

# Town Centre Living Competitions – Report



The competitions were launched on 27 January 2023 to encourage quality design solutions for social housing within town centres and progress the Government's *Town Centre First* policy's objectives of compact growth and town-centre revitalisation.

The competitions also sought to encourage more architectural firms to compete for social housing design projects. All four competitions were adjudicated anonymously by four separate juries, with the entries only identified by an entry number.

The four sites were identified by local authorities following an open invitation by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It is intended that the winning architectural practice for each competition will, in addition to the prize, be awarded the design commission for the project. The winning proposals will be progressed by the various local authorities as live projects funded by DHLGH, through to construction and delivery.

**The Town Centre Living Competitions results, announced at the RIAI on 14 June 2023 by Minister Darragh O'Brien TD are follows:**

## **Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan**

The Castleblayney Jury were: Valerie Mulvin FRIAI, Director McCullough Mulvin Architects (Chair); Paul Altman FRIAI, Senior Advisor DHLGH; Lorcan MacCinna, Senior Engineer Monaghan County Council

**General Jury Comment:** "The jury was very impressed by the range of schemes and approaches, the generally high standard of response, and the possibility for many of the principles identified to have an application beyond Castleblayney to other towns throughout the country. Sifting out the most careful of these responses took time and involved much discussion and enjoyable debate. The most successful schemes did succeed in crafting a particular response to the site and its idiosyncrasies in order to make a *successful place* of it.

Schemes that delivered a strong, active and urban response to 'The Commons', by making a new urban edge to what is now an unappreciated car park, promoted a new reading of 'The Commons' as a significant urban space within the complexity of the town's grain. Some schemes proposed improvements to 'The Commons' itself, bringing the influence of the new scheme beyond the boundary and affecting the whole town in a positive way. In tandem with that approach, successful schemes also created a direct and sympathetic relationship to the Protected Structure. The shuffling of these two significant dynamics and the elegance and skill of some proposals really took on the opportunities of the site in a dramatic and imaginative way. This agility in handling existing contexts is essential in creating strong, simple and well-crafted interventions into the existing town fabric."

### Castleblayney, First Prize Winner: 'The Old Fire Station' (Entry 5218)

Boyd Cody Architects with James Flaus and Kevin Quinlan



**Architects' Statement** (extract): "If we are to take the *Town Centre Living* agenda seriously as architects, we have to work with the existing built fabric in every Irish town to provide much needed homes. Refurbishment or adaptive re-use is critical to this design approach. We need to identify existing buildings which lend themselves to residential use. The 'Old Fire Station' in Castleblayney with its surrounding (protected) structures is a perfect site for re-development. Within its walls, the large drill yard can be transformed into a shared communal space. New terraces of houses and apartments will be built and the existing utilitarian buildings can easily be converted into housing units in the future, so for this stage of the competition, we have also included their design in our entry for consideration. (...) The 'Commons' lends itself to this spatial regeneration, it is a large car-park which can become a re-surfaced square, sustainably planted with Scots Pine trees, at times becoming an open

marketplace, a play area, or even a carpark. Facing onto this new square is our housing project on the Old Fire Station site, with its water, lift and clock tower signifying a past use for a new future. To address the immediacy of construction in Ireland today and tackle the housing crisis directly through architectural design, we need to build economically, simply and repetitively, providing housing prototypes or models that are easy to assemble, contain standardised formal components, and most important of all, provide comfortable and useful living space.”

**Jury Citation:** “This project creates a strong sense of memory, reaching back to earlier occupation of the site as a Fire Station, grounding the scheme in the past yet looking to the future. The Architects gave very good consideration to the Protected Structure on site – both to contribute to open space and in terms of integrating it into their proposal. This is a good signal to find appropriate uses for our protected structures to keep them as active contributors. The winning entry has a strong urban presence with an active frontage onto ‘The Commons’. The site layout strategy, which facilitates connectivity to lands to the south is excellent with general applicability elsewhere. Low embodied carbon and adaptive reuse are seriously considered including the use of cross-laminated timber and timber frame. The scheme addresses climate change challenges by retaining part of the old fire station and incorporating it into the new building as well as the reuse of materials from demolished buildings to clad parts of the proposed buildings where possible. Noteworthy is the strategy for the lift location to serve deck access to the top levels, which inverts the idea that older people need to be located at ground level. In this scheme, duplex dwellings deliver good use of land – with family units on the lower floor to best enjoy gardens, with older citizens and those with mobility challenges gaining view, connectivity and calm with generous upper balconies and the potential to facilitate ageing in place. The simple, clear layouts work well and repeating plan types will deliver economies.”

