

## 4.0 Approach to Design

### 4.3 - Core Concepts

Based on Camden's advice, we went away and began to immerse ourselves in the site in an attempt to arrive at some basic conceptual reactions, which would inform the design process to come.

#### 4.3.1 - Communication Flow

As outlined in section 3.0 our reaction to the history of the site and the way it was formed has been a key generator in the development of the design.

The site is born out of flow and communication. This is an apt starting point for such a development, as both of the proposed uses, whilst apparently very different, have some things in common.

In the same way that the River Fleet flowed into London centuries ago, so St Pancras Way is the vein that has fed Travis Perkins for the past three decades as well as the artery that links it to the developing city around.

Students by definition spend their time in University or College in dialogue with their tutors and fellow students to learn and grow. They also make friends and contacts whilst in higher education that will stay with them for their whole lives. Over the life of the building there will be many thousands of students coming and going and adding to the vibrancy and history of the area.

The redevelopment of the site will allow these forms of communication to continue side by side for many years to come.

This flow of communication through the site is something that we wanted to express in the design of the project.



Fig - 4.3.3 - Victorian Post Box



Fig - 4.3.2 - Penny Red

#### 4.3.2 - The Living Bridge

Our first conceptual reaction to the site was discussed in relation to its historical context and its part in the flow of time that has formed and continues to inform the area.

Our fundamental starting point then is to consider what it means to be here on this site at this time in its history.

The unusual programmatic requirements give us our first problem, in how to separate the two distinct and normally uncomplimentary uses to be contained on the site. The Travis Perkins facility needs to occupy as much of the ground floor as possible in order to be efficient and economically viable. In order to maximize storage and allow the site to function, Travis Perkins also require a clear headroom of 6.0m.

The student accommodation therefore will be lifted into the air, and so we had to find a suitable metaphor to address and inform this unusual situation.

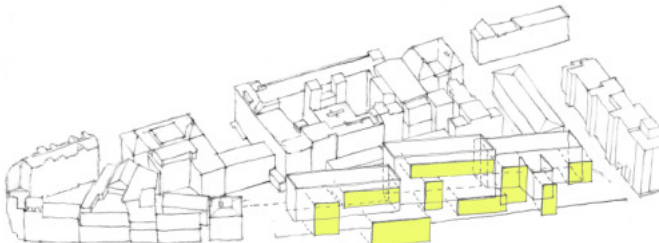
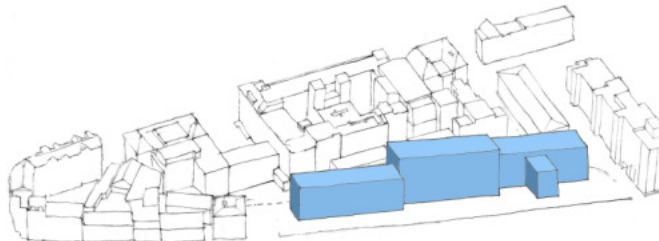
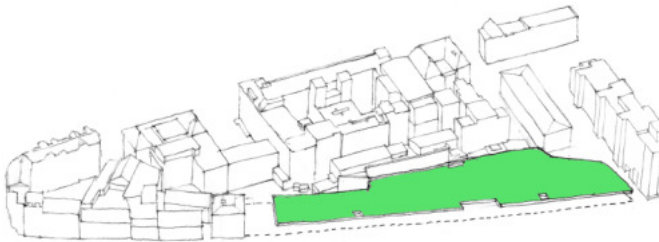
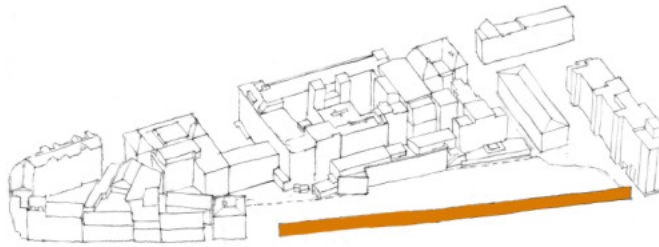
The time spent living in this development will see the students grow both socially and academically and at the end of their study course they will be very different people to when they began.

