

PROJECT

The Barbican NW Podium Project



The Grade II listed Barbican Estate is a unique architectural gem within the City of London. It was constructed between 1969 and 1980 restoring a bomb damaged part of the City. The Architects Chamberlin Powell & Bon planned it as a network of pedestrian precincts above and separated from traffic. This enclave contains the renowned Barbican Arts Centre, residential towers and blocks, a school, college, commercial premises, gardens and lakes. The materials palette is primarily high quality exposed aggregate concrete for walls and

brindle clay pavers for the pedestrian podium. Maintaining the quality of the surroundings requires a continuous programme of maintenance and replacement. By late 2011 the City of London concluded that a comprehensive replacement of the paving was required to address reoccurring problems with the waterproofing of the pedestrian areas, raised over commercial premises. Bickerdike Allen Partners was appointed to prepare a scheme to strip the existing deck, re-waterproof and repave a first phase in the North West podium. All paving and

landscape features were carefully detailed to meet listing criteria, reduce dead loads on the slab and ensure longevity of replacement elements.

The replacement materials had to be an exact match to the original Etruria Marl Hawkins brown brindle clay pavers no longer manufactured. Chris Hancock at Bickerdike Allen Partners explains, "in the absence of any UK manufacturer of 18mm thick clay pavers, we were fortunate to discover that Ketley was considering establishing a new production line for quarry tiles. Working together to meet the Barbican's requirements, Ketley established production of an Etruria Marl 18mm thick paver and they were able to meet all the exacting requirements for colour variation, high slip resistance, flatness and volume production." 7400m² of fully bedded new Ketley pavers and paver specials in a mix of 40:40:20 Blue Brindle:Brown Antique:Brown Brindle, have been laid on this first phase of refurbishment, even replacing patches of waffle tiles previously used for slip resistance. These waffle tiles had a square relief pattern which provided additional slip resistance on the walkway sections. However they also

gathered water in the grooves and moisture was then transferred when they were walked upon, which detracted from the appearance of the tiles and made them prone to failure. The challenge for Ketley was to produce a tile with at least the slip resistance of the waffle tile but in a smoothfaced finish. The Ketley Quarry tiles achieve a significantly higher slip resistance than the existing smoothfaced and waffle tiles, with mean USRV of 68. It was therefore decided that the waffle tiles were no longer needed. Through dialogue with planners and local residents, a mix of 3 Staffordshire colours was selected, reflecting the colour pallet around the estate and giving a fresh, more vibrant appearance to the podium area. Great attention was paid to watersealing movement joints, upstands, insulation, and keeping screeds dry. All were sources of previous decay in the paving and substrates.

Volkerlaser, the principle contractor had the exacting task of maintaining public access and ensuring the continued amenity and safety of surrounding commercial and residential occupants. Successful liaison with residents and the City of London throughout the contract period from November 2013 to May 2015 ensured continuity of the work. A T Knotts, the paving sub-contractor met the challenge of matching existing bond patterns over large areas of flat paving. The careful execution of replacement features, such as the tight curves of plant bed edges, and the Beech Garden amphitheatre and pond gives the scheme its particular quality and aesthetic appeal. Previous paving work at the Barbican was carried out in the 80's when the Hawkins tiles were laid, which were of a uniform brown brindle colour. Across the Barbican estate the colours vary depending on when they were laid, the earliest tiles laid had a wide colour range and the objective this time round was to choose colours that are in keeping with what can be observed but also introducing more warmth and interest across the large expanses of paving.

The scheme demonstrates the enduring appeal of clay pavers whose rich colours provide a warm focus amidst the surrounding concrete structures of the estate. This has set the standard for further parts of the Barbican podium paving to be renewed in future years. **Web: www.ketley-brick.co.uk**

