

Public realm



Building study
Brute instinct

John Puttick Associates' respectful refurb of BDP's iconic Preston Bus Station improves the station's circulation and connection to the city while remaining true to its Brutalist aesthetic

The brief was to upgrade BDP's Grade II-listed 1960s bus station into a modern-day facility. It was important to create a high-quality public realm in front of the station, thereby improving the way the building links to Preston. The refurbished station needed to reinstate a welcoming main entrance and provide 33 bus bays along the eastern side of the building, as well as four coach bays in the redeveloped taxi rank to the south of the building. It also needed to facilitate the efficient circulation of passengers and incorporate waiting areas.

Words George Kafka
Photography Gareth Gardner

In one of the vast waiting areas of Preston Bus station, a group of councillors stands before an unveiled plaque marking the official re-opening of the infamous Brutalist building. Saved from demolition in 2013 and since refurbished by London-based John Puttick Associates, the station was never shut during its delicate renovation, which makes the standing, besuited congregation somewhat incongruous with the usual bustle of the station. What's more, Puttick's work is so intricately loyal to the late-60s design by Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson of Building Design Partnership that you'd be forgiven for overlooking his renovation altogether. As one Prestonian put it to me: 'It doesn't look that different to the way it used to be ... or is it the upper floors which have been done up?' Alas, the upper floors remain untouched and still in use as car parking space; but look closely and it's clear that important changes have taken place at ground-floor level.

Most immediately noticeable is the removal of buses from the west side of the 170m-long structure. Here, the space will be left to the public, with some low-key landscaping and open space for events organised by the neighbouring Guild Hall and Charter Theatre. This space creates a natural concourse and clear points of entry for pedestrians, replacing underground tunnels that have been filled in as part of Puttick's work. 'The one major flaw with the old bus station was that it really prioritised vehicles,' explains Puttick, who won the commission, his first major project, via anonymous competition. 'Our idea was to flip that over.'

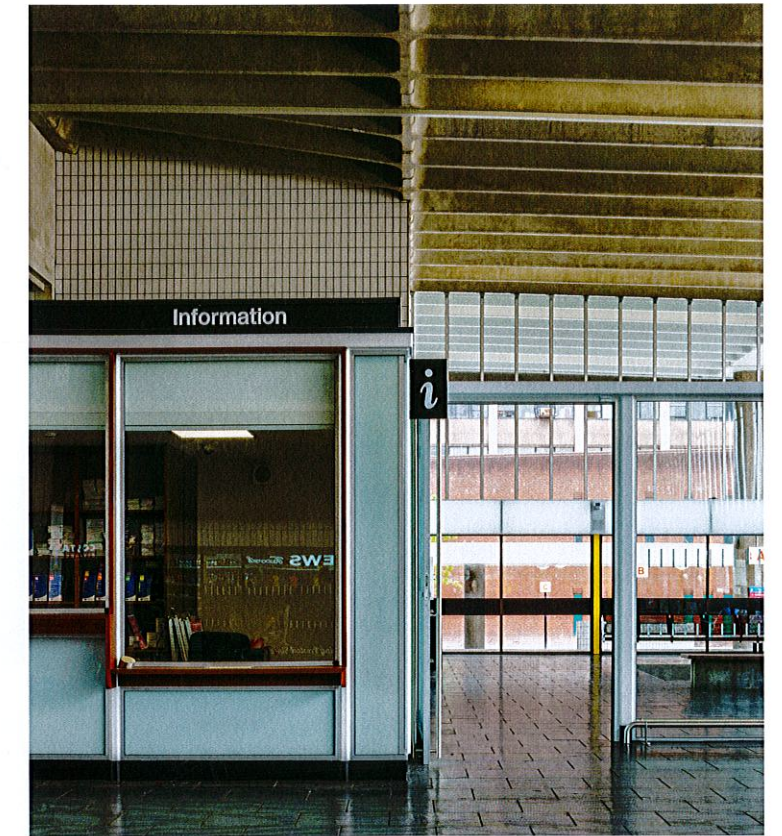
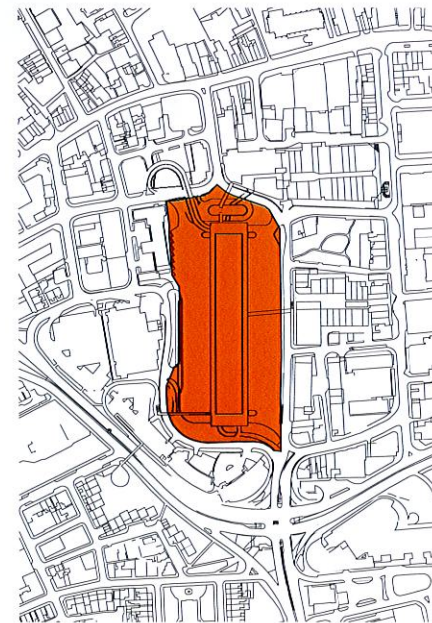
Inside, the changes are again subtle and largely cosmetic. The removal of bus stops from the west side of the station exterior means the front half of the interior is now primarily for circulation and waiting areas. Iroko barriers that divided the space into pens for boarding buses have been removed and repurposed as benches atop concrete mounds, removing visual clutter and creating more space for passing passengers. Kiosks that had been floating in this waiting area have also been absorbed into the central spine of the structure to the same effect.