Both physically and metaphorically therefore, they will be living on a bridge. This notion of the inhabited bridge is a powerful image that has been expressed in architectural terms throughout the ages, with Old London bridge being the apogee of the form. In literature too, the inhabited bridge has been explored in a number of books, and has a powerful grip on the psyche.

Being on the bridge should be a distinctive experience and we would want to create a sense of place that feels unique in the city but not separate from it, in the same way that living on the old London Bridge must have felt special and distinct but still inherently part of London.



## 4.0 Approach to Design



### 4.4 - Conceptual Elements

This is a large, prominent site where we are attempting to accommodate two uses that are not normally compatible.

We've therefore taken a very elemental approach to the design process by separating it into a series of tectonic elements that are each treated individually as a design task, whilst addressing the overall conceptual approach as outlined earlier.

The elements are:

- The Fence
- The Deck
- The Blocks
- The Skin

These elements are then brought together to create the whole design.

We've followed this process from the beginning, re-addressing each element until it has been through a robust procedure.

On the following pages we will show how each of the elements has been developed throughout the design process.

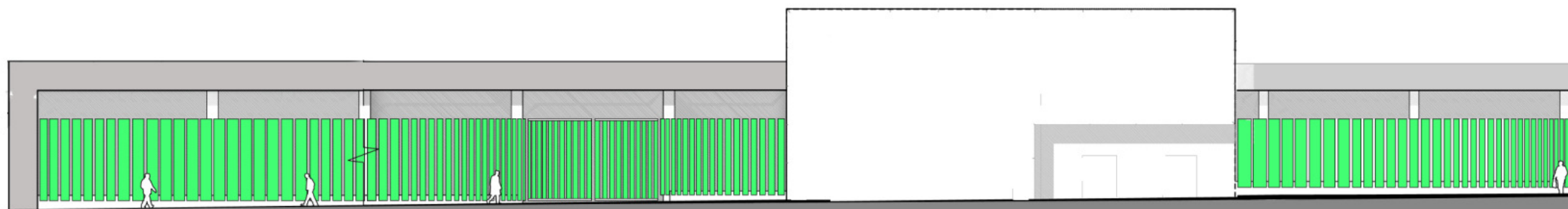
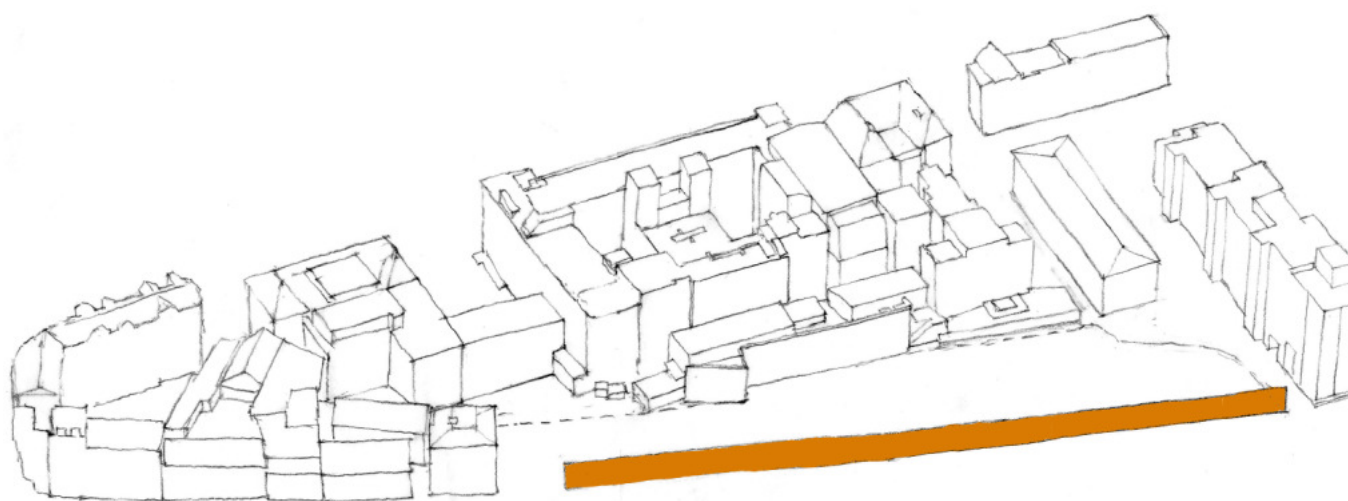


