

Won in limited competition, this scheme for a new visitor centre formed part of a masterplan to accommodate increasing visitor numbers at Winchester Cathedral. Great sensitivity was required both architecturally and in balancing the various functions of the Centre within the life and ministry of the Cathedral.

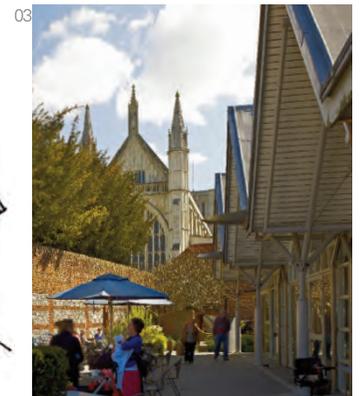
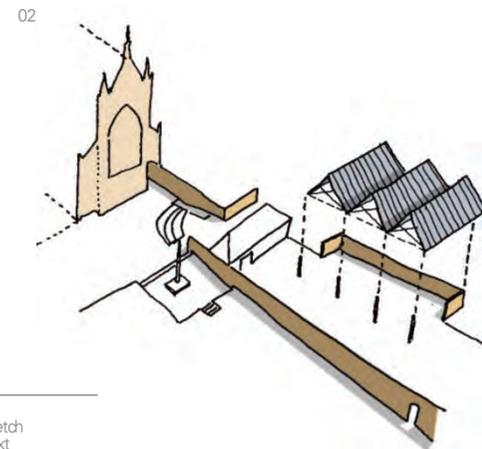
The first phase included the conversion of a Grade I Listed, 17th century coach house to provide a new visitor entrance, retail and office space. Passing through this building, a new public refectory is located in what had previously been the kitchen garden of the adjacent historic house and before that, an ancient burial ground. The refectory was the first new structure to be built within the Cathedral confines for 350 years and was designed as a lightweight steel frame bearing on shallow foundations to avoid damage to the rich archaeology below.

The various parts of the masterplan are arranged around a series of landscaped courtyards that connect and integrate the buildings into their historic surroundings. The new refectory is sited away from the scheduled ancient precinct wall to create an enclosed garden on the north side of the building. The form and lead cladding of the three gabled sections of the refectory roof not

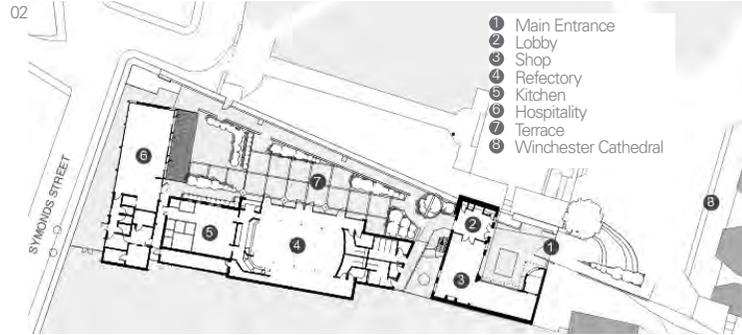
only respond to the roof of the cathedral itself, but are also designed to maximise daylight in the courtyard. In summer months the glazed wall of the refectory opens up onto a dining terrace to allow the interior and exterior spaces to merge.

The first phase of the Visitor Centre won planning consent endorsed by English Heritage in late 1991, and was opened by Her Majesty the Queen in 1993. Following its popular and commercial success, ArchitecturePLB was invited to design a second phase to accommodate ever-increasing visitor numbers and an emerging demand for a hospitality and conference suite.

Although a second building had been part of the original masterplan, the logistics of construction were made more complicated by the proximity of the new refectory that needed to remain in operation throughout. Access and working space were extremely restricted and the new building was therefore designed to minimise on-site operations and wet trades. In addition, the archaeological remains were at an even shallower depth than for Phase 1 and for these reasons a different structural solution was required.



01 Phase I exterior
02 Initial concept sketch
03 Scheme in context



Total Area : XXXsqm GIA (Phase I); 100sqm GIA (Phase II)
 Procurement Type : Traditional contract
 Local Authority : Winchester City Council

Our response was a single storey, lightweight, timber-framed building which preserves the archaeology below by treading lightly on the ground with its shallow raft foundations. The accommodation comprises a multipurpose space, used for functions and meetings, together with an office, and additional catering and ancillary spaces. The transparency of the building highlights the beauty of the historic flint wall behind and maximises views of the West front of the Cathedral from inside.



This sensitive balance and contrasting of materials is apparent throughout the entire complex, with contemporary steel and glass used in the new buildings, sympathetically juxtaposed against the traditional materials and textures of the surrounding historic context. Since completion in 1999, the Centre has been well used by the local community and has also generated a valuable income for the Cathedral.



- 01 Phase II exterior
- 02 Ground floor plan
- 03 Dining space interior
- 04 Rear of building
- 05 Longitudinal section