Department for
Culture, Media and Sport
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London
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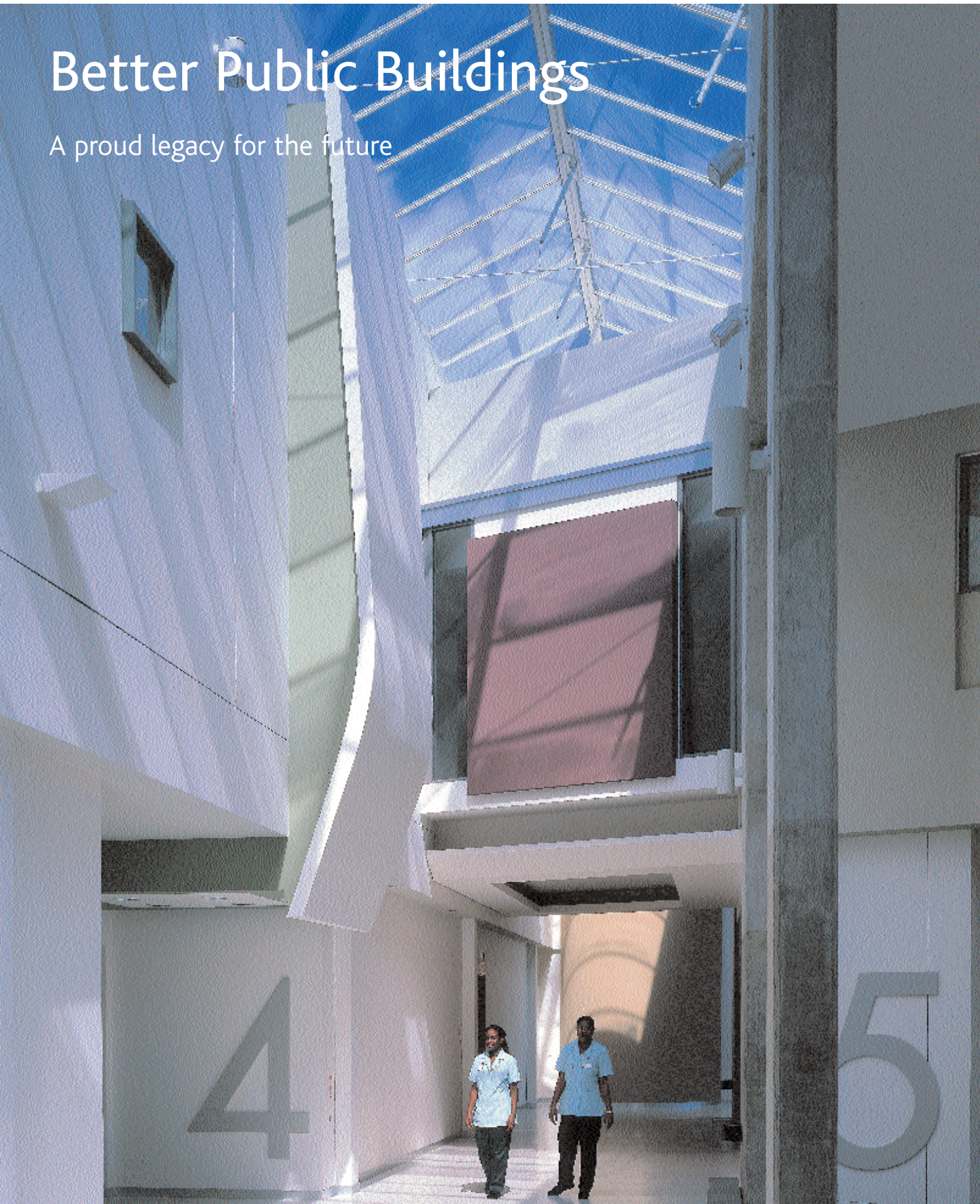
HM Government

Better Public Buildings

A proud legacy for the future



This report has been prepared by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for:

The Better Public Buildings Group chaired by Lord Falconer.

