Made to fit

Royal Veterinary College
Student Village
Hertfordshire

hawkinsbrown.com
The Royal Veterinary College needed new student accommodation, a restaurant and conference facilities on its Hawkshead Campus. Set in rolling Hertfordshire countryside and on green belt land, the project required a sensitive response to its rural location. Time was also critical. Existing facilities were passed their prime, with valuable accommodation revenue being lost to private landlords. Added to this, the site was a live campus 365 days of the year. The sooner the new student village was ready, the better.

Working closely with the Estates Team, we made sure the scheme was right for both the unique setting and type of student. Soon-to-be vets and veterinary nurses are a dedicated, aspirational bunch. High quality at good value were our other key considerations. By engaging early and frequently with planning officers, and developing a cohesive set of design principles, the planning application was approved in just three months.

Engaging early

Responding sensitively to the setting
Softening the mass of the new architecture was fundamental. Our approach introduced three- and four-storey pavilions, linked by raised decks and featuring carefully considered roofscapes. The brick-based pavilions, clad in untreated timber, sit naturally in the landscape.
Creating a one-off student village
Made for aspiring vets

Hawkehead Campus is home to a particular type of student: mature, extremely hardworking and predominantly female. Our design solution was built around this profile.

1. Shaping a community
The student village has an intimate residential feel in context to the vibrant world of the campus. Between the pavilions, pitch roofs provide shelter for a series of 77 lodges a considered part of each building.

2. Increasing the pavilion footprint
To gain extra student accommodation spaces, we made the stair cores external. In planning terms, these elements weren’t obscured circles and shadowed patterns. Alongside Nicky, we created a multitude of cardboard cut-outs of delicately manufactured off site, safely on the ground floor. Power and electricity are triggered by an energy-saving switch (just like in a hotel), but with a vital override switch. When students go out, they have clear charging, so their laptops remain charging, so hours are served all day.

3. Integrating art into the fabric
Collaborating with artist, Nicky Hirst, we identified each pavilion’s stair core cladding as a canvas. The result is ethereal while being grounded in the college’s heritage. Nicky’s work is inspired by the word ‘Eclipse’. As well as conjuring up geometric images, it also reveals relaxed bodies, the name of a famous horse that dominated racing in the 1769-1770 seasons. When Eclipse died two decades later, a vet school was established to determine the secret of the horse’s success. This was the college’s foundations.

4. Encouraging social interaction
Generally, stair communal lobbies, with a natural colour palette and areas for sitting and socialising, are claustrophobic. Instead, other than the basics in standards, it is a great screening for from the corridor, the lobbies are a great place to gather.

5. Making the inside details count
Our design incorporates special security features for a largely female set of occupiers, including night-vision glass windows that automatically adjust to ensure safety on the ground floor. Powder-coated, an energy-saving switch just like in a hotel, but with a override switch. When students go out, they have clear charging, so their laptops remain charging, so hours are served all day.

6. Designing a restaurant, and a refectory
The 200-seater restaurant provides valuable break-out space, assists ventilation and the balcony windows flood the spaces with natural light, a chimney on top. The simple, modern conference facility is flexible to hold a range of events. Night-lighting allows views from the staircase with assisted ventilation and the balustrado provides suitable knee-cut spaces, with breathtaking views.

7. Delivering swiftly by standardising construction
To beat phase one, we worked closely with the main contractor, Morgan Sindall. Together, we ensured there was always a working restaurant on the campus and exploited the advantage of prefabrication.

- Re-defining pre-fab bathrooms: All 191 en-suite bathroom pods were manufactured off site. The process from ordering to fully fitted out took just six weeks. Being produced in a factory environment, standardising construction and producing to fully fitted out took just six weeks.

- Designing the furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E): The student furniture was made off site, being rigorously tested for its robustness before bringing in place.

8. Standardising: The pavilion windows
Working with sub-contractor, PS Systems, we refined numerous sketches, designs and mock-ups of the powder-coated, composite windows. The result is a kit of bespoke window types, with elegant joining and sight lines. Each pavilion window maximises the countryside views and sight lines. Each pavilion window maximises the countryside views and sight lines. Each pavilion window maximises the countryside views and sight lines.

9. Delivering swiftly by standardising construction
To beat phase one, we worked closely with the main contractor, Morgan Sindall. Together, we ensured there was always a working restaurant on the campus and exploited the advantage of prefabrication.

To beat phase two, the artwork becomes shimmering gems at the end of the stair cores, catching the light and revealing the landscape beyond. Lit at night, the stairs feel like giant lanterns.

Julia Roberts Partner

HawkinsBrown.com
Making the most of your site
Hawkins\Brown is a modern British architectural practice with an award-winning approach to design. We put our hearts and minds into realising your project’s potential. You’ll discover creativity, commitment and a desire to collaborate to reach the best solution.

To find out more about our practice or talk to us about your project, contact:

Oliver Milton
OliverMilton@hawkinsbrown.com
+44 (0)20 7336 8030

London
159 St John Street
EC1V 4QJ
+44 (0)20 7336 8030
mail@hawkinsbrown.com

Manchester
3C Tariff Street
M1 2FF
+44 (0)161 641 5522
mail@hawkinsbrown.com

hawkinsbrown.com