2010 Civic Awards for Design and Conservation

By rewarding the best architectural projects in the last five years this Award Scheme aims to stimulate interest in our built environment and develop a deeper and broader appreciation of both traditional craft skills and high quality contemporary construction. This is the eighth round of Civic Awards, but for the first time the scheme applies to the extended area of Cheshire West and Chester. It is also a happy co-incidence that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Chester Civic Trust which has been a partner in the scheme since 1995. The third partner is the Cheshire Society of Architects and the scheme is also supported by English Heritage.

Nominations have been submitted under four categories. These are Residential Developments; Community, Health and Educational Buildings; Commercial, Retail, and Industrial Buildings; and Public Realm and Open Spaces. Each of the above was also divided into either wholly or largely new build projects or conversion, refurbishment and conservation projects. A near record number of 67 nominations were made by the public, architectural practices, owners and contractors.

A judging panel was appointed by the Award Sponsors with representation from each of the three organisations. This panel was ably supported by John Healey from the Council’s Conservation Department who was responsible for much of the administration of the scheme. Information submitted with nominations was closely inspected and a shortlist was agreed. This was followed by a series of visits following which the judging panel arrived at its final decisions.

The judges were impressed with the quality of the schemes nominated for these awards and were pleased to see that they were from all parts of Cheshire West and Chester. We had no problem in agreeing that six of the nominations were worthy of an Award but following a lengthy debate decided that a new category of Highly Commended was required for four further projects. Information on these ten schemes is included on the following pages with a short commentary from the judging panel explaining what influenced its decision. A further twelve nominations were considered worthy of recognition and will receive Certificates of Commendation and these are listed on the back page.

It became very obvious to the judges that successful projects generally resulted from a close working relationship between the building owner, the design team and all of the contractors and sub-contractors responsible for the building work. They also recognised the very significant input from the Council’s Conservation Department into many of the schemes. Finally my thanks go to my fellow judges Peter Boughton, Chris Goodall and Philip Harrison for all their hard work and for making the whole process great fun!

Peter Hadfield
Judging Panel Chairman
All Saints Church of England Primary School, Saughall
Award for Community New Build

Owner                  Cheshire West and Chester Council
Designer              Lovelock Mitchell Architects
Contractor            Willmott Dixon

This project is a new 10 class 310 pupil school with a unique design that has provided a stimulating learning environment and at the same time addressed issues of energy efficiency and sustainability. The new school has amalgamated existing infant and junior schools into a single site. The design was strongly influenced by the site, with the curved footprint integrating existing features such as mature oak trees and a pond.

The building has two wings which curve around a courtyard with classrooms on the outer face and support areas on the inner part of the building, many of which open directly off the circulation spaces. This layout has been successful in integrating the two schools and produced a cohesive unified entity. The project has been assessed under the BREEAM education scheme and has achieved a rating of excellent.

The judging panel was very impressed with the quality of construction and the simple but careful detailing. The mix of internal spaces provides delightful teaching spaces which are complemented by equally successful external areas.

Extension to 16 Lache Lane, Chester
Award for Residential New Build and Refurbishment

Owner                  David and Alyson Cowell
Designer              Andy Foster Architects
Contractor            ColRich Enterprises

The owners of this 1930s house wanted to restore and improve their home and add a new contemporary space at the rear. From the front door the hall leads through the centre of the house to a flat roofed link with a vista down the garden, and then into the strikingly modern extension. This extension provides a new kitchen and living areas within a single open plan space. Within this area there are large level access bi-fold doors which connect the house to its landscape. Other works within the house have restored the original quality and introduced habitable accommodation in the loft.

The judging panel agreed that this project has a real wow factor with careful and consistent detailing together with an extremely high standard of finish and construction.
Leighton Hall Farm, Neston
Award for Residential Conversion and Conservation

Owner: Various
Designer: Donald Insall Associates Ltd
Contractor: Leighton Hall Developments

The Hall itself no longer exists at Leighton but some of the buildings surrounding the original farmyard remain, including a very fine 17th C three storey barn, which is Listed Grade II*. Up until 2005 the complex of buildings was part of a working farm and had been much neglected and was in critical state of repair. The whole has now been converted to provide a mix of very high quality residential units around a landscaped courtyard.

The judging panel found that high quality materials have been used throughout the conversion. This together with sensitive, appropriate design detailing, and particularly the consistently high standard of workmanship, have resulted in a residential scheme that not only sustains the listed building and its curtilage but also enhances the environs of the Parkgate community.

The Gunnery Development, High Street, Tarvin
Award for Residential/Commercial Refurbishment and New Build

Owner: Various
Designer: Sandra Murray and Associates
Contractor: Matrec (Developments) Ltd

The premises of the grocer’s, tea blender’s and corn merchant’s business known as George Gunnery and Co were built some fifty years or so after Tarvin’s Great Fire of 1752 and comprised shops, warehouses and a corn mill. Part of the complex is Grade II listed and it stands in an important location in the centre of the village and at the heart of the Tarvin Conservation Area.

The business declined and with it the condition of the buildings until the site was acquired by Matrec and a reconstruction project commenced. They painstakingly restored the premises converting some to provide residential accommodation and office space together with retail units and also constructed sympathetic new areas.