Fig - 4.3.1.1 - The Fence - The Final Design with Gates Closed

## 4.0 Approach to Design

### 4.4.1 - Conceptual Elements - The Fence

The Fence has a key function in that it separates the site from the street and contains the connections between the public and the private realm. As a unifying tool it will advertise and explain what the site is for and will draw both types of users through into the site from the city beyond. The fence will also be the boundary line of the builders' merchants itself.

As such, it is required to be secure, but it must also make clear what is happening behind, which should be easily identifiable as a builders' merchants. It's also important that the fence to Travis Perkins should be clearly distinct from the student housing above, and should be clear to the visitor that it represents a separate independent use.

For most people, the experience of the site will be from street level, and it's therefore vital that this fence is designed to a high quality and makes a positive contribution to the public realm.

The design began as quite a solid separation from the street, more like an actual wall but has evolved through consultation with both the client and the planning authority to become a more transparent fence.

Early discussions with the client made it apparent that the boundary treatment of Travis Perkins was to clearly show the brand and use of the site, so that visitors would quickly be able to recognise it. Another important aspect of this boundary treatment was that it should not look like a commercial part of a largely residential development.

The Local Authority Design Officer was in agreement that the use of the site should not be hidden behind a wall but should be as open as possible in order to add interest to the street.

The final design of the fence successfully addresses these concerns and we have further injected it with conceptual vigour by setting the fence out in a pattern that suggests there is a pulse of communication flowing through the site.

