

# Chips by the canal

Construction is complete on the first building in the prestigious New Islington sustainable regeneration development in Manchester. The mixed-use building, called Chips, is designed to offer canal-side living with energy saving made easy, reports **Ella Taylor**.



Photo by Christian Richters

Designed by architect **Will Alsop** of **Alsop architects**, Chips has been given a BREEAM Eco Homes 'Excellent' rating for its 142 apartments, which sit above a ground floor restaurant space.

The building is based on the shape of three chips stacked on top of one another, each of a slightly different length. The three chips, or blocks, are all around 100m long and 14m wide, and contain three storeys.

The different lengths and staggered positions of the blocks mean that the end of the middle block hangs out over the bottom block, creating a sheltered outside dining area for a restaurant. The top block is shorter in length, so that the roof of the

middle level provides a communal terrace area for residents overlooking the canal that surrounds the building.

"Chips is a truly unique building and we are delighted with how it has turned out. We wanted to introduce a building with a real visual twist, something which would entice people in and around Manchester whilst emanating humour and attractiveness," said Mr Alsop.

New Islington is one of seven national **Homes and Communities Agency's** Millennium Communities, and is being created in collaboration with **Urban Splash**, **New East Manchester** and **Manchester Methodist Housing Association**. It is

designed to be a sustainable suburb with 1,700 new homes as well as commercial space.

It keeps sustainability at its heart, with the site itself re-using previously developed land as well as the provision of drinking water from boreholes in the surrounding sandstone and energy from a community combined heat and power (CHP) plant.

The first key principle of New Islington, according to the website, is: "Residents shouldn't have to make a conscious effort to reduce energy consumption, the building and service infrastructure should do it for them – the only lifestyle change required by the residents will be the separation of waste to assist recycling and reduce landfill."



Another key principle of New Islington is that being environmentally friendly should cost residents less, not more. A flat rate 'service charge' has been recommended for energy consumption, rather than traditional meters. With the exception of electricity, which is metered, a supplier would make more money from selling less water, gas and so on, encouraging occupants to use less.

New Islington's aim is also that dry recyclable materials will be treated on-site, with ambitions to introduce tax credits to reward waste reduction.

As part of the Millennium Communities programme, Chips had to comply with guidelines set out by the HCA, including reducing energy and water consumption, generating renewable energy, using sustainable building materials, producing reduced construction and domestic waste and including affordable housing. It also had to meet strict sustainability targets set by Manchester Methodist Housing Association, which bought around 40% of the flats.

Inside the flats are planned around a central 'pod' containing a bathroom and kitchen. Originally the intention was for every pod to be prefabricated off-site, but though this worked for the bathrooms the kitchens were ultimately built in-situ.

Chips will be offered to rent or to buy, with Urban Splash teaming up with **Plumlife** to offer 50 homes under the Government's Rent to Homebuy scheme. This allows first time buyers to rent at a discounted rate, typically 80% of the market rate, for up to five years while they save for a deposit to buy it.

Daylight is maximised by the specification of large and varied types of windows supplied and fitted by Scandinavian timber

company **Janex**. Where possible every flat has some full height windows, with high thermal performance and good insulation in the walls to keep heat in. Windows clad in black aluminium, sliding patio doors, French doors and timber doors painted black all feature, each of different sizes to break up the long façade and contrast with the colourful external panels.

### Excitement

The ground floor restaurant has a double height ceiling and is elevated 1.5m above ground level in places, allowing natural ventilation to get through to a car park in the basement. The car park is of course a less sustainable feature of the building, with spaces provided for one car per apartment, despite a new tram stop promised to link New Islington and Manchester city centre.

Chips is built on the site of a former hospital ward and a mill, which were demolished to make way for the new development, rather than being refurbished or converted into homes. It is unclear whether or not any of the building materials from them were re-used.

Also developed Chips and the masterplan in following six months of community consultation, which involved taking local residents on site visits to high-density residential developments that supported the type of sustainable infrastructure they wanted, as well as directly asking them what type of homes and facilities they wanted.

Chips stands next to a purpose-built arm of the canal, an extension of the existing network of canals in the area. The building is made from reinforced concrete and finished in different shades of brown contrasting

with splashes of lime green, pink and lemon.

**Martin Stockley Associates**, the project engineers, described Chips with excitement: "It zigzags along the edge of the Ashton Canal as a group of three-storey elements ('chips') stacked on top of each other. Each three-storey element takes a different route along the edge of the canal producing overhanging or inset zones along the perimeter at the interface of each box. This creates a rich and interesting form both visually and structurally."

► <http://www.alsoparchitects.com/>

► <http://www.newislington.co.uk/>

► <http://www.urbansplash.co.uk/projects/chips>

### New Islington, a Millennium Community

The Millennium Communities programme was launched by the Government in 1997 and delivered by **English Partnerships**, now the HCA, to create new sustainable and environmentally responsible communities. It specified that Millennium Communities must:

- Meet Eco Homes Excellent and BREEAM Excellent
- Reduce the energy used in constructing homes by 50%
- Reduce the amount of metered energy consumption by 20%
- Generate renewable energy
- Reduce water consumption by 20%
- Reduce domestic waste by 50%
- Reduce construction waste
- Maximise design quality
- Improve construction quality and efficiency
- Give better noise reduction
- Have improved space standards
- Include affordable housing
- Have 'A' rated white goods
- Introduce car clubs and cycle facilities
- Use sustainable building materials
- Achieve Lifetime Homes standards
- Achieve Secured by Design standards
- Improve site Health and Safety
- Be IT enabling

The six other Communities are:

- Greenwich Millennium Village, London
- Allerton Bywater Millennium Community, near Leeds
- South Lynn Millennium Community, King's Lynn
- Telford Millennium Community
- Oakgrove Millennium Community, Milton Keynes
- Hastings Millennium Community