Clearing these spaces has the added impact of revealing the generosity – even grandiosity – of the bus station's foyers, which



extend dramatically, thanks to the curtain wall and concrete ceiling that span the length of the structure. New lighting design highlights these features with hidden LED uplights that illuminate the exposed concrete beams of the ceiling. Responding to comments from public consultation bemoaning the previously gloomy atmosphere created by hanging lights, Puttick's new system celebrates the station's interior form in a manner reminiscent of other temples to transit, such as Eliel Saarinen's Helsinki Central Station, or indeed his son Eero's TWA flight centre in New York. In Preston, it's a cunning move that transforms the space into a more welcoming hub by night. As Puttick puts it: 'If all we had done was the lighting, it would still have been totally different.'

Crossing beneath the central spine and on to the back half of the structure, the main visible refurbishment has been to the bus stop doorways: sliding timber door frames that had never worked properly have been



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replaced by new automatic doors, the timber salvaged to line the new information desk at the station's south end. More discreetly, all of the materials on the outer façade have been faithfully replaced at ground-floor level, the rhythm of the new mullions, for example, closely matching those of the 1969 original.

The graphic identity of the station has also been spruced up. Private bus company branding has been filtered out, leaving only the bus stop numbers and destinations marked out in Rail Alphabet typeface along a backlit central band and upright markers. It's a fitting choice of typography, not only because it matches the original signage but it also nods to a broader trend in transport aesthetics, such as we have seen with the recent rebranding of the South Western Railway and the re-nationalised London North Eastern Railway, whose graphic identities clearly hark to a golden-age-of-British-Rail sensibility. It is also fitting because Preston is the home of a resurgent municipal socialism – dubbed 'the Preston model' – the political system closely



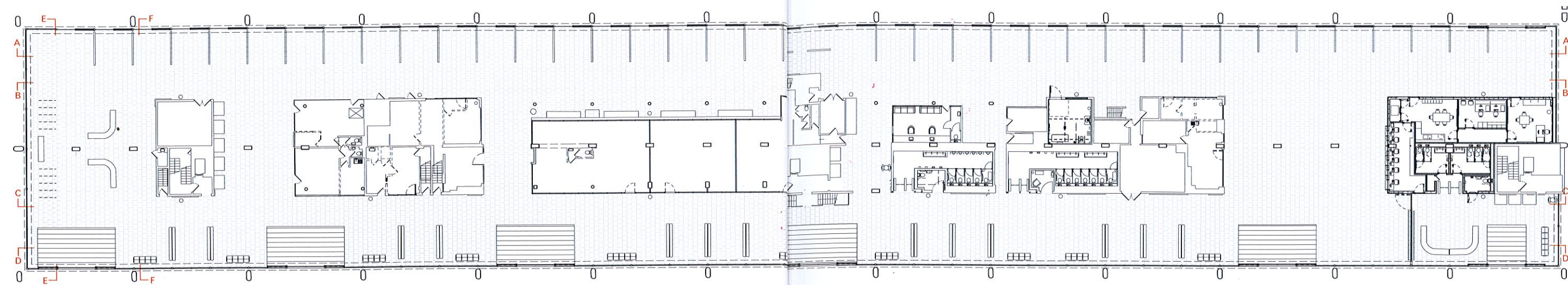
associated with the mid-century graphics of nationalised infrastructure and, of course, Brutalist architecture.

