



# RIBA Client Design Advisor

## Newcastle Schools BSF

### Wave 1 Project

#### The project

Fletcher Architects were commissioned by Newcastle City Council as Client Design Advisor to develop concept designs for Newcastle's BSF Wave 1 Project. In 2003-2004, they worked closely with the LEA and Council during the development of the Strategic Business Case and Outline Business Case. The resultant conceptual designs were used to inform the Invitation To Negotiate. The schools are currently being delivered via PFI. The project was led and coordinated by Paul Fletcher.

**"It has been really helpful for us to have Fletcher Architects working on the BSF project. They have been able to interpret our needs, supporting us within this very complicated process. They have helped us to understand what the possibilities are for our school and we are now feeling much more ready to take on a building project of this scale."**

Barry Morrell, Deputy Head Kenton Secondary School (1,800 pupil, 14-19, with vocational, PRU and SEN provision)

#### How the RIBA Client Design Advisor was involved

The Client Design Advisor worked with various LEAs and schools to develop an understanding and awareness of key aspects of design potential and provide concept designs and feasibility studies for specific schools and sites. This is of particular benefit in Building Schools for the Future (BSF) projects, assisting schools to manage the design elements of the process.

With Newcastle City Council the CDA developed a range of design concepts and visions for seven schools, two secondary, four primary and a special school (autistic), to support their BSF Wave 1 programme.

The CDA's involvement with the schools began as part of a School Works *Design Festival*, where the CDA facilitated participatory workshops to ascertain staff and pupils' ideas for the design of their schools. The participants sought to understand the issues that most affected them, developed potential ideas for how good building design could solve these issues and reached consensus around the most popular solutions.

The CDA visited each school to speak to staff and students and to see their existing buildings in use. The CDA ran baseline Design Quality Indicator workshops with the schools, enabling the children and young people to share their priorities for their new buildings in terms of 'Impact', 'Functionality' and 'Build Quality'.

Following the DQI exercise the CDA spent time with each school to get a better understanding of their day-to-day issues and requirements. The CDA observed typical school days, from the arrival of staff and pupils, through typical lessons, breaks, lunches, assemblies and the end of school day for pupils and where possible the continued use of the school into the evening. During these 'immersion' days the CDA had opportunity to meet with the wide diversity of people who use and interact with the schools. This allowed a fuller understanding of each school and the specific requirement priorities for the new schools.

Throughout the design process the CDA used these priorities to be sure that the new schools were

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going to meet the requirements of the children and young people.

Whilst developing the concept designs the CDA continued to work closely with the schools, the LEA (including their cost advisors), educationalists, local planners and community representatives. This collaborative process allowed each school head and their BSF design champion (each school had nominated an individual) to achieve a much greater understanding of their requirements and aspirations for the new schools, which in turn enabled the CDA to develop more robust output requirement/ specifications and school visions.

With this understanding and the cost models developed by the LEA, the plans from the local planning authority initial conceptual designs were developed. They embraced the output requirements for each school and explored design options with the constraints of Building Bulletins, planning restriction and the cost models.

In order to offer maximum benefit to each school the concept designs shared ideas from each of the schools, so that all of the concepts were of benefit and interest to each school. This included methods of managing circulation, classroom clustering, toilet areas, dining and social space and the relationship of internal and external spaces. This allowed specific concepts to be provided for each school whilst allowing schools to learn from each other and further expand their ideas and understanding of the possibilities for the new schools.

**"Fletcher Architects' concept designs have empowered our schools to really engage with the school design process, inspiring meaningful debate around their needs, and demonstrating the potential of their particular sites. I believe that our investment in initial design will go a long way to ensuring that the BSF project delivers excellent schools for Newcastle."**

Frank Jordan, Design Champion and BSF Leader, Newcastle LEA

All concepts were developed as computer models (virtual prototypes). This allowed the schools to interact with the concepts via real-time computer simulations and video, permitting a greater understanding by each school. By combining

participatory design modelling and theatre based techniques, each school was 'immersed' into the concepts. The schools were empowered to respond to a much greater extent. They were able to understand the importance of creating a robust output vision/specification, of understanding the implications of local planning pressures, and how the Building Bulletins could be used to create very effective new learning spaces. Most importantly the process allowed each school to become far more aware of the importance of design and how to be a 'critically aware' client/end-user.

For each of the schools, particular attention was paid to the everyday experience of the children and teachers within the building. The CDA ensured that the journey between classrooms and play spaces was straightforward and pleasurable, and delineations within buildings and play areas enabled children to mingle with one another whilst knowing that certain spaces were their 'own'. Particular benefit was brought to those pupils with special needs.

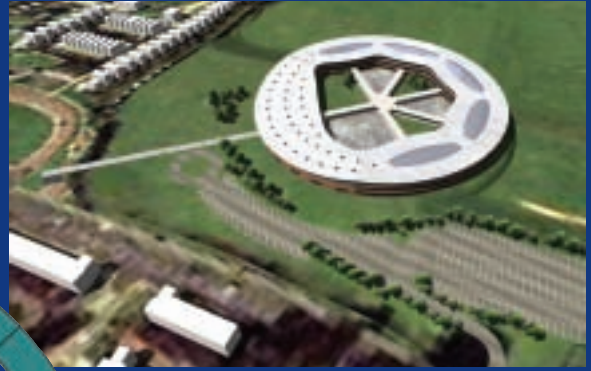
Classroom spaces were carefully designed to enable the teachers to adapt the rooms to suit a range of activities at different times of day, as well as facilitating the use of the latest teaching and learning methods. Each of the concepts was markedly different, reflecting the particular priorities of each of the schools and the children and young people that had participated in the design process.

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