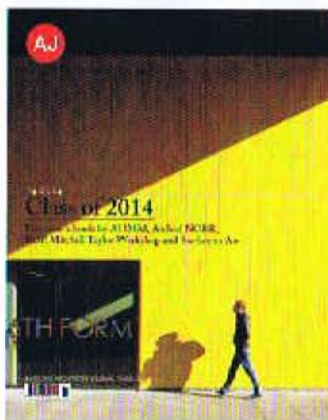


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The letter of the week's author will receive an AJ mug. Letters should be received by 10am on the Monday before publication. The AJ reserves the right to edit letters.

Save London's USP



London is an immensely complex city subject to constant evolution, but a transformation on this scale ('London set for skyscraper boom', AJ online 12.03.14) with potentially over 250 tall buildings needs to be carefully considered.

The current planning system, with layers of interested parties and different policy objectives, is not the best way to handle this challenge. The fragmentation of planning responsibility needs to be addressed, and a collaborative, flexible framework or forum put in place to ensure that tall buildings make a positive contribution to the character of London, rather than undermining its current unique selling point, which is the sophisticated balance between layers of history and new development.

While we cannot proscribe the vital character that makes London unique, we can provide a framework to ensure informed decisions are taken to allow that character to flourish.

Nigel Barker, conservation and planning director, English Heritage

Concern for schools

The five schools featured in last week's AJ might be used as a test bed for 'what architecture is and what it is for', but we could debate which, if any, of the five is 'Architecture'. All offer design solutions but, for me, only Kingswood School has made a positive contribution, clearly expressed, at reasonable cost. Architecture should enrich lives through opening opportunities and experience.

Last week I had a preview of the latest plans for the St Paul's School rebuild in Barnes. The first stage, by Nicholas Hare to a masterplan by Patel Taylor, is complete and occupied. The next stage, designed by Walters & Cohen, will soon be submitted to planning. This is a major scheme to replace the Clasp system designs with something of architectural quality and a long life. But of course it is a private school, with some of the best results in the country. It has a reputation to uphold and alumni and governors to support it. It is a long-term project. The results built so far and proposed are significant, considered

architectural responses. If we are serious about providing quality education, the model that St Paul's can afford should be available for all. Building Schools for the Future, for all its faults, which Paul Monaghan touches on, was not the answer, but it was an evolving model and could have been improved by stripping out the repetition and wastefulness. It could have emerged as a system 'delivering well-designed schools for a good price'.

To the procurement system has now been added the uncertainty of sponsors and management. Recent design reviews of schools in Cambridgeshire were based on a generic brief, sometimes without the sponsor. In an area where many new schools being planned, this is a major concern. That the design review system is being used is to be welcomed, but it is often left too late.

That Portakabins could be an acceptable solution in Barking, (no criticism of Surface to Air intended) is just another example of a political system that cannot plan and deliver design quality for an equitable society. That there are 16 similar projects across London is depressing beyond belief.

Simon Carne, architect, by email



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