The Tetley’s bitter drinkers at the Headingley Taps describe it as a green mollusc, Grotbags’ knickers and like something quite large hiding under a grass carpet. They’re talking about Alsop Sparch’s pavilion at Headingley Carnegie stadium in Leeds, the home of Yorkshire cricket.

I’m a Yorkshireman and a cricket fan, and took my son to his first game, Australia v Pakistan, at the ground this summer. To me it looks like a blanket draped over a 70s-style office block, albeit one that tilts towards the wicket at an angle of 14° – the optimum angle to cost-effectively avoid glare. But if you ask the architects they’ll tell you the 4,000m² scheme was conceived as a soft, green cricket glove gripping a ball.

This undulating cape is made up of triangular metal panels hanging off a steel frame. The building curves around the pitch and is ‘sliced off’ at the east, in part to respect boundaries and counter right to light issues with the red brick terrace housing snuggled up behind it.

Built to a tight brief, on a tight site and on a tight budget, the £21 million, four-storey pavilion (it has a lower ground floor) replaces the less elevated Winter Shed and substandard Media Centre at the ground’s Kirkstall Lane End. The design team, led by Alsop Sparch director Shaun Russell and associate Ed Norman, wanted to avoid the ubiquitous cable-stayed roofs at other cricket grounds such as the Hopkins-designed Mound Stand at Lord’s and the single-use pods, like Future Systems’ Media Centre also at Lord’s. Alsop, clearly fond of the project, concurs: ‘If I see another cable-stay I’ll be sick’. Alsop bagged the commission (with Duncan Macaulay) from another branch of what was then SMC Group. He visited the completed project on the same day he left the practice for RMJM.

Inevitably, with its large press room capable of holding 100 Wisden-loving journalists, comparisons will be made between the Yorkshire pavilion and Future Systems’ lavish monocone. On one level that would be unfair and, in some ways misses the point, because the Carnegie Pavilion is not really a pavilion at all. It is a clever hybrid of cricketing essentials and university faculty which allows the building, unlike the majority of cricket grounds, to be used almost every day of the year.

Without majority funder and pavilion co-occupier Leeds Metropolitan University (Leeds Met), Yorkshire County Cricket Club (YCCC) could not have delivered the raft of money-making hospitality suites, spacious new changing rooms and upgraded media facilities demanded by the likes of Sky. The building, which legendary Barnsley-born umpire, Dickie Bird described as ‘first class’, has ensured test match cricket will be played in Yorkshire.

But creating this ‘unique dual-use, year-round, higher education and sports facility’ has been tough and has led to some complex structural gymnastics – including supporting a large protruding auditorium in its very centre. As Russell put it: ‘In effect we were given two separate and contradictory briefs.’ The building has to work in four different ‘modes’ depending on the time of year and what game is playing. During a high-profile test match, the pavilion is given over almost entirely to YCCC, housing 1,000 spectators, staff, pundits and squad members. In term time the capacity drops to 800 students, with dining rooms becoming classrooms, TV studios morphing into meeting rooms and the media centre transforming into a lecture theatre. On days when less important county cricket is being played students can watch the game over the lecturer’s shoulder – unless the large, split-level blinds are pulled down.

Talking to students smoking outside it is clear they are delighted with the sparkling new facilities, but not with the lack of a café on site. This is surprising, given the building includes a large teaching kitchen.

Internally the spaces are restrained, mainly cream and purple and clearly driven by a risk-averse client who has opted for cheap and cheerful Leeds Met ‘branding’. Russell says he’d have liked more of a hand in the interiors: ‘It looks like any other university building, with a few exceptions.’

The views over the pitch, however, are first class and the Leeds Met staff, housed in the offices at the top of the building, have some of the best seats in the ground. But despite the architects’ claims that journalists prefer using the media centre to the ‘too high and too remote’ showpiece at Lord’s, the writers I contacted were unconvinced.

Richard Hobson of The Times feels the new centre is ‘inferior’ to the old one because it is poorly located and is not a ‘purpose-built’ press box.

Dean Wilson from the Mirror is ‘disappointed’ with the racks of press seats that are too tightly squeezed in and ‘not directly behind the [bowler’s] arm’, effectively skewing the sightlines so the journalists sit more in line with third man. ‘Not great,’ he added.

Nevertheless, Carnegie Pavilion is brave and dynamic, and a welcome, active addition to the ground. Will it emulate Future Systems’ success and

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Bag the Stirling Prize? I doubt it. Perhaps not, and previous winner Will Alsop admits as much: 'There is nothing very fancy here – it is a good, honest building. But I'm very proud of it.'

**Carnegie Pavilion**

**Alsop Sparck**

Triangular rainscreen facade

As a condition of the planning consent for this site, the building profile to Kirkstall Lane steps inward as the building rises in an attempt to reduce the mass of the architecture against the street. The triangular rainscreen facade was used as a 'wrapper' to unify the changing profile of the allowable floor plates to create an external glove. The facade form was fully 3D-modelled to derive bespoke node connection points from which the triangular panels spring and the connections themselves had to allow for 3D movement and adjustment on site. Mesh reveals span from the rainscreen panels back to the triangular glazed openings to provide continuity with the glazing.

The facade is composed of two sections. The inner, weatherproof layer is an insulated Metsec frame system with integrated waterproofing membrane and vapour barrier. On the outer face is a continuous lap-sided cementitious board. The adjustable galvanised node connections punch through the inner skin and are fixed to the building slab edge whenever possible. On to these nodes the pre-fabricated, PPC Exapet triangular-framed panels were attached and then aligned on site.

*Ed Norman, associate, Alsop Sparck*
1. Dressed, sealed and watertight junction with roof steel structure
2. Insulation
3. Breather membrane and vapour control layer overlapped and sealed
4. Vertical faces of pressed metal capping and flashing aligned around entire main roof
5. Galvanised angle for facade slabs where required
6. Insect mesh
7. Polyester powder coated Epamet triangular framed panels
8. Metsec projects past upstand edge
9. Void
10. Vapour control layer bonded to slab
11. Dressed, sealed and watertight facade base plate connection junction
12. Breather membrane
13. Timber batten
14. Horizontal and lap-sided cementitious board

0 150mm
Left The media centre from where journalists watch the matches

Bottom right
The street-front elevations provide a striking juxtaposition

Top right Entrance
Left A county game unfolds in front of the Carnegie Stand