



Designer Retail Outlet Centre

Ashford, UK



Place
Kent, UK

Date
1996–2000

Client
BAA McArthurGlen UK Ltd

Cost
£21 million

Area
19,510 m²

Structural Engineer
Buro Happold

Services Engineer
John Brady Associates

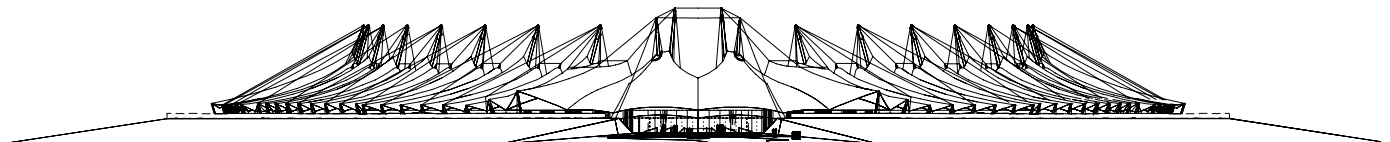
Quantity Surveyor
Davis Langdon & Everest

Landscape Architect
Derek Lovejoy
Partnership

Main Contractor
Galliford Northern

Whatever the sum of the reasons, the flexibility and practicality of the individual shop units, the overall ‘shop-ability’ and the unique site plan coming together as they do - the package really works

Joey Kampfer, McArthur Glenn Designer Outlets



The retail outlet centre occupies a former railway and engineering site adjacent to Ashford International Station in Kent. The 19,510 m² factory outlet centre aims to attract visitors from all over Europe. It is estimated that the retail centre has a capacity for approximately 3,000 visitors at any one time.

All the retail units open on to an enclosed car park for 1,400 cars. An IRGE tensile roof that, at the time of construction was the world’s largest continuous membrane structure, springs from the surrounding landscape, providing a sense of enclosure to the retail units and a sense of place to the development.

Twenty two bright orange steel masts support the tensile fabric roof approximately 1 km in length and covering an area of 30,000m² which provides shelter for the single storey retail units below. The units are insulated ‘boxes’, designed for ultimate flexibility and capable of undergoing rapid reconfiguration.

The distinctive tent structure is festive in spirit, unites the units under a single canopy and announces it proudly within the 30 acre site. It is undulating in form, rising to high points whose vertical masts act as counterpoints to the horizontal nature of the development and local topology. It wraps around the edge of the leaf-shaped plan and joins at the entrance, at the northern end of the site.

Visitors entering the complex by foot are met by a tourist information centre, a public display area, management suites and a food court. Those travelling by car will arrive from the southern end of the site and park in the landscaped car park.

Servicing to the centre is accessed by a service road at the rear of the retail units, which is concealed from view by the 3 metre landscaped embankment. This embankment gently slopes up to the eave-line of the retail units. To the outsider, an impression of self-containment and privacy is given for what is, in reality, an ever-changing public space.