training course and the Carbon Co-op would be funded through profits from Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig, a multi-award-winning north-west Wales community hydro scheme: an example of a foundational circular economy par excellence. *Patrick Hannay*



Key to cross section (below):

1 Entrance hub/meeting/lunch space
2 One-to-one meeting
3 Locker room and changing
4 Facilities
5 Store
6 Small group training
7 Flexible training space
8 Flexible training space: digital
9 Apartment: open plan living space
10 Double bedroom
11 Single bedroom
12 Apartment and workshop entrances
13 Open plan workshop
14 Planted rooftop

Retrofitting Walter's Way

How does a self-build architectural icon of the 1980s, founded on almost zero building waste and true empowerment of lay builders, cope with aiming for net zero in the twenty-first century? Reflecting on a recent retrofit of a Segal-Method self-build, Barrie Evans wonders whether it also suggests a radical method of funding, so that genuine self-build for 'one planet developments' could become a major option for sustainable living.

1

Phil Sayer

Phil Sayer

Walter Segal was an architect of many parts though best known in the UK for his self-build, timber-frame approach.[1] His final scheme was 13 houses in Lewisham now called Walter's Way. It ran on site from 1984 to completion around 1987, two years after Segal died.

Constructionally, Segal's 'Method' was a timber post-and-beam system of cross frames, bolted together on the ground, then raised into position. Only twelve columns – each 200 × 50mm – support the whole house, on pad foundations. (Some pads on other sites were hand-dug pits, backfilled with hardcore, a bit of concrete on top, capped with a paving slab). In this retrofit case it was discovered during design that each pad had been piled to cope with ground conditions.

Post-and-beam framing allowed Segal to make all external and internal walls demountable. They sit on a tartan grid, made up of 600 mm panels, a dimension chosen to be half a sheet of plasterboard or a woodwool panel wide. This is essential Segal. Choosing dimensions and materials that minimise waste and are available from any local builders' merchant. There were no wet trades. Plumbing was push-fit. This simple approach greatly enhanced buildability. If you can drill a straight hole and cut a straight line, Segal said, you can build a house. Well, almost. The original self-builders did do a brief night-school course on basic carpentry, plumbing and electrics, and were mentored to some extent on site by a project manager. This should still be offered for one planet development self-builders in Wales.

Frame layout could in principle be flexibly designed on grid. Typically, all but two columns here are on the perimeter, projecting off-grid outside the house, sheltered by the broadly overhanging flat roof, still in pretty good shape after 45 years. However, for the 'piled-pads' of Walter's Way all the house frames were the same. Not that you would know this from looking at the much-altered Walter's Way houses today.

Within that framing, external wall panels were 50 mm woodwool with a 3 mm fibre-cement (Glasal) outer sheet and insulated plasterboard within. Internal wall panels were the same 50 mm woodwool but sandwiched between two sheets of plasterboard. All panels were 50 mm apart on plan, providing vertical routes for services. These gaps were covered by 100 mm wide battens on either side simply clamped together through the gap with three bolts at the top, middle and bottom. As a result, there was an insistent rhythm of battens, on ceilings too, plus bolt heads, visible on walls everywhere.

These battens have, of course, distorted. On my first visit, sitting in the kitchen, I was able to see outside under the window cills where panels had slipped down. Insulation was of its time, now totally inadequate. Cold-bridging and airtightness were hardly thought about.

Walter Segal wanted people to be as involved as possible in the design of their home, not just in its construction. The description of what Jon Broome (in 1985 Segal's assistant architect) calls the Segal Method begins with planning a building. It is not just a construction system.[2] Segal knew that these self-builders were financially stretched and offered them what were genuinely starter homes, ones he was confident they could, with growing experience, both redesign and rebuild as time went on.

2-5
Before and after floor plans: The original house was only 72 m² in internal area with three bedrooms, only one of which could comfortably accommodate a double bed (it needed to extend beyond the existing frame). The south wall and first floor north wall were taken down and pushed out by 1.0 m. At ground floor level on the north and the east a deeper 2.0 to 3.5 m extension spreads to the site boundary. It provides a good-sized entrance hall, shower room, tech room-cum visitors' bedroom and long office for two homeworking. Total now 102 m².

First thoughts were that the 1.0 m extensions might be cantilevered off the existing frame. But loads, including the extended ballasted flat roof, ground conditions, engineering conservatism and the larger north and east ground floor extensions, led to new pad foundations, so to piling. A big bill. Piling would not often be needed in upgrading other Segal projects.

2 First floor plan before retrofit

4 First floor plan post retrofit

3 Ground floor plan before retrofit

5 Ground floor plan post retrofit

N

1 (facing page) Iconic images photographed by Phil Sayer of Walter Segal at work with self-build residents. These and others all appeared in a memorable double special issue of the *Architects' Journal* in November 1986, the first issue edited by Charlotte Ellis telling the story of Segal's enagement with self-build and other pieces of his architecture, and the second issue by Jon Broome explaining in huge detail how Segal's system was assembled.

As wall panels must be located on the grid, this variety reduction and simplicity of walling options made designing layouts much more accessible to self-builders. Design was conducted on A4 sheets of graph paper between architect and self-builder. Models were sometimes built. Of course, it always remains difficult for the untutored eye, even some tutored ones, to envisage spaces represented on paper. But improvements were made by some self-builders as they worked on site. While panels and battens and bolts can be a bit of an eye-ache, there remains a compensating sense that the whole building is mutable, inviting you to mould it to your needs, even to play with the architecture.

This house (now my daughter's and her partner's) was the most unaltered of the 13 built in Walter's Way, sold when the last of its self-build family moved to a care home. The recent pictorial study of Segal Close and Walter's Way shows the rich variety of adaptations others have undertaken.[3] One of the original self-builders, still resident, near-demolished his house to install a ground-source heat pump and underfloor heating. Though few of the original self-builders remain, everyone is in spirit a self-builder here today, and some self-designers too.

Externally, could a Segal-type panel demountability have been saved while upgrading insulation and airtightness? I think not. A system of interchangeable panels to achieve effective airtightness would today need sophisticated gasketry, which is beyond the capability of self-builders, unless they were offered it as an off-the-peg system. Some houses in Walter's Way still retain parts of the original Segal envelope, but they are often relined internally.

Partitions in Walter's Way generally keep much more to the original Segal interchangeability.[3] For this house though, existing ground floor walls, either internal or once external, have either been removed to open up space or incorporated behind continuous plasterboard. Downstairs, the Segal look and partition adaptability has been lost.

A builder was employed for the envelope and downstairs services and partitions. Then money ran low. So, we self-built. My daughter teaches three days a week so, for most weeks over most of two years, we carried out the project two days a week, in addition to many weekends and evenings. We built fitted furniture and cupboards. We rebuilt the stairs, originally a forest of 50 x 50 mm timbers, in plywood (while the stair was still in use). However, upstairs we did use the Segal potential. We took down every bedroom partition to create a new layout, reusing the woodwool slabs and much of the plasterboard and battens, ceilings included. So upstairs, at least, Segal's visible sense of design and construction possibility remains. Though right now for the current owners the thought of starting again is the stuff of bad dreams.

To see Walter's Way today[3] is to experience Walter Segal's self-design and build method still alive, still suggestive of future possibilities. Yet it, and self-build more generally, have not become major parts of home provision in the UK. Can they? The UK volume house-building industry built around profiteering in land is not a good place to start. Nor is the current institutional infrastructure of housing finance. Segal Close and Walter's Way were Lewisham council-sponsored projects. They chose to work with Segal. Even so, in each case it took three to four years to negotiate with various bodies, find prospective self-builders, and deal with regulations and finance before getting on site. Not surprisingly, some people

who had originally won ballot places to self-build dropped out.

But it wasn't all bad news. Lewisham's finance model was to pay for materials and some project management while the self-builders supplied their labour. The result for self-builders was a shared equity home – part rent, part mortgage – that they eventually came to own. Affordable in a real sense. Could something like this be recreated? Perhaps, surprisingly, the UK government's Help to Buy scheme offers one pointer. One part is the scheme for subsidising deposits for first-time buyers. But there is another part, Help to Buy Shared Ownership.[4] You buy 25 to 75%, the rest is rent.

But, suppose we invent a version called 'Help to Build'. Instead of 25% or more initial purchase, the 25-plus % could be counted as the value of labour to be contributed by the self-builder, so no deposit at all would be needed. The remainder would be covered by rent, if wanted, or some rent some mortgage. Rent and/or mortgage would cover government loans for materials, as Lewisham did. In time rent could be converted to mortgage.

Where could this happen? Segal acquired Lewisham sites that developers didn't want. But let's get more ambitious. New housing developments being added to settlements on their rural perimeters already mix mainstream houses with an 'affordable' quota. Why not a Help to Build quota too? To borrow a Thatcherism, this could be a 'Right to Build'. A self-build part of the site would have to be separated off, of course, both because construction would be happening with different people on a different timescale and also because conventional purchasers might well be discomforted by the challenge of different lifestyles next door and by the superior innovation and quality of the self-builds.

The financing part of Help to Build could also be used for the Uplands. But some other mechanism would be needed to allocate land to build on.

Even with such an enabling infrastructure another major inhibitor remains – self-build itself. For so many people it is just too demanding a commitment, too all-or-nothing. It needs some less demanding options to be more widely appealing. Let's not call it watering down, more realism for twenty-first century lives. On a Help to Build site the developer could put in services and perhaps foundations. Houses could also be designed to be self-built as real starter homes rather than the pinched two- or three-bedroom semis that some starter-home scheme buildings have become, because there was nothing in them for developers.

As for architects? Broome has moved on from being a full architectural service practice, now describing himself as 'Architect : self-builder : enabler'. It is the enabling that is particularly needed, in feasibility, help with self-design, with understanding what's involved in self-building, with believing it is possible. As a young architect self-building his own house in Segal Close, Broome was offering expertise, scheduling and ordering materials, plus general problem solving. But he was also aware that architects were not trained with a useful hands-on knowledge of building. To be an enabler he needed to develop that set of skills too.

Architect-enablers, serviced sites, off-the-peg frames for self-builders,[5] warehouses of components, an enabling land supply and funding infrastructure of Help to Build – is this all just a dream? Why? To ramp up the volume of one planet developments we are going to need all this and more if we are serious about a net zero-carbon future.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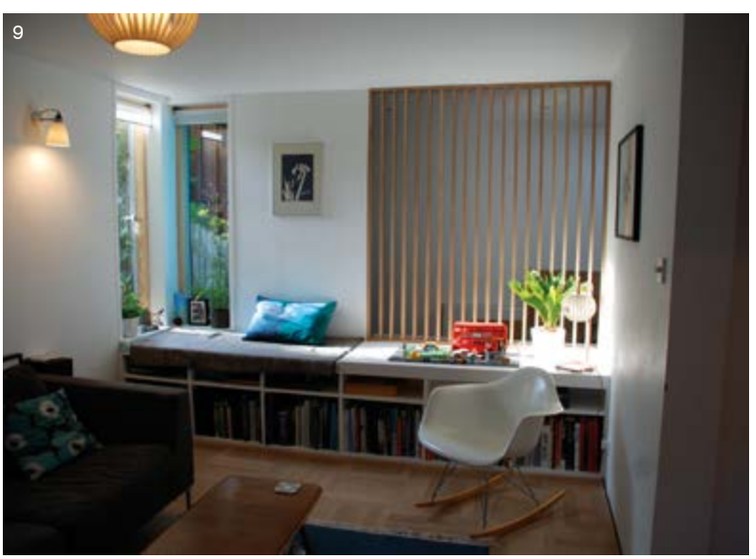
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The financing part of Help to Build could also be used for the Uplands in Wales.

12

13-14

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6-15
Before and after exteriors and interiors: New walls are stud-built, existing walls are overclad in studwork, which is simply screwed to the outside of the existing walling. New and old are united externally with black-stained larch cladding. All incorporate mineral fibre insulation batts and membranes for balancing airtightness with breathability. Fortunately, the boarded floors were originally well insulated with mineral wool. 25 x 25 mm battens were screwed to the sides of floor joists with Glasal sheets laid loosely on them to support the insulation. However, even on this steep site, there was not enough crawling space to easily add more from below. Existing ceiling insulation could have been upgraded too as the 300 mm wide plasterboard strips were screwed up into 25 x 25 mm battens on the joist sides, with extra support from the 100 mm battens screwed to the joist soffits.

6 The rebuilt staircase.

7 Work in progress while still living and working in the house.

8 Upstairs bedroom as completed.

9, 10 Lounge and kitchen areas as completed.

11, 12 South west elevation before and after retrofit.

13-15 South east elevation before, during retrofit and after.

Credits

Principal architect: Sam Brown, working first for Jon Broome Architects and then for MAP Architecture.

Photography: Black-and-white images by Phil Sayer. Colour images by Taran Wilkhu.

References

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2. On Jon Broome's website www.jonbroome.co.uk there is a 'read more' link at the bottom of the homepage to a PDF of Jon's full graphic article explaining the Segal Method (from *The Architects' Journal* of 09.11.86)
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4. www.helptobuy.gov.uk
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Place plans, please

A recent planning initiative in Newtown, mid-Wales, has been getting a lot of promotion. Is this really a radical tilt towards citizen power, giving a much needed lift to under-resourced planning departments and bringing real meaning to 'place making'? Dick Cole investigates.

The often intense debates between citizens and planners on local development plans (LDPs) in Wales seem to be mostly about future housing needs – how many and where, a contest between powerful house builders and weak communities resisting their demands, with the local planning authorities caught in the crossfire.

For many years Wales had little in the way of town plans, town centre plans, or even master plans or site briefs on offer, apart from some wide-ranging informal 'community' or 'whole place' plans that have often neglected land-use planning. Rarely is there anything that could be recognised as design or place making.

Fortunately, in 2015 the Welsh Government introduced non-statutory 'place plans', to be initiated and prepared by local communities and to conform with and add detail to the LDP, potentially with adoption as strategic planning guidance (SPG) by the planning authority. Place plans are an important element of the government's core emphasis on achieving well-being through sustainable place making, as described in *Planning Policy Wales*.

Refreshingly, and deliberately, little Welsh Government guidance is available on the preparation of place plans, though Planning Aid Wales and the Design Commission for Wales (with Coombs Jones, architects) have developed useful guidance and, like other consultancies, offered their services. This freedom from control contrasts with the similar, but much more regulated, English neighbourhood plans introduced in 2012. If approved via an independent examination and a referendum, these English neighbourhood plans do become fully part of the statutory development plan, rather than just guidance, and may even grant specific planning permissions via development orders. But is this straitjacketed delegation of power any more real than the relaxed approach in Wales?

Unlike LDPs, place plans are clearly bottom-up, led by local communities focusing on their local needs and visions. Ideally, they would be prepared before or in parallel with the LDP, informing it with local information and helping to build trust between levels of government. In practice, so far, they usually have to conform with an adopted LDP, though they may extend beyond the LDP time horizon and include suggestions for the next LDP.

Not every community needs a full-blown place plan. Little land use or environmental change may be expected in some settlements; a design brief or code for a development site may be sufficient, or there may already be enough policy in the LDP and other SPG.

Deciding to go ahead

Public participation, gathering evidence and plan preparation are expensive for local councils in terms of time and money. But a number of towns and villages in Wales have taken up the place plan opportunity and one of the latest is the *Newtown & Llanllwchaiarn Place Plan,* led by Newtown Council with help from Powys County Council, Planning Aid Wales and Bristol's Place Studio.

Newtown has a proactive and comparatively high-spending town council; it already had a community action plan that had helped to gain a £1.1 million lottery award to support an asset transfer of amenity land. A new bypass was seen as both a threat and an opportunity for the town's future, and the council now wanted a more comprehensive plan with public support to guide its business plan; the county council wanted to test the place plan process.

The place plan cost £36,000 over two years, two-thirds of it spent on part-time staffing, helped by £16,000 from Powys County Council, the officers of which also gave much time to the project. This seems to be remarkable value if judged by the quality of the content alone. After two years' work the Newtown plan is a formidable 100 pages plus numerous appendices and is undoubtedly a credit to those responsible for it. However, there

was much unpaid work by dedicated staff and community volunteers, not available everywhere, and such comprehensive exercises should not be embarked upon without careful consideration of whether the commitment is justified.

So how good is it?

The plan certainly appears to meet its aims to:

- 'Influence future planning decisions in the town
- Identify priorities for investment
- Create a body of evidence that can be drawn on to attract investment into the town
- Direct the future work of organisations in the town, including the Town Council.'

Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn have a little over 11,000 residents. Engagement events and surveys produced 7,000 comments on post-it notes and the like. The team reckons that the community contributed about 760 hours to the plan preparation; good press coverage, social media, leaflets and posters and 21 events aimed to reach beyond the usual older middle-class residents, though the response to a £50 cash prize survey was disappointing. Nearly 70 community volunteers were involved in evidence collection. Overall, a pretty high level of participation.

Each policy and project in the plan is based on suggestions from the community. The document is built around eleven interlinked topics. Each topic section contains basic evidence, a summary of community comments from the consultation events and public survey, and tabulated policies and action projects. The policies often seem to say little more than the LDP, whereas the lists of projects are much more useful, with broad time scales, though no comparative indication of costs. The action programme, which goes well beyond land-use planning into health and well-being needs, seems very ambitious, even for fifteen years, but this is an aspirational council and no community idea has been entirely omitted. This council knows that progress is not always in accord with a rationally prioritised programme, and that the town has to be ready to grab funds from bodies with different or changing priorities – witness the recent rise in Welsh Government active travel expenditure.

As so often with planning reports, there is no easy way into the lengthy document – a disappointment for a reviewer and more so for any interested resident. A summary would have been helpful. The reader has to go to the vision on page 26 to start to learn what the plan aims to achieve by 2036. Much of this early content would be better in appendices, whereas appended plans of housing sites, character areas and active travel routes would be handier in the main report. Of course, many people find maps and plans difficult, but written content often needs the definition of plans. The plan would also have benefited from illustrative sketches of some of its projects.

Easy reading and visual appeal are gateways to public engagement, and the Newtown plan will not attract special attention in this respect, though it does have more appeal than an otherwise similar plan for Brecon. Ruthin's 2012 plan and its 2018 review (https://www.rhuthun.com/ruthin-future-dyfodol-rhuthun) demonstrate the effectiveness of illustrations. On the other hand, the Newtown plan has a 'library of evidence' that brings together a wealth of information and ideas gathered while the plan was being prepared and often lost elsewhere.

The planning policies add content on 'character areas' and 'active travel' to an LDP that was prepared several years ago. The place plan policy, which states that 'any new development will only be supported where it can be reasonably argued that it will contribute towards the mitigation of the effects of climate change', may challenge the Powys planners. Many references are made to the need for design briefs for housing sites, but they are only in the action programme. One hopes the developers do not get their full application in before the community's brief is ready. The town council did not have the time or urban design skills to include these in the plan. Who will do it in the action plan? A final section makes suggestions for the next LDP, including some housing sites, open spaces for protection and electric vehicle charging points.

The town council already points to the attraction of nearly £1.2 million of Welsh Government funding where the readily available place-plan evidence strengthened the applications. While such a plan may not be a requirement of funding bodies, most like to see that applicants are following a clear strategic direction with community support. Good value is apparent.

But place plans have yet to deliver the sort of detailed land-use and urban design content that both communities and developers need if we are to get better place making. At one time many planning authorities had the resources in multi-disciplinary teams to do this. Civic design was well understood but now they can rarely afford to buy in those skills, leaving developers and their consultants to run riot, and the community with little scope for influence. If design quality is to improve, the Welsh Government needs to respond to the calls for more urban design resources for planning that have come from the future generations commissioner and the RTPI.

Let's have more plans, more variety

There are now more than 900 adopted neighbourhood plans in England. The government offers financial support and incentives for their preparation and these higher-status, but cumbersome, plans give local communities more power than place plans, an appealing feature for settlements feeling distant from their planning authorities, though they can be vehicles for undue nimbyism. Welsh communities can do without the bureaucracy of the English model but they might explore some neighbourhood plans for examples of policies that would really strengthen those in their LDPs.

Place plans give power to those who engage, to influence, if not always decide, the shape of their towns or villages. Every community in Wales where land-use change is anticipated should probably have one. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the process itself, engaging many across the community, working with the local authority and achieving consensus on what needs to be done. Local democracy needs such partnerships to be nurtured and sustained.

But does it always need to be so time-consumingly expensive and comprehensive? Welsh Government flexibility clearly says not:

'Essentially, (a Place Plan) is about elaborating further on the detail contained in the statutory development plan. This could be expressed through development briefs/master plans for allocated sites or a town/village strategy that addresses community scale issues such as design, community facilities and open space. Alternatively, sites could be identified in a Place Plan which are not allocated in the LDP, albeit they would have to align with the framework set out in the LDP. This could include identifying small scale windfall sites within a settlement boundary.' (Development Plans Manual 3 – para 5.8)

Welsh communities should make more use of this planning tool, timing and scoping it to meet their particular needs, the resources they can muster, and make sure that the right skills are available to articulate and negotiate the outcome they want. Some more three-dimensional examples would be welcome, and of course some government cash incentives would especially help city and valleys' communities to follow in the footsteps of towns like Newtown. Chepstow has now started, but why should country towns have all the fun?

Dick Cole is a former town planner who now advises the Abergavenny and District Civic Society on planning matters. The town has achieved much without a place plan but the new LDP may need to be supplemented by one with urban design to the fore.

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Food for thought

Over 100 years separate two educational initiatives in south-east Wales that offer food production skills and more to younger generations. Both now involve retrofitting and adding to existing farm buildings. Is this just reinventing the wheel or a necessary cyclical revolution as a counter to losing our way in the natural world? Report by Tim Graham.

Monmouthshire was a front runner in Wales in training early twentieth-century farmers. The county council took over the charity-funded Monmouthshire Agricultural and Horticultural Institution at Rhadyr Farm, Usk in 1924.

Late nineteenth-century agricultural depression in the UK, partly generated by cheap imported wheat from the USA, drove the need for UK agricultural reform. The 1914–18 war ramped up demand for locally sourced food production. The market was clearly not delivering. State engagement through colleges would have to set the pace. County Farms would become part of a later prescription.

The Usk college was the only one of two such pre-first world war institutions in Wales. Inter-war saw the addition of Llysfasi, Denbighshire in 1919 and eventually Golden Grove, Carmarthenshire in 1952; finally the substantial Welsh Agricultural college at Aberystwyth in 1970.

1 Monmouthshire's Agricultural and Horticultural Institution as seen in 1947 (photo: © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales: Aerofilms Collection). The 1917 building to be transformed into a new catering training facility is bottom right. The three gable-ended central cross ranges have been recently demolished. The horticulture, top right, is now a car park and headquarters of Monmouthshire County Council.

(**Above**) Site axo; an early scheme hoped to relocate the large livestock shed and replace it with a horticulture facility to serve the restaurants.

Key to Projected plan

1 Coleg 1917 kitchen
2 Coleg 1917 restaurant
3 Bar and reception
4 Brasserie 2
5 Brasserie 1
6 Visitor entrance
7 Commercial kitchen

2 Long section perspective of the new facility using the full volume of the original 1917 building by taking out the inserted first floors.
3 New front elevation, respecting the original.
4 Projected plan of new catering training facility.
5 Commercial brasserie 1 looking through to brasserie 2.
6 Brasserie 2. Beyond it, the Coleg 1917 non-commercial restaurant.

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By 1947 a fine set of educational buildings had been assembled either side of the A472 just outside Usk. The earliest, completed in 1917, was a fine purpose- built brick and slate-roofed livestock and hay storage complex to house horses, cattle, dairy cows, calves and fat stock pigs. Hidden behind its imposing and near symmetrical two-storey, road-facing façade were two hipped-roof, single-storey ranges, one at each end of the main building, and then three gable-end cross-ranges in the middle. The three middle ranges have only recently been demolished, but much of the robust and carefully considered detail, both externally and internally, survives. Now under the management of Coleg Gwent, the world of horses has come to dominate the curriculum although a large livestock farm is still part of the mix. The 1917 building, which is no longer used for livestock, is to become a new catering training facility designed by Chepstow architect, Hall + Bednarczyk.

