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Galbally is a 19th-century planned town with a consistent urban character. Limerick County Council selected a sloping site close to the village square to locate a phased development of social housing. The first phase of building comprises six three-storey family houses, and five single-storey houses designed for ease of access for old people.

The site layout takes advantage of the slope and the views toward the village and the mountains beyond. The new houses were considered to be an extension of the existing urban form – two sloping terraces, rendered and slated in traditional materials in compliance with planning requirements. While each house steps from the next, the overall building line slopes with the contour of the site.

The entrance to each house has been designed to provide a seat, planting box, and threshold, cast in terrazzo within a recessed porch – a social zone between house and town. Earth-coloured porch-reveals identify each house within the terrace.

GALBALLY SOCIAL HOUSING
Each house steps from the next, the overall building line slopes with the contour of the site.
ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

HUTTON – What I like about this is the use of very ordinary architectural forms and very ordinary materials in a contemporary and intelligent way.

SUDIJC – It’s a very interesting scheme, and I like lots of things about it. I like the way that it provides people somewhere to sit outside. I think it’s a very good scheme indeed. It is very sophisticated. But I’d like to interrogate it a bit more.

WALKER – That’s the whole beauty of the project, that it is literally inviting people to use the street, to use it as a community.

HUTTON – I think the change in scale between the front and back blocks is well handled.

SUDIJC – And I like the use of colour. I think this project has medal-winning potential. It’s beautiful. But to have a bedroom on the ground floor doesn’t quite fit.

HUTTON – Maybe it’s for a teenage child who doesn’t want to be up with parents, or for a disabled person.

TURPIN – It could be a playroom, or a flexible room. I wouldn’t knock it just for that.

BRADY – The first thing to strike me was the use of colour. It’s lovely to see colour against this grey backdrop. It’s good, strong colour as well.

TURPIN – I find the unpigmented plaster render very grim altogether for social housing.

BRADY – But the colour bits will stay colourful because they’re recessed and protected. It’s a pity it’s so hard. The whole outside, the concrete is so hard.

TURPIN – It looks like terrazzo.
HUTTON – I think this project merits an award, definitely. I think it’s sophisticated, and the urban massing is very intelligent.

WALKER – I love that big opening on the balcony. It’s a good design for a relaxing space, a recreational space, and encouraging to see it in a design for social housing.

SUDJIC – And the key was to turn the staircase parallel to the front, and that means they gouge these holes out, which creates a very nice area for colour.

BRADY – Something that’s good about it is that you’re not entering directly into your house off the street. You have that secondary space.

SUDJIC – But perhaps social housing should be about maximising space. This is architects saying let’s make an interesting building rather than give them maximum space.

WALKER – But a lot of the problems of social housing is that you are crammed into tiny spaces. You don’t have anywhere to escape.

TURPIN – Realistically, how much time do we spend on balconies in this country, in the countryside? I find the seat-plinth more satisfactory, and I think this photograph here is appealing, suggesting the extension of a typical village street, where you could sit out in the morning. You can imagine that happening.

WALKER – Absolutely. And nattering all day long with your neighbours, which is basically what Irish culture is about.

HUTTON – Yes, this aspect is really sweet.

BRADY – It’s very sociable. And this is low budget. That’s why, when you look at the hard concrete surfaces, you have to remember that this type of project doesn’t afford brick interlocking paviours, or any kind of landscaping at the front.

SUDJIC – No, no. This is not about low budget. If you want to make this cheaper, then you just make this wall come to here, rather than concentrate on the façade.

TURPIN – And terrazzo doesn’t come cheap either.

HUTTON – They have put the money into bits that you touch as you enter.

BRADY – It’s nice to see a different approach to social housing like that. It’s very refreshing.

SUDJIC – Despite my reservations about the three-storey plans, I think this is an award.

WALKER – I think it’s award level definitely. I think it works really well with the village.

HUTTON – Yes, I think this is an elegant, original scheme, which, as a whole, is very successful. I think the relationship of the low-rise to the high-rise, and the space in between has been very well handled. I admire the use of colour with these ordinary forms and ordinary materials. I would definitely give it an award.

TURPIN – I think that the architect sacrificed floor area for the vanity of that elevation, I have real moral difficulty about that. I think the plinth-seat is very successful, and I think the ope is less so.

BRADY – I like the way the outside of the building has been treated with the stepped entrances. I think that works well. And social housing of this quality should be encouraged.

HUTTON – And it has been excellently presented.