

The University of York Campus: 40 Years of Growth and Change; What Next? by Sir Andrew Derbyshire

The fourth talk on 24 November in a series of Open Course Lectures on “The Architecture of Universities” held at the University between 3 November and 8 December 2005.

NOTE: words in **BOLD typeface** indicate a slide illustration.

1, Preamble

My forty year connection with the university came to an end five years ago and until last month I hadn't been back. I couldn't bear to see what was happening. It was the way the ideals of the founders were not just being ignored but actively rejected that I found distressing. The destruction of Alcuin College was a particularly painful blow.

The original design of this place was related to a set of social and academic objectives which seemed to have achieved the desired result. I'm not attributing York's high ranking in teaching and research entirely to the way in which it was physically structured in the early years. But good design is not marginal. It can make the difference between a life that is comfortable, enjoyable and stimulating and one that is marred by a continual struggle against a hostile and depressing environment. My worry is that recent changes may threaten the success of the University if they are continued and I want to examine this threat and discuss ways in which the danger, if it exists, might be averted.

Like all good things my talk is divided into three parts. First I shall look at the origins of the university and the first ten years of rapid growth to 1973. This is by way of a reminder of the way in which the aspirations of the founders were translated into built form. My second chapter deals with the twenty year period of consolidation which followed until 1993 when the present phase of resurgent growth began. Ten years later we are now at the threshold of a kind of rebirth on a new site and I shall finish by considering the plan which is emerging.

2, Early Years

My story starts with the four people who jointly wrote the Development Plan of 1962: Lord James the Vice-Chancellor, John West-Taylor the Registrar, and the architects Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and me. In the course of the most intensive brainstorming I have ever experienced, we achieved a meeting of minds about the purpose and nature of a twentieth century university more harmonious than any consensus between designers and clients that I have ever experienced.

Our academic brief told us that the university was to be collegiate and we were to plan for an equal number of men and women undergraduates divided between 40% reading science

subjects and 60% non-science. The University Grants Committee put flesh on these bones with a target of 3,000 students in ten years for a budget of £6m excluding the cost of residence. There were to be no schools or faculties of related disciplines. Each subject was to be defined by its own department so that degrees could be taken in a wide combination of subjects.

Our key proposition was that a university is essentially a society of individuals living and working together for the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. This sounds like a truism but if it's taken seriously it leads to four major objectives with significant architectural implications.

The first was that we should aim for a coherent social structure in which living, working and leisure activities could be pursued close to one another, and in which each individual would be able to find intermediate groupings with which he or she could identify so as not to feel lost in the anonymous mass of the whole university. This was our interpretation of the college idea and implied a lot of residence on campus and the placing of departmental headquarters inside the fabric of the college. Emphasis was placed on teaching by one-to-one tutorials and small seminar groups led by the academic members of the college. At that time we thought that a college would cease to be friendly if it had more than 400 members. We assumed that in the long run two thirds of the undergraduate members of the college would be in residence and a limited amount of staff accommodation was located nearby with a house for the provost.

The second objective was to encourage the greatest possible informal contact between the students and academics of different disciplines to build bridges between the different cultures. The space taken up by laboratories made the science departments too big to be embedded in the colleges like the non-science departments. We therefore settled for a compromise in which the three major sciences were dispersed among the colleges so as to avoid the daunting bulk of a science faculty.

The random contact which we sought would not take place however unless we provided direct, sheltered and safe pedestrian communication between the different buildings. The answer was the covered way system, which also carries the other essential currents of movement - telecommunications and electricity in the roof and district heating in a duct below the path - all readily accessible without any digging. These footways, protected from vehicular interference, penetrate all the building units and intersect at the centre of each with places to meet and talk and take refreshment nearby.

The third objective was to produce a structure of growth which would be viable at all stages of development and robust against the inevitable vicissitudes of funding. Starting from Heslington and moving north-westwards towards the city was an essential element of this strategy since it lodged the young foundation near Heslington Village rather than isolating it in a field. It also meant that as the university colonised the site from the east the builders departed to the west so that we could establish a clear boundary between the working university and the

noisy battlefield of construction.