The judging panel found outstanding attention to detail and a consistent use of high quality appropriate materials. The mixed use works well and has been successful in bringing back land areas into use, whilst the front part of the development has significantly improved the village streetscape.
St Mary’s Church, Thornton-le-Moors  
Award for Community Building Conservation

Owner: The Churches Conservation Trust  
Designer: Tim Ratcliffe Associates  
Contractor: Treasure and Sons of Ludlow

This Grade I listed church was built in the fourteenth century but the communities that it once served have now largely disappeared; the last service being in 2004. Since then the building has been little used and has had virtually no maintenance, with the result that two years ago it was on the verge of collapse. At this point The Churches Conservation Trust organised essential maintenance and repairs to safeguard the building fabric.

The roof was repaired and re-slated, stonework was made good and replaced and the windows were repaired and re-leaded. Many of the internal features have also been repaired and conserved.

The judging panel was impressed with the painstaking attention to detail and outstanding quality of workmanship. The local communities, and in particular the environment of Thornton-Le-Moors village, have been very much enhanced and sustained by the repair of this very important historical church building.

The Town Hall, Chester  
Award for Community Building Refurbishment

Owner: Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Designer: Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Contractor: Greenough and Sons Roofing Contractors Ltd

This project comprised the repair and maintenance of the exterior of the building. Carefully chosen new stone has been used for repairs to the walls, tower and parapets and the quality and workmanship of the re-slating and new lead work is excellent. In particular the replacement of the cast iron ridge finials and trimming of the slate work to the dormer windows has been carried out in an exemplary fashion.

The judging panel felt that whilst applauding the very high standards of this conservation and repair project, the fact that it has been necessary for so much work to be done is a very damning indictment of the lack of maintenance to this important Grade II listed building by previous Local Authority administrations.
The Red House, Dee Banks, Chester
Highly Commended for Commercial New Build and Refurbishment
Owner Ray Stalker
Designer DGA Architects Ltd
Contractor Paveaways Ltd

The Red House was originally constructed in 1850 and had become tired and run down; it had been unsympathetically extended at the rear on a number of occasions. From the roadside the external facade has changed little but from the river side there is now a radical two storey glass extension and the interior has been altered to form a year round high quality restaurant facility.

The concept was to extend and enlarge the rear of the building in a contemporary planar glass box to create a dynamic and exciting dining experience. Entering a traditional pub and being met with a two storey glass void is exciting and the almost invisible enclosure allows unparalleled views of the River Dee.

The judging panel liked the uncompromising modern approach and good quality materials and construction.

Chester Station Transformation
Highly Commended for Commercial Refurbishment and Conservation
Owner Network Rail and Arriva in conjunction with Chester Station Gateway Partnership
Designer Building Design Partnership and Donald Insall Associates Ltd
Contractor Various

Chester’s railway station was built in 1847-8 in the Italianate style and was at the time the longest station in Britain. It was built to serve four railway companies who each carried out detrimental alterations. This unsatisfactory state of affairs continued until recently when a transformation programme was begun. This is an ongoing programme of projects with the aim of regenerating and restoring the station and its environs.

The judging panel was amazed at the huge amount of administrative problems which the team overcame and was impressed with the improvements achieved. It was also good to see previously redundant spaces at first floor level being brought back into use. However the panel felt that the station square suffers from outdated highway engineering practices and that the angular modern interventions within the platform concourse did not fit comfortably within this space.
Orangery at Lyndhurst, Childer Thornton  
Highly Commended for Residential New Build and Alterations

Owner: Steve and Jodie Bramwell  
Designer: Lovelock Mitchell Architects  
Contractor: Quinta Construction

This project comprises alterations within the existing house to provide a larger kitchen, dining area and utility room together with an extension to provide additional living space. The new part of the building was constructed in what was a rather unattractive patio area with views to the orchard and sunken garden. This space has a glazed roof and large glazed doors which make it very light and airy, and the bi-fold doors successfully link the room to the garden. It has simple careful detailing, retains several interesting features and connects well to the existing house. Renewable energy sources include a wind turbine and photovoltaics, water heating is supplemented by solar panels, and an air source heat pump is utilised.

The judging panel liked the simple elegant living space and the way it links to the existing house and garden.

Rebuilding and Stabilising of a Section of Chester City Walls  
Highly Commended for Public Realm Conservation

Owner: Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Designer: Gifford and Tweed Nuttall Warburton  
Contractor: Maysand Ltd

During April 2008 part of the Chester City Wall collapsed and a section was found to be in a very precarious condition. Following a detailed study it was agreed that this section of the wall would be dismantled and reconstructed. The outer faces of the wall were reconstructed with stones laid back in their original positions, with a new core through which ties stabilise the whole. New paving slabs on a waterproof membrane completed the work.

The judging panel was very impressed by the thoroughness and professionalism which it is evident has been exerted at all stages of this project, with the exception of one very visible feature. The new modern handrail was felt to be inappropriate and not in keeping with any aspect of any part of the City Walls. It has set a very unfortunate and undesirable precedent should any other section of the old oak handrail require replacement elsewhere around the circuit of the Walls. It is for this reason alone that this scheme has not been given an Award.
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