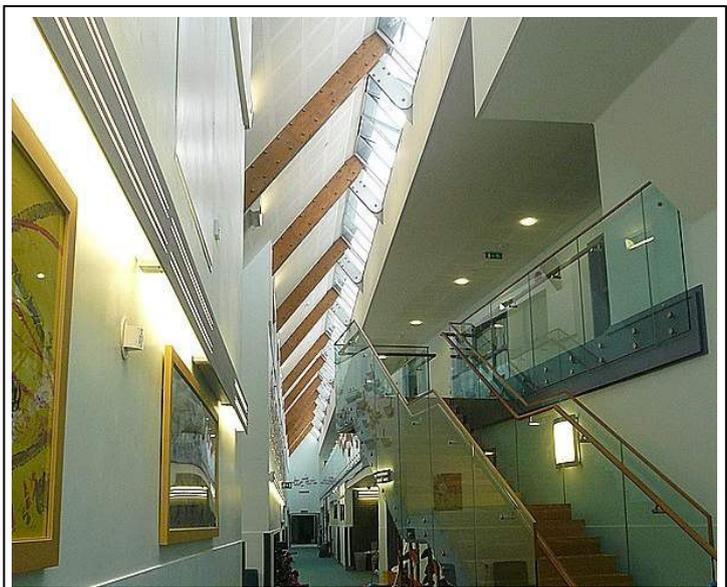


Portsmouth Society Design Awards 2008

The panel of judges for this year's competition were: *Paul Grover, Chief Executive of the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design, Paul Ramshaw, Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy at Eastleigh Borough Council, and Pauline Powell and Celia Clark, members of the Society.* We were pleased that we had a good range of entries to judge this year in the three categories: **Best New Building, Best Restored Building** and **Best Landscaping**. Winners are presented with blue ceramic plaques which are unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth. To be eligible, schemes must have been completed by the 31st December of the previous year.

Best New Building

The outright winner of the **Best New Building** Award was the Mary Rose School, the sparkling new campus off Locksway Road in Milton for 110 Special Needs pupils from 2 to 18 years. It cost £9m and has 90 staff. The key central corridor is one fifth of a mile long, hung with enjoyable artwork. The Sixth Form is housed upstairs – reached by a dramatic glass sided staircase. At one end is an almost circular swimming pool with special lighting and sound effects. The grounds include a sensory garden, playground and gardens with outdoor seating. The design was by Andrew Malbon and Ross Aylward of the City Architects' department.



Interior of Mary Rose School (picture by Celia Clark)



Commended: Admiral Square, Nelson Road Southsea (picture by Celia Clark)

Three other **New Buildings** were commended. One was Admiral Square, a group of fourteen new town houses in yellow brick in Nelson Road in Southsea by Willowbrook Property Services designed by Adams Poole. They have roof gardens because there is no room for conventional gardens at street level. The lightness at the top was influenced by St. Paul's Studios Cromwell Road artists' houses. The judges liked the very crisp proportions of this modern design within the important Thomas Ellis Owen conservation area, with its balanced elevations, bay windows and generously

proportioned windows, and retained trees. Originally two big villas stood on the site which faces Grove Road North. These were replaced by the red brick General Accident office block. The scheme was held up by eighteen months of negotiations with the planners who wanted the principal elevation to be to Grove Road North - but this is not as people live: they arrive and leave by car.

This front/back problem was also evident at the **Blue Building Gunwharf Quays**: Architect Scott Brownrigg, builder Berkeley Homes. The judges criticised the blacktop at the entrance – which as a result looks like a back entrance. It could be a really pleasant space, but there is no entrance sequence. Front doors should face onto public spaces. The building manager explained that the other gate to St. George's Road was due to open, so the blacktop was a road. Most people come in by car and don't use the 'front' entrance at all. So you get houses with no front. Paul Ramshaw on behalf of the city council had improved the design which had lacked originality. Instead the facades are modelled, breaking up the areas of colour – blue and terracotta, emphasising the curved form. Modelling the façade from a clear cliff face helped reduce vortices. There was a lot of wind tunnel testing. There was discussion with the City Council and English Heritage about the historic Gunwharf wall and the height of the buildings set back behind it. The aim was to be complimentary to the wall.

