

PUBLIC SPACE AND THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT

London Modernist Case Study Briefing

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ELEPHANT AND CASTLE SHOPPING CENTRE



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PROJECT INFORMATION

Case Study: Elephant and Castle (E&C) Shopping Centre

Dates: E & C Masterplans (1947, 1956, 1958); Shopping Centre (1965)

Architects: E & C Masterplans by London County Council (1947 – R. Matthews, Chief Architect, LCC; 1956 - Leslie Martin, Chief Architect, LCC; 1958 - Hubert Bennett, Chief Architect, LCC); Shopping Centre - Boissevain and Osmond

Clients: London County Council and the Ministry of Transport; Willets Group (Shopping Centre)

Contractors: William Willett (Contractors) Ltd in collaboration with Tersons Ltd.

Financing: Masterplan - London County Council; roadways and roundabouts – Ministry of Transport; Shopping Centre - Willets Group

Site area: 31 acres (whole masterplan); shopping centre 290,000 sq ft commercial and 100,000 sq ft office

Cost: Cost of construction c. £2.5 million

SUMMARY

Elephant and Castle was one of the Comprehensive Development Areas (CDAs) delivered by the London County Council (LCC) in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act (1947), and part of the wider project of post-war reconstruction. The LCC was responsible for devising a masterplan for a number of prominent sites anchored around two roundabouts, a traffic system devised by the Ministry of Transport, and not much liked by architects and planners who then had to work with it. Sites were apportioned in a mixed development of housing, retail, commerce, education and health.

In 1958, when a second version of the LCC Architect's Department masterplan was published, the Council's Town Planning Committee directed its executive officers to begin the development of 'Site No.1', which ran the length of Newington Causeway opposite the Metropolitan Tabernacle. It was this site that was intended as a Shopping Centre, a new covered shopping precinct and concourse, linking the various transport interchanges (bus, rail, tube, car and pedestrian). The addition of an office tower, not originally intended for this site, was reflective of the boom in speculative development in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The competition for the shopping centre design received 36 submissions in the form of partnerships between lead developers and their chosen architects. The eventual winners were Willetts Group, a family firm of estate agent and builders being pushed in new directions by inexperienced managers, with the firm Boissevain and Osmond as architects. The practice, a husband (Paul Boissevain) and wife (Barbara Osmond) team, had had growing success in competitions of international stature such as the Sydney Opera House, the National Gallery in London and civic buildings for Toronto. Although inexperienced in shopping centre design, they were nonetheless selected for their skilled use of ramps and sunken concourses to guide the shopper through and up the centre.

The success of the Shopping Centre, thought to be inevitable because of the concentration of working and residential populations in its vicinity, was by no means forthcoming. Within two years of opening, it had been condemned as a 'white elephant'. Remedial attempts on the design, ranging from repainting to installing market stalls first inside, then around the sunken exterior of the building, did not produce long-term commercial sustainability.

The story of the public space in and around the Shopping Centre is frustrated by limited records. Unlike Peter and Alison Smithson, Boissevain and Osmond left no archive of drawings or correspondence. Similarly, Southwark Council have retained only limited records relating to the project. The records of the London County Council, however, provide some insight into the design and planning process. Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, despite these archival holes, is nevertheless of real importance to understanding part of the shift in the conception of post-war public space. The Centre was a fully enclosed American-style shopping mall over three levels, and acted as a podium for a separate office block. Sunken piazzas outside flowed into a public atrium space inside. It was the second of its kind in Europe, and its spatial organisation and its marrying of the car and shopping pointed the way to contemporary shopping centres like Westfield.

1. CHRONOLOGY

- 1911 Walkway systems introduced by Southwark Council to address pedestrian/traffic congestion. Predecessor to the pedestrian walkways and pedways of the Southbank and the Barbican.
- 1926 Ministry of Transport (MoT) proposed a new southern ring road that would divert traffic in and out of London around E&C. Not implemented.
- 1929 MoT proposed a giant circus for E&C, with central park node, and an outer boulevard lined with commercial and residential.
- 1930 LCC proposed, based on plans from the MoT, a softer treatment of the circus, based in part on the plans for the Aldwych from 1905, the last buildings of which were being finished, and largely welcomed. The LCC plan was approved by Parliament, but shelved during the Depression.
- 1936 *Trunk Roads Act* passed (regulations to prioritise car circulation in new developments).
- 1937 *Barlow Commission on the State of Traffic in Towns and The Highway Development Survey* (Sir Charles Bressey, Sir Edwin Luytens) introduced central planning and spatial reorganisation.
- 1941 10th and 11th May, Elephant and Castle heavily bombed during the Blitz.
- 1942 *London Replanned* published by the Royal Academy called for a “grandiose new capital”. Proposed E&C redevelopment was a large park with wide boulevards.
- 1943 *County of London Plan* (1943), Patrick Abercrombie and J.H. Forshaw proposed a new road plan for London, and identified E&C as a traffic roundabout with architectural additions “dominated” by traffic management.
- 1947 *Town and Country Planning Act* enabled local planning authorities to designate Comprehensive Development Areas, effectively replacing the ‘Reconstruction Areas’ set out by the 1944 Act
- 1947 The LCC redevelopment plan for E&C: a 47-acre site with a 37-acre park to the west.
- 1950 Central government rejected Abercrombie and Forshaw’s new road network. Ad hoc traffic planning continued.
- 1951 LCC *London Development Plan* identified 100 potential areas for comprehensive development. Eight sites were selected to be Comprehensive Redevelopment Areas under the *Town and Country Planning Act, 1947*. These areas included the South Bank and E&C. Led by planner Graeme

Shankland, E&C was to comprise of 31 acres, two roundabouts, an axial roadway, six development sites, and a high tower at the northern end. It would incorporate commercial, pedestrian subways, a sunken plaza at the northern roundabout, and public spaces. MoT approved the plan and began road works.

