

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT



This historic map shows a curved line that divided the Norman and Anglo Saxon areas of Nottingham. It is incorporated into the new design as a balustrade and a line of coloured paving.

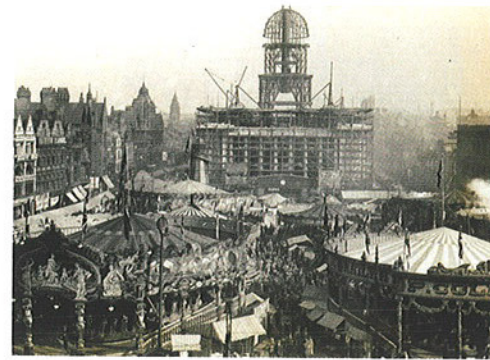
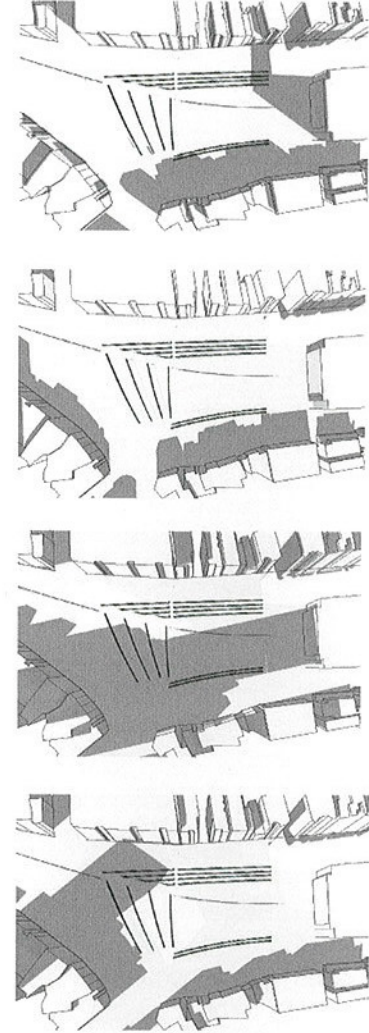
Nottingham's Old Market Square has been transformed by Gustafson Porter's modern re-interpretation of the historic space. **Tim Coulthard** visits the city to see how the project is being received.

FOR 800 YEARS, OLD MARKET SQUARE HAS STOOD AT THE HEART of Nottingham, a constant presence quietly witnessing the evolution of the city. At 11,500m², it is the second largest square in Britain after London's Trafalgar Square. Its sheer scale demanded a role at the heart of the city's social, cultural and commercial life for centuries.

"The Guardian of the City" was how Gustafson Porter described the space when putting together its successful entry for the design competition that triggered its redevelopment – an important acknowledgement of the square's role in the city as the public – at times nervously, at times cynically – awaited the results of the transformation.

This latest incarnation involved the replacement of a 1970s design by TC Howitt, architect of the adjacent Council House building that still stands imposingly on the east side of the square. The impetus behind the 2004 international design competition (run by Nottingham City Council) was the widespread view that the square no longer served the modern city effectively. There had been previous attempts to launch a redevelopment of the square, but the looming expiry of European funding earmarked for the project forced a more urgent approach among the city's politicians.

Old Market Square has long served a variety of ad hoc and formal functions – from the spontaneous revelry that greeted Nottingham Forest's European Cup victories in the early 1980s to fairs, markets and formal civic occasions. When occupied



1 In low winter sun, the north side receives the most direct light
2 Sun study results
3 Masterplan of the square

4 A fairground dominated the square as TC Howitt's Council House was completed in the 1920s
5 Sunlight on the water feature creates life
6 The old square design

ere was a general clutter of equipment, while
, its large expanses of concrete earned it the re'.