The Group embraces:

The Cabinet Office
The Department for Culture, Media and Sport
The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
H M Treasury (Office of Government Commerce)
The Ministry of Defence
The Department of Health
The Department for Education and Employment
The Department of Social Security
The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

The work of the Group is closely associated with the Movement for Innovation and the Achieving Excellence initiative.

The text was written by Paul Finch, a member of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, drawing on material previously prepared by members of the Better Public Buildings Group.

Front cover image: The ACAD centre in west London, part of Central Middlesex Hospital, breaks new ground in delivering urban health care. **Architect:** Avanti Architects. **Photographer:** Nicholas Kane.

Foreword by the Prime Minister

Better Public Buildings

100 years ago public buildings were often the pride of Britain's towns and cities. Schools, railway stations, post offices and libraries set high standards of building design that the private sector tried to emulate. The best embodied a strong sense of civic pride.

More recently, however, the public sector has too often been associated with poor design and bad management. Too many of the housing estates, schools and hospitals built in the second half of the twentieth century were ugly, ill-suited to the needs of their users and costly to maintain.

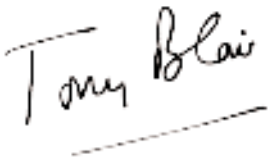
Yet we know that good design provides a host of benefits. The best designed schools encourage children to learn. The best designed hospitals help patients recover their spirits and their health. Well-designed parks and town centres help to bring communities together.

It is widely believed that good design is a costly luxury. But this is simply not true. As Sir John Egan's report 'Rethinking Construction' demonstrated, best practice in integrating design and construction delivers better value for money as well as better buildings, particularly when attention is paid to the full costs of a building over its whole lifetime.

That is why I have asked ministers and departments across government to work towards achieving a step change in the quality of building design in the public sector. The government is already substantially increasing capital spending. I am determined that this additional money should be well spent, leaving behind a legacy of high quality buildings that can match the best of what we inherited from the Victorians and other past generations. And I am determined that good design should not be confined to high profile buildings in the big cities: all of the users of public services, wherever they are, should be able to benefit from better design.

The good news is that a lot of progress is already being made, helped by the new Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment which is bringing some of the best architects together with schools, courts, Sure Start centres and benefit offices. Through the Achieving Excellence initiative, government organisations have started addressing their performance as clients by setting measurable targets and objectives with a strong focus on lifetime costs, quality and design. As this report shows, there are some outstanding examples for the rest of the public sector to learn from.

Over the last few years Britain has benefited from a host of new landmark buildings, many of them funded through the lottery. Now we need to apply the same energy and imagination to improving the tens of thousands of everyday public buildings which play such a vital role in our lives.



Why good design matters

Better Public Buildings

Good design of public buildings can and should:

- respect and enhance the location, the environment and the community;
- add value and reduce whole-life costs;
- create flexible, durable, sustainable and ecologically sound development for the community;
- minimise waste of materials and energy, in construction and in use;
- provide functional, efficient, adaptable spaces for home, work and recreation;
- be attractive and healthy for users and public;
- contribute to construction which is quick, safe and efficient;
- use space, materials and resources with imagination and efficiency;
- produce buildings which are safer to construct and easier to clean and maintain.

Good design enhances people's lives, transforming how they feel and how they behave; it can:

- revitalise neighbourhoods and cities;
- transform derelict sites and neglected buildings, reducing pressure on the countryside;
- uplift and bring hope to neglected communities;
- reduce crime, illness, truancy;
- help public services perform better: hospitals, schools, housing, transport

Good design in the public sector is achievable and affordable.

Good design delivers functional buildings and civilised places while retaining a human dimension.

Good design is worth investing in. It is the key to giving the client maximum value for money through the whole life of a building.

Good design is a commitment to a better quality of life for all.

Opposite: The Market Place, Armagh, is an arts centre representing a new spirit for a community in need of spiritual renewal. **Architect:** Glenn Howells Architects.

