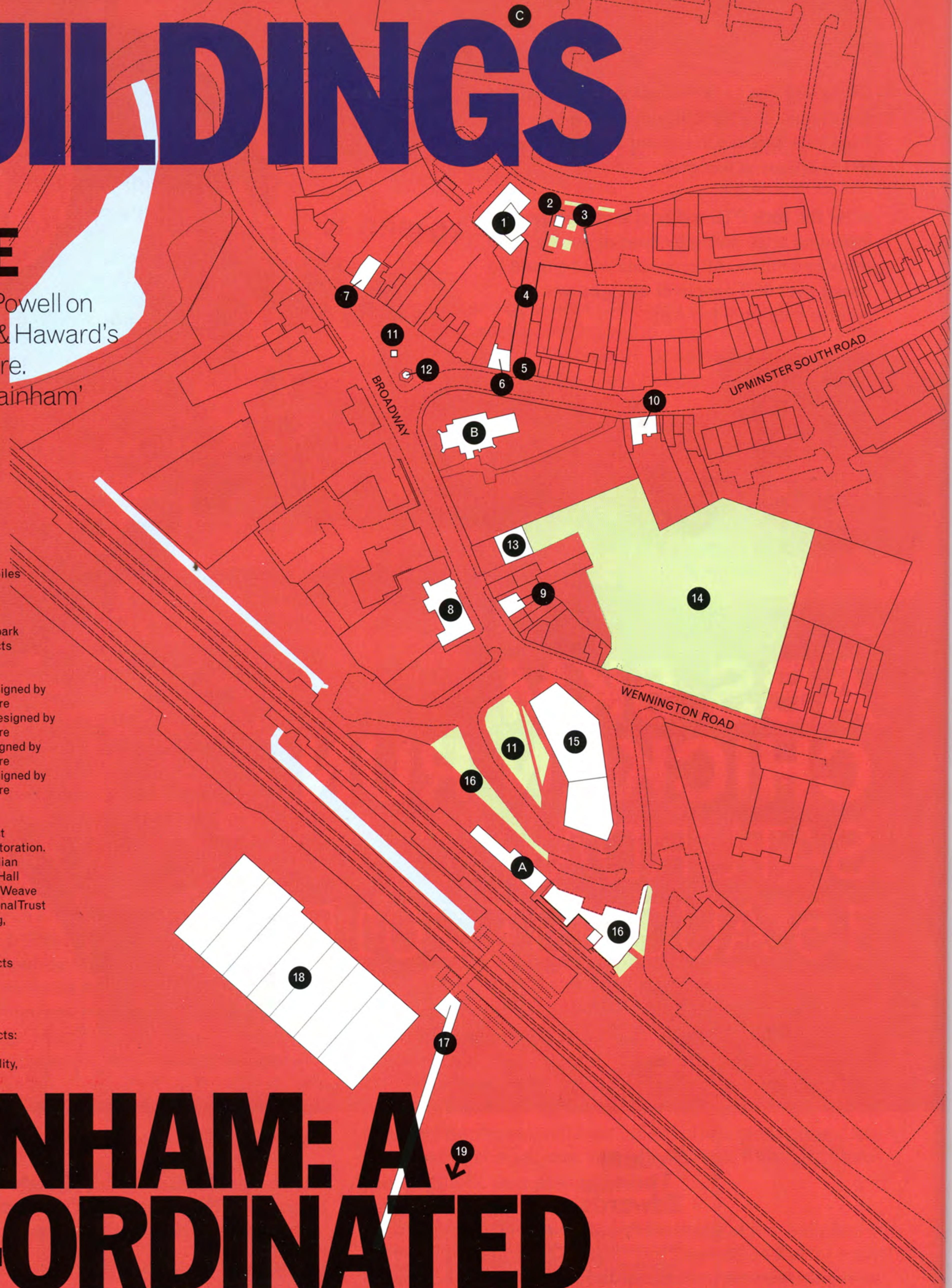


BUILDINGS

ONLINE

Read Kenneth Powell on van Heyningen & Haward's 2006 RSPB centre. Search 'VHH Rainham' on TheAJ.co.uk