### **Second Prize Winner: Entry 5224, Clancy Moore Architects**



Jury Citation: “This design has a strong urban presence and active frontage onto ‘The Commons’. It is a site-specific response with sensitive front elevational reference that complements the gable of the Protected Structure, forming a visual gateway to the open space. Connectivity to lands to the South has informed the site layout. Unit layouts are designed for living spaces enjoying a good westerly aspect. The western elevation is particularly successful, creating balconies behind an incipient colonnade in a gentle curved plane. This closes the urban space to the end of the site and carefully differentiates the threshold by using levels and materiality. The use of duplex units delivers a good use of land. Apartment layouts are very well considered with good spatial sequence, appropriate orientation and fine reference projects suggesting the ethos of the place made.”

**Third Prize Winner: Entry 5118, Donnelly Turpin Architects**



Jury Citation: “This design has an excellent site layout strategy of two linked courtyards – one to localise car/service access and utilities, the other making a quality, child friendly public space. The corner linkage of the courtyards is elegant and effortless. The scheme has a good urban presence and active frontage onto ‘The Commons’. The southern pedestrian connectivity to the lands to the south can be delivered, and potentially, an eastern connection as well. The scheme has given good consideration of how to successfully incorporate the Protected Structures into the scheme, creating usable rooms and community spaces. The site layout strategy has some general applicability to other sites. There is a clear sense of a new community being connected and integrated into Castleblayney’s urban grain.”

*In addition to the Prize Winners, the Jury also made the following non-premiated awards:*

**Highly Commended: Entry 4736, Lawrence and Long Architects**



Jury Citation: “A good consideration of the context and a successful site strategy to provide a quality open space, displaying fine grain and a great sense of place. The design creates a strong urban image for the scheme, creating a sense of identity for each resident within a very clear community. There is excellent control of threshold and boundaries between public and private open space, with elegant materiality. The site layout strategy successfully provides for connectivity to lands to south and potential access from the east, and has some general applicability to other sites. The use of duplex units delivers good use of land. The scheme shows a good relationship to the Protected Structure.

### **Commended: Entry 5231, Brock Finucane Architects**



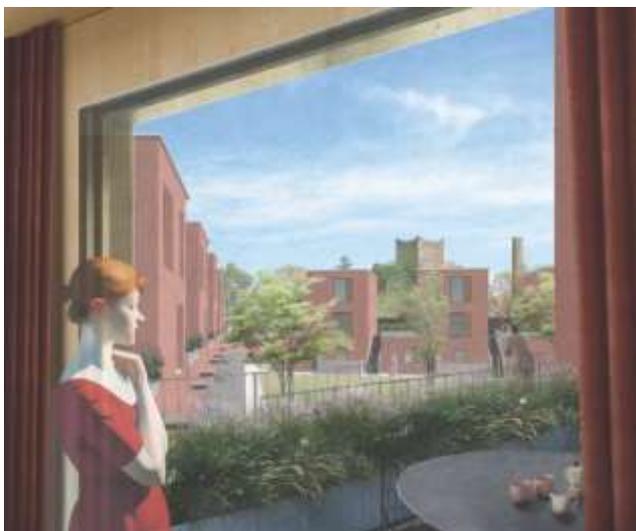
Jury Citation: “This scheme has a strong urban presence onto the Commons serving as a welcome to the public open space. Connectivity to the south, and potentially to east, act as design generators, thus ensuring good integration into the urban context. The site layout strategy delivers a quality open space, forming a shared surface, with some general applicability in the approach, to other sites.”

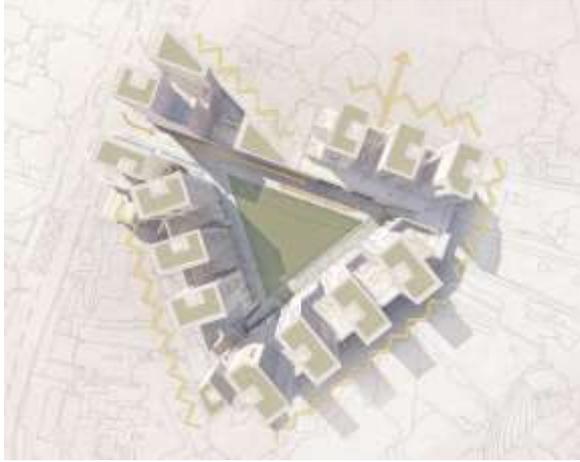
### **Kildare Town, Co. Kildare**

The Kildare Jury were: Miriam Delaney MRIAI (Chair); Gareth Williams MRIAI, Architect Advisor DHLGH; and David Creighton FRIAI Senior Architect Kildare County Council

