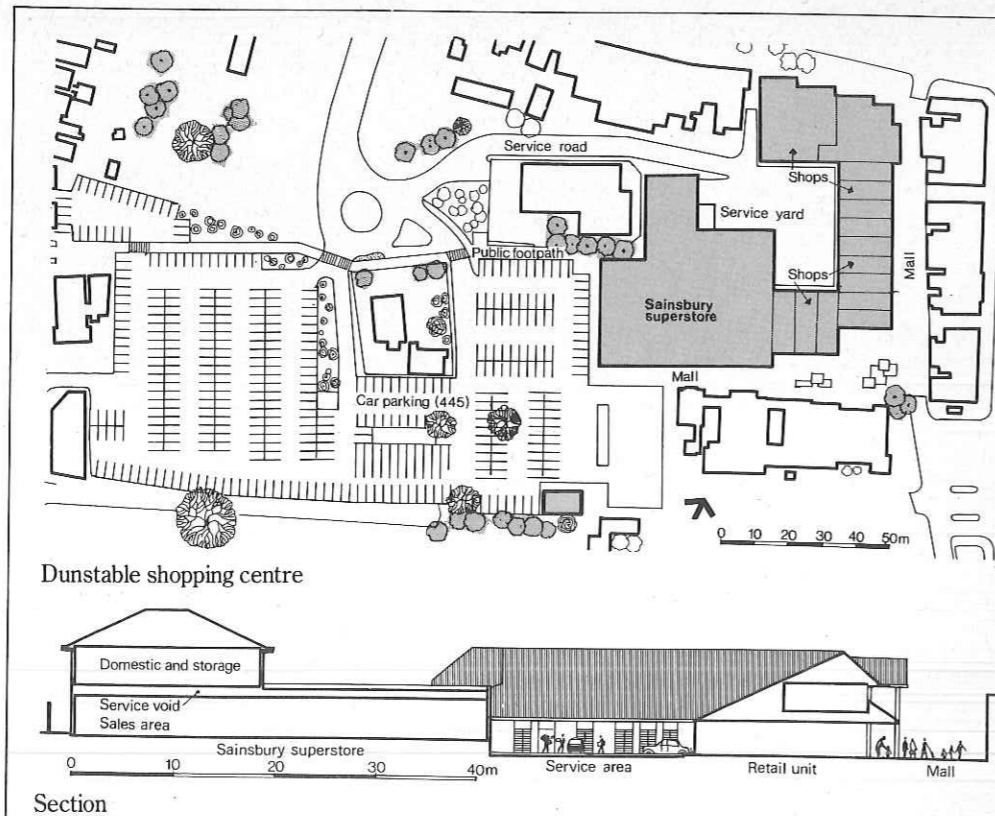


of finish and appearance that might attract customers and win over local authority planners. Architectural design is usually commissioned from a number of experienced architectural consultants, though Sainsbury for one have an in-house department of architecture and mechanical and electrical services with a staff of 250.

A fundamental architectural problem is how to fit a bulky superstore with carparking next to suburban small-scale housing areas. Carparking can be effectively broken up by the generous use of trees and other planting. Large-scale building forms are more difficult to cope with. Through their published design guides, a number of local authorities have been pushing towards a domestic style of architecture.

Pitched roofs and brick walls are the most obvious features of the domestic-style shopping centres promoted by the design guides. This approach may be congenial enough in Dunstable, where Sainsbury's new centre occurs within a conservation area, despite a few limp elevations. Such "Ovaltine architecture" reaches its logical conclusion in the town centre of South Woodham Ferrers, where at the request of the Essex planners the architects have contrived to simulate "a low-lying cluster of farm buildings merging with the flat landscape so typical of the county." The development, devised as one entity on a greenfield site emerges as a pastiche of an organically evolved grouping of vernacular buildings. The scheme will undoubtedly become an embarrassment when the fashion swings away from vernacular styles, unless the constructional detailing drawn up by a twentieth-century commercial architect pretending he was an eighteenth-century rustic carpenter gives way beforehand. The design guides' intention of giving shopping centres a sense of identity could be more honestly achieved by allowing the natural bustle of shops to more freely express itself.

A commercially successful formula having been established, district shopping centres are undoubtedly the growth area of the moment in shopping developments. But there are only a limited number of retailers around who can undertake this kind of development, and given the size of these centres, there can only be a limited number in any one town or city. Clearly then, district centres, and the retailer and developers of them, are going to have a particularly strong influence on the future urban structure – and shopping patterns – of this country.