- A Rainham Station
- B Church of St Helens and St Giles
- C Tesco store
- 1. The Royals, Civic Architects
- 2. 'Railing Hall', Mark Pimlott
- 3. Viking Way Passage, pocket park improvements, What If Projects
- 4. Viking Way Passage, East
- 5. Mural, Objectif
- 6. Shopfront: Kings fish bar, designed by Good People / Pie Architecture
- 7. Shopfront: Guys and Dolls, designed by Good People / Pie Architecture
- 8. Shopfront: Phoenix Pub, designed by Good People / Pie Architecture
- 9. Shopfront: Cold Blooded, designed by Good People / Pie Architecture
- 10. Shopfront improvements: 2-8 Upminster Road South
- 11. Public realm masterplan, East
- 12. War Memorial clocktower restoration.
- 13. Rainham Hall restoration, Julian Harrap Architects. Rainham Hall interpretation design, Studio Weave
- 14. Rainham Hall Gardens, National Trust
- 15. Rainham Library and Housing, Maccreanor Lavington
- 16. Rainham Station forecourt improvements, What If Projects
- 17. Rainham Trackway, Peter Beard_Landroom
- 18. Wildspace Warehouse, Alison Brooks Architects
- 19. Wildspace Masterplan projects: bridges, wayfinding, seating, play spaces, educational facility, Peter Beard_Landroom



RAINHAM: A CO-ORDINATED TRANSFORMATION

A series of interventions in the town of Rainham – often quite modest in scale – have had a profound cumulative effect, writes *Ellis Woodman*

Lying a 25-minute train journey east from Fenchurch Street Station, the town of Rainham only just falls within the curtilage of Greater London. If you have not made the trip, you may yet have registered the town in passing since a second rail-line – the high-speed link to the Channel Tunnel – runs immediately alongside. While high acoustic barriers obscure much of the view, passengers' attention is momentarily piqued by the sudden flash of colourful stripes presented by Alison Brooks' overcladding of a group of industrial sheds, which stand alongside Rainham Station. Completed in 2011, this was one of the first of more than a dozen interventions in the town, steered by the Greater London Authority and the London Borough of Havering. Most are of modest scope, comprising public realm improvements, adjustments to existing buildings and shop front redesigns. Collectively, however, their impact has been profound; bringing the identity of this historic settlement into new focus and consolidating its relationship to the wider Essex landscape.

The programme's central ambition has been to reconnect Rainham to the 479ha of marshland that in turn separates it from the Thames. Previously a Ministry of Defence firing range, this area was bought by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and opened to the public as a nature reserve in 2006. The design of new pedestrian infrastructure – including bridges, a wayfinding system, seating, play spaces and an education facility housed in a suite of reclaimed shipping containers – has been led by architect Peter Beard_Landroom. The project, which was the sole British finalist in the 2014 European Urban Public Space Prize, is distinguished by its sensitivity to the qualities of a place that is at once a highly fragile ecology and strongly defined by the adjacency of road, rail and river infrastructure. Landroom's work has a richly tactile character, making extensive use of preweathered steel, but is careful to avoid presenting an unduly bucolic image.

The project's most substantial component is The Trackway, a 220m-long ramp, which rises up from the marsh, initially on embanked ground and subsequently propped on raking tree trunks. The bridge over the Channel Tunnel rail link at Rainham Station was previously served only by a tight, dog-leg staircase, but the Trackway offers a more appropriately scaled connection and establishes a relationship with the other large

objects in this open landscape, such as a run of electricity pylons and an elevated stretch of the A13.

