



Ian Appleton won the competition with a tight design that made effective use of every corner of the space. By opting for the minimum dimension suggested in the brief, the complex has been contained within a volume appropriate to the proposed budget. It will be interesting to compare this design with the final building after a period of detailed consultation with the client, a discussion which will doubtless be concerned with acoustic isolation between auditoria in such a tightly contained building.

had stipulated their ideal requirements. The rationalisation of conflicting requirements and subsequent agreement of priorities — matters which I have suggested can only be satisfactorily resolved by debate — were left to each competitor's judgement. With an optimistic quantity surveyor it was just about possible to provide a building which would meet all the requirements for the revised budget of £5.8 million. But such a budget made it difficult to design a public building of the quality that should occupy a city centre site.

Moreover, the volume alone of a building incorporating all the brief's requirements implies a crippling annual overhead. And an easy to maintain building implies capital outlay. However, it is a tradition of British

theatre that running costs are assessed creatively at the project stage — otherwise new theatres would never get built!

By dealing rigorously yet ingeniously with the brief's suggested dimensions, the winning scheme by the Appleton Partnership has produced a compact building. However one wonders how the balance between the various elements can be maintained in such a tightly organised building during the phase of development and reworking with the client. For example the band room, where coats and instrument cases are left is a record distance from the orchestra pit (fly floor level, behind the backwall of the stage): can it be moved without significant knock-on effects for the rest of the accommodation? And is there

sound isolation between the theatres?

The client's desire to maintain the extensive Graecian thrust of Bill Houghton-Evans' successful existing auditorium, yet add the technology of a fly tower and a wagon stage system, produced a conflict for which, in the absence of resolution by debate, no competitor was able to propose a sufficiently elegant solution. While the termination of the side walls suggested a notional proscenium where full height flying facilities might begin, this would be to the rear of a point where scene designers would be likely to find such facilities most useful. A fire curtain falling across the wagon stage so that each scene had to be designed with a gap at that point is surely unacceptable. Yet the absence of any fire curtain could cause the authorities to restrict stage storage to current production only, and insist that scenery be constructed entirely from inherently fireproof materials throughout. The budgetary consequences could lead to minimal scenery and therefore little justification for the fly tower, the wagon stage or even the extensive workshops specified in the brief.

Although the basic form for the main theatre was pre-determined by the client's understandable wish to recreate the essence of the successful actor/audience relationships of their present theatre, competitors had almost total freedom to suggest a format for the second theatre in the complex. Most offered a variation on the courtyard form, acknowledging that, while it is capable of flexibility, this particular form provides an opportunity for the proscenium and end staging of plays that do not respond happily to an open thrusting relationship with the audience. However a few schemes, including the winner, opted for the adaptable box that has found decreasing favour in recent years.

Having responded to the requirements of a performance and its network of associated activities, little of the budget remained for an aesthetic statement of any power. Most submissions were serviceable buildings, using their fly towers to make an honest proclamation of their theatrical function, and their windows to show the attraction of life within. But in my view most of these buildings would make rather routine visual statements, except perhaps the appropriate hints of frivolity in Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis' suggestion of a circus 'big top' and the resonances of nineteenth century warehousing that accompanied Roderick Ham's appealing essay in domesticity.

Ted Cullinan's exciting piece of rather dangerous living highlights the negative aspects of a competition. Cullinan's design for Leeds is full of creative energy and risk-taking. His debate with the client might have produced a Playhouse that pointed the way ahead rather than, as is the case, the series of essays in state-of-the-art cost-effective professionalism which have resulted from this experiment in competitive design.

And so it only remains to confirm that the experiment certainly did nothing to develop any latent competitive spirit that may be lurking in me personally!