Monmouthshire as the home of the Abergavenny Food Festival, born of concerns to counter the devastating effect of the foot and mouth disease on locally sourced agriculture, has partly morphed into a fine-dining county just as the festival has shifted from a 'local' focus to UK-wide niche independent food processors, and a massive annual magnet for tourism.

By a curious happenstance of land deals, Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) relocated from its former Gwent headquarters from Cwmbran new town to nestle in a new building by Powell Dobson Architects set among the educational buildings of Coleg Gwent's Usk College campus. After all it is a rural farming county. In parallel, and somewhat curiously since Coleg Gwent took over the Usk College, market pressures have brought to the fore equine studies, a small animal-care centre and veterinary-nurse-training facilities although it still retains a 267-acre working farm with 200 dairy cattle and a herd of 250 sheep. Horticulture as a key part of the landscape, as in the rest of Monmouth and so much of Wales, has vanished. This is short sighted.

The county has some of the finest agricultural land in Wales, but its use is dominated by cattle and sheep and keeping them fed. While austerity pressures may be forcing the sale of its County farms, and other land holdings for housing development, it has, uniquely among local authorities in Wales, appointed a food officer to drive an agenda of local food sourcing. And while the college has drifted up-market to focus on horse handling, elsewhere in the county food manifestos allied to a new generation of young horticulturalists and growers may drive MCC and Coleg Gwent to revive the original range of training intentions of which this handsome 1917 building was an early contributor.

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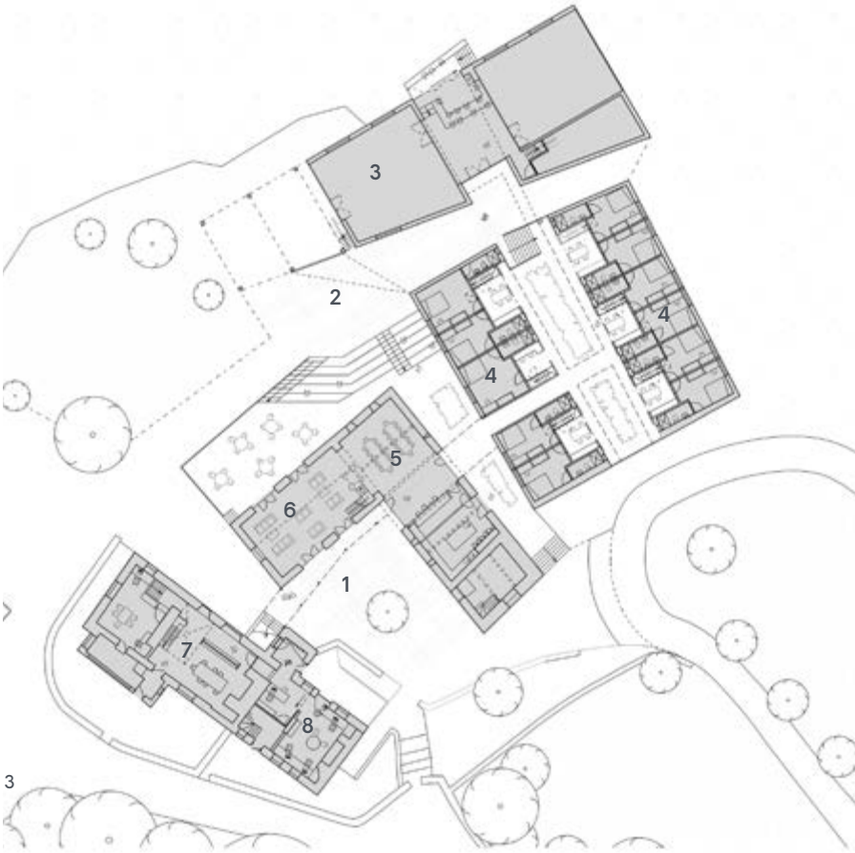

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More stirrings in the undergrowth

Thirty miles away to the north in and around Talgarth there have been progressive educational stirrings for some years now, as the evolving Black Mountains College (BMC) now makes a substantial move to give itself a physical base, designed by architect Featherstone and Young. The scheme is in for planning permission. The college was tempted earlier to convert a redundant hospital in Talgarth, but its recent securing of a 50-year lease on Troed-yr-harn Farm, one mile south of Talgarth, gives it a base that is more synergistic and empathetic with its educational mission.

Over years the annual Hay Festival, eight miles to the north of Talgarth, has increasingly front-lined food, farming and progressive agricultural thinking as the opening debates of its programme. Hay has a powerful intellectual diaspora. Ben Rawlence, chief executive of BMC, is an award-winning writer, and former speech writer for the Liberal Democrats. His co-founder is Owen Sheers, an internationally renowned poet, author, film script writer and playwright. The BMC trustees are an impressive group. They have a former chief environmental adviser to the Welsh Government, Dr Harvard Prosser, and George Soros's head of higher education initiatives founding 20 universities around the world, Dr Bill Newton Smith. Sue Pritchard as chief executive of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission is also a trustee 'with a mission to bring people together to find radical and practical ways to transform our food system and improve our climate, nature, health and economy'. They have Wales's only Green Party county councillor and chair of the Policy Forum at Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Emilly Durant. The scale of their educational ambition is in inverse proportion to the seemingly tiny settlement of Talgarth.

Wherever possible further-education and degree-level learning, experiments and projects will happen outdoors. They claim 'the Brecon Beacons National Park is their campus'. The 'Real Farming Trust' will showcase agro-ecological and regenerative farming practices on its 120 acres. But BMC's vision goes way beyond progressive agriculture – it is a critique of most contemporary higher education. It shares the aims, governance and teaching methods of its 1933–1957 rebellious college namesake, the Black Mountain College of North Carolina, which attracted 'maverick spirits' such as John Cage, Cy Twombly, and Buckminster Fuller. It's a sort of Summerhill for grown-ups. There will no academic departments, all resources will be for teaching and learning; there will be a single all-encompassing interdisciplinary arts/science degree launching in 2022, taught in intensive blocks of 3.5 weeks. Six mandatory modules cover 'earth and human systems', 'learning to learn', and 'art-based sensory training'. Critical creative thinking and communication skills along with teamwork and learning through all the senses are central. Class sizes are capped at 20. Placements are already signed up with climate-change leading businesses. The office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales is bound in as a collaborator. Starting at 20 students for the first year, by year 4 it aims to be 120, with an eventual maximum at the farm campus of 300.

Key to site/floor plans

1 Entrance courtyard
2 Teaching courtyard/social space
3 Teaching building
4 Accommodation barns/courtyard
5 Historic barn – dining and bar
6 Historic barn – common room and mezzanine
7 Farmhouse – library and tutorial
8 Farmhouse – administration

1 Aerial view of Troed-yr-harn farm, the new home for the Black Mountains College.
2. Plan of all the existing buildings. The large barn at the top of the plan is to be removed and replaced with new buildings for student accommodation and new teaching spaces.
3. New site plan (see key left).
4. Sketch ideas for the architecture of the new student accommodation.
5. Cross section/elevation on new student accommodation and teaching space.
6. New and retro-fitted architecture for Black Mountains College.

It's clear that Featherstone Young's architecture is utterly on message, an exemplary fit of client and architect. Existing and new external courtyards are knitted together encouraging pedestrian permeability into the landscape, reusing as many of the existing buildings as possible. The social hub is around the existing house and historic barn, which becomes a dining hall and common room with a linking entrance courtyard between the two. An existing raised terrace with spectacular views to the landscape is further raised to the barn floor level to create an outdoor dining/social space; this leads to a social steps/event space intended for outside lectures, film nights, graduations and general socialising.

An existing dilapidated barn, compromising potential long landscape views, is replaced by a new teaching building using the existing floor slab, while creating another courtyard. The new building form and massing is simple and barn-like, but carved into it are covered but open-sided outside teaching areas and a glazed focal entrance, offering views through to the

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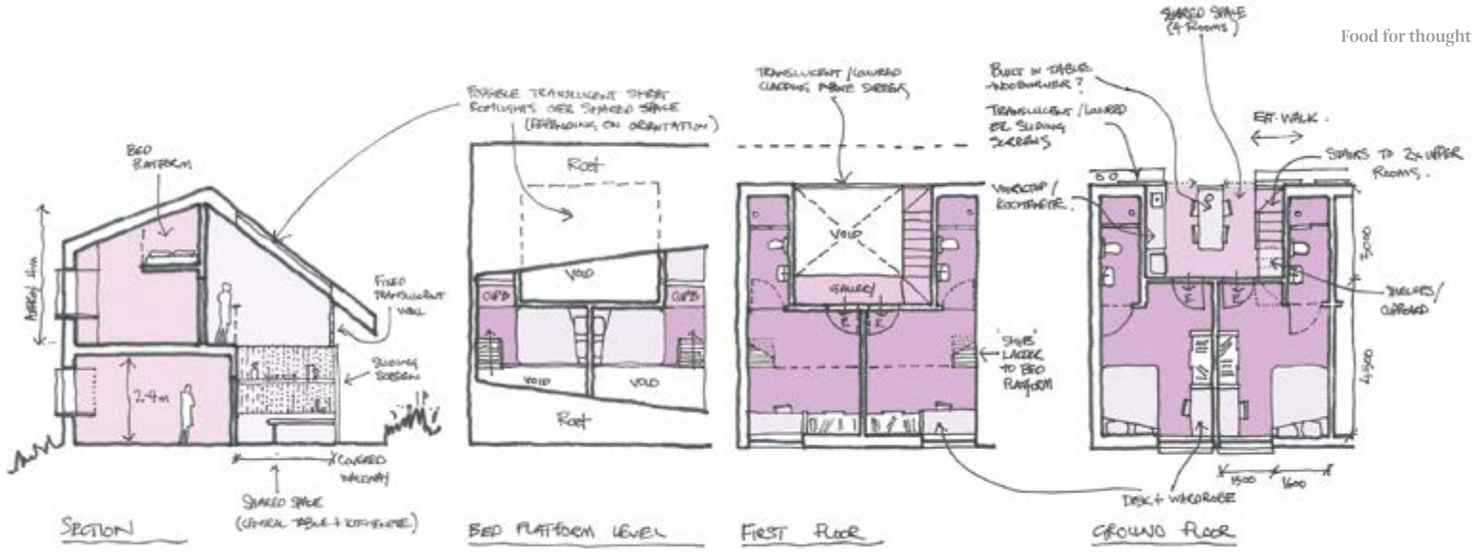

landscape from the new student accommodation elements. At the centre is a sunken 'firepit' teaching area akin to a large conversation pit.

Other dilapidated sheds compromising the integrity of the historic barn are replaced with two new two-storey accommodation buildings. Pursuing the core ethos of the college's mission, a third of each ground floor will be a shared semi-external kitchen/eating spaces incorporating circulation to the upper level. Agricultural-style corrugated translucent roof sheeting is also installed on the sliding barn-door-like screens that can provide enclosure when needed.

Existing concrete floor slabs are retained where possible to minimise the new construction's embodied energy. New slabs and floor screed are limecrete. Cement and gypsum-based products are avoided. Locally sourced timber frames minimise new foundations. Hempcrete forms some new walls and insulates existing ones. Natural wool for some new walls and foam-glass underneath new slabs complete the laudable intention to minimise the carbon footprint.

Chris Blake of The Green Valleys is a trustee and is also advising on the energy strategy. PVs on roofs and in the landscape, biomass boilers fed from locally source coppice, air-source heat pumps, solar-thermal panels, pumped water 'batteries' storing excess heat from the PVs, all are deployed.

No wonder Michael Morpurgo is claiming that 'no educational institution could be more important, or more urgently needed'. So, no pressure then. Coleg Gwent at Usk as a teaching institution could perhaps reflect on and learn from this enlightened educational experiment. The two architectures have served their respective clients well.

Note: Archival research used in this article on the 1917 Coleg Gwent building at Rhadyr Farm, Usk pp. 40–41 and the development of other Welsh agricultural institutions was set out in a report by Edward Holland of Holland Heritage, dated March 2020. www.hollandheritage.co.uk

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The attunement of imagination

Matt Hawes

With so much number crunching seeking to justify a zero-carbon architecture we are in danger of losing architecture's connection to a meaningful life. One unit at the Welsh School of Architecture sought a rebalancing and reconnection to our heightened senses of nature in those Covid-limited times of quietness and solitude.

This unit of students at the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA) run by Professor Wayne Forster was originally founded on the creative potential of architectural science combining with more sensory (phenomenological), and cultural characteristics of place. This was once the default setting in the WSA as well as for a number of great architects – Aalto, Corbusier, et al – but recently the reversion to the two distinct and separated traditions of the applied sciences v the humanities (with a few exceptions, see Dean Hawkes's *The Environmental Tradition and The Environmental Imagination*) has been quite marked in practice and also in schools of architecture.

The overall quest of this unit is to rekindle and build on these traditions.

In his introductory chapter of *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science*, Alberto Perez-Gomez suggests that human feelings are located – bound to a particular place with its specific temporality and character.

Furthermore, he argues that the environment matters in ways that perhaps we have not fully fathomed. 'It matters not only as a material ecology that must obviously be kept alive for the survival of our species, but also because it is nothing less than a constituent part of our consciousness [...] While the role of architecture designed by professionals may be debatable today for a number of reasons, it is clear that the physical places where we act are of the utmost importance for our well-being.' [1]

While ecologically responsible buildings and sustainable settlements are not only desirable but necessary, in themselves they cannot connect us to a meaningful life. As we have seen from practice, standardised and 'quantifiable' systems for sustainable design can easily reduce complex ecological and energy-driven relationships to oversimplified (and commoditised) technical checklists, subject to manipulation for profit.

'True psychosomatic health depends on attuned environments.'

The unit attempted to exploit the various intrinsic qualities and states of sun, wind and light to create architectural solutions based on a transdisciplinary approach.

How can the elements be harnessed to provide a fossil-free environment that enables environmental comfort AND delight?

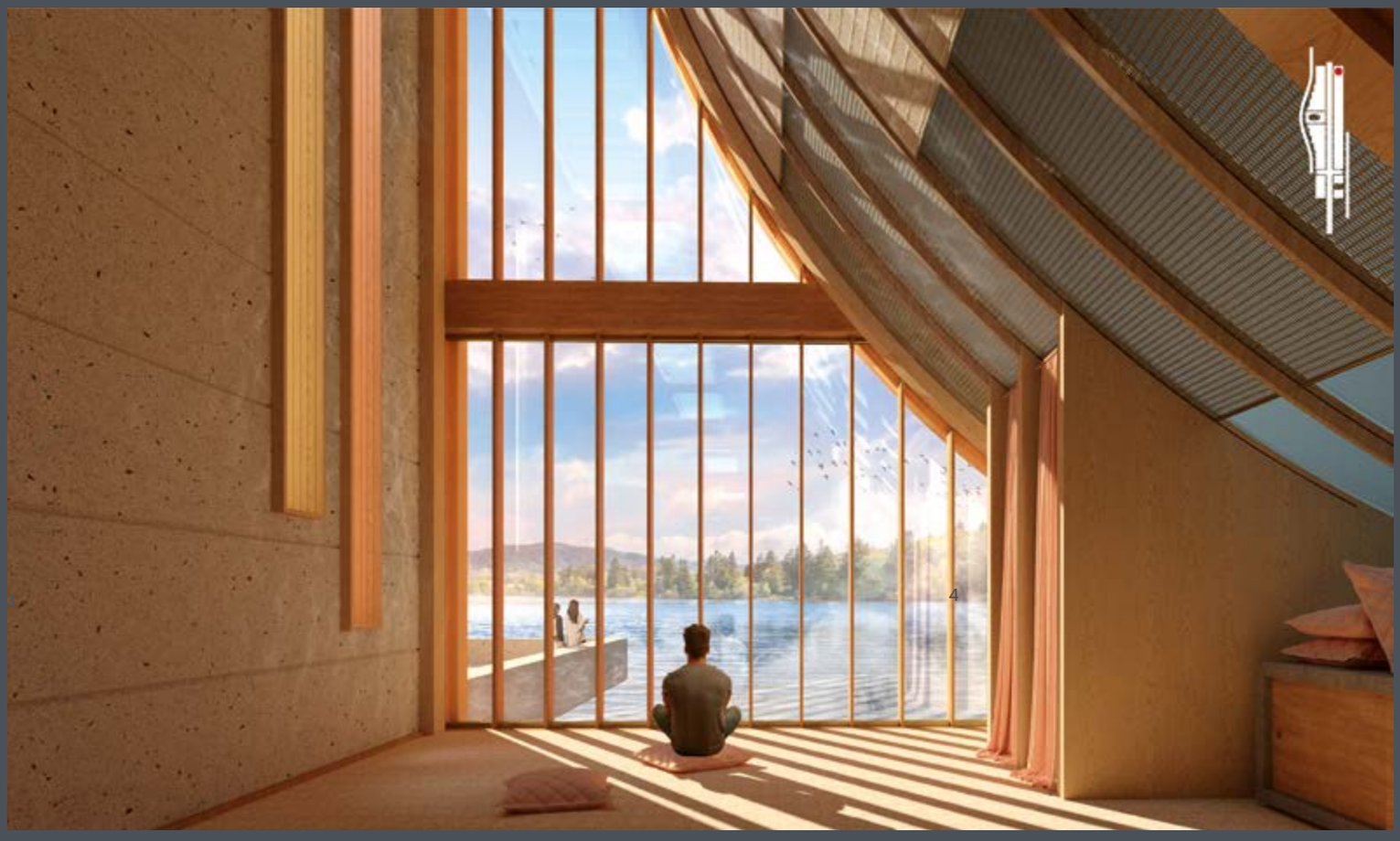
How can we design places that are physically and ecologically resilient that resist the impending or present stresses of human activities and promote 'attunement'?

This might require a combination of skills. Three very different architects come to mind as inspiraton. Phillipe Rahm – who has employed scientific principles to manipulate and redesign environments; Gilles Simon – the author of *The Planetary Garde*n and who places other species as equivalent to humans; and Peter Zumthor, who is best known for making atmospheric places based on a sensuous appreciation of material tectonics.

Two students' projects (pp.45–46) from this unit illustrate a sound response to these challenges.

Reference

1. Perez-Gomez, Alberto. *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science*. MIT Press, 2016, pp. 3, 4.



The sanatorium of light, Trondheim, Norway

Ahad Almeida-Sheikh

The project explores the notion of mørketiden – the 'dark time' in Trondheim, a small town in Norway 250 miles north of Oslo. In the winter months the days are eerily short, with blackouts occurring well before 16:00 local time. The ominous purple hues of the polar night twilight are beautiful, but the effects on the circadian rhythms of the locals are greatly affected, with most of them developing seasonal affective disorder.

The thesis proposes to design a 'sanatorium of light'. A growing trend among the residents of Trondheim is to holiday in warmer climates during the winter months leaving the city, for the most part, desolate. The sanatorium of light is for those left behind.

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) is located in Trondheim. During the winter months over three quarters of the town's inhabitants are made up of these students and the sanatorium of light is intended to be a circadian rehabilitation chamber for them.

Weather, light and time: Attuning to place through architecture, weather and landscape.

Achill Island, Ireland

Matt Hawes

Can an architecture and landscape be instrumental in the experiential dimensions of weather and place?

Inspired by landscape artists and their ability to capture the subtleties of place and the visual dimensions of its light and weather, depicting how these change over time, the thesis asks if the same can be achieved through architecture. Taking inspiration from late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish landscape painters, the project seeks to embrace the atmospheric qualities and dramatic landscape of Achill Island and the Irish west coast through a creative retreat and study centre for arts and humanities students at NUI Galway, and an associated landscape experience centre for tourists travelling along Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way. The project proposed is the antithesis of 'exclusive' architecture. It suggests that our experience can be elevated by connecting to the subtleties of light, weather and time that characterise a place. Instead of shutting the external environment out, architecture should embrace it and become receptive to the variable conditions of the sky, the light and the weather.

Architecture studio as the bridge

The 1958 Oxford conference on architectural education kicked it all off. Sir Leslie Martin led the charge. Architecture needed academic status. Universities had to be the preferred future route, away from art schools or technical colleges. Research income for universities would confer further status.

In 1962, F R Leavis for the humanities was having an intellectual punch up with C P Snow's cultural critique of the ignorance of science among the ruling class. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* was published in 1959. Snow rejected what he felt was a destructive and false divide. So, where did the practice of architecture sit, a bridge between two cultures? Then came Harold Wilson's 1963 'white heat of technology' speech.

Richard Llewelyn-Davies, a practitioner of that 'white heat' became professor of architecture at The Bartlett in London in 1960. In the same year, Dewi-Prys Thomas became head of the Welsh School of Architecture and its first professor of architecture when the college of which it was a part was redesignated as the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) in 1967. The science bent was to be confirmed with Thomas's astute hiring in 1970 of Pat O'Sullivan (see p. 60) as chair of architectural science. O'Sullivan went on to build an architectural science research empire networked into business, industry and government. But still there was a chasm; a tempestuous debate opened up between the humanities critique of architecture chair Alan Lipman and O'Sullivan's science. They could not be in the same room. Lectures from both disciplines were superb but O'Sullivan took little interest in the design studio. Studio quality was not shining. Twenty years later came a dramatic volte face.

O'Sullivan left Cardiff for London in 1988 to take up a position as dean of faculty and professor of environmental design at The Bartlett. He was to build on a strong established science research base, but what he is most remembered for is his extraordinary 1990 coup of persuading the design-studio doyen of the Architectural Association, Peter Cook, to join its arch-rival The Bartlett. He cemented this by hiring Christine Hawley to join Cook in 1993. Design-led, research-based education was to rule at The Bartlett, as it still does to this day.

The Cook revolution born from O' Sullivan's masterstroke of diplomacy at The Bartlett was profound and set the school on a meteoric rise in international standing. O'Sullivan clearly saw the way the wind was blowing. He was the ultimate networker, the academic fixer and operator. C P Snow would have been proud of him.

Curiously, O'Sullivan's most lasting legacy in Wales may be that the three heads at the Welsh School of Architecture that followed his departure to London were all members of O'Sullivan's architectural science group: Malcolm Parry, Phil Jones and Chris Tweed (*see right*). Others have ensured the design studio now bridges the divide with elan. The fixer had a long reach.

Cometh the hour...

Chris Tweed succeeded Phil Jones as the eighth head of the Welsh School of Architecture in 2012. The university sector and particularly those Russell Group, research-led universities such as Cardiff University, were in the thrall of structural change. The move towards a corporate, business-focused and performance-led university was full steam ahead (like it or loathe it) and the reverberations of the 2008 global financial crash were still very evident. Since then, we have had Brexit and a global pandemic, Covid-19. The word turbulent comes to mind.

Leadership in such times requires resilience, the ability to anticipate change, create the change you desire – or need, and lead for the future. Chris Tweed anticipated the need for change and understood that the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA) would be much diminished in this new world unless it had robust plans for its future.

The WIDER-BE plan (Well Informed Design and Education through Research in the Built Environment) was to build a bigger and more resilient school and to persuade the university to invest in space, facilities, and people in what was and continues to be a very competitive environment. Tweed succeeded.

In 2018, after three years of negotiation with the university, the school secured a £20 million+ investment in this strategic project. The refurbishment is to be completed later this year. Apart from the Bute library and print services, the WSA now occupies the entire Bute Building for the first time in its history. When complete there will be a doubling of floor space, creation of a central exhibition hall on the ground floor (the former assembly hall), a hybrid studio to support multiple making and other creating activities, state-of-the-art digital teaching rooms, and a highly configurable 'living lab' to support engagement with external stakeholders in research and education.

During his nine-year tenure Tweed backed more community outreach, such as the university's community gateway engagement project led by Dr Mhairi McVicar and two spin-off, not-for-profit student-led organisations engaged in overseas development projects – Orkidstudio and CAUKIN.

