



September 2014

**Rogers Stirk Harbour –  
The Leadenhall Building**

Heneghan Peng in Greenwich  
Panter Hudspith's Royal Road  
Maki and Correa in Toronto  
FCB Studios: green burial hall  
AHMM: 240 Blackfriars Road



**BUILDING** ■ Royal Road: Panter Hudspith Architects at Elephant & Castle

*Inspired by furniture and medieval towns, a high-density scheme offers solid, sensitive and sociable urban housing, finds Hari Phillips.*

In the midst of our current housing crisis, the Heygate Estate in London's Elephant & Castle has become a lightning rod for criticism of the approach to housing and regeneration. Southwark Council has been widely condemned for the demolition of 1200 largely affordable homes which are being replaced by a developer-led scheme including a nominal amount of affordable housing, tearing open the debate about what regeneration means and who it benefits.

However, anyone looking beyond the hyperbole surrounding the Heygate will have noticed a number of smaller housing developments emerging in Elephant & Castle over the past few years. These 'Early Housing Sites' have been constructed by Southwark with its development partners to relocate residents from the Heygate Estate, and have been designed by a variety of notable architects. The first, by dRMM on Wansey Street, was completed in 2006. Others by Metaphorm,



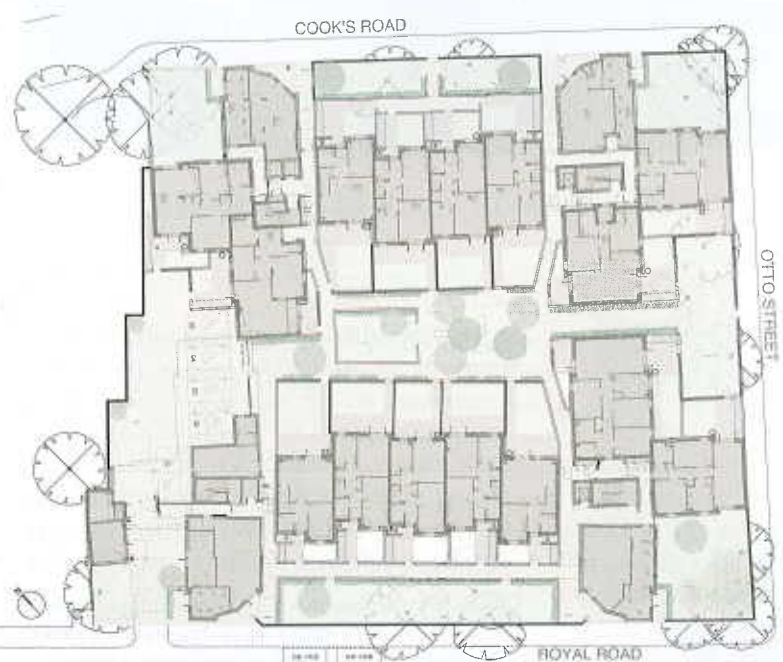
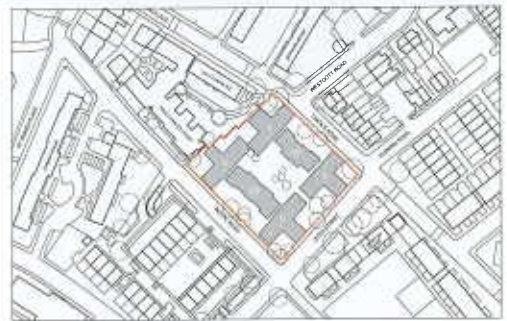
Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, S333 and Loates Taylor Shannon have followed.

Most of the Early Housing Sites use vibrant lightweight cladding systems in jaunty arrays which seem incongruous and insubstantial against the robustness of the context. However, the latest and largest of these projects demonstrates an altogether more solid and grounded approach which manages to respond more appropriately and sensitively to its environs.



Royal Road by Panter Hudspith Architects provides 96 affordable homes (20 shared ownership) on the site of a former elderly care home just to the north of Kennington Park. Panter Hudspith was selected for the project in 2006 following a design competition run by Southwark and its development partner Affinity Sutton. The scheme was then

*Above, left The blocks' form recalls furniture with open 'drawers' containing living rooms and balconies and topped by roof gardens (phs: Morley von Sternberg - left, top; Inge Laursen - above).*



mothballed, first due to protracted development agreement negotiations and then by the extraordinary decision to refuse planning consent against the recommendation of Southwark's own officers – a piece of petty posturing that makes one question politicians' role in the planning process. Naturally, the decision was overturned at appeal but not until a further nine months had been wasted.

The scheme – largely unchanged from the competition submission – is a variant of a conventional courtyard block modified into four loosely adjoining cruciform blocks with a core at the centre of each. This layout allowed the retention around the perimeter of the site of existing mature trees that are characteristic of leafy Kennington and nearby Kennington Park. This strategic decision was an important one, not only for the obvious environmental benefits. The trees help to bed the building into the site and enrich it through the play of shadow, texture and colour.

The layout also has other benefits: all of the flats are double- or triple-aspect (mostly triple) providing excellent daylight and natural

*Left* Ground, fourth-floor and roof levels. The four circulation cores range from four to nine storeys. Three main vertical blocks project from each, housing one flat per floor. The cores are linked along Royal Road and Cook's Road by three- and four-bedroom duplexes with front and rear gardens. One-, two- and three-bedroom flats with roof terraces form the upper levels of the linking blocks.



ventilation; there is not a single communal corridor in the entire development and the ground-floor duplexes are given some breathing space instead of being pushed hard up to the back of pavement. The building form also has plenty of potential for the architects to play with. They have fully exploited this opportunity, stepping the wings of each cruciform block up and down in response to the height of surrounding buildings, which range from two-storey houses to eighteen-storey towers. This richness of articulation is given further complexity by stepping elements of the facade slightly forwards and back. Looking at a detailed model of the scheme it seems like the architects might have taken these games a little too far. Viewed in the flesh, however, it works well. The scale of what is a very large housing development is cleverly disguised.

