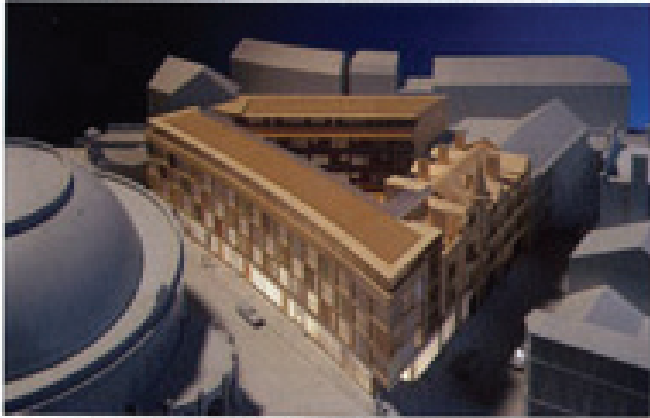




Ulrika Frimley's thatched poolhouse extension is high-tech modern yet continues local traditions



Ar-NM's mixed-use housing and commercial scheme in Leeds adapts a shopping arcade well etc

“
The terrace is a proven way of creating lively, safe streets
 ”

for £185,000, and has since had it valued at £215,000, a very high price in Scotland. The structure is predominantly of wood, with extensive glazing and an open-plan living space. This is a fitting resort to the rash of horrendous kit-housing that infects rural Scotland, and could become a model where there were very few good examples before.

Another major issue that will undoubtedly come to define the look of housing in the future is the need to make housing environmentally sustainable. Already, high-profile examples of a new sustainability aesthetic have been completed: Michael Hopkins' new MP's block opposite the Houses of Parliament, and Short Associates' Lancaster Library at Coventry University to name but two. Buildings like these wear their sustainability like a badge, with natural ventilation coasts being the in-your-face signs of an ecological building strategy. This is taking some time to trickle into housing design, but is beginning to, with the Integer House, seen on a television documentary last year, and other one-off sustainable houses.

The most important large-scale ecological housing scheme so far attempted on these shores is nearing completion in Sutton, Surrey. The Beckington Zero Energy Development (BeZed) is vaultingly ambitious — a collaboration between the Peabody Trust Housing Association, environmental charity Bioregional and architect Bill Dunster.

The look of these does not immediately recall any traditional form of housing, with its featherwork units, grassroofs, recycled wood cladding, ventilation coasts and roof terraces. The form has been arrived at through research into how the shape and orientation of a house can maximise the benefits of natural light and ventilation. It is intended as a prototype for future development, with recycled construction components, combined heat and power generation and recycled waste water, and could well be the shapes of things. These may not have the slick, modernised lines of the best new housing, but they may well prove attractive to

homebuyers, especially as utility bills will be cut by up to a third compared to a conventional house of the same size.

These houses are laid out as a terrace, a house type that is a proven way of creating lively, safe streets and sociable communities. The density is much higher than conventional suburban development, and comparable to that of Georgian terraces. At street level, rows of front doors create a recognisable street scene, and set a good precedent for future development, ending the proliferation of self-contained and inward-looking housing developments, and starting a street grid that could be extended to create a legible residential quarter.

Densification of the suburbs is also a big issue; making this comfortable is an even bigger one. At BeZed, high-density does not mean a lack of space. Every flat has external space, be it a roof terrace, garden or balcony, and its sustainable credentials make it even more attractive to the conscientious family.

Similar layout principles are applied in an urban context in Peter Barber Architects and Jessica & Whiles' masterplan for two large estates in Hackney. A return to terraced housing, at high density, but with plenty of outdoor space and good surveillance on to the street is helping to design out crime in these areas. This is the kind of development that aims to end the urban wildernesses of the worst council estates through high-quality design. The surrounding environment is equally important: a mile-long linear park shows that housing design alone cannot improve communities, but good masterplanning and landscaping are needed as well.

These examples show that there is a lot to be positive about in British housing design. With good designers and far-sighted planners, perhaps we can start to imagine our futures as being in our existing cities, rather than imagining a place where we can start all over again.

Kieran Long is buildings editor of *Building Design* magazine