

St. Ebbes New Development

..... a model of successful regeneration.

Margaret Maden, 12 Dale Close, St. Ebbes. Oxford OX1 1TU. (2014)

In **1977** a proposal to re-develop the SENDRA part of the St. Ebbes area was approved by Oxford City Council. Its previous condition- shown on the cover of this pamphlet – had caused concern on health and social grounds for much of the 20th Century, especially after the 2nd World war.

The social ('Oxford Corporation') housing estate, located between Friars Wharf and Thames St. had already been developed in the 1960s when there was reference to the removal of the 'disused gasworks'. The City Council was supported in its belief that an adjacent 'private' – mainly freeholder – estate made sense.

The 1977 proposal was for '141 dwelling houses, 29 flats and a shop'. It also included a new bridge over Castle Mill Stream and refurbishment of the nearby Gas Works railway bridge. Included in the planning permission was a set of conditions and objectives, including 'a landing stage and mooring', detailed landscape requirements (shrubs and trees were to be included in site layouts), improvements of the children's playground at Friars Wharf and restrictions on the use of garages or the removal of trees.

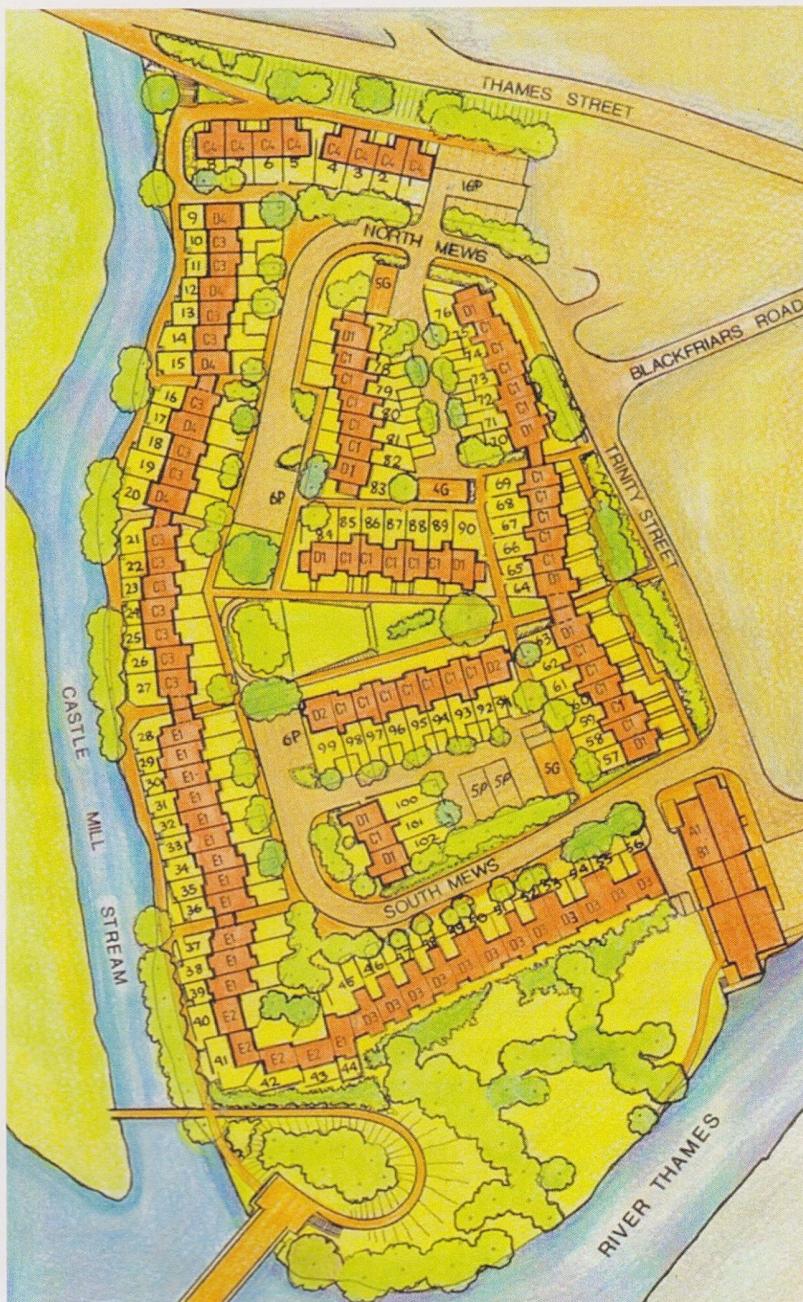
The required landscape plan had to include 'a survey of existing trees showing sizes and species....and shall show in detail all proposed tree and shrub planning, treatment of paved areas and areas to be grassed.'