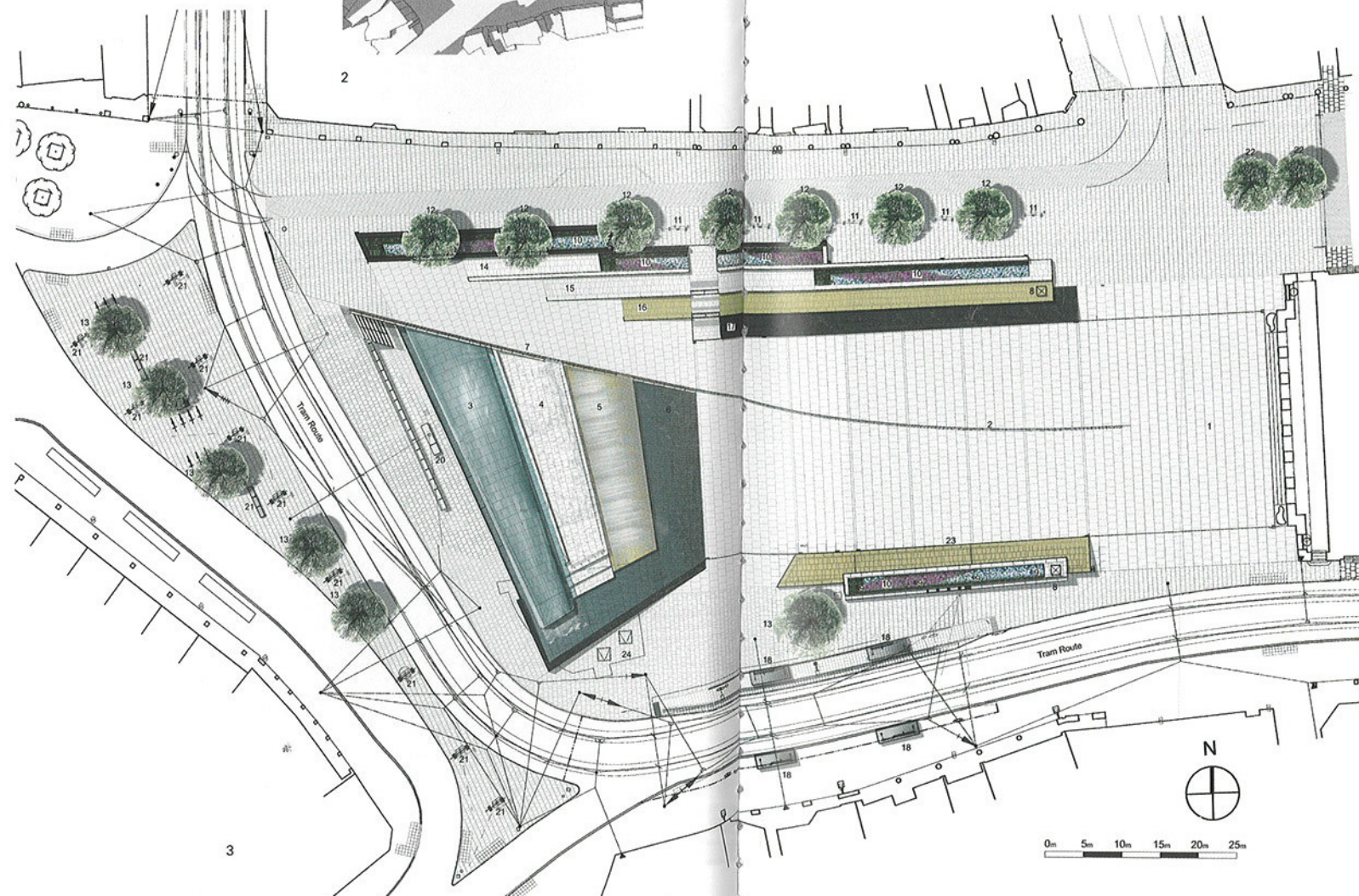
ompetition entrants was wide-ranging and at
re: "The square is the central meeting point for
ottingham and, on sunny summer days, is
ar. It is also regularly used for events ranging
activities to major fairs and public gatherings.
e is that the square does not always look at its
s are taking place. The design teams will be
/ how the existing, very diverse range of activi-
ssfully accommodated in both a functionally
ually appropriate way, befitting a space of the
re seeking."

s of analysis would shape much of Gustafson
he first was a sun study that inspired the loca-
ents, such as seating and the water feature, by
s of sunlight and shadow. Secondly, pedestrian
sis by consultants Space Syntax raised the need
ovement lines and levels in the area.

design is one of clean, geometrical lines that
blank canvas for the life of the city. That is not
s under-designed, but rather, it is understated.

their own words, sought to reflect the sense of
terises the square: "After walking through the
reets of Nottingham or travelling on a com-
am, one arrives at the spacious Old Market
a sensation of release and a feeling of being
uare is the city's guardian angel, a safe haven, a
nergy, wait for and meet friends, a place to be
tarily from daily routines and, on occasion,
r cultural and civic events."

and subsequent 3D modelling revealed that
eived the most direct sunlight during the year,
he edge along which the majority of seating
ater feature, perhaps the most striking design
partial sunlight in the west of the square, but
ods of shade in which the effects of light on
sible. /...



