



BATH
PRESERVATION
TRUST

Recommendations for Architecture & Design in Bath

January 2011

Introduction

This statement has been developed by the Trust's expert Architecture and Planning Committee who comprise of building historians and built environment professionals who practice (or have practiced) architecture, urban design, conservation, town planning, and engineering, and has been adopted by the board of Trustees. Content has been reviewed by English Heritage, the Georgian Group and the Princes Regeneration Trust.

The statement puts forward a set of five recommendations for architecture and design in Bath. Its aim is to provide a clear description of the Bath Preservation Trust's views on how contemporary architecture should be shaped as the city progresses into the twenty-first century.

The statement is made in support of the Trust's charitable objects, which include the mission:

“To promote high standards of planning and architecture and to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement for the public benefit of the character, amenities and buildings of historical, architectural or public interest in and around the City of Bath.”

The Recommendations

The Trust's five recommendations are summarised below. They should be read in conjunction with the remainder of this paper which provides the rationale, and explains the recommendations in greater detail.

Recommendation 1	new interventions must be informed by a thorough understanding of the significance and vulnerability of the built environment of the World Heritage Site
Recommendation 2	historic fabric should be preserved and repaired where possible
Recommendation 3	new interventions must respond sensitively to their context
Recommendation 4	the detailing of new interventions must reflect Bath's tradition of high-quality craftsmanship
Recommendation 5	proposals for new developments must take account of the national and international importance of Bath and of the views of the local community

Background

Bath is a complex and highly sensitive city, an historic urban landscape in a rural setting, which is under constant pressure to change. It is the only complete City in the UK to be designated as a World Heritage Site, and one of only a handful in the world. Unique natural resources, built form and landscape combine with a cohesiveness that is recognised and valued internationally for its architectural and social history.

Change is a natural ingredient of every human settlement as it evolves through time. Consequently, city-wide World Heritage Site designation does not exclude progressive development. However, **the preservation of the Palladian Georgian architecture, the eighteenth century town planning and the visual homogeneity of the complete city in its landscape setting, which are of *Outstanding Universal Value*¹, is pivotal to the management of change.** As the Statement of Significance defines Bath's quality of architecture and urban design, its visual homogeneity and its beauty derive from the skill and creativity of the 18th and 19th Century architects who applied and developed Palladianism in response to the specific opportunities offered here. These architects related each individual development to those around it and to the wider landscape, creating a city that is harmonious and logical, in concord with its natural environment.

The catalogue of disastrous destruction and inappropriate building in Bath during the 1960's and 1970's has resulted in a widespread distrust of any new architecture that is not classical or traditional in appearance. Bath is studded with expressions of change over many centuries, yet in the city centre relatively little architecture reflects the economic boom and innovative construction of the late 20th century which dominates most townscapes.

Sites will continue to be brought forward for regeneration as the city continues to succeed as a visitor attraction and retail centre, and strives to meet a pressing need for more and affordable housing and employment growth. Heritage is an essential factor in place shaping in Bath and must be respected. However, much can be achieved by high quality contemporary architecture, *with* conservation of the historic fabric, to restore the integrity of the city. The challenge facing the city and its custodians today is to ensure that new architecture, created in response to modernisation and growth, is appropriate and sensitive to the significance and quality of Bath's designated and undesignated heritage assets². The heritage assets of Bath require protection in development management decisions; intervention must be managed in a way that sustains and enhances their heritage significance. 'Significance' is a key term within planning policy³ and encompasses all of the different historic, architectural and aesthetic interests.

¹ Revised statement of OUV published by B&NES/UNESCO 2008

² Designated assets comprise the citywide World Heritage Site, the City of Bath Conservation Area, approximately 4980 listed buildings, Roman and Bronze Age archaeology, and listed parks and gardens.

³ Planning Policy Statement 5 Planning and the Historic Environment 2010, paragraphs 12-15.

The Bath Context

Topography

The old city lies within a bend of the river Avon. From the valley bottom slopes rise gently at first, and then steeply, to the edges of the bowl, contained by a tree lined ridge. Buildings characteristically follow the contours of the hillsides and step up slopes, avoiding areas of unstable ground. Bath is remarkable both for its topography and for the way the built environment negotiates it.

Views and vistas and landscape setting⁴

Because of the hilly terrain, there are many panoramic views within the city featuring prominent valued landmarks, such as the late Medieval Abbey. Many parts of the city have green vistas, views to wooded slopes or farmland. When approaching Bath from the surrounding countryside, the city is invisible until the edge of the bowl is reached.

