



# Chadwick Hall by Henley Halebrown

**'This is the third intervention on the landscape,' exclaims Henley Halebrown founder Simon Henley as he walks me around the exterior of his RIBA Stirling Prize-shortlisted student housing for Roehampton University.**



**Appraisal** Laura Mark  
**Photography** Jim Stephenson

Henley's comment is a bold one. The 210-bedroom scheme sits in the garden of the Grade II\*-listed Georgian villa Downshire House and next to the Alton West Estate, which was completed by London County Council Architects in 1959 and is believed by many to be one of the capital's finest examples of Modernist social housing. Compare these with this 'third intervention', which the

practice also describes as 'Brutalist Revival', and the scheme has a lot to live up to.

'Our approach was very much drawing on these two histories,' Henley continues, 'both in terms of typology and planning and in terms of construction and materials.'

Named after the sculptor Lynn Chadwick, whose three bronze figures *The Watchers* look out from

the site towards Richmond Park, Chadwick Hall is made up of three buildings which sit around an existing garden on the site of a demolished John Soane-designed villa.

Sitting within the mature trees, walled gardens, and existing lawns, the blocks' locations are defined by the landscape's surviving features. If it is an exercise in contextual design you are looking for, then this



## Project data

**Start on site** February 2014  
**Completion** September 2016  
**Gross internal area** 6,365m<sup>2</sup>  
**Procurement** Design and Build  
**Construction cost** £12.6 million  
**Construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>** £1,980  
**Architect** Henley Halebrown  
**Client** University of Roehampton  
**Structural engineer (post-contract)**  
Campbell Reich  
**Structural engineer (pre-contract)**  
Buro Happold  
**M&E consultant** Skelly & Couch  
**Quantity surveyor (pre-contract)**  
Bernard Williams Associates  
**Project manager** Gardiner & Theobald  
**Planning consultant** Boyer Planning  
**Heritage consultant** Steven Bee Urban Counsel  
**Approved building inspector** MLM  
**Acoustic consultant** KP Acoustics  
**Transport consultants** Royal Haskoning  
**Landscape architect** GROSS.MAX  
**Bio diversity** Skilled Ecology  
**Arboriculture** Arborhelp  
**Main contractor** Morgan Sindall  
**CAD software used** Vectorworks  
**Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**  
21kg/m<sup>2</sup> (estimated)

scheme ticks all the boxes. Its layout allows for interaction and you can imagine students sitting out on the lawns between the blocks or calling to each other from the balconies of the individual bedrooms. The space created externally is generous and welcoming.

Henley describes the buildings as 'an antidote to modern construction' and, in the current climate of student housing, where we so often see cheap, prefabricated panels of brick being lifted onto steel or concrete frames, he does have a point. At Chadwick Hall the brick is loadbearing and there is an honesty in its construction.

The brown-coloured brick hues chosen to match the colour of the remaining villa are complemented by reddish stained concrete lintels and banding and light-coloured metal balustrades. Deep diagonal reveals are well-detailed and there is almost an English politeness about both the spaces created and the materiality.

'In a way, we have two buildings – a conventional building on the inside and these interiors are then wrapped in ruins of brick and concrete,' says Henley.

'Those ruins are the part of the building that works the hardest both visually and experientially. It is the threshold between the interior – the private realm of the student – and the common ground of the garden.'

It is a shame, however, that once you do pass over the threshold, the interiors do not display the same generosity in terms of material quality and spatial delight.

In the generous stair we see an octagonal motif, which is used throughout the three buildings from bay windows to octagonal columns. But, once past this staircase, the flats differ little from the standard student accommodation that can be seen across the country. Small cell-like rooms are clustered into

apartments or terraces for groups of between six to 12 students. These share a communal living space, which is arranged around a kitchen. The materials used are bland and, in contrast to the rich brick of the outside, the spaces feel cold and lifeless. The student bedrooms and living spaces are little different from the new halls of residence I lived in myself more than 10 years ago.

