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# FROM THE EDITOR



It's hard to believe that next year will be a decade since the Grenfell tragedy, the most devastating single event in UK construction since the second world war. The response has been patchy, with the golden thread and the Building Safety Act bringing in some much needed accountability, but also creating logjams of approvals at the regulator which aren't producing the fast change needed.

An area which was left in limbo post-Hackitt was the promised reform of construction products regulation. Like the promised review of Approved Documents, the lack of signs of action is an indicator of the complexity and difficulty of changing the status quo in a fragmented and confusing web of regulations, testing and procedures with little national coordination.

However, the Ministry of Housing has now nailed its colours to the mast, with a Construction Products White Paper that comes with a pledge to "strengthen safety and regulation of building products, ensuring they are properly assessed before being used." It also has a candid admission from the slightly 'Brazil' movie-sounding Under Secretary of State for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy – Samantha Dixon – near the beginning of the Foreword.

Dixon says: "We must move from a framework originally designed to reduce technical trade barriers to one that places safety, accountability, public confidence, and growth and innovation at its core." In this simple sentence, there is an entire world of tangled commercial issues, vested interests, and lack of third-party governance, which have made the efforts of enlightened suppliers and specifiers difficult to safeguard in projects.

The Government says the White Paper will lead to a "crackdown on unregulated practices and weaknesses that are undermining the construction sector," and that all products "must be properly assessed before being used in the building process." It admits that only around a third of products are even covered by regulation, and this begs the question, how do you police the unregulated majority, without requiring a drastic shift to mandating regulated products?

Secondary legislation is expected later this year which will detail how this will all work. But, as the Government begins to make Annual Reports on Grenfell Tower inquiry implementation (first report saying that 12 recommendations have been "completed," they cannot hope to tick the box on the reform of construction products regulation any time soon.

Although the Building Safety Regulator is now a standalone body independent of the HSE, its list of challenges are huge, with nine months reportedly a standard wait time now for Gateway 2 submissions. As well as potentially being a symptom of under-resourcing, this is also a factor of the realities of having a single, consistent regulatory system, rather than the more piecemeal, if less accountable processes it replaces. Its performance was recently deemed "unacceptable" by a parliamentary committee, but it has managed to cut its backlog down to three open project submissions, admittedly by some sleight of hand involving creating another channel for "complex schemes".

Full review of Approved Documents – also advocated in Hackitt's report – is the last and probably most elusive piece of the jigsaw. Apparently (at least in terms of reviewing Part B), it's another thing the Regulator is currently doing. Bearing all this mind, for it to turn into the all-encompassing single construction regulator which has been called for will need huge funding and manpower to supply the demand.

**James Parker, Editor**

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#### ON THE COVER...

WGP Architects responded to the challenge of designing a "consciously sculptural" building discreetly set within the gardens of an Arts and Crafts house in Kent. For more information visit page 12.

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## AWARDS

# RIBA International Awards 2026 shortlist announced

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has revealed the 52 projects shortlisted for the 2026 RIBA International Awards for Excellence.

Celebrating outstanding architecture from 18 countries, the biennial awards highlight design that tackles global challenges, including climate change, limited resources, social equity and rapid urban growth.

The shortlist features projects from five continents, ranging from net-zero industrial hubs to refugee art centres. The list includes projects from global practices, including David Chipperfield Architects, Foster + Partners, Snøhetta, Hassell and WOHA, alongside noteworthy boutique firms, including MAKER architecten and Studio Mumbai.

The shortlisted project show architects “reimagining cultural, civic, educational and community buildings as open, adaptable spaces that support shared identity and public life,” said RIBA. Libraries, museums, schools and community facilities “are conceived not only as institutions but as civic anchors that connect learning, culture and everyday



activity.” Adaptive reuse plays a key role, with former industrial and corporate structures transformed into cultural venues, civic hubs and mixed-use environments that extend the life of existing buildings while retaining elements of their architectural history. Many projects also emphasise community participation and local context, reinterpreting religious, neighbourhood and hospitality spaces as inclusive places that strengthen ties and support local economies.

Across housing, landscape and infrastructure, the projects address

density, sustainability and resilience while maintaining quality of life. Housing models “explore incremental growth, cooperative living and low-carbon construction, alongside the reuse of industrial buildings and the use of environmentally conscious materials. Together, these approaches demonstrate how architecture can integrate environmental performance, social value and long-term adaptability,” said RIBA.

The winners of the RIBA International Awards for Excellence will be announced on 11 June.

## LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

## Common Practice Studio completes national leadership programme

An architectural design studio has strengthened its strategic direction and commercial foundations after completing a national leadership programme.

Manchester-based Common Practice Studio, now in its third year, was founded as a small, values-driven practice committed to ensuring thoughtful, meaningful and purposeful design is accessible to all. Working across community-focused projects, co-founder Yan Wing Le joined Help to Grow:

Management, the Government-backed 12-week leadership initiative to step back from day-to-day delivery and “take a more strategic view of how the practice operates and evolves sustainably.”

As many small architecture studios balance design delivery with the demands of running a business, Yan Wing Le said the programme “provided vital space for reflection.”

Help to Grow: Management supports SME leaders in strengthening productivity,



leadership capability and long-term growth planning.

For Common Practice Studio, the programme “reinforced the foundations required to transition from early-stage practice to sustainable, long-term growth while staying aligned to its values-led design ethos.”



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## VIEW POINT

Trevor Morriss, principal at SPPARC, discusses its “heritage-led” adaptive reuse of Modernist icon Ravenscourt Park Hospital into new London housing; and what architects can learn from its guiding principles of fresh air and sunlight, a century on.

Despite its key role in popularising the Modernist movement in Britain, Ravenscourt Park Hospital in London’s Hammersmith has sat empty for 20 years and now appears on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk register. Following planning consent for developer TT Group last July, SPPARC’s heritage-led repositioning of the former hospital into 140 residential units and a 65-bed care home will ensure the survival of its architecturally significant Grade II\* listed buildings. It will also open the site up to the public for the first time through dedicated community spaces, new pedestrian routes linking to Ravenscourt Park, and a landscaping scheme that reflects the importance of open space in the original design vision.

As its original name suggests, the Royal Masonic Hospital was commissioned by the Freemasons, to provide low-cost healthcare to its members and their families. For the hospital’s architects (Burnet, Tait & Lorne), it represented a major shift in style for their practice. Despite winning the project in 1929 based on Neo-Georgian proposals, lead architect Thomas S. Tait would later radically redesign his plans in the International Modernist style. With its flat roofs, horizontal lines and sparse ornamentation, the hospital’s layout and aesthetic exemplified this emerging movement. The campus of four red-brick



SPPARC’s design for two new blocks “are in the spirit of the original masterplan”

buildings – three hospital blocks and one entrance building, are joined by glass bridges in a cross-axial layout.