Architecture

The medieval town built on the abandoned Roman settlement was reinvented in the 18th century and the architecture of this time is now the prevailing style. The city is a collage of ad-hoc developments. Elegant, classically inspired Georgian architecture is dominant in the city centre and along the principal routes into the city, with terraces varying in scale, height and length, from palatial to artisan. 19th Century villas are scattered upon the valley slopes in Bathwick. West of the city centre, industrial and commercial developments, including some 18th century warehouses, line the river Avon. Victorian terraces sprawl beyond these industrial areas.

Post-war wholesale clearance and redevelopment introduced many modern housing and office blocks to the city centre, while city expansion created significant areas of uniform and prefabricated housing.

The suburbs reflect piecemeal growth. Here, houses are typically varied, from small terraces and semi-detached properties, to medium and large sized houses on large plots. Building types are similarly varied and include 18th and 19th century villas, vernacular cottages, and simple modernist shopping parades. The University of Bath site, developed from the 1960's onwards, is largely in a modernist idiom; the hospital site contains a range of building types including a small number of historic buildings. There are a few architecturally innovative buildings located on the city periphery such as the 1930's Kilowatt House, Wessex Water headquarters and the performing arts building at Bath Spa University's Newton Park site.

Form

Bath has a limited range of building form. The terraces are prevalent, with continuous frontages and building lines; roofscapes are punctuated by repetitive chimneys and projecting party walls. Roofs are mostly pitched, historically gambrel or mansard. Larger

⁴ The important views and vistas are identified in the *World Heritage Site Setting Study* published by B&NES in October 2009.

houses and villas have an M shaped double pitch behind the parapet. This limited range gives an unusual cohesiveness to the City.

Grain/Pattern

The pattern of development reflects the topography, following the river, river crossings, and watercourses, as well as some ancient travel routes. In parts, especially where medieval routes or boundaries persist, it is organic and irregular, and in other areas, where Georgian developers were dealing with open land, it is regular (linear or curvilinear). Curved and angled terraces are set out on wedge shaped plots. Designed 'set pieces' and groups of buildings are separated by designed open spaces. Sequences of buildings and spaces form ensembles and create series of intimate and grand spaces.

Height

The height of buildings in Bath is generally uniform, at street level mainly two storeys with prominent three or four storey 18th and 19th century terraces, punctuated by occasional church spires and towers. The topography can make some terraces appear as six storeys where the basements and attics are revealed. The general lack of tall buildings emphasises the way in which the Georgian City hugs the contours of the hills and attaches the built environment to its landscape.

Bulk and Massing

The linear terraced form is interrupted by bulky 20th Century buildings, such as the City of Bath College, the Hilton hotel, and other modern office and housing blocks. The solid massing of blocks cuts against the grain of the historic townscape, obliterating old streets and alleys. In addition, the relative scale of bulky buildings is exaggerated by comparative differences in height; this is particularly noticeable around the City of Bath College complex and Snow Hill flats.

Scale

The scale of the built city is essentially human; it is comfortable and on the whole very consistent. Some of the set pieces are monumental, yet they remain domestic in scale. Floor-to-ceiling heights are generous but the historic buildings are never overbearing. Grandiose Palladian villas and palatial architectural showpieces were designed in harmony with the landscape. Terraces, coordinated in scale and appearance, range from sizeable four storeys (six storeys including basement and attic) to modest two storey artisan dwellings.

Proportion

In Bath, systems of order and proportion give unity, harmony, balance, symmetry, and rhythm to its architecture. Proportion varies with the size of building, its use and its context. Proportion is created by the floor-to-ceiling heights and fenestration, which historically were often significantly higher than modern norms. In Bath many buildings are proportioned so as to imply a classical order even if they are astylar or without actual columns or pilasters.

Order

The class orders (Doric, Ionic, Tuscan, Corinthian and Composite columns or pilasters) are essentially a proportioning system. In the characteristic astylar facades of Bath the orders are frequently implicit rather than present, although they are used for emphasis, for example to close vistas and to frame and give proportion to long terraces and crescents. Where the full orders are visible (for example in the great set pieces of the Royal Circus and the King's Circus) they contribute powerful structural and visually decorative elements in the street scene. The spacing of orders creates differing architectural impressions. For example they can be used to create height and reduce weight.