At the same time the WSA has remained in the top 10 (top 5 in some tables) schools of architecture in the UK. In 2015, it entered and held on to its position in the top 50 schools of architecture in the world – good for the school and university, and also for Wales.

For decades, Cardiff University ignored the architectural talent within its midst. The door to the estates department appeared firmly closed. Tweed has manged to open that. The WSA has now been able to make contributions to the architecture of the university's estate (see pp. 66 and 67). As well as a preference for collaborative and inclusive working Tweed also championed initiatives to ensure well-being among students at the school. Equally he pushed for better gender balance and ethnicity among staff – a much needed shift. The senior management team now consists of five women and six men – previously one woman and four men. Academic promotions include five female and three male readers and a growing number of female professors. Most telling of all Professor Chris Tweed's successor is to be Dr Juliet Davis, who takes up her post in August 2021.

Book reviews

The ethics of a progressive food movement overlap and resonate with an architecture that does minimum harm to nature.

Vegetarian Architecture: Case studies on building and nature

Andrea Bocco Guarneri | Jovis

David Lea

The reticent cover and eye-catching but perplexing title of Andrea Bocca Guaneri's book give nothing of its internal riches away.

But the first page bursts into a rousing exhortation to 'do simple things with simple means', supported by inspiring quotations from earlier ecological prophets, philosophers and farmers. To survive we must grasp that the true source of our economic life is the economy of plants. Plants give us all the food, clothing and shelter we need for one planet living. In a sustainable economy we do not need to steal from future generations. The cultivation of plants constitutes the farming year. In this sense we can talk of 'vegetarian architecture'. From this insight grows a list of principles that should guide our choice of building materials and their use, for example:

Work with nature.

Do as little as possible.

Make full use of locally available materials.

Use materials that are easily absorbed by the environment.

Cut down on industrial products.

Reduce energy in production.

Reduce use of motors.

He also warns us not to be captivated by the performance of new buildings, but rather to reduce the energy use of existing buildings.

These themes remind me of that inspirational book *The One-Straw Revolution* by the Japanese permaculture farmer Masanobu Fukuoka. When asked by a visiting professor what percentage of the world's population should become new peasant farmers, he replied that 100% would be about right. The challenge is to determine at what point the balance between this ideal and the present situation should be struck.

Peter Harper of the Centre for Alternative Technology proposes as an attainable general rule for building materials 80% natural materials derived from stone, earth and plants, and 20% 'industrial vitamins', materials with a higher embodied energy such as glass, metals and plastic. The 80/20 rule would allow for the continued development of appropriate high-tech pathways alongside more natural production methods for food and shelter.

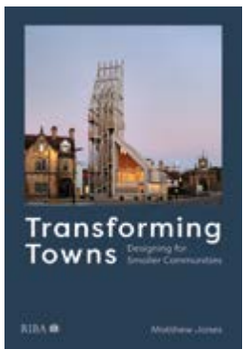
Twelve case studies from across the world illustrate how the book's principles can be put into practice. The projects are described in impressive detail, covering the funding, social aims and organisation of the clients, the building process, and energy use. From my own experience I can confirm that the study of the WISE building at the Centre for Alternative Technology is broadly accurate.

The buildings are illustrated with clear drawings – helpfully redrawn in a consistent style for publication – and informative photographs, but I cannot be alone in finding the referencing system wholly impenetrable and frustrating. Page footnotes and captions would be more accessible, surely?

The book ends with analyses of energy performance according to various databases. But, as the author points out, the databases for embodied energy vary so widely that in some cases they are practically useless, probably because they have been devised to suit the machine economy and the bureaucratic requirements of building regulations. If we follow the most direct route from nature into building this problem would not arise.

This is a very impressive, positive and helpful book that crams a huge amount of information into its 240 pages, very well expressed, in a clear and lively style.

From years of DCfW experience and direct involvement in small town strategic improvements we have a truly accessible guide to better place making.



Transforming Towns: Designing for Smaller Communities

Matthew Jones | RIBA Publishing

Dick Cole

The cover illustration of Matthew Jones's RIBA book is the stunning Auckland Tower in Bishop Auckland's market place, the welcome point for a tourism project that should transform the prospects of this ancient town. One has to admire the imagination and bravery of those who designed and approved this.

If nothing else, this Welsh architect's guide to what his profession can offer to struggling small towns will encourage you to visit some of the 19 projects from Britain, Ireland and mainland Europe that he uses to illustrate his theme. His own work with the Design Commission for Wales and the Welsh School of Architecture on *Ruthin Future*, and many other small towns of Wales, highlights the value of a sustained planning and community engagement process. Covid-19 has now worsened the plight of many towns while possibly improving the prospects of others. Not all will have sufficient scope to retain vitality by replacing retail with other uses and activities, but thoughtful developments such as those illustrated at Southwold, Rye or Hebden Bridge demonstrate how much design quality can help.

UK governments have recognised that planning policies requiring 'high-quality design' may be doing no more than preventing the worst design (I was about to say 'most ugly' but inevitably some will say that the Auckland Tower is ugly) (see also p. 77). The official response is usually lengthy guidance and, in England, costly local design codes with community involvement – all very good in their way, but reading Jones's book is much more likely to be inspirational than a bland design code. Or it would be if we had enough good urban designers to produce the goods and, more importantly, the clients and planning authorities to support them.

A regular contributor to the Welsh School of Architecture reflects critically on his specific practice-based research – as we all should.

Dwelling on the Future: Architecture for the Seaside, Middle England and the Metropolis

Pierre d'Avoine | UCL Press

Wayne Forster

Pierre d'Avoine occupies a distinctive place in British architecture as a practitioner and teacher based on the elegance of his ideas, designs and buildings. In this 'journey' through a range of innovative projects he offers new ways for contemporary housing in the UK.

Since the Renaissance architects have created methods of intellectual scrutiny of architectural design that rely upon the very stuff of architecture – drawings, models and critical analysis but, most recently, the monograph, mainly consisting of a catalogue of projects with little critical commentary, has held sway. Still there is no cohesive framework or outlet for design-based research in architecture.

This book, the first in a series published by UCL Press and edited by Jonathan Hill and Murray Fraser of University College London, aims to fix this by fulfilling the need to create knowledge and method through actual propositions enabling their authors to reflect critically on their specific practice-based research.

At the heart of the book are twelve projects ranging in scale and location and, most critically, cultural contexts. Like his 2005 *Housey Housey – A Pattern Book of Ideal Homes*, d'Avoine's method is to combine conventional architectural representation, in the form of beautifully judged line drawings, physical models and critical texts, but supplemented here by interviews that he has conducted with the full range of project partners. These illuminate the rich, diverse and often idiosyncratic contexts within which housing in the UK is produced and prove that good housing is not merely a socio-technical process. The resulting proposals suggest the triumph of possibility over regulatory limitation.

As the Welsh Government's laudable Innovative Housing Programme progresses, *Dwelling on the Future* illustrates the value of different ways of thinking and acting.

touchstones

TIME FOR THE BIG GIRLS AND BOYS

Wales only ever built six private finance initiative (PFI) schools. *Touchstone* covered one of them, the Pembroke Dock Community School in spring 2002. The tension of benefits and disbenefits was all too clear.

The Welsh Government moved quickly away from this English method of building procurement. The Welsh Government's '21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme' has avoided leaving local authorities in deep debt for decades to these private-sector-finance ventures.

For too long many further education colleges have been underfunded, understaffed and their building programmes put to the back of the public funding queue. Caught between well-funded schools programmes and the competitive ambitious building programmes of universities, they might be welcoming the new kid on the block 'WEPCo' the Welsh Education Partnership Company. It uses what is referred to as a MIM, a mutual investment model. Is this just another fancy name for PFI? It would seem not entirely, as argued in an Institute of Welsh Affairs article of 2 February 2019 'Is the Mutual Investment Model PFI lite?'

Who and what is WEPco? It was set up in September 2020. 'This long-term partnership and joint venture between the Development Bank of Wales and WEPco's partner Meridiam will provide development services to Local Authorities and Further Education Institutions throughout Wales to improve the educational estate.' This was the Welsh Government's press release description. So, it's not quite PFI let loose in the world of private finance. The Development Bank of Wales was formed in 2001 by the Welsh Assembly Government. It is an independent company, providing commercial funding to Welsh SMEs. Lending top limits are currently £5 million for SMEs. Presumably, this is not necessarily a limit in its relationship with WEPCo's Partner Meridiam.

It's good to know that 'WEPCo will be targeting the development of Net Zero Carbon projects'. This new procurement and delivery route will be overseen by a Welsh Government-chaired strategic partnership board.

In November 2020, WEPCo received its first formal 'new project request' to develop an all-through school in north Wales. Design work has commenced. Alongside existing 21st-century schools frameworks such as SEWSCAP and SWWRCF, this new kid on the block is in one sense just another procurement and delivery route, but presumably the Welsh Government would not have gone to such considerable trouble if it did not think it superior to the existing routes. Is the attraction to local authorities that this new venture is promoted as quicker, faster, cheaper, more sophisticated or is it simply that this is an optional parallel funding stream? The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

On Meridiam's website it states it has 'won a major education contract to develop, build, operate and maintain new schools and Further Education colleges across Wales'. It's a £500 million capital expenditure. You should know also that Meridiam was in 2020 the selected preferred bidder in the Future Valleys consortium for the final section of the A465 Heads of Valleys project. Meridiam is also 'developing 5 schools and 3 day-care centres for over 4,000 pupils in Espoo, the second largest city in Finland'.

In a presentation to Constructing Excellence Wales, Sarah Humber the Welsh Government's MIM programme director along with members of WEPCo stated that the Meridiam scope of work would include the 'pre-identified Band B pipeline' of the 21st century schools programme 'consisting of 33 revenue funded school and college projects', including 'four colleges, ten secondaries and all-through schools and nineteen primaries'.

On its presentation are countless new school building images; none is credited to an architect. On one slide only, 'How we work with participants', the names of architect Sheppard Robson and engineer Arup appear. The management services provider Fulcrum is part of their core team also. Later there is reference to a 'lead architect' (one assumes that to be Sheppard Robson) who will work with a local architect. Sheppard Robson has no reference to this huge programme of work on its website. An image of 'Eastern High' appears, but its architects, Cardiff-based Powell Dobson Architects, has not yet heard from WEPco. Hartridge School by HLM Architects Cardiff appears but they have not heard either, neither has Stride Treglown Cardiff, nor any other Welsh architectural practice formerly involved in schools. Might all Welsh architecture practices that previously offered a full service in delivering schools be relegated to being executive architects only, delivering schemes by others, yet another cultural takeover in Wales by global finance and their London based architectural collaborators?

Every project will be tendered for by a design-build contractor. WEPco also plans to set up the WEPco Academi 'to support upskilling', to ensure 'innovation and skills for new technologies and modern methods of construction are available to the wider Welsh supply chain'. This is welcome news.

One of Meridiam's core values stated in its presentation is 'we are local'. Its website states 'Meridiam is a global investor and asset manager based in Paris specialized (sic) in developing, financing and managing long-term public infrastructure projects. Founded in 2005, Meridiam invests in public infrastructure in Europe, North America and Africa'.

'Meridiam, has offices in eight countries (France, Luxembourg, United States, Canada, Turkey, Senegal, Austria and Ethiopia), manages €6.2 billion of assets and has to date invested in over 62 transport, building and public services projects.' So I guess you can call yourself local anywhere on that basis.

This has the feel of a total takeover not a partial alternative funding stream.

Are we back at Pembroke Dock but with knobs on? *Touchstone* will be following this initiative with enormous interest.

Notes:

The Welsh Government MIM/WEPco presentation can be seen at:
https://www.cewales.org.uk/files/1216/0209/3445/WEP_Supplier_Engagement_Presentation_06102020.pdf

Institute of Welsh Affairs reference: 'Is the Mutual Investment Model PFI lite?

https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2019/02/is-the-mutual-investment-model-pfi-lite/

Touchstone sent a series of questions seeking a clarification of facts to architects Sheppard Robson. These were forwarded to WEPCo . No answers were received despite two requests.

FOOD IN YOUR FACE

Architecture has a way of exposing deep unresolved cultural conflicts within commissioning clients.

A client-body is used to the weekly timetable patterns and the term/vacation structures of the academic year. It is used to further education in livestock farming, food production, vet training and equine skills. It has a café at another campus that offers only a simple lunch created by students training, to fit with the student day. The clientele there is elderly, retired, expecting good plain fare at under £10.00 for two courses. That is the model a part of the client thinks can be replicated.

The new project, however, is to offer high-end chef training, responding to the fine-dining culture of the county's diaspora. Some students will be taught in college kitchen format, but to run real high-end there must be evening dining, late working, way beyond college hours, under the eye of a demanding chef. Food at a price way beyond £10.00 is needed to subsidise running costs. The college will need commercial patronage from some leading local gastronomer. It will need customers with thick wallets. How do you cope with this gear change?

Behind the two new catering kitchens, one for college training and one for high-end chef mentoring serving a public-facing restaurant clientele, there are servicing rooms to both and a giant cattle shed. The intense smell could be problematic. Will it make the food source smell too close to the fine diners? This juxtaposition reminds me of an architecture student project, an abbatoir on top of a steak restaurant. Was that too much in the diner's face?

Design suggestions are made to move the cattle shed, relocating it with a state-of-the-art new facility away from the new catering college. In its place would be a reintroduced a PTFE-roofed horticultural facility, bringing back training skills for students lost in the 1970s to the monoculture of livestock only farming; but budgets cannot do it.

Architecture cannot resolve these clashes of state and private educational cultures and competing values and ethics on farming's and fine dining's futures. The process of architecture can only expose the unresolved. It cannot sort it. That's up to the people and messy complexity of clarifying the strategic brief.

ISS WHAT THEY CALL MODERN AART, INNIT?

Tobacco sponsorship has long gone, banned in the UK in 2005, *writes James Franksson.* In the arts, sponsorship now seems to be the preserve of foundations, philanthropists and trusts as arts organisations are fearful of accepting funding from corporations that cause environmental damage or recruit unethically. Fifty years ago, however, tobacco sponsorship in the arts and sport was rife. In 1972 the cigarette company Peter Stuyvesant, the slogan of which was 'the scent of the big wide world', sponsored the innovative, UK-wide 'City Sculpture Project' in which emerging artists created sculptures for specific urban locations, aiming to 'inform and interest people who [had] become accustomed to more classic forms of sculpture'.[1]

One of the eight artists invited, Garth Evans (born Cheshire, 1934), chose Cardiff as the site for his work because of his family ties with south Wales. He made a large-scale, black-painted steel sculpture that was sited on The Hayes for its six-month loan period, before being moved to Leicestershire where it remained, neglected, for nearly 50 years. Hats off then to Chapter Arts Centre for organising and successfully crowdfunding the restoration of *Untitled* and for returning it in September 2019 close to its initial location on The Hayes for an intended temporary stay of six months.

The restoration and relocation was just the first element of Chapter's ambitious three-part collaboration with the influential British artist who now lives in Connecticut, USA. The second was to hold Evans's first solo exhibition in Wales since the 1970s,[2] and to present a play, *The Cardiff Tapes*,[3] based on recordings made by Evans in 1972 of the comments of the 'generally bewildered' passers-by on confronting the sculpture for the first time. In his book *The Cardiff Tapes* (1972), Evans reflects that he deliberately chose not to 'explain' the sculpture as a memorial or monument despite the sculpture's formal connections to the coal mining and steel-making industries of south Wales. This was because he didn't want to move 'the sculpture away from its proper place as a piece of art and [place] it in the realm of utilitarian objects – a thing with a purpose, a use'.[4] It was up to the viewers to determine their own relationship and make their own associations with the sculpture. What it was for was to engage and challenge. It still does so, and continues to raise questions about the role and purpose of public art.

After its extended stay on The Hayes because of the pandemic, *Untitled* was relocated on 16 September 2020 to its new permanent home where it now graces the frontage of the University of South Wales's Glyntaff upper campus near Pontypridd.

James Franksson writes on British art and design in the twentieth century.

References

1 Quoted in: *Out there: Our Post-war Public Art* exhibition catalogue, Historic England, 2016, p. 20.

2 *But, Hands Have Eyes: Six decades of sculpture*, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, 14 September 2019 to 26 January 2020.

3 *The Cardiff Tapes*. Play, adapted by Leila Philip and directed by Wayne Vincent. Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, 19 to 21 September 2019.

4 Garth Evans. *The Cardiff Tapes (1972)*, Soberscove Press, Chicago, IL, 2015, p. 64.

THE FILM SHORTS GET LONGER

One of a flurry of late legacies left to the RSAW by its former director, Mary Wrenn, was the commissioning of a series of fifteen-minute audio-visual essays on some architectural icons of the Welsh landscape, produced by Lyndon Jones and Bella Kerr.

To date, and accessible from the RSAW website, the projects covered are the Senedd, Tredegar House, Cardiff's civic centre, the Severn Bridge and an intriguing juxtaposition of the Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power station and the nearby Yr Ysgwrn. Each presenter had a distinct take and an individual passion – Menna Richards, Mike Davies, Gillian Clarke, Richard Parnaby, and Elinor Gray-Williams respectively.

The new direction set by the new director Elinor Weekley will focus on community and inclusivity and aim for longer coverage. It may include the Grangetown pavilion Cardiff and the Centre for Alternative Technology.

The first series were clearly aimed to complement the tourist aims of Visit Wales, to celebrate the architecture of Wales and make it universally accessible. What we need also is to find another middle ground medium between these short films / essays, and Jonathan Vining's scholarly erudition on the best of twentieth-century modern architecture in Wales (see p. 23); we need the sort of three/four part TV series that Huw Stephens recently did for the BBC Two Wales, *The Story of Welsh Art*.

touchstones

RURAL HOT WATER

'Staycation' comes loaded with negativity in its rising usage in Covid-times. Positive unchanged 'vacation' has still supposedly to be the real deal, burning up untaxed fossil fuel, flying to our favourite escape zones somewhere else in the world. Anywhere but staying here.

But go to the website 'Coolstays' and you arrive in a glowing exotic world of UK open-air hot tubs with vistas of rolling hills. Buckets of champagne on ice are standard. (I wonder what a week's hot-tub carbon footprint is?) The most intriguing offers on the website are not the predictable cottages, converted barns, and former RSAW award-winning houses, but a world of intersectionality between tents, homes on stilts, tree houses, shepherd huts on wheels that never move anywhere, and hobbity self-builds with not a straight timber in sight.

Given Wales's stringent planning controls in the countryside that all new developments should be either in existing settlements or a replacement single dwelling on an existing rural dwelling footprint, seeing these weird and wonderful flowerings of staycation exotic all over Wales does make you wonder.

'Land managers', or as we used to know them, 'farmers', particularly those in the uplands with their post-Brexit lamb prices going through the roof, have to diversify like crazy. Not all are James Rebanks with his lyrical *English Pastoral* writing talent; so rural development proposals for 'recreation, leisure and tourism' as a Caerphilly planning policy allows, are no doubt coming in like an avalanche all over Wales.

Covid has demanded so many public service officers to be redirected away from their usual calling. These Coolstays, one assumes, even with their short-term temporary occupation must have got their appropriate planning permissions, but as one planning consultant suggested 'all authorities are working from home; enforcement officers are not out and about as much and it is generally taking longer to deal with calls, there is likely to be a time lag'. One wonders if Building Regs' inspections are subject to a similar delay.

Is this why vacation in the UK is still unreasonably given a bad press? You might get a delayed visit from the local planning officer as you lounge naked in your hot tub, leaving your 'land manager' also possibly in hot water. Don't worry, all will be well I am sure.

TIGHTENING THE REGS

Former Welsh Government minister for housing and local government, Julie James, was very energetic following her appointment December 2018. The Innovative Housing Programme, and the decarbonisation of existing homes (*see p. 30*) have been important policy steps forward.

In a March 2021 issue of RTPI news it was reported that 'planning minister Julie James this week promised that a next Labour administration would look at amending planning legislation to make sure that developers "build to the current building regulations and not the ones in existence at the time that planning consents started"'. (Did you all realise that?). 'If we're all back after the election', she said to the Senedd 'I'm sure we'll be able to put together a quick working group to be able to do that'. James is now minister for climate change.

This hints at a longstanding, depressing black hole in government action, getting the building regs in Wales to line up with the reality of all the local authority-declared climate emergencies.

According to RTPI news 'James also revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic had frustrated moves to tighten the building regulations on such issues as space standards and green infrastructure'. But how about adding Passivhaus levels of fabric performance in all new housing and only allowing planning permissions for housing being granted with a commitment by developers to install and monitor promised energy performance in-use over five years post-occupation as standard? That would be a start. There is so much else to do in making new regs bite.

Last time around on building regulations review, Wales ducked it, frightened that we would frighten off the volume house builders, that they would blacklist Wales. We don't need them. We should be encouraging small-scale, locally sourced house builders using locally source timber, backed by a serious skills' training programme. If James could do this, it would the highpoint of her ministerial career.

PUT IT ON MY SLATE

July 2021 could be a life-changing moment for many in north-west Wales. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee, chaired in China but meeting online, will decide formally whether to grant 'The Slate Landscape of North West Wales' nomination World Heritage Site status. Backed by Gwynedd Council, Welsh Government, National Museums Wales, RCAHMW, Snowdonia National Park Authority, The National Trust and Bangor University, it has taken ten years' work to reach the point where the UK government on 24 January 2020 put it forward to UNESCO as being at the top of the UK list for nominations.

In Wales there are three World Heritage sites: the 'Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd', Caernarfon, Conwy, Beaumaris and Harlech; then the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct; and most significantly for the slate landscape application, the 'Blaenavon Industrial Landscape' of south-east Wales.

In the late-nineteenth century this north-west Wales industrial landscape provided a third of the world's output of roofing slates and architectural slabs. The submission is ambitious spatially and culturally. Clearly the quarries and their waste mountains are the star performers but in the selection of seven areas over 65 miles across the north-west they are seeking to embrace the railways, the ports, the settlements and all aspects of its extraordinary industrial innovation.

The seven areas include Penrhyn Slate Quarry Bethesda and the Ogwen Valley to Port Penrhyn, the Dinorwig Slate Quarry mountain landscape, the Nantlle Valley, The Gorseddau and Prince of Wales's Quarries, Ffestiniog and the narrow-gauge railway to Porthmadog, Bryneglwys and Abergynolwyn Village and Talyllyn Railway and finally the Aberllefenni Quay near Machynlleth.

The submission is ambitious spatially and culturally. Clearly the quarries and their waste mountains are the star performers

The late Jan Morris (see p. 56), in her imagined vision reporting from the year 3,000 for the 'Five Castles Reservation' (*Touchstone*, 2017, p. 68), wrote:

'Since independence the Welsh nation's official dedication has been to the principle of Simplicity, and by now the entire Reservation has become a protected tourist enclave governed by the ideal of natural and historical preservation of all kinds, within guidelines of simple elegance. It has been backed by specific government subsidies and private investments, and it is above all ecologically enlightened.'

Let's hope UNESCO shares Jan's vision.

touchstones

TELLING THE TRUTH

Patrick Hannay writes: **Out on the airwaves of progressive politics 'deliberative democracy', as an adjunct or replacement to 'representative democracy', is much debated.** Citizens' and people's assemblies are the new kids on the block. The five-year cycle of party-political elections, on the evidence to date, is simply not suited to facing up to the truth of climate change and acting with sufficient urgency. The focus of their time horizons is just too short and too self-interested. From the abortion issue to creating a law of 'ecocide' in order to bring the fossil fuel polluters to book, many countries across the world are turning to single-issue-focused assemblies to break through the status quo.

In 2020 six committees of the UK parliament commissioned the Climate Assembly UK where 108 citizens selected through sortition and briefed by 47 different climate crisis specialists, spent the equivalent of six weekends with expert facilitators, landing a hefty 556 page report of recommendations to the UK government.