After a jet-wash, the curved parapets of the station's upper floors – the most iconic and 'brutal' elements of the Grade II-listed structure – appear softened, almost silky, in contrast to the rugged exposed aggregate columns running along the exterior façades. The most hard-core material element of the ensemble, however, is undoubtedly the rubber Pirelli floor, which today appears no more than a little scuffed after nearly 50 years of service – it's as good an advertisement for the tyre company as any glamorous calendar. More delicate, yet equally overlooked, is a rounded, pavilion-like satellite structure at the southern end of the station – once a taxi rank, today repurposed as a coach stop. Standing amidst its clean white curves, and beneath the curved roadways that draw vehicles in and out of the car parks, it's reminiscent of Lubetkin's Penguin Pool at London Zoo.

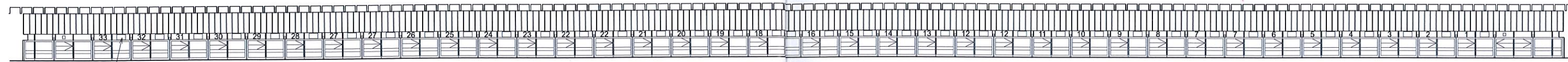
The shapes of the coach stop initially served as a formal reference for a forthcoming youth centre, also designed by Puttick, a 2,600m² building that will occupy a plot on the northern end of the new station concourse when completed in 2019. The design has evolved into more of a stepped stack of blocks behind a zinc façade that will maintain views of the bus station's span, while making a subtle reference to the tones of its illustrious neighbour. More significantly, the youth centre, which will be operated by the charity OnSide, points towards a substantive regeneration effort that goes beyond brutal nostalgia. Set to include facilities for sports and arts, it will also animate the adjacent public space and create a sense of location beyond transportation.

'The future is now bright for this building and the future is bright for Preston,' exclaims Angie Ridgwell, chief executive of Lancashire County Council. Based on the empathetic quality of John Puttick's renovation work, combined with the promise of a site that continues to evolve, it's tempting to agree. As the commemorative plaque is unveiled, bemused onlookers pass the waddle of dignitaries. They've got buses to catch. *George Kafka is a writer on architecture, editor and researcher, based in London.*