Materials

Honey coloured Bath stone (ashlar or rubble) quarried locally provides uniformity and cohesiveness. Other prevalent traditional materials in the Bath palette include painted cast and wrought iron, lead, natural slates (stone, Welsh, Westmoreland Green, and Delabole), pennant paving, setts, clay double Roman Bridgewater pantiles, cream or red terracotta chimney pots, lime render, timber sash windows, and glass. Lias limestone and ornately patterned brick are less common. Concrete was also used in a number of 20th Century buildings, but this is now generally recognised to be inappropriate.

Details

The city abounds in architectural finesse, 'icing on the cake' details which provide an exhibition of ornamental stonework (volutes, columns, capitals, pediments, ramped cornices), incised street names, delicate wrought iron, elaborate door knockers, gilded details, and a patchwork of shop fronts. Vertical sliding sash windows are a major feature of the townscape.

Approaches to new architecture in Bath

In accordance with its charitable objects, which recognise the need for the living city to develop and improve, the Bath Preservation Trust has often set itself apart from other heritage-focused pressure groups and individuals by stating its support for design which is of its time, provided it is of a high standard and quality.

The term 'architecture' in this context covers all physical interventions and designed urban fabric, including buildings and extensions, structures (such as bridges and pavilions), open spaces, street furniture and public art. The character of any new intervention will depend upon its designer and context, but may be expected to fall into one or more of the following categories⁵:

1. **Classical** - ranging from sensitive urban repair in accurate replica or traditional style through to superficial or exaggerated pastiche.
2. **Vernacular** - design and materials appropriate to a local context, especially rural.
3. **Adaptive reuse** of existing buildings.

⁵ These categories and their definitions are included with a view to facilitating debate and avoiding misunderstanding.

4. **Modernist** - distinct and of its time, may draw reference from the past and context.
5. **Environmental** - low/high/alternative-tech architecture. Energy efficient, innovative design. 'eco-minimalism' eg passive solar, bale-house, 'eco-bling'.
6. **Expressionist**- a bold or arrogant, 'iconic' stand-alone approach (e.g. deconstructivism and structural expressionism).
7. **Understated contemporary intervention** - possibly with subtle historic reference, may appear to blend seamlessly.

The Trust considers that there is room in Bath for most of the approaches mentioned above, in the appropriate place. However in a city as compact and homogeneous as Bath it will very rarely be appropriate for architectural interventions to be superficial or arrogant in design. In addition to the architecturally designed there is also room for structures that evolve on the basis of the use of traditional techniques, vernacular materials and craftsmanship. The Trust will encourage architecture and design that responds sensitively to the distinct visual identity of its **context**. This is explained further below.

The Trust encourages contemporary architecture that is thoughtful and harmonious in its composition and execution, demonstrating the best standards of craftsmanship, finish and construction, and promising longevity to create our future heritage. World Heritage Site designation demands the exercise of discrimination, accepting only excellence in architecture and urban design. The planning system and building regulations now require all new architecture to be 'low carbon' and development to be **sustainable**. This underpins standards for all types of building.

The following paragraphs set out in more detail the Trust's recommendations for high standards of architecture and design.

New architecture and design in Bath should have regard to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 - New interventions must be informed by a thorough Understanding of the significance and vulnerability of the built environment of the World Heritage Site

Proposals for new interventions must be supported by an understanding of the significance and value of the place and its heritage assets. This understanding must be used to minimise conflict with heritage conservation⁶.

Development proposals must be informed by the following:

- i. The significance of Bath as identified in the statement of Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site.
- ii. Site specific conservation area appraisals/character assessments, conservation statements or conservation plans.
- iii. Historic buildings reports, site appraisal, survey and analysis to establish the significance and value of existing historic fabric and context.
- iv. Cultural and visual impact assessments.
- v. Design and access statements and planning statements must inform and accompany development proposals and justify the design approach; they must be explanatory, and cover all necessary elements⁷.
- vi. Design and development briefs should set out guidance and frameworks for the development of more complex sites.

Recommendation 2 - Historic fabric should be preserved and repaired wherever possible

- i. The approach to new architecture should result in the least possible disturbance to, or loss of, historic building fabric and preserve authenticity.
- ii. Heritage Impact Assessments should identify the impact on the fabric of a historic asset.
- iii. New development must preserve the Outstanding Universal Values of the World Heritage Site.

⁶ PPS5 paragraph HE7.2

⁷ As set out in the CABE guidance, *Design and Access Statements, how to write read and use them*, 2006.

