The recipient of over 14 awards including an RIBA Award, the Oxford Castle Heritage Project is an exemplar urban regeneration project. It marks the latest development of a site that has undergone many changes in nearly one thousand years of history, showing a continuity of use as a centre of local, regional and national authority.

This £23 million project was the result of close consultations between ADP, Oxford City Council and the commercial developer. It involved the conversion of the listed former Oxford Prison buildings to form an 86 bedroom hotel, Heritage Centre, restaurants and shops. The scheme includes a variety of apartments above new retail units in a vibrant mixed use environment.

Having decided to redevelop the site, the Council and developer, working closely with ADP, began the difficult process of imagining beyond the cold dark cells to the potential inherent in this austere but remarkable site. ADP were committed from the outset to working with the site’s distinct features and long history, rather than against it; imposing an inappropriate scheme that ignored or overrode the individuality of Oxford Castle. These are key tenets of exemplar conservation architecture, and successful urban regeneration.

The redevelopment of the site emerged as one of mixed use, mingling residential and commercial areas to create a vibrant new interpretation of Oxford Castle. At it’s heart would be the gaol, refurbished into an exciting, unique hotel. This shift in use nevertheless retains the residential nature of the original building, where the shutting of prison doors in one becomes the mode of privacy in another.

Access to Oxford Castle has long been denied the people of Oxford, and as such, an important part of the county’s history had been neglected. ADP were keen to reinvigorate this history, making it visible, tangible and dynamic for the public using the site. At the heart of this aim lay the Conservation Plan.

The Conservation Plan and design approach was to adapt the buildings to their new uses whilst maintaining as much of the original fabric as possible. From the earliest beginning, ADP devised a set of design principles to ensure a coherent, unified approach to the redevelopment.

Where new materials were needed to repair the existing fabric, a careful choice was made with new insertions/additions of striking modern design complementing and enhancing the existing buildings.

Full recording of all the buildings on the site was undertaken and all the principal buildings retained. Traditional building methods were adopted where appropriate, and in particular for the repair of the Norman St. George’s Tower, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the earliest secular standing structure in this country. Its restoration has led to its removal from the English Heritage Buildings at Risk register, a major conservation achievement.

A Consents Group drawn from key stakeholders, English Heritage, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford Archaeology, Oxford City Council Conservation Department and the design team met regularly throughout the development process. They took a pragmatic and practical approach acting to reduce delays.
The principle of reusing existing materials was adopted throughout. Repair of the extensive external stone facades was achieved by patching in rubble stone, sourced from within the site wherever possible and using a lime based mortar. When new stone was to be used, considerable effort went into getting Bath Stone to match, sourced from the same quarry as the original stone. Traditional methods were used in the extensive lime plastering and rendering carried out.

2007   RIBA South Conservation Award
       Oxford Castle
2007   RIBA Award
       Oxford Castle
2007   RICS South East Overall Award
       Oxford Castle
2007   RICS South East Regeneration Projects
       Overall Winner
       Oxford Castle
2007   MIPIM Hotel and Tourism Award
       Malmaison Hotel, Oxford Castle
2007   Civic Trust ‘Outstanding Centre Vision Award’
       Oxford Castle