Why and how

Better Public Buildings

Why our aspirations should be higher

Good building design isn't just about making the environment we live in more attractive. It's also about ensuring that buildings better serve the needs of the organisations and people who use them. So well-designed schools help pupils learn; well-designed town centres cut down on muggings and car crime; well-designed office buildings make people more motivated and productive.

A good international example of the full range of economic and social benefits that good design can bring is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The resulting surge of visitors and spending has given the whole city a lift. Closer to home, the extraordinary popularity of Tate Modern has encouraged longer-term thinking about the regeneration of the whole of north Southwark, while completion of the new Art Gallery in Walsall has triggered unprecedented numbers of visitors to the town.

What is true of such flagship buildings is also true of local buildings which have a more direct effect on people's lives.

- Research indicates that patients staying in well-designed modern hospitals make better progress more quickly, resulting in shorter bed-stays and thus greater throughput.
- Well-designed schools (such as those developed by Hampshire LEA) can have lower truancy rates and improved attendance compared with schools which are poorly designed or are in poor condition.
- Well-designed buildings and environments are less likely to be vandalised.
- Use of public services and community participation are higher on housing estates where proper design consideration has been given to houses and to the design of the immediate environment.
- Good estate design, and the design of individual homes, discourage crime.
- Good design takes into account crucial minorities who use buildings but are too often overlooked: the young, the old, disabled people.
- Good design of health facilities like the North Croydon Medical Centre helps people through a time of particular vulnerability
- Birmingham's development of Brindley Place and Centenary Square links major public buildings with small shops, restaurants and open spaces in a thriving integrated public area.
- The stations on the Jubilee Line Extension have been internationally admired (though the cost and time overruns were unacceptable and demonstrate the need for improvement of procurement practices).

Below: Marshall's Mill, Leeds: a sensitive conversion of a Grade II* building has provided striking offices for an internet news service and other businesses. **Architect:** JS Hinchcliffe & Partners

The importance of properly maintained and improved heritage facilities should also not be underestimated: English Heritage's Conservation Area Partnerships have helped to bring new life to run-down areas. The regeneration of the Corn Exchange in Leeds brought a boost to the city's economy. Revitalisation projects involving both refurbishment and new buildings have transformed parts of Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and other cities. Well-designed open spaces such as parks, squares and gardens are also important to the public.

Why and how

Better Public Buildings

Value for money

It is sometimes claimed that good design is an unaffordable luxury. Too often, an assumption is made that cheapest cost signifies best value, while good design is an optional extra which results in higher prices. Neither is true. The key to good design is that it takes account both of fitness for purpose and of the whole-life costs of a building to meet the user's needs in delivering value for money. Typically the cost of design is only about 1% of the lifetime cost of a building, and may be dwarfed by long-run energy and maintenance costs. Good design can cut maintenance costs and help to ensure that there is a higher residual value. The million-pound mistake is made on day one, in poor briefing and design thinking.

Because the impact of public buildings and spaces is partly subjective, it is sometimes assumed that it is impossible to measure and that qualitative judgements should pay little part in decisions about building procurement. But these factors are part of the value to the public and must be included in the overall assessment.

