

Norwich Cathedral's new Refectory and Library Extension

The client's viewpoint on the planning process

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Major development within the cathedral close has shown the importance of regular, informal discussion with approving bodies before formal submissions for planning permission.

The vision of a rebuilt refectory abutting the south side of the cathedral cloister and of a reconstructed hostry or guest hall along the west side was first put forward by the late Dean Hook in a retirement address in 1968. A generation later, and with the need for improved educational and visitor facilities even more pressing, the implementation of that vision has at last begun.

The monastic refectory and the adjoining first-floor chamber at the south-east corner of the cloister were extensive ruins, while the arched entrance is all that visibly remains of the hostry. These were the highly sensitive sites selected, in consultation with the authorities, for the provision of a library extension, restaurant, classrooms, song school, exhibition space, meeting room and shop.

The proposals represented the largest extension to any English cathedral in recent times and were an early test of the new procedures laid down in the Care of Cathedrals Measure 1990. Very helpfully, the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (CFCE) had produced suggested guidelines for major developments within cathedral precincts, and these were carefully followed. Early archaeological assessments and trial excavations were essential to avoid unforeseen delays at a later stage.

The key to securing the approval of the CFCE was for very early and informal consultation, not only with the Commission

but also with all those bodies entitled under the Measure to make representations to the CFCE, namely English Heritage, the local planning authority, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Royal Fine Art Commission (now defunct). As the scheme was developed by the architects, regular contact, including site meetings, was maintained with those bodies before any formal submissions were lodged.

The local Fabric Advisory Committee proved a most useful sounding board during the planning process. Once the CFCE's approval with its detailed conditions was obtained, the grant of planning permission became a much smoother process.

Phase 1 of the new development has been the completion of the new Refectory and the Library extension, thereby avoiding the interruption of any existing Cathedral activities other than the closure of the cloister car park. The smooth working of the contracting process and subsequent building operation owed much to the able and dedicated design team working on the project, a team willing to adapt its plans to accommodate the Cathedral's wishes. Essential to the process were professional project managers reporting to the Project Management Committee that was established by the Chapter and chaired by a local but nationally known architect. The Chapter Clerk was a member of the Management Committee acting as Project Coordinator and representing

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the Chapter at the design team's monthly meetings.

In a remarkable way the completed buildings preserve the mediaeval footprint and, with their use of traditional materials, sit comfortably alongside the cloister. The incorporated remains of the original buildings are now more evident and much better appreciated. The eating area at first floor level is light and airy, while the interior of the Library extension has a distinctive beauty of its own. The former ruins have been brought to life again to serve the needs of a new millennium.

Interior (left) and exterior (below) of the new Refectory, designed by Hopkins Architects Ltd.



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