THE CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

NIGEL TURPIN

Team leader, city centre and urban design,
Nottingham City Council

Before it was re-designed, the space really wasn't achieving what we wanted, mainly due to the changes in levels that prevented the large events we wanted to hold there and stopped people from crossing the square. Poor lighting created a lot of hiding places, which led to people not wanting to use the square.

We wanted a flexible performance space and to encourage people to linger there, with a café culture developing on the north side.

The Gustafson Porter design was the one that responded best to the brief. Some schemes in the design competition came in with "big bang" scenarios of huge sculptures and different underground spaces, but Gustafson Porter created the flexible event space that we wanted. It handled the level changes comfortably with the seating terraces and gave it an interest at one end of the square with the water feature. I think that without the water feature, it would have been too simple.

The square can now host public events, but also looks great when it's empty, when the people give it vitality. There is something like 15 times more seating area in the square, even though it is a clear space. Even so, in the summer, you can struggle to find a seat

because people love being there.

The whole ethos within the city is to reduce the clutter. The planters are very effectively used in that way. One of the reasons we won Britain in Bloom this year was that the judges said the planting scheme was so well integrated into the seating areas, it looked as though it was properly designed into the scheme, which it was.

It's a cool, low-key space. It is subtle, allowing the people to add the life.

There were a number of stakeholders involved in putting the brief together and a lot of expectations and needs to incorporate. Our leisure people think it's fantastic, with events such as the ice rink and big wheel bringing in revenue. Our maintenance people like it because it's so much easier to look after, without the level changes and areas they couldn't clean.

For the general public's reaction, you only have to look at the popularity of the square and see how many people use it. It is also being enjoyed by people with disabilities who previously couldn't even get into the square because of the changes of levels.

It's considered to be a success and growing more successful as people understand how the space works. They realise it is there for them to use: whether it's to rest, watch an event or interact with the water feature. I think it's wonderful. I like to sit on a sunny morning and look out at the water feature and appreciate the elegance of the square – watching the world go by and seeing how people use it.



"The new scheme concentrated on creating routes across the space and re-integration with the city"



analysis of pedestrian movement in Old Market Square adjacent streets would be crucial to the overall philosophy design. By plotting and analysing the routes taken across square, Space Syntax made a series of critical observations and recommendations.

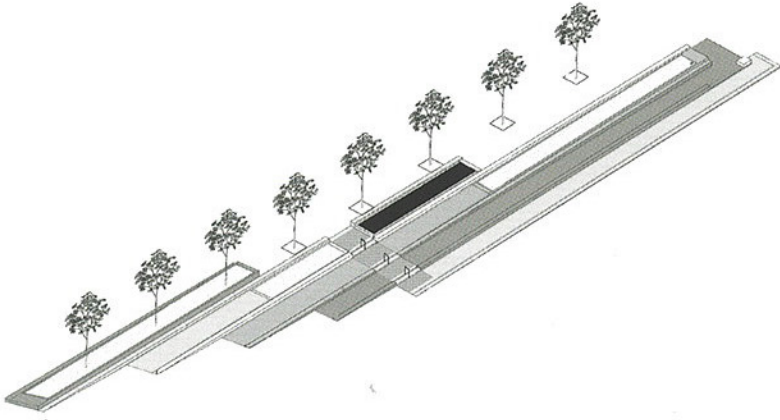
Simply, the centre of the space had become a no-go zone for pedestrians. "The current layout of the square does not provide direct pedestrian routes across the space – traversing the square involves multiple changes of level and direction," reads the Space Syntax verdict. "As a result, the routes that cross the centre of the square are considerably less accessible than the routes along its edges." In fact, 78 per cent of pedestrians entering the square did not enter its central portion, put off by the raised platforms and walls that obstructed the route.