For SPPARC, a practice that has built up a portfolio of major projects and a reputation for reworking some of London’s most significant heritage buildings, it is always a pleasure to work alongside the design ingenuity of historic architecture. On its opening in 1933, praise for the Royal Masonic Hospital was near unanimous. It won both RIBA’s Gold Medal for Building

of the Year in 1933 and the London Architecture Bronze Medal in 1934. A two-page spread in *Country Life* described the hospital as ‘one of the most successful... contemporary buildings in the country’, while *Architects’ Journal* hailed it as the architectural event of the year.

This widespread acclaim was about more than just aesthetics, however. Hospitals embody prevailing beliefs about healthcare from the time in which they were built. Before they shifted to a focus on minimising

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The balconies cantilever with the support of three thin piers



costs and maximising efficiencies, hospital layouts reflected an understanding that the basic principles of plentiful sunlight and fresh air are fundamental to good health.

As an example of this design philosophy, the hospital's largest ward block, Block B, is oriented south to maximise the amount of light entering the wards, with its U-shaped layout overlooking a communal garden. Perhaps the most iconic feature of the hospital's Modernist style, the semi-circular sun balconies on Block B's private wards also reflect these principles. Made possible by the work of Swedish engineer Sven Bylander, the balconies cantilever with the limited support of three thin piers, representing a major innovation in welding and thin concrete design for the time. These provided patients with access to fresh air, while their glass tiles allowed natural light to penetrate all levels.

A testament to the quality of its design, the hospital would go on to enjoy over 60 years in operation, remaining self-funded even after the National Health Service was established in 1948. Financial difficulties would eventually lead to its closure in 1994, re-opening as an NHS Diagnostic and Treatment Centre in 2002, before shutting its doors for good just four years later.

With no further identified need for a hospital on the site, SPPARC's sensitive conversion into residential use and a care home will meet local needs and targets while continuing its historic use by the healthcare sector. An extensive public consultation process revealed enthusiasm for these new uses along with support from both Historic England and the 20th Century Society.

In many ways, Ravenscourt Park Hospital represents one of London's largest ongoing heritage restoration projects. After two decades of vacancy, the former hospital has, unsurprisingly, fallen into disrepair. The project will clean up the buildings'

heritage exteriors, with sensitively crafted interventions and additions of varying scale. Landscaping works will restore the original ornamental water feature, built-in planters, garden walls, gates, lighting, and clock.

While some of SPPARC's heritage work elsewhere requires relatively more intervention due to these buildings' original uses – like the transformation of Olympia's Grade II listed former multi-storey car park into a school and 5-star hotel – Ravenscourt Park Hospital's plan form lends itself well to residential conversion. As an emphasis on wellbeing rises to the fore of housing design, there is much that modern architects can learn from the hospital's deliberately generous open space and wall-to-window ratios.

Blocks B to D, the former hospital's operational core, will be turned into spacious new housing from one-bedroom apartments to family offerings. Internally, existing floor levels and cores will be maintained, remodelling these where needed to meet modern space standards, fire safety requirements and inclusive design principles. In many cases, SPPARC was able to come up with innovative ways to subtly incorporate the original plan form into the new use, for example, by repurposing the nurses' rooms as dining rooms and living spaces. Overall, significant historic fabric will be retained to maintain the legibility of the original design and former use.

Block B's iconic sun decks will also be retained for residential use as extraordinary private balconies. Even where some heritage features cannot be retained in situ, SPPARC has sought to relocate them to another part of the site. This includes moving the original ceramic tiles from the former children's wing on Block B to the entrance at Block A.

Ravenscourt Park Hospital is, in my view, too architecturally significant to remain hidden away from the public any longer. New public spaces and routes have

## Block B's iconic sun decks will also be retained as private balconies

been carefully designed to ensure the site's permeability without compromising the privacy of residents. The former entrance block, Block A, will house flexible spaces for hire for classes, talks, events, and other similar uses. Thankfully, most of its heritage features remain surprisingly intact to this day, including some of the interwar period's most lavish interiors and two Greek-style Gilbert Bayes sculptures flanking each side of the entrance that, in a nod to its hospital use, represent Healing and Charity – all of which will be carefully restored under SPPARC's supervision.

At SPPARC, our approach to heritage – from Olympia to the Saville Theatre – is grounded in a belief that modern additions should not copy their host architecture, but instead be worthy of it. Tait's masterplan for the hospital originally envisaged another ward block to mirror Block A. Though the site's boundaries do not allow us to replicate this vision exactly, SPPARC's designs for a new Block E and F are in the spirit of that original masterplan. Housing further residential units and the care home, respectively, the new buildings adopt a strong masonry palette that reflects on the listed buildings, without seeking to imitate them. These will replace a low-quality 1970s addition to the site that blocked off access from Ravenscourt Square to the west, with the new Blocks E and F sharing the Modernist era's ambition of unadorned surfaces celebrated through well considered detail and a carefully planned layout.

Across the site, we are implementing an all electric energy strategy that includes the installation of ground-source heat pumps, the most sensitive approach for the listed buildings that maintain a clear roof.

Rather than working against the heritage onsite, SPPARC's revival of Ravenscourt Park Hospital celebrates the design principles that informed the hospital's layout in the first place. Though nearly a century since it was first constructed, its focus on the basic principles of air, sunlight and access to the outdoors has a timeless quality that architects would do well to draw on today.

*Trevor Morriss is principal at SPPARC*



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## PRACTICE PROFILE

# WGP Architects

Kim Neville explores WGP's 20-year journey, including how it trademarked a model for human-centred, sustainable design, while pursuing AI and a collaborative culture to drive impactful architecture.

**W**GP is a relatively young practice, founded just 20 years ago. As with many emerging firms, the early years presented challenges – maintaining financial stability while growing the client base and balancing expansion with a commitment to design quality.

### Origins & setup

From the outset, the practice aimed to become a commercial studio capable of delivering architecture at scale while contributing to innovation in design. At the heart of the firm is a philosophy rooted in wellness, a principle that continues to shape its work today. As the team puts it: “We believe architects should contribute to and improve people’s experience and lives.”

Sustainability has since become a central driving force for the company. Even before this sharpened focus, there was a strong interest in material efficiency, and what the practice describes as ‘appropriate forms’ of construction – embedding efficiency into schemes from the outset. They compare the ethos to “how a product designer would approach design for manufacture, but built in from the beginning.” Alongside this technical approach, as it grew, the firm explored how efficiency could inform spatial experience, articulation and architectural complexity.

