

The University of Liverpool Precinct

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Introduction

The quality of a University campus is regarded as critical in attracting students and staff, and as greater competition between British Universities has developed, so greater attention has recently been paid to improving the varying campus environments that we have.¹ The University of Liverpool Precinct Development Framework aims to re-establish a strategic vision for a campus environment that has recently suffered from adhoc building and landscaping. Whilst some parts of the campus are very attractive and well used, other parts are of a poor environmental quality. The plan aims to improve the balance between areas, assist the University when briefing for new schemes, and encourage the designers to consider how their own contributions might benefit the campus as a whole.

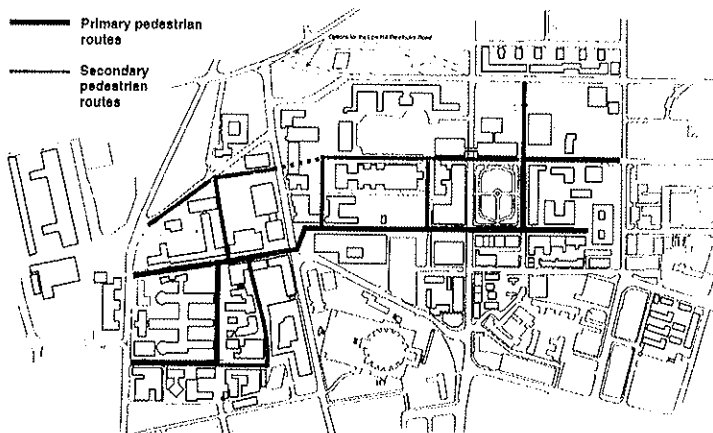
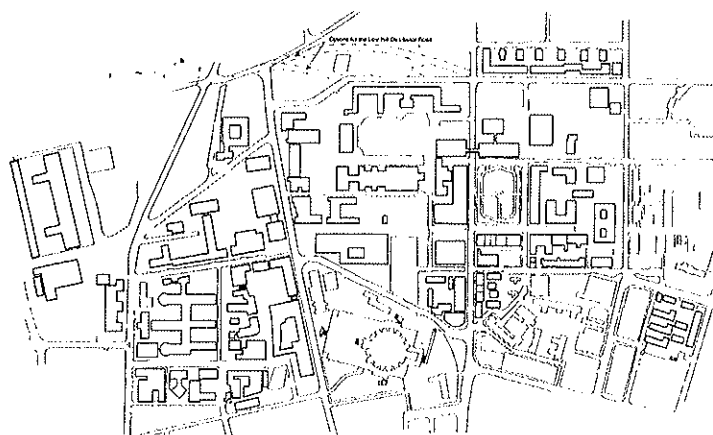
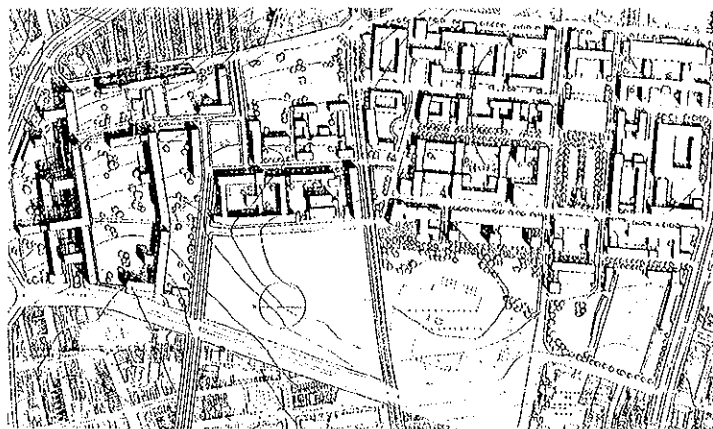
The existing campus

The Liverpool University campus is half a mile to the east of Liverpool city centre. In 1949 William Holford devised the first formal plan for the campus.² Holford sought to impose a series of large rectilinear "super-blocks" onto the original street system. This would retain the axial nature of the previously Georgian system of streets and squares, reduce vehicular through routes, and create a structure that would be defined by a series of closed vistas and quadrangles.

The first new University buildings respected Holford's super-block plan, but by the mid 1950s buildings were adopting a more "stand alone" character. As a result the essence of Holford's plan was lost. By 1974 a vast area to the edge of Liverpool city-centre was transformed into an institutional environment. The campus today is compact but almost exclusively given over to academic and student uses, with few obvious reasons for non-users of the University to enter the area. The parts of the campus of genuine environmental quality date from prior to the University's period of post-war accelerated growth and tend to be at the southern end of the campus. To the north the campus is more fragmented, with new buildings set within car parking.

