Phoenix Initiative
Coventry

- Priory Maze, Garden of International Friendship. Artist: Kate Whiteford
- Glass bridge and spiral ramp by MJP/Whitbybird. Artist: Alex Beleschenko
- Coventry Transport Museum extension by MJP
- Millennium Place with Time Zone Clock. Artist: Françoise Schein
- Whittle Arch by MJP/Whitbybird
- Priory Place by MJP ~ 84 apartments and 3,000sqm retail
- Water Window by Susannah Heron
- Youell House by MJP
- Priory Cloister
- Visitors Interpretation Centre by MJP
- Priory Garden

Client: Coventry City Council
Completion: June 2003
Cost: £50m
“By reconnecting two key visitor attractions the project has generated the critical mass required to kickstart further regeneration.”

This is the most important regeneration project for Coventry since the city was re-built following its destruction during the blitz of the Second World War. A new journey has been created through the city to amplify Coventry’s standing as the city of international peace and reconciliation, symbolised by the ruined and re-built cathedral. It capitalises on visitors from the Cathedral, providing a clearly defined pedestrian route with new destinations along the way that encourage people to stay longer in the heart of the city and support local businesses.

The 3ha site links two major visitor attractions; Basil Spence’s Cathedral and the Coventry Transport Museum. Our project regenerates a previously neglected part of the city by creating a series of connected new public spaces. By uncovering some of Coventry’s ancient past, while creating two new public squares, two beautiful new gardens, plus housing, cafes and bars, the Phoenix Initiative aims to create a new focus for the city.

Overlaying the urban structure is an extensive public art programme. Each artwork is integral to the design and context of each new space and draws on local history and tradition to provide a new exciting urban experience that is relevant and representative of Coventry’s past, present and future.

The scheme has created major new interest in the area and has since attracted considerable further investment.
Our Visitor Interpretation Centre has the dual purpose of explaining the locality’s rich history, as well as providing a meeting space for a Multi-Faith Group, an organisation set up to encourage understanding and co-operation between Coventry’s diverse religious communities.

The building sits on the threshold of the masterplan’s axial route and is flanked by two new gardens. The building has been designed to express the transparency and openness of its use. While having a distinctly modern style, it adopts the same red sandstone employed in the original Benedictine Priory, and the adjacent Holy Trinity Church.

The remains of the priory’s original 11th century north nave wall have been preserved, revealed and built upon to form the rear wall of the Centre.
The Priory Garden and the Priory Cloister are both inspired by their setting on the site of Coventry’s excavated 11th Century Priory Cathedral, that was destroyed during the Dissolution in the 16th Century.

**The Priory Garden**

Designed as a sunken garden, inserted into the excavated nave of the original Benedictine Priory, it features a new lawn punctuated by the foundations of the Priory and a floor sculpture by Chris Browne, depicting the Anglo Saxon landmark, Cofa’s Tree, from which the name Coventry is believed to have derived. Visitors can enjoy elevated views of the garden from the timber walkway that links the nearby Holy Trinity Church with the new Visitor Interpretation Centre.

**The Priory Cloister**

The adjacent walled garden of the Priory Cloister, landscaped by Rummey Design Associates, has a quadrant of pleached lime trees that recall the simplicity and contemplative nature of a monastic cloister. Artist David Ward has created a sound installation that gives the impression that there are voices murmuring in the branches of the trees. Eight speaker columns set near the branches relay recordings from local people describing their life in Coventry.
Priory Place & Youell House, Phoenix Initiative Coventry

Priory Place
Priory Place is designed as a vibrant urban space surrounded by shops, bars and cafes with new housing above. It provides 84 apartments and 3000m² of retail space at ground level. The design uses a combination of materials which include white render, timber and local Red Sandstone. A water installation by the artist Susanna Heron, Water Window, evokes the medieval mill race, powered by the River Sherbourne, that now flows under the square.

Youell House
Our new building looks on to the new Priory Place and provides new supporting accommodation for the Cathedral. The new building is constructed over an undercroft within which the recently excavated archaeological remains of a monastic dormitory will be preserved and made accessible to the visiting public.
The new Millennium Place is an extraordinary new public piazza for the City of Coventry. It is fan shaped and is dominated by the twin stainless steel clad Whittle Arches (designed by MJP and Whitby Bird), which act as a landmark gateway to Millennium Place. It is a venue for open-air concerts and plays, offering opportunities for an Arts and Events programme, co-ordinated with events in the Cathedral and its environs.

It is bounded by our new extension and entrance to the Coventry Transport Museum (CTM). A ramp along the edge of the space leads to a new glass bridge, designed in collaboration with the artist Alexander Beleschenko. This elegant spiralling structure threads its way through the existing trees of Lady Herbert’s Garden and arrives at a new garden designed on the theme of international friendship.

The piazza has substantially increased the number of visitors to the museum. It was also shortlisted for the Gulbenkian Award for new museums.
Public Art in
Millennium Place,
Phoenix Initiative
Coventry

We have collaborated with International artists to create major art works. Belgian artist Francoise Schein’s Time Zone Clock is set into the surface of the new square using LED lights to indicate the actual time in Coventry and that relates geographically to the 26 cities to which Coventry is twinned.

German artist, Jochen Gerz, has developed a 45m long Public Bench that sweeps along the northern edge of the square. The people of Coventry were invited to give their name together with another name and a date of their choice to be printed on a plaque and mounted on the bench.

At the threshold of Lady Herbert’s Garden, Gerz has installed the Future Monument, a glass obelisk surrounded by plaques bearing the names of the people of Coventry’s former enemies who are now their friends.
This is a collaborative project between Rummey Design Associates and British artist Kate Whiteford. It represents, in landscape terms, Coventry’s role as a City of International Peace and Reconciliation – a Garden of International Friendship. The garden sits at the north east edge of the masterplan site, adjacent to the recently restored Lady Herbert’s Garden and the old city walls. The space is planted with a circular maze, which recalls the possibility that there was originally a maze depicted in early maps in the Benedictine Priory grounds. This is flanked by a curved plinth, engraved with a text extracted from the Coventry Mystery Plays, by local writer David Morley.

The garden also includes lavender beds flanked by a red sandstone viewing platform, which supports a new glass bridge that spirals up from the new public square.