The station forecourt has undergone a low-cost but effective remodelling by What If: Projects, which responds to the area's increasing popularity with walkers and cyclists, providing covered bicycle storage and signage indicating distances to points along the river. Directly opposite, Maccreanor Lavington has realised a more substantial project that formalises the station square. This £6 million building comprises two conjoined parts which negotiate the transition between the scale of the open marsh and that of the medieval village that forms Rainham's core. A five-storey block, incorporating shared ownership apartments, looks out across the station, while a library and children's nursery occupy a lower wing that frames the route to the north.

Particularly effective is the way the energetic roofline of the higher element provides walkers on the marsh with a distinctive destination point, while the lower block artfully presents a more domestic image towards the town. Unfortunately, what could have been a really terrific project has rather too obviously been subjected to a Design and Build procurement process. Coping details are bodged, paths through the adjacent landscaping are too narrow for two people to pass, and the library interior feels barely considered in architectural terms. One is also left wondering whether the brief hasn't been too ambitious. The two retail units on the ground floor of the residential block remain unlet and it is not hard to see why.

Save for the times when the station square is occupied by commuters, this remains a quiet place at the far end of Rainham's principal shopping drag.

Heading north, we soon find the village centre, focused around the Grade I-listed Norman-era church of St Helen and St Giles. The adjacent 1729 sea merchant's house, Rainham Hall, owned by the National Trust, is set to reopen to the public in autumn, following the completion of Julian Harrap's restoration and a new café and interpretation facilities by Studio Weave.

A number of less architecturally distinguished buildings have also been significantly enhanced through a programme of shop front improvements led by Pie Architecture and graphic design studio Designed by Good People. Their hand-painted murals and lettering playfully draws on 19th-century typographic and illustrative

Rainham shows how, with care and funding, development might serve to make a place more special, rather than less

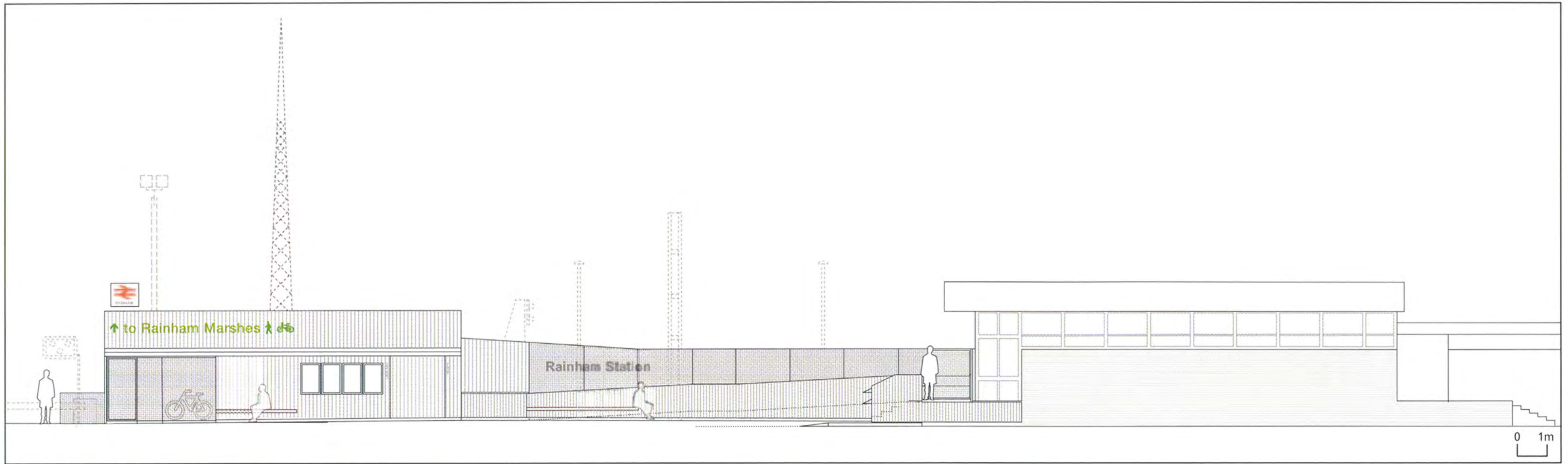
conventions. Particularly magnificent is that of Coldblooded, a shop whose frontage offers the promise of 'Dragons and Other Curiosities in Rainham's Amazing Reptile Emporium'. The labyrinthine network of passages that lies behind more than lives up to that billing. Be sure to visit before lunch, when the smell of a bucket of defrosting rats sends the residents – including a five-foot long caiman – into a state of frenzied anticipation.