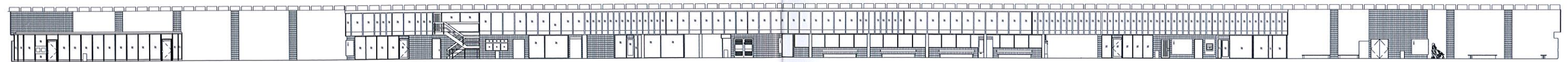




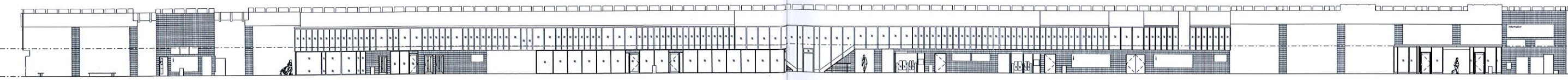
Ground floor plan



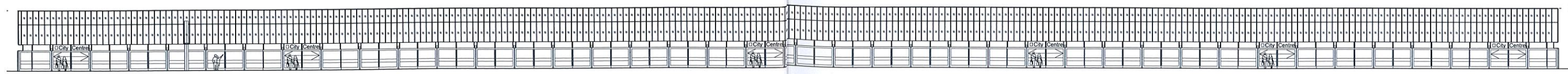
22 Internal elevation A-A



Internal elevation B-B



Internal elevation C-C



Internal elevation D-D

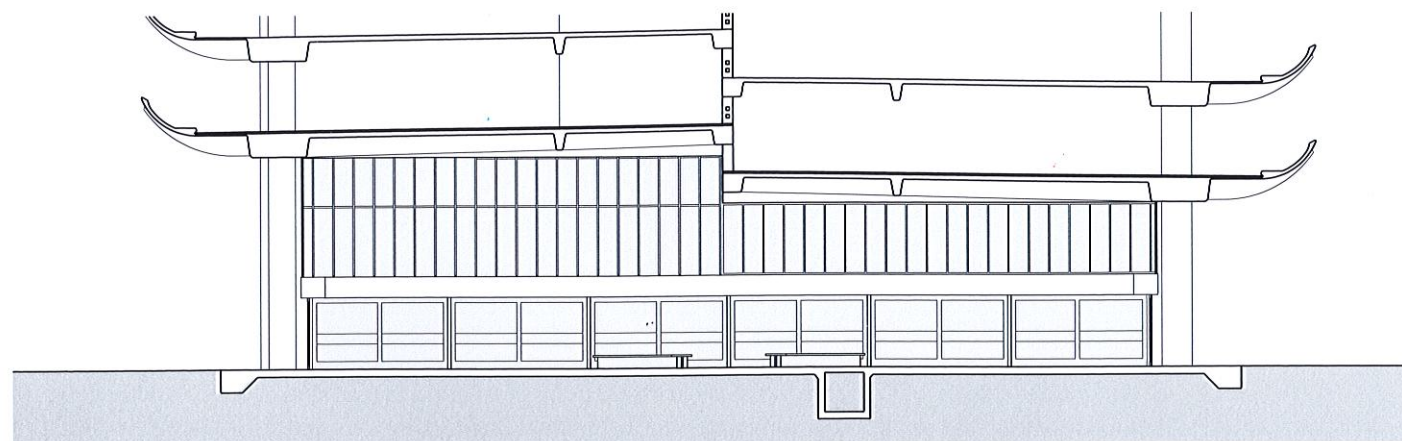




Project data

Start on site November 2016
Completion June 2018
Gross internal floor area 31,250m²
(concourse: 4,250m²; car park: 27,000m²)
Construction cost Concourse refurbishment: £5.75 million; concrete repairs: £5.73 million
Construction cost per m²
Concourse: £1,354; concrete repairs: £212
Architect John Puttick Associates
(masterplan, concourse refurb and youth zone), Cassidy + Ashton (car park and retail)
Transport AHR
Acoustics Charcoalblue
Landscape Planit-IE and Lancashire County

Council Highways Department
Fire engineering and access consultant
Buro Happold
Planning consultant Cassidy + Ashton
Structural engineer engineersHRW
M&E consultant Skelly & Couch
Quantity surveyor, project manager and CDM co-ordinator Lancashire County Council
Approved building inspector Preston City Council
Main contractor Conlon Construction (bus station refurbishment), Engie (bus apron, public realm and youth zone)
CAD software used MicroStation, Rhino



Section E-E

Architect's view

Preston Bus Station is a celebrated Grade II-listed Brutalist building designed by BDP and completed in 1969. In refurbishing the building, we wanted to reinstate its powerful original design. To do this, we opted for a pared-down interior and returned features to their original materials and colour palette.

The entry points to the bus station have been consolidated and a main entrance hall established to give spatial coherence to the building, improving the sense of orientation and flow. There has also been a change of emphasis from prioritising vehicle access,

as was the done thing in the 1960s, to a more contemporary arrangement which favours pedestrian access.

From an urbanistic perspective, we have arranged the building so that its west side, with a new seating and waiting area, faces the public square, which, when completed in 2019, will also improve the sense of connection with the city centre. The east side is devoted to the bus gates. At the core of the building are the information centre, café, shops and other facilities. The exterior of the building has had some changes in

addition to required maintenance works. These include replacing the concourse-level glazing throughout by removing the original glass and its framing and installing mullions of the same profile to maintain the original aesthetic.

The timber-framed doors on the ground-floor façade have been replaced with bronze-coloured anodised aluminium-framed doors that are similar in tone to the wood that was used previously.
John Puttick, director, John Puttick Associates

Structural engineer's view

Preston Bus Station has suffered some minor but conspicuous repairs and interventions in the past. As admirers of this iconic building, our aim was to leave the original structure untouched wherever feasible. This approach was shared by the whole project team, requiring close examination of any proposed demolition. Where intervention was needed, there was a wealth of archived drawings, allowing us to understand how the original structure was designed.