Another aspect of growth is change. New subjects emerge at the moving boundaries of established subjects and open up new research horizons. The expectations of the country and its young people will vary with changes in political attitudes and economic circumstance and will place unexpected demands on university life. New technologies will introduce new methods of teaching and research. What this meant for us was the need to provide flexibility not only in the geometry of the plan but in the construction of the buildings as well.

The fourth objective was the most intangible and had to do with the image and identity of the place. We believed that we had to provide the university community with particular qualities of environment if the experience of belonging to it was to have the significance and value that it should. For undergraduates at any rate the unique three year shelter of the degree course is a precious opportunity to establish moral values and friendships which can last a lifetime. It was this quality of memorability which seemed to us to express the particular identity of place and experience which we were seeking. Hence the lake, trees, grass, ducks and generally unpretentious buildings disposed informally in the landscape.

We defined the **minimum viable university** as a triad made up of two colleges and a science department. This will be shared by the three traditional science subjects in the early days. As the other departments are built it will later be occupied by a single subject with an area reserved for future growth. The triad is the basic cell of the growing organism. It can be expanded into a **symmetrical hexagonal structure** to represent the ten year old university with eight colleges, space for special buildings of unknown function and many directions of growth round the perimeter. This theoretical diagram can then be transferred as **four phases of growth on the site**.

This **aerial photograph** shows the site before university. It is generally flat agricultural land of poor quality rising 70 feet to the north with a spur projecting to the south east from an ancient monument called Siwards How. It is a spongy washed out glacial moraine and is waterlogged. It was clear that the increased area of impermeable surface following from building development would lead to flooding. The remedy for this would be to improve the site drainage and lead it into a balancing reservoir to contain the increased flow and release it slowly. This immediately in our imagination became a lake.

The areas taken up by the **four phases** can now be drawn to scale on the map and the diagram becomes the **development plan** with circles of different areas representing the footprint of each building unit based on a calculation of floorspace modified by assumptions about building density. These assumed an average height of three storeys with a maximum of five and a sufficient separation between units to allow the insertion of additional functions in the future and to maintain an aesthetic of identifiable buildings in a landscape.

The **first phase** due for completion in 1963 consists of the refurbishment of Heslington Hall and the basic site preparation. This includes a spine road dug into the hillside to provide an easier walk across the slope of the hill and the construction of the lake bed and weirs. **Growth** then occurs at two yearly intervals to the end of the first ten year period. This produces an accommodation surplus every other year to allow for delays in construction or an unplanned increase in student recruitment. At the end of each phase academic and residential accommodation are in balance so the university is viable even if growth is halted. **Structural landscape preparation** and treeplanting takes place ahead of each phase to provide shelter belts running across the contours.

Just as the Development Plan was designed to accommodate growth and change we were concerned that the future of the university should not be constrained by future planning decisions affecting Heslington Village and the hinterland. We therefore set out the **long term land needs of the university** both in terms of its expansion on the periphery of the village and the need to secure land immediately adjacent to house staff and students who were not resident in college so as to avoid overloading the City's housing stock. At the same time we saw the need to resist pressure for development in the village itself and the Planning Authority agreed to designate the Main Street as a Conservation Area and reserve an area for the growth of the University in the long term. The proposed line of the Ring Road encroached on this area and the then Ministry of Transport agreed to move it further south.

The next major decision was the choice of structural system for the buildings critical to the programme - the colleges and science buildings. Study of the local building industry revealed a serious state of overload which was going to get worse. This meant that if we were to use conventional constructional techniques, which would be labour intensive on the site, the required speed could only be achieved by importing manpower from further afield and this would cost more than we could afford.

The answer was to transfer as much labour as possible from the site to the factory - in other words to prefabricate. The government in the early 60s were still struggling to deal with the war's aftermath of shortages and because conventional construction couldn't cope it was encouraging the development and use of prefabricated systems - in the same way that the present government is proposing to deal with the housing shortage. If we were to proceed along these lines it was therefore common sense to develop one of the systems that had been developed to build schools.

The most important criterion for choice was that the promoters of the system had to be willing to let us design new components to bring its performance up to university standards. After studying the existing systems we chose the only one that was not run commercially but was actually managed by a group of local authorities and was therefore responsive to the needs of user clients. This was the Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme, or CLASP for short, which had been created to serve the needs of the Local Authorities working in areas

liable to mining subsidence.