These early steps enabled the practice to evolve naturally, supported by a pragmatic sustainability focus; one that responds proactively to the climate crisis. The company explains the approach: “Our Efficient Architecture™ manifesto – more with less – has evolved into a holistic approach to sustainability: identifying opportunities and solving them with as few moves as possible.”

A clear definition of responsibilities across the senior leadership team is core to the practice’s modus operandi. Strategic vision, operational stability, problem-solving leadership and specialist interior expertise are seen as complementary drivers that allow the firm to grow, while remaining aligned with its core values.

The firm’s origins lie in hospitality and high-end residential projects, with leisure also entering the portfolio early on due to personal interests in fitness. Over time, it developed a strong reputation across the full spectrum of residential work, from student accommodation and Build-to-Rent schemes to later living and care sectors, as well as emerging models such as co-living.

While WGP may have pivoted from their early hospitality focus, the learnings from those foundations remain evident. The

experiential qualities and interior architectural thinking developed in that sector continue to inform its residential and wellness projects, an approach the team believes “translates particularly well.”

### Culture & ethos

Internally, WGP operates a hybrid working model but continues to value face-to-face collaboration, particularly in relation to training and professional development.

The company’s leadership style has evolved through ongoing learning and self-reflection. As the leadership notes, “We have a diverse company across every metric, and we feel that contributes to a culture built around collaboration and shared values.” The firm recognises that as it expands, adapting processes to best support teams while maintaining efficiency is crucial.

WGP defines and measures the value of design as a combination of sustainability, inclusivity, functionality, and social impact. Each element carries merit on its own, contributing both quantitatively and qualitatively to design value. However, the firm observes that the most meaningful outcome emerges when these factors intersect: “The result we find most telling, the one that seems to emerge from all of them together, is the contentment and satisfaction of the team.”

Efficient Architecture™ represents WGP’s 20-year journey distilled into a teachable, scalable design framework. Their path has been fairly linear, beginning with a focus on construction, fabrication, offsite manufacturing, and material efficiency. Over time, they have come to understand that these are not ends in themselves, but tools to enhance human experience, embrace complexity and support financial sustainability. They continue to build on this foundation adding layers to address the full spectrum of sustainability but always through efficient, thoughtful approaches.

### Design process

WGP does not follow a fixed signature design approach; instead, the firm focuses on problem-solving rather than trends or fashions. That said, they admit there is an element of recognisability in a WGP building, even if that was never the firm’s explicit intention.

Sustainability runs throughout, using targets that are both “measurable and meaningful.” They are harnessing computational and AI methods to “quickly checking KPIs as we design, and adjust in response to the data. 2026 will hopefully be the year that this process is fully embedded.”

The firm places strong emphasis on clear, consistent client communication, embracing the challenges. “We have worked through some genuinely difficult moments very collaboratively with clients.” They say this clarity is also applied to the practice leaders’ role, to help get the most out of the team: “Defining the leadership roles is part of a process that establishes identities that speak to our values, allowing us to effectively lead the talented people on our team at scale and pace.”

As a result the trust it has built with clients (seen as the firm’s biggest achievement) has enabled the securing of prominent schemes and “fostered a culture where teams, past and present, are supported to grow and develop.”

The practice believes that as architecture becomes more “data-rich and interconnected,” it is well set up to benefit, being “grounded in second-order cybernetics and systems thinking, with an emphasis on feedback loops and the observer’s role within the system.”

As well as monitoring KPIs, they are using AI to interpret complex data, and “support the calculations that inform sustainable design.” And, by embedding “meaningful feedback” into the design process, they aim to make their Efficient Architecture concept measurable.

## Projects

One of WGP’s most striking projects, The Folly, was a unique commission for a modern folly, a ‘consciously sculptural’ sustainable building discreetly set within the gardens of an Arts and Crafts country house. “Part lookout, part entertaining space, and part retreat, and is unashamedly free of typical building constraints, celebrating its beautiful surroundings.”

The modular primary structure and layered approach to internal and external cladding use recycled and recyclable timber and

aluminium, allowing components to be replaced to extend the building’s design life. The free-spanning internal space provides flexibility of use, while prefabricated transportable leaves and screw piles can be relocated and repurposed elsewhere.

The logarithmic spiral form minimises surface area and reduces heat loss. The building’s height, combined with rainscreen cladding, was planned to facilitate effective ventilation. In-house solar gain simulations informed the form, orientation, and location of glazing, supporting mitigation measures such as overhanging eaves to reduce overheating, thermal mass from rafts and highly insulated cassettes to retain solar gain, and partial burial of the structure to regulate temperatures.

Operationally, the building relies on an all-electric solution, with a heat pump served by geothermal piles, below-ground plant with minimal visual or acoustic impact, and underfloor water-fed pipework. Beyond embodied carbon, operational carbon and therefore whole life carbon were important drivers for the design.

Another prominent project for WGP is the Theatre Square & NW2 Participation Building. Central Ipswich offered an unusual challenge: a 1960s public space above a hidden spiral car park, featuring a disused fountain bowl, with a developer willing to fund transformation provided parking was retained below. The goals were an expanded New Wolsey Theatre and a gateway statement for the local authority, to support wider regeneration.

The main constraint was the car park below. WGP worked with the existing corkscrew concrete structure rather than against it, aligning the new building’s form with the structural grid below. No new foundations were required, and the 282 m<sup>2</sup> timber structure sits on hidden beams resting on the original surface. “Material efficiency guided fabrication,” say the practice; the



### THE FOLLY

The practice responded to the challenge of designing a “consciously sculptural” building discreetly set within the gardens of an Arts and Crafts house in Kent © Anthony Coleman

**THEATRE SQUARE & NW2 PARTICIPATION BUILDING**

Rescue of a 1960s public space above a hidden car park in Ipswich © Peter Cook



panelised timber superstructure was fabricated offsite in sections. A projecting gold canopy uses a 5 mm folded steel plate, made of interlocking segments.

**Looking ahead**

The firm identifies its main challenge as maintaining design quality while scaling the business, and sees its Efficient Architecture “manifesto” as central to this. They explain that it gives the team

a clear framework to work within as the practice grows. By embedding the firm’s ethos and values fully, they can bring new people in without diluting what makes the work successful.

WGP is enthusiastic about embracing opportunities, particularly “responsive architecture” that incorporates principles of cybernetics. As the climate continues to change, they are exploring how buildings, urban design and landscape can adapt in real time to human, environmental, and technical variables.

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## COMMENT

# The real value of AI for architects

Karl Smith at Creative ITC explains how architectural practices can move from experimenting with AI to strategic integration, by leveraging structured data for measurable outcomes – thereby building their capability to serve future needs.