- 1954 Conservative central government passed the more developer-friendly *Town and Country Planning Act* of 1954, lifting wartime building licences. Tall buildings permitted.
- 1956 February – LCC Town Planning Committee announced Comprehensive Development Area plans for 30-acre site at E&C. As part of this they announced a new shopping centre, to be constructed on the east side of Newington Butts between the two roundabouts. A plan was published under direction of LCC Chief Architect Leslie Martin to accompany new road layout. Perimeter blocks lined the new roads, with a large public piazza at grade, and a sunken plaza at the roundabout.
- 1958 Competition for the replanning of the centre of Berlin – Boissevain and Osmond submit a scheme with Percy Johnson-Marshall with Colin Buchanan as a consultant. Their scheme ‘proposed to create a civilised environment within which the pedestrian could walk the length and breadth of the city centre on an elevated platform without encountering a motor vehicle...’
- 1958 October – Updated plan for E&C Comprehensive Development Area by LCC Chief Architect Hubert Bennett. Perimeter blocks dropped in favour of “freer” urban fabric, with point and low blocks set back from the roads, and “occasional” public space between buildings, rather than large plazas.
- 1959 July – LCC Architect and Valuer instructed by the Town Planning Committee to discuss development of shopping centre site with developers, and stimulate public and developer interest by advertising the scheme. Valuer draws up preliminary requirements for development of shopping centre site.
- 1959 September – Meeting held at the LCC with interested developers, architects and surveyors about procedure and possibilities for the site.
- 1960 February – Town Planning Committee report on proposals for development from 36 private developers and their architects. Five schemes are shortlisted and asked to carry forward their designs
- 1960 July – Winning scheme by Willets Group with Boissevain and Osmond architects announced.
- 1961 Faraday Memorial in the E&C round-about completed by the LCC Architecture Department (Rodney Gordon architect).
- 1961 February – outline planning permission given for Shopping Centre development. Number of revisions required

- 1961 June – submission of detailed plans for Shopping Centre by Boissevain and Osmond.
- 1961 July – detailed plans (including materials) agreed in principle.
- 1962 Castle House in E&C is completed by the LCC Architecture Department under Hubert Bennett.
- 1962 March – William Willett authorised to include additional offices on the site subject to further planning application. They also asked to incorporate restaurant/banqueting facilities within the main shopping area.
- 1964 LCC completed the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts in E&C.
- 1965 Draper Estate in E&C tops out at 230 feet – the highest residential tower block in London at the time.
- The Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre by Boissevain and Osmond completed for the Willets Group. (The first was the 1964 Birmingham Bull Ring, developed by the Laing Development Company and Birmingham City Council.). Hannibal House, the office tower on top, attracted no private sector renters. The Ministry of Works took it over for its own offices.
- Greater London Council replaced London County Council.
- 1969 October – Concrete-clad metal-faced walls replaced with glazed bays, and giant illuminated red signs reading ‘Shopping Centre’ installed.
- 1970 c. December, market arcades installed within the shopping concourses.
- 1977 May – External pedestrian areas within the Shopping Centre classified as ‘walkways’ (i.e. no longer private space) in order to be more effectively policed after a spate of ‘hooliganism’.
- 1979 July – Conversion of unoccupied upper parts of shopping centre into offices for the Department of Health and Society Security by the Property Services Agency. Building clad with glass-reinforced concrete panels.
- 1990 August – Shopping Centre is painted pink, replacing its original ‘murky green’ colour and an outdoor market is set up in the surrounding ‘moat’ of the Centre.

2. POLICY AND IDEOLOGY

i. National

The Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Development Area, and the Shopping Centre which made up one of its most important sites, was testament to the strength of municipal power in planning policy in the immediate post-war decades. The London County Council (LCC) had responsibility for masterplanning, procurement, planning permission, and supervision of the development. The national policy emphasis on reconstruction after World War 2 allowed the LCC to develop Comprehensive Development Areas. The *Town and Country Planning Act* in 1944 had laid down the idea of Declaratory Orders for areas that had suffered war-damage. Under the *Town and Country Planning Act 1947*, which instituted much wider ranging reform of the planning system, these areas were now deemed Comprehensive Development Areas, to be administered by local authorities.¹

There were two other important developments in planning ideology. The first was the ever-increasing impact of motor vehicle traffic and private car.² The second was the impact of American architecture and planning on the UK. The covered shopping mall, in particular, was an American innovation.

ii. Municipal

The Comprehensive Development Area of Elephant and Castle was driven forward by the London County Council Architect's Department, a large and complex department which employed many prominent architects of the period at one time or another. Planning policy and delivery was the responsibility of the Town Planning Division of the Architect's Department, headed by Arthur Ling until 1956, with some 250 staff.³

As a separate but related consideration, the Ministry of Transport (MoT) had proposed a new road layout predicated on two large roundabouts at ground level for the Elephant and Castle, which were roundly criticized by the LCC's planning division, which had suggested a multi-level intersection. Percy Johnson-Marshall dismissed the MoT layout as 'obsolete': the decision and preference for perimeter development made "the whole terms of reference...inimical to a contemporary solution".⁴ Proposals for a lower level pedway (in other words, pedestrian segregation from vehicular traffic), including a sunken concourse on one of the roundabouts, were then unwisely rejected in favour of pedestrian tunnels that connected individual sites.

In 1956, the *Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Development Plan* was published under Leslie Martin's headship of the LCC Architect's Department, and jointly authored by the LCC Engineer and Valuer. It was typical of changing planning policy and ideology in the post-war

¹ P. L. Garside, 'The significance of post-war London reconstruction plans for East End industry', *Planning Perspectives* vol.12 no.1 (1997), pp.19-36.