The Gustafson Porter scheme therefore concentrated on creating routes across the space and re-integration with the rest of the city centre by emphasising the links to the main streams of pedestrian movement. Two major diagonal routes through the square now facilitate pedestrian movement between strategic points. These diagonal routes are also reminders of the historic routes through the city. The diagonal movement through the square is intended to animate its centre and create a vibrant environment by balancing the pedestrian movement with more varied activities.

These new east-west routes enable access to specialist markets and popular events. By removing obstructions such as /...

- 1 A sustainable timber balustrade offers informal seating on the ramp
- 2 Space Syntax analysis shows pedestrian movement avoiding the centre of the former square
- 3 Varied colours of granite form seating terraces
- 4 The water feature can be drained to form a viewing and seating area

"The intrusive level changes that characterised the square's previous incarnation are gone"



ramped level changes, steps and balustrades, a greater flexibility in the arrangement of events such as fairs, markets, and performances will allow a better choreography of movement. The layout leaves four spaces for rest and events, the water feature to the west, the seating steps to the north, the market place at the centre and the tram stops to the south.

The intrusive level changes that characterised the square's previous incarnation are gone. Instead, a long ramp extends from the northwest corner into the heart of the area, the very part that had been a no-go zone before. Its traces an historic map line that divided the city into Norman and Anglo-Saxon areas centuries before.

The ramp skirts the water terraces, with the FSC-recommended sustainable tatajuba timber balustrade providing a gentle curve of impromptu seating along its side. The other side of the ramp is lined with stepped seating terraces of grey, black, white and beige granite blocks that delineate level changes, providing a constant flow that provides the requisite places for rest without cluttering the rest of the space.

The line of seating along the north of the space is reflected by a line of *Ginkgo biloba* trees along the elevated, sunnier position of Long Row, where it is hoped the terrace feel will encourage the arrival of a café culture.

The water terraces in the west offer an alternative and spectacular focus to the Council House that dominates the square's east side. The contemporary interpretation of an historic system is a series of three water terraces that change character as water passes down the slope of the square's west side. The water appears as though it is passing through a purification system.

During the day, the three water feature terraces are the square's active element. When the market occupies the centre of the space, the water terraces remain an alternative focus around which people can sit. However, when a major event takes place in front of the Council House, the water feature can be switched off and drained, and its terraces then serve as an amphitheatre for civic and cultural events.

In surfacing, seating and planters, granite proliferates as the dominant material. It was sourced mainly from Portugal and the specification was based on the desire to create a scheme that /...



1 Design drawing showing the stepped seating terraces

2 Raised planters and trees soften the effects of the granite surfacing

3 & 4 It is hoped that the sunnier northern side will develop a café culture



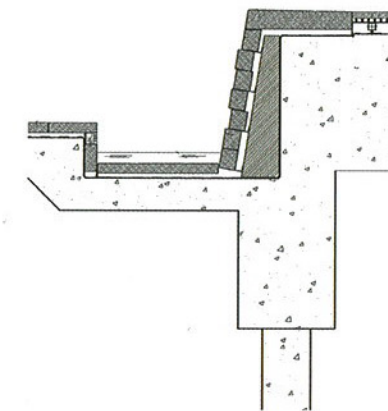
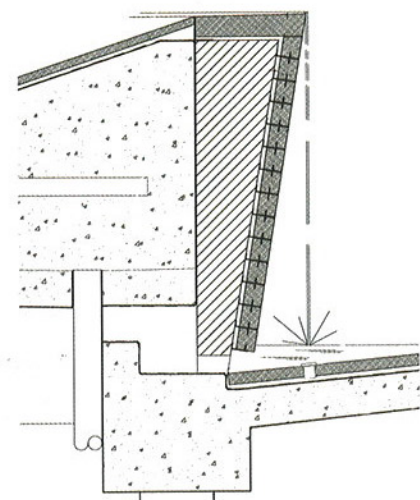


would last for decades. To ensure its durability, four different granites were laid in test slabs outside the Council House and their performance was observed over several months before final specification was made. The rich, patterned appearance of the final selection adds texture to the larger areas of uniform surfacing and has the added bonus of rendering the ubiquitous chewing gum almost invisible.