The Consortium welcomed the University as a member and we were invited to join the Development Group based in the Nottingham County Architect's Department to design the new components that were needed on the understanding that these would be made available to the other members of the Consortium.

CLASP was based on a flexible steel frame and a foundation system designed to cope with the subsidence ground wave which would tread lightly on our sodden soil. Among the new components we needed was a range of **precast concrete cladding panels**. Their colour and texture was the subject of much discussion. We experimented with a number of different materials for the exposed aggregate which formed the external surface of the panels. These included **fluorspar and white cement** to add sparkle and **different granites** to add colour. To our great disappointment we could afford none of them and had to settle for **river gravel** dredged from the bed of the Trent.

One of the unique virtues of CLASP was that all its components were dry jointed so that construction could proceed in rain, shine or frost. They were also light enough to be handled by two men or a mobile crane so that the footprint of the building on the ground was free of constraints imposed by lifting technology. Once the **steel frame** had been speedily erected and the roof was on many other operations could proceed in parallel. Here is the mobile crane putting in place a **prefabricated bay window** - another special component with which we enriched the range of the system.

Regular dialogue Dialogue with the VC and Registrar continued to discuss the designs for the early colleges and science buildings and included new professors as they were appointed. Roger McMeeking arrived in 1964 as Deputy Bursar and later as Bursar became the manager of the building programme. The design of each college was assigned to a dedicated team led by a job architect working closely with the nominated provost and the Heads of Departments allocated to the college. We intended that, although using the same kit of parts and following the same basic brief, each college would be architecturally different in response to its position on the site, the ambitions of the provost and the needs of the departments which it housed.

Derwent College establishes the basic organisation structure. It consists of a nucleus at the centre served by the main covered way route to which are attached the blocks of residential accommodation. These contain study bedrooms for undergraduates and flats and tutorial offices for members of staff. Every effort is made to give each room a different shape and window position and access is by staircase with interconnecting corridors to provide maximum opportunities for a variety of contacts and avoid isolation. The nucleus provides a multi-purpose hall with adjacent kitchen, bars and snack bars, junior and senior common rooms and a mixture of teaching and research rooms for the departments - in this case Politics and Philosophy. Some of the lecture and seminar rooms are centrally timetabled for the use of other departments and

students outside teaching hours. The college library is placed on the **first floor** for peace and quiet and was seen as a branch of the Central Library. **Outdoor courts** near the snack bars are intended for eating out in the summer and Derwent has a **water court** which indicates one of the major sources of water for the lake. The nucleus is identified by **pyramidal rooflights** to help newcomers to find their way in the somewhat tortuous circulation system.

I won't go into detail about the design of the other colleges- you know them all anyway. Enough to say that they were all related to the water and landscape in different ways. I would however like to remind you what the late **Alcuin** of fond memory was like. It had wonderful views south over the rest of the campus and celebrated this with a dining room and library on the first floor. The covered way connecting chemistry with the library and bookshop passed under the building in a cloister to one side of a **court** with access to the junior common room. The **view to the east** towards chemistry and **to the west** towards the library made this a very pleasant journey with the added virtue that University Road, being **dug into the hillside**, was invisible. This has now all been destroyed.

The first science building, an essential element of the **minimum viable university**, had to serve all three conventional sciences in the early years. With growth it would be taken over entirely by chemistry. In the intervening years it would share with biology when physics is built and biology would eventually move into its own building. CLASP easily achieved the necessary flexibility for these migrations. We gave the building a **deep underfloor space** for both wet and dry services and a **plan** designed to promote contact between undergraduates and research activity. We hoped that sheltered public routes through the building would demystify its secrets to the non-scientists. Top-light throughout the building made the rearrangement of space easy. An **undergraduate laboratory** could become **space for a research team** and at one time even housed the **university computer**.

The first chemistry professor complained that although we had given him a library and lecture theatre we had failed to provide a meeting place for discussion and refreshment. We remedied this in physics with a double height exhibition space with a snack bar and centrally timetabled lecture theatres nearby. Biology has similar accommodation in a central position. I wonder whether the recent extensions to Chemistry and Biology have included similar facilities on their public routes.