² For a broader overview of this theme, see K. Morrison and J. Minnis, *Carscapes: The Motor Car, Architecture and Landscape in Britain* (New Haven, 2012).

³ For an effective summary of the structure and activities of the London County Council Architect's Department, see E. Harwood, 'London County Council Architects (act. c.1940 – 1965)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May, 2016), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/97268>, accessed 13 October 2016.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.187.

period.⁵ Proposals for Elephant and Castle before the war had been a “classic example of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century” planning.⁶ Abercrombie’s *County of London Plan*, for instance, had proposed a “grand manner” hexagonal roundabout with perimeter development: “The main object was to take advantage of the extensive bomb damage to create a new centre for this part of London by a development surrounding on the east, west and south by buildings of similar height, and on the north by an imposing tall building worthy of this position.”⁷

Changes were made to the Comprehensive Development Area plan in 1958 to reflect shifts in planning preference away from perimeter blocks and uniform levels. As the trade magazine, *Keystone*, noted at the time: “The original design, apart from the tall block of offices at the north end of the schemes, showed the roads and the Broadway lined by generally level development. It is a considerable achievement on the part of all concerned that it has been possible to diversity the heights and to free up the alignments of the buildings without losing the unity of the development as a whole.”⁸

iii. Local Authority

Because the London County Council had overall planning responsibility for the Elephant and Cast Comprehensive Development Area and the road layout was determined by the Ministry of Transport, there was little consultation or involvement of Southwark Borough Council in the planning and design of the Shopping Centre.

iv. Parties in Power

Municipal Politics

The LCC from 1955 – 1965 was dominated by the Labour party. The first GLC government elected in 1964, taking power on 1 April 1965, was also Labour.

GLC

1964 - Labour

1967 - Conservative

1970 - Conservative

1973 - Labour

1977 - Conservative

1981 - Labour

1985 - Thatcher government abolishes the GLC effective 1 July 1986

Greater London Authority (established in GLA Act 1999)

Ken Livingstone (Labour) 4 May 2000 - 4 May 2008

Boris Johnson (Conservative) 4 May 2008 - Present

⁵ According to Percy Johnson-Marshall, much of the planning was completed by 1954. See also London County Council, *A general description of the proposals for the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle* (London, 1956).

⁶ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities*, p.187.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.186.

⁸ ‘Elephant and Castle Special’, *Keystone (Association of Building Technicians Journal)*, vol.32 no.3 (Autumn 1958), p.1.

State Politics

Winston Churchill (Conservative) 10 May, 1940 – 26 July, 1945

Clement Atlee (Labour) 26 July, 1945 – 26 October, 1951

Winston Churchill (Conservative) 26 October, 1951 – 6 April, 1955

Anthony Eden (Conservative) 6 April, 1955 - 10 January 1957

Harold Macmillan (Conservative) 10 January 1957 – 18 October 1963

Alec Douglas-Home (Conservative) 19 October 1963 – 16 October 1964

Harold Wilson (Labour) 16 October 1964 – 19 June 1970

Edward Heath (Conservative) 19 June 1970 – 4 March 1974

Harold Wilson (Labour) 4 March 1974 – 5 April 1976

James Callaghan (Labour) 5 April 1976 – 4 May 1979

Margaret Thatcher (Conservative) 4 May 1979 – 28 November 1990

3. AGENTS

i. Client

London County Council

As described above, the London County Council was the planning authority for the Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Development Area. The LCC had responsibility for masterplanning and encouraging development on the identified sites, often through competition between developers and their associated architects. The LCC were interested in developing the shopping centre typology, and engaged with developers and architects at an early stage. Within the LCC, the Town Planning Committee, the Valuer's department and the Architect's Department, especially the Planning Division. The Planning Division had four departments: one for the *County of London Development Plan*, another for Research, a third for Planning Applications, and a fourth, a 'Reconstruction Areas Group', headed by Percy Johnson-Marshall and responsible for dealing with war-damaged areas.

In 1956, Johnson-Marshall reorganised the group and brought in three senior planners, Walter Bor, Gordon Logie and Graeme Shankland, supported by a team of eight or so fellow planners.⁹ This group took responsibility for Comprehensive Redevelopment Areas, which had been proposed in the LCC *Administrative County of London Development Plan of 1951*, including a 31-acre site at the Elephant and Castle.¹⁰ The reorganisation was in part necessitated by the fact that there had been little interest in the site since the publication of the first plan. In order to stimulate investment, the LCC began to use public-private partnership as a development vehicle. As Johnson-Marshall described it, the "LCC became worried and decided to pump-prime the operation."¹¹ In order to stimulate development, the College of Printing was moved to its more prominent site and designed in-house by the LCC. Its original location was given over to the Draper Street housing project: "When interest in

⁹ See P. Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities* (Edinburgh, 1966) p.198.

¹⁰ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities*, p.187. For an account of Shankland, and one which mentions his role in the Elephant and Castle CDA see O. Saumaurez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland. A Sixties Architect-Planner and Political Culture of the British Left', *Architectural History*, (2014) pp. 393-422.