Recommendation 3 - New interventions must respond sensitively to their context

New developments in Bath should reflect the highest standards in contemporary urban design, by providing significant enhancement of their immediate setting; by their sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area; by their use of materials, craftsmanship and methods of construction and their contribution to protecting and enhancing heritage assets. New buildings should be designed to last, and new uses for old buildings should be long-term and appropriate to their context.

- i. Consideration must be given to the particular inter-relationships of the specific site in its immediate setting as well as in the wider City and its surrounding landscape.
- ii. The scale and proportions should respect and where possible reflect the surrounding buildings and spaces
- iii. The local palette of materials (as described above) should normally be the first choice for new developments.
- iv. Dominant use of glass leading to the creation of glare and reflectivity should be avoided; there are, however, potential exceptions depending on the use and location, eg. Thermae Bath Spa.
- v. New materials such as zinc, membranes, or sedum roofs and cladding in timber and other materials need to be handled with great care. A very positive case would need to be made for any divergence from the local palette.
- vi. Colour should be appropriate for the specific context, and should harmonise with the Bath palette.
- vii. The use of lime render may be acceptable in appropriate locations (such as the rear elevations of new developments which have limited visibility).
- viii. Where existing buildings are being repaired or extended, care must be taken to select the appropriate type of Bath stone (whether newly quarried or reclaimed).
- ix. The use of reconstituted stone will not normally be acceptable, except in the case of alterations to buildings which were originally constructed using reconstituted stone. Similarly, artificial slate is not normally acceptable.

Recommendation 4 - The detailing of new interventions must reflect Bath's tradition of high-quality craftsmanship

New architecture and design should:

- i. Reflect local detail and strengthen local distinctiveness and character.
- ii. Demonstrate quality craftsmanship and execution.

- iii. Have considerate lighting which is consistent with Bath's characteristic low levels of luminosity
- iv. Have high quality bespoke signage and shop fronts which match the surrounding townscape.
- v. Have integrated street furniture and boundary treatments.
- vi. Be easily cleaned and maintained.

Recommendation 5 - Proposals for new developments must take account of the national and international importance of Bath and of the views of the local community

Pre-application discussions with interested groups in the local community may help to develop collective views and a sense of involvement and pride, build consensus and create a better outcome. Consultation with national expert stakeholders and use of the Design Review process⁸ are encouraged for the development of major sites.

⁸ CABE *Design Review Principles and Practice*, November 2009

BPT Position Statements

The Trust has adopted the following **Position Statements** which illustrate how these Recommendations can be applied in practice.

- BPT1. The Trust considers that the integrity of Bath would remain unharmed by sensitive urban repair and accurate replicas in the appropriate context. (*Example Herschel Place, Bathwick Street*)⁹
- BPT2. The Trust considers that a superficial approach - crudely assembled elements of classical or vernacular architecture lacking in refinement - is not consistent with the elegance and craftsmanship which contribute to the significance of the city and is, therefore, inappropriate in Bath. (*Examples the Podium: parts of Southgate*)
- BPT3. The Trust welcomes good modern architecture, which is well constructed in high quality materials and craftsmanship, and of exceptional design, in the appropriate context where it would not have an adverse impact on the significance of a heritage asset. (*Example Thermae Bath Spa*)
- BPT4. The Trust welcomes understated, non-intrusive environmental design in the appropriate context where it would not have an adverse impact on the significance of a heritage asset. (*Example Wessex Water*)
- BPT5. The Trust supports adaptation and reuse of existing buildings, in the interest of preserving our heritage and energy conservation, provided that there is no adverse impact on the significance of a heritage asset. (*Examples St Michaels Church, The Countess of Huntington's Chapel*)
- BPT6. The Trust considers that there is very little scope for any buildings or architecture which stand completely apart from their context. (*Example Snow Hill Flats*)
- BPT7. The Trust supports understated contemporary interventions provided that there is no adverse impact on the significance of a heritage asset. (*Examples Milsom Place, St Andrews Terrace*)

⁹ The Trust's position on the acceptability of urban repair through accurate historical replica differs from UNESCO's view as set out in the Vienna Memorandum that all forms of 'pseudo-historical' design are to be avoided – not least because the 18th Century neoclassical movement itself could be described as 'pseudo-historical', but is at the heart of Bath's architectural development in the Georgian period.

Suggested Reading

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UNESCO Vienna Memorandum on "World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture - Managing the Historic Urban Landscape". 2005