The physics facility has since been sympathetically extended to serve large meetings in the Central Hall although the multi-storey teaching wing has never been one of our more cheerful efforts - particularly its **north face** which the sun rarely reaches. I always looked forward when the time came to a more colourful refurbishment. Imagine my surprise to discover that it has now become **dark brown** and even gloomier.

Assuming that we could secure the programme for growth with the CLASP based colleges and departmental headquarters we could adopt a more relaxed attitude to the provision

of one-off buildings like the Central Hall and Library. We designed these as more conventional structures and allowed ourselves the liberty of an architectural style which expressed their functions in a more declamatory way. Thus the **Library** - perhaps symbolically the most significant building on the campus - is like a warehouse to store ideas and is simple but dignified to suit its elevated site. The **Central Hall** expresses externally the tiered seating of its auditorium with a suspended roof demonstrating the column free space of the interior.

We saw these buildings as points of architectural emphasis embedded in the less demonstrative vernacular of the CLASP buildings which would depend on the academic life within to give them vitality. The often quoted analogy is the butter cross setting off the modest utility of a Cotswold town.

Thus I come to the end of the first heroic ten years of growth and the country is hit by a series of oil shocks. Roaring inflation overtakes our expenditure limits which are held constant by a government unwilling to admit to the crisis in public. Wentworth, the last, sixth, college to be built in this period shows the scars of this wounding time. We couldn't afford a steel frame for the **residential blocks** although we clad them in standard CLASP panels for the sake of uniformity with the other colleges, but we had to clad the **nucleus in timber**.

Although this is a sad ending to my first chapter we could at least congratulate ourselves that every building had been put up on time and within budget. The University's ambitious plan for growth had been achieved even though we had finished up **two colleges short** - college IV up on the hill and college VIII on the plain. College membership had therefore risen to 750 but apparently without social disruption.

3, Consolidation

The hard times of the next twenty years to 1993 were specially difficult for York because of its small size and lack of historical resources. It has been said that, "*The early 1980s marked the low point of the worst economic depression that Britain had experienced since the 1930s.*" Even so good things continued to happen such as the student opinion survey of 1983. We had made a plea in the original Development Plan for a biennial programme of feedback so that the need for change could be identified and the Plan modified to suit. I don't know why it took so long to happen but when it did it taught us two important lessons. The first was that an astonishingly high proportion of arts and social science students had friends in the science departments and vice versa - in the 80-90% range. It looked as though bridges between the two cultures were really being built.

The second was that although students liked the landscape, the convenience of living and working in the university and the Central Hall and Library, the rest of the buildings were described in response to an open question as "bland, grey, dull, monotonous, modern, bleak and uninspiring - specially in the winter".

The university was struggling to cope with rapidly rising energy and maintenance costs and it became evident that we could kill several birds with a single stone by changing the architectural vocabulary. Brick walls of high thermal capacity and insulation, maintenance free pitched roofs and self-coloured PVC window frames and rainwater goods gave us a palette of warm colours and textures to brighten the place up.

The designer responsible for applying the new language was my colleague Bob Owston. I have failed to credit any architects and engineers so far because there were so many involved in the early years of rapid growth and they have been acknowledged elsewhere. Bob however soldiered on during the twenty year interregnum serving with distinction a sporadic programme of minor works which would have tried the patience of most architects.

The first buildings to get the new treatment were the **College Extensions for Derwent and Langwith**. These applied other lessons which we had learnt from the student survey by grouping twelve to fifteen rooms around a three storey staircase with a big kitchen - dining - meeting room at the bottom. We also made a start on **James College** (No VIII in the Plan) using the same design principles. We included a small common room to make up for the lack of a nucleus which we hoped would be built later on a site we had reserved. This was a mistake. I also regret that we failed to include the initial stages of a covered way system.

We remedied this in new buildings for **computer science** and **IRISS**, (the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences), both of which had internal covered ways which could be incorporated later into more extended routes.

In 1989 Roger Mcmeeking launched the Science Park on land between the Central Boiler House and Heslington Church. This attracted firms like **Smith and Nephew** who needed to consolidate their research activities in one place and looked for symbiosis with the relevant departments of the university. The Park is now full and its success has contributed to the Government nomination of York as one of the six Science Cities in the U K.