¹¹ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities*, p.186.

the area had thus been revived by public enterprise, the LCC then held limited competitions for the other available sites.”¹²

The LCC recognised early on that it would be unwise both economically and architecturally to carry out the whole 40 acres of redevelopment itself.¹³ The *South London Press* reported in January of 1965 that the whole of the Elephant and Castle development area was “the product of a firm alliance between public and private enterprise”. The first commercial development was by the prominent Modernist architect Ernő Goldfinger: Alexander Fleming House. The Shopping Centre was similarly left to the private sector. In August 1960, the journal *Official Architecture and Planning* reported that it had been “intended from the first that this part of the scheme [the Shopping Centre] should be entrusted to a private developer”.¹⁴ Opinions on the success of these private-public partnerships vary. The LCC lacked business sense, and Willetts failed to adequately investigate the commercial potential of the site.¹⁵

Willetts Group

Willetts Group had been a housebuilding firm and estate agency with its roots in the second half of the 19th century. It was later acquired by the Westminster Trust, itself eventually acquired by Land Securities. Oliver Marriott’s *Property Boom* profiles the company and its leading executives in his chapter on Elephant and Castle: “After the war it [Willetts Group] had marked time until 1956 when Kenneth Rose, a speculative housebuilder from Birmingham, came in as joint managing director.”¹⁶ Rose employed Bill Albery to help him develop the business, and Marriott notes that “Rose tried his hand at the Elephant and Castle competition as a way of taking Willett into the commercial development business, which he could see was booming, without needing too much capital tied up in sites.”¹⁷ Willetts were, however, unprepared for the undertaking and trusted the analysis of the LCC that the site would attract traders and customers. This trust proved misplaced.

Over the course of the project, Willetts itself went through testing times: Rose and Albery left after a dispute about the company’s direction, only to rejoin a year later when the company had been taken over by Charles Neale, a solicitor-turned-developer. In Marriott’s assessment, “Willetts paid dearly for its rash attempt to jump on the band-wagon of the property boom”, although the company was ultimately protected by more prudent developments elsewhere.¹⁸

We have no information about the nature of the relationship between developer and architect once the competition had been won. Certainly, they do not seem to have worked together again, and neither party seemed to have attempted another shopping centre project.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Southwark Council Archives (hereafter, SCA), PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, *South London Press* (January 8 1965), p.13.

¹⁴ ‘Shopping Centre and Offices at the Elephant and Castle’, *Official Architecture and Planning* (August, 1960), p.347.

¹⁵ O. Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London, 1967), p.217.

¹⁶ Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p.217.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.222.

ii. Architect

Boissevain and Osmond were in joint practice from 1947, and based in Epsom at the time of the Shopping Centre project. Little biographical information or practice records survive.¹⁹ Paul Boissevain (1922–2014) was Dutch-born, and was trained and taught briefly at the Architectural Association (1951–1952). Barbara Osmond (1922–2010) trained at the Regent Street Polytechnic, qualifying in 1945. She was elected ARIBA in 1946, her proposers being Basil Spence, William Crabtree and J Kenneth Wheeler. They were a well-regarded practice and reasonably well-known after coming third in the Sydney Opera House Competition (1957), second in the National Gallery London Extension (1958-1959), and entered in the Toronto City Hall and Square Competition in 1958.²⁰ They were also well connected and in touch with the latest in planning theory and practice, submitting with Percy Johnson-Marshall an entry for the 1958 Berlin Hauptstadt competition to reconstruct the centre of Berlin, with Colin Buchanan acting as consultant. By the time of the Elephant and Castle the firm's design practice was, according to *The Architect and Building News*, reaching a period of maturity: "...the office is slowly developing a "style" which (for major projects) has its finest flowering to date in the Elephant scheme. Yet in the earlier and more humble jobs...the promise was there."²¹

iii. Pivotal relationships

Willetts and Boissevain and Osmond

Based on interviews with Albery, Rose and Boissevain, Marriott has noted that Willetts happened upon Boissevain and Osmond "after a chance meeting when Willett had sold Paul Boissevain a plot of land."²² Both inexperienced in the commercial development sector, we have little other insight into the working relationship of developer and architect. They do not seem to have worked together again, and neither party seems to have attempted another shopping centre project.

4. BRIEF

In terms of public space, the LLC declared that "[w]hen completed, the Elephant and Castle should be the first large area at the centre of any of our cities in which the detailing of the space between the buildings – the roads, pavements, underpasses, light-fittings and general urban clutter – has been treated as a major design problem in itself."²³

The brief for 'Site 1', allocated for the shopping centre, was to develop the three-acres between the two roundabouts opposite the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Site 2 covered what would become Erno Goldfinger's Alexander Fleming House, at this time identified as a "commercial and office site". Site 3 was the intended tower block with shops and offices. This "prominent site" would close "the main vista of the scheme", sitting above the Bakerloo

¹⁹ Some limited information can be found on their entry in the online Dictionary of Scottish Architects. See 'Boissevain and Osmond', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=401586, accessed October 19 2016.

²⁰ 'Boissevain and Osmond: a cross section through the output of the office of Paul Boissevain and Barbara Osmond', *Architect and Building News* (August 24 1960), pp.233-248.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.233.

²² Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p.217.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.16.

Line underground station.²⁴ Site 4 was intended as shops and offices, potentially with some residential accommodation, and Site 5, where the London School of Printing (now the London College of Communication) eventually sat, was earmarked for office and commercial accommodation with showrooms. Only one tower block was intended at this stage - at Site 3.

The LCC drew up further requirements for Site 1 that were widely advertised to over three hundred potential competitors. They stated that “buildings to be erected on this site will form part of a comprehensive architectural redevelopment and the Council attaches the greatest importance to the civic design aspect.”²⁵ Of a total of 3.2 acres, 0.83 acres were to be occupied by paved pedestrian areas, and there was a desire to give developers and their architects near total freedom in the design.²⁶ Public space, in particular ample forecourts, were an essential part of the briefs for the development of all the CDA sites after the revisions in 1958. A Joint Report of the Town Planning, Education and Housing Committees on Elephant and Castle from October of that year noted for instance, that the towers of the Draper Housing Estate and the College of Printing ‘have been placed in depth on their sites with wide forecourts leading to them; this gives the advantage of enabling the building forms to break away from the back of the pavement line at key points and of making additional and attractive paved and planted areas accessible to the public.’²⁷

The Shopping Centre was to be a minimum of 100,000 and a maximum of 130,000 square feet of shopping accommodation. The plot ratio was set at 1 ¼: 1 on the site, excluding the allocated pedestrian areas – the LCC was looking for near total coverage of the site. Reinstatement of existing traders on the site was also encouraged.²⁸ The development would need to include a restaurant and two public houses (one ‘built-in’ to the shopping centre, and the other ‘free-standing’ somewhere on the site). Advertising screens on the main façade were also stipulated as part of the LCC’s wish to turn the Elephant and Castle into the ‘Piccadilly’ of South London.