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, the first in Wales, and run entirely online, worked over two weekends and two evening between 6 and 28 March 2021. Funded through the Welsh Government's Innovative Housing and the Optimised Retrofit programmes, the four housing associations operating locally (Linc Cymru, Melin Homes, United Welsh, and Tai Calon) linked to Blaenau Gwent CBC and its local public service board gathered 44 local citizens through sortition, having sent out letters to 10,000 for this act of deliberative democracy. Each person was offered £250 for 23 hours of attendance.

Organised in three stages, 'learning', 'deliberations', and 'recommendations', over 20 specialists lent their expertise, each giving a 10-minute presentation followed by a Q&A session. Some were called back for further briefings. The talks are available online. (Extinction Rebellion Cymru's Sian Cox was the most inspirational.)

The climate assembly's commissioners put forward four themes (two were housing oriented) and the citizens added another four (including 'poverty'). Volunteers from the commissioners' organisations and a 23-member steering group assisted with the technical support and finding local facilitators and scribes who worked with groups of five. They were trained in two half-day sessions by Involve, which ran the Climate Assembly UK. Expert facilitator Mutual Gain was paid to structure and run the whole affair. Only one recommendation met the 80% voting benchmark of the twelve put forward on the four citizen-elected themes. Five got through out of the twelve for the commissioners' four themes. All this for £50,000.

The evaluation and feedback from the citizens are very transparent, balanced and honest. You can read it all at:
https://cynnalcymru.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Blaenau-Gwent-Climate-Assembly-Report-ENG.pdf.

As an observer, who was offered very restricted visibility, and has read the report, the fair thing to say is that it's early days. Apart from the courageous and overawing challenge of facing up to poverty and climate change, two of the other four citizen-elected themes, 'communication' and 'education', suggest that the greatest value of these events at a local level is telling the truth and getting as many people as well informed as possible in the shortest available time. The holding to account can follow on from that.

A CURATORIAL RINGMASTER

Iwan Bala writes: **Un o golledion y byd celf yng nghyfnod y Pla yw clywed bod Robyn Tomos wedi colli ei swydd fel trefnydd y Lle Celf yn yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol.** Mae hyn yn codi cwestiwn mawr am ddyfodol y celfyddydau gweledol ar Faes yr Eisteddfod yn y dyfodol.

Bu Robyn wrthi yn ddyfal yn datblygu y Lle Celf (a elwid gynt yn Arddangosfa Celf a Chrefft) i fod yn fwy cyfoes yn ei hymddangosiad a'i strwythur. Fe aeth ati i greu digwyddiadau atyniadol i gyd-fynd â'r gwaith celf, y dylunio a'r bensaernïaeth. Bu'r syniad o gael beirdd i ymateb i weithiau celf yn llwyddiannus iawn, ond roedd sgyrsiau a pherfformiadau cerddorol a theatrig yn digwydd yn y Lle Celf hefyd. Ambell waith, fe greodd y posibiliadau i weithiau celf ymddangos y tu allan i'r adeilad ac mewn mannau o gwmpas y Maes drwy gydweithredu â Cywaith Cymru ac eraill.

Roedd yr elfen gydweithredol yn amlwg yn ei ffordd o ddelio â'r Pwyllgorau Celf, canolog a lleol, wrth drefnu'r arddangosfa arbennig – arddangosfa o waith celf a oedd yn gysylltiedig â'r ardal ble fyddai'r Eisteddfod yn cael ei chynnal. Roedd ei gefndir newyddiadurol hefyd o bwys yn yr elfen hon o'i waith, a phwyslais ar y 'naratif'. Cofiaf arddangosfa wych ac amserol o waith Charles Bird yn Eisteddfod Caerdydd yn 2008 a greodd archif o waith yr artist unigryw hwnnw ac a oedd hefyd yn ddetholiad o stori dinas Caerdydd. Bu Ken Williams, aelod o'r Pwyllgor, yn weithgar dros ben mewn cydweithrediad â Robyn yn yr achos hwn.

Yn y rhwydwaith o weithgareddau a chymunedau celf yng Nghymru, mae i'r Lle Celf le eithriadol o bwysig, ac roedd Robyn (a fu wrth y llyw ers 1997) yn rhan annatod o'r rhwydwaith yn sicr.

Carole-Anne Davies (Design Commission for Wales) writes: the Design Commission for Wales worked closely with Robyn Tomos during his time with Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru in relation to its sponsorship of the award of the Gold Medal for Architecture, Architecture Scholarship and Plaque of Merit. Robyn was pivotal to the annual selection and judging process and committed to a close working relationship with ourselves and our partners and fellow awards supporters at the RSAW. We offer our sincere thanks and warmest wishes to Robyn and his future endeavours.

Patrick Hannay (editor Touchstone) writes: Mounting an annual contemporary art, craft and architecture peripatetic national gallery show for a quarter of a century is a true tour de force. I had the immense pleasure of chairing the local arts committee with Robyn holding it all together when Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru came to Abergavenny in 2016. Only then, seeing it all at close quarters did I fully appreciate the enormous undertaking that Robyn enacted each year, aided regularly by Sean Harris and other wonderful art gallery craftspeople. The years overlapped, finishing off the previous year's admin, starting up the next year's local committee, while wrestling with current art, craft and architectural selection processes with new sets of selectors each year – it was a substantial skill to keep such a huge number of spinning plates in motion and balanced.

Robyn began with the National Eisteddfod a year after *Touchstone* was launched in 1996. It has been a long shared journey trying to find the best medium to inspire and educate the public about the best of contemporary architecture in Wales. Some mediums worked better than others, there is still more work to do, but it has been quite some ride. Thank you Robyn.

SHIFTING ACTS OF RESISTANCE

Tim Graham writes: **There is a view in some quarters that the very practice of architecture as currently conducted is completely incompatible with the serious need to stay within the Paris Agreement of a 1.5°C global warming limit.** Does this stark critique haunt many of us day-to-day? Some may even find the *Architects' Journal's* current RetroFirst campaign – making new-build the option of last resort – somewhat challenging. After all, old habits die hard. How many architecture school project briefs frontline an existing building and minimising embodied energy?

In the pre-pandemic climate of non-violent direct-action on climate issues, initially fronted by Extinction Rebellion, direct action on climate change in architecture came to the fore with the launch on 30 May 2019 of the organisation Architects Declare (AD) that has now morphed and overlapped with Construction Declares.

Some Stirling Prize-winning practice founders of AD soon came in for substantial criticism. Foster + Partners, Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA), Grimshaw, and dRMM, were all involved in substantial new-build transport infrastructure projects that were in turn seen as utterly incompatible with AD's goals. Fosters and ZHA bailed out of Architects Declare in December 2020. Refreshingly, AD is not wasting time on blaming and shaming others but is focused on direct positive action.

On 2 October 2019 the Architects Climate Action Network (ACAN) was launched at Studio Bark in London with a highly focused series of campaigns on key issues (https://www.architectscan.org/about).

So, how is direct action by architects on climate issues shaping up in Wales? It seems only 21 out of a potential 100 chartered practices are signed up to Construction Declares and of the signees to a recent ACAN campaign on housing standards and building regulations there appeared to be only two members of Welsh educational institutes, the Centre for Alternative Technology, and the Welsh School of Architecture, and one practitioner. Is this simply the inevitable outcome of devolution? Our focus is the Senedd and Julie James, not Robert Jenrick Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (for England) in London. Are we just doing our own thing and if so where is the heat of collective architectural climate action in Wales? Is there heat?

> How many architecture school project briefs frontline an existing building and minimising embodied energy?

In the first Robert Maxwell Memorial Lecture (held online) at the University of Liverpool on 29 April 2021, the esteemed architectural historian Kenneth Frampton cantered through fifty years of his critical writings, his shifting acts of resistance to 'globalised capitalist commodification', as he kept referring to it. Entitled *Reflections on the predicament of architecture: seven points in retrospect* (https://stream.liv.ac.uk/7fujymst) he romped through 'spectacle', 'megalopolis', 'settlement', 'regionalism', 'tectonic', 'megaform', ending up suggesting that 'landscape' should supersede urban design, without hardly mentioning the c-words (climate change) or the s-word (sustainability). What did he make of our current predicament?

It was in his answers to questions that his true colours were exposed. Asked whether his Marxist critical perspective has lost some of its potential validity now in the days of global capitalist dominance, he took a deep breath. 'The fact that we are locked into this globalized insanity is indisputable? This is a terrible world this globalization [...] it is very disturbing, and it's clear that the problem of climate change is directly related to this.'

Julyan Wickham lobbed in another question about the 'unfinished modernist project'. Frampton got into his stride. 'It's an aspiration', but 'let's leave architecture out of it [...] in today's modern project it is also subsidised free education. The unfinished modern project is also a workable, substantial health system that hasn't been starved of funds, as in the case of the English [sic] National Health System by right-wing governments. This is all very clear.

It's not just architecture that's not finished'.

So, are we ready to join Frampton and confront 'globalised capitalist commodification' and call a spade a spade, where new-build architecture responding to seemingly endless rising of GDP, is simply deeply problematic? The jury is out.

Tributes

Jan Morris
2/10/1926 – 20/11/2020

She may have been made an honorary RIBA Fellow but Jan Morris, resident of Llanystumdwy, was an honourable Welsh citizen of the world, one of the greatest writers about place in the twentieth century. This is a bilingual tribute from her son Twm Morys

Galwais un bore ym mis Tachwedd ym Mhenamser, lle mae Bethan Rees Jones yn byw, a lle bydd y ddraig goch yn hedfan o hyd ar ben y boncan i godi ein calonnau. Bu'r ddraig ers ychydig ar hanner y mast a hefyd â'i phen i lawr, a'm plant yn amau efallai mai oherwydd ymadawiad Jan Morris â'r byd roedd hynny. Cyn imi ddweud gair, 'Twm!' meddai Bethan Penamser, 'roedd hi'n ddrwg gan fy nghalon glywed am dy brofedigaeth. Roedd Jan yn golofn i ni, on'd oedd?'

Bûm i lawer gwaith yn cadw cwmpeini i'r awdur taith bydenwog fu yn holl deyrngedau'r papurau newydd: yn Harry's Bar yn Fenis; yn yr eira yn Efrog Newydd; ar y trên bach stêm i Dargeeling; ar lethrau Pen y Fâl, lle consuriodd i mi un p'nawn o ha' frwydyr Isandlwana a buddugoliaeth fawr y Zulus dros y fyddin Brydeinig.

Ond cefais gwmpeini Jan arall hefyd, honno roedd un o'i chyndadau wedi boddi yn Afon Gwy ar ôl troi ei gwrwgl, oedd, yn ôl y goel, yn perthyn i Rowan Williams, Archesgob Caergrawnt (drwy ei fam, Morris o Ystradgynlais), oedd â naw o ewythredd a modrybedd yn y wlad rhwng y Fenni a Threfynwy, a thaid oedd yn hobnobio efo Elgar ond oedd yn medru hel ei achau yn ôl i Rhodri Mawr! Y Jan a gafodd row wrth y bwrdd cinio un tro ers talwm am siarad yn ddi-baid efo fi am lyfrau ac am Gymru. Y sawl fu efo fi ar aml i gyrch yng Nghymru, y wlad a'r chwedl, oedd yn aelod o Orsedd y Beirdd, yn medru iaith ei thadau yn ddigon da, meddai, i ddarllen *Y Ffynnon* a'r Beibl, yn cyfri y diwrnod y cyflwynwyd iddi fedal y Cymmrodorion am ei chyfraniad i Gymru yn un o'r dyddiau mwya' fu dros ei phen erioed, a'r sawl oedd yn meddwl mai ei chymdogion yn Eifionydd oedd y bobol ffeindia' yn y byd.

Yn ystod yr wythnosau diwetha', roeddwn yn cael mynd at ei ffenest ym Mryn Beryl. Buom yn siarad llawer, wrth reswm, am Trump, a siom fawr iddi oedd i'w phroffwydoliaeth ynghylch hwnnw, sef y byddai'n cael troedigaeth yn debyg i Paul, beidio â dod i ben. Ond bu'n holi llawer hefyd am hynt a helynt Cymru a syndod iddi oedd bod Mr Drakeford, dyn nad oedd hi wedi sylwi arno cynt, dyn Llafur mawr, Undebwr, wedi gwneud y safiad gwleidyddol cryfa' dros Gymru o neb ers dyddiau Glyn Dŵr! 'Ah, but he's had Glyndŵrness thrust upon him,' meddai. Gorffennwyd y lled-ddyfyniad Shakespearaidd wedyn: 'One was born Glyndŵr, some achieve Glyndŵrness, and some have Glyndŵrness thrust upon them...' Oni fyddai'n wych o beth, meddai, dro arall, petai Drakeford yn gwneud rhywbeth i'n synnu ni i gyd tra oedd yr haearn yn boeth, yn taro yn galed ac yn Gymreig? Ond roedd arni ofn mai ein siomi ni wnâi o, yr un fath â Trump, a mynd yn ei ôl i gowtowio fel cynt. Gofynnais a gawn i gyhoeddi'r sylw hwn? Cydsyniodd. Ddiwrnod marw Jan, anfonodd Mr Drakeford neges hyfryd iawn ar *twitter*. 'She was a real treasure to Wales,' meddai. Ac anfonais innau neges Jan yn ôl ato.

Yn ystod y dyddiau ola', pan oeddwn yn cael mynd i mewn i'w stafell, es i â chopi o'r llyfr cynta' brynodd James iddo'i hun, a'r llyfr y byddai o yn ei ddarllen i mi yn hogyn, sef *The Welsh Fairy Book* gan W. Jenkyn Thomas. Darllenais rai o'r straeon fu'n ddiléit inni'n dau wrth erchwyn y gwely, ac yn wir, stori'r dyfrgi rhyfedd mewn sach nad ydi o'n ddyfrgi o fath yn y byd ond yn ddyn bychan coch, oedd y geiriau call ola' glywodd Jan gennyf i.

Ond ym Mhenamser roeddem ni... Gofynnais i Bethan pam oedd y ddraig â'i phen i lawr ac ar hanner y mast? 'O!' meddai, 'y mab Llywelyn sy wedi bod yn rhy brysur i'w rhoi hi i fyny'n iawn...' Dywedais fod y plant yn meddwl efallai mai nodi bod Jan wedi mynd o'r byd roedd hi. 'Wel,' meddai, 'mi geith fod felly!'

Image: The community send-off at Trefan Morris of the hearse taking the late Jan Morris to Bangor crematorium (photo: Iolo Penri)

I called one November morning in Penamser (a farm whose name means literally 'In a While' or 'End of Time') where Bethan Rees Jones lives, and where the Red Dragon always flies on the top of the hillock to cheer us. The dragon for a while has been at half mast, and upside down as well, and my children thought that maybe this was because Jan Morris had left the world. Before I'd said a word, 'Twm!', said Bethan End of Time 'my heart was hurt by the news of your bereavement. Jan was a column to us all, wasn't she?'

I was many times in the company of the world-famous travel writer in all the tributes in the newspapers: in Harry's Bar in Venice; in the snow in New York; in the little steam train to Darjeeling; in the bazaars of Cairo; on the slopes of Pen y Fâl in Monmouthshire, where she conjured up for me one summer afternoon the battle of Isandlwana and the defeat of the British army by the Zulus.

But I kept company with another Jan as well, who was, so rumour had it, related to Rowan Williams the Archbishop of Canterbury (through his mother, a Morris of Ystradgynlais) and had an ancestor who had fallen out of his coracle on the Wye and drowned, nine uncles and aunts on her father's side in the country between Abergavenny and Monmouth, and a grandfather on her mother's side who hobnobbed with Elgar but who traced his pedigree back to Rhodri Mawr.

This was the Jan who was told off at table once long ago for talking with me ceaselessly about books and about Wales. The Jan who came with me on many campaigns in Wales, the country and the legend, who was a member of the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Island of Britain, who spoke the language of her fathers well enough, as she said, to read the local paper and the Welsh Bible, who counted the day the Cymmrodorion presented her with a medal for her contribution to Wales as one of the best days of all her life, and who thought that her neighbours in Eifionydd were the kindest people in the world.

During the last weeks, I was allowed to go to the window of her hospital room to talk with her and take down what she said. We talked a good deal, of course, about Trump, and it was a great disappointment to her that her prophesy about him, that he would have a conversion like Paul, never came to pass.

But she enquired often about what was going on in Wales, and it was astounding to her that Mr Drakeford (the First Minister of Wales), a man she'd hardly noticed before, a big Labour man, a unionist, had made a stronger political stand for Wales than anyone since the days of Glyn Dŵr! 'Ah, but he's had Glyndŵrness thrust upon him', she said.

We finished that quasi-quotation from Shakespeare afterwards: 'One was born Glyndŵr, some achieve Glyndŵrness, and some have Glyndŵrness thrust upon them. And wouldn't it be a wonderful thing', she said 'if Drakeford astounded us all while the iron is hot – strike "hard and Welsh"?' But she was afraid that the man would disappoint us after all, like Trump, and slink back to the old kowtowing. I asked if I could publish this comment. She consented. The day Jan died, Mr Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales, sent a lovely message over the social media: 'She was a real treasure to Wales', he said. I sent back to him Jan's message like this: 'One was born Glyndŵr, some achieve Glyndŵrness, and some have Glyndŵrness thrust upon them. What will you do next? Will you astound us by striking hard and Welsh while the iron is hot? Or will you slink back to the old kowtowing?'

During the last days, when I was allowed to go into the room, I took the first book that James ever bought for himself, the book that he read to me as a boy, *The Welsh Fairy Book*. This book led to many a debate between us over the years: Jan was critical of the surreal plotlessness of those old stories. I loved it! I read at her bedside some of the stories we both delighted in. The story of the strange otter in the sack, who turned out to be not an otter at all but a little man all in red, was the last sensible words Jan heard from me.

But we were in The End of Time... I asked Bethan why the dragon was upside down and at half mast. 'Oh!', she said. 'My son, Llywelyn, has had so many things to do that he hasn't put it up properly.' I said that the children thought that maybe it was because Jan had gone from the world. 'Well', said Bethan, 'let it be so!'

Mae'n rhyfedd yma 'Nhrefan
Hebot ti. Go gently, Jan.

Jan Morris:
born 2 October 1926;
CBE 1999;
died 20 November 2020.

Among her many books, *The Matter of Wales* (1984) later republished as *Wales: Epic views of a small country* (1998) must remain her greatest literary gift to the landscape and culture of Wales.

Graham Brooks

27/02/1928 – 21/03/2020

Brooks's career-shaping project and winner of his first Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture: the Capel house, Llandaf, Cardiff (photo: estate of Graham Brooks, courtesy of Ian Brooks).

Where would you go to find the greatest concentration of modernist housing developments in Wales? Swansea, Newport, one of the coastal settlements of north Wales, the capital, perhaps? How about the village of Dinas Powys in the rolling countryside between Penarth and Barry? Here, in this settlement of only 9,000 inhabitants, is located not only T G Jones and J R Evans's brutalist Little Orchard housing (see p. 19), but also four speculative housing developments designed by one of the pioneers of Welsh modernism, Graham Brooks of Hird & Brooks, who died in March last year aged 92.

Brooks was inspired by the work of the Danish Functionalists of the 1950s and their preoccupation with craftsmanship, the expression of materials and structure, and a modern understanding of space. For over 40 years (initially with the practice Stanley and Hird, later Stanley Hird & Brooks, and then, from the mid-1960s, Hird & Brooks) he designed distinctive, overtly Scandinavian-style houses and housing in south Wales, consistently winning awards.

Of the four Dinas Powys developments, the group of 18 single-storey houses in the grounds of the listed Mount House is the most compelling – and probably Brooks's finest work. He made a study visit to Denmark with the developer-client and, while there, made a point of showing him a housing estate in Aarhus by Friis & Moltke, which was helpful in gaining support for what he had in mind. The houses at The Mount are sensitive to the orientation of the sun and employ an architectural language of flat roofs, white-painted brickwork wall planes, and dark-stained structural timbers and joinery to telling effect. The later Merevale development nearby of seven T-shaped patio houses are built in brickwork with tiled, low-pitched roofs and, again, are satisfying in terms of their aspect to the sun and the privacy created by the predominantly blank appearance the houses present to the access road.

The catalyst to The Mount, and indeed much of Brooks's subsequent work, was the Capel house at Llandaf in Cardiff, completed in 1966, and the winner of the Gold Medal for architecture at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 1968. Richard Weston wrote in his *Touchstone* article in 2003 that 'stylistically the design may have been overtly Scandinavian [...] but spatially the design was grounded in a language that can be traced back via the celebrated "Case Study" houses of the 1950s and Wright's incomparable Usonians [...] to that architecture of free-standing planes and "flowing" space that crystallised in Mies van der Rohe's Brick Country House project of 1924 – which in turn was indebted to Wright's first "destruction of the box" in the revolutionary Prairie Houses. It was, in short, Modern'.[1]

The clients were discerning, and had initially shortlisted two well-regarded south Wales practices – Powell & Alport and Alex Gordon and Partners – to create their vision, before adding Hird & Brooks to their list because they were impressed with (of all things) a petrol filling station in Llandaf that the practice had completed in 1961. The original proposal for the service station had been Regent Oil Company's standard design and its brashness caused controversy being sited in the vicinity of the cathedral. Brooks redesigned it to be as unobtrusive as possible incorporating Scandinavian ideas – then managed to change the community's attitude. It was his first design to be built since graduating with distinction from the Welsh School of Architecture in 1952.

The self-proclaimed highpoint of Brook's career were the years 1975 to 1981 designing adventure holiday cabins for the Forestry Commission, a project won in competition with 16 other UK practices. At woodland sites as far afield as Liskeard in Cornwall, Pickering in North Yorkshire and the banks of Loch Awe in Argyll, these superbly detailed, all-timber prefabricated cabins – of which four types were developed – were widely published at the time.

In 2002, Graham Brooks received an outstanding achievement award in the Welsh Housing Design Awards for his career-long commitment to quality design in the field of domestic architecture, and his unique lifetime contribution to contemporary housing design in Wales was recognised through the award of a commendation in the Dewi-Prys Thomas Prize scheme in 2012. *Jonathan Vining*

Graham Brooks, architect:
born Cardiff, 27 February 1928;
married Aase Ginnerup 1959 (one son);
died Penarth, 21 March 2020.

References

1 Richard Weston. 'The extraordinary ordinariness' in: *Touchstone*, issue thirteen, November 2003, p. 5.

John Wallbank

09/02/1955 – 23/03/2020

On 23 March 2020, the architecture profession in Wales lost one of its most loyal supporters when John Wallbank died suddenly of a heart attack. John was the face and voice of Ibstock Brick in Wales for over 35 years until his retirement on St David's Day in March 2017.

For many architects in Wales, specifying brick meant picking up the phone to John Wallbank. John's evident love of good architecture and his ability to have meaningful conversations about how buildings were put together combined to make him an extraordinary individual. 'Always look up!', he would say to his beloved wife and school-girl sweetheart Alison whenever they were walking through a town or village, never wanting her to miss an unusual or interesting feature.

John was the driving force behind Ibstock's sponsorship of the RSAW Spring School in Portmeirion – a partnership that enabled the event to return there in 2015 after a long absence. Also, through John's influence, Ibstock became an outstanding and loyal patron of *Touchstone*, securing the magazine's survival through difficult times. A regular exhibitor at the RSAW annual winter conference in Cardiff, on one rare occasion John couldn't attend because of a clash with the Brick Design Awards in London. For many delegates, John's warm-hearted presence had become such an integral and reassuring element of the event that this was a striking absence. The most frequent query at the registration desk that day was 'where's John Wallbank? What's up?', leading to John's offer to supply us with a cardboard cut-out of himself for any future diary clashes!

Always modest about his achievements, few people know that John took part in one of the most poignant humanitarian relief efforts of the 1990s.

One of the last events John sponsored was the Design Circle 'Skyline' drawing competition. Art was a subject close to John's heart – he enjoyed collecting paintings and photography – so this was an event he found particularly rewarding and enjoyable. Another of his interests was architectural conservation. Hearing that the RSAW Conservation Coach was visiting The Red House in his home town of Merthyr, John joined us for the building tour and hosted a reception to round off the day (making it quite a task for us to get everyone back on the coach!).