I talked earlier about reserving land near Heslington Village for student housing. This became increasingly urgent with the growth of student numbers and the slow rate of increase in college accommodation. The University Design Unit had already designed some very seemly **student housing** near the Village but with the increased pressure in numbers and the growth of the City's own housing problems more had to be done. **Halifax Court** is an example of the university's response in the hands of design and build contractors.

This was regrettable for two reasons. First the obvious decline in architectural quality and secondly in the provision of a minimal porter's lodge, a shop and a common room. This gave the Court a superficial resemblance to a college but without providing for the essential academic functions of tutorials, teaching and research space and places for refreshment it was in fact a hal

of residence. Unintended consequences came into play and we thus unwittingly began the downgrading of the college idea which has recently been gathering momentum. Hindsight tells us that we should have been brave enough either to complete **James** or start college **IV** up on the hill.

However we can also claim that after thirty years of growth and change the university had achieved most of the aims of its founders. As far as academic excellence is concerned it has been consistently in the top ten rankings and the results of the student survey are backed up by anecdotal evidence from former staff and alumni that the York experience has not only been memorable but the prelude for a rewarding life.

4, 1993 A Renaissance Begins

This was the context in which the university embarked on a period of resurgence in 1993 led by Ron Cooke the new Vice Chancellor. He gave Roger McMeeking his last job before retiring of conducting a Review of the original Development Plan to generate a new one for the next ten years. He set up a steering group of culture carriers and took on board a number of issues such as the tendency of students to cater for themselves and the growing expectations of the student body and the lucrative conference trade for *en suite* bathrooms attached to study bedrooms. This had already been successfully achieved in the refurbishment of one of the residential wings of Langwith which proved that CLASP was up to the job. The Review also took on board the stresses and strains placed upon the existing environment at the Heslington site by the pressure for growth and the need to increase the research effort and open new departments.

The major findings of the Review were: first that if the collegiate structure were to be maintained we had to define a **minimum viable nucleus** - we did this and tested it out on the site we had reserved for that purpose at **James**; secondly that the only substantial area left for growth on the existing site was on the hill to the **north of University Road**. We noted that radical landscape design would be needed if this part of the site were to compete successfully with the established landscape to the south and suggested making a belvedere for views to the Minister and the Howardian Hills, preserving other important vistas, reserving a site for College IV and placing a new bridge across Heslington Road to make a more direct connection with Biology and Wentworth. We also suggested strengthening the tree belts and protecting the land around the lake from further development.

It was clear that the University would also immediately have to apply for planning consent to create a major extension within the area already reserved for university expansion. In collaboration with the Local Planning Authority the Review suggested a **landscape structure** and a development brief as the basis for a future development plan. It was doubtful that there would be enough water to form a lake and Hal Moggridge, our landscape consultant settled instead for a system of canals and wilderness marshlands where, in his words "*a rich biotype*

can be established, stimulating to the academic curiosity and enchanting to the modern eye”.

A central communications spine for pedestrians and cyclists connected with the rest of the university by way of an underpass below Field Lane. We envisaged growth starting at the west end of the site nearest to the existing university and proceeding eastwards. The Review recommended that the existing intensity of development defined by a 20% site coverage and building height generally limited to mature tree cover should be applied on the hill and on any other areas of future growth such as the new site. The Review was published in 1995 and accepted by the entire management and decision making structure of the university.

At this point Roger McMeeking retired. He was succeeded by a Director of Facilities Management. I tried to maintain my position as architectural adviser to the university and some useful work was done including a plan for an inexpensive cleaning programme to brighten up the CLASP panels. But there were straws in the wind which began to make my position untenable. Word began to spread that the original CLASP buildings were past their sell-by date and ripe for replacement although there was no evidence for this. There was growing misunderstanding about the meaning of a college and I began to hear it said that the collegiate system was symptomatic of the nanny state and that the best way to educate students was to immerse them in the rough and tumble of city life.

Our landscape consultant was told that he was no longer needed. After over forty years service I was dropped from the membership of the Estates and Buildings Committee and I was shown, as a *fait accompli*, proposals for a substantial building programme which I could neither endorse nor influence. So I said farewell with great regret. The VC, in his words, was “*really disappointed and not a little upset*”. He thought I had let him down and although he asked me to keep in touch the relationship, which I valued, inevitably lapsed.