The proposed site layout (see next page) was accepted, although in the later planning permission of 1983, for Phase 2 – north of Sadler Walk – the total number of 'dwelling houses' was increased from 141 to 163.

The original builders were Hills Structures and Foundations of Wembley, Middlesex and the architects were ADP (Architects Design Partnership) then based in Henley-on Thames, now at Cantay House, Park End St. ADP had won an architectural competition for the project in 1978. Later, the scheme won a national award for 'outstanding urban renewal'. In *Oxford, An Architectural Guide*, by Geoffrey Tyack, the estate is described as possessing 'a strong visual appeal, with steep pitched roofs, rich brick walls and luxuriant vegetation – a welcome contrast to the tarmac and concrete wastes of the nearby car parks of the Westgate Centre.'

The initial development was along Dale Close, Nos. 1-29, then 30-32, followed by 3-15 Trinity St. and 1-9 Sadler Walk. Hills went out of business after one year's work and in **1980**, Barclays Bank assumed overall control, employing former Hills employees. Property prices ranged from £31,000 to £55,000.





Site Layout

From Hills
Sales
Brochure,
1980.

Below....

Architect's impressions of planned Sadler Walk (left) and back of Dale Close (right)



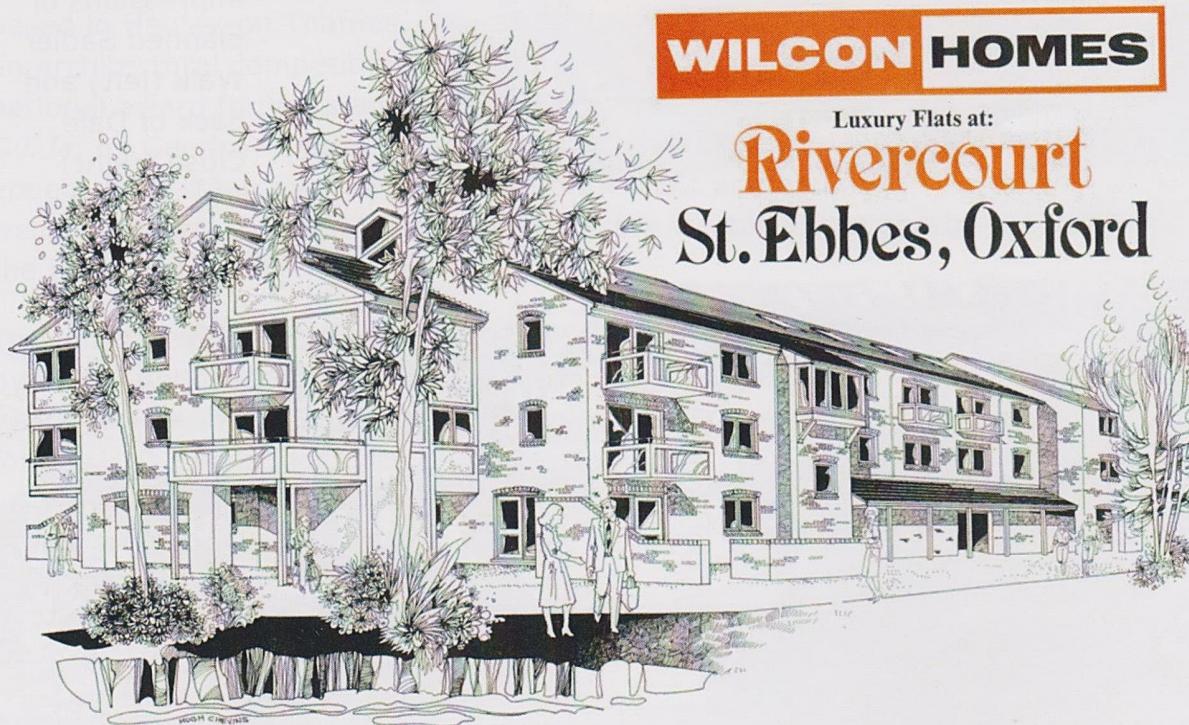
Phase 2 followed some 3-4 years later with a new planning consent in **1983**. In this, the named builders were Wilcon Homes Ltd and Design Group, Northampton. The original architects, ADP, were not re-appointed.