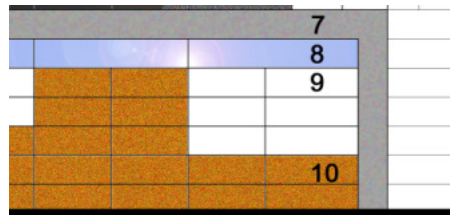
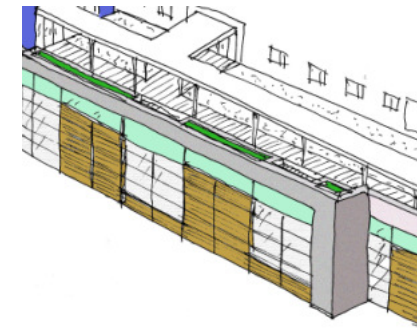
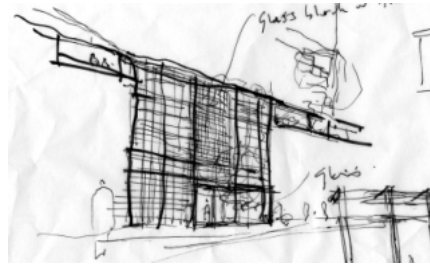
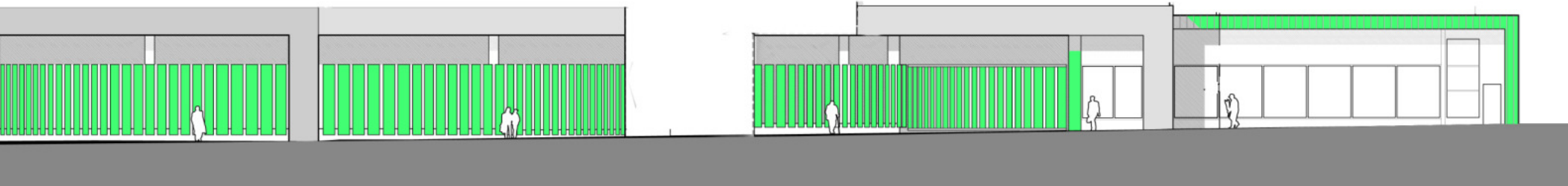
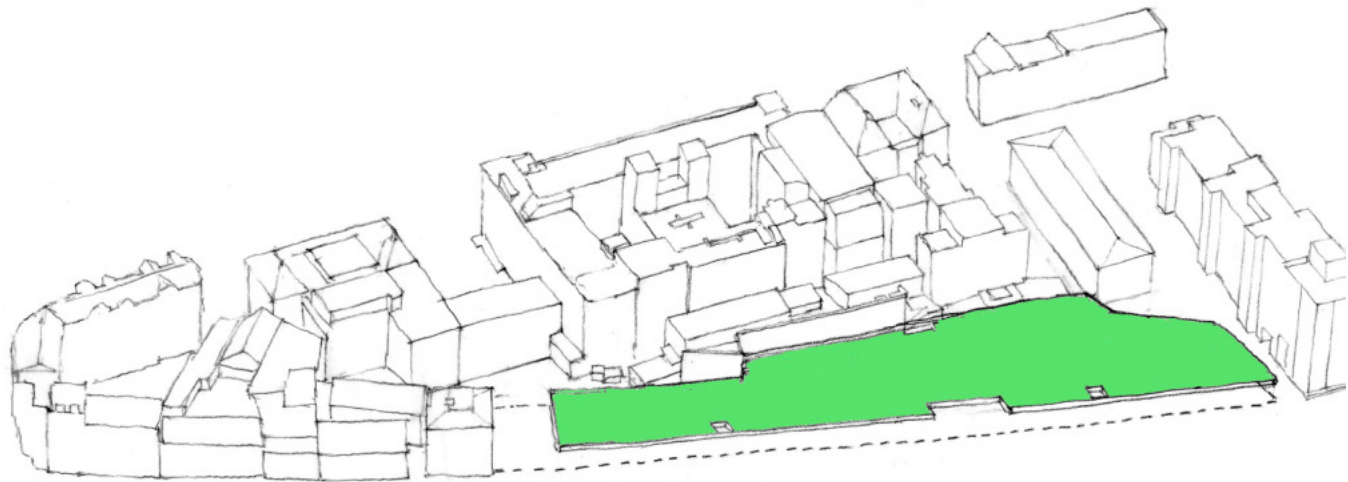


Fig - 4.4.1.2 - Early Versions of the Fence



Fig - 4.4.1.3 - Design Development of the Fence





## 4.0 Approach to Design

### 4.4.2 - Conceptual Elements - The Deck

The Deck separates the two uses. So on passing through the fence, the Travis Perkins staff and visitors stay on the ground and the Unite residents rise up on to the deck. This deck will be expressed as a bridge that takes the residents up above the city around them and allows them a degree of separation from the world but also shows that they are rooted in the urban context and will return to the wider world different people to when they arrived.

The fence and the deck will be visually separate to express their two tectonic forms.

The deck was conceived as a bridge, but as it was to fill the site the formality of the bridge form was lost in early versions.

We revisited the concept and decided to explore splitting the bridges into separate elements that followed more closely the mass of the blocks which sit on them.

Oriental landscape design sometimes incorporates bridges which stagger, so that when crossing them, the traveller is forced to turn or stop and consider the views and to engage with other travellers.

We therefore split the wall up into three separate stepped bridges.

This gives a formality to the design of the deck, and also has the advantage of breaking up the line of the site on the boundary, thus giving added interest and animation to the boundary treatment.