5, Recent Events

Since when, as I said earlier, I was reluctant to visit until recently when I found that an astonishing amount of development had taken place in the last five years. Even if I'm disappointed by the architecture I have to acknowledge the high level of innovation in the development of new academic initiatives not to mention the hard work that must have been deployed by the management to raise the money. It just seems such a shame that the opportunity was missed to make York an exemplar of modern university architecture like one or two of the other new universities.

What have I found? **James** has been completed without a nucleus. The space reserved for this has been lost to a couple of residential blocks. When I first saw the designs for the new student residence at Wentworth I commented on the **crescent** that, “*It is essentially a monumental urban form - think of Bath, Edinburgh and Belgravia - and therefore quite foreign to the University of York idiom which relates to the romantic English tradition of pavilions*

placed informally in a naturalistic landscape. The whole scheme also causes the loss of some mature landscape and water area - there is plenty of room for the required amount of accommodation without encroaching on the lake." Sad to say my visit confirmed my original reactions.

It is however apparently flourishing as a college which is more than can be said for poor Goodricke which has been overwhelmed by a big sort of **canteen** which, like a cuckoo in the nest, puts the college dining hall completely in the shade. Perhaps this was the result of the search for a site for what was called a students' venue - a place for a rave-up or big meeting. Our solution to this was to build under the **grassy hump** on on the landward side of the Central Hall. The **section** worked well with a gallery on the same level as the stage and the **final result** was relatively unobtrusive with a grass roof just as convenient for lounging in the sun as its natural predecessor. I don't think anything has come of this.

Similarly nothing came of **our solution** to the search for a suitable place for shops and a university information centre for visitors to serve as the main entrance for the University. We saw this linking with the square outside what was Computer Science, now inhabited by the Environment Department. The **actual solution** prompted a response from me when I saw the drawings that, *"This is typical commercial developers' architecture - Clifton Moor comes to the university! As the front door of the whole place it should surely demonstrate architectural quality equivalent to (its) academic achievement."* But this is the **real front door**.

Although landscape maintenance still seems to be good the same can't be said for some other elements of the built environment like the Goodricke - Vanbrugh bridge over the lake which used to look like **this** and has now **lost its glass**. Is this a sign that the covered ways, like the colleges, will be allowed to succumb to advancing years for lack of conviction?

In spite of its architectural quality the new commercial building does, as we had hoped, bring to life the little square at the foot of the spiral ramp up to the library. At the top of this however we encounter some more lost opportunities. The **covered way** which used to approach the entrance to the library now leads to a blank wall. A new entrance to the library is shared with the **new extension** round the corner. The legibility of the covered way as the direct link between buildings has been replaced by an indirect, more sombre and less attractive invitation to explore.

The new library makes no attempt to combine harmoniously with the existing building. I expected the curved wall at the front to express a significant space inside the building but couldn't find it. Instead the interior deploys a labyrinthine collection of rooms all sharing the gloomy outlook provided by dark tinted glass which seems to indicate an approaching storm whatever the weather. The **east elevation** is a restless combination of many different shapes and materials. I wonder how they can be justified for a building of this size.

The **journey to the east** into what used to be Alcuin is without shelter and has a rather

bleak urban character out of tune with the rest of the University. The vocabulary of different shades of grey indicates that the findings of the student survey and our attempts to use a warmer palette have been ignored. People may not like **CLASP** but that's surely no reason to treat it so unsympathetically. Even the new plastic window frames are dark grey. According to the signage the college still exists but the approach over the bridge which used to lead to the nucleus once again leads to a **blank wall** behind which lurks a canteen whose existence I accidentally discovered when I helped a lady with a trolley attempting to enter it through a black glass fire door. I similarly discovered the **landscaping** when I witnessed another person equally confused by the communications struggling to use it as a footpath down the hill.

The search for the entrance to Alcuin College was a game of blind man's bluff with a crowd of conflicting signs. When I eventually discovered it I found a little **conservatory** containing a bar and a porter's lodge tucked under a corner of one of the original study-bedroom blocks. This finally convinced me that the University was having second thoughts about the collegiate structure. Whereas I had seen elsewhere signs of erosion and a perhaps subconscious weakening of the college idea, this was murder.