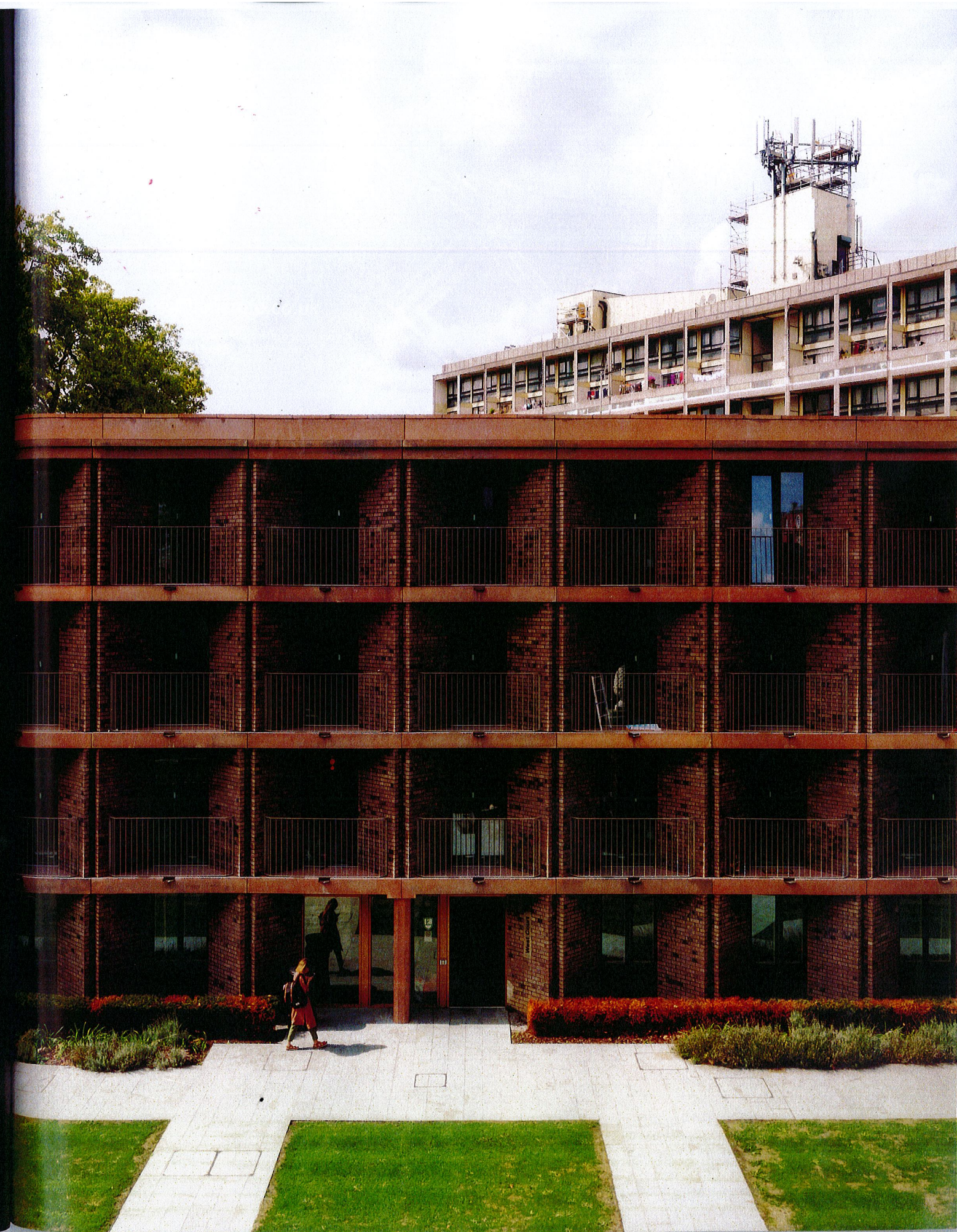
Where they do excel, however, is in the views out – full-height windows give a connection with the lush landscape below. It is nowadays uncommon for student rooms to have balconies and openable glazing, since universities are increasingly protective with regard to the health and safety of their students.

Henley comments: 'Student housing of its very nature is generic.' Indeed, this is true. Yet for something to be Stirling shortlisted it should surely push the boundaries and not offer generic solutions.

It is rare for student housing to even make it onto the RIBA Stirling Prize shortlist; the only other time it has happened was in 2013, when Grafton Architects' Medical School for the University of Limerick made it through the selection process into the final six (though there was some student housing in Reiach and Hall's Glasgow Riverside College).