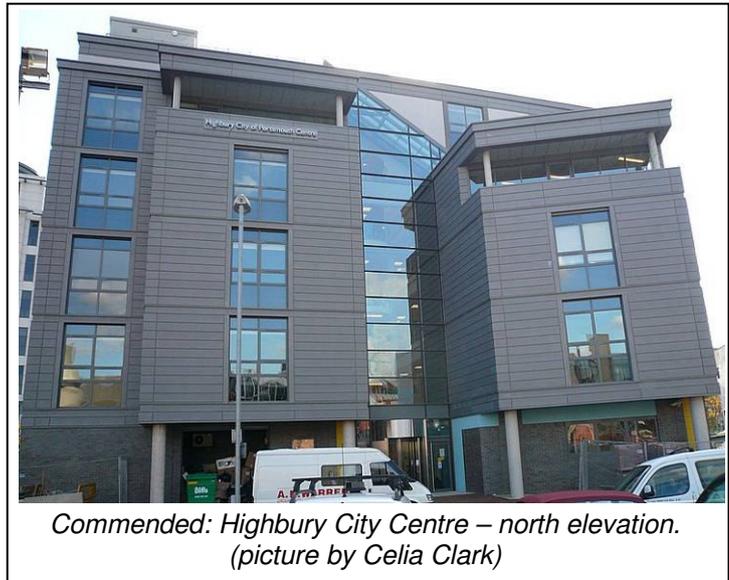


Paul Ramshaw stands next to the Whale at Gunwharf by Richard Farringdon (picture by Celia Clark)

The judges also looked at the open space in front of Blue Building and tower and **The Whale** by **Richard Farringdon 2007** which was chosen from entries to a limited competition for a list of suitable artists. Southern and SouthEast Arts were invited to submit a long list, shortlisted by a panel including Paul Ramshaw and Clare Looney – a 2/3 stage robust process. The Whale was the simplest entry, but has been pared down and was smaller than the first design. It could have been five times as big....The disappearing whale appears to be at the wrong angle... It needs a head to appear somewhere else....It was supposed to be a Portsmouth whale that had been around the world, covered in traditional bad taste sailors' tattoos, but they were now too subtle and tasteful....The artist's design had subtle ripples around the base – removed by Health and Safety? Stephen Fry said "Anything that gives a Health and Safety Officer 'a moment' gives me unbridled joy...." and we agree! The judges felt that the paving is dull and the space is too wide – it leaks atmosphere on each side.

Another **Commendation** in the **Best New Building category** was **Highbury College's new city centre building** which opened in October 2007. It was designed and built by AWW of Bristol and Kier Southern for 80 staff and 450 students. The city council wanted mixed use development. There are separate uses in each block – separately funded, reflected in the gap through building. Its siting in Winston Churchill Avenue works beautifully. It doesn't try and dominate the street. The north entrance sits well behind trees, not intended to stand out from its context like the University Library, winner last year. The grey overall cladding colour is relieved by aqua and yellow stripes, but the Portsmouth Society preferred the original green. The Head of School said it doesn't feel like a college, but a professional looking environment, offering training for life and