Further to the north remained our **last college extension** which expressed more emphatically the big kitchen-common room at the bottom of the staircase leading to a court. We imagined that this would complete the college but no such thing! - beyond lies a sort of housing estate of **halls of residence** ignoring the basic principles of urban design in a collegiate environment and devoid of the kind of the special landscape treatment which is necessary to rescue this rather dull part of the site from anonymity and make it a unique place.

Fleeing from this desolation I thought I would take a final look at the **view of chemistry** from Alcuin which had always been one of my favorites. Here again was desecration demonstrating the hostile invasion by vehicles of a **space** which I had hoped would always be kept green, and a curious out-of-scale fragment of **new covered way** connected with the extension to chemistry. I have not dealt with **this**, nor the similar extension to **biology**. Both suggest over-development to me and completely overshadow the existing buildings. However I have depressed myself, and perhaps you, too much already. But I trust I've said enough to suggest that in spite of the most encouraging academic growth mistakes have been made and opportunities missed from which I hope the appropriate lessons may be learnt for the future.

6, The Future

This future is of course Heslington East. The physical shape of this will be revealed at the forthcoming public inquiry into the University's planning application for the development which will add some five thousand students to the population of the University of which two thirds will be living on the site. A **Master Plan** is displayed on the University's website. This is not the way to describe a meaningful strategy. Although it demonstrates a landscape structure with major treeplanting, it falls into the error of drawing shapes of imaginary buildings which

have yet to be designed. Previous studies also suggest that such a substantial lake may not be sustainable on this site.

We can however hope for something better in due course. A new design team has been appointed to develop a design guide and master plan on the basis of a brief which gives cause for hope. Some of its key principles are, for instance - and I quote - *“To successfully integrate residential, research, teaching (and) social and sporting environments to provide a coherent and vibrant community.* and *“To create a built and landscape form that encourages social interaction and the exchange of ideas and information”*.

So far so good - the founding fathers would have applauded. The brief continues with an endorsement of the college structure as *“the bedrock of a supportive environment for students and staff”*, but then ominously continues that *“The physical expression of a college needs to be revisited”*. It proposes the grouping of departmental clusters to encourage interdisciplinary working and that major teaching facilities should be concentrated in dedicated buildings but the implication is that these would not be part of the college. The provision of social and catering facilities is not discussed. The campus will be car free and everything will be linked to a new form of covered way system. This will be adjacent to major facilities not through them as in the original Development Plan.

The brief also requires the Plan to provide for a close physical relationship between commercial organisations and research departments so that collaboration can foster the commercial application of new knowledge. This must mean that the functions of the Science Park will be more closely integrated with the rest of the campus than they are at present.

I am left with the impression that although the new plan is based on the original aims of the University its physical form will be fundamentally different. Instead of being integrated in a single college building, residential, academic and social accommodation will be housed in separate blocks linked, but not penetrated, by covered ways. It would be interesting to see the evidence that this fragmentation will be beneficial whereas there is some evidence that the 1962 integrated version has been a success. We are as usual desperately short of good information and I should like to see more feedback of the kind which gave us such illumination in the 1980s so that the way the existing structure of colleges and departments is perceived by students and staff and the way it is working can inform the new architecture. Otherwise there is a danger that design policy will be dictated by prejudice and pragmatism rather than an understanding of basic human needs in an academic setting.

On the other hand while I welcome these intentions as an improvement on the roughshod vandalism of recent years I wonder how this can be avoided in future. At the risk of being presumptuous I can't help suggesting a few thoughts based on my own experience that may ensure that the intentions of the new Development Plan are successfully realised. The first is that all the important bodies of the University must understand and influence the Plan through

discussion and endorse it in action. The second is that the University should have access to independent architectural advice to help with the preparation of the brief for each project and the selection of design teams, and to provide guidance on design matters to the Estates and Buildings Committee. The third most important proviso is that the top people in the University must give their authority to the development process by taking a serious interest in it and being involved at crucial stages. I know that they are hard-pressed with matters that can seem more important but neglect here can lead to permanent damage.

I have both watched and been involved in expensive disasters brought about by neglect of these criteria. Conversely when they are satisfied everybody involved can find the whole process rewarding and enjoyable, as it was in the first ten years of this University which remain for me the best years of my whole career. I can only wish the same for everybody involved in the next ten years of this unique place.

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