Architecture & Construction

The Forum was designed by the award-winning architect, Sir Michael Hopkins.

The Forum is conceived as a courtyard surrounded by a three storey, horseshoe-shaped enclosure of load-bearing brickwork, which accommodates the various activities on a series of balconies. The courtyard roof is supported by bow-string steel trusses forming leaf shaped panels, infilled with acoustically absorbent material or glazing. Light enters into the heart of the building, creating a dynamic public Atrium.

The key sustainable strategy is the use of the building mass as a 'passive' environmental modifier and the introduction of 'active' building engineering systems, only to assist the fabric to recycle ambient energy.

Its spectacular glazed end wall frames the Gothic church tower of St Peter Mancroft, welcoming the city in, and forming a major public space in the forecourt.

Construction Details

Following the granting of planning permission and completion of an archaeological investigation, piling and excavation for The Forum began in May 1999. Construction was completed in October 2001 and the building was opened to the public in November of that year before being officially opened by The Queen in July 2002.

The three-storey external frame is built over a two-storey basement car park and is formed from exposed concrete. The main enclosing horseshoe wall is made of handmade load-bearing brick, punctuated by a regular rhythm of windows. This brickwork mirrors the adjacent City Hall in using bricks that are longer than standard. The roof is supported by tubular steel trusses, in-filled with acoustically absorbent metal cladding, whilst the adjoining areas are glazed. The solid panels of the roof are made from zinc.

There is a time capsule in the foundations of the building which was buried on 17 March 2000 and which contains various items including coins, stamps and a copy of the Eastern Daily Press. It also contains papers and plans relating to the building with personal messages from people working on the project at the time. The capsule will remain hidden unless it is found by someone many years in the future.

Design Concept

What are the ideas behind The Forum design?

The Forum was designed by Sir Michael Hopkins. He has designed a number of other award-winning buildings including Norwich Cathedral Refectory (2004).

Sir Michael designed The Forum to fit in to its surroundings. The horseshoe shape is a response to the site's irregular geometry and the enclosure at the back fits comfortably into the smaller scale of buildings on Little Bethel Street. To the West, the open glazed end embraces the marvellous Gothic church tower of St Peter Mancroft.

The three-storey horseshoe form of the building accommodates different activities on a series of balconies around a dynamic central public atrium. It is conceived as a covered courtyard which lets light into the heart of the building. The spectacular glazed end wall, 15 metres high, opens on to the forecourt and St Peter Mancroft to welcome the city in.

In addition to considering the building design, thought was also given to making it comfortable to use. For example, acoustically absorbent materials are incorporated into the roof panels, wall linings and bookshelves of the Library, thus ensuring minimal noise intrusion for the purpose-built perimeter study areas. Other features include the towers at each end of the horseshoe shape which are used to ventilate the car park.

Environmental Features

Sustainability is the key to success

The Forum was designed according to a sustainable strategy which would lessen the building's impact on the environment. The design takes advantage of the thermal mass of concrete and thick brick walls to help stabilise the overall temperature and heat gains caused by users.

The entire third floor houses heating and cooling plant, air handling units and a whole host of other plant to keep the building running. The plant is continuously monitored and managed by a computerised building management system to ensure the most efficient use of resources. Beneficial heat is also recycled to the building from the plant room, thereby helping to reduce energy consumption.

The central glazed atrium allows natural light into the heart of the building and also acts as a return air path for the air displacement ventilation system.

Principal Contractors

Working together :

Architect
Hopkins Architects

Main Contractor
RG Carter Limited

Quantity Surveyors
Turner and Townsend

Structural /Civic Engineers
Whitby Bird

Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Fire Consultant, Wind Consultant
Faber Maunsell

Acoustic Consultant
Adrian James Acoustics