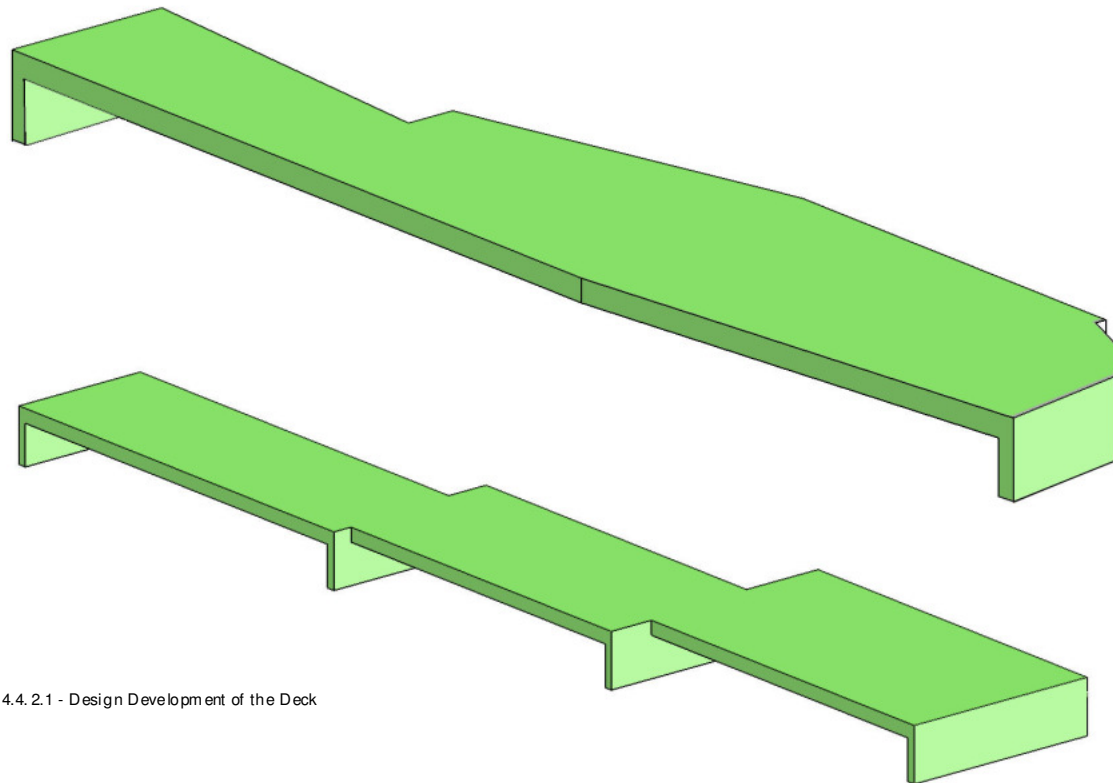
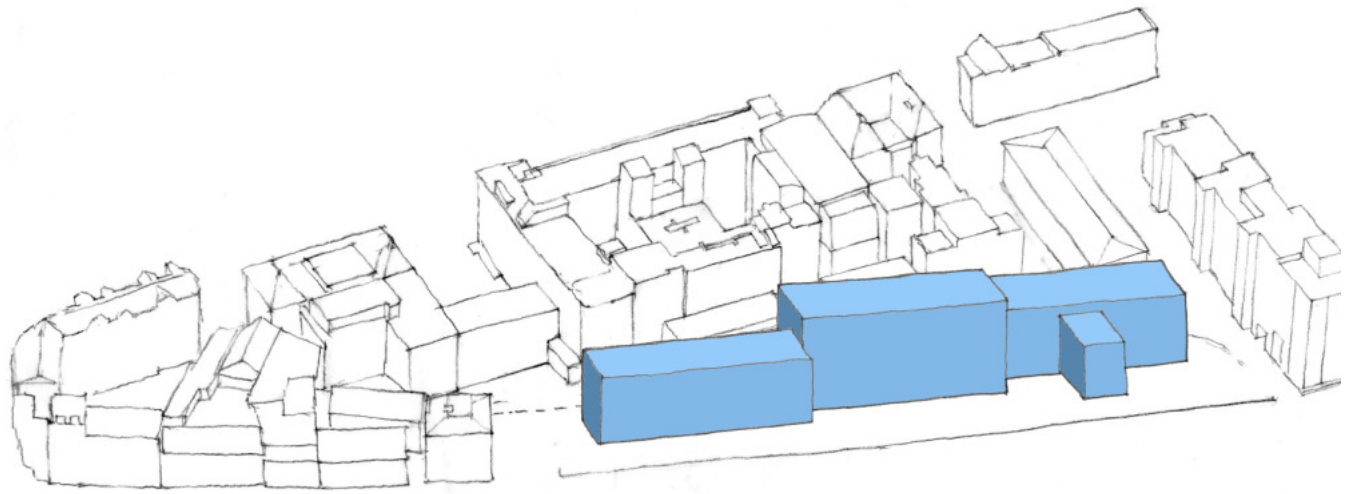


