

A new-build community media centre has been harnessed as a tool for education and empowerment in South Bristol.

Subject: Miles Ford

Profession:
Manager of the Archimeda Project,
Knowle West
Local architecture centre,
Bristol

Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC) offers opportunities in photography, film and digital media to residents of Knowle West, a deprived estate in south Bristol. It occupies about 30% of a dilapidated 1960s medical centre. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the premises are a barrier to the progress of KWMC. At the beginning of 2004 the Archimeda Project was created, through a partnership of the Media Centre and the Knowle West Development Trust, to oversee the redevelopment of the site. Miles Ford was employed as project manager.

"The Project had little experience with the Built Environment, so I approached Bristol Architecture Centre for advice," says Ford. Since then the Architecture Centre has acted as a reference source. Its director, Gillian Feamyough is one of the Archimeda Project's nine-person commissioning team.

A priority of the project is that young people are involved in every aspect of the building's design and creation. "We formed a 'core group' of interested young people, and asked them to define their priorities. These included environmental sustainability, the use of recycled materials, improved security and access, and cutting edge design," says Ford.

Working in partnership, the Architecture Centre and Archimeda arranged a walking tour around Bristol, to help shape the brief. The core group have also visited the Centre of Alternative Technology in West Wales, and London's South Bank, as part of Open House in September 2004 (see also, pages 18 - 19). With the brief defined, the Architecture Centre helped to run an architect selection process for the design stage.

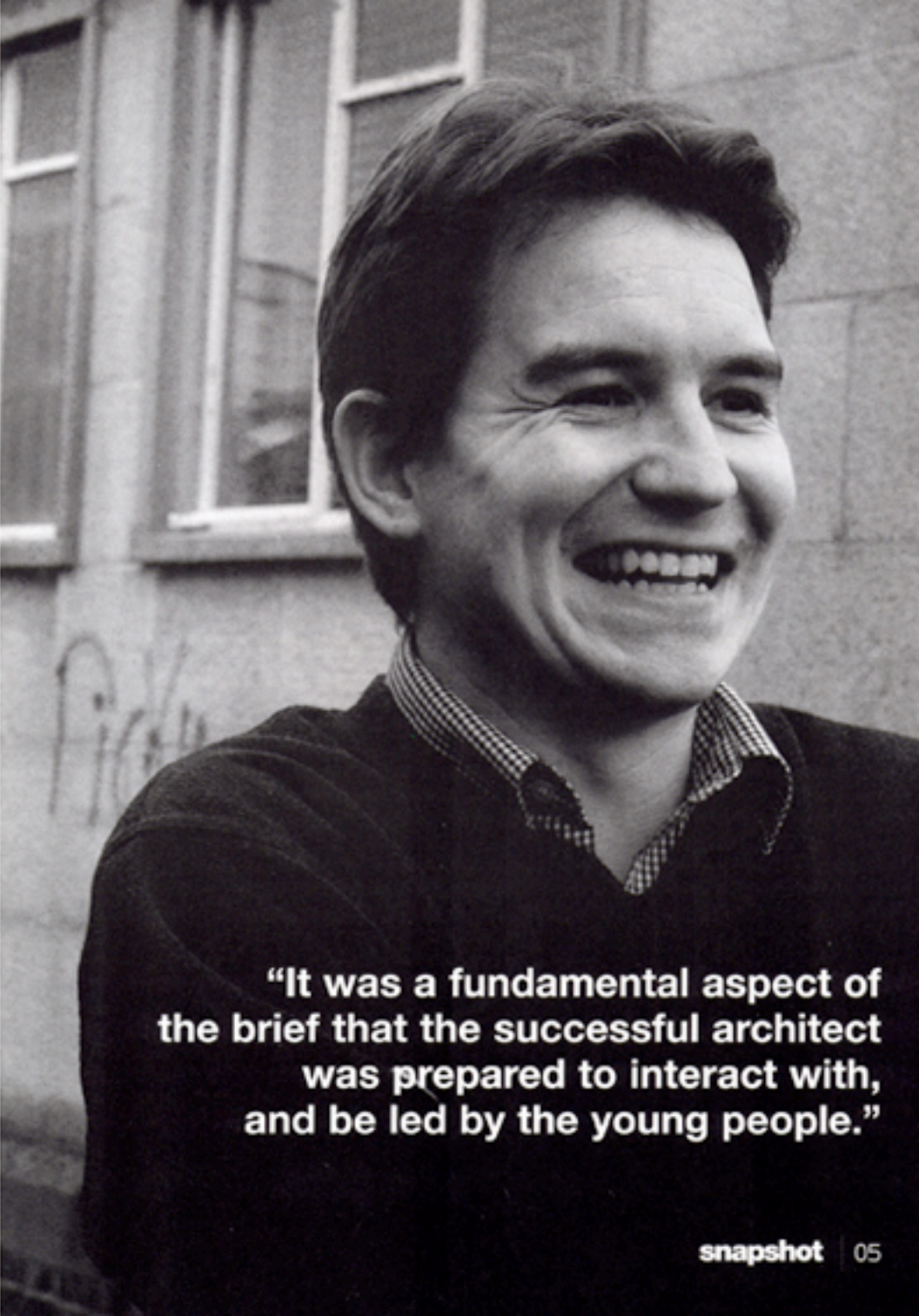
"When the shortlist of three architectural practices was announced, we took the core group on visits to their offices, and buildings they had completed. It was a fundamental aspect of the brief that the successful architect was prepared to interact with, and be led by the young people," says Ford. White Design, a local practice with a track record of environmental design, was appointed in January 2005.

The next stage is to design the building, which White Design will develop in consultation with the core group. "We also need to raise more funds," says Ford. "But if all goes to plan, the new building will be complete by early 2007."

Until then, the Architecture Centre will retain close ties to Archimeda. "It's a really good opportunity for us," says Amy Harrison, education officer with the Architecture Centre. "It can be tough to connect with out-of-school groups. It is also an opportunity to be involved in a community project right the way through."



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