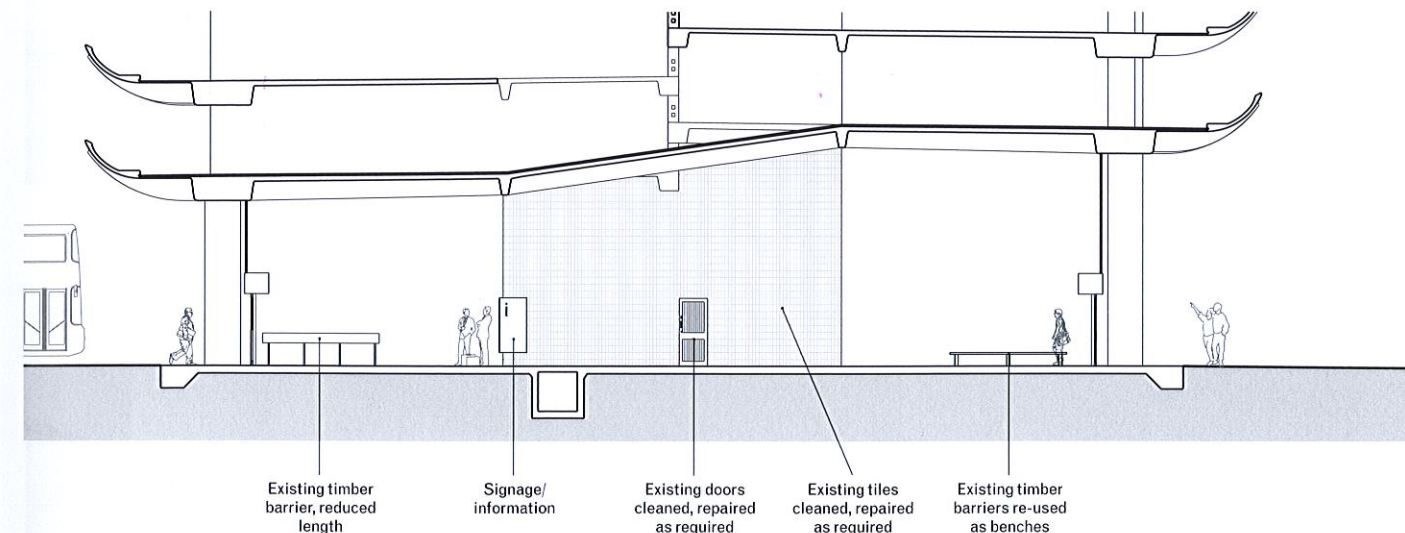
In one location the removal of a structural wall from beneath a cantilever beam

changed the way the beam behaved, reversing the direction of bending. Unable to accurately confirm the existing reinforcement, we reverted to designing the beam as we would have in the 1960s for the original condition and then confirmed the adequacy of the design for the new loads. This avoided the need for new structural elements and maintained the floor-to-ceiling heights of the original design.

Elsewhere, radar scanning proved useful and allowed us to design a modification procedure for the main columns, installing

additional reinforcing links within the existing column size to replace structural restraint lost when adjoining parapet walls were demolished. Engineers are often asked to make the structure as discreet as possible. Here, where the original structure is such a powerful contributor to the architecture, we sought to minimise not only the size of new elements but also the need for them. The result is very satisfying and we are proud to have been part of the ongoing story of Preston Bus Station.

Kate Purver, associate, engineersHRW



Section F-F

Planning consultant's view

Preston Bus Station may be an iconic building, but it only gained its listed status in 2013 following a lengthy campaign and the threat of demolition. Despite being a so-called 'Marmite' building, no one can deny that it is one of the most dramatic transport buildings in the country.

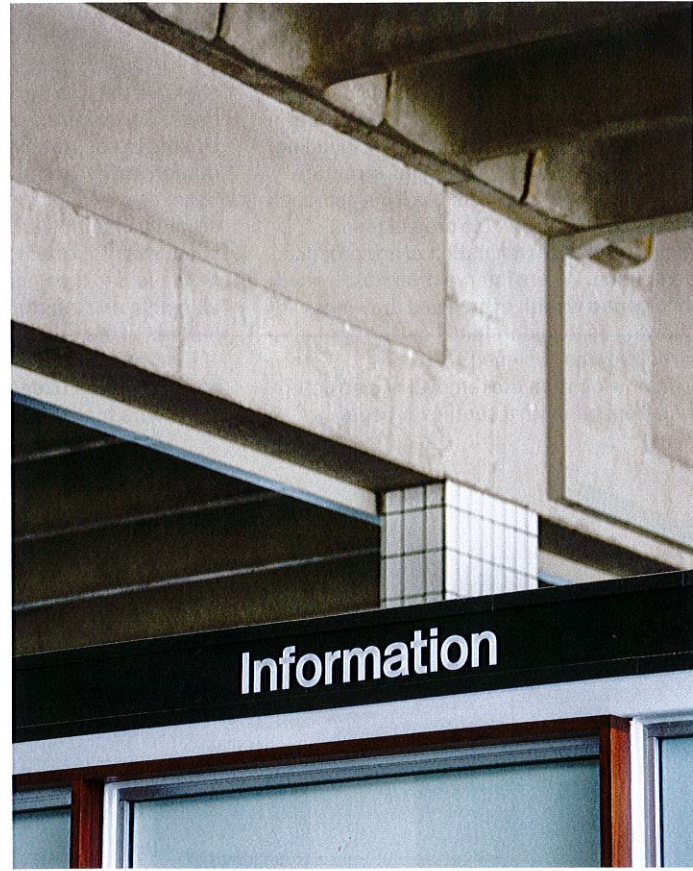
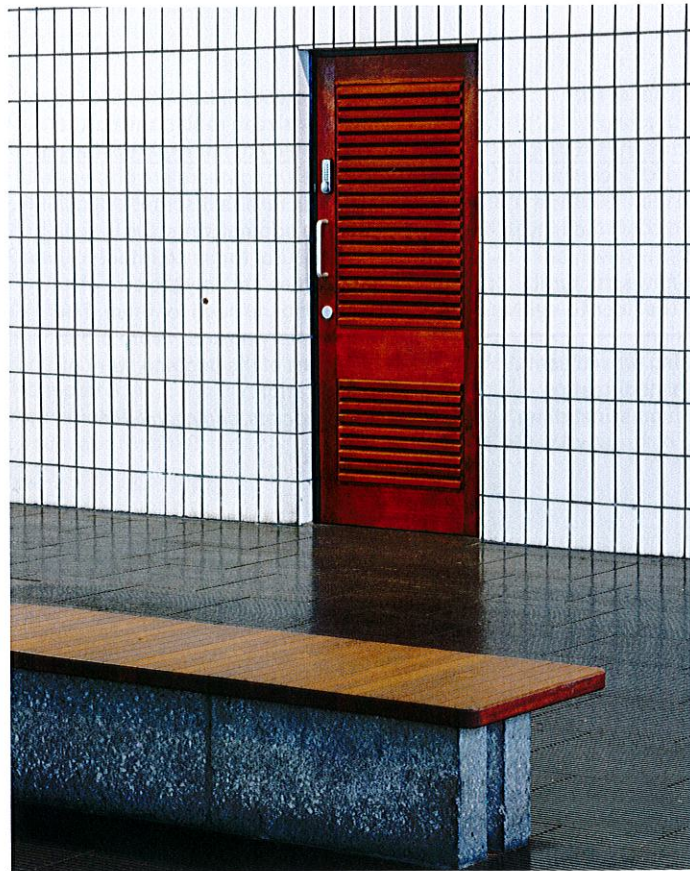
In working on the refurbishment project, Cassidy + Ashton, acting as planning and heritage consultants, had to adhere to listed building legislation and carefully balance the need to retain historic fabric where practical with the need to provide a modern bus

station experience. One aspect of this was the proposal to replace the original wooden sliding doors with their modern automatic equivalent. The original doors were heavy and difficult to open, undermining the original airport-like concept of the bus station since it opened in 1969.

Extensive negotiations took place with Historic England and The Twentieth Century Society to justify the proposed replacements. This engagement was aided by a passing comment during a public consultation event from a retired engineer,

who stated that he had worked on the original project and that they had always intended to have automatic sliding doors but had run out of money!

The opportunity to effectively complete the original brief helped convince the amenity groups that this was the appropriate way forward. In so doing, the key to success was to engage directly with the interested parties, to understand their perspectives and explain the proposal in more detail.
Alban Cassidy, director, Cassidy + Ashton



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Working detail

As part of the refurbishment, the concourse façade has been replaced around the whole of the building. This was necessary, as the upper glazed area had failed, due to corrosion of the glazing bars, and the lower timber-framed sliding doors were largely inoperable and it was not possible to automate them.