In September 1959, The LCC arranged a meeting with developers, surveyors and architects to go through the brief. Senior officers from the Architect and Valuer’s departments explained the competition procedure. The Town Planning Committee would shortlist a number of schemes based on those departments’ recommendations, and thereafter developers and their architects would be invited “to submit details amplifying their proposals and, if they so wished, amending their offers.” At the end of this process, the winning scheme would be chosen based on architectural merit and financial considerations. The

²⁴ London County Council, *A general description of the proposals for the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle* (London, 1956), p.23.

²⁵ LMA, LCC/MIN/11,865, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (20.7.59), ‘Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Development Area...Disposal and Redevelopment of Site No. 1’, Joint Report by the Architect and Valuer (1.7.59) presented to the Town Planning (Redevelopment and Road Improvements) Sub-Committee, Appendix, ‘Preliminary Particulars of Principal Shopping Centre (Site No. 1)’, Newington Butts, p.3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ LMA, LCC Minutes (1958), Joint Report of Town Planning Committee, Education Committee and Housing Committee on Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Redevelopment Area (October 21 1958), p.645.

²⁸ This particular stipulation is referred to in LMA, LCC Minutes (1960), Town Planning Committee Report, p.528. It is repeated in the ‘Particulars’ cited above, where it is noted that traders displaced from the CDA or by pre-war damage will be offered suitable accommodation by the developer.

LCC were careful to point out that they would not judge the competition solely on the basis of economical costings.

The competition attracted 36 proposals participants included Maurice Bebb (who proved so instrumental in realising *The Economist* plaza and buildings project), Richard Seifert and Partners, Matthews and Johnson-Marshall, Owen Luder, John Burnett, Tait and Partners, and other leading office-architects and practices of the day.²⁹

Those shortlisted were:

Arnold Lee, with Erno Goldfinger

Bernard Sunley Investment Trust Ltd, with Arthur Swift and Partners

Marcus Leaver and Associates, with Ardin and Brookes

Max Rayne with C H Elson and Partners

The competition concluded with the Willett Group and their architects, Boissevain and Osmond, as winners.

Hubert Bennett's Report for the Town Planning Committee categorised the entries into:

1) Shopping concourse on two levels:

These schemes proposed a subway shopping concourse, with lower shopping parades "usually laid out in a very spacious and attractive way...There is often a first floor for extra shop and storage space."

2) Ground level only schemes:

All pedestrian circulation space provided at ground level.

3) Ground and first floor schemes:

Two-level circulation, felt unlikely to be successful 'since there is little incentive to go up to the first floor walkway which is limited in extent...".

4) Recessed centre schemes:

"Often with deeply recessed central 'square' or 'place' which breaks from the main shopping frontage." Felt to be unsuccessful as they encouraged the formation of 'dead pockets' in the design

A select few, including the winning scheme, were felt to sit outside of these categories.³⁰

5. DESIGN

i. Design intentions

Because of a lack of records and archival material, it is difficult to construct any clear 'design intentions.' Nevertheless, Boissevain and Osmond's work with Percy Johnson-Marshall and Colin Buchanan for the 1958 Berlin competition gives some idea of their approach to urbanism at the time.

The Berlin submission was predicated on four principles or 'conditions' for the metropolitan

²⁹ See LMA, LCC/MIN/12,036, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (Jan – Jun 1960), Joint Report (9.2.60) by the Architect and Valuer, 'Disposal and Redevelopment of Site No.1', T.P.538, Appendix A (list of schemes submitted).

³⁰ Ibid., 'Disposal and Redevelopment of Site No.1', T.P.538, p.4.

centre: the first was to fulfil civic and economic (or functional) requirements; the second, to provide social activities; the third, to attract consumers as well as citizens, and the fourth, to provide “for them all as spectators, so that it can form an adequate theatre for them both as actors and audience”. This last principle meant that the city centre would be “an arrangement of spaces within buildings, of spaces between and around buildings, of spaces intermingled with trees, verdure and water. And all these spaces must be interconnected with the environs of the city and with other cities in a manner which will be efficient, safe and gracious for today and for the foreseeable future.”³¹

The brief for Elephant and Castle did not perhaps require such exalted objectives, but the Berlin submission provides insight into not only the minds of those involved in establishing the model of Comprehensive Development Areas, but also those appointed to design one of its most prominent sites. No doubt the imperatives of the developer’s need for a return on investment and the restrictions of planning regulations would have meant some compromise, let alone the scrutiny of the LCC’s councillors and executives. Nevertheless, the 1958 entry demonstrates that Boissevain and Osmond were, like many architects of their generation, interested in the problems of pedestrian and motor traffic. Collaborating with Johnson-Marshall and Buchanan also demonstrated a level of sophistication and engagement with leading thinkers and practitioners of the time. The basic concepts Johnson-Marshall listed were: “the Heart of the City”, borrowed from CIAM discourse, and City-Sector Planning, which championed “an almost complete upper-level pedestrian podium”. This Berlin podium level was to “consist of squares, terraces, walkways and a covered shopping centre”³². So that, although Boissevain and Osmond lacked direct experience of designing shopping centres, they shared with many of their contemporaries an urbanism that could help them make design decisions.