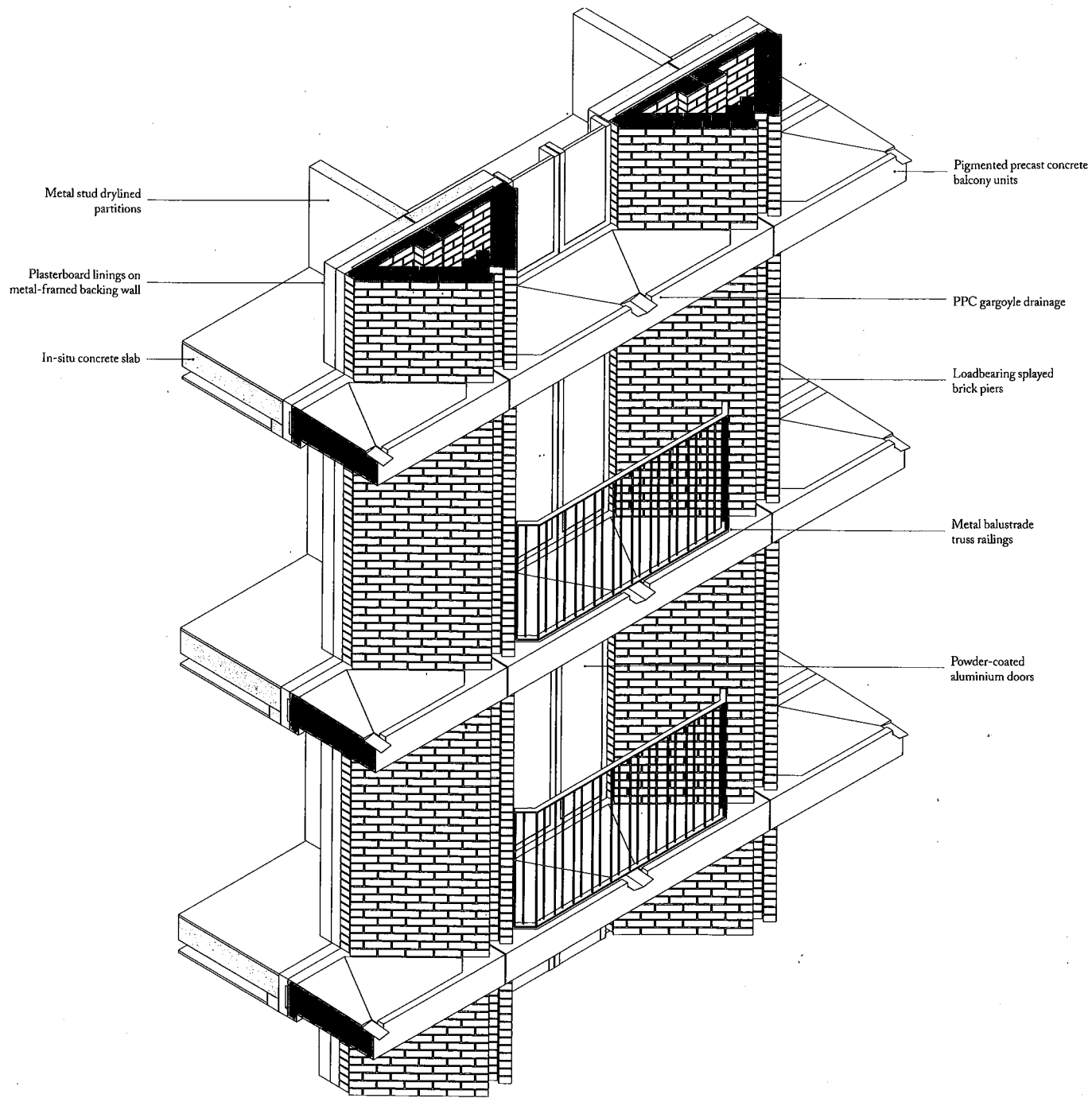
There are some similarities between these two schemes, albeit Grafton's was much larger and involved a number of other facilities: both are brick, both deploy deep, angled reveals to the windows and both reference the work of revered Modernist Louis Kahn.

With that in mind, if we are looking at student housing as a typology then, given the current landscape of student housing, this is probably one of the best examples built in recent years. It has a sense of civic duty, permanence and robustness.