Wilcon benefitted from the site elevation created under the earlier Hills work when an additional 1.5 metres of soil and clinker and a concrete base had been part of the earliest groundwork. This probably explains the lack of flooding in any house on the estate.

There were additional planning requirements relating to the possible inclusion of oil-fired central heating and the conditions applicable to the siting of refuse bins. Original requirements were included – the planting of shrubs and trees ('no trees shall be lopped, topped or cut down'), the restrictions on the use of garages, the quality of building materials and the centrality of 'visual amenity' in all structures. Curiously, there is reference to 'the visual appearance of the Conservation area in which it stands'. There is some uncertainty about a Conservation area being in place at that time.

Phase 2 comprised the north side of Sadler Walkthe difference in brick type is still observable, north and south sides... the Castle Mill Stream end of Sadler Walk and all of Trinity St. Wilcon called this development 'Rivercourt-St Ebbes'.

Phase 3 was the Rivercourt Apartments block and its sales brochure was issued in **1987**. Prices ranged from £69,500 to £120,000 for 17 apartments. Included on its site layout were 2 shops; a larger one on the SE corner of the building and a smaller one inside the rear parking area. It appears that the larger shop was thought of as a ship's chandlers combined with 'mini-supermarket'. Why neither shop was realised is unknown.



So...what about the quality?

From the chronology provided here, it can be quickly appreciated that the City Council and ADP architects, in particular, were committed to high and imaginative standards of 'visual amenity' as well as to ensuring the provision of more basic measures - sewage, flood and pollution prevention, car parking etc.

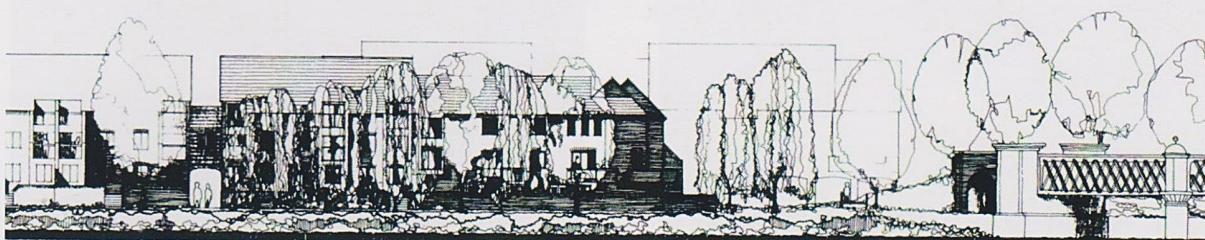
In the planning consents, the detailed reference to *vegetation* is noteworthy and the combined forces of ADP and builders, the City Council's Parks' department and the residents is something we all appreciate to this day...with the latter two carrying on the good work. The contemporary photos which form the final pages of this pamphlet bear testimony to this.

The *curved walls* along Dale Close are another positive architectural feature and this earlier phase also included the distinctive over-fired bricks (a job lot of Ockley machine-made multistock seconds acquired by Hills).