In addition, they were clearly interested in exploring the new typology of the covered shopping centre. Kathryn Morrison’s *English Shops and Shopping* provides a detailed discussion of the evolution of such developments:³³ “Planned managed shopping centres did not emerge in this country until the 1950s”, and in the post-war period, open-air pedestrian precincts were the norm for reconstructed areas.³⁴ Prompted by the LCC’s masterplan, Boissevain and Osmond’s Shopping Centre brought together the latest in American retail design with more traditional concerns about precinctual public space.

The covered shopping centre emerged in mid-1950s in the United States. The first examples were “little more than cheaply constructed boxes which relied on artificial lighting and air conditioning.”³⁵ They were, however, increasingly influential on British architecture as the typology developed, though in this context “they were adapted to less spacious urban locations, necessitating more compact parking and servicing arrangements”.³⁶ They also increasingly depended, as the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre illustrates, on artificial light and air conditioning, and it was “precisely these technological advances that had encouraged the adoption of the windowless wall for pre-war American department stores

³¹ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities*, p.117.

³² *Ibid.*, p.118.

³³ K. Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: an Architectural History* (New Haven, 2003).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.260.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.261.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

and post-war American malls, and which were now having a similar impact in Britain”.³⁷ Boissevain and Osmond may have been influenced by Walter Gropius’s proposals for a shopping centre in Boston, the Boston Back Bay Center (1953. Here, a “large shopping precinct was proposed at the upper level, together with offices, including the main office tower of forty storeys, an hotel, exhibition hall and large Convention hall”.³⁸

Boissevain and Osmond’s competition drawings show generous and rather glamorous public spaces inside and out, with elegantly dressed shoppers who bore little resemblance to the existing population around the site. In this, the architects took their cue from the LCC, which envisaged the Elephant and Castle redevelopment as an extension of London’s West End, little understanding north Londoners’ complete lack of interest in crossing the river, or the resistance of the local area to gentrification. That was to take many decades more.

Little evidence survives of the developer’s design intentions. Willetts Group were, however, fairly conscious of public relations and produced a brochure for the development in advance of its completion. This gives some indication of how they viewed the design, which they described as “the largest and most ambitious shopping venture ever to be embarked upon in London”, set “to revolutionise shopping concepts throughout Britain”.³⁹ Sited in a “spacious pedestrian piazza”, the Centre would be “more than a major traffic intersection. Indeed, its spacious Concourse and its pleasant, planted piazza will make the Shopping Centre the most convenient and congenial place to meet one’s friends in the whole of South London”.⁴⁰

ii. Design development

As described above, Boissevain and Osmond’s scheme was selected after a two stage competition, the first stage of which had attracted over 30 entries, and the latter stage of which was based on more developed design and financial schemes by developer and architect. The LCC Architect’s Report described the winning scheme as “in a class by itself”.⁴¹ In a subsequent press release, the Council described it as “being quite outstanding in its original conception of an arcaded multi-level shopping centre and also producing a simple and extremely fine architectural composition. The financial offer of the Group was, in the Committee’s judgement, also the most favourable of the five schemes...”.⁴² It was felt that it provided more shopping space (214,000 sq ft) and less office space (70,000 sq ft) – at competition stage – than the other schemes.

The building was planned on three levels, with accommodation for 100 shop units. The most prominent feature was a “great glass roofed arcade”, retractable for clement weather and much commented upon in contemporary press accounts. In addition, “planting and fountains, sculpture, pavement cafes and seats for shoppers” were provided, though in the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Our Cities*, p.147.

³⁹ SCA, PAM 658.87, brochure entitled ‘The Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre – A Willett Development’, p.1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.10.

⁴¹ LMA, LCC/MIN/12,036, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (Jan – Jun 1960), Joint Report (9.2.60) by the Architect and Valuer, ‘Disposal and Redevelopment of Site No.1’, T.P.538, p.7.

⁴² SCA, PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, ‘LCC Press Release – Press Conference (14.7.60): Elephant and Castle Comprehensive Redevelopment Scheme – New Shopping Centre.’

end, the public realm was much less animated than this description promised.⁴³ It was noted that the levels of the floors had been so arranged “that pedestrians need only travel half a flight of stairs up or down by easy ramps to reach the two main floors”.⁴⁴ In the winning scheme, the floor of main arcade was nine feet above pavement level, with a lower arcade at seven feet below the pavement level, with connections to the subway systems and the sunken pedestrian concourse. The levels were slightly adjusted in the final scheme.

The shopping arcade was cruciform in plan – the sixty foot main arm ran the whole length of the site, and the long mass of the shopping block was felt to unify the two roundabouts.⁴⁵ The shorter arm across the site connected the bus stops on Newington Causeway to the mainline station at the rear of the site. The 170 foot office block above, later named Hannibal House, matched the height of the tower of the London School of Printing across the road. In his report, Hugh Bennett felt that the scheme “provide[s] a shopping centre it would be pleasure to shop in, with high standard of amenity and convenience...and yet manages to achieve the result in very simple and practical terms”.⁴⁶

Outline planning permission was sought in January 1961 and approved the following month, subject to a number of conditions. Those most relevant to the development of shopping centre’s public spaces included alterations to the new road layout, the level of the forecourt and the position of ramps, subways and staircases to ease communication between the various transport systems. Better access was required for fire-fighting vehicles, and overall means of entrance and egress to prevent congestion. These further details were worked out over the summer of 1961, and final approval was granted in September of that year.