Laura Mark is an architecture critic and curator

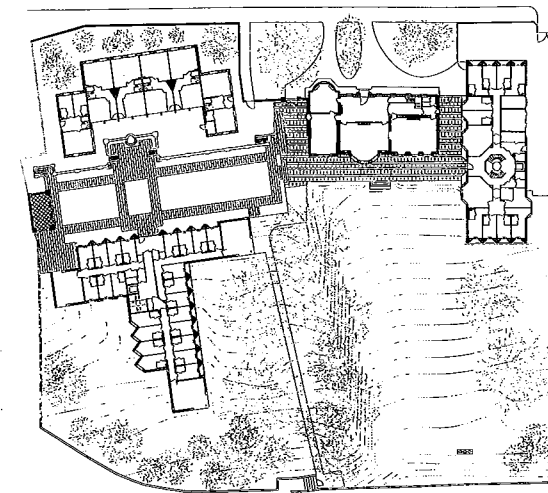




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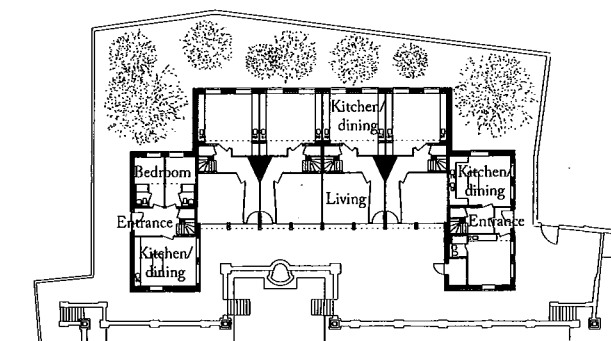
Balcony construction axonometric detail

60

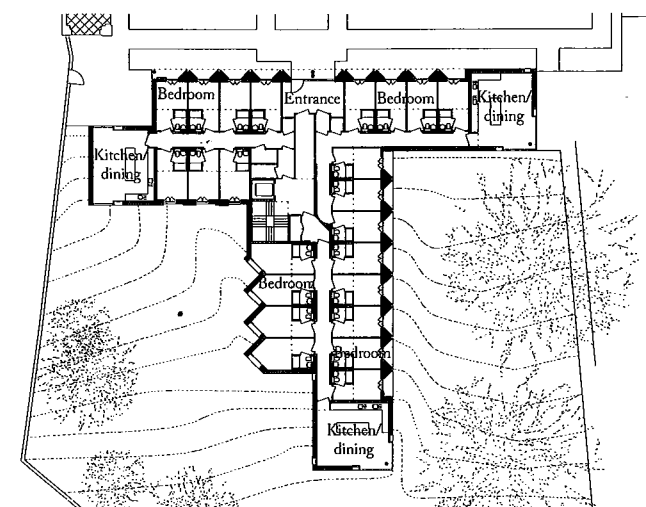


Site plan

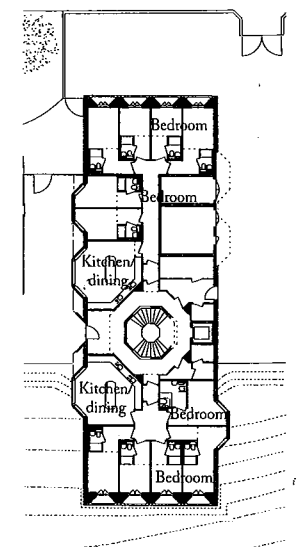
0 20m



North residence ground floor plan



West residence ground floor plan



South residence ground floor plan

0 10m



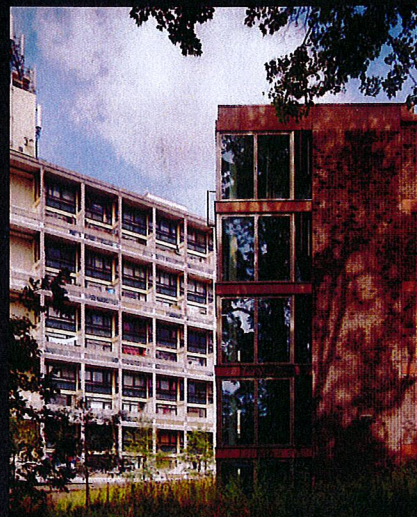
Chadwick Hall is a project concerned with history, social purpose, and the way we build.

There are two significant layers of social and architectural history which create the context for the work. In the 18th century, families commissioned villas in Roehampton by Archer, Chambers and Wyatt. Two hundred years later, in the 1950s, the London County Council Architects' Alton West Estate recast these villas as follies and co-opted the 18th-century parkland, Downshire Field, as a setting for social housing and a foil to its brave new world. In 1951 Bill Howell visited Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles. The following year he and his future partners, Killick, Partridge & Amis, designed the maisonette blocks using Corb's Modulor scale. A second house, The Cedars, with wings by Soane, stood on the north half of the site until its demolition in the early 1900s.