The detailing of the horizontal band which divides these two areas was crucial to the success of the façade replacement and also to the lighting design, signage and distribution of services. The original horizontal structural members were kept and the exterior

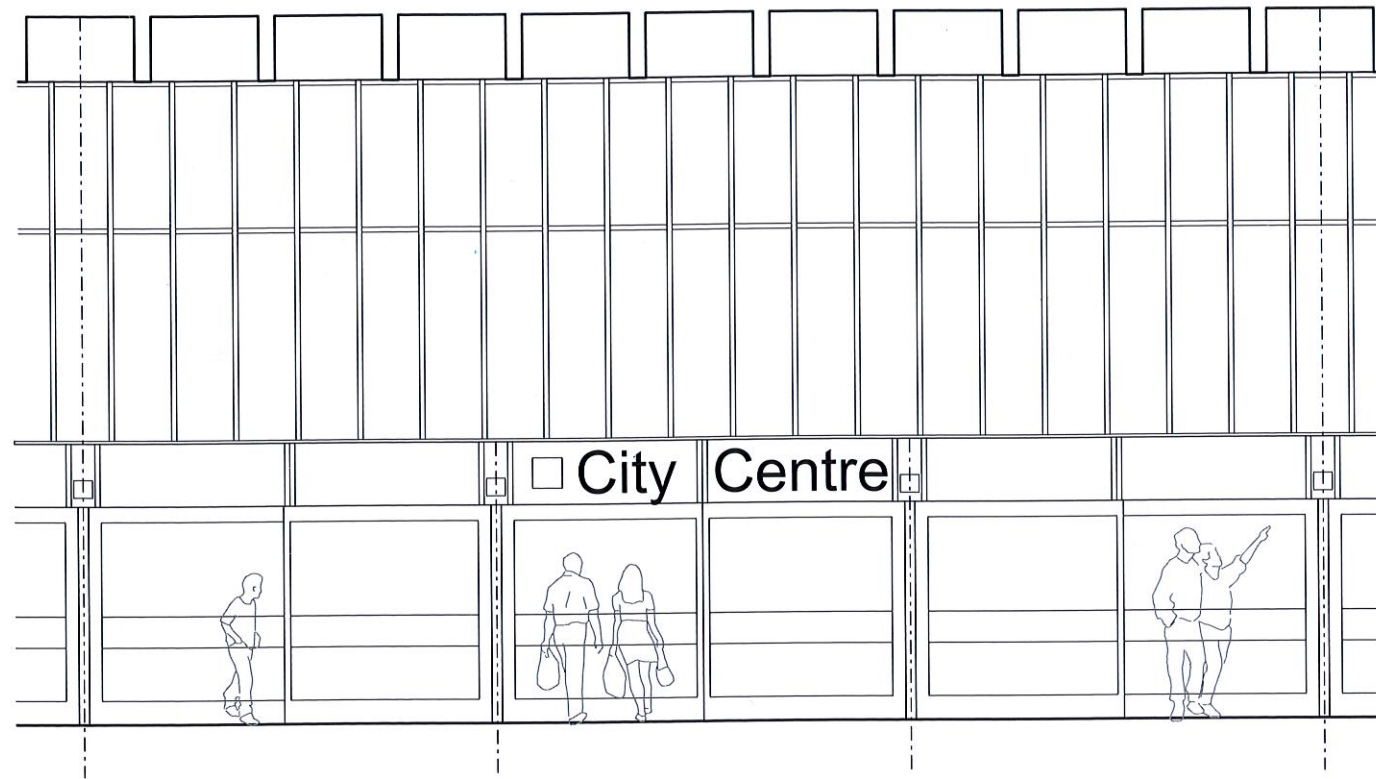
blue-painted timber boarding replaced with a more durable powder-coated pressed-aluminium sheet matching the original colour and profile.

On the inside, translucent light boxes have been reinstated, with new back-lighting and new signage installed in the spirit of the 1960s design but reflecting the new organisation of the building. Linear LEDs are mounted on top of the horizontal structure to uplight the concrete soffit, providing most of the illumination of the concourse. Electrical services are run through the void space and

the PA system is integrated with perforated aluminium covers over the speakers. Automated door drivers have also been accommodated here.

An exposed concrete building such as Preston Bus Station leaves little opportunity to conceal the services required by a modern transport hub. The detailing of the horizontal façade band was important in resolving a number of technical challenges in one place without compromising the original architecture.

