For the visitor to a city, a station is a gateway. It announces arrival. It provides a welcome. It offers orientation. And it reveals how the next leg of a journey can be accomplished. At its best it also characterises the city which it serves. For those who live locally, a station is a tool. It must be practical. It must be efficient. And it must be easy to use. Everything must be in the right place, every connection must be clear. But it must also be something that is a pleasure to experience. It must look, and feel, beautiful.

Our proposal defines the architecture of the new station as three, parallel, vaulted roofs which because they are aligned with the new over-platform bridge face both east toward the city and west towards the country.

The central roof encompasses the main space of the concourse while the northern roof accommodates the ticket barriers and the transfer to and from the platforms. The southern roof houses the retail components of the brief, either, prosaically, in the form of shops and shopfronts or, more dramatically, as freestanding pavilions within the space. As they come to ground on either side of the tracks, the vaulted roofs create a strong, three-bay portal which firmly announces the presence of the station, and commands a new public square. As suggested by the existing masterplan the station square is further enclosed on its northern edge by a separate building containing south-facing retail uses – cafes, restaurants – at ground floor level.

Masterplan - Site model photograph

City grain plan

Masterplan - Concept sketch

Masterplan - Roof plan 1:1250
While the space of the new square is primarily given over to pedestrians, a taxi route across the space has been maintained, allowing for taxi pick-up to be located on the south-east corner of the square (taxi drop off and waiting would be located in the adjacent square to the north). This move – perhaps the only one where we have run counter to assumptions made within the existing masterplan – is, we believe, important because, together with the removal of the short stay parking to the west of the tracks, it avoids the need for the new building on Becket Street to accommodate vehicles in its undercroft. In our proposal, this building – assumed to be offices – sits firmly on the ground.

What this building does provide however – in a colonnade facing the street – is a sheltered pedestrian thoroughfare connecting the bus interchange and the multi-storey car park directly to the station.

While our proposal retains the layout of the bus interchange envisaged by the masterplan, it reconfigures the bus stop canopy to relate directly to the alignment of the churchyard opposite. In this way the new canopy effectively provides a western edge to the churchyard enhancing, rather than diminishing, its presence within the city.

These moves are significant, for the station is as much a set of public spaces as it is a building. And the quality of these spaces, and the clarity of the routes that connect them, are as important as the architecture of the station itself.