

The project was to provide a new public space and a tourist information centre, creating a Gateway to Southwark.

The tourist information centre's architecture becomes appropriately emblematic of how urban regeneration can give an area a thriving identity, attracting other commercial and cultural ventures.

The project is focussed on the repossession of public space from bureaucracy, blight and uncontrolled traffic engineering.

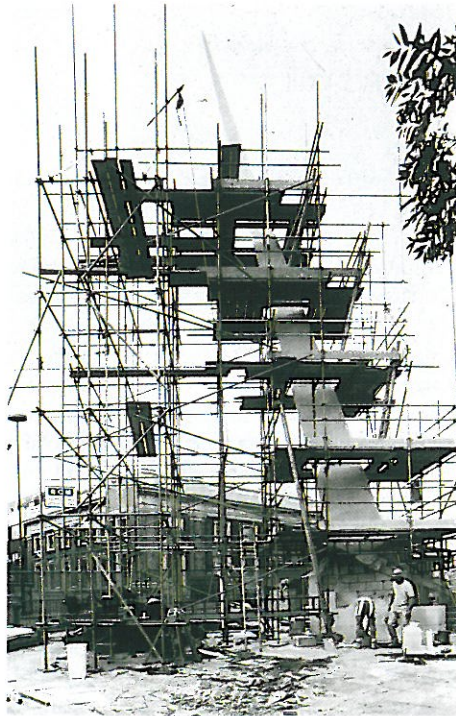
The improvements were achieved after a careful analysis of the site, including 24-hour filming, public consultation and the subsequent decision to create a new public space in front of London Bridge and the River Thames.

The inclined, 16m long Portland stone needle is an important element in creating a

sense of place and has rapidly become a landmark for the area, meriting a mention and a gaze on London sightseeing tours.

The Needle's structure and craftsmanship are achievements in themselves. Made from 25 differently shaped blocks that taper from 1500x1200mm at the base to 60x40mm at the tip, each block was toggle jointed and hand finished.

The blocks of Portland stone were hand set in a lime mortar bed. The structural engineer had to calculate the forces in each joint in order to size the internal tensioning system, which consists of up to six stainless steel rods allowing the 19.5° lean.



The whole space is re-oriented by the new stairs from the pedestrian ramp on to the space re-paved with Yorkstone. Railings were removed and the perimeter protected by carved granite trief kerbs. Bedded granite pebbles act as tactile pedestrian markings.

Two large granite blocks from the John Rennie bridge (circa 1826) were discovered while digging the foundations for the needle. They have been incorporated within the space as seats, raised on stainless steel brackets and underlit by LED strips.

Judges' comments

The craftsmanship and detailing needed to ensure that this stone needle exhibited the precision to make such a prominent feature in the streetscape impressed the judges enormously. Such simplicity is difficult to achieve.



STONE FEDERATION MILLENNIUM NATURAL STONE AWARDS 2000



CRAFTSMANSHIP – AWARD

Southwark Gateway
Tourist information centre
and stone needle
London

Architect/designer
Eric Parry Architects

Owner/client
London Borough of
Southwark

Builder/main contractor
Mansells

Principal stone contractor
Ketton Architectural Stone

Stone supplier
Albion Stone Quarries
Dennis Gillson & Son

Stone used
Portland Whitbed (needle
and base), Yorkstone
paving, Caledonian
granite pebbles,
Portuguese Alpen Durade
granite kerbing.