

LUNCH with Keith Clark had been in the diary for a couple of months or so.

He is an architect and it was fortuitous we should lunch just days after the city council launched its design guide, which includes a chapter on tall buildings.

There would be plenty to talk about, especially as Keith had some years ago thrown a spanner in the works by proposing a glass pyramid in the Old Market Square similar to that outside The Louvre in Paris.

We met at Iberico, the smart tapas bar in the basement of the Shire Hall on High Pavement.

Just down the road the new multi-million pound contemporary art gallery is taking shape, due to open next year.

Over lunch including squid, tortilla, skewered beef, duck and seared salmon, we start.

It appears a tall building has a definition. It must be at least 94 metres high. And Nottingham has none that high, says Keith.

Victoria Centre is 72m high and the chimney of Eastcroft incinerator 91.5 metres. He has come prepared.

Keith says: "There is a place for tall buildings in Nottingham and people do like to live high up. Nottingham should be a distinctive city that people want to come to and is economically successful.

"And tall buildings should be at gateway locations."

Keith had walked across town from his Ropewalk offices where his practice, Clark Birch Perkins is based.

It has taken him through some of the city's grimmest architecture, Maid Marian Way.

"Maid Marian Way was unfortunate," says Keith. "But the city has made big improvements since then.

"We now have the new arts centre, Nottingham Contemporary, on High Pavement. It will greatly enhance Nottingham in terms of architecture."

I play devil's advocate and suggest it looks like a military command centre, is inward looking and is an interloper in its surroundings.

I argue that part of the Lace Market is largely domestic in scale with the width of buildings respecting their history.

The gallery, I suggest, looks hostile, is harsh and lacks warmth or human relationship.

Keith disagrees. In fact, he disagrees strongly, pointing to its simplicity and the cladding.

"It is a sensitive building. It doesn't have to scream Guggenheim, and it will grow on you, Richard.

"The middle distance view may be weak but the night-time view will be fabulous.

"The gallery has basic, simple elements with very fine cladding motif of Nottingham lace. That is important."

Keith says Nottingham needs a contemporary gallery and says The Castle is both out of the way and not an art gallery:

"I will be an even bigger fan when Nottingham Contemporary is finished. The city has had the foresight to invest in such a building.

"It will be a beautiful building which will stand the test of time. People will say 'Wow'."

The conversation quickly moves back to tall buildings. Keith is a fan of the Swiss Re building in the City of London, sometimes vulgarly referred to as the Erotic Gherkin.

"I love it. When you are close to it, because of its shape, it looks small. It



STRONG VIEWS: Keith Clark (left) loves Nottingham's new arts centre, Richard Tresidder is

How tall could beautiful for cit

By **RICHARD TRESIDDER**
Business Editor

disappears after four or five storeys. What a sophisticated tall building, the simplicity and functionality."

Here, Keith, a Scotsman, looks wistful, and says: "I have never done a tall building and would love to. They attract business and enhance the economy. In the right street scene and the right context there is no problem. But they have to be beautiful, they have to be simple."

I mention Nottingham's own attempt at a high-rise building, Jurys Inn on London Road.

Keith says: "I can see what they were trying to do at Jurys Inn. It is not a Swiss

Re. It is a high building which, frankly, is too complicated, too many facets, not enough concept."

Architects by their nature, like picking up a pencil or brush to draw.

Keith grew up in Fife and at the age of 15, spent Saturday mornings with a local architectural practice.

"I loved the smell of the lino, the gas, the print machine and cigarettes. I earned 7/6d (38p).

"And nearly 50 years later, I love it even more."

Leaving school at 17, Keith got into the School of Architecture at Edinburgh University, the beginning of a long training and apprenticeship which embraced studying at the Royal Institute of British Architects in London.

Within six years of qualifying, he had

rejected London, the commutes, for Nottingham, joining Boots the Chemist. He stayed for 15 years. He had a deep recession in 1992.

"It was the lowest point. I left Boots of my own accord to go to but it eventually moved into the mainstream of architecture. Keith is teetotal, gives up years ago.

"It was one of the best decisions I made - I didn't like the noise, now I feel so fit and healthy."

This is helped by his love of the tranquility of a 30-minute run.

It is clear that Keith has a profession - and The Nottingham Playhouse. "I see art in three