



↑↓ Brandon Street, front elevation



Housing, London

Metaphorm Architects set new standards for public housing in terms of form, cost, procurement and material palette.

UNITED KINGDOM — TEXT: ISABELLE PRIEST

Given their very different visual appearances, it is somewhat surprising to learn that these two housing projects have so many similarities. Both are by Metaphorm Architects. Both are jointly for London Borough of Southwark and London & Quadrant Housing Association. And both are part of the same regeneration scheme of the soon-to-be demolished Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle, south London.

This is a testament, however, to the scheme's organizers. In their ten-year re-housing programme of the estate's 3000 inhabitants, Southwark council have chosen to variously develop fifteen local plots as pilot projects, holding an open architectural competition for each.

In so doing, the council have taken a rather different, perhaps recompensing, approach than to that which first led to the building of the vast, Brutalist Heygate in the 1970s. Like many contemporary estates, Heygate rapidly fell into a state with unmanageable levels of dilapidation and crime. Consequently, Southwark seems to have taken the line that they do not know what state-funded housing today should look and feel like. It is this open-mindedness that has allowed room for such diversity in the resultant architecture. The regeneration of this area has been courageously embraced as an opportunity to define new standards for public housing in terms of form, cost, procurement and material palette. In essence, the council has adopted a policy toward sensitive, site-specific housing as the progressive, forward-thinking model for schemes encompassing mixed tenure. Furthermore, the pilot schemes set the bar extraordinarily high for private housing as well.

Tasked with guiding the council toward the most appropriate and optimal intervention for the site, Metaphorm Architects entered the competitions for Brandon Street and Library Street. With two very contrasting proposals, in 2006 and 2007, respectively, Metaphorm won them both.

At Library Street, Metaphorm have used a sequence of private- and controlled-access outdoor spaces to determine the massing of their design. The architects also used the divided geometry of the site by the intersection of Milcote Street to split the housing typologies into 34 variously-sized flats in a five-storey block on the west side and six four-bedroom townhouses to the east. An existing community garden on the otherwise derelict and vacant site was retained and extended to unify the scheme, merging with the townhouses' back gardens and a formal, sloped landscaped entrance to the flats. In addition to the ground level outdoor space, the apartments have been provided with generous loggias, terraces and balconies proportional to the size of the flats. These wrap around the east, west and south faces of the block. Likewise, the townhouses have been planned with small gardens and a *piano nobile* with full-width balcony. Both typologies additionally have use of a shared garden planted with trees and flowers on the roof of the apartments.

Meanwhile, the emphasis at Brandon Street has been extensively about the public space and interface. The building is characterized by one long facade of hexagonal tiles blurring in colour gradient from deep red to bright yellow. The elevation gently curves in line with pre-existing (since replaced) trees on the most public side, Brandon Street, which is heavily used by commuter cyclists during rush hour. At ground level, a two-tone, snaking bench has replaced a wall previously utilized by the adjacent nursery school children to wait for their parents. At the centre of this colourful wall is the entrance to a set-paved courtyard from which access to the five storeys of flats is gained. The other public elevations are much more discrete, using the materiality and form of neighbouring buildings to inform their design.

Whilst these are visually incongruous buildings, Metaphorm's meticulous detailing and sourcing of unique but affordable materials really sets the projects apart. This is especially noteworthy, given the limitations of the Design and Build



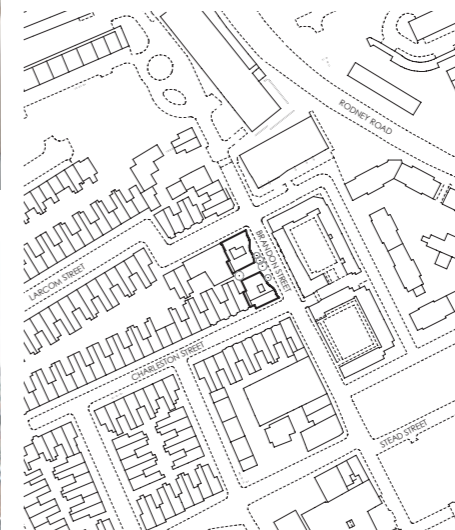
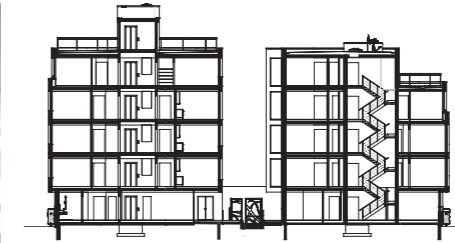
↑ Entrance to courtyard



↑↓ Apartment interior



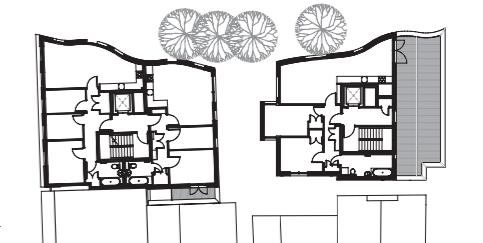
↓ Longitudinal section



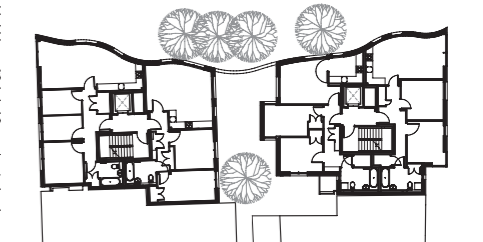
↑ Detail of the tiled facade ↓ South-west end facade