Fig - 4.4.2.1 - Design Development of the Deck



Fig - 4.4.2.2 - Stepped Bridges





## 4.0 Approach to Design

### 4.4.3 - Conceptual Elements - The Blocks

The student residential blocks themselves sit on the podium deck as distinct elements. Their design springs from their use and comes from the pattern of modular apartments that they contain.

In the original pre-application presentation, the proposal was essentially a linear form without any clear break in the mass apart from the entrances and stair towers.

The general form and mass of the buildings was agreed at the first design meeting in September 2010 and has not significantly altered since.

The concept however was to place them on the deck in a pattern to address some key points:

- The highest block is located in the centre of the site to fit in the streetscape. This also reduces significantly the daylight impact on the neighbouring buildings.
- The blocks will step back up to the street in parts to continue the building line rhythm without creating a canyon effect.
- A reasonable and coherent amenity space should be left on the deck and contained by the blocks.

Later in this report we will show in more detail how the above items are addressed by the layout of the blocks on the deck.

As the general form and mass was agreed early on, we have been more concerned with improving the appearance of the blocks through the design development of their elevational treatment.

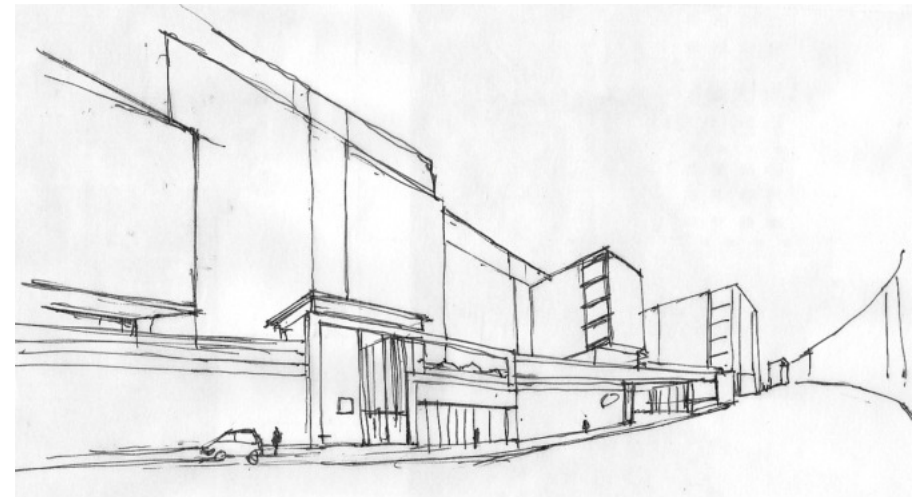
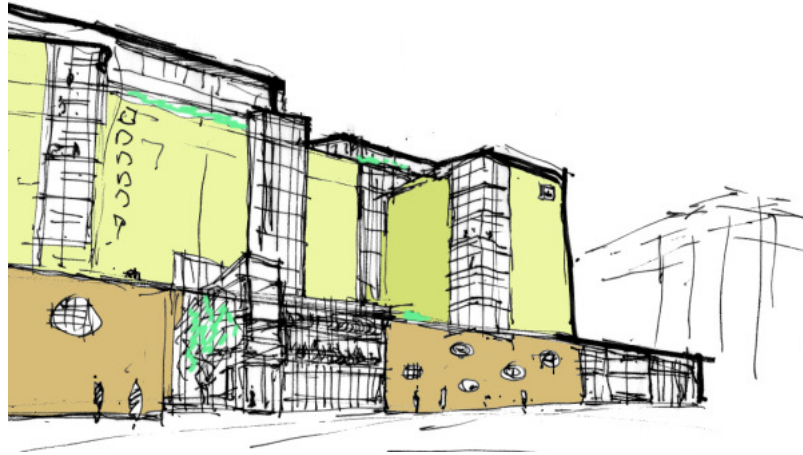
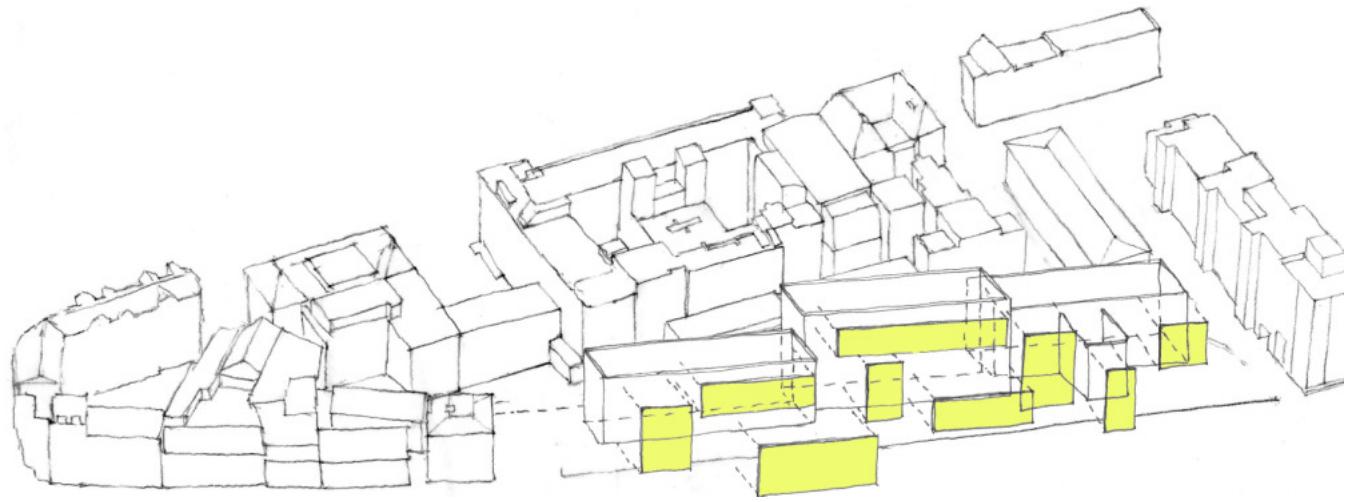


Fig - 4.4.3.1 - Design Development of the Blocks



## 4.0 Approach to Design

### 4.4.4 - Conceptual Elements - The Skin

For a project of this size, the treatment of the elevations is crucial to its success, and we've therefore spent a lot of time in the development of the façade design.

The conceptual approach to the site was one that addresses and celebrates the transitory nature of occupants in the area and the connections they make. The modular nature of the proposed construction can either be expressed or hidden behind a façade. Both approaches have been used in the past and both have their merits.

We initially looked at expressing the repetitive modular nature of the construction and then shifting it slightly so that the elevation itself suggests movement and change (fig 4.4.4.3-A). These shifting facades are contained at the ends with quite strongly expressed elements, to show that whilst the occupants are transitory, the building and the operator is there for the long term.

The honest expression and celebration of the modular nature of the design and how to convey this in the skin of the building has been at the core of our design ethos and this page shows how that has developed.