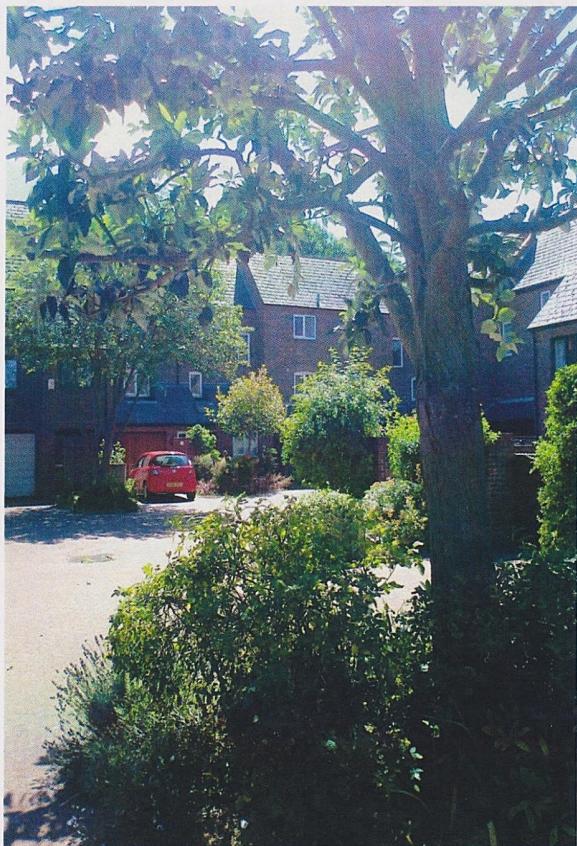
The '*staggered*' *roof-lines and frontages* of terraced housing are valued attributes and that principle has been continued into later phases. The combination of steep 'in-out' elevations of rooflines, irregularly placed balconies and profuse vegetation, both public and private, along Castle Mill Stream continues to be enjoyed by many walkers and cyclists.

The original *paintwork* was carefully selected to complement the rich tones of the over-fired bricks – Nos 1-12 Dale Close; dark brown stain, Nos 13-18, sage green and Nos 19-29, black windows with yellow gates. The original 'settlers' still argue about the exact colour themes. Gates were designed with diagonal slats which weren't entirely weatherproof...most have now disappeared.

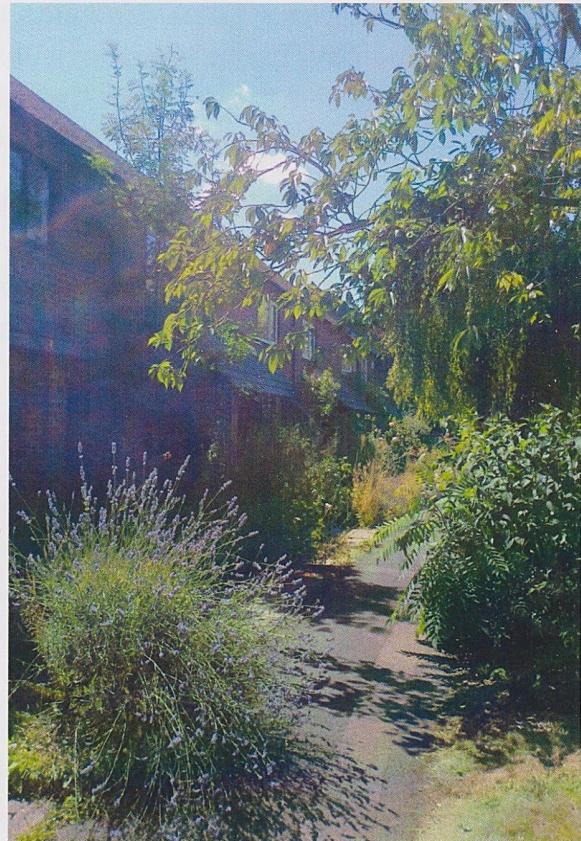
SENDRA was founded in 1981 and has kept a careful, unobtrusive watch over the quality of our environment. Early in the 1980s, for example, SENDRA ensured that double yellow lines were provided so as to control the number of parked cars, whether of residents or visitors. We appreciate this urban, inner city 'oasis' and will continue to care for it.



