

## HOW WE DID IT...

# Barking square planting regenerates area image

**PROJECT** Barking Town Square, one of the mayor of London's 100 Public Spaces.

**BACKGROUND** A13 Artscape was the catalyst for public realm improvements which were integrated into a mixed-use scheme that secured backing when Barking was recognised as an area of opportunity in the sustainable communities plan.

**WHO IS BEHIND IT?** London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, Muf Architecture/Art, Redrow Regeneration.

**PROJECT AIMS** To improve Barking's public realm in the context of a mixed-use scheme.

**SKILLS INVOLVED** Planning, urban design, civil engineering, project management, consultation, tenacity and leadership.

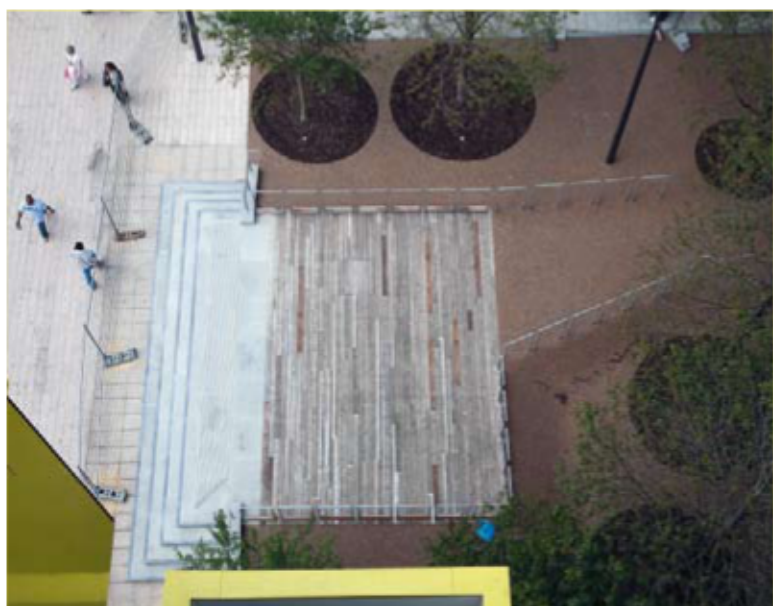
In Barking signs of growth can be detected. Woodland has taken root in the civic square and four mixed-use buildings stand tall, signalling the completion of an award-winning project to bring a distinctive character to the east London borough.

Designed by Muf Architecture/Art, the finely landscaped civic square frames the learning centre at the heart of a major regeneration which has transformed the once-declining borough into a hub of activity while preserving its industrial heritage.

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham head of spatial regeneration Jeremy Grint believes that high-quality design has been key to the success of the redevelopment: "Its symbolism is about changing people's perceptions of the town."

An arboretum follows the line of an arcade paved in black-and-white terrazzo and dotted with chandeliers. Steps lead to the pink Spanish granite floor of the square and up to the 1950s brick town hall.

A cornerstone of the square is a folly wall, complete with a secret garden. A partition screens a supermarket with 19th century salvage by master bricklayers from Barking College. A *memento mori* to the major regeneration, it points to the varied architectural styling that won the 2008 European prize for Urban Public Space.



**Town square: arboretum and paving create high-quality public space**

One factor of success was Muf's link with Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, which built the four blocks — the Lemonade Building, Bath House, Piano Works and Bike Shed — that surround the square. The architects and designers introduced the arcade to link to the main shopping street of Ripple Road and, via the town centre's ring road, the vast Gascoigne Estate.

Having overseen the planning process from the start, Grint emphasises the importance of noticing the details of infrastructure. The scheme has 500 housing units, a hotel and retail space. Tiny elements make all the difference, he says.

The chandelier lights, designed by Muf and Tom Dixon, give scale to

the arcade and illuminate the trees in the arboretum. Wild cherry, river birch, willow trees and swamp cypresses cluster around the gently sloping area, creating a pleasant green space for residents of the 17-storey Lemonade Building, whose flats only have balconies for air.

"The arboretum softens the high buildings. Because we put in mature trees, it created an instant impact. The wooded play area brings elements of the countryside into the centre of the town," says Grint.

Muf lead designer Alison Crawshaw says: "We have worked closely with the council on the planting of trees and fencing models, ensuring that the arboretum has good irrigation. There are benches to enjoy the sun, undulating play areas and spaces for group activity."

Grint has overseen modifications since Redrow Regeneration took over the development in 2006. "This project was done over a period of time when many people were resistant to what was being suggested. So there was an element of pushing the boundaries," he explains.

He advises that when taking the helm of a public infrastructure redevelopment, planners should hold on to their vision of a high-quality design while recognising the need for compromise in the process. ■

Nicola Homer

“Details such as chandelier lights are important — giving scale to the arcade and illuminating trees