

Character area studies suggest how each part of the campus could be developed

## THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In the 40 years since the authorities of Coventry and Warwickshire combined to establish the University of Warwick it has become one of the most respected higher education institutions in the UK. In order to maintain its position the University needs to continue to expand its teaching, research and support activities, and to develop its estate accordingly. In 2002 MacCormac Jamieson Prichard Architects (MJP) were appointed as Development Plan Architects to ensure that the University develops as a planned, coherent entity.

Some of the improvements that have already been made include:

**THE OVAL PLAZA**  
MJP worked with landscape architect Chris Churchman to design a landscape scheme, which integrates the new administrative and student centre at University House with the main campus. The plaza and avenue reinforce a key axis identified in the masterplan, which extends towards a previously isolated satellite campus.

**MASTERPLAN OBJECTIVES**  
The masterplan (the design element of the wider 'Development Plan') provides a framework for development to the proposals building on past masterplans, reinforcing the main assets of the campus, and to provide the following:

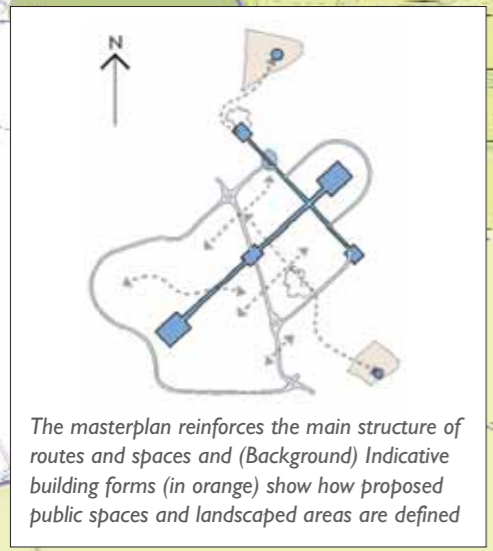
**UNIVERSITY HOUSE**  
MJP designed the refurbishment of University House, which provides a location for both staff and students and is an important element in the masterplan's aim to promote interaction between students and academic staff.

- A robust, flexible framework that allows for phased expansion, and enables the University to respond to changing needs and new opportunities
- A framework for the location of future buildings, key routes, squares and landscape to create a coherent environment
- Zoning of academic departments and other activities to promote interaction
- Plans which support sustainable development
- A safe and inclusive environment
- A sense of place – through proposals for urban design, landscape, ecology, art and archaeology
- Management of pedestrian and vehicular movement

**STUDENT RESOURCE CENTRE**  
Thirdly, and central to plans for enhancing learning facilities is the "Learning Grid", a student resource centre designed by MJP.

The brief was prepared by Anne Bell, the University Librarian with a new experimental service delivery approach. It called for an innovative, rich environment open 24 hours a day, 364 days a year which supports collaborative research and student learning for individuals and groups, and provides an alternative facility to the traditional learning environment, within the central library. The facility is based on a digital environment with a wide range of electronic equipment, areas for brainstorming, presentation practice and multimedia facilities, as well as access to core reference books. The Learning Grid is designed to be modern, inspiring and functional, with a relaxed informal environment, where food and drink, and mobile phones are allowed and normal student interaction is encouraged.

The masterplan provides the context for the development of all aspects of the university campus and promotes a visual and social character for the university. "Character Area Studies" show how each part of the campus could be designed, including sketches of how each area might look.



The masterplan reinforces the main structure of routes and spaces and (Background) Indicative building forms (in orange) show how proposed public spaces and landscaped areas are defined



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MJP's design also actively addressed issues that are currently critical within the Higher Education sector: creating an innovative environment that fosters new methods of learning, teaching and research; attracting students to come to the University, and providing an environment that will encourage staff and students to mix.

The project was implemented on a minimal budget, and involved the refurbishment of an unpromising, corporate 1980s building.

The design provides a place that students can adopt as their own space and adapt on a daily basis to their needs and preferences, but that also has the character of a purposeful environment for study.

• Collaborative approach

The planning, development and management of the project was undertaken in a truly collaborative effort between MJP, the Library, IT Services, the Student Union, and academic staff. The team all worked closely together to develop the brief and the design.

• Design approach

The first major design move was to locate the facility so that it was directly visible and accessible from the building's atrium at each level. This was important to ensure integration between the students and other users of the building.

The second move was to link the levels of the Learning Grid physically and visually with a contemporary perforated steel staircase, which provides a focus for the space and deliberately contrasts with the institutional character of the existing building.

To create a relaxed environment MJP used a range of screens and furniture to create a loose arrangement of working areas that the students could configure to suit their changing needs. Curves, colours and textured materials are used to create a lively environment – and as a reaction against IT facilities in other institutions which provide dreary rows of computer desks.

• The facility a year on

An evaluation of the facility has been undertaken by the University, and the Librarian, Anne Bell, confirms that it has been "extraordinarily successful" for both academic staff and students.

Students have commented on the facility's comfortable and relaxed atmosphere, and feel that they have genuine ownership of the space, which in turn helps to motivate them to work more effectively.

FUTURE IMPACT

The success of the facility has led to a reappraisal of both learning and teaching practices and is likely to have a big impact on future provision of library learning facilities at Warwick.

A satellite facility called 'Bio-Grid' has already been completed, and there are current proposals for the refurbishment of the central library integrating a new 'Teaching grid' facility with a new approach to how academic staff develop teaching methods and their curriculum.

All of these key improvements are part of the university's drive to coherently develop its estate and will enable it to sustain its leading position as a top educational establishment.



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