

Revealed: new images of Preston Bus Station plans

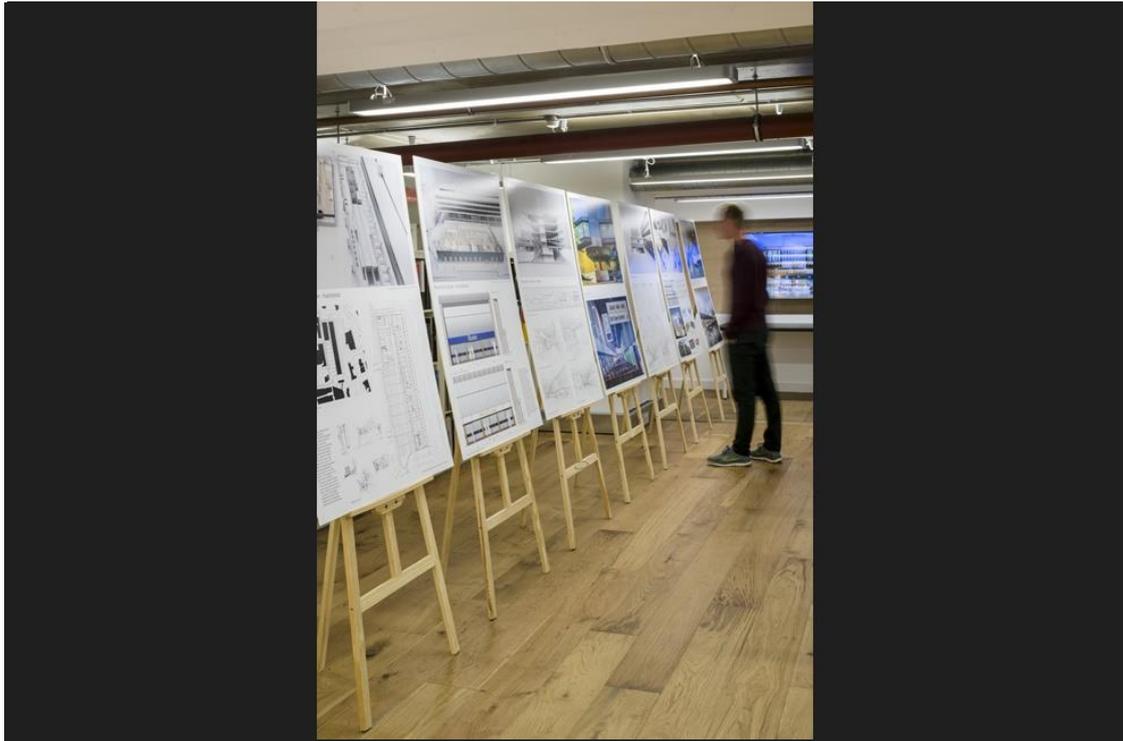
14 NOVEMBER, 2016 BY [RICHARD WAITE](#)



Preston Bus Station and Youth Zone exhibition

Source: Gareth Gardner





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New model shots have been released of John Puttick Associates' reworked concept for a new youth centre at Preston's Grade II-listed bus station

The designs were showcased in a recent exhibition, hosted by engineers [Skelly & Couch](#), on the restoration and refurbishment of the BDP-designed bus station, which the New York-based practice is also overseeing. Combined, the cost of the new youth centre and overhaul of the existing 1969 neo-Brutalist station has been budgeted at £23 million.

The [emerging US firm](#) revised its original [competition-winning scheme](#) for the youth centre to make it 'less complex and more affordable' and to respond to concerns raised by the Twentieth Century Society and Heritage England.

The practice won the high-profile job in August last year, beating Flanagan Lawrence, Letts Wheeler Architects, Preston-based Cassidy + Ashton, and Sane Architecture from France.

The architect says the new Youth Zone building 'combines the lightness of a pavilion-like design with the gravitas required of any building with a significant community role' earmarked for the site next to the 'powerful forms' of the bus station.

A spokesperson for the practice said: 'In plan, the Youth Zone's relationship to Preston Bus Station is very much in keeping with the original BDP strategy of a family of satellite structures, including the vehicular ramps and taxi rank. Together with John Puttick Associates' new scheme, these satellites now read as a sequence of sculptural objects adjacent to the main building.

'In its massing, the terraced horizontal forms of the Youth Zone respond to those of the bus station, and step down to address both the existing building and the new public space. They also preserve the long views alongside the station.'

A planning application for the youth centre scheme was submitted in September and is expected to be decided early in the New Year. The revamp of the existing bus station is already on site..



John Puttick interview (AJ 20.05.16)

Competition winner John Puttick talks to *Tim Abrahams* about why his design for the youth centre next to Preston Bus Station has changed so much

The new design is an advance on the competition-winning entry. Is it a total redesign?

