BOYCOTT, ILLINGWORTH, CLOSE – AND ALSOP

Alsop Sparch is about to join the great names that adorn the sacred home of Yorkshire cricket. But it took more than a sports club to construct the Headingley Carnegie stadium's new pavilion, as Ike Ijeh found out. Photography by Simon Kirwan
Itself one of the largest developers in the city and is in the process of consolidating and improving its multiple property holdings.

Its previous projects have included the distinctive Bowl development at Hampshire County Cricket Club and Falden Clegg Bridgley’s Broadcasting Place, both of which are in the city centre.

Crucially, Bam, the main contractor on the Bowl project, was also involved in the building of Headingley Carnegie Pavilion. This enabled the repositioning of several established relationships and personnel onto Headingley. Simon Fearn, Leeds Metropolitan University’s capital projects manager, said this “provided a continuity that was key to addressing the complex operational requirements the dual client brief demanded.”

Externally, the four-storey stand, five-storey if we acknowledge the lower and upper ground floors, appears to be two separate, architecturally distinct buildings.

The “public” or street façade to the north faces Kirckstall Lane while the “private” façade at the south looks out onto the cricket ground. It is the street frontage that provides the building’s most distinctive features, a series of perforated, triangular metal panels.

Four layers of this patterning are applied, with the lowest slightly taller and the uppermost significantly shallower than the middle two. At various points, a triangular panel is replaced by a window of the same shape. This triangular grid also wraps round the stand’s side west elevation.

The footprint of the entire building curves away from the street edge, allowing the insertion of a small landscaped plinth in between and for the block to be significantly set back from its closest neighbours of residential properties.

The rear south-facing facade features the triangular pattern with a sheer, inclined glazed curtain wall. The wall has a chequered, orthogonal pattern that is formed by an irregular grid of clear and opaque glazed panels. A cantilevered box that forms an internal auditorium protrudes from the centre of the elevation and is mimicked by additional pairs of more modest, linear balconies elsewhere on the facade.

At the bottom, leaning columns cantilever the lowest tier out over the existing rows of ground side seating underneath. And at the top, the triangular metal panels of the street facade emerge as an overhanging roof, a momentary, hood-like reminder of the building’s signature aesthetic.

Undoubtedly, the introduction of Alup’s provocative, abstract forms into a primarily Victorian, residential local streetscape was always going to invite controversy and divide opinion. This building, particularly its triangular metal panels, clearly and quite deliberately does not “fit in” to its surroundings.

But there are several ways for buildings to relate to context and contrast can be as powerful as harmony. There is a certain surreal, melodramatic quality to seeing this strange, quasi-organic chandelier emerge from behind a pitched roof or peek over a narrow chimney. Incongruity, if handled well, can induce excitement and spontaneousness. Does it do so here? Almost. The architect and project team claim to have taken great care to ensure that the building sweeps its contact with immediate surroundings. For one thing, it is sunk below ground level. Its footprint is peeled away from the street edge to provide landscaped space and avoid overshadowing houses. The metallic panels have been subtly coloured in various shades of green to reflect the hue and texture of surrounding trees.

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**SIMON FEARN, LEEDS METROPOLITAN**

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**Panel Game: How the Stand was PUT Together**

Bam, the main contractor at Headingley, has an illustrious pedigree in stadium construction. Two of its projects are about to host World Cup games: Johannesburg’s reconstructed 86,000-seater Soccer City stadium and the new 46,000-capacity Nelsom Mandela Bay stadium.

Headingley now provides a capacity of 18,000 (an additional 670 seats) and replaces the former “End” and media stands. Enabling works began in November 2008, when the opportunity was taken to level the pitch and provide even more seating. As Simon Sutcliffe, project manager for the new pavilion, explains, “there was originally a 3.6m slope across the site. By levelling the pitch we were able to provide 300 seats of additional seating under the new stand and within the relocated zone.

The stand is a piled-foundation concrete-frame structure with five sheet-steel cores containing stairs and lifts. A structural steel top-deck extends from the second floor upwards. The south, pitch-side façade is a glazed curtain wall punctuated with steel balconies and clad in a mixture of translucent white and clear panels.

