

INTRODUCTION

This report provides information about a series of Schools' Workshops which were held in Gravesend in October 2000 as part of the Kent Architecture Centre's programme of work within the North Kent SRB4 Project.

The underlying theme of the Workshops was that of Sustainable Design.

Towncentric, based in Gravesend, has an on-going programme of work with local Schools, both Primary and Secondary. It was considered important to ensure that the architecture centre's proposals would not conflict with this existing programme, and indeed, there were benefits to be had from working together on the project.

The architecture centre considers there to be clear advantages in involving young people in 'real projects'. Work that the architecture centre was involved with on a 'Community Resource Centre' for a community group in Gravesend presented an ideal opportunity to provide a real project through which the issue of Sustainability could be addressed.



The contents of each of the two Workshops, one for older Primary School pupils and one for Sixth-form pupils, were planned around the twin themes of Sustainability and Community Centres. A 'powerpoint' presentation was devised to provide an introduction to Sustainable Design as it applies to buildings, pitched at a level whereby it could be understood by both age groups.



PRIMARY SCHOOL WORKSHOPS

A series of workshops, aimed at Year 4-6 pupils (9-11 year olds) from Gravesend Primary Schools, was organised jointly by the Kent Architecture Centre and Towncentric, with support from the North West Kent Business Education Partnership.

The workshop took as its focus the proposed development of a 'Community Centre' somewhere in the Gravesend area, and sought to introduce pupils to the complex subject of Sustainable Design.

Each workshop was designed to last two hours and was made up of four parts. However, in negotiating dates with individual schools, the actual length of each individual workshop was reduced to between 90 and 105 minutes, and the precise content of each workshop varied according to response on the day.

The four key areas of focus in the Workshops were as follows:

1. Pupils were asked what kinds of activities they thought a 'Community Centre' might need to accommodate, based on both their own interests, and those of other age groups - parents, grandparents, teenage and younger siblings. As a follow up to this discussion, each class were asked to complete a survey which would provide feedback on what kinds of activities they thought might be demanded locally.
2. A large map of Gravesend at 1:1250 was used to stimulate discussion about whereabouts within an existing built-up area you might locate a new Community Centre building. There was the opportunity for pupils to 'role play' the conflicting views that might be held by groups of people as diverse as local residents, people wanting to develop the building, the site owner, environmental activists, local politicians etc.
3. Pupils were shown a 'powerpoint' presentation which had been specially prepared about 'Sustainable design', which provoked wide ranging discussions.
4. There was a chance for pupils to use 3D modelling through the use of cardboard models of the types of spaces which might be included in a Community Centre.

The feedback from the Teachers indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to be involved with a 'real live' project, and that they would like to continue to have some kind of involvement in the on-going process, even if only through being sent a Newsletter to let them know of progress on the project. The information from the survey sheets about activities in a Community Centre will be fed into the real project as part of the community consultation process.

A total of some 150 Year 5 pupils from two Schools took part in the Workshops. In both Schools there were plans for these Year 5 pupils to share their experiences with other year groups.



SIXTH-FORM WORKSHOP

This Workshop, aimed at Sixth-form pupils from Gravesend studying Design & Technology or Art & Design, was organised jointly by the architecture centre and Towncentric, with support from University of Greenwich School of Architecture, Gravesham Borough Council and the North West Kent Business Education Partnership.



The workshop was intended to introduce the Sixth-form pupils to the issues concerned with sustainable design. Following a short Powerpoint presentation about Sustainable Design, the sixth-formers teamed up with Architecture students to work through the process of preparing sketch ideas/ designs for a Community Centre for a site in Gravesend. They were presented with a brief, based on a live project from the architecture centre's current portfolio, and were taken on a visit to the site identified for the purposes of this exercise. After this site visit, the teams of students had just over three hours to come up with ideas ready for a presentation to Gravesham Councillors and the Chief and Deputy Executive of the Council. The sixth-formers presented their sketch designs with evident enthusiasm, and earned praise from both Councillors and Officers for their ideas.



The ideas from the workshop will be fed back to the architecture centre's Client for the Community Centre, and further School's workshops are already being planned for next year.

EVALUATION

All students were studying Design & Technology A or AS level

The following percentages of students described the workshops as:

- Boring 0%
- Interesting 100%
- Made me think 100%
- Hard work 67%
- Relevant to my coursework 16%
- Not related to my coursework 50%
- Enjoyable 100%
- Waste of time 0%
- Exciting 33%

Students were asked how the workshop activities might help them in terms of either their coursework, their personal development or in thinking about careers. Some of the comments are reproduced below:

"It made me think about ideas that I had never thought of."

"Gave me ideas on how to develop more than one idea."

"Showed me how to lay out my work and the drawing."

The following feedback came from the Head of Design & Technology at one of the Gravesend schools:

- The students had very much enjoyed the day's activities
- In discussions in class since the workshop, it was apparent that the students had picked up a good deal in terms of technical vocabulary, and a greater understanding of the main issues associated with Sustainability.
- The new A-level courses require a number of 'Key Skills' to be demonstrated- including such things as 'communication' and 'problem solving'. The experiences offered by a workshop such as this meet these requirements in a very direct way.
- There was a commitment on the part of both the School and the architecture centre to work together in the future to continue and build on this relationship.