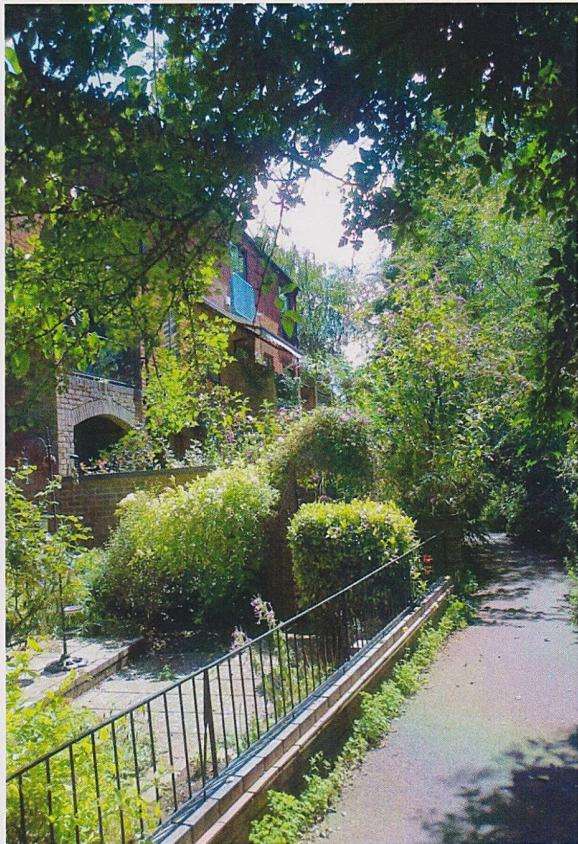
Thanks to Paul and Paula Peters and Cynthia Harper, three of the original pioneers who have helped in producing this. Also to Jack Blencowe and Colin Bridger for copies of the original sales brochures. Rob Fowler at the City Council's Planning Dept. has been extremely helpful... and patient. Bob McIntyre completed the reprographics. MM.



Dale Close from the inside of the estate looking south

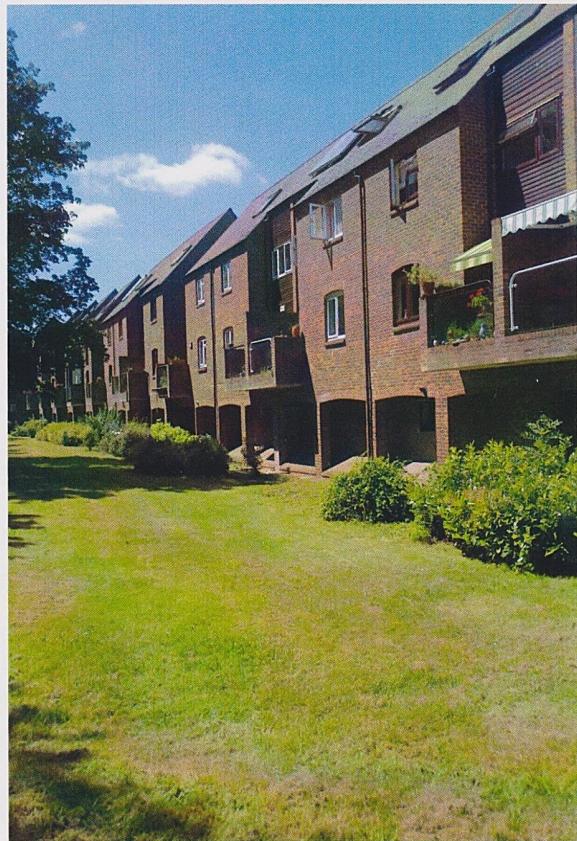


Sadler Walk



The west side of Dale Close from the river walk

Dale Close from the south





Dale Close showing the curved garden walls

Trinity Street looking from the inside of the estate