The planning concept

The new "University of Liverpool Precinct Development Framework" has been devised by professional planning and architectural staff at the University. It uses ideas from authors such as Cooper Marcus and Francis³ for promoting outdoor activity. This approach to planning and design was one to which our precinct had not been previously subjected. We wanted to adapt some of the bland spaces between buildings that

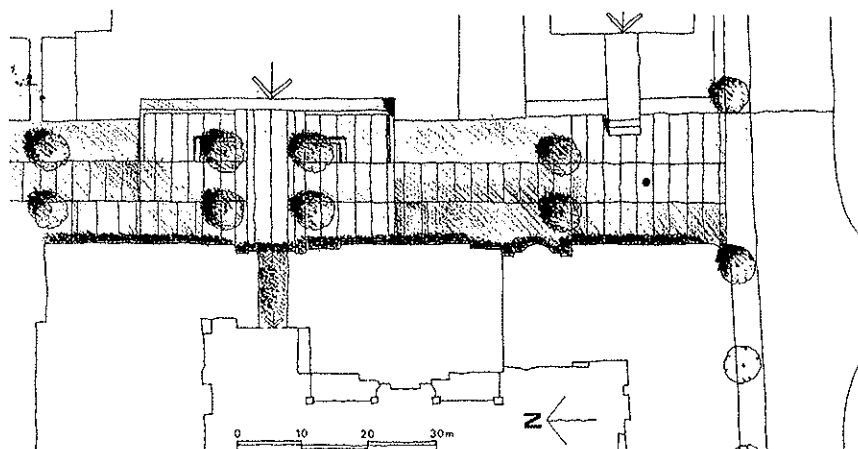


Top: Holford's original rectilinear plan for the University Campus.

Middle: The current extent of the University including the Royal Liverpool University Hospital to the left of the plan.

Above: The pedestrian network. New buildings should give shape to and be orientated towards both the primary and secondary networks.

Top right: Enhanced pedestrian spaces encourage activity near university buildings. Sketch ideas by CASS Associates, Liverpool.



areas which have previously been dominated by cars. The majority of these spaces are in the northern section of the campus.

Implementing the plan

It is the purpose of this plan to co-ordinate future developments so that the precinct can become greater than the sum of its parts. We hope that new buildings might create a coherent external environment which is visually stimulating, but also a place where appropriate activity is encouraged.

The plan allows us to prioritise spending. Our ideas for key public spaces have allowed us to do this, and funding for this work can come from the normal landscaping budget, or from bids to funds like the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In addition the plan allows the University to more positively influence the local authority's land use and highway policies within its vicinity. The fact that the University is a key wealth creator in the city could be used to encourage improvement to the main highways through the campus, and development of adjacent sites.

Conclusion

At Liverpool University the axial planning from the 1940s and 1950s created a relatively clear structure to the campus in certain areas, but this emphasis on the visual character of the precinct has ignored some of the social opportunities that the design of new buildings and landscaping can make possible. As a result underpinning the new plan is a concern for life between buildings and we feel that we have addressed the factors that might deliver that life. #

References

1. Cannings, H (1998) 'The Manchester Higher Education Project', in *Urban Design Quarterly*, Issue 65, pp 36 - 38
2. Holford, W (1949) *Proposals for the Development of a Site for the University of Liverpool*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press
3. Cooper Marcus C and Francis C (1998) *People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold

performed some visual or axial function, but otherwise offered no real support for activity. We wanted to think in a more coherent way about the layout, types of building use, and features of design and landscape that might encourage differing types of activity within the differing outdoor spaces. This would allow us to improve the scope for casual encounter, as well as providing settings ranging from the busy to the tranquil.

There are three main themes to the plan:

- promoting mixed uses within the vicinity of the precinct;
- designing buildings to respond more positively to their context ;
- creating a pedestrian route and open spaces strategy.

Mixed uses

The plan encourages the development of additional housing within the vicinity of the campus, it promotes the redevelopment of retailing sites, and it looks to introduce more outdoor sports facilities within the precinct. The housing would allow for a wider customer base for secondary uses such as shops, cafes and bars. This builds on a current tendency for developing student accommodation within the vicinity of the campus and the city centre. We might allow the wider city to encroach a little more into the campus to allow greater overlapping between the University and the rest of the city. Neighbouring communities should be encouraged to use both the sports facilities and shops, and the facilities suggested are located in key locations to allow this to happen.

Response to context

The plan encourages the remodelling of existing buildings, and the design of new buildings to enhance the interface between buildings and their adjacent spaces. This means physically defining the key public spaces, but also building entrances so that incidental "front porch" activity can occur. Many of the academic related buildings are insular. Sometimes they fail to give shape to the public spaces, more typically they provide some shape, but don't assist in

animating adjacent spaces. In particular the building entrances have not always been designed to support life within the key public spaces. The blank internal lecture rooms can tend to abut the main routes through the campus, and sometimes internal circulation spaces and incidental activity spaces within buildings are not used to provide a more positive relationship between the inside and outside activities.

Building entrances should provide space for a range of incidental activities: cycle parking, building access, campus and building information, formal and incidental seating and meeting. They can also be used for providing some sense of what is going on inside the buildings. The best entrances are slightly raised, in the sun, but providing some form of shelter. Entrances with either formal or informal catering and seating arrangements are particularly popular as students get air between lectures, drink coffee or smoke a cigarette.

Pedestrian route and open spaces strategy

We have sought to impose a series of secondary routes onto the campus which, through landscaping, lighting and future building will become more clearly defined. New buildings should give shape to these routes, but also have their principal entrances from them. The vast amount of activity observable is pedestrian activity, and the campus has a notional pedestrian spine that provides a link across its centre along the line of former streets. Perpendicular routes to this spine can, however, be very unclear, and recently buildings have been located without relating to the key pedestrian desire lines.

Most importantly, we have sought to enhance key public spaces within those parts of the campus with a low environmental quality and to enhance key University buildings. Where possible we have also tried to improve the interface between adjacent buildings and spaces. The introduction of new landscaping, lighting, seating and public art can also help to suggest a new image and pattern of use for