a continuous wall of building on the more visible side, and thus create a big single dominant form over an area that is visually irresistible when seen in long views across the valley—one of a number of points on which Park Hill seems able to challenge comparison with the well-known Carlo Fidelo housing outside Cirencester (cf. AR November 1936, page 295).

The decision to make the whole scheme one building (existing cases show and a small school) gives, obviously, a unity to the design, but unity is a word that has taken a terrible beating of late, and it is worth while to see what lies behind this obviousness. Firstly, there is the unity of place, such as any large constructional form on the area it dominates, but reinforced by the fact that quite a lot of ground is practically surrounded by the arms of Park Hill. Secondly, there is the unity of performance—at all points within the main building, the same kind of structural frame supports the same kind of residential function. This does not mean that there are no expansion joints or other structural variations where needed, nor does it mean that all the apartments are identical in accommodation and aspect. But it does mean that the general nature of the building is everywhere sufficiently alike for the visitor or inhabitant to notice it, so that at points ten minutes walking time apart one is conscious of being in the same building.

The project team at some early stage in the design decided to let this general identity of use and structure set the pattern for the exterior, and this brings up the third unity, that of detailing. The regularity of external treatment was very heavily criticized in some quarters when the designs were first published because it failed to express the individual dwellings within the block—from outside one can distinguish which floors are flats and which are maisonettes, but not how many bays a large or small apartment occupies along floor that. In front of the finished building this objection seems trivial, since the identity of dwellings is effectively established by the grouping of their front doors on the access side, and the project team were clearly right to go for unity and continuity of key treatments, and for regularity of detailing throughout.

The detailing too has been attacked, though not in print. One must say, frankly, that some of it seems under-designed, and some of the junctions appear ill-considered—particularly, where some non-repeating functional element, such as the additional external staircase in the corner of the shopping centre, has to be hatted against the façade. But this, again, is a trifling objection because the scale of the detailing is trifling when compared with the scale of the block, which could clearly absorb quite a lot of detail without detracting from its unity, and continuity of key treatments, and for regularity of detailing throughout. Again, some of these details seem entirely unpaiseworthy, notably the standard precast balustrading in bay-window units which, with its double top rail, is strong enough visually to stand up as a unit in the façade pattern, massive enough when viewed from inside the block to give a sense of security, yet not so lumpish as to block the view outwards too much.


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