DUNSTABLE SHOPPING CENTRE

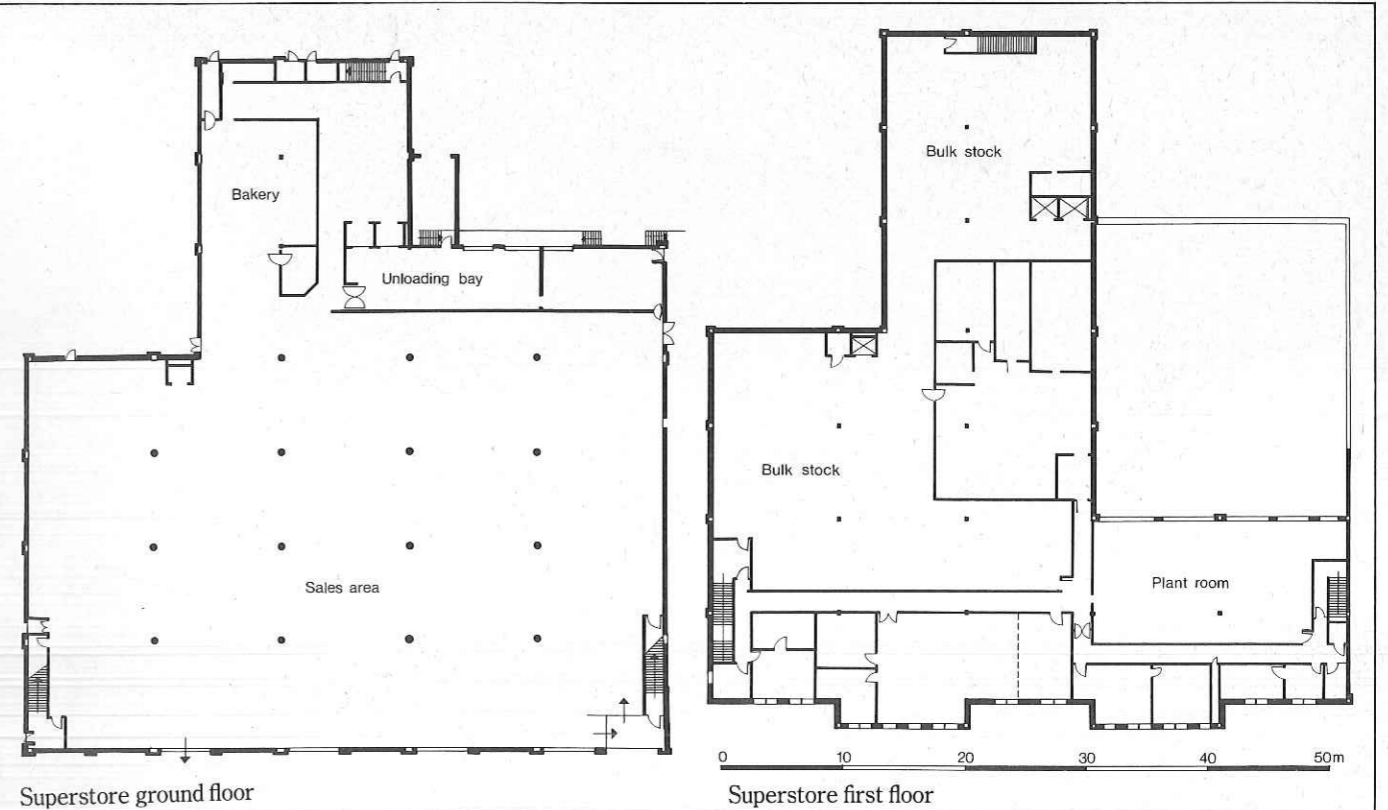
Sainsbury's shopping centre near the town centre of Dunstable is an example of how the district shopping centre formula can be designed to fit into existing townscape. Dunstable is a small county town of some 32 000 people, and can be regarded as lying within a similar catchment area to that of more normal suburban shopping centres.

The land was acquired by the South Bedfordshire District Council, who invited tenders from developers. A precise brief demanded two-storey buildings with pitched roofs that would relate to the conservation area in which the scheme is situated.

The retail outlets enclose a central service yard, while the shop fronts face across the main road and carefully paved pedestrian malls to existing shops, houses, church and hall. Shop windows are shaded by colonnades and overhanging canopies. Customer carparking lies adjacent to the superstore in the town's backlands, where it is not overlooked by existing buildings.

The superstore replaces the town's existing Sainsbury supermarket and is four times its size. Other retail units include a newsagent, hairdresser, jeweller, dry cleaner, motor accessory shop, diy shop and two fashion boutiques. A public lavatory is also provided.

While emulating a traditional style of pitched roofs and arched



Superstore ground floor

Superstore first floor



windows, the designers have not been bashful about using twentieth-century technology in construction and finishes, including plate glass shop windows, black asbestos-cement roof tiles and plastic rainwater goods.

location

Ashton Square, Dunstable,

Bedfordshire

total site area

2 hectares.

gross retail area

6225 m²

superstore gross area

3900 m²

superstore sales area

1800 m²

carparking

445 spaces

developer

J Sainsbury Ltd, London SE1

architect

Scott Brownrigg & Turner,

Guildford

quantity surveyors

Henry Riley & Partners

main contractor

George Wimpey Ltd, Luton

completion date

November 1978

Opposite page middle: At Dunstable a pedestrian mall is created between the new shops and the existing building of the town

Opposite page below: The superstore nestles below pitched roofs

Left: All retail units back on to a service court

Left above: The superstore interior is a simple modern shed

SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS TOWN CENTRE

The town centre was developed by Asda on land purchased by Essex County Council as part of the council's master plan for what is virtually a pocket new town at South Woodham Ferrers. The town centre was designed to a detailed brief drawn up by the county council, which particularly emphasised that the appearance should be in accordance with the Essex Design Guide.

The town centre lies adjacent to the town's newly developed loop road. The bulk of the carparking lies between the superstore and the road, from where overflow carparking is accessible to the rear of the centre. Two service yards are situated to the rear of the centre. One of these is exclusive to the superstore; it is equipped with covered loading bays and is screened by a brick wall.

Supporting the Asda superstore are 16 shop units of varying size including a large furniture store, chemist, newsagent, fashion boutique and bank. Also developed and let by Asda are a studio house, craft house, petrol station, and tyre bay, as well as a bus shelter and public toilets. As part of the town centre, the county council is itself developing two pubs, further craft homes, light industrial units, fire station and church.

The layout focuses on a pedestrianised town square to one side of the superstore. By juxtaposing two- and three-