In its first housing development, at nearby Bear Lane, Panter Hudspith looked to medieval towns for inspiration. Such places manage to accommodate dense communities which foster a strong sense of belonging while giving space for individuality underpinned by a common use of material and an ingrained understanding of tradition and context, notes partner in charge Simon Hudspith.

These themes are further explored at Royal Road. Hudspith and project architect Inge Laursen explain that they set out to make every dwelling unique – a concept that would



*Above, below* Most homes and the circulation cores have aspects on the communal central courtyard, which contains a playground for toddlers and seating among newly planted trees (phs: MVS).

make most contractors and developers break out in a cold sweat. This was achieved by replicating units as far as possible but then tweaking balcony positions and fenestration. Hudspith explains that they wanted residents to be able to clearly identify their own home from the street. To achieve the desired variation in fenestration, the architects established a set of rules and then allowed each of their team to create different elevations within these constraints. As the elevations were being designed, it became clear that the proportion of glazing to brickwork was resulting in an unsatisfactorily heavy-looking building.





To lighten the appearance and ‘amplify’ the presence of the windows, Panter Hudspith devised a saw-tooth brick panel detail. Located adjacent to windows, it appears as if the brick has been drawn back like a curtain to reveal the windows behind. Elsewhere, randomly arranged saw-tooth panels hint at the possibility of windows concealed beyond.

The number of games being played with massing, fenestration and articulation could have been overbearing but a well-selected, pared-down palette of complementary materials pulls it all together into a coherent entity.

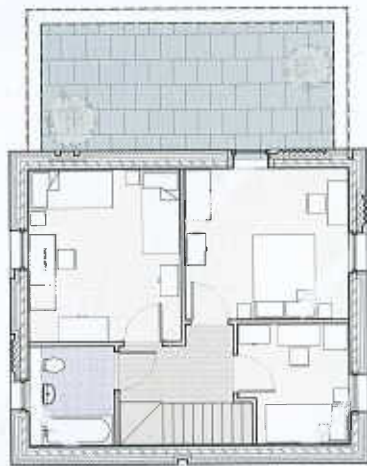
As the building steps back on upper floors, the opportunity is taken to give the flats and

duplexes generous roof terraces – a precious commodity in the heart of the city. Hudspith again refers to medieval towns, and the way that neighbouring rooftops are appropriated as amenity space.

At the heart of the development is a communal garden with a children’s play area bordered by private gardens to the ground-floor duplex apartments. The courtyard is smaller than it might have been had the building been arranged as a more conventional perimeter block, and in model form it looks

**Top, right** Recessed oak-lined balconies (phs: MVS).

**Below** Flat plans: 100 square metre three-bedroom duplex (left) and 70 square metre two-bedroom flat.





too small to be successful. Yet in reality the compression of the central space gives the development a more powerful sense of community. It's easy to monitor children playing and to wave or chat to neighbours on balconies. Once again thoughts turn to spaces in medieval towns and the way in which they convey ownership through their proportion and size.

Royal Road has a good quality, robust feel throughout, particularly impressive given that it was constructed on a design and build contract for a frugal £1320 per square metre. As ever it's the little things that make the difference: recessed rainwater goods, deep brick window reveals, saw-tooth brick panels and garden walls incorporating redundant brick samples slipped in between Forticrete blocks. A particularly neat brickwork detail makes the lower floors of the building look like they've been 'pulled out' from the taller blocks like drawers.

Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 is achieved through a well-insulated envelope (the external wall achieves a U-value of 0.1) topped up with photovoltaic panels and a gas-fired Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit, which together provide 20 per cent of the energy consumed on site.

Panter Hudpith don't know whether any of the former Heygate residents now live in the development; Southwark won't divulge the information. It seems unlikely, given the time

lag between the Heygate decant and Royal Road's completion. If that is the case, it's disappointing. Nevertheless Panter Hudpith has produced a cost-effective, high-density building that is a model for affordable urban housing and which sits comfortably alongside its Victorian, inter-war and post-war neighbours. Most importantly, it has created the foundations for a community, and what I suspect will prove to be much-loved homes.

*Hari Phillips is a director of Bell Phillips Architects, whose work includes high-density affordable housing schemes in London.*

**Top** Garden walls formed from reconstituted stone and brick slips (ph: MVS).

**Below** Sawtooth brickwork alongside windows helps to animate the facade, and creates a 'curtain' effect with striking shadows. The openings do not appear to follow a pattern, calling into question whether the plans repeat from floor to floor (ph: MVS).



#### Project team

Architect: Panter Hudpith; design team: Simon Hudpith (partner in charge, below), Inge Laursen (associate), Kaori Yamamoto, Jeremy Zuidema, Toru Seaki; main contractor: Higgins Construction; structural engineer: Thomasons; m&e engineer: Hulley & Kirkwood; client: London Borough of Southwark.

#### Selected suppliers and subcontractors

Brick: Ibstock Ivanhoe Cream and Ivanhoe Athena Blend; reconstituted stone walling: Forticrete Anstone Walling (splitface natural colour); paving: Perfecta by Marshalls; windows and doors: Russell Timber Technology, John A Russell Joinery, Whiteinch.