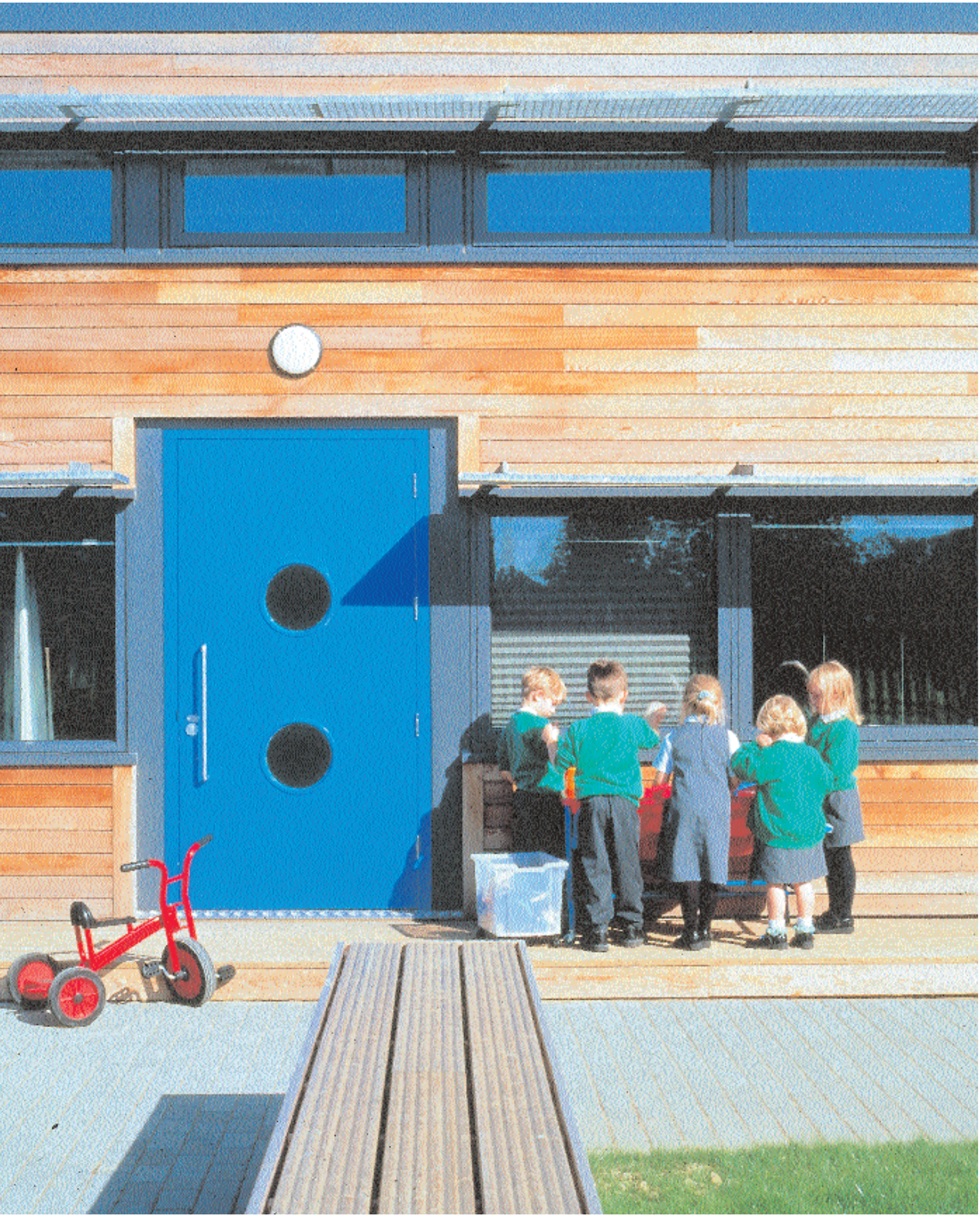
A good building needs an informed client who, at the highest level, is committed to high quality design. The client will need to bring together the requirements of function and affordability, value for money over the whole life of the building, and an appreciation of the effect which the building has both on the people who use it and on the character of its surroundings.

How our aspirations can be better achieved

The government and the construction industry established the Movement for Innovation to address the recommendations of Sir John Egan's Construction Taskforce, published in July 1998, which set a challenging agenda of radical reforms. Leading companies are working to improve quality, and to reduce the costs and time taken to deliver new buildings. In response to Egan's recommendation that change must be client-led, Government organisations too are overhauling their own procedures and setting measurable performance targets and objectives through the Achieving Excellence programme, which will come to fruition early in 2002.

