

The RICS North West Social Impact Awards 2020

Reported by Andrew Harris

The Windmill Green project



Every year the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors select the very best construction projects which transform the everyday lives of people. This year twenty-nine north west projects were considered and winners in seven categories – and the overall Project of the Year - have been announced. In September they will all compete with winners from other regions for the national RICS awards.

The first award category is for any commercial development projects whether retail, office, industrial or mixed use. The winner is the Windmill Green project in Manchester. This design, build and operate project is by the FORE Partnership was judged to combine a sensitive architectural approach with ultra-low carbon features and an innovative social impact. The judges said that Windmill Green is a thoughtful and innovative reconstruction which engages with charities and tenants to provide first-class accommodation whilst meeting the needs of the community. It is the first multi-let office in Manchester to be awarded 'Outstanding' status by BREEAM – the Building Research Establishment Environment Assessment Method created in 1990. A major achievement by the FORE Partnership, architect tp Bennett and surveyor Walker Sime.

Category 2 is for education projects and the winner is the Alliance Manchester Business School in Manchester. Known as AMBS it is, with about 2,000 students and more than 200 staff, the largest campus-based business and management

school in the UK. The project has transformed the existing Business School with significant new building additions, new retail space, new executive education facilities, new public space and a new hotel delivered in partnership with Manchester office-supplier Bruntwood. The judges said it has transformed the gateway to the surrounding built environment. It provides functional space plus benefits for students, staff and the community. The developer is MACE, the architect is BDP and the surveyor is Walker Sime again.

The third category is for healthcare projects. The winner is the 'Institute in the Park' for Alder Hey Children's Hospital. This provides a flexible facility which supports interdisciplinary working and enables Alder Hey to engage with partners and others beyond the hospital. It is built on the site of the old Alder Hey hospital – the stunning new hospital was the overall winner in the 2017 RICS regional awards – and relates well to the parkland setting while enhancing the environment by the use of natural materials, good natural daylight and excellent temperature control.



Top:
The Alliance Manchester Business School

Above:
The 'Institute in the Park' for Alder Hey Hospital

The judges said that the 'Institute in the Park' enhances the wellbeing of those working there and sends a positive message to researchers. Local community groups can use the facilities and the parkland has been freed up for use by the public. The client was the Alder Hey Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust which was assisted by the contractor Morgan Sindall, Hopkins Architects and the surveyor AECOM Ltd. ►

Category 4 is for heritage projects which can involve the conservation, renovation or restoration of one or more buildings. The winner is the St Bernard's Church project in Liverpool which has been converted to provide 11 affordable homes. It is an example of how a landmark but redundant building can provide housing which is both exciting and low-cost. The 'Home Partners' each contributed 'sweat equity' of 500 hours labour to accrue a deposit for purchase. The new houses are part of a growing community on land donated by the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The judges said that the project successfully retained glimpses of the church's architectural features – such as an arch or the glory of a stained glass window. The new owners have worked hard for their homes and created a ready-made community of friends and neighbours who are proud of their achievements. The project was developed in the name of the Hampton People Building Communities assisted by Ainsley Gommon Architects and the Wilkinson Cowan Partnership was the surveyor.



St Bernard's Church in Liverpool

Category 5 is for leisure projects which can include tourist attractions, hotels, community centres and sporting facilities. The winner is a most unusual project – the Oasis Centre and Sandpiper Place in Gorton, Manchester. The Oasis Centre Charity provides support for vulnerable residents in Gorton – one of the most socially deprived areas of the city. The new centre opened in March this year and is already a meeting place for disadvantaged local people and a base for a mainly voluntary team undertaking outstanding work in the community. It plays a central part of everyone's life and is the result of 4 years of unpaid advice and work by surveyor Roger Hannah. Roger purchased a derelict bank and adjoining land from Manchester City Council for just £2. He then arranged for 26 houses to be developed on part of the site with the price of the land funding 50% of the cost of the new Oasis Centre. The judges recognised that the new

The Oasis Centre and Sandpiper Place in Gorton



centre was achieved by the charity working 'hand in hand' with Roger Hannah. The charity was also helped by Grays Architect.

The penultimate category - number 6 – is for residential projects. The winner is the development of 170 one- and two-bedroom apartments and a state-of-the-art care facility at Westhead Avenue in Kirkby, Knowsley. The project is transforming a disused brownfield (urban) site into a much-needed development in the heart of one of the most socially deprived areas of Merseyside. The care centre will provide support around the clock to meet the individual needs of residents. It is a flagship project for Liverpool Mutual Homes and Knowsley Council. The architect is the Paddock Johnson Partnership and the Lane End Group is the surveyor and contractor. ►

An interior view of the Westhead Avenue Project in Kirkby



The seventh and last category is for student accommodation which enhances the student experience and supports wellbeing. The winner is Horizon Heights in Liverpool which provides more than 1,000 units of student accommodation and creates a splendid impression with visitors to the city partly due to the striking grey/blue brickwork, large glazed areas, perforated fins, glass curtain walling and safe aluminium cladding. The project's 'public realm' unifies the accommodation and the surrounding area to provide a functional, attractive, engaging and secure environment for students. The judges said that the building has been designed for and by its end users. Safeguarding students is at the heart of the design which also promotes social inclusion. The benefits provided by the project have helped to bring about a reduction of antisocial behaviour in the order of 15%. The development team was the client Unit Students, contractor McAleer & Rushe, architect Falconer Chester Hall and surveyor Tower Eight. ►



..... and finally. The overall regional winner – the Project of the Year – is the Oasis Centre and Sandpiper Place. The judges recognised that the leisure category winner is an outstanding example of professionals working in both the built and natural environments. The awards are based on social impact and it is hard to imagine a more appropriate winner than a building that will provide a massive improvement to the social welfare of the local community. ■

The Oasis Centre and Sandpiper Place in Gorton



Andrew E. Harris gratefully acknowledges the help and images provided by the RICS in the preparation of this article. He is a chartered surveyor but not part of the judging process. Copies of previous RICS regional awards can be seen at www.andreweharris.co.uk under Published Articles/ Environmental Topics.