- The modules would be formed from a regular palette of panels laid out in three different patterns. The modules can be given further broken down into sub categories, by the introduction of subtle changes in the panel types by introducing matt and gloss versions of the same colour (Fig 4.4.4.1)
- These different modules would then be distributed around the site to form the blocks.
- A skin of brick would be applied to become the public face of the building, brick being the most prevalent building material in the immediate neighbourhood.
- The skin would be carved out in places, to show the pattern of modules behind.

The cell like nature of the construction could suggest isolation, but the method of scattering the three module types around the development is suggestive of the connections made whilst living there. The carved openings further accentuate this by paying no attention to the layout of the flats behind but cut across the boundaries of the individual units.

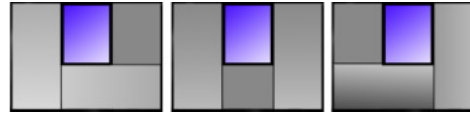


Fig - 4.4.4.1 - Three Distinct Module Patterns

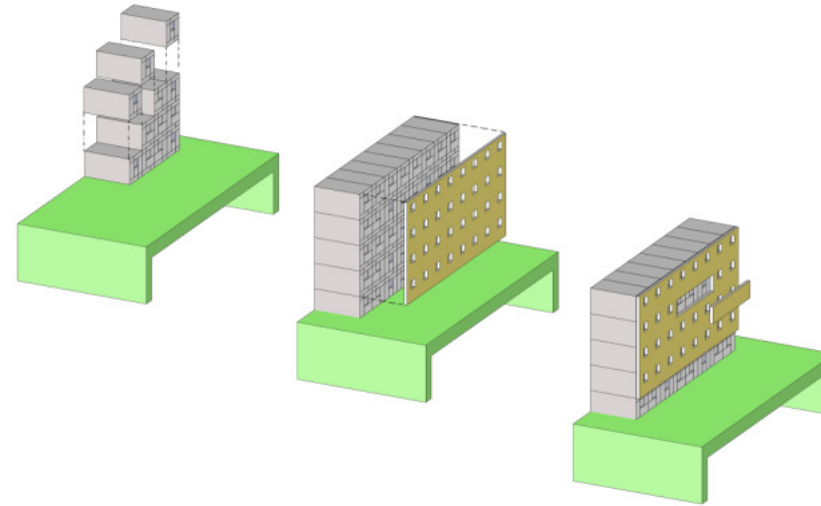


Fig - 4.4.4.2 - The Skin is Applied and Carved Away

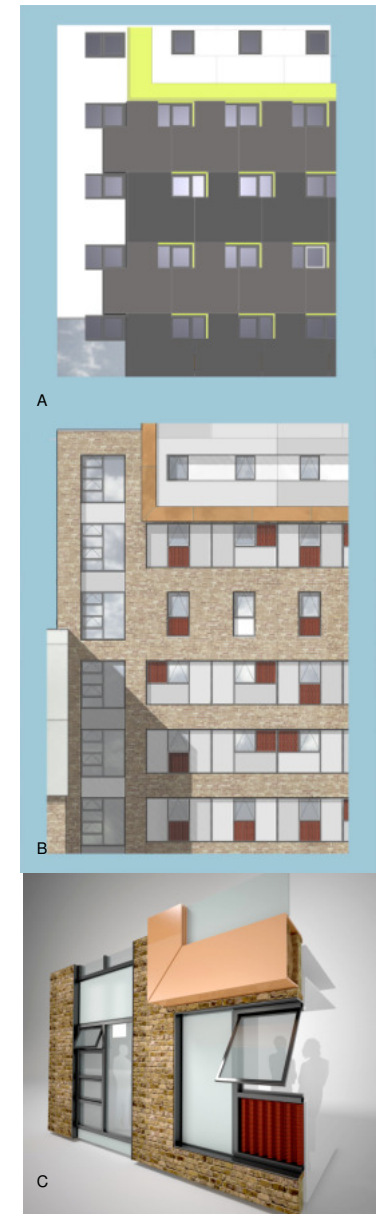


Fig - 4.4.4.3 - Façade design development