While much of the site is given over to the hard surfacing needed for a robust and adaptable event space, its sides are flanked by planters containing more than 800 shrubs and 4,000 bulbs. Seven mature *Ginkgo biloba* and six *Quercus palustris* trees were also planted to mark natural borders to the square.

The Speirs and Major lighting scheme is used to reinforce the flow of the new diagonal movement lines, while also offering flexible options for illumination during public events. Nottingham city centre has become increasingly populated by numerous and varied columns that house lighting, signs, CCTV cameras and tram power lines, creating a cluttered appearance. The new design has attempted to avoid repeating the mistakes elsewhere by using multi-purpose columns that employ down lights, banner fixings and uplighting with reflectors to create a variety of options and lighting treatments, with less disruption to the flow of the space.

These are complemented by fibre optics below the water jets and concealed lighting to benches, steps and handrails. Five listed lanterns and two flagpoles have also been refurbished and /...



This page and opposite: the water feature, seen here in situ and being tested, consists of a series of terraces and jets

"The water terraces in the west offer an alternative and spectacular focus to the Council House that dominates the east"





1

“The Speirs and Major lighting scheme reinforces the flow of the new diagonal movement lines”

integrated into the new scheme.

The square re-opened in April last year, marking the end of a three-year journey for the design team at Gustafson Porter that had seen the project through from its beginning in 2004. The process has not always been simple – the importance of the square to the city’s residents meant there was some opposition to the scheme, inspired by debate about the design, the cost of the project (almost £7m) and the lengthy period of upheaval during construction.

The design competition, while ultimately decided by a judging panel, also featured a public vote element, in which Gustafson Porter’s scheme was not the favourite. Nilesch Patel, a member of the Gustafson Porter team, is philosophical about the nature of public acceptance for the design. “Even if it had been the public’s favourite at that stage, who knows what they would have thought when it was built? Perceptions of projects change – look at the Millennium Dome, people don’t speak badly of it now that it has found a new purpose.”

He also rightly points out that landscape design grows on people in a more subtle way than that of buildings: “When you see a model of a building, it can be seen as more of a constant, whereas landscapes change over time. This landscape has been designed to be there for many years and it will adapt gradually over time. Schemes prove their worthiness when they are finished and being used by people.”/...



2

1 & 2 The lighting scheme by Speirs and Major

THE PROFESSIONAL’S VIEW

It is appropriate that the 2004 competition to redesign Nottingham’s historic Old Market Square was won by a practice headed by a designer who had originally trained in textiles and fashion, once the lifeblood of this city. Kathryn Gustafson, co-founder of Gustafson Porter, has brought her distinctive sculptural style to the site, gathering up the threads of the community, its culture and outlook, to knit a new place into the older fabric around and to spark regeneration.

Old Market Square lies to the east of Nottingham Castle, contained by the medieval streets on ground that falls south from Long Row, on its north side, to South Parade below. TC Howitt’s elegant 1920s Council House concludes the space on the east, with the evocatively named Beast Market Hill to the west. The NET tram bounds the south and west of the site.

The square needed to regain its status as a focal point for Nottingham, for daily use or specific events and to reflect the city’s status as one of Britain’s eight ‘Core’ cities. The design needed to guarantee accessibility and orientation to provide a welcoming, uncluttered and, above all, safe space. It needed to be robust in terms of legibility and materials and easy to maintain. Has it succeeded?

When I visited on a bright, cold Sunday afternoon, Nottingham was recovering from ‘the night before’ in the square. What is abundantly clear is the space’s ingrained character. Despite its new minimalist modelling, this remains a medieval square; it is brash, colourful, vocal, full of movement and small dramas. It is good that such robust materials – granite, brushed steel, hardwood – were chosen as all are already grubby and marked with use. The mesmerising water feature, a mix of flat and angled planes, complete with water spouts and falls, dominates the west end of the square and can be



DEBORAH EVANS
Eastern territory landscape architect,
English Heritage

drained to be used as a performance space. It attracted paddlers and reflectors, while a temporary Ferris wheel occupied the main space.

