

SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT ONLY ABOUT CARBON EMISSIONS

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, 4 one-, 2 two- and 2 three-bed residential units, and an impressive array of green features.

The scheme focuses on an incongruous gap site on the Clerkenwell Road, most likely left over from bomb damage during the Second World War. Development in the area dates back to 1144, and since then the over-layering 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 RPA were happy to comply. 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 RPA 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 complement 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% on-site supply of renewable energy. However, 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. RPA has



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. They 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.

- Further information from Jim Richards or Simon Bradbury, Richards Partington Architects, First Floor, Fergusson House, 124-128 City Road, London EC1V 2NJ. Tel: 0207 490 5490. Fax: 0207 490 5494. E-mail: jim@rparchitects.co.uk or simon@rparchitects.co.uk Web: www.rparchitects.co.uk