A key element of both initiatives is that best value for money is likely to be obtained through integrated project teams in which clients, designers, constructors, subcontractors and specialist suppliers all work in partnership to produce the best possible outcome. Egan sets a target of 10% reduction per annum in cost and construction time. Pilot projects such as the MoD's new barracks at Wattisham show that, by mobilising all the design skills and construction experience in the team, we can achieve high quality with minimum waste.

Opposite: The school at Great Notley, Essex, combines sustainable design with low cost and natural materials. **Architect:** Allford Hall Monaghan Morris. **Photographer:** Tim Soar.



Why and how

Better Public Buildings

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), created by this Government, is charged, among other things, with promoting good design in public sector building projects. This is largely carried out via 'project enabling', where a CABE commissioner or representative works with a client team to help in areas including selection of consultants, brief writing, advice on competitions, and improvement of procurement procedures. CABE is available to provide help and advice, on design and design procurement, for government departments, other public organisations and private sector clients. It is also promoting quality through committees covering design review, regions, education and technology.

For example CABE is working with the Sure Start team to provide advice and encouragement to local clients, so that each Sure Start centre carries a message of excellence and encouragement. CABE is also working with the Courts Service on projects in Exeter, Bristol, Cambridge and Ipswich to ensure that new courts built under the PFI have design excellence as a priority from the outset.

The priority in the future must be for the public sector to become a smarter client. To achieve that government and other public bodies should:

Continue:

- Acknowledging the fundamental importance of design leadership as a key function within an integrated project team to provide best value for the client.
- Encouraging high expectations in respect of the design standards expected for all public realm developments.
- Working with CABE and other bodies to promote the importance of design.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Construction Task Force and Achieving Excellence programme to improve quality and value for money in construction.
- Developing key performance indicators for design quality within construction programmes.
- Promoting the civic ethos which is crucial to improved built environments nation-wide.
- Encouraging the creation of regional architecture centres to promote good design and community involvement systematically throughout the country.
- Introducing procurement arrangements that enable specialist suppliers to contribute to the design development from the outset.
- Demanding buildings on time, in line with their original budget and without defects.

Opposite: The Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh has shown how new architecture can work successfully in an historic setting. **Architect:** Benson & Forsyth.

Why and how

Better Public Buildings

Stop:

- Regarding good design as an optional extra.
- Treating lowest cost as best value.
- Valuing initial capital cost as more important than whole-life cost.
- Treating buildings as purely functional plant without civic significance.
- Imagining that effectiveness and efficiency are divorced from design.
- Being frightened to take calculated risks.
- Assuming that the public does not care.

Start:

