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Key learnings

1. Making opportunities from constraints

All schemes demonstrated a journey of opportunities created from initial challenges to the project. At Brentwood School, an existing Victorian building (Otway House) in the middle of the Sixth Form Centre site initially posed a significant constraint to the development as this had to be retained. However, a rethink of the site layout resulted in Otway House becoming a key element of the tripartite composition of the development, connecting the newly built classroom block and assembly hall, whilst promoting a historical connection to the site and creating a series of courtyards.

Changes in layout and structure to optimise amenity space, privacy and sunlight were observed in the housing developments. At St Chads, constraints around drainage due to the low-lying nature of the site were solved with the creation of swales to act as amenity spaces. The two house types were paired at 90 degrees in order to provide sufficient garden space in a high-density development without compromising privacy. At The Echoes, irregular modifications in the roofline were required to allow sufficient sunlight to the rest of the development. These design changes have resulted in improvements to indoor and outdoor spaces, through additional functionality and new, interesting and distinct forms and shapes. This has been achieved whilst minimising cost and responding to existing constraints with an inventive and detailed approach.

2. Balancing construction costs to achieve elegant design

Ensuring cost effectiveness in the housing schemes was achieved, in part, by balancing high-quality materials in limited amount with interesting, focused and repetitive use of standard inexpensive structures, fixtures and materials. At The Echoes, standard materials were used throughout whilst triangular balconies were clad in high-quality durable perforated and corrugated anodised aluminium panels – resulting in privacy in sunlit balconies in a visually-striking scheme. At St Chads, a simple palette has been achieved by using cheaper red brick and more expensive pale-yellow brick interspersed amongst the two house types. At Bracelet Close, all external fixtures and fittings, although standard and inexpensive, were coloured in the same dark grey colour. **Across the housing schemes, the choice of materials and forms has resulted in defining and interesting visual variety whilst retaining low costs.**

Brentwood School similarly adopted a simple approach in response to its heritage context, by taking inspiration from local vernacular forms and materials, and played and modified these in the gables, roofline and brickwork to achieve a simultaneously familiar and different architectural language.

Date 11th March 2019
Location Brentwood School | The Echoes | St Chads | Bracelet Close

Suffolk Design

Event learnings: Essex study tour

- A. Use of red and white brick as a defining feature of St Chads.
- B. Brentwood School's new Learning Resource Centre responding to the existing site with sensitivity and framing the library square.
- C. Visually striking corrugated aluminium balconies at The Echoes.