iii. Design as built

In 1962, with Albery and Rose having returned to Willetts, the firm requested to move and expand the restaurant facilities and increase the office accommodation. The restaurant had originally been sited between the shopping tower and the office block. This was indicated in plans and photographs of models published in the contemporary press, with a large windowed section beneath the tower. Willetts now wanted to move the restaurant into the shopping area “in order to accommodate banquets”, and use the now redundant area in the tower for more office accommodation. At this time, the Architect to the Council also provided a useful table showing the changes in floor space use in the development of the scheme (all figures except plot ratio are in sq ft).⁴⁷

	Competition	Selected Scheme	Outline Permission (6/2/61)	Approvals (10/7/61 and 18/9/61)
Shops (incl. storage)	135,000	201,900	224,399	221,857
Offices	155,000	87,900	99,743	99,000
Restaurant	-	-	6,384	6,384

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ LMA, LCC/MIN/12,036, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (Jan – Jun 1960), Joint Report (9.2.60) by the Architect and Valuer, ‘Disposal and Redevelopment of Site No.1’, T.P.538, p.7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ LMA, LCC/MIN/11,977, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (13.3.62-26.3.62), Report by the Architect to the Council (6.3.62), T.P.210.

Total	290,000	289,900	330,526	327,241
Plot Ratio	2.08	2.08	2.47	2.44

This table shows how the site was loaded with more and more floor space area, in particular for shopping and restaurants, as the scheme developed, and the dramatic difference in office space accommodation between the competition brief and the selected scheme. Aside from the change in the position of the restaurant/banqueting facilities, there were no substantial changes to the design-as-built from the approved schemes.

Users would enter at the upper ground floor using the ramps from three sides of the building. In the centre of the upper ground floor, a double height atrium revealed a glass roof, which could be drawn back :in sunny weather to provide an open air-concourse". Linking, a footbridge with a booking hall led from this upper ground floor to the British Rail station. Below this the lower ground floor (reached from the upper storey by an escalator) connected to the pedestrian concourse. Further below this were basement storage areas and two levels of car parking, accessed via ramps to the rear of the site.

All shop units faced into the central concourse, and the trade magazine *Interior Design and Contract Furnishing* (May 1965) noted that the interior "owes its success to the wide, pleasantly-scaled central concourse, which is intended to be used as an occasional display-and exhibition-area. The decorative features in the centre, such as the plant-troughs and the terrazzo bench-seats, are well designed and scaled to match the building". The concourses were divided effectively into four courts, lit by the glazed roof and at the upper floor, "deep concrete balustrades help to tie in and define the courtyard areas".⁴⁸

By the opening in March 1966, it was estimated that the Shopping Centre received a flow of around 42,500 visitors per week, and there was an atmosphere of optimism about the development, despite the fact that even from the very beginning, not all the shop units had been leased. The *South London News* reported that:

Early artists' impressions of what the Shopping Centre should look like may seem to have been idealised, with their pools and trees and plants in profusion, but they do indeed represent a practical ideal towards which the developers and tenants are working with a constant progression of improvements and innovations.⁴⁹

In fact, this mismatch of aspiration and reality shows that the seeds of the Centre's long decline were already sown. "Research and commonsense", *South London Press* continued, echoing the Willetts Group PR, "agree that in a few years' time the Shopping Centre will have established itself solidly as South London's major social centre and rendez-vous."⁵⁰ In 1975, within just a decade of the Centre opening, the same paper reported that not only had Ravenseft Properties taken over from Willetts Group, but the new owners had "no plans to celebrate the shopping centre's 10th anniversary".⁵¹ By this time, a fifth of the shops were unlet and "firms have moved away from the second floor of the centre because shoppers are

⁴⁸ 'Shopping Centres', *Interior Design and Contract Furnishing* (May 1965), p.241.

⁴⁹ SCA, PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, *South London Press* (March 25 1966), p.4.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ SCA, PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, "'White Elephant" has a massive face-lift', *South London Press* (1975).

thin on the ground". From the late 1960s, in tandem with the slow decline of the Shopping Centre's commercial success, further alterations to the design were made. In 1970, market arcades were brought inside, though the developers were "rather cautious about introducing such an environment within the confines of the centre".⁵² This innovation had some limited success, and in 1990, the exterior public spaces which wrap round the three main faces of the centre were given over to informal market stalls that attract both local shoppers and visitors from much further afield.

6. MATERIALS/ CONSTRUCTION

The question of materials, in particular facing materials, was a particularly vexed one in the development of the project. When Boissevain and Osmond won the competition in 1960, the LCC accepted that there were still "of course, several points of detail still to be settled, in particular the question of facing materials, which we shall consider more fully at a later stage".⁵³ As part of the attempt to turn the development into a Piccadilly-like retail centre, the building was supposed to be covered in advertisements, and was ultimately a decision to be managed by Southwark Metropolitan Borough Council.⁵⁴

When initial planning permission was sought and approved in the opening months of 1961, facing materials for external elevations were approved only in principle, "subject to the submission of full particulars of the proposed colours".⁵⁵ By this time, architects wanted "the main horizontal mass of the shopping block...treated in a darker material so as to contrast with the light glass elevations of the tower block of offices".⁵⁶ This "darker material" was to be large slabs of porcelain enamelled steel panels, which had "been used on an important new building Stockholm".⁵⁷ Even at the building's opening, these were not considered entirely successful. *Interior Design and Contract Furnishing* described the building as "somewhat unfortunately clad in panels of green-enamelled metal", and complained that the front elevation was "marred by seemingly irrelevant slits".⁵⁸

The Centre's structure was of concrete, revealed in the rear elevation and embellished with paint and decorative shuttering texture. Upper parts of the building were re-clad with glass reinforced panels and new fenestration was inserted on the outward elevations to get natural light into the offices.⁵⁹ By 1990, the shopping centre was painted pink, to replace what had become "murky green".⁶⁰ It was re-painted blue in 2011.⁶¹

⁵² SCA, PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, *South London Press* (15 December 1970).

