

## **David Cotterrell: Barton Hill**

Location: Barton Hill, Bristol

Role: Artist (Design Team Collaborator)

Date: 1st June 2005

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Client: Sovereign Housing

Commissioning Body: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Arts & Business and Public Art South West

Collaborating Organisation(s): Levitt Bernstein Architects

In June 2005, Sovereign Housing Group secured a PROJECT Creative Homes Award to employ an artist as part of the design team for the second phase of an innovative housing development in Bristol. PROJECT was a national funding scheme in 2004-6 jointly supported by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and Arts & Business (A&B) and managed by Public Art South West.

In their initiative, Sovereign Housing Group hoped to achieve a greater integration between building construction, the public realm and public art. Now that the project has moved from planning into realisation of the development, Barton Hill shows just how well collaborations between developers, architects and artists can work. A wealth of new ideas has been brought to the table, and the project has become a blueprint for similar developments in the area.

### Background

Barton Hill is part of the New Deal for Communities area in Bristol, which also covers the neighbouring areas of Lawrence Hill, Redfield and the Dings. The area was granted approximately 50 million in 2000 to make sustainable improvements to education, health, employment and the environment over a 10 year period. In order to tackle high crime, as well as poor living conditions, an area Masterplan was developed for the central space which includes 8 local authority tower blocks and a rank of dilapidated shops.

Sovereign and Solon Housing were selected to deliver the housing element of the plan and the first phase of 26 new family homes, designed by Levitt Bernstein Architects, was completed in December 2005. The next stage in the housing programme is a much larger and more complex one. Around 65 mixed tenure new homes are planned for the five sites located within the central tower block area, alongside a new urban park and the area of defensible space being built around each block to allow residents to oversee the security of their neighbourhood.

The regeneration scheme provided a unique opportunity to transform a location where multiple landlords, budgets, agendas and priorities had taken their toll and led to environmental degradation, maintenance problems and a poor reputation. The success of the regeneration project depends largely on how well it addresses these issues, through a strong engagement with the fabric and history of the site and its community, as well as a mindful design process that brings this engagement to life.

To realise these objectives, the Sovereign development team decided to involve an artist in the project at an early stage, and in June 2005 a PROJECT Creative Homes award, supported by CABE and Arts & Business and managed by Public Art South West, secured the necessary funding. A steering group including a local resident was formed and in August 2005 the group chose artist David Cotterrell, based on his previous regeneration and masterplanning work. As well as researching the context of the new developments and meeting local resident groups, the artist worked closely with the schemes architects to bring more creativity to the planning and design process.

### The process

By contrast to the more common practice of commissioning artists to produce work as an add-on to the design at a later stage, David Cotterrell's involvement from the early stages allowed him to influence the development of ideas right from the beginning and to focus in particular on underlying principles that needed to run through the overall design concept.

These included a requirement to respond to some of the more complex issues of the development, such as scale, movement, cultural influences, community aspirations and the impact of wider regeneration initiatives. Together the team identified elements of design which would lead to high-quality new homes but also help increase the sense of safety in the area; create an enduring desirability about Barton Hill; and as a result enable the area to develop a more positive reputation.

Key themes that emerged were:

heritage - projects which focus on human, rather than architectural, legacies for the area  
navigation - projects to tackle the present disconnection of Barton Hill from the larger City of Bristol, which is enjoying an upturn in its economic and cultural life  
perspective - identifying the areas different architectural styles and finding positive ways to use these to address the boundaries between public and private spaces

The legacy

As a response to the issue of navigation, David Cotterrell and architect Justin Owen (Levitt Bernstein Architects) identified four significant nodes in the area. The treatment of these nodal points could greatly influence the way that people move across the park, along the new routes and between the blocks. A well landscaped area and sensitively designed buildings would make the difference between whether or not people felt safe and comfortable enough to make use of the routes and the park as well as how they viewed living in their homes in the long term.

Beyond the team's intentions to embed such considerations into the emerging design, there was from the outset an ambition to create a legacy to guide any ongoing physical redevelopment in Barton Hill, and ultimately Bristol. A key element was the production of a Public Art Guide in August 2006, drawing on the experience of the project and providing models of how art could be used to frame future developments, and be embedded in the principles of good neighbourhood management.