But the professional persona representing Ibstock Brick with such integrity was only one aspect of this generous and civic-minded man. For many years John was a church warden, a governor at two Merthyr schools – Heolgerrig Primary and Cyfarthfa Secondary – and chair of local charity The Merthyr Mendicants.

Always modest about his achievements, few people know that John took part in one of the most poignant humanitarian relief efforts of the 1990s. In response to the crisis in Romania, John volunteered to help drive a convoy of vans across the continent, taking medical supplies to hospitals and orphanages. Surviving being held at gunpoint by soldiers who thought the aid convoy was an ambush, the volunteers reached their destination safely, sleeping on the floor of the local Baptist church. As they left the orphanage, one little girl clung so fiercely to John's neck that he was desperate to smuggle her to safety in the UK. Forced to leave her behind, that heart-rending scene stayed with John throughout his life.

On the day of John's funeral, Covid restrictions prevented all but close family attending the burial – so the entire village of Heolgerrig dressed in black and lined the pavement to honour his cortège as it passed. What could be a more fitting goodbye for this dearly loved and deeply-missed Merthyr boy? *Mary Wrenn*

John Wallbank: voice of Ibstock in Wales: born Merthyr, 9 February 1955; married Alison James 1978 (one daughter); died Merthyr, 23 March 2020

Patrick O'Sullivan

28/03/1937 – 10/02/2021

He set up the groundbreaking architectural course at St Fagans, using real buildings as laboratories to observe and measure building performance. The degree courses at the school soon became recognised for their strong architectural science and environmental design content.

Patrick O'Sullivan, who died in February at the age of 83, was a pioneer of architectural science who built at the Welsh School of Architecture one of the largest multi-disciplinary research and development groups of any UK school of architecture.

Pat O'Sullivan was appointed to the chair of architectural science at the Welsh School of Architecture, which was then part of the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST), in 1970 at the early age of 33, having moved from Newcastle-upon-Tyne University. This was a time when schools of architecture recognised the need to develop a research culture and the then head of school, Professor Dewi-Prys Thomas, saw architectural science as an area that provided an opportunity for building a strong and vital research capability.

O'Sullivan was a pioneer in taking the subject forward, specialising in building energy and healthy buildings, and establishing Cardiff as a world leader in the field, building an interdisciplinary research group that still flourishes today. He set up the groundbreaking architectural course at St Fagans, using real buildings as laboratories to observe and measure building performance. The degree courses at the school soon became recognised for their strong architectural science and environmental design content. While at Cardiff, he led major research projects on better-insulated housing, passive solar design and sick building syndrome. He became extremely adept at bringing industry funding to large-scale projects and in transferring academic research outcomes into practice.

He recognised the importance of working closely with government and industry, collaborating with both the electricity and gas industries. He was a member of the independent inquiry into legionnaires' disease outbreaks, and chaired the England and Wales Building Regulation Advisory Committee.

He enjoyed working on real projects, including the refurbishment of Windsor Chapel, Hampshire schools, Liverpool Energy Study, and St Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight, work that would now be termed 'research in practice'. His work with architectural practices led to the award of an RIBA honorary fellowship in 1980 and, in 1988, he was awarded the OBE.

O'Sullivan played a major role leading up to the merger of UWIST and University College Cardiff in 1988, at which time he left Cardiff to take up the post of dean at The Bartlett, University College London, a post he held until 1999. He continued to occupy the Haden-Pilkington chair at The Bartlett until his retirement, after which he and his wife Diana returned to live in Cardiff.

Pat O'Sullivan will be remembered by those who had the privilege of working with him for his enthusiasm for the subject, his sense of fun, and his ability to communicate the subject to a wide audience. *Phil Jones*

Patrick O'Sullivan, architectural scientist: born London, 28 March 1937; married Diana Grimshaw 1963 (3 sons, 1 daughter); OBE 1988; died Cardiff, 10 February 2021.

See also p. 47 for other aspects of O'Sullivan's career.

Professor (emeritus) Phillip Jones OBE specialises in research, design and teaching in the field of decarbonising the built environment, and was head of the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University from 2002 to 2013.

Jane Llewellyn-Dixon
30/12/1949 – 02/01/2020

Literacy for all, was her life's work… she would find a way through her charm, skill and humour to take people over these seemingly impassable barriers without them hardly noticing.

Every word in the 25 years of *Touchstone* magazines since 1996 has come under the unerring scrutiny of sub-editor Jane Llewellyn-Dixon. No slip of grammar or syntax or punctuation would go unnoticed. Being not from an architectural background there was no way that trendy phrases or obscure references, only known to the architectural cognoscenti, would be acceptable. She understood in the best *Touchstone* tradition that this was a journal for all, for people like her fascinated by contemporary architecture and of course for the profession as well.

Literacy for all, was her life's work. Starting with FE literacy classes for hard-pressed farmers who had missed out on their schooling, and were facing a mountain of government forms, to taking on primary school children struggling with their reading, taking in the seemingly hopeless cases, she would find a way through her charm, skill and humour to take them over these seemingly impassable barriers without them hardly noticing. She ended up running single-handedly the roll-out of a UK-wide literacy programme produced by the charity Unitas, across the whole of Wales, for use in all schools. Building visits by *Touchstone's* editor were sometimes combined with fitting in her Welsh school visits in faraway places, when *Touchstone* deadlines were pressing. Literacy and architecture overlapped.

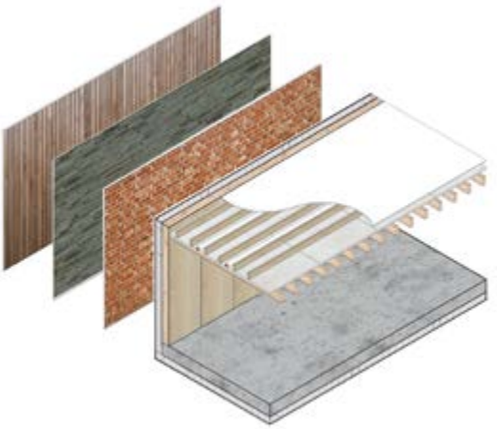
It was rumoured by some that maybe she was the face behind the architecture critic Janet Marshall, using the name as a pseudonym. A rare small picture of Marshall appears once on p. 3 of the 2016 *Touchstone* issue, but those who know Jane well think the Russian hat is not really in character. She did however have unerring visual judgement on fine contemporary architecture. She never turned down a chance to share in a sneak preview of some fine modernist house even if they would always remain a dream beyond her financial reach. But she did have a fine small contemporary garden-room built for her in Cae Penydre, Abergavenny, a sedum covered mono-pitched roof with a spectacular east-facing clerestory to the sky and the morning sun, and at a turn, a fine view to the south of her favourite mountain, the Blorenge, with a window angled open to the very small garden she created from scratch. It was a garden room in the fullest of senses. Perched up high on her favourite special purpose-built corner seat, that doubled beneath her as a small library of her favourite gardening books, she could commune with the sky and the mountain. This was for her an anchor of light and literacy to a place that she loved.

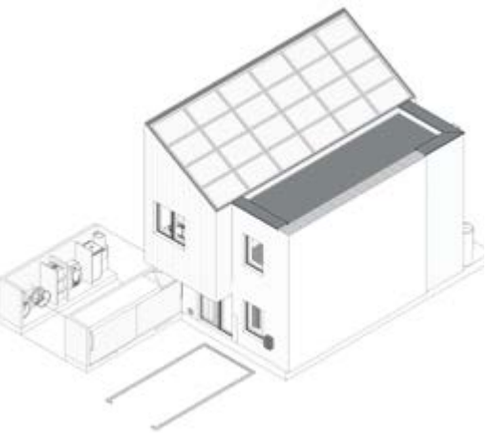
Now and then in small private moments, she shared a quiet smile with the former director of the RSAW, another non-architect, when some in the profession became over-inflated with their sense of self-importance. She was known for a gentle tease now and then, even of the editor.

For over eighteen years Jane and Jonathan Vining kept the literacy of *Touchstone* in immaculate order. Very little missed their patient eyes. But she will certainly be missed. Her laughter could be heard brightening up many Portmeirion spring schools. She lit up a room.

Jane Llewellyn-Dixon:
born Bristol 30 December 1949;
married Bristol 1971 (two sons, one daughter);
died Abergavenny, 02 January 2020.

As we have been going to press, things have been loosening up. Lockdown meant no talking to strangers, no building visits, so now that things are opening up the following projects (pp. 62–71) completing might be of interest to see in the flesh.





OPENI

1. Homes for the long term

Despite the handbrake turn from new-build to retrofitting existing housing as the principal homes-investment focus of Welsh Government, many of us will still be awaiting, with considerable anticipation, the full completion of the Parc Haddau, Pontardawe new-build scheme for Sero Homes by Loyn & Co architects.

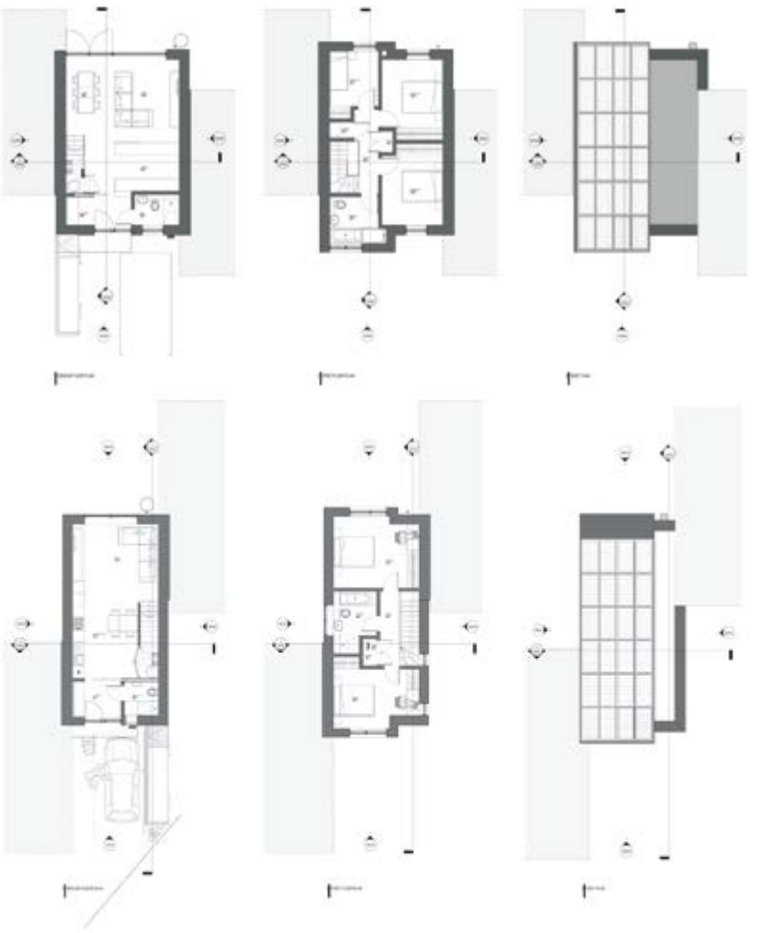
Why the interest? Well, at a design level simply because it could marry and deal with holistically the best of spatial, environmental performance and landscape thinking in contemporary homes design for those most in need.

For an architect with a very long track record in award-winning, one-off, somewhat extravagant houses for the comfortably well-off, the challenge to turn those skills to the service of providing a scheme of 35 affordable homes, is something the Loyn practice has relished for years. A lot is at stake, not just for the practice, but also to show the volume house-building industry how far behind the curve they truly are with their anywhere-anyhow-fossil-fuel-guzzling products.

As a journalist, one is used to receiving spectacular CGI images of schemes. Ones that foreground landscape are frequently trying to mask the less-than-lovely architecture. In the case of Parc Haddau, one of these images is *only* landscape. It masks nothing. It says everything about the ambition.

The site includes an ancient woodland, a stream designated as a site of importance for nature conservation, as well as sensitive wetland and grassland habitats. The landscape design thinking of Farrer Huxley is absolutely core to the project. The landscape spatial framework drives the layout. The intimate landscape detail offers the simple disciplined sawtooth site geometry of the housing layout a counterpoint of genuine richness. It will take years to establish. Who will tend to it over time? After all this is the Achilles heel of so much contemporary private housing. Individual gardens are fine, but who will care for landscape of the shared public realm usually ruled by the road layout and maximising plots for the greatest financial returns? Securing the sale and moving on is the dominant mantra. Public landscape is surely just a headache.

Social housing history of the 1970s in contrast had many fine examples of beautifully landscaped layouts – just think of Ralph Erskine at Byker. The parks department was there for the long haul to look after it. The odd one in the private sector, such as the magnificent Span Developments schemes of the 1960s by architect Eric Lyons as a developer-partner of architect Geoffrey Townsend, showed there was another way. But they were rare. Lyons was also in it for the long term. As a developer-architect



N G U P

he was rare. There is something of 'Span' in Sero Homes. Having architect Andy Sutton as one of the founding directors makes Sero partly architect-led also, but most innovative of all is what comes with the best of fabric-performance design allied to energy-monitoring technology and building all that into a different housing management and financing system. This is an equally important innovation.

The homes will be competing with other affordable housing providers. The concept is that the rent for a Sero home will include its utilities, the costs of its heating bills. These will be extremely low so Sero's rent will be equivalent to an affordable housing rent plus energy bills on a less energy efficient home. Sero can also sell the energy not used by the tenants to the national grid. This additional income stream will supplement the rent and justify the additional cost in initial construction. They are in it for the long term.

The design brief was to provide 35 zero-carbon homes, one community building, and one community guest annex for short-term let to visitors, and that 'zero carbon' is as defined under the serious strictures of the Green Buildings Council not simply some lazy PR labelling.

The buildings integrate Passivhaus design principles to reduce energy consumption. There are integrated solar panels on the roofs and ground-source heat pumps buried in the earth. These things have informed the external appearance of the houses. Each home has a mono-pitched, timber-clad roof element. This provides enough space for 38 sqm of solar panels. To prevent the solar panels overshadowing each other there are flat roof sections between the houses that also act as 'blue' roofs to attenuate the rainwater run-off on each plot. The ground has such poor rates of infiltration that it is not possible to accommodate the SuDS strategy in the landscaping.

The houses have been angled 30 degrees from south to shift the peak photovoltaic production times earlier and later in the day. This is so the energy demand on the site (mornings and evenings) can be matched with the energy production from the panels.

To balance internal changes in temperature in a lightweight timber structure, exposed thermal mass is placed in the most efficient place. The ceilings of each level of the homes have 50 mm of exposed concrete between exposed timber joists. This provides an additional 5 degrees of cooling compared to locating it on the floor. The homes are also to have a net zero embodied carbon primary structure made of cross laminated timber, which has a negative carbon footprint. This offsets the embodied energy in the concrete foundations and thermal mass. Externally, low embodied energy and locally sourced materials are used including timber, local stone and reclaimed brick.

The scheme will attract considerable attention, but remember it's there for the long term. You will have to be patient to judge whether this is truly benchmark setting.

2. Grounded lessons

Central government-led system-built schools of the 1960s and 1970s were infamous for their blasted-heath, scorched-earth approach to landscape. They just landed in flat deserts of tarmac and grass. Sports surfaces have become more sophisticated over time but, except for the best of primary school designs, the matter of learning outside in a landscape that is seen as an extension of the curriculum and of the learning inside, is a rare occurrence. School is about containment and safeguarding while keeping overlaps with the community's contributions to a minimum.

In Monmouthshire two major schools have recently been completed, one at Caldicot and the other at Monmouth. Both have their designs delivered by BDP from its Bristol office. Of the two schools, Monmouth seems internally to be the greater tour de force (*see right*) and certainly worth a visit; it is the sort of thing that one has come to expect from BDP's schools' architecture, but externally it appears at both schools that we have not moved on much from the 60s and 70s. Caldicot is positively prairie-like.

What is singularly lacking is some creative overlap with local volunteer 'growing groups' in each settlement, working with the heads, teachers and the children to develop an invigorating extension of the curriculum and being involved early on in the site feasibility study and landscaping strategy.

Everyone on the formal procurement side parrots the Well-being of Future Generations Act criteria and Professor Graham Donaldson's report re-crafting the curriculum under the four purposes of creating:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued, members of society....

So, couldn't 'fulfilling lives' include as a matter of course engaging with the land, learning how to grow with nature? All this is having to occur back to front at Monmouth with local volunteer Transition Town members and other pushing a more enlightened agenda after the school contract is complete.

With even greater Welsh Government centralisation of power over school environments seemingly on the way under WEPCo (see p. 50) and with Monmouthshire about to embark on anther major school in Abergavenny, let's hope that lessons can be learnt fast and we can get ahead of the curve and have the whole project design, led by landscape.

3. A people's palace

Everything that was previously a 'centre' has now become a 'hub'. As a formative word of the digital age, 'hub' is now firmly established as a physical presence.

We need these sorts of words to describe places that don't fit our traditional building-type nomenclatures. Some signal a societal transformation. Job descriptions and boundaries of the workers in them become loose, multivalent, overlapping. Who uses the spaces within the 'hub' becomes hugely diverse. Former exclusive territories become open to all, multi-purpose.

Establishing an appropriate aesthetic language for such places is always a challenge. Multi-purpose with all the fit-out elements being mobile can so often end up bland and characterless.

Inserting a twenty-first century 'hub' inside a magnificent late nineteenth-century town hall, theatre and market hall building, as GWP Architecture has sought to do inside Wilson and Willcox's Abergavenny building of 1871, adds another layer of tensions to resolve. Inserting a projecting and floating first floor into the majestic Victorian market hall space is tricky. To make the best of the spatial opportunity will require contemporary structures and materials. Handling this with confidence will be challenging. Internally all those portraits of former mayors, the slightly stuffy pomp of the former mayor's parlour, will the 'hub' find places for these memories, can we balance just the right amount of formality with looseness or will it all become a digital anywhere-anyhow place?

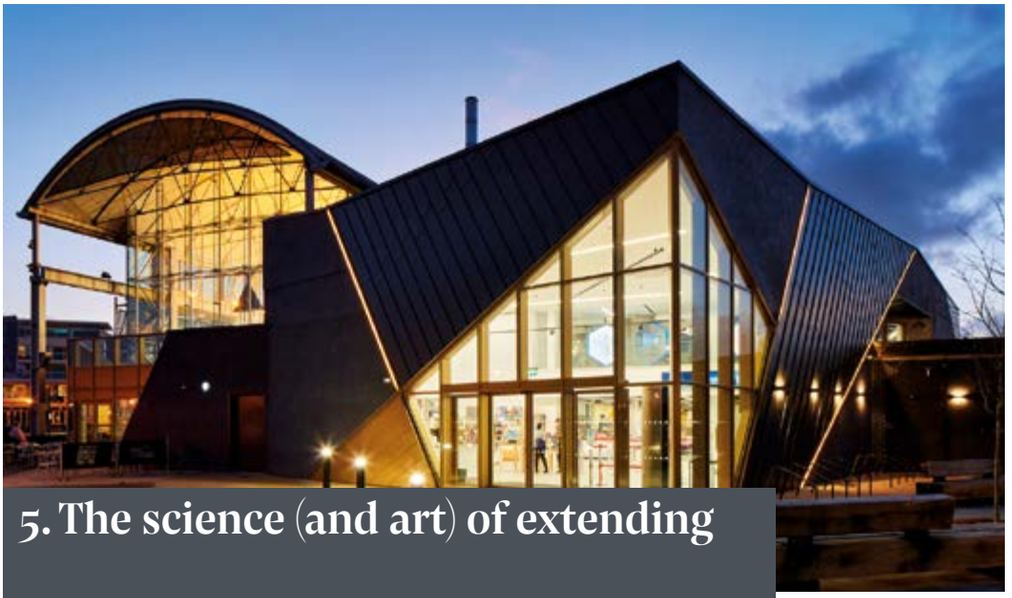
When we are through the worst of this pandemic and the Abergavenny Hub can be fully opened, it will offer a quite remarkable assembly of uses: a ground floor 'one-stop-shop', a tourist information point, a theatre and events reception, a police contact point, and then a 340-seat theatre above with, adjacent to it, a new lift in the tower, and a fully functioning first-floor library that can double up as a skills' and employment training facility with spaces for town councillors' meetings, a base for the town clerk, a contemporary council chamber doubling up as community gathering place, all overlooking the thriving market hall produce below. What a spectacle it will be.

In one simple sense, without the hub and its spokes the outer rim will always collapse. For a place of public services and public gathering, binding a settlement's citizens together, the term 'hub' seems appropriate, even if an unattractive, mechanistic and blunt word. Some might rather call it a 'palace of the people'. Now you're talking.

4. Brecon beacon

30 minutes up the road from Abergavenny, Brecon now has its own version of a 'hub'. Like Monmouthshire County Council, Powys has been trying to rationalise and condense services, overlapping job titles and roles, all addressed by adding a new town-centre piece of architecture. Like Abergavenny the pandemic is frustrating its full enjoyment. Currently the new library is only open for click and collect. Unlike Abergavenny the new architecture of the relocated library with new community and education facilities, including a café, shop, and tourist information by Powell Dobson Architects (Swansea office) is standalone, but plugs into the rear of Brecon's somewhat austere neo-classical mid-nineteenth-century former assize courts and Shire Hall, that loom over the town-centre approach. This connecting of old to new resolves the disabled access challenges for old and new buildings alike.

The Shire Hall building has for some years functioned as Y Gaer museum and art gallery run by the friends of the Brecknock Museum, but floors inserted in 1974 compromised the grandeur of the original spaces. These have been removed. There is a re-display and reinterpretation of the museum's collections, and the opening up of the original cells for the first time. In contrast to the forbidding, rather closed existing building, the new addition exuberantly addresses the landscape. A sandstone-clad, wedge-like upper storey floats above a transparent base framing a spectacular view to the mountains. The citizens of Brecon have been patient for a long time. It's been a long time coming. Will it be worth the wait? Go and see for yourself and drop into Abergavenny while you're at it.



5. The science (and art) of extending

One of the architectural icons of Cardiff Bay, one that is distinct without being shouty-look-at-me, is Ahrends Burton and Koralek's building for Techniquest, the UK's first purpose-built science discovery centre, opened on 1 May 1995.

Artfully reusing the steel frame of the former Baileys engineering workshop, ABK wove the new into the old, sometime breaking out boldly to focus an entrance or to house a globe for a star-gazing dome. Despite the new free-form elements moving within the rectilinear historic frame, the balancing act always left the clarity of the original frame perfectly legible and just sufficiently visually dominant.

So, what do you do when the client decides it wants to transform this existing building – by doubling its footprint and expanding the exhibition space by 70 per cent. That's one helluva balancing act to pull off.

'The new extension provides over 1,000 sqm of additional exhibition and commercial hire space. It also has the dual purpose of accommodating large corporate and private events, increasing income further to help ensure financial sustainability.'

The designer of the new scheme, HLM Architects, Cardiff, claims to have 'created an envelope design concept. The new build wraps over the existing, such that the existing single-storey back-of-house roofs became new mezzanine exhibition floor space, linking the existing three-storey volume to the new-build, double-height entrance space'. The new-build element, HLM says 'is inspired by origami offering a contemporary contrast to the existing'.

There comes a point in some buildings' lives where yet another extension would be more simply resolved by demolishing all the existing and starting again. If the addition is so large, how do you keep the integrity and clarity of, in Techniquest's case, two distinct structures of different designs and eras. In a world that properly prioritises concerns about any project's embodied energy, demolition should be avoided, so that leaves the architect with potentially quite a headache with such a scale of transformation. The new project was completed September 2020. With the pandemic it's hardly had a chance to be explored. So go and see it in the flesh when you can and make up your own mind how the balancing act works.

6. Disciplined collaboration

Cardiff University has become a more architecturally ambitious client over the last decade. Two major outcomes of this ambition are coming to fruition. First, the Centre for Student Life on Park Place by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios (see p. 67) and second, here, the 'Abacws' by Stride Treglown and Adjaye Associates working as a single architectural team. Following selection through a Sell2Wales invitation to a tender short list of five teams, Stride Treglown worked with Adjaye Associates up to RIBA stage 4a. Stride Treglown is taking the building through to completion in July 2021.