The square follows the topography in a series of broad and narrow terraces, some tapering into the ground, others rising up into tiered seats or planters. Movement continues in the paving of the central area, which decreases in unit size towards the edges, creating a sense of excitement and moving off. The terraces are themselves of different widths and colours – a cool palette of black to buff – perhaps incongruous in a city of red brick, but offering different options for use. The high and broad terraces on the north side complement the ‘fast track’ route marked behind in the paving along Long Row, the rear of the terrace offering rest for those with time to spare. On the south, the terraces are broader, slower, perhaps anticipating the wait for a tram. Ferris wheel aside, this is an easy space to negotiate, clear views fostering a sense of independence and security.

The design was tasked to knit into the surrounding townscape. It does, but with varying degrees of success. In Long Row, the new paving successfully flows into the buildings, many of which are clad in granite. However, to the east, the square stops abruptly against an expanse of 1990s coloured brick paving; differences in quality and condition being only too evident. Likewise to the south, the design stops at the street, sitting uncomfortably with the perfectly/



1



2

Gustafson Porter was aware of the mixed feelings for the project from the outset, says Patel. “Members of the public always made comments when we were on site. Some people would brand it a waste of money. But there had been a lot of disruption for people to endure, so perhaps that was partly to blame – we didn’t take it to heart.”

Spend time in Old Market Square now and one can see that the forms of use envisaged in the original design philosophy are being realised. Certainly the removal of awkward levels and creation of new diagonal movement axes have liberated the centre of the square, and even on a crisp winter’s day when we visited, the seating terraces were well used.

In recent months, the scale of the open areas has been temporarily lost as first an ice rink and latterly a Ferris wheel have occupied the space. While these interventions may intrude on the aesthetics and appreciation of the design, they are nothing if not giant reminders that this historic square has been reclaimed for the people.

Hopes for the area are high – a 2001 report by consultants Scott Wilson estimated that re-development of the square could create up to 400 jobs and boost Nottingham’s economy by £12m each year. Its success will be judged not in the first year, but by how it stands up to decades of use and how the city incorporates it into its life, an approach to evaluation that would doubtless please its designers.□

“This landscape has been designed to be there for many years and it will adapt gradually over time”

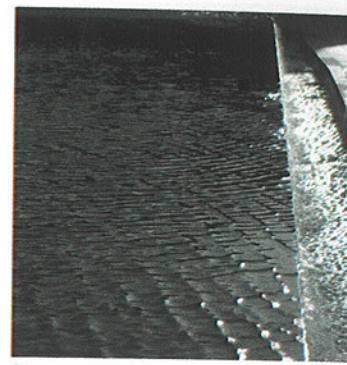
Nilesh Patel, Gustafson Porter

1 & 2 Construction images show the level of disruption to the city centre

3 The reflection of light on water is a key part of the movement in the space

durable but different detailing of the tram stop. This reality, together with the slightly depressing array of commercial outlets around, creates a tension compromising the design’s ability to “spill out” (brief) from the square. Only on the west does the design continue in a simplified form along Beast Market Street, accommodating the NET and drawing the eye towards Chapel Bar, reengaging two areas of the city. A successful and subtle design concept is the horizontal definition of the space, achieved by repeating the coursed 19th-century brick of the low-rise buildings in the stone terracing of the square and water feature. This historicism continues in the square with Gustafson Porter wittily mimicking the listed Chinese lanterns on the north side in the rectangular tree guards and litter bins around.

Technically this is an outstanding example of hard landscape; the designers and main contractor, Balfour Beatty, having delivered an exemplar. There are some beautiful details, including right-angle drainage channels cut into the granite beneath the trees; linear steel tree grilles; steel and hard wood hand rests along the seat terraces; a delivery bay integrated into Long Row. Handrails are slender and elegant, lit at night from underneath, their form continued in tactile wooden ‘bum seats’ near the water feature, elevated from practical to elegant through slender supporting columns and taught wiring. Principle and accessible steps descend from Long Row into the main body of the square, while other steps lead down beside the water feature. Signage, bollards and lighting all satisfy the use and ornament test. Elegant finger posts and bollards mark the principle corners, while lighting is provided by high standards, their x16 luminaires like small stadium lights marking the perimeter. Elsewhere, uplighters, some with mottled glass covers, highlight specific features while at night, an array of fibre



3

optics plays with the water.