The fundamentals are the same. The restoration of the bus station, adding the coach station and the public space are all the same, except the separating out of the youth centre. It's the bit that everybody remembers because it is the new part but there are a lot of other types of work in this project such as a bit of masterplanning, very careful restoration, public realm and so on. So I can understand why that grabs a lot of the attention, it did at the competition. The other aspects though are really significant.

What can you tell us about the public realm?

What a lot of people don't realise is that the station as it currently stands is cut off from the city. Both sides of it are bus parking. The original idea was that access was through subways but no one likes using these. The very big move we are making is that the whole area to the east of the station – what is now the apron, housing 40 bus stands and parking – will become an amazing new public space with mainly hard landscaping but with a row of trees, benches and soft landscaping.

I know it's an important building

What is the context to the restoration work on the bus station?

When we first came on board, it was seen as a big challenge. But for us, it's been a good process working with both the Twentieth Century Society and Historic England. As a designer, I've really enjoyed engaging with them. I know it's an important building and so do they. They are very thoughtful and knowledgeable about the architecture. They want to protect the building but they are also relatively realistic about the things that need to change to keep it operating as a transport hub, which in the end is a great achievement. The use of the building is a key thing to them.

What philosophies are guiding you on decision-making in the restoration work?

We wanted to fundamentally take it back to the original design. The idea with the materials is to bring it back to the sixties vision. The black rubber tiles and the white tiles will stay. Even the wooden shuttering will stay, although it will go back to being a nice charcoal grey as it was in the original. Then we add new design elements to support new functions. We established that approach. I found both groups really helpful when looking at the new stuff, which is always difficult because their remit is to protect the building. For example, with the new coach station there are new screens that have to be added. We have

had really informed, detailed design discussion which is nice. Does it touch the concrete soffit, or does it remain at a certain level? How is it fixed? What are the materials?

What makes the restoration of a Brutalist bus station different from architecture of a different time period?

It's different for an architecture that was originally about functionality and expressing those functions. This is an architecture that was engaged with contemporary life and was for contemporary life, so I think that the frame of discussion is different than if you were talking about a medieval chapel. It's reasonable to think that the original concept was to allow change; it wasn't seen as a fixed design at the time. Part of the emergence of Brutalism refers back to megastructures which are exactly not fixed.

What is the programme and nature of the new building?

The priority for the council was how to keep the bus station as a bus station and bring new life to this part of the city. They were already working with charity Onside, which runs youth clubs throughout the North West to bring one of their facilities to Preston. Onside's model, in contrast to how it was in our day, is always to put the clubs as central as possible. Their mode is bringing together facilities that actually attract young people rather than what they've been given in the past. There's always a sports hall, and arts and music facilities. There's also business incubator stuff and a café; normally there's a football pitch which in our case is on the roof. They've been really successful.

Moving the youth centre away preserves the bus station

Why was the building attached to the bus station in the competition entry?

Being attached was part of the competition brief. In fact, it asked for part of the programme for the youth centre to be inserted into the bus station. After the competition we had the opportunity to meet the client, and then really importantly for this project, we got to meet the Twentieth Century Society and Historic England and have a long dialogue with them, but also the operators of the bus station, and the charity running the youth centre. It quickly became obvious that there were many benefits on an organisational level to separating the youth centre from the station. But the key one is that it preserves the bus station, and views of it.

What does the building actually contribute to the new relationship between the bus station and the public square?

The idea is that it will terminate the view which at the moment bleeds off to the Holiday Inn beyond. If you were to just pave this over, I don't think it would work that well. You need something to define the end of it.

Can you explain your thinking about how the design of the building evolved?

We developed this stepping massing as a response to the way the bus station steps out. We started to carve into that form to make openings so when you look at it from the south, from the public space, it's got a big opening for the main entrance, but also so you can what is happening in the building. We're exposing the columns along the side adjacent to the bus station. At the moment we are proposing that the cladding is zinc.

It's a new building and it should be a different thing

What does the new building share with the bus station?

The original building was utilitarian in the best sense of the word. The new building is utilitarian in the same sense, hopefully. It's not an art gallery, it's a facility for young people to use every day and to knock it around. There are little elements such as a concrete base around the building which on the south side raises up to form a seat – a light reference to the built-in furniture you have in the station, but it won't be *too* literal. It's a new building and it should be a different thing.

How did you feel about the criticism you received when the competition entry was made public?

It's a public project and it's had a long history. Part of me wasn't surprised there was some criticism because it provokes strong feeling. It's quite right that people debate it; it's a public building and an important one. However, some of the criticism was on a surface level, eg 'I don't like that image' or 'I do like that image', and architecture is never just about one image. There are many different layers to this project. I can't think of a project I've worked on that has this level of complexity.