



## Project

**Location:** Botley Primary School, OXFORD, UK  
**Dates:** Jan 2017- June 2017  
**Participating Institutions / Organisations:** Botley Primary School, OBU  
**Case Study / Project Leaders:** Orit Sarfatti, Andrea Placidi  
**Tutor Names / Team:** Orit Sarfatti, Andrea Placidi, Claire Hart  
**Student Names / Team:** Year 2 Interior Architecture

## Description

Botley Primary School in Oxford went through a process of expansion in recent years. Its current pupil intake is over 400 children and it is expected to grow to its full capacity of 460 pupils by 2020. During the renovation project undertaken at the school last year the existing canteen was left untouched. There is an urgent need to replace the underperforming building; a 1940's single skin dilapidated building detached from the main school building, carrying the dubious title of 'the most hated building in the school' by pupils and members of staff as one.

The canteen live project, which is at the heart of this case study, was initially set up as a design exercise for second year interior students from Oxford Brookes University. The students were asked to provide design proposals for a renovated dining hall, based on the existing premises available at the school. It soon became clear that the emphasis should be on rethinking the design outcomes to accommodate very limited funding, a result of the austerity policy of the current government which plans to cut school funding by 8% by 2020 (the IFA, May 2017). The project's goals were adapted to include raising public awareness to the need for the expansion of the canteen as well as to provide a design platform for the school when seeking for funds.

The students, following our standard design process for live-projects, met with school representatives, both staff and children and visited the site a few times between January and

April 2017 to form a better understanding of the constraints.

The result of the exercise was presented in an exhibition at the existing school canteen. The exhibition presented twenty different design strips and models in various scales to better communicate the design proposals to a non-professional public. Each strip presented a student's design proposal for the site.

## Evaluation

### Findings & further steps:

The exhibition was successful in raising parents' and school governors' awareness to the acute issue of the canteen (many parents, for example, had never visited the canteen prior to the exhibition), but it also gave rise to two important issues which we need to discuss and further developed.

The first one is of a pedagogical nature. Should the student output be a design proposal, i.e. a set of architectural design drawings? Or should it be a design programme which may communicate better the nature of the design proposition, in which the student not only responds to the client's brief but also offers a solution which encompasses a wider set of considerations that are often overlooked or oversimplified when setting up the initial brief. In other words, should we expect design students to develop and portray solely their design skills, or should we expect a student's proposal to include a level of social responsibility in their design process, and subsequently their design solution? The former option would suggest a designer role to be reduced to one that is mainly measured on visual merits, downgrading the role of architectural education.

The second issue arising from the project is of a more pragmatic nature. The students went to great lengths to find innovative design solutions which would include incorporating other users of buildings from the local community, an option which would comply better with the criteria of community-

based-funds such as the lottery fund and design proposals of flexible spaces that accommodate other school activities which at present, the school struggles to accommodate.

Finally, in the process of surveying the school; its physical and human context the students came to realise that the parents of the school children - representing the diverse nature of the local community - work professionally in many areas which could potentially contribute to the erection of the new canteen if an alternative mode of operation was to be considered. The range of professions included architects, builders, brick layers, carpenters, graphic designer and other professions, which could be employed at different stages of the project.

Thus the next challenge should be to use the enthusiasm and the sense of empowerment which the students' project successfully injected in the school to initiate a second stage of a community co-building project and to explore better what the implications may be and whether there are relevant.

In our Interior Architecture programme at Oxford Brookes University we often use the live project as a way to imbue 'life' and a sense of purpose to projects which would otherwise suffer from acute lack of resources and therefore a poor implementations of needs. This project provided a chance to reconsider the amount of 'life' we could pour to a community through the model of a 'Live project'.

"Architecture Connects" association of architectural educators conference, 6-9 September 2017, Oxford Brookes University, UK

# Botley School Canteen