Maintenance is the greatest test and here the city and people of Nottingham let their new square down. A national obsession with chewing gum and litter dropping cannot be ‘designed out’ and it is unfortunate that the city has reverted to augmenting the number of litter bins (many un-emptied) with its own heritage range. Additional planters are also appearing and similarly dilute and clutter the space, contradicting the council’s own brief. On a positive note, there was no visible vandalism. Even the planting, including the new *Ginkgo* and oak trees, which has to work hard, had not been wantonly damaged, but revellers have done justice to some of the box hedging backing the planters. Inside is an uninspiring mix of fashionable grasses, drought resistant plants (read low maintenance) and winter bedding.

The design had to reflect “the distinctive character of Nottingham”. I suggest it does, but perhaps not quite in the way Gustafson Porter or the client expected. There is little or no café culture here yet; this is not a piazza, despite the council’s own insistence. It is a flexible space and certainly of high quality, in principle more than fulfilling the requirements of PPG1. However, whether it can move the city forward or will be marooned within it, only time will tell. Certainly, the space is robust and honest, but the subtlety within the design is perhaps lost, overwhelmed by the sheer vitality of its audience.□





1



2

DETAILS

Project
Old Market Square, Nottingham, UK.

Client
Nottingham City Council

Budget
£7m

Site size
11.5ha

Work schedule
October 2005–March 2007

Lead landscape architects and design team
For Gustafson Porter Ltd:
Mary Bowman, Dominik Bueckers,
Mark Gillingham, Kathryn Gustafson,
Inês Marcelino, Nilesh Patel, Neil Porter,
Kinna Stallard

Quantity surveyors
Davis Langdon LLP

Specification
Davis Langdon Schumann Smith

Engineers
Ove Arup and Partners Ltd

Lighting design
Speirs and Major Associates

Public realm design advisors
Space Syntax Ltd

Conservation consultant
Jules Renfrew Associates

Soil specialist
Tim O'Hare

Main contractor
Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd

Water feature specialist
OCMIS Ltd

Architectural metalwork
WD Close and Sons Ltd

Natural stone paving and cladding
BDN Construction Ltd

Lighting works
J McCann & Co Ltd

Historic architectural metalwork
Chris Topp & Co Ltd

Soft landscape
Ashlea Ltd

Materials
Main material used is a light grey Portuguese granite, complemented by beige granite, also from Portugal, and smaller areas of white and black granites from China. Granite surfaces laid with a hydraulic mortar supplied by Steintec Ltd

Planting details
Mature trees supplied by Van den Berk Nurseries: *Ginkgo biloba* and *Quercus palustris*
Shrubs: *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle', *Buxus sempervirens* 'National', *Caryopteris x clandonensis* 'Arthur Simmonds', *Lavandula x 'Grosso'*, *Perovskia* 'Blue Spire'
Perennials: *Geranium* 'Brookside'
Bulbs: *Crococsmia* 'Star of the East', *Iris siberica* 'Blue Moon', *Lilium regale* 'Golden Splendour', *Narcissus* 'Thalia', *Muscari comosum* 'Plumosum'
Grasses: *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light'
(About 25% of planting space was left clear, for additional planting to be introduced by Nottingham in Bloom)



