



## **New residential development:**

### **Integrating trees into new housing developments**



### **Accordia, Cambridge**

**This Sterling Prize winning scheme was commended for its innovative approach to incorporating trees into the development**

# Introduction

This exceptional residential scheme close to the centre of Cambridge has been fitted densely into a site which formerly housed government offices and prefabricated WWII buildings.

High architectural quality by Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects (65%), Maccreanor Lavington (25%) and Alison Brooks Architects (10%) offers an exciting range of design, especially in the private housing. The significant number of affordable units (30% of the scheme) benefit from proximity to open spaces, have slow speed streets, communal play areas and external materials to match the private units.

The development is set in a strong and protected green structure of magnificent mature trees, and its legible road layout displays an openness unusual in modern housing. Over 700 mature trees have been supplemented with additional planting, and the scheme provides three times the open and wooded green spaces compared with developments locally, with the added amenity of a number of play-spaces. Some shared communal areas are exceptional, particularly one shared garden with imported pleached pear trees.

The scheme has been awarded the 2008 Stirling Prize and a Building for Life Gold accreditation in 2006.

# Objectives

- To provide high density, high quality, city centre housing
- To retain key structural trees both on and adjacent to the site
- To accommodate future generations of trees on and adjacent to the site
- Minimise risk of creating an “architectural zoo”, by ensuring that the three practices use a common set of materials of Cambridge stock brick, copper and timber



Mature planting in front of Lavington's houses



Using mature trees as vistas

## Actions

- Strong working relationships between architect and landscape architect/developer/contractor/client from the outset
- Robust interpretation of tree retention policies
- Pre-application site visit between tree officer and developer to demarcate tree protection zones
- Regular on site supervision of tree protection measures during construction phase

## Achievements

- Retention of prominent large species structural trees on site
- Significant contribution to the principles of climate adaptation through urban greening
- New tree planting providing shade and amenity for residents
- Visual amenity of wider area secured for future generation of residents
- Effective communications, increased knowledge base and trust building between all participants that rolled over into subsequent projects
- A successful Span-type housing for the 21st century

## Lessons Learnt

- Engagement on tree issues must be undertaken at the earliest opportunity e.g. the conceptual and design stages
- Expert arboricultural advice should be obtained at these stages of the scheme as well as during development and implementation
- Set down clear markers on which trees should be retained from the outset
- Establish effective communications between partners
- Construction phase site supervision inspections by the tree officer are essential
- Volume house-builders can deliver high quality architecture, and as a result improve their own bottom line



Innovating pleached pear tree planting

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