**General Jury Comment:** “The Kildare site was challenging – a back land site in a sensitive location- requiring a convincing contextual response. Each of the prize winners demonstrate distinctive site strategies, indicating the diverse range of approaches across the entries. The projects that stood out were those that combined a strong urban proposal and approach to the existing streetscape with good unit design - simple design considerations of dual aspect units, good orientation, high quality private amenity space, and well-planned units were key factors in making our evaluations. The standard of entries was very high, demonstrating the value of open architectural competitions in generating innovative design solutions for housing and town centre regeneration. The jury wants to congratulate the RIAI, the DHLGH, and the Local Authorities for organising the Town Centre Living competitions – the strength of the entries shows the desire amongst architects to contribute positively to national efforts on housing.

### **Kildare, First Prize Winner: ‘An Thriantán’ (Entry 4831), Shay Cleary Architects**





**Architects' Statement:** "Our project proposes to provide a defined place of real character, intrinsically linked to the urban form of Kildare Town. It will provide high quality housing in an urban form, entirely own door accessed, centred around a new community garden at the heart of the development, **An Thriantán**. We propose a strongly modelled form of perimeter development to the site, forming a communal space of unique character. This proposed space resonates with the historic Market Square in Kildare Town at a smaller scale, echoing the form and urban presence of that particular place. The 18th century Market Square is a key reference point in the urban fabric of Kildare Town and as such is referenced in the proposed name of the scheme, An Thriantán (The Triangle). To achieve quality housing without resorting to out of context apartments blocks, we propose to employ innovative housing typologies, which will provide higher density housing, of an own door format. Given the particularities of the site, it is of critical importance to resolve the key issue of overlooking to the rear of the proposed perimeter development, preserving the amenity of neighbours. For some time, the project team have been conducting research on medium-density, low-rise, high-quality housing typologies, and their compatibility with existing development patterns nationally, in line with best international precedent. This has developed against the backdrop of the current housing crisis and has sought to recognize the particular issues which exist in our towns, of which Kildare is an exemplar."

**Jury Citation:** "This will be an exceptional housing scheme - an exemplar project for 'Town Centre First' living. The jury commends this innovative housing scheme for its convincing urban strategy and the design quality of the individual units. The triangular arrangement of the scheme is appropriate in morphology and scale to Kildare town, creating a housing scheme of notable character. The jury appreciated the active streetscape to Station Road, and the sense of enclosure of the outdoor space created by the perimeter built form, with excellent passive supervision. The architects show great sensitivity to the context; the treatment of the surrounding boundaries is particularly well handled, ensuring privacy to neighbouring sites, while the modelling of the scheme to avoid overlooking between units is very well controlled. Individual units are own-door, well planned, dual- aspect throughout, with each unit enjoying generous private outdoor space; efficient use of the site is achieved without loss of privacy or amenity spaces. A consistent contemporary architectural language is evident throughout the scheme."

### **Second Prize Winner: Entry 5194, Davey & Smith Architects**



Jury Citation: “The jury enjoyed the unified crescent arrangement of this scheme, creating an attractive internal streetscape. The outdoor space is generous and retention of existing trees commendable, ensuring a communal garden of real quality. The scale and form of the housing works well on the site, the street response is appropriate and the potential for expansion to the adjacent site well considered. The architects’ suggested material palette and reference to the housing schemes of Frank Gibney were positive attributes of the proposal.”

### **Third Prize Winner: Entry 5118, Donnelly Turpin Architects**



Jury Citation: “This project demonstrates a strong architectural response to the site, with three clearly distinct forms relating to the three unit typologies used: cottages, apartments and a terrace of two-storey houses. The subdivision of the public outdoor space into two zones of differing character is well handled, with convincing social spaces for movement, congregation and playing, although the east site boundary is left exposed. The jury highlights the well-judged mix of unit types, good orientation on living spaces and strong sustainability statement for the scheme.

