

THE DRAWING BOARD

HOW NEW BUILDINGS MIGHT LOOK AND HOW WE ARE TO INTEGRATE THEM INTO CORNWALL

Words by **Tim Hancock**



Cornwall is a special place in more ways than one. I am a proud Cornishman, and the opportunity to be a practising architect in Cornwall and the current branch chairman of the Royal Institute of British Architects at this time is a privilege.

Architecture and construction are currently at a crossroads. We have a duty to design and construct buildings that have a smaller environmental footprint. The duty is not only in response to legislation, but also social and economic needs - and rising fuel prices won't go away.

So how does this translate into a built form, and how do we respond to the challenge of integrating these buildings into the Cornish environment?

Our buildings will have to perform differently; some analysts say that the carbon footprint of buildings will have to be reduced by a minimum of 80 per cent. Solutions include making them super-insulated and extremely airtight, with mechanical air intake and extraction systems. Others believe that we will have to include large areas of south-facing glass, and solar spaces that will passively heat the building; already we are seeing more renewables on our buildings.

In the end, I suspect that we might have a bit of both, and the benefit for users should be cheaper running costs. We also have an opportunity to design buildings that respond positively to social and health needs, by creating better communities and more enjoyable places to live.

Either way, the result is going to be a new building stock that looks a lot different to what we have grown accustomed to. Many will say that this is a good thing, citing that many recently constructed buildings offer little in design quality or positive contribution to the Cornish landscape. I am currently

helping to organise a conference on design quality in the built environment with Cornwall Council. It is hoped that this event will put design quality at the top of the agenda, whether it is contemporary or traditional, but importantly it must be affordable and sustainable.

The challenge for architects is to design buildings that meet the new requirements while ensuring that we meet our client's brief and budget, and that the resulting building does not have a negative impact on the landscape and people. Understanding will be our greatest tool as architects; we will have to ensure that our clients, the planning authorities and the wider community understand and appreciate our design decisions. I liken the challenge we have for example to the architects who designed the historic buildings that we know and many love today; these buildings pushed the boundaries then, and were not always liked.

Part of the solution, I believe, lies in the materials we use and hopefully in the quality of the design, and this is where the debate and challenge starts. I believe that in the majority of cases, architecture should be of its time, but this does not always mean more glass and steel. We can learn a lot from the materials that have been used historically in Cornwall, and these materials can also help our new buildings fit in.

We have to ensure that we design buildings that use sustainably sourced materials, that we use these materials in an efficient manner, and that our buildings run efficiently. Hopefully we can also design better places to live, work and enjoy. 🏡

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