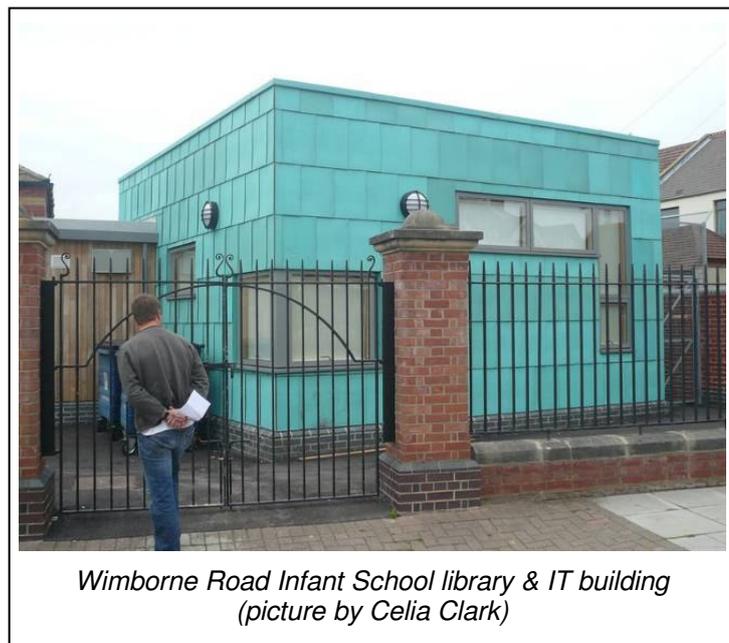
work; with practical hands on experience, like coming to work. The building has two entrances and is in a very deprived area with a lot of expensive equipment. They could have had a barrier entry, but decided not to. The aim is to raise the aspirations of the students, and security is achieved instead by self locking doors to secure the equipment. The Library supports the curriculum, which includes catering, health and leisure, travel and tourism, literacy and numeracy, hair and beauty and IT. The original idea was a rooftop restaurant - to appeal to the nearby corporate market, but this would have meant walking through the college, so the restaurant is on the ground floor. The atrium, dramatic stair and students' rooftop café are successful and enjoyable. The steel kitchen fittings, international cooking equipment and Charvet stoves are the best equipped kitchens students will ever work in. The foyer has the college bookshop, Internet café and open access PCs added. In its second year the college has attracted 300 extra students – from Somerstown, Landport and Gosport.



*Commended: Highbury City Centre – north elevation.
(picture by Celia Clark)*

There is no parking for staff – they use public transport or carshare. The colour schemes are themed on each floor. There is air-conditioning on the south side because of solar gain and IT and kitchens on south side, but on the north, natural ventilation via the atrium. The college talked to retailers in the Northern Quarter who identified skill shortages on the shop floor, so there is a new course in retailing, visual merchandising. St. Lukes Food Technology use recorded lessons via a video link. The aircraft mockup for training aircrew was provided by a specialist company. The Judges agreed that Highbury fulfils a complex brief. Though not great architecture, time and thought has gone into it. It is on a very tight site, yet it does not feel cramped. It has a fresh, sharp quality. From inside the environment is different – windows frame the many views. It is proving flexible in practice; it works.

The third **Commendation** in the New Buildings Category was **Wimborne Road Infant School library & IT building** in Wimborne Road Southsea designed by Daniel Bunt of the City Architects' Department. The new facilities work well and the judges liked the copper tile cladding of the boxy extension.



*Wimborne Road Infant School library & IT building
(picture by Celia Clark)*

The judges also saw the **New atrium** at **1000 Lakeside** at Western Road, Cosham. The cavernous spaces of the former IBM building are gradually being converted into smart office accommodation,

and the dramatic new foyer which fills in the space between two former entrances is a welcome showcase for Art Space artists. They felt that Garden View in St. Vincent Road Southsea was too urban a design with too dominant a rotunda in an area of low key domestic architecture. They were very critical of the new houses in Havelock Road Southsea – a very poorly designed and built block of speculative housing.