Barton Hill is one of the prime examples in the UK of how housing projects can rise above an economy of mere purpose and truly benefit from a sensitivity to resident aspirations, wider regeneration in the area, cultural diversity, and a long-term neighbourhood management agenda. Additional support from the EU funded Image initiative has recognised this and extended the scope of the project's aspirational work.

The Sovereign Housing development may form the catalyst for the development of a public art strategy for the area, says David Cotterrell. There is a hope that the work which will be defined and realised through the housing improvements and construction will create a foundation for future arts investment and within this brief an outline proposal for legacy arts projects is being developed."

The budget

The project received a Creative Homes Award of 15,000 towards the costs of engaging the artist, and the value of the design phase work was 30,000, with an estimated value of the construction phase being 10 million. The aim has been to finance the public space and public art aspects of the project from within the original programme budget for Barton Hill regeneration and through developer contributions for each site.

Feedback

A key aim has been for the community to contribute to the development of the scheme in a meaningful way, and there has been both formal and informal consultation with local people. In terms of how the various project partners have worked together to deliver the project, feedback suggests that there has been a complete step change and this will continue in Barton Hill. A PROJECT Evaluation Report in May 2006 showed that expectation of the effect on the process of the scheme was high, with 70% of the project partners anticipating a very positive effect, 80% feeling their own working practice had been affected by the experience; whilst 60% said their mindset had changed as a result of their involvement with the scheme.

### Key Issues

#### The value of a collaborative approach

Successful collaborations are achieved through a shared understanding of the underlying issues and productive dialogue around how to address them involving the artists and the other creative, architectural, environmental and engineering teams. By engaging the project artist as a member of the design team at an early stage, an opportunity was created for genuine collaboration, innovation and enhancement of the design proposal.

#### A people centred approach

Rather than dictate a series of artworks for insertion in the public realm, the project sought to outline themes and trends that affect the built environment, suggesting ways of exploiting the positive nature of the area. Concentrating on social rather than architectural legacies of the area, the artist worked with the community and design-team to devise a rolling programme of artworks, projects, interventions and events in line with the changing community and its interests and needs.

#### Ensuring a legacy and wider adoption of best practice

A key objective of the project was to embed the principles of good neighbourhood management into future work in Barton Hill, and to apply the knowledge gained to other developments in the New Deal for Communities area. By producing a Public Art Guide which articulates the merits of a collaborative approach and offers concrete examples of how art can be used to frame future developments, the project will have a long-lasting impact not only on the local planning framework but also on the role that artists will play in urban design and regeneration schemes elsewhere in the city and beyond.

### Concluding Comment

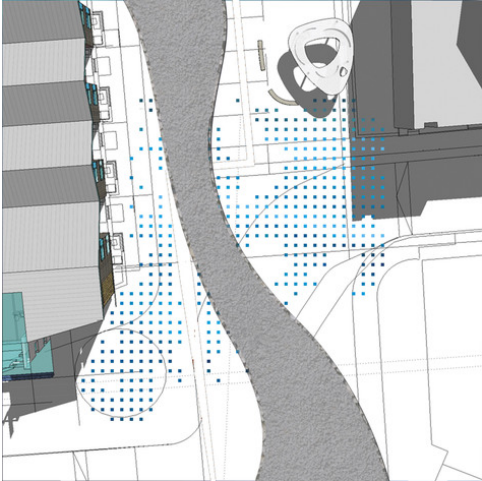
Involving David in the design team was at times challenging, verging on the mystifying, however the new perspective and energy he brought, meant that we stretched our thinking way beyond our traditional development processes. We are very proud of the resulting designs and optimistic about the knowledge that this public art-led approach could bring into the affordable housing sector.

Lisa Denison, Regeneration Co-ordinator, Sovereign Housing Association

Text by David Drake reprinted from Public Art On-Line website.

### Downloads:

The BartonHill Art Guide produced during this period can be downloaded [here](#).



Barton Hill Culvert (LED Lighting Proposal)



Rear Window (Screen Proposal)