On our site, what we found was a remarkable historic landscape: a vale, parkland, a field boundary of mature trees, a Georgian house and vestiges of a garden dating from 1911. Our work is the third evolution of this landscape, and both the planning and construction draw on 18th and 20th century traditions.

Our masterplan takes existing landscape features and uses these to compose associations between buildings. South Court replaces the lost wing of Downshire House. North and West Court are paired around the garden and summer house that replaced The Cedars. Student housing has become industrialised. Instead, Chadwick explores how plan types serve to link the individual, institution and natural world. The masterplan itself gives structure to the student community.

Staircases eschew function alone. The one in South Court recalls a lost octagonal timber stair in William Chambers' nearby Parkstead House.



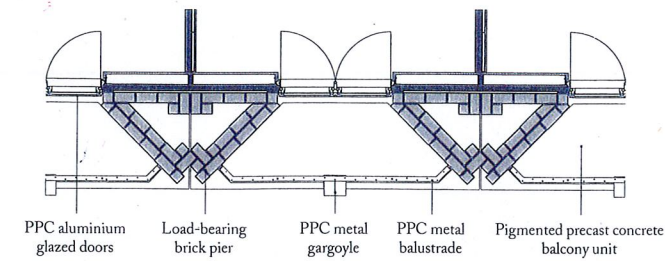
## How we built it by Henley Halebrown

The octagonal geometry, employed first in the stair, threads through the buildings, in bay windows, balconies and the occasional column.

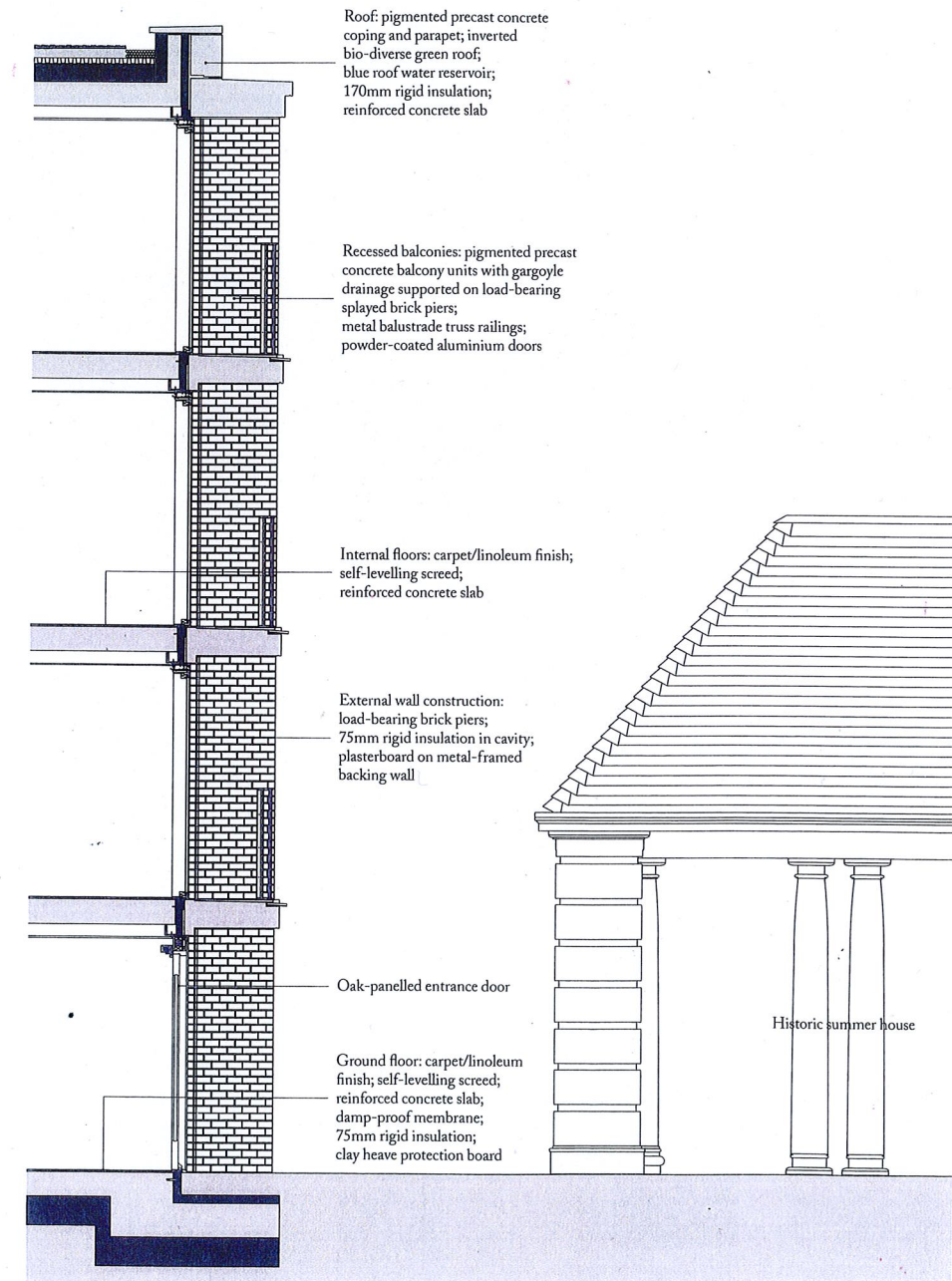
The Georgian and Brutalist buildings have much in common. Loadbearing brickwork and a concrete frame mean they appear as they are constructed. We realised we could emulate this by encasing conventional concrete frame structures inside loadbearing brick walls. Interiors are wrapped in heavy 'ruins' which create the space for balconies mediating between the common ground of the garden and the private realm of the room. The ruins play down the performative aspects of the walls and instead heighten the perceptual dimension of experience. More than any other element, the window offers generosity and the means by which to see, hear and smell. The architecture emphasises the enduring properties of buildings *per se* and the academic institution, the natural setting creating a counterpoint to the order and gravity of the buildings.