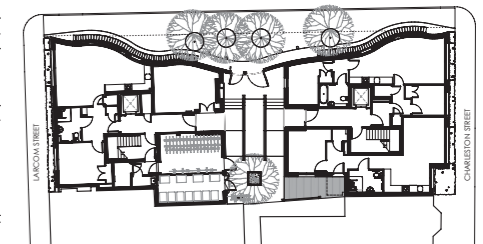
↓ Fourth floor



↓ First floor

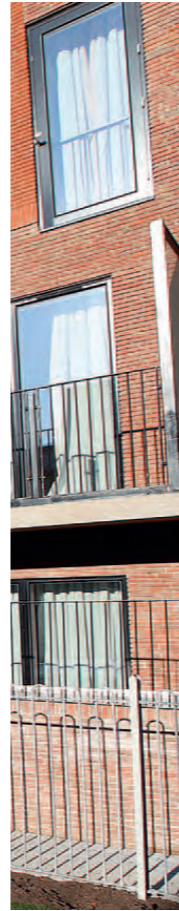


↓ Ground floor





↑ Library Street, apartment tower and town houses



↓ Second floor



↑ Entrance to the apartment block



↑ Top floor apartment, roof terrace



↑ Town house interior

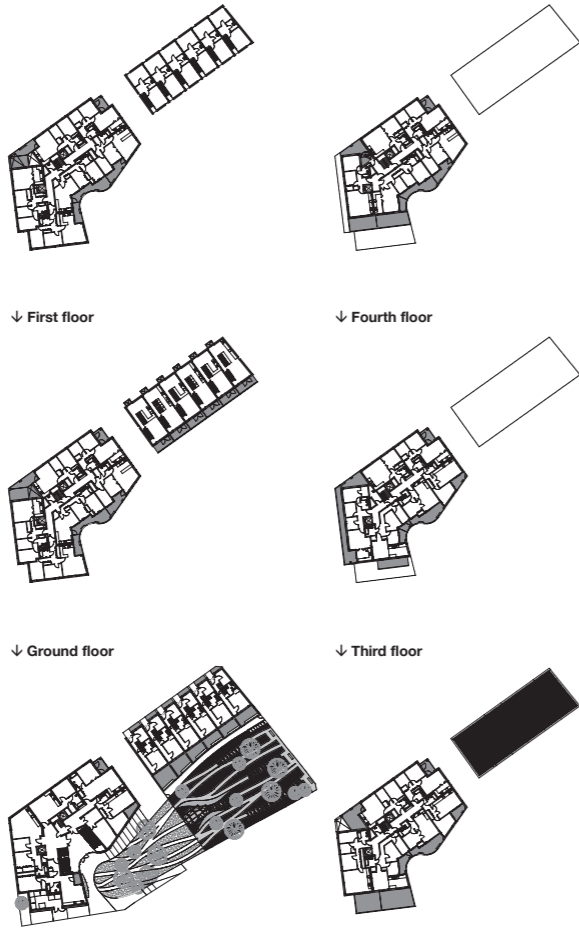
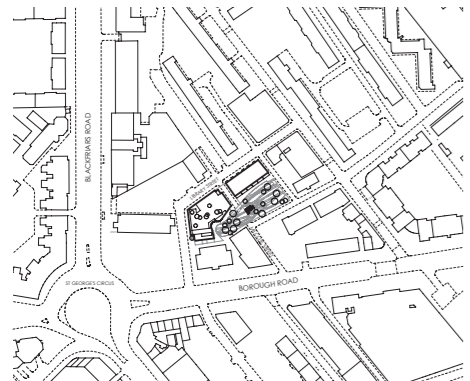
(Housing, London)

contract type specified. The buildings are also particularly interesting as they are very much part of a pan-European project. At Library Street, the five shades of ultra-slimline, handmade-quality bricks were sourced from Belgium, whilst at Brandon Street, the 37 coloured tiles were sourced from France, the black, slightly ceramic bricks from Germany, the granite setts were off-cuts from a Portuguese supplier, the scratch-render is Belgian, and the aluminium-veneered timber windows supplied by a company that operates across the continent. In many cases this involved a great deal of effort by the architects, as they visited suppliers in person.

In all, this European approach has influenced very particular colourful and playful styles of architecture that give a crafted feel to both projects and go a long way in achieving the architects' aim to 'break away from the form and materials of existing social housing'. ←

**BRANDON STREET HOUSING SCHEME, 2006–2012
LIBRARY STREET HOUSING SCHEME, 2007–2012**

Architect: Metaphorm Architects
Client: London Borough of Southwark and London & Quadrant Housing Association
Address: Elephant & Castle, London
Info: <http://metaphorm.com/>



↓ Fourth floor



↓ Third floor