John Puttick, director, John Puttick Associates

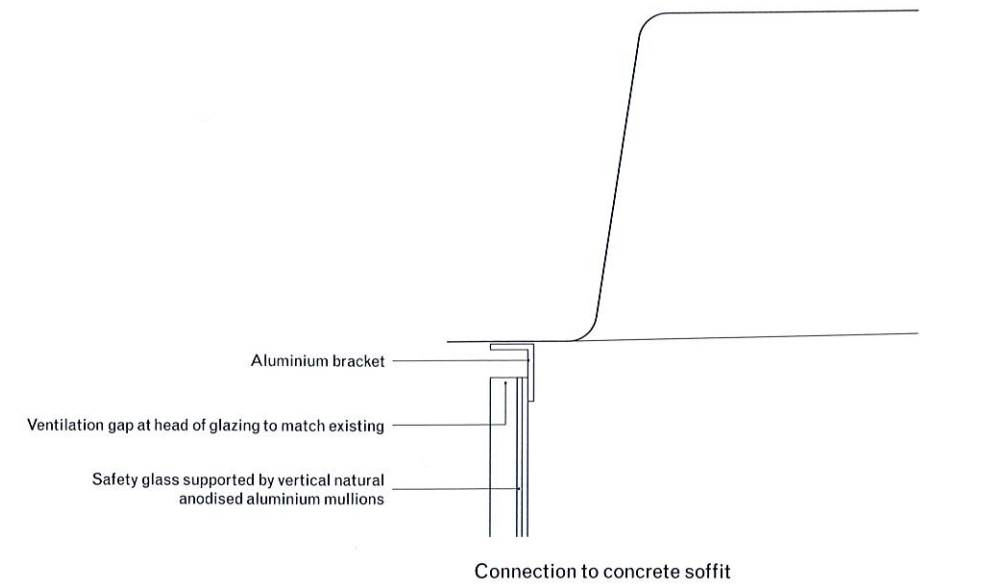


West elevation typical sliding door detail

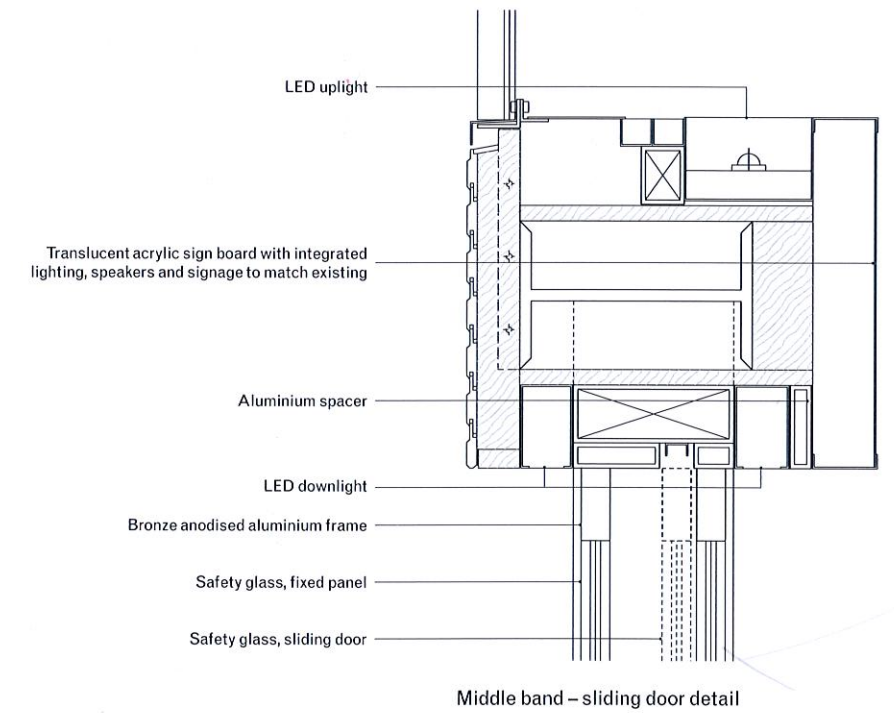
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Sliding door detail section

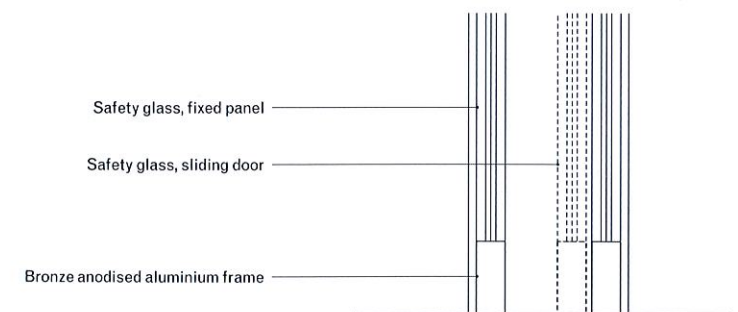
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Connection to concrete soffit



Middle band – sliding door detail



Connection to ground – sliding door detail

0 0.1m