**M**ore than half of architecture professionals are already using AI in their operations, with many more planning adoption in the coming years. Practices are seizing the powerful opportunity to accelerate creativity, support faster design exploration and improve project outcomes. These benefits are increasingly critical as the industry faces mounting pressure to design and build smarter to meet the rising demands of a growing global population projected to reach 10 billion by 2060.

However, artificial intelligence is moving faster than the architecture industry's ability to restructure itself around it. Many practices are struggling to realise their full potential. Legacy IT systems, siloed data and AI capabilities make it difficult to deploy AI effectively, exposing firms to unreliable outputs, delayed adoption and higher operational risk. To move beyond experimentation, firms need a clear understanding of AI's real world value and the barriers that limit its impact.

### From curiosity to commercial execution

AI is already reshaping architectural workflows. According to the NBS 2025 Digital Construction Report, adoption continues to accelerate across design and delivery teams. 42% of architecture professionals are using AI tools today, with a further 37% planning adoption within five years. Initial fears that AI would replace creativity have largely subsided. Instead, AI is increasingly augmenting it by expanding design exploration, accelerating feasibility studies and supporting faster decision making.

However, the real transformation has now moved beyond visualisation into operational intelligence. Across the asset lifecycle, AI is being integrated with IoT and digital twins to create closed-loop decision systems. IoT gathers real time telemetry. AI translates that data into predictions and risk signals. The digital twin provides contextual simulation to test outcomes before action is taken. Insights generated during delivery and operation then cycle back to inform future design decisions.



Competitive advantage is being built in data-backed execution. Indexed BIM and IFC datasets are enabling delivery teams to ask the model direct natural-language questions. Computer vision compares site imagery, LiDAR and scans against federated models to detect variance early. Historical programme data is training schedule risk models that forecast delays before they surface commercially. Pre-design costing models are becoming more accurate through structured portfolio data.

When grounded in structured, high-quality data, AI stops being speculative and delivers real world operational impact. This is what moves margins.

### Hidden risks: why AI pilots stall

While most practices are experimenting with AI tools, fewer than 1% of architecture firms report organisation-wide AI integration. A key reason for this gap is that many practices approach AI as a standalone innovation initiative rather than as an organisation wide enabler. This means many firms neglect the robust data groundwork on which AI success relies.

AI does not fix weak digital foundations – it exposes them. AI built on fragmented foundations amplifies confusion. Siloed legacy systems result in AI exposing interoperability weaknesses. If governance is unclear, AI introduces risk rather than efficiency.

Legacy IT remains a significant barrier. Outdated, batch-oriented IT environments struggle to support real-time AI workflows. Interoperability gaps between design platforms, cost systems and project controls limit insight. Cloud migrations undertaken without architectural planning often introduce further complexity through unexpected egress costs, performance constraints and sovereignty concerns.

At the same time, firms also face growing risks around security and intellectual property. Feeding proprietary design data into external AI models without clear governance can compromise competitive advantage. Large models may unintentionally replicate protected content. These risks are leading many firms to move away from off-the-shelf tools to develop more secure proprietary systems based on their firm's own data and platforms. Without defined guardrails, firms risk commercial exposure in pursuit of efficiency.

### AI integration demands operational redesign

True AI maturity begins with a simple but often avoided question – what commercial outcome are we trying to improve? Architecture firms must first define the results that matter most – increased bid success rates, reduced design-stage rework, improved delivery margins, accelerated programme certainty, reduced insurance exposure, improved utilisation and fee recovery.

AI that is not anchored to top-line growth or bottom-line protection will remain experimental. Industry specialist partners can help practices cut through AI hype and focus on commercial impact. With that direction set, firms can build a pragmatic roadmap that prioritises the right use cases, data sets and tools. When aligned to measurable KPIs, AI investment becomes strategic rather than tactical.

To support scalable AI, firms must modernise their digital foundations. Workloads must be placed in the right environments, whether on-premise, private or sovereign cloud, public cloud or edge. A cloud-smart strategy balances governance with agility, enabling secure data mobility while maintaining compliance and performance.

## While most practices are experimenting with AI tools, fewer than 1% of architecture firms report organisation-wide AI integration

Data must be central, structured and governed. Design archives, schedules, project decisions and cost histories should not sit in isolated silos. When AI models are anchored in structured, portfolio level knowledge, outputs become reviewable, traceable and commercially defensible. This is the difference between speculative prompting and institutional intelligence.

However, even the best laid IT plans can go awry when firms underestimate the human element. Even when practices define the right problem and select the right tools, adoption often stalls at the point of operational integration. AI only creates value when teams know how to use it effectively.

Effective adoption requires training teams on how prompts influence outcomes, teaching users how to structure inputs for accuracy, establishing clear usage protocols, embedding AI into existing workflows, and creating feedback loops to refine output quality. AI capability building must sit alongside technical deployment. Firms that treat AI education with the same seriousness as BIM training will move faster and safer than those relying on informal experimentation.

### Harnessing AI for long-term advantage

AI integration is ultimately a leadership test – and one that will expose inefficient operating models across the architecture industry. The firms that will lead the next decade of digital construction will move on from experimenting with tools and focus instead on building the cleanest data environments, defining the clearest commercial objectives and investing in capability development. AI transformation is not about chasing innovation headlines. It is about building operational intelligence that compounds over time.

For smaller practices, this shift represents a significant opportunity. With strong foundations and disciplined governance, AI can level the playing field, allowing lean teams to compete at scale without matching headcount. For larger firms, the stakes are higher. Marginal gains in delivery efficiency translate into substantial commercial advantage across global portfolios.

AI holds enormous potential across the architecture sector, but firms will only realise its full value if they deploy it with intention and discipline. Firms must define the commercial problem first, align AI initiatives to measurable outcomes, strengthen digital and data foundations, establish governance before scale, invest in structured user capability and training, and embed AI into operational workflows rather than treating it as an overlay.

Architecture firms that move from experimentation to disciplined execution will be the first to reap rewards far greater than efficiency. Those that act now will be best positioned to turn AI into a true strategic advantage, reshaping how projects are conceived, delivered and optimised across the entire asset lifecycle and delivering the infrastructure the future demands.

*Karl Smith is director at Creative ITC*

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**BUILDING  
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# Extracting maximum natural value

A new 'garden village' in Cornwall is the result of years of hard work, repurposing former clay quarries into a low carbon settlement with community and green living at its heart. Roseanne Field reports on how LHC Design tackled a complex masterplanning challenge.





The town of St Austell in mid-Cornwall has become known for the so-called ‘Cornish Alps’ – the conical pyramids formed by spoil heaps from the area’s 250 years of clay mining.