3



4



5

1 A line cuts the square along its historic Norman and Anglo-Saxon divide

2 Design sketch

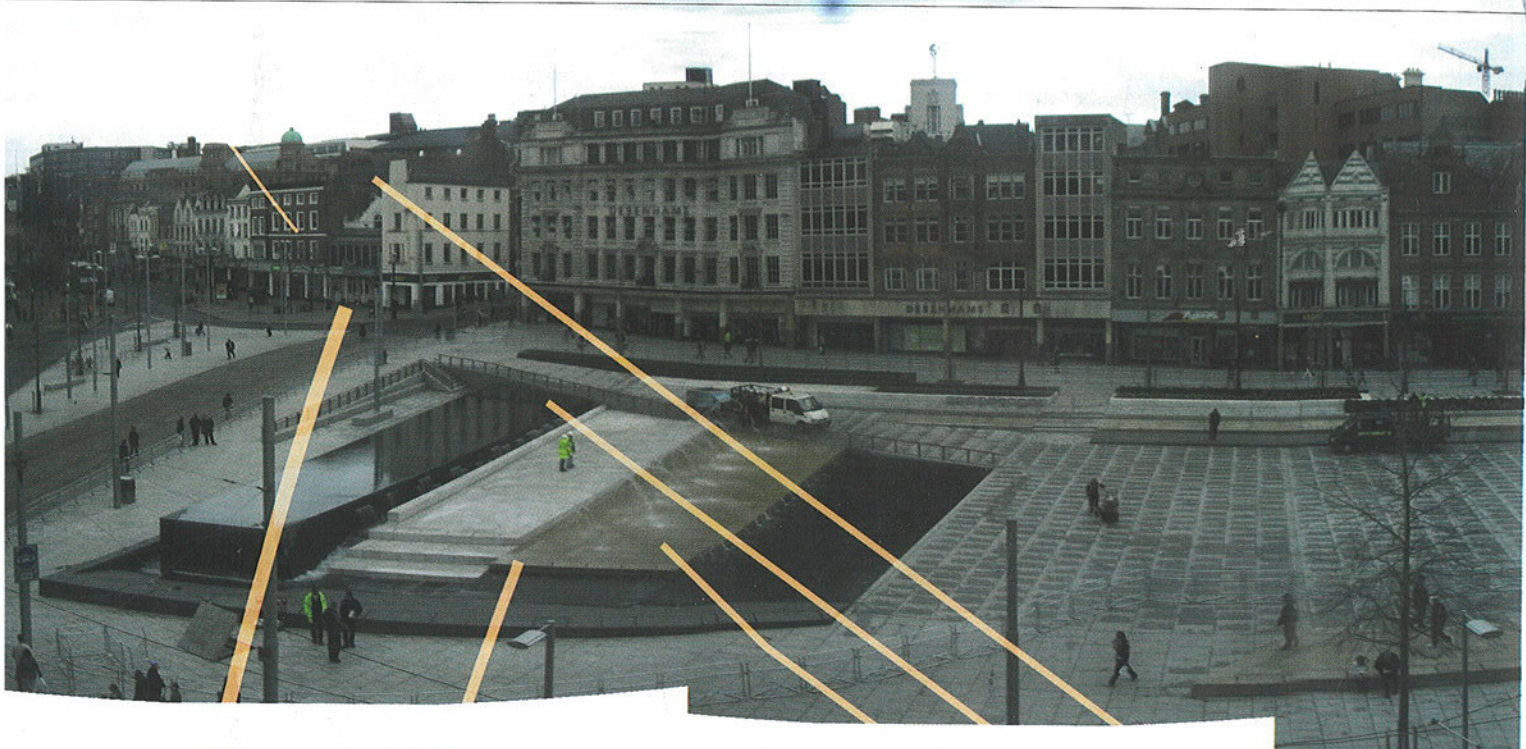
3 Tree grille

4 Granite paving in situ

5 Timber hand rail

Suppliers

Lighting: Meyer, Philips, WE-EF, LEC
Lyon, Sill, Louis Poulsen, Urbis Lighting
NJO, Group C Lighting, Mode Lighting
Street furniture: Townscape Ltd (cycle racks), Broxap (bins), ACO Technologies and Elkington Gatic Ltd (slot drains), Surespan Ltd (access covers)
Bespoke elements: all seating elements are formed from solid granite blocks, averaging 500mm in width, 400mm high, and 1400mm long
Feature lighting masts supplied by Abacus Lighting Ltd and Siteceo Ltd
In-ground electrical power units set below the main square, by Landmark Products Ltd
Tree grilles and corsets by Machan Engineering Ltd
Balustrades and armrests by WD Close Ltd, Jakob tension wire by MMA Ltd



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Freedom of movement

Gustafson Porter's re-design of Old Market Square, Nottingham



Cover photograph
Joe Gardiner

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Land Use Consultants' re-design and re-interpretation of London's historic squares

The background of the cover is a black and white photograph of a fountain with multiple jets of water spraying upwards. In the foreground, a dark, curved structure, possibly a railing or part of a fountain's basin, frames the view. Below this, a waterfall cascades over a ledge into a pool of water. The overall mood is serene and architectural.

LANDSCAPE

04.08

THE JOURNAL
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INSTITUTE

Fluid motion

Moving up a level with
Gustafson Porter in Nottingham

The right angles

How town squares can lead the
revival of urban design in the UK

London's treasures

Land Use Consultants' work
to rejuvenate historic squares

Four corners of the earth

Exploring the form and function
of major international squares