⁵³ LMA, LCC Minutes (1960), 'Town Planning Committee Report (No.2)', p.529.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ LMA, LCC/MIN/11,226, Town Planning Committee Minutes (1961), Report (4.7.61) by the Architect, T.P.697, f.267.

⁵⁶ LMA, LCC/MIN/11,952, Town Planning Committee Presented Papers (10.7.61-25.7.61), Report (4.7.61) by the Architect, 'Submission of Detail Plans for Redevelopment of Site No.1'.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ 'Shopping Centres', *Interior Design and Contract Furnishing* (May 1965), p.241.

⁵⁹ 'Offices from Shops', *Construction (Department of Environment)* no.30 (July 1979), p.9.

⁶⁰ SCA, PC 688.87 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre - Press Cuttings, *The Trumpet* (August 1990), p.1.

⁶¹ 'Litmus Test', *Building Design Online* (April 19 2011),

<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/comment/boots/litmus-test/5017125.article>, accessed October 19 2016.

The specially designed furniture, including terrazzo benches, intended for central internal areas and the main concourse to Newington Causeway was, it's assumed, removed as alterations and reprogramming of spaces occurred.

7. RECEPTION

Trade press

'Elephant and Castle', *Keystone: Association of Building Technicians Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 3, Autumn 1958, pp. 6-19:

It is a considerable achievement on the part of all concerned that it has been possible to diversify the heights and to free up the alignments of the buildings without losing the unity of the development as a whole. (p.8)

The School of Printing ... by its carefully worked-out set-backs in plan not only increase the spaciousness of the main roundabout but also defines an "ante-chamber" of space leading into the central area from St. George's Road. Equally, in the south the set-back in the housing frontage, while maintaining a sense of enclosure which the original perimeter development suggested, now not only allows a visual connection with the greenery of the existing open space across Newington Butts but also, in the little piazza so formed, adds a delightful new feature to the area. (p.8)

It certainly would have been good to see more wholehearted separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic: nevertheless, granted the assumption that separation is to be achieved by pedestrian underpasses, the brief is being carried out with considerable intelligence. For instance, apart from making the subways extremely attractive ... they are also being made as shallow as possible so as to reduce the physical effort involved in their use. (p.8)

It is very good not only to see the principle of mixed use so generously accepted as essential to central area redevelopment, but also the pleasantly un-bureaucratic unity of architectural control that has been achieved over the whole area. (p.10)

[On Draper House:] In designing the scheme the architects have sought a contrast—very much in the London tradition—between the liveliness and bustle of the piazza and shopping frontage with its bright fascias, sky-signs, fountains, and pub on the "public" side and the quietness of the backwaters created by the gardens enclosed by the blocks on the "private" side. It is very encouraging that the first published design by the L.C.C. housing architects for a really metropolitan site should be so good. (p.12)

The paved forecourts achieved by the serrated frontage also undoubtedly contribute to "monumentalising" the building. (p.14-15)

When completed, the Elephant and Castle should be the first large area at the centre of any of our cities in which the detailing of the space between buildings—the roads, pavements, underpasses, light-fittings and general urban clutter—has been treated as a major design problem in itself. (p.16)

J.M. Richards, 'Elephant & Castle', *Architectural Review*, February 1963, pp. 94-102:

The layout of the Elephant and Castle area, the important south-London traffic intersection which is being almost wholly rebuilt after war-damage, has been improved considerably since the London County Council first published its plan in 1956. Perimeter development all round the central traffic-space has been replaced by a freer disposition of buildings conceived in three dimensions rather than two. (p.94)

The traffic-space itself ... still represents a lost opportunity; an earlier multi-level scheme would not have driven pedestrians so ignominiously underground. (p.94)

...the most substantial buildings to be completed ... designed by Mr. Ernő Goldfinger ... sets a standard of clarity and vigour.. (p.94)

It was a constructive idea to incorporate this relic [the Metropolitan Tabernacle] in the otherwise wholly modern range of buildings, but the rebuilding behind and alongside the portico is unimaginative; moreover it neither allows the significant shape of the tabernacle to tell nor makes the most of the townscape opportunities this juxtaposition of old and new presented. (p.94)

To avoid the monotony of a continuous unbroken façade, it was decided to develop the site in three blocks, interspersed with open spaces to be planted and form recreational areas for the people working in the offices. (p.96)

'Shopping centre', *Architects' Journal*, 28 July 1965, pp. 205-215:

The road system was channelled around two roundabouts and the land surrounding divided into sites mainly for office and shop development, thus recreating an already outdated pattern for several more decades. (p.208)

The centre's social and commercial character is, with the massive increase in personal mobility, being gradually subjugated to its other character of a transport complex. It must be said that the Elephant and Castle tends to lie on the route of people whose destination is elsewhere. (p.208)

[On the Shopping Centre:] In their enforced acceptance of the site and its inherent environmental qualities the architects felt that, to overcome the noise from motor traffic and the railway, an introverted design was the best solution to provide within itself civilised surroundings in which to shop in peace and quiet and away from danger. (p.210)

The shops at this level [lower ground floor] open onto the road sides as well as to the internal concourse, but the outward environment is limited however to the extent of the surrounding lowered pedestrian terrace defined by the retaining wall at the back edge of the public pavement. The lowered terrace, split informally into areas, is of pedestrian scale, containing planting, seating and small advertising standards, and one feels well separated and insulated from the noise and bustle of the traffic above. (p.210-11)

This car park has a total capacity of 150 car spaces—hardly enough for the employees of the 115 shops let alone the office employees and shop customers. The developers are

also in the process of constructing a multi-level car park on the other side of the railway to make good this deficiency. There is therefore total separation of the shoppers from any vehicular intrusion. (p.214)

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