China clay – otherwise known as kaolin – is used, as its name suggests, to make china and porcelain. Though still mined today, the industry was at its peak in the early 1900s, with many mines and quarries having since shut down.

One such piece of land is located just north of St Austell, near the villages of Penwithick and Carthew. In 2010 the area was earmarked to be developed into what was being termed at the time as an ‘eco-town’ – one of a government-sponsored programme of new towns.

The eco-town concept eventually evolved into the current garden village/garden town scheme, which has seen dozens of sites across England earmarked for development into new communities with the primary purpose of tackling the country’s housing shortage. These developments are hoped to be designed and built with a set of key principles in mind; blending good quality housing with significant amounts of green and landscaped surroundings, aligning with an emphasis on sustainability and enhancing the environment.

The redevelopment of the 550 acre site at St Austell is being overseen by Eco-Bos, a joint venture between global engineering and construction contractor Orascom and

industrial mineral producer Imerys, which employs over 1,000 people at open pit mines across the UK.

In 2006, Imerys announced they would be restructuring their china clay operations, resulting in a surplus of 700 hectares of land no longer required for mining. The following year, the Government was to introduce its eco-town initiative, thereby providing an ideal opportunity to repurpose the West Carclaze site.

From the inception of the scheme, Eco-Bos brought LHC Design on board who were involved in “shaping the vision and leading the masterplanning and outline design,” explains LHC Design director, Graham Devine. Due to the project’s significant scale, while LHC Design have undertaken several elements, primarily their involvement has been the delivery of the overall masterplan alongside landscape proposals.

### Strategy & approach

The overall goal was to repurpose the brownfield land into a “healthy, low-carbon village where gardens and green corridors shape the experience of place,” says Devine.

The scheme went through years of development following its initially being earmarked in 2007 as a potential ‘eco-town.’ Then in 2009, initial outline government approval was achieved, with a public exhibition of the proposals taking place in 2010.

**“The challenge was to knit energy-positive homes, community uses and blue-green infrastructure into a complex, post-industrial landscape”**

Graham Devine, LHC Design



## ECO TOWN

The West Carclaze site being nominated as one of the Government's 'eco-towns' in 2010, providing the ideal opportunity to repurpose the site

Having worked on the initial plans under the eco-town scheme, LHC Design remained involved throughout the project's evolution. "Early government eco-town policy set the context for a pioneering, sustainability-first settlement; our role was to ensure continuity of that intent into delivery," Devine explains.

The project then went through several years of development. In 2014 public consultations were held, and in 2016 the project was revived under the new garden towns initiative (replacing the eco-town scheme).

Planning was granted in September 2018, with the approved scheme including the demolition, site clearance and associated necessary groundwork. A phased development would then ensue, comprising up to 1,500 homes and a local centre including a primary school, employment floor space, local retail, health and community facilities, and areas of open space, as well as renewable energy provision and energy centres, drainage and associated infrastructure.

The homes range in size from two to five bedrooms and are a mix of open market

and affordable, as well as some custom-build provision. These homes include bungalows and apartments, as well as houses. The mix and tenure of the housing was guided by the outline planning consent and design code, as well as Section 106 obligations. Phase-specific schedules dictate the typical affordable unit size.

As part of their work in developing the scheme, LHC Design led a design competition to produce a range of alternative house types that could fit the overall concept. The practice also spent time researching and investigating construction forms that would be suitable for widescale delivery.

LHC Design helped guide the project through numerous Non-Material Amendment (NMA) applications. "We designed and delivered bespoke house types, incorporating and developing landscape design and construction packages for the first phase of 169 homes to be delivered onsite," Devine says.

The scale of the scheme meant "careful parcelisation, phasing and infrastructure, supported by the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF)," explains Devine. "LHC's

mixed-use and residential experience informed the design code, street hierarchy and green infrastructure sequencing to keep the long-term build-out legible and resilient,” adds Devine.

### A village of gardens

Eco-Bos’ brief given to LHC was for a “village of gardens,” explains Devine. This included low-carbon homes and “walkable neighbourhoods” – offering residents a lifestyle that can be centred around nature and wellbeing. He explains: “The challenge was to knit energy-positive homes, community uses and blue-green infrastructure into a complex, post-industrial landscape, all governed by a design code and multi-phase delivery strategy,” he adds.

The site’s previous use has drastically shaped the land and its characteristics, over the centuries. Similarly, although china clay is no longer mined within the boundaries of the site, several resultant mineral pits and other areas are used for the “disposal of micaceous residues” – a byproduct of china clay extraction – and water extraction from various bodies of water onsite.

LHC Design wanted to make the most of this history within the design, rather than conceal it. “The masterplan embraces this heritage as drivers for landscape character, routes and ecology,” says Devine. He adds: “Cultural diversity within the china clay area is manifested through a

unique group of features.” These include mining terraces and platforms, industry haul roads, water bodies, cliffs, mica dams, tips and hills, despoiled/disturbed landscape, dry and wet heathland, wet willow and broadleaf woodlands, mire and wetland, historic field patterns and farmstead remnants, as well as traditional Cornish hedge banks and walls.

West Carclaze shares its vision with other garden villages being developed within ‘clay country,’ explains Devine. The principles include mixed and balanced communities, with housing to suit all including affordable homes, and regenerating employment opportunities including flexible workplaces. The schemes within the masterplan also aim to be “socially holistic” – in harmony with other essential facilities, and viable and sustainable over the long term.

To comply with their garden village status, the developments have to be “environmentally responsible, low energy and low impact,” and prioritise ‘green’ transport including walking, cycling and public transport, as well as including extensive green space to enhance and increase the biodiversity and ecology of the sites. The schemes are also designed to sit harmoniously in their location, “sympathetically integrated” into the landscape – natural and post-industrial – and respectful of their cultural heritage, while, says Devine, “seamlessly connecting with existing communities.”

**“Heritage assets and ecology shaped the park hierarchy and wetland restoration, so the place reads as Cornish and contemporary”**

Graham Devine, LHC Design



This is a vision that has remained unchanged since the scheme's early gestation as an eco-town, Devine explains. "The designation of West Carclaze as a garden village consolidated and strengthened the strategic vision for a forward thinking and exemplar approach to developing new settlements, especially in more rural regions like Cornwall," adds the architect.

Devine says he believes the garden city principles that underpin garden village designation have raised the profile and awareness of the benefits of green infrastructure, and bolstered its chances of caretaking and management over the long term by local stakeholders. This will help "provide long term community benefits over many generations."

The principles have resulted in the practice "layering green realms from private plots to parks," Devine explains. These have been aligned "wherever possible" to south-facing slopes to maximise natural light and integrate roof-mounted PV. "The concept is both placemaking and performance: gardens frame daily life while the landform

underpins the energy strategy."

