

The Ecology Building Society Headquarters, Silsden

Hodson Architects were commissioned via a limited competition and interview to design an innovative office building for the Ecology Building Society in the Aire Valley, Yorkshire. Our main responsibility was to provide a good quality-working environment which responded to the specialness of the site and context with respect to distant views, gardens, extendibility and flexibility in use. Of particular importance was the delineation between public and private spaces and security. Our approach to sustainability is not one of 'bells and whistles' or dull but worthy architecture, but rather informs the full range of decision-making, aiming to produce contemporary architecture with a clearly understandable strategy and dynamic.

The Ecology Building Society seeks to promote the concept of sustainability through its mortgage lending and provides an ethical savings scheme in support of this. The level of 'sustainability' achieved in the new building is therefore an important consideration for its members, who take a close interest in how the society's affairs are conducted.

We enjoyed a period of nearly one year between our commissioning and submitting for planning permission. The broad strategy for the building was agreed fairly quickly, which allowed us time to make significant improvements through a process of fine-tuning. A mix of models, sketches and drawings was employed to explain the scheme and promote discussions with the client team. A well-attended public meeting was also held to explain and invite comments on the scheme.

The building is arranged around an axis along the length of the site from the northeast sloping down to the southwest. The ground floor of the building is arranged on two levels in response to the sloping site. This axis is the line of primary circulation from the car park across an entrance bridge and through the building aligned on a distant view of the hills. The other important determining element of the building is its cross section. This organises the parts of the building into a more defensive cellular structure against the road and a lightweight timber and glass construction over the open plan areas facing onto the private garden areas. This cross section also allows daylight to reach all parts of the internal working area and facilitates natural ventilation. Daylight modelling undertaken during the design process indicated that targets could be met. Our aims for the building included attaining amongst the best figures nationally for air tightness, energy and water consumption. Some of the eco-friendly components incorporated into the building include a sedum planted roof, reclaimed stonewalls, rainwater harvesting and photovoltaic cells.

Completed - November 2003

Value - £900,000

Awards - Bradford District Design Award - Building of the Year 2004

- RIBA White Rose Award for Sustainability 2006

Published in 'Eco-Tech' - November 2004

