Architects refuse to build bridges with Charles

Chris Gourlay and Steven Swinford

THE Prince of Wales may be addressing empty seats when he makes his return to the Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba) this week after 25 years of bad blood.

Angered by Prince Charles’s attempts to use his connections with the Qatari royal family to stop a modernist design by Richard Rogers for a £1 billion housing development in Chelsea, some members are calling for a boycott of the lecture.

Clarence House had hoped the occasion would be a chance for a détente after Charles famously used his last speech at Riba in 1984 to lambast a planned modernist extension to the National Gallery. It was subsequently blocked.

In a letter to a newspaper yesterday, the Stirling prize-winning architects Will Alsop and Chris Wilkinson and seven others called on all architects “who value democratic procedures” to shun the prince’s address on Tuesday.

Peter Ahrends, the architect leading the boycott, described the attempt by one royal family to intervene with another royal family as “medieval”. He said: “This intervention must now be resisted by the profession; not because of the question of architectural style but because his actions again threaten an important element of our democratic process.”

But George Ferguson, a former president of Riba, said this weekend: “These are architects putting up barricades to protect themselves rather than enter into a mature debate.

He added: “In many ways the planning system is not as democratic as they claim . . . all sorts of pressures are put on planners.”

In another blow to Charles, the December 2007 accounts of the Prince’s Foundation for Integrated Health (PFIH) — the most recent available — show that it has been investing in oil, tobacco and arms companies.

PFIH, which promotes complementary medicines and alternative therapies, has invested £1m in an array of companies including BP, Shell and the Russian Gazprom conglomerate.

A further £112,000 is invest-

Charles: architects angry

ed in the Artemis UK Special Situations Fund, which has holdings in BAE Systems, the weapons manufacturer. It has also put £109,006 into the Invesco Perpetual Income fund, which has large stakes in British American Tobacco and Imperial Tobacco.

A spokeswoman for Charles said: “The prince is not responsible for, nor is he involved in, the day-to-day administration and operations of individual charities within the Prince’s Charities group.”