Certain elements of the masterplan were dictated by the location and history of the site. "The clay country landform drove terracing, drainage and attenuation, and view-led massing," says Devine. "Heritage assets and ecology shaped the park hierarchy and wetland restoration, so the place reads as Cornish and contemporary."

There were several potential geotechnical and land contamination hazards due to the previous mining activity, such as pits and quarries, tips containing potential contaminants, underground mining shafts, and other potential contaminants. All hazards were assessed, constraints identified and mitigated by "standard engineering design or by good working practice," says Devine. Mitigation measures were minimised where possible by designing to respond to geological features rather than alter or remove them.

Ecological investigations also took place across the entire site, the results of which also impacted development proposals. One of the core principles





identified as needing to be addressed was biodiversity, within green infrastructure and ecological mitigation strategy frameworks. “Ecological features are to be incorporated into the green infrastructure at macro and micro scales to create habitat networks that interact and blend with the surrounding landscape,” Devine says. The development’s relationship with the local microclimate was also “fundamental,” he continues, “to shape the development and the successful delivery of a low energy and sustainable settlement.”

The drainage design was influenced by and made use of the existing hydrology of the site. “The underlying strata effectively prevents infiltration and any current rainfall is collected and directed over the topography through dispersed over ground flow and informal channels,” explains Devine. This is then collected within lakes on the site.

A Landscape and Visual Impact

Assessment (LVIA) was undertaken for the initial outline planning application. It considered existing elements of the landscape – topography, vegetation, boundaries, water bodies, routes structures and more – assessing the effects the proposed scheme would have on the landscape and views.

### Continual collaboration

With the project having currently spanned over 15 years, good collaboration and communication has been absolutely essential. Change has been continuous, both in terms of the people working on the scheme who have come and gone, as well as changes in policy, technology and client priorities and objectives. But throughout, “collaboration has remained constant,” Devine asserts. “LHC worked closely with Eco-Bos and partner architects under a robust design code, balancing innovation with deliverability.”

### GREEN SPINES

There are two ‘spine’ trails through the masterplan that connect the site east-west, offering around 16 km of paths leading to lakes, parks, play and picnic areas



#### A BETTER ORIENTATION

Plots have been “specifically orientated from a solar perspective,” say the architects

Two of the more major changes seen during the project’s evolution were advances in sustainability standards and smart home technology. This meant the whole approach to the design had to evolve alongside these, “embracing new tools, new thinking and new expectations, while holding true to the original ambition of creating a healthy, landscape-led community,” explains Devine.

All the typical collaboration was also essential to the project’s success and progression over the years. Engineers, ecologists, planning consultants, drainage and highways agents, flood risk analysers, and property agents all collaborated closely with the design team to ensure the masterplan and development itself would be suitable for all stakeholders.

#### Spatial planning & materials

The overall layout of the development was carefully planned to fulfil the ‘village

of gardens’ brief, focusing on the green elements and sustainability features to promote a more eco-friendly way of life for residents. The scheme has two ‘local centres’ that each house shops and cafes and a community hub, which are accessible on foot and using sustainable transport. Overall the project will encompass 500 acres of “healthy and sustainable lakeside community” and 350 acres of “managed country park.” Employment opportunities have been provided via the already-opened Enterprise Space for Advanced Manufacturing (ESAM).

There are two ‘spine’ trails – Blue and Green – that connect the site from east to west and offer approximately 16km of paths leading to lakes, parks and play areas, picnic areas, and viewpoints with a ‘habitat network’ for animals and plants. These will connect to the existing clay trails while also offering access to previously inaccessible areas of the site, and parts will

specifically support horse riding and dog walking. Every house has both EV and e-bike charging. As well as the ability to hire e-bikes, there is also a bike club and shared car club.

Plots have been “specifically orientated from a solar perspective,” with gardens, terraces, glazing and roof pitches for PV all carefully considered. “Design consequences were positive,” explains Devine. “Roof pitch geometry, south facing plots, plant space and electrical capacity were set early, so performance is designed in, not retrofitted.”

The scheme will include a 7.5 MW ‘solar park’ of PVs supporting the site with renewable energy. Community gardens and landscaping intertwined with the Blue and Green Spine will include vegetable patches, allotments and orchards to encourage healthier living. The overall layout will also, in the words of Devine, “generate community living through the specific design of boundary treatments.”

Also included in the plan is The Sports Park – a recreational space for exercise, play and relaxing – and The Heritage Park, designed as a space where residents can meet and socialise, and also highlighting the mining heritage of the site and surrounding area. A new primary school and nursery – Sky Primary and Eden Project Nursery – opened on the site in September 2025,

constructed offsite utilising MMC and designed as a zero-carbon in operation building. The school “makes full use of the unique setting with enriched outdoor learning,” says Devine.

The homes themselves are being constructed with a low carbon timber frame, and incorporate air source heat pumps and integrated solar PV, with high performance fabric. A number of the houses will also be equipped with battery storage to enhance renewable energy’s effectiveness. “The drivers are clear,” says Devine, “embodied carbon reduction, EPCA outcomes, buildability and operational savings. Homes that give more than they take.”

In October 2025, Eco-Bos secured a partnership with Samsung to equip every home with SmartThings – an integrated smart home system incorporating the heat pumps, smart appliances and Samsung’s heating and hot water solution ClimateHub – allowing residents to optimise their energy use with its AI Energy Mode. “This locks the fabric first and renewables strategy into everyday use,” Devine says.

Current SAP modelling has indicated that each home will benefit from up to £3,498 of savings per year, with any surplus energy exported. Eco-Bos has reported up to 9.28 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> will be saved per home per

**Up to 9.28 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> will be saved per home per year, with a potential £4,000 a year net benefit**





### LOCALISM

“Cornish hedges, walls and green lanes stitch together landscapes and settlements,” says Devine, explaining local features which have been emulated in the scheme



year, with a potential £4,000 a year net benefit to owners.

When it came to landscape design, the guiding principle was a “connected green infrastructure matrix,” Devine says. This includes the parks, open spaces, allotments, play areas, lakes, walking routes, sports fields, “ecological mitigation areas,” general planting, and sustainable drainage features such as swales and attenuation ponds.

The scheme incorporates a number of ‘green lanes’ – streets with green verges or hedge banks and no footpath or kerb – traditionally a typical feature of Cornish settlements. “These form a range of functions such as movement corridors, wildlife and ecology links, visual and physical buffers and landmarks to aid legibility,” Devine explains. They reinforce the existing landscape and form links through the development to surrounding landscape, and create attractive green routes through higher density areas.

