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Wise design brings success

Designs for a communal gardening space have won recognition for Northumbria University's architecture students in an international contest.

Master of Architecture students – Sean Normington, Emily Scullion, Sam Sedgewick and Tom Sykes – received an Honourable Mention in the Commonwealth Association of Architects' Welcoming Inclusive Spaces for the Elderly (WISE) competition, which attracted entries from around the globe.

The student team was shortlisted for their response to the competition brief which asked entrants to submit design proposals that would connect older people with wider society.

The students' communal gardening project proposes transforming the former yard of the Harland and Wolff Ship Building Company in Belfast, reconnecting the site to the city centre and providing a neutral space in which some of Belfast's 50,000 people of pensionable age can meet and work together on a common hobby.

At the heart of the scheme is the pleasure of social gardening. The shortlisted design incorporates a series of community gardens that would allow elderly people to interact with populations of all ages, including a communal allotment space and a market place to sell the produce.

The team also proposed a waste-to-energy operation adjacent to the gardens which would help to resolve Belfast's increasing landfill project, providing clean energy to Belfast city centre and nourishment of the gardens with compost produced as a by-product of the process.

Team member Sean Normington said: "We wanted to bring about the social integration across all generations, in an area historically and currently associated with political unrest. The scheme aims to stitch the previously segregated 'Titanic Quarter' back into the city centre. It is less about growing vegetables, and more about growing communities and allowing the elderly to feel part of something.

"We thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with each other and feel really privileged that our work has been recognised in a competition of this scale."

The annual Commonwealth Association of Architects' WISE competition, sponsored by Fielden Clegg Bradley Studios, invites architecture students from around the world to design forward thinking environments for aging populations. Proposals have to address the climate, culture and context of their sites and demonstrate creative reuse and recycling.

An international judging panel will award prizes totalling £4,600 to the winning entries. The winning designs will be exhibited in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in February and will also be published in the Architectural Review.

Sebastian Messer, Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Northumbria University, said: "Whilst the project is a critique of the current proposals for the site, it is a joyful and inclusive proposition borne out of its context, both physically

and socio-economically.

“The students’ success in the competition recognises their work and demonstrates how Architecture can be an agent for positive social change.”

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Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox
Press Contact
Student Communications Manager
james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott
Press Contact
PR and Media Officer
kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown
Press Contact
PR and Media Officer
gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk