

Community Building and Crèche in Colchester

Architects:

DSDHA, London

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Assistant:

Jamie Brown

Structural engineers:

Jane Wernick Associates, London

Others involved in the project see page 330

Extensive consultations were carried out to determine local needs and the best location for this new crèche and community centre. The architects were commissioned with the design following an RIBA competition. During the day, the centre accommodates public services such as health clinics, parent support groups, a crèche and play sessions. At other times, it is used for general community activities as well as by a professional women's organisation.

The two-storey building has a split-level ground floor, which reflects the sloping topography. The underlying aim was to create a kind of gatehouse to the adjoining heath. There are two main entrances, which pro-

vide access to the central cafe and reception area. These amenities form the hub of the ground floor community spaces. Large areas of glazing here allow generous views through the structure from both entrances. Offices and medical facilities are located on the first floor.

The angled plan form helps to create a graded series of external spaces extending from the entrance area to the community garden and the informal courtyard, which is shaded by a large existing tree. The triangulated roof acts as a landmark and beacon that is visible from the elevated surrounding roads and green areas. Externally, the building has a rendered ground-floor plinth, with

a rainscreen of timber boarding to the walls and roof above.

The facades overlooking the heath are in a robust form of construction to deter vandalism. On the courtyard side, in contrast, the plinth is stepped down, and there is a seating area for the cafe. Here, too, it was possible to create more generous areas of glazing and boarding.

The centre was conceived with natural ventilation and lighting as far as possible. The partly concrete structure provides the necessary thermal mass, while the timber cladding was heat-treated to improve its resistance to rot and insect attack and to avoid the use of chemical preservatives.



No. of groups: family room 1,
crèche 1,
community rooms 1–3
No. of children: crèche 10,
community room 30
Age: 0 months–4 years
No. of staff: approx. 8
Client: Colchester Borough Council
Gross floor area: 438 m²
Size of group rooms: 30–60 m²
External area: Secure play area,
community garden,
public open space
Completion date: 2006
Construction costs: €1,060,000

Site plan scale 1:2000
Sections • Floor plans scale 1:500

- 1 Community room
- 2 Store
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Cafe
- 5 Family room
- 6 Crèche
- 7 Terrace
- 8 Void
- 9 Medical room
- 10 Waiting room
- 11 Office
- 12 Staff room

