

16 APRIL 2007

Richards Partington Architects - setting new standards with their £10 million eco-positive, mixed use development proposal for Clerkenwell Road



The new planning application for 96-100 Clerkenwell Road is a pioneering example of the kind of scheme we may see being rolled out across the UK if the government is to achieve its own recently announced carbon targets. It describes the transformation of a central London petrol station into a car free, mixed-use and contextually sensitive building.

The proposed £10 million development, undertaken for Azure Property LLP, integrates the principles of sustainable design with the needs of the urban environment to provide 3,300 sq feet of retail space, 20,000 sq feet of office space, 8 two and three bed residential units, and an impressive array of 'green' features.

"Sustainability is not only about carbon emissions," comments Simon Bradbury of Richards Partington Architects (RPA), the designers of the scheme. "We believe in the importance of economic viability and social capital as well as in contributing to local architectural and environmental quality."

The scheme focuses on an incongruous gap site on the Clerkenwell Road, most likely leftover from bomb damage during the Second World War. Development in the area dates back to 1144, and since then the overlaying of detailed street patterns, and the addition of a major thoroughfare and a series of large-scale Victorian industrial buildings, all contribute to the dense and vibrant local feel. In response to this, RPA have adopted an approach, which aims to repair the break in the urban fabric, and add to the sense of local character and diversity.

The result is essentially a hybrid design. Offices face onto the busy Clerkenwell Road, where the building's massing restores the street's once continuous frontage. A ground floor retail strip wraps around the base to emerge onto a second frontage, this time overlooking St. John's Square. The quieter, more delicate environment provides the setting for the residential programme, as well as a first floor artisan studio.

"Discussions with Islington Council highlighted a desire to see a wide range of uses – an objective with which we were happy to comply," Bradbury explains. "Mixed use buildings are more socially sustainable, and ensure a high degree of flexibility, which provides future-proofing within a dynamic urban context. To integrate the building further with the surrounding fabric we cut through one corner at the ground and first floor level, and created a passageway connection between Clerkenwell Road and St. John's Square. This added yet another use: that of circulation and navigation for pedestrian traffic. It also resonates well with the medieval character of the square, and the networks of narrow lanes and passages which feed it."

Equally the architectural language of the design is drawn from the local vocabulary. The structural rhetoric of adjacent industrial buildings is subtly re-expressed through a strong frame, and a muted restatement of the base. Scales are balanced to redraw continuous parapet lines, and a blue grey brick has been chosen, both to compliment the variation of hand-made bricks on nearby buildings and to lend the new building a distinctive quality.

All of this historical and contextual harmony throws a veil over the building's real technological sophistication. Ground source heat pumps, rooftop wind turbines, solar thermal panels, and a community heating system all contribute toward a 20% onsite supply of renewable energy. However, as Bradbury is quick to point out, this is only achievable in conjunction with passive techniques and good design.

"There's no point in generating energy if you are just going to let it go. We have designed a high performance building envelope, comprised of a fully insulated external wall and glazing system. In addition to this, deep window reveals and metal louvres are carefully proportioned to provide maximum shade from the high summer sun, and natural light from the lower winter sun. Generation goes hand in hand with efficiency. We also looked at ways to help improve the awareness of users, offering a green roof with a supply of harvested rainwater, and ample cycle storage for office workers as well as residents."

The proposal gives body to the possibility of competitive high density urban infill with EcoHome and BREEAM ratings of 'Excellent'.

- end -

Notes for Editors:

Media Enquiries: Claire Lalaguna
Satellite MPR
Old Bank House
1 High Street
Arundel
West Sussex
BN18 9AD
T: 01903 885 414
M: 07973 314 594
E: claire@satellitempr.com

Architects: Jim Richards, Simon Bradbury
Richards Partington Architects
First Floor, Fergusson House
124-128 City Road
London
EC1V 2NJ
T: 020 7490 5490
F: 020 7490 5494
E: jim@rparchitects.co.uk
E: simon@rparchitects.co.uk

Richards Partington Architects is an ambitious, young practice with experience in a broad range of fields including urban design, housing, arts, education and commerce. For further information please visit www.rparchitects.co.uk

Client: Dominic Fryer
Azure Property LLP
Time & Life Building
1 Bruton Street
London
W1J 6TL
T: 020 7409 5500
F: 020 7409 5501