While the station defines the village's southern edge, its northern extent is less happily framed by a vast Tesco superstore. Retrospective attempts have been made to bind these neighbours into a more fruitful relationship. Architecture practice East has led the design of a series of public realm improvements that have articulated the route from Tesco to the station in dark brick setts and wide 'bacon-rind' stone kerbs. The formerly grotty passage that leads into the village from the north has been enhanced particularly effectively, with high walls introduced in dark engineering brick so as to block back-garden clutter from view.

At its Tesco-facing end the route is framed between two structures. To one side stands artist Mark Pimlott's *Railing Hall* – a ghost of a building sketched out in high-finned railings, which frustratingly still lack the planting that the artist had hoped would grow over them. To the other side is the Royals Youth Centre, which has recently acquired a roof extension by Civic Architects. Cantilevering out over the passage, this heavily glazed volume dramatically transforms the expression of what had been a grimly fortified facility, drawing it into conversation with the tower of the church that stands behind and presenting the interior to the street in theatrical fashion. It is a small project but in a country that has all but abandoned belief in the value of proactive planning, this kind of sustained and co-ordinated transformation is extraordinarily rare. At a time when many outer-London communities face the prospect of rapid change, Rainham offers a precious model of how, with care, patience and funding, development might serve to make a place more special, rather than less.

Peter Beard_Landroom's work at Rainham Marsh features in Shared Cities, an exhibition of the finalists in the 2014 European Prize for Urban Public Space at Burlington Gardens, London, 21 July-9 August. There will be an opening-night discussion between architects who have worked on projects at Rainham. Details at architecturefoundation.org.uk





RAINHAM PROJECTS | RAINHAM STATION/VIKING WAY PASSAGE

WHAT IF PROJECTS

Rainham Station forecourt has received a facelift and, since January, has provided a welcoming space for train passengers, which strengthens links to the village and the rich landscapes of Rainham Marshes and Thames Chase.

While acting as a masking device for station equipment, the new black timber screen forms a defined forecourt space between the street and the station building, providing a ramp, seating, shelter and secure bike parking. It also creates a backdrop for new, bold wayfinding graphics.

As part of the project, the environment along Ferry Lane and Celtic Farm Road was improved to complement the new library square and to create a connection to Rainham Hall's garden, including new footway finishes, a woodland meadow, greening of verges, street trees and a foraging strip of fruit bushes.

What If Projects, working with young people from the Royals Youth Centre, formulated a brief for Viking Way Passage: a pocket park that brings together the community; a place that provides opportunities for sitting, play and to spend time; a space for events and activities linked with the Royals and the wider community; and a place connected to the village and the marshes with new planting, greenery and 'softer' finishes.

The existing space, with its *Railing Hall* installation by Mark Pimlott has been adjusted, with a small budget, to create greener areas with more trees, planting, benches and a stage.

A perimeter fence has been replaced by a timber screen with integrated seating that provides a surface for interpretive and placemaking text referring to the species planted in the square. *Gareth Morris, director, What If Projects*

Data
Rainham Station forecourt
Date commenced February 2013
Date completed January 2015
Cost £345,000
Location Rainham Station

Viking Way Passage
Date commenced March 2014
Due for completion July 2015
Cost £21,000
Location Viking Way

1. Rainham Station elevation
2. Bold megagraphics are used for wayfinding
3. Text on the perimeter fence refers to the species planted
4. Mark Pimlott's installation *Railing Hall*

