

# Review: A multi-functional development in Bristol

25 July 2016 by John Baker , [Be the First to Comment](#)

J3 is a versatile new community facility, as well as a landmark for a deprived part of the city, finds John Baker.



(PIC **gcp** Chartered Architects)

J3 takes its name from its location, close to junction 3 of the M32, and its sign is highly visible.

The J3 development is a bold scheme in Easton, an area on the east side of Bristol city centre that lacks some of the more obvious benefits of a prosperous and generally progressive city. It provides valuable accessible housing, together with community and business space, and has also created a landmark in the area.

The scheme, which opened in 2013, is the result of cooperation between the libraries department of Bristol City Council and Knightstone Housing Association, and the strong commitment of the designer, **gcp** Chartered Architects. It comprises 59 houses and flats, alongside a library/learning resource centre and nine business units.

The project took a long time to develop, relying on the use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers to assemble the site, and considerable funding from the government's Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The development process also included a great deal of community engagement.

### **A prominent scheme**

The striking design using strong forms and bright colours, together with its big J3 label, gives the scheme prominence and high visibility alongside junction 3 of the M32 motorway, one of Bristol's gateways. It acts as a banner for the regenerative investment needed in the area, and for the quality of development that should be promoted.



(PIC **gcp** Chartered Architects)

The development successfully combines different uses in the same buildings, which increases the number of people attracted to it and generates activity throughout the day.

The site was once a Baptist church and burial ground. It is in an area severed by the construction of the motorway in the 1970s, and the site became further isolated as it attracted unsocial activity. The development has restored links in the network of foot and cycle ways, although generally with the use of several underpasses. It has thus enhanced connectivity with increased accessibility, safety and social interaction.

The scheme provides housing for people from the community with a variety of needs, adding life to the area and contributing housing that is accessible to people whose needs are not met by the private market. Funding from the HCA was a significant part of enabling this addition to the stock of affordable housing to be achieved.

## **Community asset**

J3 is a great addition to local resources. The library/resource centre, which was a catalyst for the project, is now one of the most used in the city. It is a true asset to the community, making information, and educational and entertainment material readily available in a great communal space, as well as providing rooms for meetings and community events.

The fact that the nine business units are all let demonstrates the need and demand for such space if the terms are right.

There is a great need for more housing and community resources in many parts of Bristol, as in many other cities and towns. There are also many sites where these needs could be met, areas improved and confidence increased.

J3 shows what can be achieved, but it also illustrates the level of cooperation needed between agencies and the community, and the level of perseverance and commitment required to create a multi-purpose development.

*John Baker is a partner at planning consultancy PBA Associates, based in its Bristol office.*