

idea of propelling people into movement and that is what happens here – they get up onto the mounds and move around. It's big enough to have that effect."

The smaller mounds are turf-covered and planted with wild flowers to add seasonal vibrancy, while the largest mound features seating and a spiral path that leads to the peak. From there, the view back across the city makes Canary Wharf visible, creating an unprecedented link between east and west. Looking away from the city, the Chilterns are visible on a clear day. To the delight of the designers, the mounds are already being absorbed into the social and cultural functions of the surrounding community. Some uses are unsurprising – they are a wonderful spot for sledging during snow. But others have been totally unexpected – on certain holy days, hundreds of Hindus come to the eastern mound to pray at sunrise.

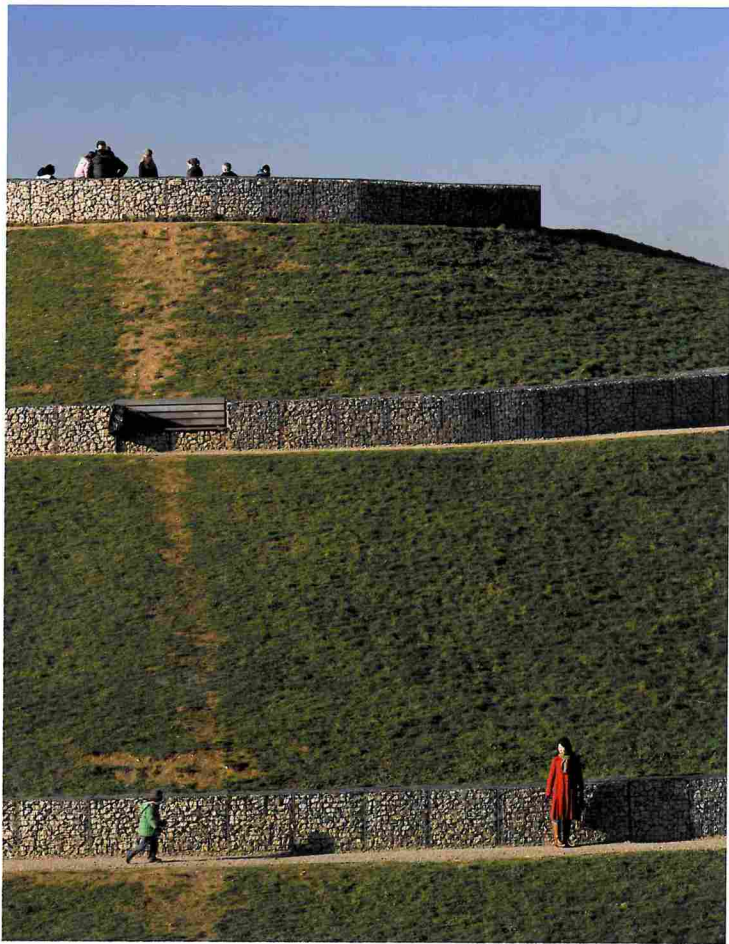
There are further instances that reinforce the powerful effect of landscape on emotion and behaviour, says Fink. "The local school has autistic children, who are often very sensitive to open space. But for some reason, they really took to this mound, and when they get disturbed or upset, they bring them here and walk round the path. The kids recently designed their uniform and have included the mound and path on the badge."

The build-up of the mounds was critical to unlocking the financial and ecological benefits of the project. It is entirely self-financing by using inert

waste from building projects around the South East. The construction of the mounds ultimately used 100,000m³ of imported material, much of it from some of the region's best-known projects. As we walk up the largest mound, Fink reveals that beneath our feet is the recycled rubble from Wembley Stadium's legendary twin towers and material displaced for Terminal 5 at Heathrow.

It would eventually take about 65,000 lorry loads of waste to create the park, and it is estimated that if the clean construction spoil was not utilised here, then 13,000 journeys of several hundred miles to outlying tips would have been necessary, in addition to the embodied energy used for the passive processing of the waste material.

The earth forms have been delivered almost as they were originally conceived, but it is the other aspects of the original concept that have been compromised. In developing the plans and accompanying funding model, FORM developed two options of varying degrees of ambition. Northala Fields could develop as either a fiscally neutral project – solely funded by £6m of spoil-generated income, delivering a park with a functioning urban fishery and a limited range of local sport, art and play facilities; or an aspirational project – a sustainable exemplar 21st-century park with a wide range of facilities supported by a long-term endowment fund for maintenance and the provision of free inclusive >



The Cracker



NORTHALA FIELDS FOREVER

Northala Fields, the largest park to be built in London for a century, is an exemplar of sustainable construction and design, as **Tim Coulthard** discovers

THE UNMISSABLE EARTH FORMS of Northala Fields mark a new gateway to west London. They are landmarks for the largest new park in the city for a century and symbols of a momentous struggle that took place for the scheme ever to become a reality. As well as providing a valuable new amenity for residents in nearby Northolt and Ealing, Northala Fields represents proof of an ecologically sound, financially robust model for the creation of a major new green space.

Lead designer ForM Associates (formerly Art2Architecture) has seen the project through an eight-year journey, working in a project team that also included EDAW, ecologist Peter Neal and design and build support from LDA Design. During that period, ForM has been cast variously as designer, mediator, agitator and saviour, but has emerged vindicated for its passion and persistence.

Northala Fields lies at the heart of the Northolt and Greenford Countryside Park, a network of open spaces covering 100ha, from Northolt village in the north to Ruslip Road in the south and flanked by the busy A40. The new park occupies an 18.5ha plot that was first acquired by Ealing Borough in 1997 from Kensington and Chelsea, which had previously used it for sports pitches for schools. The site lay dormant until 2000, when Ealing launched a competition for ideas for uses for the land, which had started to attract anti-social behaviour and was prone to

flooding, a threat to nearby housing.

Rob Cairns, who at the time was Ealing's project manager, said the brief concentrated on the practical requirements for incorporating the necessary earth fill, using water, offering flood defences and featuring an ecological focus. There was a general feeling that there should be an artistic approach to the earth forming, but the direction was not specified to competition entrants. Cairns says that the entry led by ForM was the "obvious choice". "They responded best to the brief, incorporating all of the elements in a meaningful way."

Black and white photography dating back to the 1900s provided the spark of inspiration for ForM partner Peter Fink. One particular shot of a naked woman had particular resonance for Fink, who was struck by "the emotional connection between the female form and landscape".

ForM's proposals for Northala Fields represented a dramatic move away from the conventional British notion of parks, both in design and implementation. The dominant forms are four conical mounds of heights of 15m, 20m, 25m and 20m that screen the border of the site. They are both playful and functional, acting as an extremely efficient noise screen from the adjacent A40. For Fink, the forms have a very clear effect on visitors. "We were trying to find a resolution that doesn't overwhelm the urban rim. I was fascinated about creating a landscape in a city on a scale that doesn't exist. I had this >