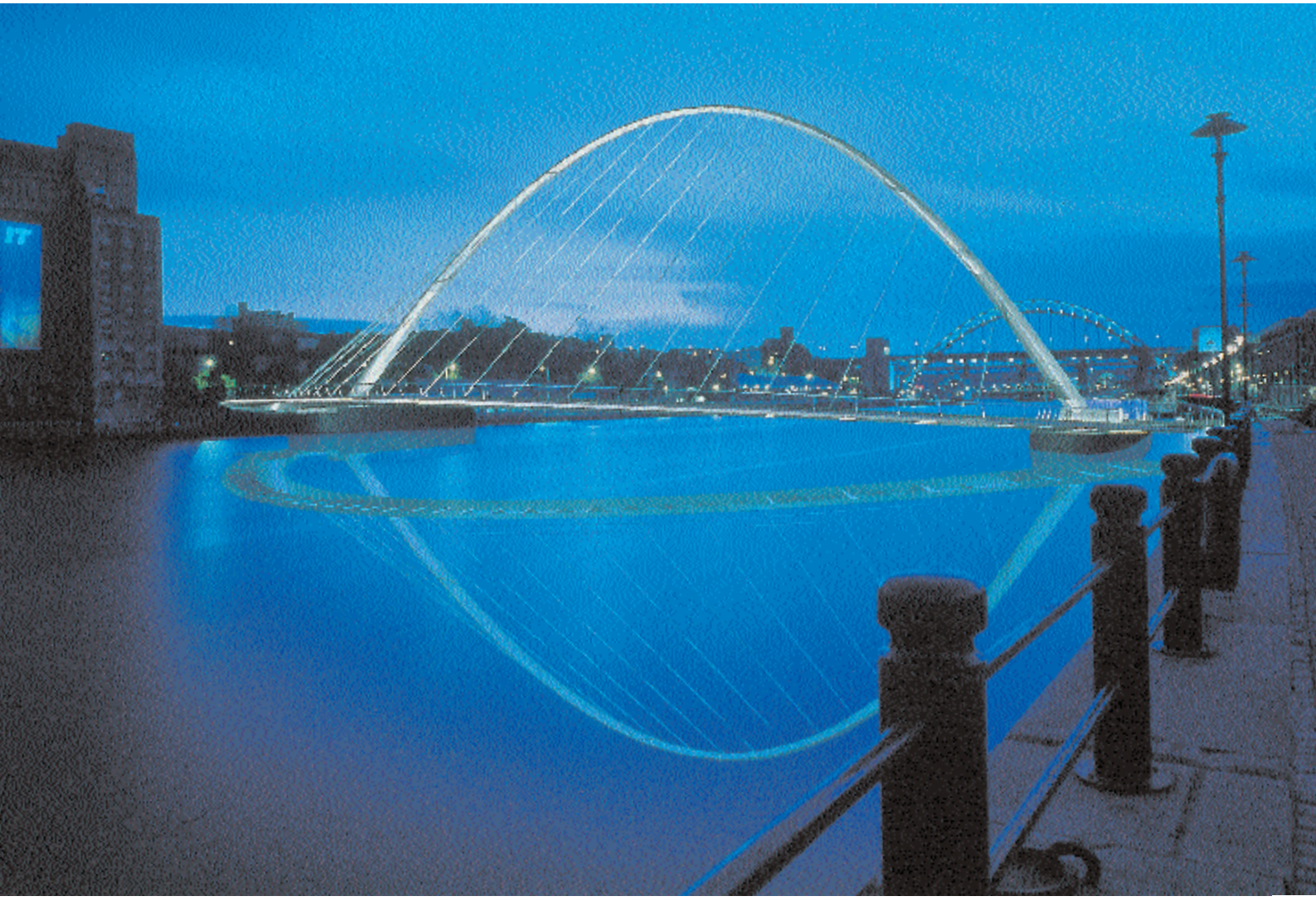
- Identifying the high-level post which should incorporate the role of 'design champion' within government departments and other public bodies.
- Insisting that measures to ensure the appointment of good designers are reviewed by the design champion.
- Promoting high-quality design on PFI projects in line with Treasury Note 7.
- Supporting local authorities who apply good architectural and urban design standards, particularly to public sector projects.
- Encouraging planning authorities to insist on appropriately high design standards for public projects.
- Allowing enough design time for projects of real quality to emerge.
- Measuring efficiency and waste in construction.
- Appointing integrated teams focussing on the whole life impact and performance of a development.
- Encouraging longer-term relationships with integrated project teams as part of long-term programmes, always subject to rigorous performance review.
- Using whole-life costing in the value-for-money assessment of buildings.
- Ensuring there is single-point client responsibility for any given project, with authority.

Opposite: This surgery in City Road, Manchester, is far removed from the old image of NHS utilitarianism, combining traditional materials to produce a welcoming image. **Architect:** Hodder Associates.

Conclusion

Better Public Buildings

If these principles are followed we will be rewarded with attractive, aesthetically pleasing buildings which are fit for purpose and represent good value for money. Our public building stock, and the public realm which surrounds it, will be better appreciated, will last longer, will work better, and will better represent our civic aspirations.



Above: The design of the Millennium Bridge in Gateshead shows how the ordinary can through design become extraordinary. **Architect:** Wilkinson Eyre Architects. **Photographer:** Positive Image.