Abacws is a £23 million teaching and research facility of about 9,800 sqm, the new joint home for Cardiff University's schools of mathematics and computer science. By consolidating the two faculties under one roof, the university aims to further encourage collaboration and integration.

A 'work hub' houses academic and PhD offices; a learning hub includes lecture theatres, seminar rooms, hybrid and specialist learning spaces including computer labs, the cyber-security lab, the EPSRC MAGIC Room, research laboratories and a financial lab/visualisation lab. A learning centre has a range of individual and collaborative study settings.

Located beside Cardiff University's central campus on Senghennydd Road, the building is immediately adjacent to the Cardiff Business Technology Centre, students union, and Cathays railway station. The restricted, narrow site, with noise and solar gain challenges from the south drove the massing strategy. A highly efficient footprint was needed to keep the storey heights in the conservation area within acceptable limits.

A key design challenge was to maintain and enhance the existing pedestrian movements around the site and between Senghennydd Road and Cathays station. A plaza was created to the east of the building to draw people through to the station. The new building aims to 'fill in' the urban grain along Senghennydd Road and create defined areas of active frontage with the introduction of a colonnade to offer a sheltered pedestrian route adjacent to a glazed façade (*see left*).

The façade is clad with composite panels on a steel frame and has been carefully optimised with respect to orientation, fabric element performance, glazing area and form, external shading and cost to achieve a design that balances the conflicting considerations – allowing beneficial heat gains in winter, precluding excessive heat gains in warmer months and maintaining good daylighting levels all year round.

7. University challenge

The Joint Students Union building by Alex Gordon and Partners burst onto Park Place in 1974 boasting a 1,600 capacity venue for rock concerts, a night club, a pub, a studio for Xpress Radio and home to the much-respected and much-read student newspaper *Gair Rhydd*. They were heady, radical times. The union was one of the most renowned and active in the UK. Its somewhat robust but low-key dark-brown brick architecture of the time, with its memorably oppressive entrance sequence to a megastructure that climbed over the railway to embrace the radical Sherman Theatre the other side of the tracks, appeared to inversely reflect the colourful intensity of the students' activities. In its last years the receding facade was constantly being overlaid by more and more gaudy graphics (*see top left*) declaiming the vibrant life within. It was always on the edge, a place apart, independent from the neo-classical Portland-stone pomp of the formal architecture of Cathays Park.

47 years later and due to open in September (depending on Covid) we have a new and very different animal on the side of Park Place, the 'Centre for Student Life' by architect Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios (*see left and below*)

Cardiff University describes it as a 'new home for the Student Support and Wellbeing department'. The 'Centre for Student Life demonstrates the University's commitment to prioritising student health, wellbeing, and welfare, putting them at the heart of the campus', as though they could be anything else. This is seemingly, in language at least, worlds away from 1974.

Jonathan Vining

Rock concerts and heavy drinking will presumably have migrated to the rest of the city.

There will be 'student connect' – the students' first point of contact, the front-of-house service in the building. Then 'futures' – made up of the 'careers and employability' and 'global opportunities' teams. There will be services for 'advice and money', 'counselling, health and well-being', 'disability and dyslexia service', 'academic study skills and mentoring team' and crucially, for a university with a global student population, 'international student support'. There will be a new 550-seat Sir Stanley Thomas Lecture Theatre, social study spaces and catering outlets including the ubiquitous global chains of Greggs and Costa Coffee. Rock concerts and heavy drinking will presumably have migrated to the rest of the city.

The new building is the very opposite of recessive. Since its first CGI appearance in the press, its scale and some say overbearing colonnaded presence on Park Place has been hotly debated. Has the architecture of high-res digital led to misjudgements on scale and proportion? Some argue its material and formal vocabulary wrongly seek to join it to the centrepiece architecture of Cathays Park, instead of finding an 'edge' architecture, subservient to the civic centre's masterpieces.

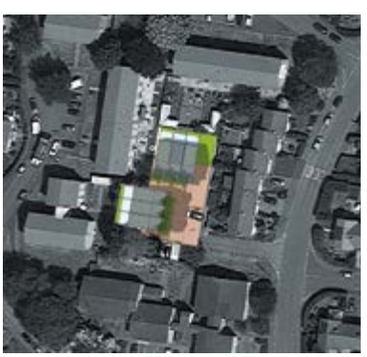
It would be tempting to interpret this new attempt to incorporate the architecture as the corporate absorption of student life. Interestingly, the Joint Students Union and the students' union itself has been absorbed by the new centre, but the 1974 building is no longer visible from the street. So, a part of the truth is that just as it was in that 1974 building, the students' union itself has been always innovative and focused on the best practice services for student welfare. It still is a very active union. But now with the pandemic havoc played out on younger generations, and with a 'school-strike' cohort about to enter higher education, a more radical confrontational mood may return: the corporate may be held to account. 'Welfare' may seem too polite a word. One side of Park Place may need to confront the other with some home truths. Edginess may return in social behaviour, but the architecture speaks of other things.

8. Innovation values

Ever since the first prefabs rolled off the post-second world war production line, taking up the slack of aircraft factory innovation and assembly efficiencies, housing architects having been searching for the holy grail to match that. Fast forward seventy years and the material of houses must now have the lowest embodied energy. The climate emergency demands a massive upscaling of off-site skilled fabric assembly to cut out the air leaks. A whole raft of new innovative servicing and heat-generating technologies have to be incorporated. The quality control and speed of off-site fabrication has to be accelerated. Performance monitoring digital technology has to be included as standard. Making claims for net zero-carbon is simply not good enough, you have to prove it in use. Not surprisingly, the Welsh Government launched with considerable fanfare in February 2017 the Innovative Housing Programme (IHP). Four years on we are in phase 4 of this energetic programme. A huge number of projects across the country have been chasing that grail. But should that be the scope of the focus?

So, it takes quite a bravura step for someone to say quietly from the sidelines 'excuse me, what about a sense of spatial generosity, an uplifting sense of light and airiness, and simply that core quality of architecture, delight?' I can do the 'commodity', and we should by now be able to do 'firmness', I can get alongside all of those technological and scientific demands, but what about delight? And maybe we need to focus our efforts to fit the needs of the young single homeless and the down-sizing elderly freeing up their former homes for families.

It also takes a quiet modesty to keep the scale of the schemes small but, more importantly, use those underused but spatially tricky small parcels of brownfield land born of a more profligate era of low-density homes where garage rows are no longer required.



Monmouthshire Housing Association heard that quiet voice. Over the four phases of the IHP they have ten schemes in various locations across the county at various stages of development (*examples of some sites are shown bottom of pp. 68-69*). One in Abergavenny (*illustrated here*) and one in Caldicot are built and occupied. Two in Bulwark, Chepstow are under construction. Three are wrestling with Natural Resources Wales on flooding issues, and three are paused by the challenging issue of phosphate run-off into the Wye and Usk (*see right hand column this page*).

Each site uses a combination of a single-storey courtyard house type and a two-storey assymetrical double-pitch roof section with patio. Each house through every trick of plan making using the positioning and type of glazed openings and sliding doors to extend that sense of space beyond what the actual dimensions are. They are stretching available floor area to the maximum within inevitably limited budgets. The courtyard type is 65 sqm, the two storey is 75 sqm. But it's the volumes in the section, the use of space beneath the pitch and how that relates to the immediate space outside the dwelling, that provides the delight so clearly felt and evidenced through survey responses by prospective tenants and owners when they came to the first two schemes launched. The heating bills will be low. They are using air-source heat pumps outside on later schemes, which means storage can increase internally. Underfloor electric heating is allied to substantial arrays of PVs on early schemes. The highly insulated fabric and all the developments are delivered by an MHA subsidiary, Capsel, so that there is continuity, lessons learnt from scheme to scheme, consistency of build quality, and total immersion with the architect in the design and development of the original house types. All of this is good practice and should be expected.

What is not expected, but is all the more pleasurable when you are in it, is the delight. The small voice came from a now part-time architect academic of the Welsh School of Architecture, who has always believed in research through design practice and that it should be put to the service of public architecture for the most demanding of social needs. His name is Wayne Forster.

Adrian Sherratt / Times

9. When two worlds collide

It's like pea soup: poultry farms turn Wye into wildlife death trap' proclaimed the headline by Robert McKie in *The Guardian* of Saturday, 20 June 2020. The home of the 'picturesque', the River Wye has been acclaimed for centuries. 'If you have never navigated the Wye, you have seen nothing', wrote the travel writer William Gilpin 250 years ago.

McKie reported that Simon Evans of The Wye and Usk Foundation stated 'the Wye looks like French onion or pea soup at times', and Evans was clear about the culprit. 'The amount of phosphate from agriculture that is pouring into the Wye has increased enormously over the past few years', he told *The Guardian*. 'We are getting double the amounts they were getting only a few years ago, and it is free-range poultry farms that are the main problem.'

Apparently, there have been 20 new free-range chicken sheds approved by planners over the area last year, and another 11 are currently being considered. There has been a knock-on or downstream effect to developers and their design teams in the areas affected. On 21 January 2021 Natural Resources Wales announced that owing to high phosphate levels on the upper reaches of the Usk and Wye new stringent drainage requirements would be required if planning permission was to be secured.

These requirements have effectively blocked many developments (*see adjacent housing story*) because even if the additional cost of on-site treatment can be borne, not all sites have the space for the type of plant required to completely remove phosphates. While we as a profession and industry must take responsibility not to pollute it seems that a more integrated, shared and responsible solution is needed and quickly. Chickens need to come home to roost where the culprit lies.

10. Council leader leads

There are a lot of positive lessons to learn from the Llys Cadwyn project in Pontypridd for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) by architects Gaunt Francis and Darnton B3 (*see below*). Most importantly it is proof that with good council leadership and sound officer procurement, the council is better off taking the development initiative itself rather than waiting for several London- based developers to make a ham-fist of getting schemes to stack up and then pulling out. That was tried twice.

Facing across the River Taff to Ynysangharad Park, Gaunt Francis's historic researches led them to find the old burgage plots at right angles to the river and an erased River Street also at right angles connecting Taff Street to the river. This now serves a new bridge by Darnton B3 to the park. So, instead of the traditional street-fronting urban block, Gaunt Francis made the one block into three buildings and turned them to the river creating several permeable routes through to a handsomely surfaced new riverside walk.

Like many current councils, RCT needed to find way of funding new multi-public service buildings to cope partly with cuts but also to create new public service realignments.

In the curvilinear structure, offering a gestural nod to the spectacular, world-renowned William Edwards' arched bridge to the north of the site, are a ground-floor one-stop-shop, a café and meeting rooms with a library connected to a further library floor above, all topped off with a second-floor council gym. The two rectilinear buildings are spec office space with a café in one corner of one of the blocks; the larger building is currently occupied by Transport for Wales.

While this project is yet another example of this curious procurement process of making architects subject to competitive tender at RIBA stage 3 for a building they have already designed (and then in this case not being able to follow it through), Alan Francis was at least kept on as design consultant by RCT and the transition was handled well. How exactly RCT funded and procured all this, taking the lead as they should in such an important site in their community, we will have to wait until Covid properly lifts and the next issue of *Touchstone*, to discover more.

© Will Pryce

11. In public service

There was a time in the UK when the best of architects aspired to join the best of local authority architects' departments to focus their talents on public architecture. For the post-second world war generation of young architects, building the 'New Jerusalem' was a passion, focusing most resources on the essentials of shelter, education and health.

Over time inevitably the delivery vehicles for public architecture have changed out of all recognition. County architects' departments have almost evaporated, but some architects are still fortunate to spend most of their careers serving the public realm, providing the public essentials. Maybe post pandemic we will see again a resurgence of focusing on the public essentials.

One such architect was the late Amy Cowan, who trained at the Welsh School of Architecture from 1995 to 2000. She worked initially at Nightingale Associates in Cardiff alongside Kieran Morgan and Colin Hockley on the ground-breaking single-bedroom-only ward provision at the Aneurin Bevan Hospital at Ebbw Vale. Following this, she had a period working with Professor Wayne Forster in DRU-w from August 2011 until November 2013 where she worked on a funded research project on low-carbon buildings.

With the challenge of the unexpected early onset of cystic fibrosis, the large public service company Capita, which had absorbed the renowned Welsh practice Percy Thomas Partnership, was able to take Amy on, and allow her to fit in what work she could manage around the challenges of her diminishing health. She eventually died peacefully on 27 March 2018 at St David's Hospice, Newport, aged only 40.

Her final public project at Capita has just recently been completed (*see top and below*), the new Merthyr Tydfil bus station, a strategic part of the regeneration of the centre of town around the River Taff. It is a fitting legacy from a fine public architect. Maybe the council could erect a plaque in her memory?

It is a fitting legacy from a fine public architect. Maybe the council could erect a plaque in Amy Cowan's memory.

photos by Max Creasy

12. Small but perfectly formed

The pandemic has made things very tricky for architectural journalists. Buildings cannot be properly visited; many are closed to the public. One cannot interview users and clients, so a responsible proper review cannot be done.

An extra layer of complexity occurs when the project to be covered is a private house. Understandably the inhabitants don't want hordes of architectural tourists swarming around with long distance lenses, so the only responsible thing for a journal to do, is to conduct a full review on the page – but we can't. At least not yet.

It might also be a journalist's temptation on seeing a potential small house extension, even if it is a small-project award winner to say 'oh well, a couple of images should suffice'. But that would be very wrong in the case of Martin Edwards' seemingly modest extension to a small house in north Wales (*shown here*). So, we will be returning to this project and giving it the coverage it deserves. The context is archetypal. The response is distinct but maybe there are general lessons to learn from its simplicity and careful assembly. That way also the owners can rest easy.

The architecture of water

One of the many positive strategic takeovers of the early years of Welsh devolution was the decision to set up Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water as a not-for-profit company, unlike their English counterparts.

Egged on by the indefatigable Geraint Talfan Davies, then director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, this meant that for Dŵr Cymru, money earned over costs was not creamed off to shareholders but instead was invested in the considerable upgrading required for the water delivery system across Wales.

Within that same cultural shift came a more open policy towards a wider section of the public being allowed to share the use of their magnificent reservoirs and landscapes surrounding them.

Dŵr Cymru's most notable early architectural commission was a new visitor centre and a separate boating clubhouse building at the Llandegfedd reservoir near Pontypool in south-east Wales. This became a multi-award-winning project for its architect, Hall + Bednarczyk (see *Touchstone* 2016, p. 52). TACP Architects of Wrexham extended an existing building and added a vast array of PVs to Dŵr Cymru's visitor centre at the Llyn Brenig reservoir, north Wales.

Dŵr Cymru's most recent new-build architectural commission is for another visitor centre for the Lisvane and Llanishen reservoirs in north Cardiff. The project designed by architect Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios (*see also p. 67*) also includes a watersports centre, boat store, café/restaurant, learning zone and new bird hides. It is currently in for planning permission. The scheme commissioned in 2018 will receive financial support from the Welsh Government's ENRaW Scheme and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It could be a handsome addition to Dŵr Cymru's architectural patronage ■

All life's a zero-carbon stage

Theatr Clywd's home is a sprawling, mid-70s arts complex, originally designed to house both theatre and TV production spaces. Sited on a hillside above the town of Mold in north Wales (*see above left*), the red brick building is in urgent need of reconfiguration and upgrading. Architect Haworth Tompkins's has been working closely with Flintshire County Council and the Theatr Clywd team to open up the theatre more fully to its wonderful landscape and to the community that it serves.

Following in what is now a well-established tradition of Haworth Tomkins' many splendid theatre remodelling projects across the UK, the work aims to repurpose the existing fabric and to demolish and replace only what is essential to enable the organisation to expand its role as Wales's biggest producing house as well as the cultural centrepiece of the region.

The client and design team spent many months on research, consultation and technical option studies to maximise the cultural capacity of the building at the minimum embodied and operational carbon cost practicable. Once complete, the theatre will provide multiple possibilities for performance, music and community support uses throughout the day and throughout the year.

New structural additions like the reconfigured foyer and sun shading canopy will be made of larch and reused steel, while existing spaces will be upgraded and insulated to allow the theatre to run on 100% renewable electricity via air-source heat pumps and LED lighting. With a programme of extensive tree planting, green walls, roof planting and extensive on-site PVs, Haworth Tomkins aims to contribute to hitting a whole-life zero-carbon target and for this project to be an exemplar twenty-first century cultural space ■

Left and below left, proposal for Coed Lleol, a low-carbon footprint teaching facility by Loyn & Co Architects.

Peat freedom

The resource has been depleted over decades, and yet it is probably Wales's most vital carbon sink.

If there was ever a natural resource that the school children of Wales needed to appreciate its value and history, it is that of peat.

By now one would hope that everybody is buying peat-free compost, but that's the easy bit. The resource has been depleted over decades, and yet it is probably Wales's most vital carbon sink. For the last four years there has been a 'Welsh Peatlands Project' led by Snowdonia National Park Authority, in partnership with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, IUCN UK Peatland Programme, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, and Swansea University. This project aims to ensure there will be sustainable management across Wales of its lowland peatlands and 'molinia' dominated upland peatlands, and that it will deal with peat soil erosion and drainage, afforested peat and also the peat heavily modified by over intensive agriculture. This is a tall order.

In parallel to this programme a 'Lost Peatlands' project run by Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) is restoring areas of historic peatland between Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf, creating habitat for rare and declining species such as water voles and skylarks. It focuses on almost 6,700 hectares of upland landscape, providing new opportunities for people to discover the wealth of natural and cultural heritage that the area has to offer.

Coed Lleol is working in partnership with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council to deliver the project, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Loyn & Co Architects has been commissioned to provide a low-carbon footprint teaching facility to give some shelter in a remote spot, largely inaccessible to vehicles, out on the blasted heath (*see left and above*). It is currently seeking funding ■

Stationary stations

Developers whose projects are tied into major improvements in transport infrastructure have to be in it for the long game. This is certainly the case for the 90,000 sqm Hendre Lakes development proposed at Wentloog, east of Cardiff with at its core a new £120 million station on the GWR mainline between Cardiff and Newport (*see below*).

Designed by London architect Wilkinson Eyre and engineer Arup, Cardiff Parkway station will be first new station on the line since the 1959 closure of Marshfield. The station will be the centrepiece of an eight-year employment-led development on this 65-hectare site owned by Nigel Roberts and his son Andrew. The four-platform station and the first phase of the development, a joint venture by Welsh Government, Investec and the Roberts father and son, is currently in for planning permission. There is no residential component to the scheme.

The developer's PR by Copper Consultancy states that the project 'aims to have a significant impact on reducing road congestion', the sort of claim that will light the blue touchpaper for those incandescent with rage about the Welsh Government's principled cancellation of the M4 relief road in July 2019. Everyone knows, however, that the principal bottleneck is the Brynglas tunnels on the M4 at Newport well to the east, so at its most optimistic the Wentloog site's potential of generating 6,000 more jobs to commute to every day could dissipate that bottleneck maybe a little by the new station taking both high-speed and local trains running between London, Bristol, Newport and all stations west of Cardiff. Equally it could simply add to the problem.

The Cardiff Capital Region's Regional Transport Authority has already announced delays to its first phase of metro electrification on some valleys line to late 2024. There are many other phases of investment in buses, light railway, rolling stock and more electrification before anyone gets to the South East Wales Transport Commission's proposal, reported 26 November 2020, to build six new stations along the stretch of line between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction.

Stations, they said, could be planned for Newport Road Cardiff, Newport West, Newport East, Llanwern and Magor but, of course, this would be dependent on UK government funding and Network Rail. Figures of between £590 and £840 million have been reported for the six stations. This was meant to be part of the answer to the M4 traffic congestion issue. But with 95% of rail travel revenues having evaporated during the pandemic, and with the Welsh Government having to take over control of the train-operating franchise formerly operated by the multi-national partnership of Keolis and Amey, the new 'Transport for Wales' may sound politically kosher, but don't expect any new stations apart from Cardiff Parkway to be built within the next decade.

When you then face the fact that in Wales public transport accounted pre-pandemic for only 6% of all journeys, and rail accounted for 3%, then the scale of transition required to meet any serious climate emergency by 2030 just seems off the wall. Of course, that's because we still expect the private ownership of land to be the prime initiator of projects. Any even a cursory glance at regional transport planning in Germany or France would see the state taking the lead, compulsorily purchasing land and forward planning future new settlements focused around any new public transport interchanges. Over here we can only stand and stare agog at such obvious common sense ■

Above, the Wentloog site could eventually generate 6,000 more jobs to commute to every day.

Right, the new Cardiff Parkway station by Wilkinson Eyre and Arup, the first new station on this line since 1959.

Urban farming landmark

If you are wondering what the post-pandemic, home-working, online-retailing impact might be on our city centres, there is one urban project in Wales that you ought to keep your eye on. This is the Biophilic Living project for Hacer Developments in conjunction with Pobl Living at Picton Yard (due to be renamed) in Swansea. With a multidisciplinary team of architects, environmentalists, scientists, engineers and green infrastructure specialists advised by two university research teams (Swansea and Cardiff) and led by the ever-energetic Andrew Nixon of Powell Dobson Architects' Swansea office, might this be a model exemplar for a different form of city living even though the use-mix on the surface seems pretty standard?

The over-used developer's marketing slogan where every project is a 'landmark development' may in this case become an appropriate label. This will be the first mixed-use urban building in Wales as a vertical productive landscape.

Through retrofit alterations and extensions to the four-storey, 1960s, concrete-framed former Woolworths building, the ambitious plan will comprise 20,000 sq ft of prime-site retail, 2,000 sq ft of food and drink facilities facing on to a new city square as an events' space. There will be 22,000 sq ft grade-A commercial office space, and 44 residential units, 40% of which will be affordable. Key features include a new 11-storey residential tower with a green-roof amenity space, well-orientated apartments to maximise the views and daylight, and large balconies including built-in planters, green walls, greenhouses and facilities for beekeeping. The building will be a vertical urban farm incorporating aquaponic technologies and run by a community interest company.

Special effort has been made to maximize energy-generating efficiencies and minimise waste. Energy will be generated through PV panels, PV cells with battery storage, and air-source heat pumps, which will provide hot water to thermal stores and further heating panels. CO_2 sequestration and heat capture from stale air will be used to increase carbon reduction. The renewable technologies will reduce future residents' energy bills, and smart supply and metering will lessen future energy demand from retail and commercial spaces. Rainwater attenuation, collection and recycling will be used for irrigation and grey water use throughout. The inclusion of green walls, green and blue roofs, brises-soleil and vegetation around the building will provide thermal mass, encourage biodiversity, and help with glare control and overheating. It ticks a lot of boxes for a saner way of urban living. Now we just need to see it built. Roll on that day ■

A walk in the park?

Touchstone has always kept a keen eye on the growth of 'one planet developments' (OPDs) in Wales. Given that the Senedd legislation for them was put in place in 2011, promoted by the ever-energetic Jane Davidson, you would have thought a decade later that this internationally unique planning 'use class' would have found take-up in every county of Wales – but not so.

It ticks all the climate emergency response boxes, but among many planning authorities there is still deep suspicion that allowing such developments would blow a hole in their very restrictive rural development policies. So, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire have been enthusiastic early adopters – or at least been subject to the most tenacious applicants; but in the rest of Wales OPDs are thin on the ground.

Monmouthshire has none, which is extraordinary given the quality of the land for horticulture – a critical part of the OPD set-up.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) has approved one application at Coed Tal-y-lan, Llangadog in June 2020. So, *Touchstone* will be watching with enormous interest the progress of a new OPD application in the Clydach Gorge by Robert and Zoe Proctor. Their site (*above*) fascinatingly lies within the boundary and thus planning jurisdiction of the BBNPA, but the site is also within the boundary of Monmouthshire.