*In addition to the Prize Winners, the Jury also made the following non-premiated award:*

### **Highly Commended: Entry, 5227, Metropolitan Workshop**



Jury Citation: “This scheme appealed to the jury primarily in its landscaping strategy and design of shared outdoor space. The architects’ approach to the community garden as a means to build community cohesion is commendable. The retention of the cottages on Station Road and the clear potential for expansion of the scheme were positive attributes of a memorable project. The jury enjoyed the unique approach taken by the architects in the ‘villa’ type arrangement of the housing blocks.”

## **Roscrea, Co. Tipperary**

The Roscrea Jury were: Orla Murphy MRIAI (Chair); John Martin MRIAI Architect Advisor DHLGH; and Liam Ryan MRIAI Senior Executive Architect Tipperary County Council

**General Jury Comment:** “While rural towns in Ireland evolved as lived-in places connecting people with exchange of goods, ideas and services, their role in recent years has undergone radical change and yet they remain our cultural and physical anchors, full of potential and eagerly waiting for us to catch up, have faith in them as great places to live, that are connected and compact, particular and familiar, close to nature and neighbours. This competition offered the dual challenge of housing and towns and the jury were impressed with the range and quality of proposals entrants put forward in Roscrea Co. Tipperary. The site itself is also challenging, with sloping topography, ill-defined edges and low-rise context. Entrants explored the potential to make connections back to the Main Street, create beautiful homes that offered private and public spaces, and offered new ideas about what it means to live in a town today and in the future, all the while acknowledging Roscrea’s morphological, cultural and material character. Balancing the needs of good housing, with good urban and landscape design is not an easy task and all the entrants are to be commended for the seriousness with which they approached the competition. Their work shows that it is not only possible, but essential that towns provide high quality town centre living now and in the future.

**Roscrea, First Prize Winner: ‘Learning from Roscrea’ (Entry 5220),**

**JFOC Architects**





**Architects' Statement:** "We are proposing a project that feels as if it has always been a part of Roscrea, while creating a series of new interlinked small scale public spaces grafted onto the existing flow of the town. This project serves to tidy up a slightly ragged edge-of-town condition in the spirit of the existing Gantly Road Masterplan. We want to make a new "mini-landmark" on this prominent corner, a destination on a sunny day, connected back to the main street down existing pedestrian routes. New housing on this corner site offers more than new housing; streets are reinvented and urban space is created. New connections are created on this site with three new public spaces created. (...)

All dwellings are dual aspect with private terraces, balconies or gardens. The ground floor terraces will be separated from the public open space by landscaping to ensure privacy and amenity while encouraging green space and biodiversity. Simple forms and architecture together create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Structural forms are simple and regular to ensure affordability and efficiency. A palette of brickwork is proposed as the dominant material, as it creates a high quality public realm that is durable and low maintenance long into the future. The colours selected reference the stone built character of the town and the agricultural buildings that face the site. It is intended that the detailed design will achieve A-rated homes that are energy efficient and sustainable."

**Jury Citation:** "This proposal unanimously impressed the jury at urban, building and detail scales and in making a place that is delightful for people, both the future residents of the housing and the broader town community. The design imagines new activated street edges to Gantly Road and Chapel Lane and a clever termination to the north eastern entrance axis at the western edge of the site. This urban strategy sets up a grain and scale for the future development of the town parallel to Main Street. Public spaces are created along the modelled street edge, and at the corner of Gantly Road and Chapel Lane where a new mini-square gives oblique views and access to the shared garden to the rear. Gable-fronted terraces step down in scale from three storeys along Gantly Road, to two storeys across Chapel Lane and in a single-storey block to the west of the site. The housing is distinctive in character, playful but well-activated both to the street and to the more private shared garden to the rear. This boldness of this proposal and its fresh approach singled out this entry. The jury are delighted to award 'Learning from Roscrea' first place and look forward to seeing this new town centre living in Roscrea."

### **Second Prize Winner: Entry 5177, ODKM Architects**



Jury Citation: “This accomplished proposal imagines a highly modelled L-shape block along the northern and eastern edges of the site. The strategy creates a sunny, landscaped garden to the south, arranged in a series of terraces. A new pedestrian connection steps up from Chapel Lane to the northern entrance at Gantly Road where the community room defines the entrance corner. Despite some reservations about the organisation of the prominent south-east corner of the site, the jury enjoyed the variety of threshold spaces that allow for passive surveillance of the gardens, for shelter from wind and rain, and for casual neighbourly encounters. Low walls form planters and benches, blurring the line where ground meets building, and creating easy places to catch the sun or have a chat. Clever planning allows single- and two-bedroom apartments to interlink in plan on the ground floor, with stairs giving access to first floor single and duplex apartments from generous terraces that overlook the southerly gardens and street. The jury commend the assured handling of materials and form.”