Best Restoration

There were two winners in the **Best Restoration** category: the first was the **Kings Theatre**, Southsea which is being brought back to its Edwardian splendour by specialist contractors and graduates of the University's Restoration and Decorative Studies course. The Trustees were against using lottery money because the theatre would have been closed for two years, so they have a policy of Open/Close/Open/Close between contracts, so they don't lose their audience. They relied on volunteers wrapping and covering everything. These include amateur dramatic groups – they see it as their theatre. 1964 was the last time the ceiling was redecorated. Luckily not a lot of work was done then, unlike the Theatre Royal where the pillars were painted gloss purple. The oil paintings of 1906 have been cleaned of nicotine and touched up. The statue on the entrance tower is to be replaced by an EH approved replica cast in glass reinforced plastic. The original is in the foyer. The gallery is reopened with repaired toilets.



Joint Best Restoration: Kings Theatre, Southsea (picture by Celia Clark)



Joint Best Restoration: Flint house, Stanley Street. Southsea

The other **Best Restoration** prize went to the intricate restoration of the flint front wall of the distinctive house in **Stanley Street, Southsea** by Steve Langton and Steve Smith, well known to The Portsmouth Society as experts in this meticulous work. We have honoured them in three previous years. The inner leaf ties of the three layered front wall had gone. Structural engineers recommended Stanley steel rods. The top of the return wall had to be rebuilt as well as the entrance walls. They first took all the capping stones off, and saved the flints and gallets – small flint chips which give the wall its texture. The flint walls were re-laid using buckets of flints from the field and mortar darkened with charcoal. There are new stone caps on the garden walls.

Commended in this category were the flats in the original wings by Scott Brownrigg above the Aspex Gallery and the central entrance arch as well as

the recreated clock tower by Michael Underwood of Hedley Greentree Partnership in the **Vulcan Building in Gunwharf Quays**, itself a successful conversion from the Grand Storehouse.

Best Landscaping

The **Best Landscaping** award went to Marine Gardens, part of the splendid grounds of the former Royal Marine Barracks at Eastney, lovingly cared for by Mrs. Grayson-Smith and her contractors Pete Kidd who looks after the soft landscaping and trees and Mark Younghusband of FEM. Planting is designed to be sustainable without watering.

The judges wanted particularly to **Commend** the beautifully designed and tended gardens cultivated by the Rev. John Mortiboys at No.13 **Oyster Street** facing St. Thomas's Cathedral in Old Portsmouth. All the gardens reflect the personality of the owners. The stark 1960s buildings are softened. Revd. Mortiboys encouraged his neighbours to plant their gardens and designed the one to the left of the alley No. 15 to be no maintenance. No. 19 is transformed by Eric Stanley, retired deputy head of Portsmouth School of Architecture every year. Coach parties especially foreign ones drive by to admire the gardens.



Best landscaping: Marine Gardens, Eastney Barracks. (picture by Celia Clark)

The judges also saw **Palmerston Road Precinct Landscaping and sculptures** by Susan Whitehouse Portsmouth City Council Head of Design intended as a local gathering point with a £600,000 budget. Public consultation had been extensive, with workshops, schools involvement. The theme was 'Contemporary seaside'. Two local artists managed workshops and put in their ideas. Charles Normandel of the Meon Valley made the large steel sculptures. Designs were narrowed were down to three. Southsea Town Council held a meeting in the Library, which chose this design. Portsmouth Society members took part in several workshops but were not invited to the final meeting. Improvements to the buildings on either side by Shroeder owner of north side and David Murphy on south side were welcomed, but the judges felt that the design was 'pedestrian'. They look forward to seeing the Thomas Ellis Owen Memorial – John Thompson's sculpture - installed in front of the Friary. They also saw the dome canopy at Redwood Park School, Cliffdale Secondary School, Wembley Grove, Cosham, a stimulating gathering point for pupils. The whole campus would benefit from a holistic redesign.

This annual competition very much reflects and supports the elements of *Policy PCS10: Design And Conservation* in The Portsmouth City Council's consultation document *The Portsmouth Plan* and in itself is an example of the positive and practical work of the Portsmouth Society.

Celia Clark