

School report

Nine Elms to Pimlico Student Bridge Design Competition for Schools

Introduction

As part of the wider public engagement programme to support the Nine Elms to Pimlico bridge initiative a student competition was launched in January 2015 and has been running in parallel with the architectural and engineering competition to design a new cycle and pedestrian bridge across the River Thames, between Nine Elms and Pimlico.

Wandsworth Borough Council very much wanted to engage the hearts and minds of people living on both sides of the river and provide them with an opportunity of becoming involved in the wider competition process. As part of the campaign to raise awareness within the community local schools were invited to take part in a second competition to showcase their students' ideas for a new bridge across the river.

The Schools

Five schools in Wandsworth and Lambeth accepted the invitation to take part in the competition - Chesterton Primary, St George's C of E Primary, St Mary's R.C. Primary, Wyvil Primary, and Harris Academy.

The Brief

A simple brief, based on that given to the professional teams was issued to the schools, and age appropriate challenges were set:

KS 1 & KS2

- The bridge should look special but fit in with other buildings near by it
- It should be strong enough to allow people to walk and cycle across it
- It should be a safe bridge
- It should be high enough to let boats cross underneath it

KS 3 & KS4

- The bridge should have a strong visual quality and it should be unique.
- It must have its own identify but be sympathetic and appropriate to the local area (think about the sort of buildings in the area and the materials they are built from).
- Be of an appropriate scale and height (think about the river traffic and think about the historic/ landmark buildings in this part of London).
- The bridge should be wide enough to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians and must provide a safe and attractive link for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the river.

Schools were asked to submit their best 10 pieces of work from students working individually or in teams. The format for submission was an A2 board with a short one side of A4 sheet of text to explain the work. The submission deadline was 5th June.

The Jury

The entries have been assessed by a Jury Panel consisting of the Leader of Wandsworth Council, Ravi Govindia; Pam Alexander, Chair of Caba at the Design Council; David Joyce, Assistant Director Planning, London Borough of Lambeth; and Sarah Banham, Battersea Power Station Development Company.

Prizes have been awarded to the best scheme from each school and a further prize has been awarded to the school that has submitted the best entries.

Jury comments

The Jury enjoyed reviewing the students' work finding it both interesting and rewarding. There was an eclectic set of design ideas on display ranging from zip wires to ice cream bridges, some illustrated in coloured pens, others in pencil, and some with photographs of models made from paper, card, string and straws. The range and quality of work was varied as were the approaches each of the schools had taken in tackling the competition design challenge. This made it difficult to make comparisons between the schools and to gauge the quality of work. That said there were a number of common themes which ran across all the work. In particular shopping and eating featured in quite a number of the submissions with high street fast food outlets designed into many of the bridges, along with toy shops, and well known high street clothing and shoe stores. A number of submissions focussed ideas around keeping healthy, with lots of fun activities included within the bridge proposals. Students had also spent time thinking about the environment and the inclusion of solar panels, of adding greenery and trees, and of having 'get fit' bridges certainly impressed the Judges. At times however the concept of a bridge design was lost in and amongst the many wild and wonderful ideas of what having fun was about – particularly in the submissions by the KS 1 and KS2 children.

The quality of written work submitted in support of many of the schemes was poor with a number of very good ideas suffering as a result of not being explained well. Similarly the Jury were surprised that the KS3 and KS4 students did not seem to understand the basic concepts of scale and size with inappropriate measurements being applied to elements of their work.

Winners

St George's C of E Primary

Winner -The Ice Cream Bridge C1510

This was a funky and fun idea that has been nicely executed. The Jury liked this design because it was a real structure as well as a good idea. The use of the Ice Cream Cones to hold up the bridge was a very clever and showed an imaginative way of dealing with the towers (in other schemes these look rather lumpen and heavy). It was a very colourful scheme and had been very neatly prepared.

Another submission which attracted the Jury was the Get Fit Bridge C1509 which was fun and functional and allowed people to keep healthy at the same time.

Chesterton Primary

Winner - Zip Wire Bridge F158

The Judges loved this bridge. Not only was it fun but functional too. As well as the Zip Wire being a means of crossing the river, people can also walk over. This bridge retained its core purpose that is to allow people to walk from one side to the other, whilst including a fun and novel element.

The Leaf Bridge F157 had good ideas including the lighting scheme and the Judges especially liked the thought that had gone into the process of opening and shutting the bridge.

St Mary's R.C. Primary

Winner -The Power Bridge E1510

The Judges were very impressed with this bridge that had been named after Battersea Power Station. The inclusion of the map was liked; the solar power Wi-Fi; and the twirling shape of the bridge. The ramps to get up to the bridge were sensible and the Jury liked the fact that this scheme had made provision for wheel chair users. The model was very good too.

A number of other schemes impressed the Judges including the Confusion Bridge E158, which had echoes of the Garden Bridge; the Hurley Burley Bridge E159, which had an inspired narrative to

support a real structure that had considered how the bridge met the banks of the river; and E154, a very elegant and slender bridge which was unfortunately very high.

Wyvil Primary

Winner – Scheme D1502

This was a very good submission that impressed the Judges. It was clear that this team had thought about a bridge and in particular how to get off it. The Judges were especially pleased to see that some thought had been given to this aspect of the design. The inclusion of drawings of various landmarks as references was also clever and showed a good level of thought about the bridge and its context.

Harris Academy

Winner – Scheme A1506

A very big and solid structure, rather lumpen in form, but with many nice features including the reference to the Power Station, in the design of the pillars; the existing railway bridge, echoed in the shape of the bridge; and the Art Deco detailing. The idea of a mirrored ramp was intriguing and a fun idea too. The Judges were impressed that time had been spent looking at the practical issues of cyclists and pedestrians co-existing.

Scheme A1504 was also praised for its lightness of touch. This was an aesthetically pleasing scheme and cleverly tied the central design idea to other images used around the A2 board. The analysis and explanation of process was particularly good.

Conclusion

The Judges were impressed by the range of ideas that had been submitted and by the very different techniques used by schools to present their work. It was evident that the students had enjoyed the project and had let their imaginations run free. It was clear that some students had thought very hard about creating a bridge and kept that their main focus whilst others had explored ideas of having fun loosely based on the bridge theme, but losing it in the detail of fun fairs and shopping malls.

Whilst all the schools were to be commended for their efforts one school in particular stood out for the quality of its submissions and its approach to the project. **St Mary's R. C. Primary** work was model based with photographs of models submitted as part of the children's A2 design boards. The concept of using models was imaginative and the Jury found it very useful in evaluating and understanding the children's proposals. Models were simple, constructed from tape, straws, card, paper and string, but clearly communicated ideas, scale and structure.

This school is awarded the prize for **best school submission**.