### **Third Prize Winner: Entry 4999, O’Mahony Pike Architects**



Jury Citation: “This project is designed as a simple L-shaped arrangement that respects the scale and topography of the site’s current context, while also creating a strong edge to Gantly Road, and setting up an urban street scale and building line for potential future development to the north. A clever use of stepped section delineates the south facing shared garden from Chapel Lane. Generous and well-designed communal spaces – both gardens and shared circulation spaces – show care and attention to detail. The project achieves a density of 75 dwellings per hectare, demonstrating the potential for compact urban growth within rural town centre locations. Despite concerns about aspect of some of the apartments, and lack of defined edge to the south, the jury were impressed by the quality of this project’s approach to Gantly Road, to shared external spaces and to town centre living.”

*In addition to the Prize Winners, the Jury also made the following non-premiated award:*

**Highly Commended: Entry 5217, Boyd Cody Architects with James Flaus and Kevin Quinlan**



Jury Comments: “The jury greatly enjoyed this project, which poses the question of what contemporary town centre living should mean. With a nod to the historic model of the Big House – in this case Damer Hall in Roscrea – it also looks to the future to imagine a new housing typology of three large two- and three-storey ‘town houses’ arranged across the site. The planning of these houses is masterful, each generous apartment has own-door access, many enjoy triple aspect light and views over a new market square or communal gardens, and all have at least one private open terrace held within the building envelope. The jury had reservations about lack of definition of the edges and control of parts of the site but praised the use of mass timber structure, and repeating structural and window modules that allow for efficiency in construction and reduced embodied carbon. The community room is embedded within the northern two-story town house, fronting onto a new Market Square. This project challenges us to think, not just about the future of housing and the home but also about the future of towns, their relationship with their hinterland, culture and society.”

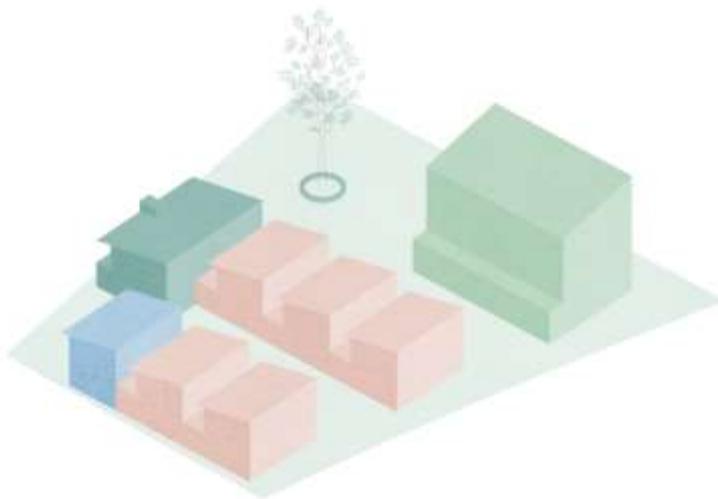
**Sligo, Co. Sligo**

The Sligo Jury were: Derek Tynan FRIAI (Chair); Joan MacMahon MRIAI, Senior Advisor DHLGH; and Seán Martin FRIAI Senior Architect Sligo County Council

**General Jury Comments:** “The Town Centre Living competitions are extremely significant in addressing the social & cultural significance of our towns, promoting the potential of social housing to repopulate them and, through the architectural competition model, reinforce the role of design innovation in realizing quality urban and residential environments. The competitions seek to generate innovative and appropriately scaled medium density housing models to address the specific challenges of urban contexts – design proposals that as built exemplars will demonstrate the potential for living well in our town centres. The interest in responding to this brief was clear in the 37 comprehensive design entries submitted for the Sligo site alone which demonstrated a wealth of responses to the brief and the challenges of the particular site.”

## Sligo, First Prize Winner: 'Housing at Pirn Mill Road' (Entry 4904)

TAKA Architects



**Architects' Statement:** "The lands at Pirn Mill Road are a strategically important site for Sligo Town. They are located at a transition point between the older town centre and the future docklands development, which will form a gateway to Sligo town when approached from the north. We have developed a proposal for town centre homes at Pirn Mill Road which offer an exemplar model for low-rise medium-density housing which is also appropriate for many town centre sites in Ireland. We have deployed this model in a way

which addresses and enhances the specific opportunities of the Pirn Mill Road site to create a vibrant and attractive place for town centre living. (...)

