

# A word

By Tim Waterman

## Habitat

In the current period, which began some ten to twelve thousand years ago, a significant leap in the cultural evolution of humankind occurred. The Neolithic revolution brought us both agriculture and cities. Jane Jacobs, famously, argued that the rise of cities may well have been what necessitated agriculture, which was directly counter to the orthodoxy of the time. The received view was that agriculture made settlement necessary, which then enabled cities and their energised crowding of people to come into being. Scholars now, however, are largely of the opinion that seeking to establish primacy is, as is so often the case, a futile goal. Agriculture and urbanism simply enabled each other, and ever since then humans, cities and the countryside have evolved together. This view also dispatches the old rural/urban dichotomy rather handily. Country mice and city mice are still all just mice, it seems.

Such a sweeping view of human history and geography allows us to consider all landscape occupied by humans as our habitat; and we are a very widely distributed species. From the igloo to the little grass shack, vernacular building is everywhere uniquely adapted to local conditions, and the designed landscape and city have long been shaped by them too. So indeed are our ways of life and our daily rounds called, aptly, by the sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, our *habitus*. The term also includes notions of class and lifestyle; the circles we move in both



physically and socially. It is remarkable how well the human habitat has, throughout history, served the human animal in all these regards.

In 1974 Yi-Fu Tuan defined a powerful sense of cultural identity and the love of place as *topophilia* which has helped to inform our contemporary understanding of landscape as a dialogue between people and their environment. A decade later, E.O. Wilson termed our affinity for other living things *biophilia*, and argued that this innate sense of interconnection is an aid to both our own evolution and to that of many other species with whom we share the planet. These ideas, and others on parallel tracks, have allowed us to open out our understanding of civilisation as a construction not just of the interdependence of humans in civil society

“ The golden age becomes more brassy with each generation ”

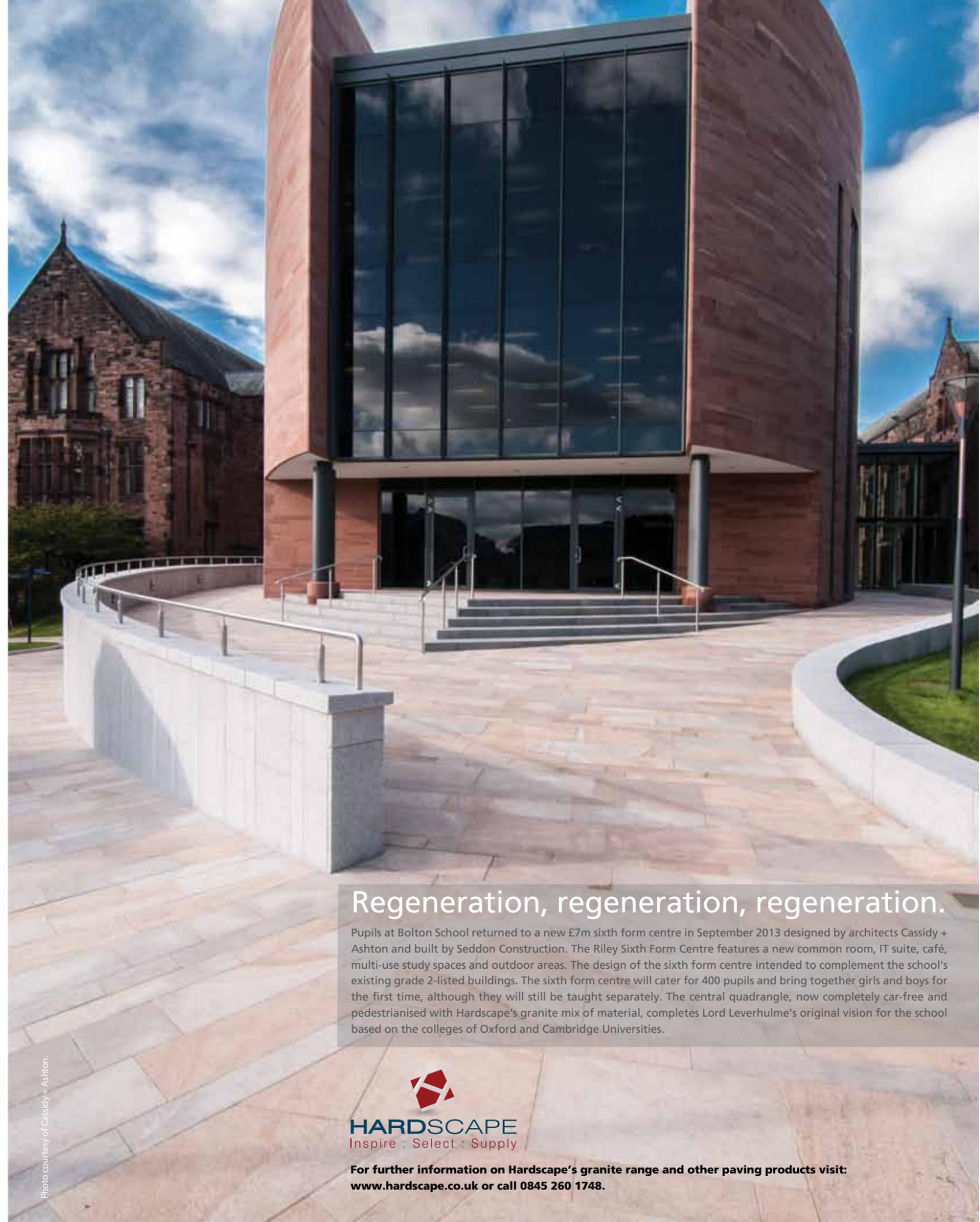
in urban settings, but also as encompassing all life and all things. It can be surmised, in this case, that progress and improvement are inevitable.

A key problem that plagues us, however, is that of the ‘shifting baseline syndrome’, which militates against progress. This posits that each generation seeks to return to a golden age that is within memory. Thus the ‘golden’ age becomes ever more brassy with each generation. My generation, for example, now romanticises post-industrial landscapes. Humans now have incredible power to shape the face of the planet, our habitat, but it is possible that our vision of its ideal state is progressively eroded. Perhaps this is just a new way of seeing the perennial balance between progress and entropy.

The place of the landscape professions now and in the future must be one in which we reinforce a positive and progressively more flourishing vision for our human habitat: one which strengthens our bonds to place, which brings city and country together in balance, and which benefits all species to the benefit of our own. The need for us to be an activist profession will only grow with each generation. •

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## Regeneration, regeneration, regeneration.

Pupils at Bolton School returned to a new £7m sixth form centre in September 2013 designed by architects Cassidy + Ashton and built by Seddon Construction. The Riley Sixth Form Centre features a new common room, IT suite, café, multi-use study spaces and outdoor areas. The design of the sixth form centre intended to complement the school's existing grade 2-listed buildings. The sixth form centre will cater for 400 pupils and bring together girls and boys for the first time, although they will still be taught separately. The central quadrangle, now completely car-free and pedestrianised with Hardscape's granite mix of material, completes Lord Leverhulme's original vision for the school based on the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities.



For further information on Hardscape's granite range and other paving products visit: [www.hardscape.co.uk](http://www.hardscape.co.uk) or call 0845 260 1748.