Hedges and walls also feature as boundary markers throughout the site, providing a tie-in with traditional villages in the region: “Cornish hedges, walls and green lanes stitch together landscapes and settlements,” says Devine. “Boundaries are normally colonised by vegetation, so they sit seamlessly within the landscape.”

Other typical Cornish features include elevated footpaths, a result of the steep hillsides, with buildings and paths on the upper side of streets elevated to provide level access as well as decrease the need for retaining structures. Tackling these often challenging gradients was made into

a virtue at Carclaze, helping the scheme blend with the local vernacular: “The landscape and topography of the garden village is varied and steep, which requires careful design of the streets and buildings to create accessible, varied and appropriate environments,” Devine explains.

Consideration was also given to what Devine describes as the “smaller elements in the public realm that add to the physical distinctiveness of Cornwall.” This includes open granite ‘kennels’ (water channels running along streets) that help with storm water drainage, large granite steps, bridges over gullies, benches and large granite kerbs. As well as adding typical Cornish elements to the development, these features – built using local materials – also complement the wider water management strategy via surface water drainage and small water courses.

### Construction & reception

Following the years of design development, construction for the first phase of the project began in 2020, completing in 2023 having continued throughout the Covid pandemic. The second phase has since begun – approximately 50% of the homes are complete and some are already sold.

During this second phase, some “alternative construction” methods have been used, explains Devine, “following ongoing research either for programme, cost or material performance benefits.” The phasing is inline with the enabling works, such as Housing Infrastructure Fund supported access and condition discharges tied to the outline consent.

The residents living in homes completed during phase one have given good feedback about life in West Carclaze so far. “They talk about community spirit, quiet sunlit streets and the appeal of lakes and trails,” Devine says. He adds that they are getting used to the properties’ smart systems; it’s a “natural period of adaptation” while they learn how to best use the systems.

Devine says they have made other “constructive points” – such as batteries and export settings – which LHC welcomes and which are being “worked through in operation.” However, the overall consensus – particularly from the sustainability point of view – is satisfyingly positive, Devine says. “Homeowners are embracing the carbon-positive lifestyle and the benefits in cost and comfort that the strategy delivers.” ■

# Garador launches Portal by Garador – A new premium front door range

Leading British garage door manufacturer Garador has launched a brand new premium range of front doors.

Portal by Garador front doors have been designed and manufactured here in the UK. Developed to meet the demands of modern homes, the Portal collection combines contemporary design, advanced security and high thermal performance, offering a complete entrance solution for homeowners and developers alike.

A key differentiator of the Portal range is the extensive customisation available. Architects, builders and homeowners can choose from a wide selection of door styles, colours, glazing options and hardware finishes, allowing each door to be tailored to suit both traditional and contemporary properties. This flexibility makes Portal by Garador suitable for a broad range of architectural styles and project requirements. Security is a core across the entire range,



with all Portal doors have been engineered to meet stringent standards and available with Secured by Design accreditation, the official UK police-backed security initiative.

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Thermal performance is another standout feature. Using advanced construction techniques and carefully selected materials, Garador's Portal doors are designed to help improve energy efficiency and reduce heat loss. The range includes options that exceed current building regulations and are engineered with future standards in mind, supporting the drive towards more energy-efficient homes.

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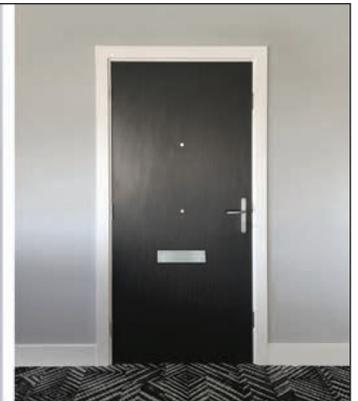


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# Tracking Innovation on Water Saving in Commercial Buildings



## COMMERCIALLY SENSITIVE

Our group of water industry representatives, building performance experts, specifiers and supply side voices tackled the sensitive issues around driving water efficiency for commercial clients, in a regulation vacuum

Despite the recent swathe of wet weather, the UK continues to face a massive future resilience issue around water supplies, but also scant regulation in the commercial sector to mandate clients and design teams to pick innovative water efficiency solutions. There is a predicted shortfall of 5 billion litres per day by 2050, and commercial clients – from workplaces to hospitality to healthcare – have a National Water Target set by Government to achieve a 15% reduction in demand by that point.

However, unless they are given the levers and incentives to invest, it's hard to see how the emerging best practice on water saving will migrate from the residential to commercial sectors, at the scale required.

Progress is being made in domestic dwellings, resulting from Part G tweaks and other initiatives such as smart metering, but as

our second industry round table on driving commercial sector water efficiency discovered, there was a disappointing lack of Government strategic leadership emerging since our last event in early 2025.

Our sponsors Delabie UK and Cistermiser were on hand to explain practical, realistic water efficiency approaches for our multi-disciplinary group, but a series of recommendations from delegates focused on the urgent need for real regulation in the commercial sector, as 'sticks' alongside the 'carrots.'

This group, including key specifiers on major commercial projects such as JLL, BAM construction, and Arup, as well as two water wholesalers (Thames Water and Anglian Water), was able to give some unique learnings on the current state of play in driving water efficiency; including on schemes with significant usage.

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Innovative water saving solutions could save clients millions of pounds while cutting carbon emissions, as reduced water use means reduced heating, abstracting, treatment and processing. But the overall social imperative is that increasing the use of approaches that treat water as a valuable resource is also vital to avoid widespread future summer droughts, predicted by scientists as a result of climate change. Some areas of Anglian Water's jurisdiction are drier than Jerusalem, as confirmed in an aside at the round table by Garry Beaver from the wholesaler. With commercial clients facing competition from exponential demand for water-hungry data centres across the country, the case for efficiency measures in new commercial buildings has to be supported by strong economics as well as sustainability arguments.

The event brought together voices from the water sector and construction to again share key examples of industry innovation, but also to review the positives and shortcomings of the Defra White Paper (a response to the wide-ranging Cunliffe Report on the water sector), which was conveniently released just before the event. Delegates revealed a varied picture of water wholesalers investing in water saving in commercial buildings, and the rollouts of smart meters by forward-thinking authorities like Thames and Anglian, and resulting data showing the weaknesses and economic losses in buildings. While this was bolstering the case for investment, it should be allied to carbon savings, and thereby harnessed to the momentum of the high profile carbon reduction agenda.

Commercial clients are (whether they realise it or not) accountable for water efficiency, and The Environment Act put the onus on them to achieve a 9% reduction in water use by 2038. Only by working closely with designers, consultants and supply experts will they be able to discover the relevant practical solutions which can not only tackle leaks but reduce ongoing spend on water waste in commercial properties.