Building upon the low-rise medium-density typical housing model, we have arranged this model on the Pirn Mill Road site, to achieve the best use of land, create active streetscapes and address the particularities of the context. In parts of the site where the typical housing model does not create the desired urban conditions, 'special' unit arrangements are deployed. These 'specials' give opportunity to increase the variety of home types while addressing the particularities of urban corners. A taller 4-storey 'landmark' block is located to the north-east corner of the site. This block continues the strategy of placing smaller homes above larger ones, using the excess floor plate of the unit below as generous private outdoor space for the one above. This taller block will be visible as a landmark when entering Sligo town from the north. It will also serve as a transition in scale to the future plans for tall buildings to the immediate north of our site.

**Jury Citation:** "The assessment panel were unanimous in their award to this submission which displayed an understanding of site, context and brief, a clear site strategy with a hierarchy of considered open spaces, supported by an innovative typology of building form and volumes. The block structure establishes permeability through the site with two defined routes one utilizing and upgrading the existing lane to the south, the second developing into a defined urban space – Pirn Mill Square – fronting onto Pirn Mill Rd and sheltered from Michael Conlon Rd traffic.

The individual dwellings are developed into two distinct typologies, the lower two storey type defining the public routes being composed of garden level units with courtyard units above at first floor, accessed by individual external stairs. Equipped with special units at the end of terraces to adjust to site conditions the type can have wider applicability in additional locations. The taller four-storey element of apartments marks the scheme from the approach across the Garavogue, establishing a marker for emerging height and density in the area. The language and expression of the scheme addresses the existing scale and context in a modest but assured way.

Almost unique amongst the submissions the proposal also addresses the construction approach, proposing timber frame off-site construction to reduce carbon emissions and construction time. The jury considered that with its considered quality, clear resolution of the site and applicability to other town sites that this submission addressed all the critical aspects of the brief and look forward to its design development and construction under the auspices of the DHLGH and Sligo County Council."

### **Second Prize Winner: Entry 5176, Aughey O Flaherty Architects**



Jury Citation: "This submission adopts a defensive site strategy of turning away from Michael Conlon Rd by establishing a central communal garden defined by two linear blocks – a principal frontage onto Pirn Mill Road with a secondary mews wall of units protecting the

space from the road. The scheme is distinguished by its inventive development of upper floor courtyards providing a series of private open spaces to dwellings, without reduced overlooking. The terrace of units onto Pirn Mill Road, for example, develops a three-storey paired type with flats at ground level and two-storey marionettes above, entered by shared stairs from the communal garden. These carefully planned maisonettes have split living areas, with kitchen / dining at entry level, with living room on upper floor with adjoining roof terrace. The language of recessed ground floor and planar surfaces above, modulated by the private terraces, defines an elegant series of facades to Pirn Mill Road and the communal garden, which sit well within the adjoining context. The articulate, well designed dwelling units forming terraces provides a typology applicable to many sites.”

**Third Prize Winner: Entry 5174, Hall Black Douglas Architects**



Jury Citation: “This submission is characterised by the adoption of a deck access typology configured in a T-shape arrangement, one three-storey block fronting onto Pirn Mill Road with a further four storey bar at right angles defining two spaces at ground level within the site where the existing wall to the N4 is retained. The apartment typology is clear with access to the ground floor units from Pirn Mill Road and with wide frontage, single-storey units entered from upper level deck access from an efficient single core, with recessed balconies orientated south and west over half their frontage. This scaling up of openings and the buildings general form with pitched roof generates a robust, clear form which has resonances with the nearby traditional mill forms. The typology could be explored further on alternative sites.”

*In addition to the Prize Winners, the Jury also made the following non-premiated award:*

**Highly Commended: Entry 4975, GKMP Architects**



Jury Citation: “This scheme seeks to create a dense urban fabric through a site strategy that deploys a series of four alternating two-storey blocks and intervening gardens to occupy the complete site, establishing an east-west grain with permeability through the remains of the

enclosing wall to the N4 and with a north-south route, connected to access stairs, that weaves through the gardens. The individual dwellings are carefully designed, essentially as single-storey apartments accessed from ground level walkways or deck access on the upper floor, cleverly arranged to avoid overlooking and provide private balconies orientated to open spaces. This is a considered strategy that generates a highly specific urban form which could have clear applicability to other sites.”

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