It seems inevitably these applications are subject to the most minute and intensive scrutiny by the planners. The paperwork for an OPD submission is simply colossal in relation to the small environmental impact and scale of the developments, living very lightly on the land. (If the same ratio of paperwork and environmental performance regulations were applied to volume-housebuilder applications, they would never get out of the ground.) But we have to recognise that OPDs challenge many powerful vested interests, from those who have recently occupied the countryside as a rural retreat in capacious abodes so that nobody can disturb their peace or their view, to the 'land managers' reluctant to see any smallholders upsetting their livestock-obsessed tradition of farming. Let's hope the planners of the national park take a robust and enlightened view of this well-planned proposal ■

Back Lane uphill

Why do planners make things so hard? When you have an architect with an award-winning track record whose most notable project was weaving in a fine set of mews houses into a complex site in the heart of a conservation area village square, why doesn't track record and good judgement allow trust in that architect by planners so that she can implement another even smaller backland brownfield site, this time in Jack's Lane in Penarth.

The site is currently occupied by some tatty garages and a neglected piece of scrubland. The house owners, whose rear garden edges the back of the site, are the financial sponsors of the project so they are unlikely to commission a project that disadvantages them or compromises the enjoyment of their properties.

The single-storey utility wings of the scheme sub-divide front courtyards that double up as car parking spaces and mediate between the lane and the two-storey element of the scheme. To the rear, ample gardens meet the existing gardens of the Victorian house on Victoria Road and Victoria Square.

This small elegant scheme is within five minutes' walk of the railway station. Does this provide a choice to give up car ownership? Does it break the rules of conservation area materials and roof forms? Surely this is not relevant. This is a lane of simple sheds and backland buildings. Having a single plain wall material of a light brick and Corten steel gates with almost random mix of pitched and mono-pitched roofs seems to blend in well with the back-lane expected aesthetic.

Must our towns conservation areas remain preserved and frozen in time while development of new suburbia continues unchecked, encouraging further car use? Surely using all leftover spaces in town has to be a sounder proposition. For Jacqui Walmsley getting planning permission for this subtle and well-resolved small scheme has been such an uphill struggle. It really shouldn't be like this ■

Urban neglect

'It's not just a commute and a frothy coffee. It's where you learn and progress and build your skills, hard and soft, and get away from your crappy flat where you're working on an ironing board.' (Zoe Williams, *The Guardian*, 6 April 2021.) There's been a furious debate over the last twelve months about the future of city-centre office work and retail post-Covid. The ramping up of online retail and home-working habits for so many parts of the service-sector population inevitably makes one speculate.

All those multiple storeys of floor plates already constructed in Central Square Cardiff – will they find occupiers? Will the planned 2.5 million sq ft redevelopment of the Brains Brewery site the other side of Cardiff Central station still stack up economically? (*see bottom left*) Will the vast 30-acre redevelopment of land proposed between Atlantic Wharf and Wales Millennium Centre down in the Bay with a 1,500-seat arena, 1,150 homes, office spaces, leisure facilities and a hotel complex and light railway scheme, ever see the light of day? (*see left and above left*) Will the international developer Vastint's vast scheme down Dumballs Road, Cardiff come to pass? Will The Urbanists' public realm project for opening up the Dock Feeder in Churchill Way suggest a different prioritising of open-air pleasure in the capital city? Will we see applications for residential towers bursting out of empty retail plots in Cardiff's arcaded shopping malls?

From our Covid-confined perspective, these all seem like dreams from another age, but is all this merely the speculation of the ignorant? What are the experts, the land-owners, the landlords, the politicians, the planners, the developers of these sites and their legal teams, really thinking? Will they want to make their plans public? We realise we have neglected the city in this issue of *Touchstone*. Our next one will place it and its architectural consequences dead centre ■

Beautiful from over the border

We may feel that 2020 upended everything, but some things appeared to remain grounded. One was the issue of seeking the 'beautiful' in buildings. In January 2020, the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission published its *Living with Beauty* report. It proposed a new development and planning framework for England that would 'ask for beauty', and 'refuse ugliness'.

'Beautiful placemaking should be a legally enshrined aim of the planning system. Great weight should be placed on securing these qualities in the urban and natural environments. This should be embedded prominently as a part of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance, as well as being encouraged via ministerial statement.'

Twelve months later, in January 2021, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) responded with a thumbs up. And so, we come to the new consultation draft of England's NPPF, which dutifully includes the word 'beautiful' no fewer than five times. Being 'beautiful' will now be:

- part of the social objectives of the planning system as a whole (paragraph 8(b));
- one of the key objectives for large new housing schemes (paragraph 73(c)); and
- overall, being 'beautiful' is (we're now told) 'fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve' (paragraph 125).

Planning systems are built out of words. Laws, policies, guidance, codes – words, words, and more words. Sometimes too many words. All those words need interpreting. Normally, interpreting them is a job for planners. When things get sticky, it can become a job for judges.

So, what does 'beautiful' *actually mean*? The OED doesn't help us much: 'that quality which delights the senses'. Whose senses are we delighting? How? And why?

As a big idea to build a planning system around, the concept of 'beauty' could hardly be more complicated. It's the topic of an entire school of philosophy for starters. This is way above the pay grade of a humble planning law and policy commentator like this one. But here are just a few issues with building 'beautiful':

- Let's be honest: we don't know what it means. Remember in its almost 200 pages the *Living with Beauty* report used the word 'beautiful' hundreds of times but didn't define it once.
- That's in part because beauty is both subjective and universal (Kant said a fair bit about this – good luck understanding it).
- We can't even agree on the ground rules for trying to establish what beauty *might* mean. Is a building beautiful if it fulfils its purpose? Or should beauty be judged without reference to purpose (another big Kant topic). Does it depend on taste? If so, whose? Yours? Mine? A planning inspector? Some planning inspectors are ex-lawyers – but speaking as a planning lawyer, why on earth would you want to make *us* the arbiters of beauty?
- Is beauty just a reference to good design? And if it is, then why does the NPPF for England talk separately about outstanding or innovative design, and development that reflects local design policies and government guidance on design – all without mentioning the B-word?
- The MHCLG likes talking about 'Bath, Belgravia and Bournville', as if that's some kind of proxy for beauty, but (obviously) it isn't. Actually, to design new places to look like Bath or Belgravia would surely take England in the direction of a Disneyworld-esque disaster.
- And this is the problem: the MHCLG is now trying to enshrine a big new idea into the heart of the planning system in England without any kind of consensus on what it actually means. Or even how to approach what it *might* mean.

So, what happens next?

Well, another German philosopher can help us there. Hans-Georg Gadamer explained that the way we understand language is mediated by our prejudices and our history.

If you ask for something as complicated as 'beauty' without defining it – or even setting out the beginnings of a definition – and then you enshrine it at the heart of your national planning policy, that's a recipe for two things: first, confusion; and second, turning our eyes *backwards*. Back towards mock-Georgian or Victorian facades. Back to idealised, mis-remembered and oversimplified pasts. When what we need are creative and bold answers to new questions.

And here's the thing: some of those bold answers might not look beautiful to you. Our perceptions can change. You've seen *Shrek*, right? Well you get the message. Beauty is a fluid and evolving business.

And that's why the 'refuse ugliness' idea doesn't work. Refusing schemes because they don't chime with our *current* conception of what's beautiful, leaves us making decisions based on misguided, unexamined and often subconscious prejudice.

Instead we should focus on high-quality design, define your design expectations and reward high-quality architecture, then you might make progress. But I'd leave beauty to the poets, the artists and the philosophers. Planners already have enough on our plates.

Zack Simons is a planning barrister at Landmark Chambers in London who writes about planning law and policy at planoraks.com

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At the heart of building

Directory 2021

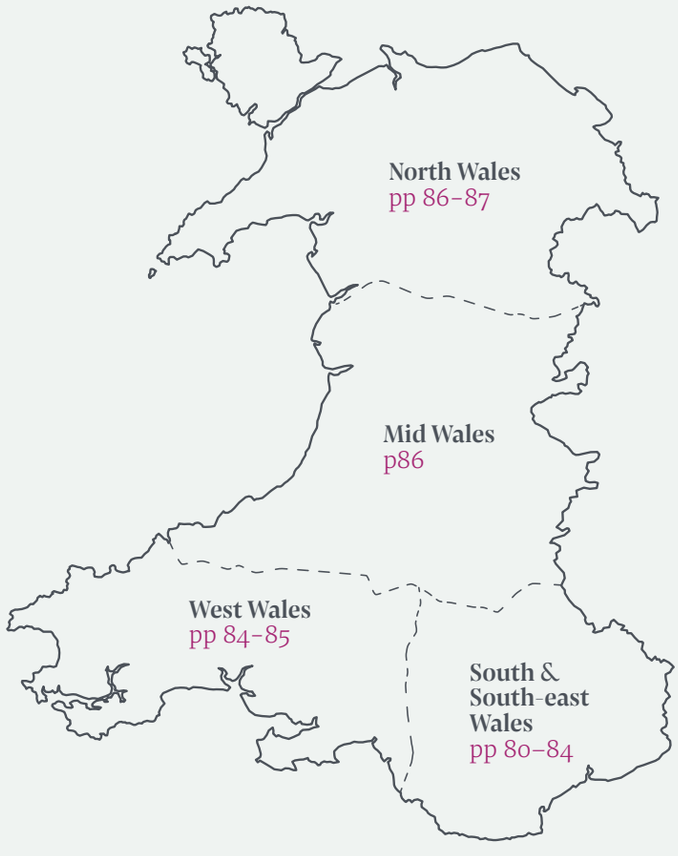
The following pages of Touchstone 2021 comprise a directory of architectural practices in Wales. The directory is divided into four areas, as indicated on the map. Within each area, architectural practices are listed under the town in which (or nearest to which) they operate, in alphabetical order of the business name. At the end of the directory section is a list cross-referencing practice names to page numbers.

All the architects featured in this directory are members of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which means they are highly skilled professionals trained to turn clients' aspirations into reality. Many also operate their businesses as RIBA Chartered Practices (denoted by * in the listings) indicating that they comply with strict criteria covering insurance, health and safety, and quality management systems.

Architects offer guidance on all the aspects of a building project from design and cost through to planning and construction. Architects have a unique ability to see things from the widest possible perspective as well as focusing on the small things that can make a big difference to a project.

The Royal Society of Architects in Wales and its parent body, the Royal Institute of British Architects, offer a free-of-charge service to tailor a shortlist of practices with the appropriate skills and experience for every type and size of project. The 'Find an Architect' service is available at https://www.architecture.com/find-an-architect/ – and you can also email clientservices@riba.org or ring RSAW on 029 2022 8987.

To find an individual RIBA/RSAW member by name, go to https://members.architecture.com/directory/default.asp?dir=3



South & South-east Wales

Aberdare

Stuckey George Architects*
14 The Glade, Plasdraw, Aberdare, Rhondda Cynon Taf CF44 0NX

A lively and contemporary office, celebrating 30 years of professional architectural practice, operating throughout Wales and the south west.

The practice currently retains a diverse portfolio of projects and offers complete RIBA services from inception and design, through to final completion.

Our design team and technical staff provide client advisory services for both architectural and planning proposals and may assist with pre-planning enquiries and consultations. We provide design and technical services for developments ranging from domestic residential clients, light industrial, commercial and extensive conservation and restoration projects.

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Abergavenny

CRSH Architecture and Energy*
One the Orchard, Llanellen Road, Llanfoist, Abergavenny NP7 9NF

CRSH Architecture and Energy specialise in design led architecture and energy efficiency. Projects include sensitive renovations and retrofits of existing buildings and new build schemes with good spatial design and the highest level of sustainability at their core. Their new build house, Un y Berllan, won Best Eco Home 2014 and was shortlisted for the 2013 National Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture. We welcome enquires from all sectors.

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mail@crsh-arch.co.uk
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Hoole & Walmsley Architects Hoole Studio Ltd*
17 Baker Street, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire NP7 5BB

A small and friendly practice offering personal service for commercial and domestic new build, renovation and conservation projects.

01873 812 509
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Barry

Dennis Hellyar Architects*
Unit 15, BSC, Hood Road, Barry Waterfront, Barry, Vale of Glamorgan CF62 5QN

Dennis Hellyar Architects is an RIBA Chartered Practice. The Founder Dennis Hellyar is an award-winning Chartered Architect with over 20 years' experience. Passionate about Sustainable and Innovative – Architecture and Design, all clients benefit from our collaborative approach to their project. Every project in the office, receives the same rigorous methodology utilising State of the Art Virtual Building Information Modelling software to achieve the optimum design, in response to the brief and budget.

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Brecon

Mundo Architecture*
2 Wheat Street, Brecon, Powys LD3 7DG

At Mundo we design the inside and allow our interiors to inform the external shell.

We continue to enjoy working in different sectors, keeping ideas fresh: office to restaurant to landscape to residential. Our designs share a common thread; one of a journey through spaces that strive to reveal the best of each and every site, natural light is a key element in our work. Additional offices near Builth Wells.

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Torcail Forsyth Architecture
Llwyn Cor Studios, Trecastle, Brecon, Powys LD3 8UH

Architectural practise, founded in 2006, engaged in a broad field of activity across the commercial, retail, restaurant and hotel, residential and ecclesiastical sectors. Expertise in development in protected areas and sites of special scientific interest. Extensive experience of listed and historic buildings. Situated in Brecon and working on projects across Wales, the West Midlands, the South West and in London.

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Bridgend

PJL Architect Limited
2 Court Road, Bridgend CF31 1BN

We are an architect's practice based in Bridgend town centre and offer bespoke building design and management services. We are able to offer a broad range of architectural services, managing projects from inception to completion.

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Cardiff

Ashley DAVIES Architects Limited
15 Pickwick Close, Thornhill, Cardiff CF14 9DA

ADA specialises in historic building conservation - repairing, restoring and adapting historic and listed buildings - and the design of contemporary insertions and extensions to historic buildings. We also undertake and prepare Heritage Impact Statements, Conservation Plans and Detailed Condition Assessments, and provide assistance with funding applications. Principal, Ashley Davies, is a Chartered Architect, an RIBA-accredited Specialist Conservation Architect and an Affiliate Member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation with 25 years' experience.

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Austin-Smith:Lord Ltd*
One Dunleavy Drive, Cardiff CF11 0SN

Austin-Smith:Lord provides services in architecture, conservation, interior, landscape, urban design and masterplanning. With a world-wide portfolio of award-winning projects across a wide range of sectors, we employ almost 50 people in five studios. Encouraged by a legacy of innovative leadership, all members of the practice are committed to achieving architecture of the highest order, combining commercial viability and sustainability with intelligent and elegant design solutions. As a highly collaborative and creative practice with a commitment to quality, we consistently provide our clients with a level of design and service excellence that exceeds expectations. Additional offices in Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool, and London.

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Projects, Design & Development, Cardiff Council
County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10 6UW

Projects, Design and Development (PDD) is an 'in house' multidisciplinary business unit that provides professional consultancy support for service area clients across Cardiff Council. The service area comprises architects, construction project managers, quantity surveyors, M&E and structural engineers, project surveyors, interior designer, principal designer and business support officers. PDD provides professional expertise in sectors such as education, leisure & library services, sheltered housing, day centres, community focused development and urban regeneration.

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DarntonB3 Architecture*
2 Callaghan Square, Cardiff CF10 5BT

Darntonb3 Architecture is a leading, award-winning consultancy providing an architecture-led, multi-disciplinary service including architectural design, project co-ordination, building services design, interior design and conservation. Our approach to design and operations provides a comprehensive, client focused service for schemes throughout the UK. Creativity is at the heart of our service and we focus on the development of real value for our clients. We challenge ourselves to envision and deliver projects that make a positive difference to our clients.

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Davies Llewelyn and Jones LLP*
The Malting, East Tyndall Street, Cardiff CF24 5EA

The practice was founded in Cardiff in 1974 and has, from its earliest time, specialised in working with public sector clients including local authorities, health authorities and housing associations in the provision of both new and refurbished social housing, elderly persons housing and health care projects up to £5m in value. The practice has developed expertise in industrial and commercial development and the refurbishment of existing industrial, commercial units and offices for private sector clients.

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Downs Merrifield Architects*
The Studio, 5 Cefn Coed Crescent, Cardiff CF23 6AT

Downs Merrifield Architects specialise in high end residential and hospitality work, bringing design quality and a highly personalised service to all our clients. We believe that well-designed environments which optimise daylight and are crafted from natural materials, create sustainable buildings which will be long lasting and exceed expectations. Our niche practice has grown from the two partners' many years of experience in the commercial and luxury sectors, creating a unique, but achievable perspective to all of our designs, combining practical sustainability with attention to detail. Our projects include one-off homes, residential refurbishments, hotels, large housing developments, listed buildings and a green energy park.

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Gaunt Francis Architects*
23 Womanby Street, Cardiff CF10 1BR

Gaunt Francis Architects is a creative commercial studio that balances business acumen and technical excellence with design creativity. Formed in 1997, GFA has delivered award-winning projects throughout the UK and abroad from its offices in Cardiff and London. GFA has an enviable reputation and track record in its 4 work sectors - working, caring, living and learning. It strives for environmentally responsible, cost-efficient, beautiful places and buildings, passionately believing that good design will always create value. Additional offices in London.

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The Bonded Warehouse, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10 4HF

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Whether providing strategic advice on complex mixed-use schemes, specialist leisure design expertise, or technical resources for construction; Holder Mathias brings a powerful combination of creativity, commercial awareness, commitment and capacity to deliver.

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Hughes Architects*
The Old Library, The Hayes, Cardiff CF10 1BH

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within 2 years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working. We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Aberystwyth, Newtown, and Welshpool.

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An award-winning RIBA Chartered Practice (20009958) with specialists across commercial, education, healthcare, science and knowledge-based R&D, residential and senior living sectors. We are a team of dedicated professionals who share a common desire – to help our clients create liveable, sustainable, urban environments. Our experience encompasses architecture, urban design and masterplanning, interior design and landscape architecture. Approved across all leading procurement Frameworks, we're delivering exemplary built environments with sustainable outcomes. We understand the importance of vision and strategy as well as the practical requirements of delivery, working with our partners from inception through RIBA 0-7 stages including post-occupancy review.

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andrew.street@ibigroup.com
www.ibigroup.com

Kotzmuth Williams Architects*

Canton House, 435-451 Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF5 1JH

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Contact: Siôn Williams

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office@kwarchitects.com
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Latter Davies*

6 Park Grove, Cardiff CF10 3BN

We aim to combine creativity with a rigorous approach, providing elegant solutions and efficient buildings responding to the needs of users and the environment.

Experience across a spectrum of building types in the private, public and charitable sectors throughout Wales and beyond, including;

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- private housing; new-build, remodelling, refurbishment.

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Lawray Architects*

Greenmeadow Springs, 1 Cae Gwyrdd, Tongwynlais, Cardiff CF15 7AB

Lawray Architects is firmly rooted in Wales.

We formed in Cardiff over 40 years ago, before exploring the North Wales market from Wrexham and then exporting our warm, comfortable yet professional approach to the wilds of London.

We believe in preserving the identity of place and balancing the desires of all stakeholders, through logical yet challenging explorations of the brief, to achieve outstanding results that are of true benefit to our clients. Additional offices in Wrexham & London.

Contact: David Hughes

029 2052 8140
cardiff@lawray.co.uk
www.lawray.co.uk

Lloyd Britton Architect Limited*

13 Sturminster Road, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 5AQ

Less is more (more or less...) – a small architectural studio providing bespoke and tailor-made architectural services and solutions on a broad range of project types in urban and rural locations throughout Wales. Work is undertaken on commissions ranging from commercial and domestic new buildings, extensions, refurbishments and conversions including listed buildings / buildings in conservation areas as well as interestingly challenging sites and development opportunities. The practice encourages the client to be an integral part of the design process working closely with the client to provide advice and guidance from concept to completion.

Contact: Lloyd Britton

07967 017 749
lloyd@lbarchitect.co.uk

Maredudd ab Iestyn RIBA*

16 Preswylfa Street, Canton, Cardiff, Caerdydd CF5 1FS

Yn dathlu mwy na chwarter canrif o adeiladu'r Gymru newydd.

An award-winning practice established in 1994. Our projects feature site specific responses to new builds, contemporary insertions or additions to existing buildings and sensitive conservation and alterations to listed buildings.

Working with clients from the private, public and commercial sectors we have designed a wide range of projects throughout Wales and beyond.

Contact: Maredudd ab Iestyn

02920 634297
abiestyn@btinternet.com
www.abiestyn.com

Pentan Architects*

22 Cathedral Road, Pontcanna, Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Pentan Architects is an award-winning design practice, with over 25 years' experience in the residential and supported living sectors. The practice holds an excellent reputation in innovation and sustainable design. People are central to our architecture and we are exponents of place-making as critical to all projects. Our portfolio of work extends across Wales and the South West, ranging from small innovative housing projects to specialist care-homes and extra-care housing, and large residential developments and master-planning.

Contact: Andrew Hole / Alun Lock

02920 309 010
info@pentan.co.uk
www.pentan.co.uk

Powell Dobson Architects*

Suite 1F, Building 1, Eastern Business Park, St Mellons, Cardiff CF3 5EA

Powell Dobson is one of Wales' largest independent architectural practices dedicated to the design and delivery of outstanding buildings. We aim to design buildings that are an inspiration to their users, provide a strong identity whilst responding to their context and that fully embrace our commitment to sustainable design. Our approach is to always embed sustainability in our design process and through research and innovation led projects, we continue to develop our awareness of new technologies in environmental design, low carbon and the wider well-being agenda.

"Our aspiration is to continue to design outstanding buildings and places that inspire, enrich and perform whilst making a significant contribution to the ongoing sustainability of our local and national environment"

As a practice we endeavour to work at the forefront of design excellence in all our projects. Through our residential studio we champion the principle of Social Architecture and how, through design, it impacts on the health and well-being of the community that use our buildings and spaces. Social architecture is an approach which we believe forms the basis of good place making.

Contact: Ann-Marie Smale

03333 201 001
www.powelldobson.com
Twitter: @PDArchitects

Prichard Barnes Architects

18 St Andrews Crescent, Cardiff CF10 3DD

Prichard Barnes Architects is a contemporary British architectural practice based in Cardiff. Led by its founding partners, architects Shaun Prichard and James Barnes, the practice is committed to excellence in architectural design. Prichard Barnes Architects can provide a full architectural design service from concept design to construction supervision.

Formerly Hatcher Prichard Architects, the practice has successfully embedded thoughtful design and sustainable principles using Building Information Modelling (BIM).

Contact: Shaun Prichard

07920 057 880
shaun@prichardbarnes.co.uk
https://prichardbarnes.co.uk/

Purcell Architecture Ltd*
Tramshed Tech, Pendyris Street, Cardiff CF11 6BH

Our employee-owned practice works as one family of experts: architects, designers, heritage leaders, and specialist consultants. Ideally placed in key regions covering the UK and Asia Pacific, our clients come to us when they need to make sense of their project; complex scenarios involving historic sites, the preservation and transformation of heritage buildings, and the building of new landmark structures and spaces. For over 70 years we have been making sure our clients' buildings are designed for use today and for future generations.

Contact: Nicola Hewes

029 2078 2685
info@purcelluk.com
www.purcelluk.com

Sillitoe Architectural Services
Earlsford, Tyr Winch Road, Old St Mellons, Cardiff CF3 5UW

Sillitoe Architectural Services is a Christian architectural practice built on traditional values and the use of hand-drawn draughtsmanship, in order to provide a friendly, personal and professional service.

Services include design, planning and building regulation applications, project management, CDM principal designer, listed building consent applications, including statements of historical significance.

Consultancy: design and access statements writing, model making (including display models in plaster); hand drawn and painted visualisations to a very high standard.

Contact: Geoffrey R. Sillitoe

07833 961 798
geoff@geoffreysillitoe.com
www.geoffreysillitoe.com

Stride Treglown*
Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff CF24 5LQ

Stride Treglown's Cardiff studio is proudly focused on the needs of our clients and the people that use our projects, creating inspiring, sustainable spaces that genuinely work. Our diverse portfolio includes award winning schools, exemplary higher education buildings, cutting edge tech and innovation facilities, patient-centric healthcare schemes and leading edge environmental residential design. With over 20 years in Wales, our Cardiff studio is one of Stride Treglown's nine regional offices across the UK. We are a certified B Corporation, and an employee owned practice with creativity and technical excellence at the heart of everything we do. We create space and places that people love to use.