The most distinctive external feature of the stand is the series of perforated, faceted, triangular metal panels clad onto the building’s north and west facades. The panels are mounted onto an aluminium sub-frame which is fixed onto the Metsec-lined external wall, which is clad in grey, ship-lap cementitious boards. These are just visible behind the perforated metal panels and around the window openings which occasionally replace them. The panels are fixed to the structure by circular galvanized metal bolt nodes on each corner.

**Leeds Metropolitan University’s top floor offices offer magnificent views of the pitch**

The stadium’s green panels contrast sharply with the local red brick terraces, although the cedar wall on the east elevation affords the impact on neighbouring houses.
The project team
Architect Aaiop-Sparc
Client and developer Leeds Metropolitan University and Yorkshire County Cricket Club
Contractor Bismarck
Structural engineer Arup
Services engineer NG Bailey

In order to be sympathetic to residential properties, its east elevation, only partially visible from the street, reveals significant upper floor set-backs and is entirely clad in a full height cedar "velilla" over which climbing vines are eventually intended to form a "living wall".

But the building appears too disparate and fragmented to work convincingly as a whole. With the exception of the southern roof overhang, each part - the cedar wall, the triangular facing, the street frontage ground-floor glazing, the south curtain wall - is articulated as an independent entity with little relation to its neighbouring zones or, ultimately, the overall building. The resultant juncions between various planes therefore seem awkward.

The Cedar wall is a case in point. Of course the attempt to mitigate the impact of a much larger building on its smaller neighbours is appropriate, even if the whiff of planning intervention lingers. But by introducing an elemental treatment and material that is entirely absent from the rest of the building, the efforts are trivialised and the unity of the overall composition undermined.

Furthermore, on the metal clad street frontage, it seems strange to apply an abstract facade pattern, and then have it conform to the structural floor heights behind it. This accommodation is as its most uncomfortable with the additional height of the first-floor pentades. The same floor height requirement is imposed on the irregular chequered grid on the sheer incline curtain wall to the south, creating a confused visual statement that is too high-harsh to be ordered yet too regularised to be random. This effect is most evident from a distance.

It is internally where the enormous efforts taken to provide dual accommodation and satisfy the joint client brief become most evident. The fact that only two internal spaces - Leeds Metropolitan's administrative offices and the ground floor teaching kitchens - are allocated for the sole use of the university is undoubtedly an impressive achievement. It is also testament to the imagination and flexibility of the design response.

All other principal areas have been adapted to offer dual functions. Radio studios double as staff or student meeting rooms and the 150-seat lecture theatre can be converted into a theatre for 100 journalists. Simon Pawson points out that the dual uses required an "extra level of thinking to be applied to all aspects of the design. A comprehensive and complex operational strategy had to be in place to separate everything, from the independent metering of services to ensure that we don't end up paying for YCCC's consumption as a rigorous security plan that controls access between areas".

As most of the cricket season occurs during the summer academic recess, Pawson expects only a "one in 12 chance" of a clash in schedule requirements between each client. "It's impossible to plan for every eventuality," he continues, "but it's something we've prepared to monitor and if necessary adapt." It is clear that YCCC and Leeds Metropolitan view their stand as an economic and cultural tool. For the YCCC its primary function is to keep international test cricket - and the lucrative financial revenues and civic prestige this generates - within Yorkshire. But both clients also appear determined to provide a new icon for a city keen to place contemporary architecture at the heart of its cultural fabric. Ragan points out that with a global audience of 500 million, Headingley will be "the most viewed Yorkshire building in the world".

The opportunity this presents for projecting Leeds's image to the outside world are obvious. Both clients are to be commended for adopting bold and uncompromisingly contemporary architecture as a means to enhance the city's reputation and Headingley's iconic status. But perhaps the real success story is the project's emphasis on collaboration. This stadium shows how dual and not necessarily related uses can be incorporated into a single development.

By adopting such an innovative comprehensive operational and accommodation strategy throughout the building, the project team has ensured that it is in the best position possible to deliver the flexibility required by the joint client brief without compromising the spirit of the design. In these times of severe economic stringency, this progressive partnership process may well be Headingley Carnegie's most enduring legacy.