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The Trust's Award for 2014 has been shared by the new combined Diocesan Office and Resource Centre at Stonebridge and the new Police Headquarters at Aykley Heads. They are two very different buildings in size, massing, style and materials, but both are distinguished by their appreciation of context, clarity of design and structure, appropriate range of materials and quality of detail.

Cuthbert House is a low, two-storey, apparently round, building thoroughly respectful of a context within Durham's green belt, which here is at its narrowest. The actual site is brownfield, having previously been occupied by the Milk Marketing Board. Both footprint and prominence of the new building are much less, not only of the last occupant but also of a subsequent, extant planning permission for the site.

From Broom Lane the structure can just be seen nestling in the wooded Browney valley – suggesting that a spaceship has landed – while from the A690, which passes immediately in front, the thin tree cover complements the glazing and buff brickwork of the modest building. The brickwork is particularly prominent at the main entrance. It is here that the building's curvature is most obviously broken. (The pointed entrance is in fact the bottom of the vertical stroke of the letter 'D', for the curvature actually takes the form of a laid-back 'D' which is the diocesan logo. This is but one of several built-in pieces of symbolism.)

Overhead, horizontal louvers form a rim to a flat roof, which has a central circular clerestorey. The wrap-around glazed curtain walling, with coated aluminium dividers result in a light, airy interior, its spacious quality further enhanced by its open-plan Offices which occupy much of the ground floor and half of the first. Uniform grey carpeting and off-white walls, with light wood doors and furniture provide a restful environment,

The ground floor is shared by office and resource centre staff. On the first floor is a further open-plan office and a series of flexible-sized rooms, but the highlight here – and of the whole Centre – is a round room at the heart of the building. With high, unrelieved walls and lit from above from the clerestorey, this remarkable architectural space reads as a modern chapter house.

The architect for the project was John Curtis of Napper of Newcastle, the contractors were Gentoo Construction of Sunderland.

The new Police Headquarters at Aykley Heads is a three-storey building, pavilion in style, classical in its formal structure. The facade consists of three horizontal layers, faced with tiles, with strong vertical louvres between the top two layers and pillars for the ground floor. The whole is an essay in gleaming white, with curtain glazing behind.

The formal rhythm extends even to the two entrances, front and back, which are identical in design and positioned in the centre of the two shorter axes of the rectangular structure. The centrally-positioned entrance towers rise above the three-storeys to overflow either side, while at the same time constituting a central spine to the roof running the length of the building. On the roof, out of sight at ground level, are rows of solar panels.

Inside, the rectangular structure lends itself to a simple layout of a long, spacious central atrium, with open plan side floors, each devoted to a particular function. (The few closed-off offices are appropriately named after fictional detectives, George Gently among them.) Looking down from the top floor one is overwhelmed by the vastness of the interior, with activity visible on the flanks; from the ground floor the activity is almost entirely hidden, From either view point, such is the acoustic

quality of the building that it is possible to believe that only a skeleton staff is on duty, whereas in fact some 400 are busy at work.

There is, of course, one more piece to put in place – the thin concrete communication tower, designed by Ove Arup for the 1960's police headquarters, and which was going to be demolished until intervention by the Trust. The tower is awaiting demolition of the 1960's building before it is dismantled and re-erected next to the new headquarters. After half a century, therefore, this unique, listed structure will at last look at ease in company of a building of sympathetic design.

The architect for the building, selected after competition, was Bruce Riches of Ryder Architects (Newcastle). The main contractor was Kier Limited, and the local consultant, Turner Townsend.

A third major building to be completed in 2014 was the new Durham Community Fire Station at Sniperley. Trustees reluctantly conceded that the Green Belt site was necessary, and acknowledge the use of location-sensitive materials, especially dark stone and timber cladding, as well as restriction of red to strips across the bottom of the doors of the building holding the fire appliances. However, we do not agree with the architects (Napper) when they assert that variety of materials and diversity of the component parts, not least in their roofs, "lessen the visual impact". See for example the view entering the city from the west, where a two-storey brick building with a full-pitched roof tries unsuccessfully to hide behind a tall stone frontage structure with its flat roof.

Finally, and in complete contrast, is a modest commercial premises on Sunderland Road. Bells fish and chip shop does not draw attention to itself with garish colour or advertisement, and may not be great architecture, but it is a delight. The single storey structure in grey, imitation timber-cladding, with a slated double pitch roof and modest protruding front gable, suggest to the passer-by that its product is also something special.