The process was tough. During the six-month period to planning, design decisions were made quickly and the scheme changed from week to week, even though the dialogue with the planners, The Georgian Society, The Twentieth Century Society and Historic England was demanding. Our involvement was by no means guaranteed beyond planning. And the scheme was procured for just £1,980/m<sup>2</sup>. One of the real joys of the scheme has been the reinstatement of Chadwick's *The Watchers*, originally installed as part of the LCC's public art programme, following the recasting of a missing figure stolen in 2006.

The Arts and Crafts architect William Lethaby spoke of 'reasonable building', not 'architecture', by which he meant the architect building well. Chadwick, we hope, is just that.  
*Simon Henley, founding director,  
Henley Halebrown*



Balcony detail plan

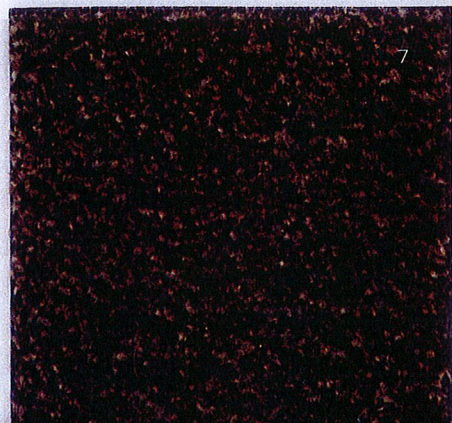
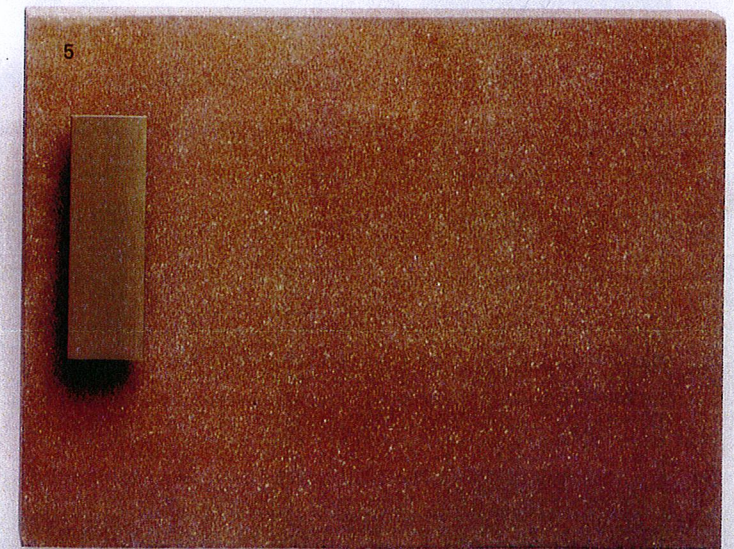
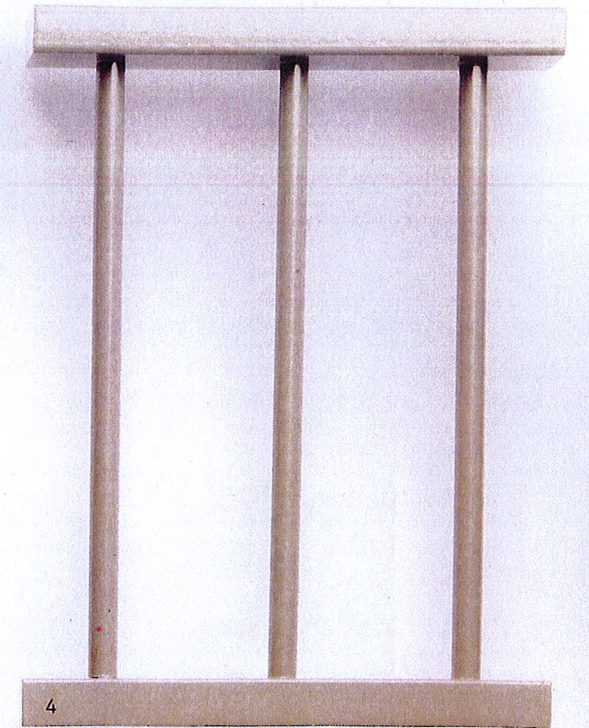