Contact: Pierre Wassenaar

029 2043 5660
pierrewassenaar@stridetreglown.com
www.stridetreglown.com

TDArchitect*
19 Conybeare Road, Victoria Park, Cardiff CF5 1GB

TDArchitect provide architectural design and consultancy services for people, businesses and organisations across Wales and SW England.

Our range of services cover everything from CAD drafting; eco-refurbishment advice; feasibility studies and surveys; planning and tender advice and on-site, contract and project management. Recognising that every project is unique, we provide a personal service tailored towards your particular brief and budget, producing individual design solutions to exceed your expectations and requirements.

Contact: Cathryn Teagle-Davies

029 2034 2465
info@tdarchitect.co.uk
www.tdarchitect.co.uk

Chepstow

Hall + Bednarczyk Architects*
The Coachworks, 12A Lower Church Street, Chepstow NP16 5HJ

Hall + Bednarczyk Architects has gained prominence as one of Wales's leading younger practices, with a track record of award-winning projects for residential, commercial and public architecture. It aims to create confident well-judged modern buildings in contexts which are frequently sensitive and multi-layered, including pristine landscapes, protected historic buildings and conservation areas.

In 2016 the practice was the recipient of the National Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture and Welsh Building of the Year in the RIBA Awards.

Contact: Martin Hall

01291 627 777
mail@hallbednarczyk.com
www.hallbednarczyk.com

Volute Architects
22 Merton Green, Caerwent, Monmouthshire NP26 5AT

Volute Architects offer a full range of specialist architectural services for the repair and alteration of historic buildings, as well as extensions to buildings in historic settings.

The practice also provides specialist accredited conservation architectural services for the conservation and reordering of ecclesiastical buildings within the southern and western Diocese of Wales. The practice is situated in South East Wales and within easy reach of the M4 corridor.

Contact: Amanda Needham

07908 960 670
info@volutearchitects.co.uk
www.volutearchitects.co.uk

Dinas Powys

Studio Walmsley Architects*
Tŷ Carreg, Old Farm Mews, Dinas Powys, Vale of Glamorgan CF64 4AZ

Our objective is to go beyond client aspirations and to exceed their expectations by means of a poetic response to the brief, through an architecture concept driven, perhaps by its structure, or the physical characteristics of the landscape of a place, its fabric and its community. Our approach is to find an appropriate architectural language that need not be driven by a decision between contemporary or traditional but through more subtle intelligent responses.

Contact: Jacqui Walmsley

07971 833 046
jacqui@studiowalmsley.com
www.studiowalmsley.com

Newport

Caroe & Partners Architects
The Estates Office, 25-26 Gold Tops, Newport NP20 4PG

Caroe & Partners was founded in 1884 by W.D. Caroe, a major figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement. We specialise in the conservation, repair and adaptation of all types of historic buildings and sites in Wales and England. Our in-depth skills cover all aspects of traditional construction, maintenance and repair. We enjoy working closely with our clients, to design thoughtful repairs and to make imaginative proposals for modern or traditional alterations and new work.

Contact: Jane Chamberlain

029 2057 7585
newport@caroe.co.uk
www.caroe.co.uk

KWL Architect Ltd*
Poplar House, Hazell Drive, Newport NP10 8FY

KWL Architects is a multi-award-winning practice, formed in 2001. Based in Newport, the Practice has an expertise in the design and development of Care Villages, Extra Care Housing, Care Homes and Specialist Care Facilities and also undertakes a range of other commissions.

The Practice has completed developments throughout the UK, for an extensive spectrum of clients including charitable trusts, housing associations, not for profit organisations, as well as commercial developer/operators.

Contact: Philip Lewis or Neil Ross

01633 817171
kwl@kwlarchitects.co.uk
www.kwlarchitects.co.uk

West Wales

Penarth

Loyn + Co Architects Ltd*
88 Glebe Street, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan CF64 1EF

Principal Architect Chris Loyn set up practice in 1987 and founded LOYN + CO Architects in 1992, being at the time one of the few architects in Wales to champion contemporary design. During its history the practice has enjoyed recognition for its achievements in architecture through published projects and many significant awards and nominations including RIBA Stirling Prize, various RIBA Awards including winning The Manser Medal twice (the only Practice ever to do so), Sunday Times House of the Year and the Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture which the practice has won three times.

The practice philosophy favours working as a team, operating in a studio environment where we share ideas and collectively review design development through each stage of a project's evolution. With a wide range of experience, specialisms and skills our team is committed to delivering high quality schemes true to their original concept, relevant to our time and unique to their site and to their client.

Contact: Chris Loyn, James Stroud, Victoria Coombs
029 2071 1432
architecture@loyn.co.uk
www.loyn.co.uk

Carmarthen

Nicole Jones Architect RIBA*
6 Myrddin Crescent, Carmarthen SA31 1DX

We offer modern sustainable architecture as well as the refurbishment of listed buildings and barn and chapel conversions. Our style is always approachable and professional.

The practice is involved in a broad range of projects from residential to small commercial projects. We also specialise in refurbishment of dental surgeries. We undertake work in Wales, Southern England and Germany.

01267 230 762
n@nicolejones-architect.co.uk
www.nicolejones-architect.co.uk

Haverfordwest

David Haward Associates Ltd*
Twll Dwrgi, Goat Street, St David's,
Pembrokeshire SA62 6RQ

We are a well-established Practice with a reputation with both clients and contractors, for providing high quality designs that maximise the building's potential and meet our clients' expectations. Several contractors have used the Practice when extending or making alterations to their own homes, due to our innovative design and well-coordinated drawings, which allow ease of construction on site. Additional office in Clynderwen.

Contact: David Haward
01437 729090
mail@dhaarchitects.co.uk
www.dhaarchitects.co.uk

iDeA Architects
3 Castle Terrace, North Street, Haverfordwest,
Pembrokeshire SA61 2JH

iDeA Architects was established in 2007 by Kevin Thompson and Chris Evans to focus on low-energy, sustainable design. Both directors have a wealth of experience in the public and private sectors.

We offer competitive design services for residential, community and public projects, as well as 'low impact' self build schemes, conversions and adaptations with the aim to provide good, contemporary design with high environmental performance standards that will add long term value.

The practice also offers valuable experience in 'place- focussed' regeneration working with commercial, civic and community organisations, and engaging with artists and planning associates to explore new opportunities for our town centres.

Contact: Kevin Thompson
01437 769 639
kevin@idea-architects.co.uk
www.idea-architects.co.uk

Oochitecture*
The Royal, Trafalgar Terrace, Broad Haven,
Haverfordwest SA62 3JU

Oochitecture is a creative practice based in Broad Haven, Pembrokeshire. We deliver projects for our clients across South Wales and the South West. Passionate about both design and the process of building, we enjoy taking projects from inception to completion, guiding our clients along the way.
We have a wide range of experience, including residential, education and commercial projects and provide full design services and project management.

Contact: Michael Bool
01437 457 501 / 07508 884 988
info@oochitecture.com
www.oochitecture.com

Llanelli

W Griffiths*
Falcon Chambers, Thomas Street, Llanelli,
Carmarthenshire SA15 3JB

W. Griffiths are an experienced proven RIBA Chartered Practice comprising a long established, practical and cooperative team of people confident across all sectors from inception to completion in UK. Additional offices in London.

Contact: Christopher Griffiths
01792 651532
chris@wgriffiths.co.uk
www.wgriffiths.co.uk

Narberth

Steve Hole Architects LLP
7 Northfield Road, Narberth, Pembrokeshire SA67 7AA

Steve Hole RIBA has been in general practice in Narberth since 1981, specialising in domestic architecture, but also with extensive commercial experience. We have developed considerable experience in identifying potential development opportunities, undertaking planning feasibilities and marrying such potential with suitable developer clients.

The practice also operates as a general local practice and undertakes architects' services for one off property developments, conversions and extensions, often dealing with historic and listed buildings.

Contact: Steve Hole
01834 861 422
info@steveholearchitects.co.uk
www.steveholearchitects.co.uk

Newport

Julian Bishop – Architect
Dan y Garn, Mountain West, Newport, Pembrokeshire SA42 0QX

Small practice specialising in residential, small community and commercial work for private clients and commercial developers, all to high sustainability standards. Most of our designs are to full PassivHaus standard, for new dwellings or to EnerPHit for domestic deep retrofit schemes.

We provide consultancy for self-builders, from inception to completion, and are long time members of the AECB and PassivHaus Trust.

The practice also undertakes PfCO registered Ariel photography and surveys of both buildings and land.

Contact: Julian Bishop
01239 821150 / 07970 041377
mail@julianbishop-architect.co.uk
www.julianbishop-architect.co.uk

Pembroke

Acanthus Holden Architects*
Watermans Lane, The Green, Pembroke, Pembroke Dock, Pembrokeshire SA71 4NU

Acanthus Holden is a RIBA Chartered Architectural Practice that has provided comprehensive design services extending from inception to completion on site for more than 25 years. The practice is also acknowledged as one that pursues an environmentally sensitive and sustainable approach to projects and has a strong record of working on conservation projects.

Acanthus Holden can provide both architectural and planning services for projects, a desirable and streamlined combination for many clients.

Contact: Peter Holden
01646 685 472
architects@acanthus-holden.co.uk
www.acanthus-holden.co.uk

Pembroke Dock

Pembroke Design Ltd*
16 Meyrick Street, Pembroke Dock, Pembrokeshire SA72 6UT

PDL Architects & Surveyors offer a friendly, client focussed service by our experienced design and technical team. We create better buildings and environments that are environmentally sensitive and highly sustainable. Through close communication and good design, we work to better our client's expectations on every project, contemporary or traditional, providing cost effective, highly sustainable and stimulating spaces in which to live, work or learn. Additional offices in Haverfordwest and Carmarthen.

Contact: Julian Mansel-Thomas
01646 683 439
pdock@pembrokedesign.co.uk
www.pembrokedesign.co.uk

Swansea

Air Architecture*
19A Catherine Street, Swansea SA1 4JJ

Innovative and dynamic spaces within a sustainable context. Air can provide a unique response to problem-solving based on discussion at all stages of design development with 3D sketches and models, involving other specialists as necessary. Site analysis to assess function, orientation, space, light, lifecycles and use of local materials. Collaboration with specialists in materials and craft-based systems. Shortlisted for Architects' Journal Small projects award, Leaf International Interior Design Awards (Best use of space), Winner of Gower Society Annual Design Award.

Contact: Robin Campbell
01792 060 013
Robin.campbell@airarchitecture.co.uk
www.airarchitecture.co.uk

Gavin Orton Architects
8 The Uplands, Pontrhydyfen, Port Talbot SA12 9TG

Gavin Orton Architects is a friendly architectural practice that brings a creative, considered and collaborative approach to all of our projects.
We work closely with our clients across a wide range of scales and sectors. We specialise in private residential projects including new-builds, refurbishments and extensions. We have significant experience in working with Listed Buildings and buildings within Conservation Areas. We provide architectural services across all RIBA Work Stages, tailoring our services to meet the needs of our clients.

Contact: Gavin Orton
07702 247595
mail@gavinorton.com
www.gavinorton.com

Huw Griffiths Architects Limited*
7 St. James Crescent, Swansea SA1 6DP

Huw Griffiths Architects is a multi-disciplinary team of architects based in Swansea. Founded by Principal Architect Huw Griffiths in 1988, the practice has undertaken an extensive range of award-winning projects across the UK. We design in response to the historical, social and environmental context of site and circumstance, delivering contemporary, practical and sustainable architecture. We have worked extensively with listed buildings, often within Conservation Areas, as well as bespoke domestic, commercial and public projects.

Contact: Huw Griffiths
01792 644 038
design@hga.wales
www.huwgriffithsarchitects.co.uk

Tenby

Argent Architects*
1 Montrose, Penally, Tenby, Pembrokeshire SA70 7PU

Following on from our Grand Designs project at Tenby Lifeboathouse, AA are on a roll - with several interesting houses on the go in stunning locations. We are also working on hotel and care home projects and an interesting local heritage scheme.

We favour timber post and beam technology for its human scale, flexibility, speed, sustainability and low impact on context.

Contact: Michael Argent
01834 845 440
admin@argent-architects.co.uk
www.argent-architects.co.uk

Mid Wales

Aberystwyth

DarntonB3 Architecture*
30 Heol y Wig, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 2LN

DarntonB3 is an architecture-led, multi-disciplinary consultancy including architectural design, surveying, conservation and project management. Our approach to design and operations provides a comprehensive, client focused and fully bilingual service for public and private projects throughout Wales. Our office at Aberystwyth specialises in housing, education, community, cultural, library and archives projects. We have a local, dedicated and experienced team who take pride in the wide range of architectural projects we deliver.

Contact: Iwan Thomas
01970 624 688
iwan.thomas@darntonb3.com
www.darntonb3.com

Hughes Architects*
Cambrian Chambers, Terrace Road, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1NY

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within 2 years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working.
We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Cardiff, Newtown, and Welshpool.

Contact: Doug Hughes
01970 636 019
enquiries@hughesarchitects.co.uk
www.hughesarchitects.co.uk

Mathew Tench Architects and Associates Ltd
Studio 2, Creative Arts Unit, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Penglais Campus, Aberystwyth University, Ceredigion SY23 3LG

We provide the full range of architectural services, including design, planning permission, building regulation approval, ecological advice and building contract administration.
The business was founded by Mathew Tench who has worked in Mid Wales for 25 years and possesses a wealth of experience in design, planning and project management. We approach every job as a unique challenge and exciting opportunity to build unique spaces meeting each client's criteria and enhance the quality of the environment.

Contact: Mathew Tench
01970 611 439 / 07866 481 086
mathew@mathewtencharchitects.co.uk
www.mathewtencharchitects.co.uk

Machynlleth

George + Tomos Penseiri: Architects Cyf*
Cambrian House, 12 Heol Penrallt, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8AL

George + Tomos was established in 2003 by Arwyn George and Dafydd Tomos, who have extensive experience of projects throughout Wales and beyond. Based in Machynlleth, we offer a bilingual service and combine creative design ideas with the use of sustainable construction techniques. We are a young team with a real passion for our work, always aiming to ensure the best results for our clients. We make buildings that work well, make the best possible use of site and budget, are technically and ecologically advanced, and suit their surroundings and context.

01654 700 337
georgetomos@yahoo.co.uk
www.georgetomos.co.uk

Newtown

Hughes Architects*
29 Broad Street, Newtown, Powys SY16 2BQ

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within 2 years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working.
We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Aberystwyth, Cardiff, and Welshpool.

Contact: Richard Lewis
01686 610 311
enquiries@hughesarchitects.co.uk
www.hughesarchitects.co.uk

Welshpool

Hughes Architects*
18 Berriew Street, Welshpool, Powys SY21 7SQ

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within 2 years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working. We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Aberystwyth, Cardiff, and Newtown.

Contact: Doug Hughes
01938 553 436
enquiries@hughesarchitects.co.uk
www.hughesarchitects.co.uk

North Wales

Bala

Rhys Llwyd Davies – Architect | Pensaer*
Swyddfa Heulwen, 29 Y Stryd Fawr, Y Bala, Gwynedd LL23 7AG

Rhys Llwyd Davies runs a small rural practice working mostly in North and Mid Wales. We regularly work on a range of projects including domestic, public and commercial buildings. The practice was established with the aim of improving the rural built environment by concentrating on the character of buildings, spirit of place, and sustainability. We encourage a contemporary vernacular architectural language and have established a reputation for sensitive alterations / renovations of traditional and historic buildings.

01678 521 450
post@rhysllwyddavies.co.uk
www.rhysllwyddavies.co.uk

Conwy

Diane Williams Architects*
Greenways, Tyn-y-Groes, Conwy LL32 8ST

We are a small practice established over thirty-five years ago, and have experience of both small commercial and domestic projects, providing services from feasibility through to contract administration/ completion. We have a respect of the vernacular whilst accepting the challenges of integrating a more modern architecture to cope with current living and working lifestyles, together with improved sustainability of building design.

01492 650 263
diane@dianewilliamsarchitects.co.uk

Donald Insall Associates*
Y Becws, Pool Lane, Conwy LL32 8PZ

Donald Insall Associates is an award-winning architectural practice and historic buildings consultancy specialising in the care, repair and adaptation of historic buildings, as well as designing new buildings for sensitive sites. For over 60 years, Insall has pioneered a pragmatic and creative approach to managing change in the historic environment, and has worked on key buildings in Wales such as the Copper Kingdom Visitor Centre in Amlwch, Caernarfon Castle and Porth Mawr in Caernarfon.

Contact: Matt Osmont
01492 592378
conwy@insall-architects.co.uk
www.donaldinsallassociates.co.uk

Rhian Evans Architect : Pensaer*
Studios A/B, Bodnant Business Studios, Ffordd Penrhyd, Tal-y-Cafn, Conwy LL28 5RS

Sole Practitioner in the Conwy Valley, offering new build and refurbishment residential projects through all RIBA stages, in addition to small scale commercial work. My focus is working with lay and experienced clients to achieve buildable solutions that deliver both quality and value.

I can recommend Structural Engineering Services with each project via an associated company at the office.

Gwasanaeth drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg ar gael.

Contact: Rhian Evans

07787 503 520
re@rhianevansarchitect.com
www.rhianevansarchitect.com

Criccieth

Lakes Architect Limited*
2 Holywell Terrace, Criccieth, Gwynedd LL52 0AY

Lakes Architect is a small practice specialising in the design of bespoke new dwellings and alterations to existing properties. The client is always the driver for our designs and we have the vision to create the space they are looking for. We take inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement, vernacular architecture, modern materials and the landscape the building is to rest in.

Additional offices in Windemere specialising in Arts and Crafts inspired residential properties.

Contact: Chris Rushton

07971 911 432
chris@lakesarchitect.co.uk
www.lakesarchitect.co.uk

Dolgellau

Eric Edwards
1 Ffordd Y Gader, Dolgellau, Gwynedd LL40 1RH

A well-established multi-award winning small rural practice since 1977 operating within the heart of Snowdonia National Park and throughout north and mid Wales. Specialising in works on listed buildings, barn conversions, single dwellings, commercial buildings, including dental & vet surgeries, sports buildings, caravan parks and sites for shepherds' huts and pods. Providing bilingual service.

Contact: Eric Edwards

01341 422 436

Hawarden

Ainsley Gommon Architects*
The Old Police Station, 15 Glynne Way, Hawarden, Flintshire CH5 3NS

Ainsley Gommon is a leading Chartered Practice of Architects and urban designers with a broad range of experience that includes housing, extra care, supported living, urban regeneration, education, healthcare, industrial, conservation and community projects. By promoting environmental responsibility and innovation in all our projects, we adopt a low-carbon approach in the design, construction and operation of our buildings and landscape designs and are signatories to the Placemaking Wales Charter. We work proactively and collaboratively with clients, consultants and contractors, using the latest BIM technology, to deliver high quality projects on time and within budget.

Additional offices in Birkenhead, Merseyside.

Contact: Simon Venables

01244 537 100
wales@agarchitects.co.uk
www.agarchitects.co.uk

Llanbedr

Gruffydd Price
Gwylfa, Llanbedr, Gwynedd LL45 2LW

Practis pensaerniol gwobrwyol gyda phrofiad helaeth o weithio o fewn Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri a Gogledd Cymru, yn arbennigo mewn prosiectau bychain preswyl a masnachol ar safleoedd sensitif neu adeiladau rhestredig.

An award-winning architectural practice with extensive experience of working in the Snowdonia National Park and North Wales, specialising in small scale residential and commercial projects involving sensitive sites or listed buildings.

Contact: Gruffydd Price

01341 241 448
gruffyddprice@hotmail.com
www.gruffyddpricearchitect.co.uk

Llangefni

Russell-Hughes Cyf*
56 Bridge Street, Llangefni, Ynys Mon LL77 7HH

Russell-Hughes Cyf is an RIBA Chartered Practice originally formed in 1989. Since formation, the practice has developed a wide range of completed building projects both in the public and private sectors. The diversity of the commissions undertaken is a feature of the practice's work.

The practice has a track record of successful commissions in the educational, commercial, residential, leisure, health and community care, industrial and museum sectors. Current project values range from £10,000 to £4.5million. In addition to its base in Llangefni, Russell-Hughes Cyf has an office in Galeri, Caernarfon.

Contact: Owain D. Evans

01248 722 333 Llangefni; 01286 685224 Caernarfon
info@russellhughes.co.uk
www.russellhughes.co.uk

Mynytho

Huw Meredydd Owen / V&O*
Nant, Mynytho, Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 7SG

Creu cysylltiad rhwng cymdeithas a'i gwerthoedd, meithrin ei chyfoeth drwy greu "lle". Creu pensaernïaeth anweledig? Efallai.

Making a connection between society and its values, nurturing its richness by creating "place". Creating invisible architecture? Perhaps.

Contact: Huw Meredydd Owen

01758 712 581
huw_nant@icloud.com
www.huwmeredyddowen.com

Pwllheli

Dobson:Owen*
3 Thomas Buildings, New Street, Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 5HH

Cwmni pensaernïol profiadol yn ymrwymedig i wrando ar anghenion a dyheadau ein cwsmeriaid gan ddarparu gwasanaeth o safon gyda gwreiddioldeb a gweledigaeth a chyda'r dyfnder gwybodaeth angenrheidiol ar gyfer prosiectau adeiladu heddiw.

An experienced architectural design practice, we value listening to the needs and aspirations of clients providing a value added service with originality and vision and with the depth of knowledge necessary for today's construction projects.

Contact: Gareth Dobson

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Ruthin

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The practice was established in 1995 and has been involved in a wide variety of projects, both large and small across the UK, with particular experience of work on historic buildings, rural enterprise developments and housing. The aims of the practice are to focus on the requirements of the client and community in order to produce buildings and places that exceed expectations. The practice operates both in Welsh and English.

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Wrexham

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Lawray Architects is firmly rooted in Wales. We formed in Cardiff over 40 years ago, before exploring the North Wales market from Wrexham and then exporting our warm, comfortable yet professional approach to the wilds of London. We believe in preserving the identity of place and balancing the desires of all stakeholders, through logical yet challenging explorations of the brief, to achieve outstanding results that are of true benefit to our clients. Additional offices in Cardiff & London.

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At the heart of building

Falling, felling and failing

Those trees laid low should be a powerful prompt to our current condition. Caught in a lull between two storms – between supposedly surmounting the worst of the pandemic and moving at pace to face the future fury of the climate emergency – we may feel in our current small clearing that we have hardly had time to breathe, let alone focus ourselves for the even greater behavioural change needed to stay within 1.5 degrees C. But those trees suggest more...

At one level, they are simply laid low on the forest floor, awaiting their transportation to the sawmill; a practical stage of forest management. But, there is a parallel to our human condition. The 20 to 30 years that defines a human generation is comparable to the time period from the planting of trees to their maturity. They are both future generations. In what seems like the rate of tree felling far outstripping the rate of planting in Wales, we have a potential mirror experience for Generation Z, the ground being removed from under their feet on every front, treading water when they should be racing with imagination to something fairer, more just, more balanced. It is nigh on impossible for us in preceding generations to responsibly define the predicament we have made as being in any way a result of looking after their well-being. The reality of our forests and woodlands is a metaphor for our blindness.

That now so familiar phrase, the 'well-being of future generations', is trotted out almost trance-like in so many areas of Wales's public discourse. It can become a security blanket, but one that's suffocating in its protective floppiness. Is it possible in any sector of our culture and economy to demonstrate that Generation Z's well-being is the foundation stone of all our prioritised efforts? If anything needs uprooting it's the complacency that we are 'building back better'. We don't have a generation of time. The trees don't have it either. We all need to sharpen our focus or stand aside and let the younger growth take over the clearing.

Images: David Wilson