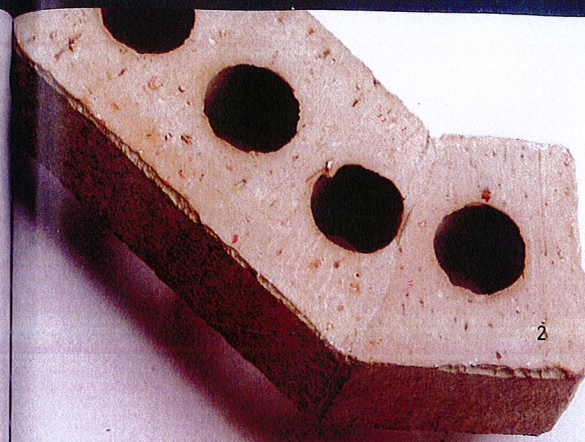
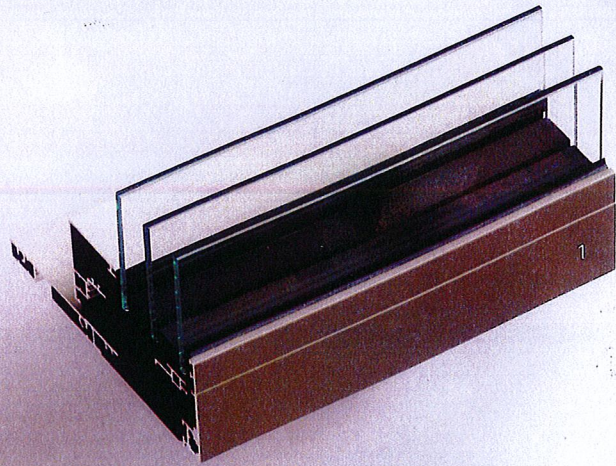


West residence detail section









1. Window frames  
Ideal Combi Futura+1 and Futura+. Finish: PPC RAL 8019 black (small sample), and bronze anodised  
[www.idealcombi.com](http://www.idealcombi.com)

2. Facing brickwork  
Vega Rustic Roehampton White by Floren  
[www.bespokebrick.com](http://www.bespokebrick.com)

3. Mortar  
CPI Euromix C121  
[www.cpieuromix.com](http://www.cpieuromix.com)

4. Metal balustrade guarding by  
Iron Designs. Finish: PPC Syntha Pulvin M4C 0916  
[www.irondesigns.co.uk](http://www.irondesigns.co.uk)

5. External precast concrete components by Amber Precast. Coloured pigment: SLP Colourtone Chocolate  
[www.amberprecast.co.uk](http://www.amberprecast.co.uk)

6. Entrance doors  
Bespoke oak by CCN  
[www.ccn-uk.com](http://www.ccn-uk.com)

7. Entrance matting  
Coral Brush 5714 by Forbo  
[www.forbo.com](http://www.forbo.com)