### The debate: The commercial challenge

The emergence of a 'roadmap' on Part G in the White Paper from Defra, following the consultation in 2025 might have suggested a stronger focus on mandated reductions in the commercial sector. However, what was billed as a comprehensive 'once in a generation reform' only contained a couple of key initiatives which would directly benefit those seeking action in the commercial space. One was the announcement of a mandatory water label, despite the unified water label having already been developed and introduced by industry), and "unlocking barriers to accelerate" the rollout of smart metering. The White Paper also contained plans to introduce a Chief Engineer within the new 'single' water regulator, but this 'hands-on' role was more about ending the ability of water companies to 'mark their own homework.'

We reviewed some of the recommendations made just under a year ago to see what progress, if any had been made. For example, greater Government direction was called for on water efficiency in commercial settings, and for water to be given a higher place on the agenda, alongside, or aligned with, carbon saving. There was also a lack of knowledge on water saving incentives or innovations in the industry but also among clients, meaning that stakeholders should come together more cohesively to promote solutions.

### ATTENDEES

- **James Parker (Chair)**, Managing Editor, Architects' Datafile and Housebuilder & Developer
- **James Fisher**, Head of Strategic Partnerships, BREEAM
- **Andrew Tucker**, Water Demand Reduction Manager, Thames Water
- **Naomi Sadler**, Director, Sadler Energy & Environmental Services
- **Garry Beaver**, Programme Manager, Anglian Water
- **Kate Fletcher**, Director, Arup
- **Daphne Doody-Green**, CEO, The Bathroom Association
- **Jane Bellard**, Co-Founder, Weir The Agency
- **Chris Brooks**, Head of Water Reduction, Save Money Cut Carbon
- **Liz D'Arcy**, Head of Data Insight & Analytics, MOSL
- **Claire Spendley**, Head of Finance and Commercial Services, Waterwise
- **Matt Wilkinson**, Director of Climate Services, JLL
- **Victoria Hughes**, Sustainability Business Partner, BAM UK & Ireland

### SPONSORS' ATTENDEES

- **Aaron Bayfield**, Regional Sales Manager, Delabie UK
- **Richard Braid**, Managing Director, Cistermiser

Despite the general lack of progress on the recommendations made in 2025, there were positive signs among the commercial clients that JLL is working with, as articulated by the firm's Matt Wilkinson. He said that from working with the "major global real estate investors and lots of the global occupiers" on their workspace strategies, JLL were "really seeing water creeping up the board, particularly across development transactions and in operations that kind of cross that life cycle."

Chris Brooks, of Save Money, Cut Carbon agreed, saying economic pressures were forcing a greater awareness: "I'm seeing businesses engage with water more because of the rising cost; there are a lot more enquiries coming through now." However he added that, because of those economic challenges, "a lot of smaller businesses have to prioritise their money elsewhere, and said that schools, for example, "are very cash strapped, but hopefully the savings should pay for their repayments."

As well as this positive indication that decision-makers (at least within blue-chip workspace clients) were increasingly seeing water efficiency as more important to their business, the tie-in to carbon savings was also being made, and was "a key piece of their strategies," where clients are driving water efficiency. Building consultant and surveyor Naomi Sadler said that "the onus was now on building owners for water reduction."

Andrew Tucker of Thames Water revealed the huge water losses wholesalers were uncovering across the commercial sector with smart meters. Thames have already installed 73,000 smart meters in businesses of various different sizes, and aims to have over 170,000

installed by 2030. He said that this was showing that of the 135 million litres per day being supplied to commercial users, 30 million was registering as “continuous flow,” meaning continual leaks.

Garry Beaver outlined the similar efforts at Anglian Water, saying the data was giving them a “huge amount of data and insight, which allows us to target more effectively, understand where opportunities and problems are, but also start to be able to measure the impact of the things we start to put in place.”

Tucker said that although “the nation doesn’t know about the national water target,” this was now confronting wholesalers. From helping Defra compile its data, he said Thames Water had discovered that the water reduction target for the commercial sector “could essentially be achieved by reducing water loss on those sites, and that that is now underpinning our entire direction of travel on reduction.”

According to Tucker, a way forward to deliver efficiency measures in the commercial sector would be for company directors to educate and empower staff within each client organisation on how they can contribute to the “national water target agenda.” This would mean “getting staff in a room and saying we need to play our role, and I need you to come up with ideas on how to deliver and exceed a 15% reduction in water use.”

He admitted that dealing with small sites was “challenging,” and Beaver added that there were “thousand with six, seven litres per hour” leaks, and it was unrealistic to tackle them all; “you have to lead from the top down.”

### Engineering out industry barriers

The water sector is split into a hierarchy of wholesalers, ‘retailers’ and clients, and the retailer end of the discussion is key as they make decisions on specific investments. Arguably, however they are not incentivised to sell less water, and so the levers for speculative progress are unclear. Their objective is to get commercial sector clients, and water retailers, to act in order to bring water efficiency measures forward, but Garry Beaver of Anglian Water said that one of their challenges was “working closely with retailers and the close contact with end users, to make sure the processes take advantage of the data.”

In this context, several delegates, including building consultant and surveyor Naomi Sadler agreed that a Part G would require water efficient measures for commercial buildings was long overdue. “We need some regulation in the commercial sector, continuous flows are colossal, and leaky loos are probably where we need to really be going.” She said that standardised data and benchmarks for water efficiency were part of the solution, but currently, “there is nothing except BREEAM that actually measures water based on building use and type.”

The group also explored how insurance could be linked to water efficiency to drive commercial clients.

Sadler advocates a “change in the terms and conditions to say, if you don’t fix your leaks within a set period of time, once you’ve identified them, you’re not insured.” James Fisher of BRE said that the organisation was currently in a “conversation” with the Association of British Insurers, about an “asset resilience scheme,” where water efficiency would be a “legal minima for insurance

as opposed to ‘top performing’ choice.” He added: “There is a tendency for everything in sustainability to be seen as a risk, but insurers know that features are opportunities or improvements.”

Fisher concluded: “I will continue to try and push resilience and insurance forward as drivers in BREEAM; buildings will be devalued if they’re not ready for these challenges.”

### Metering & data flows

As in many areas of design, and optimising efficiencies, the conversation in recent years has moved over to how data (including from an array of property monitoring systems including meters). Claire Spendley of Waterwise said that the mass rollouts of smart meters would help to resolve the organisation’s “long time call for mandatory leak detection technology on all properties.”

Andrew Tucker of Thames Water said that water reduction work “is all data driven,” and referred to the many thousands of smart meters which his organisation have installed in commercial and domestic buildings, without requiring law changes to do so. He said that data “is going to just grow massively over the next five years for all of us; every water company, every region.”

Victoria Hughes from BAM Construct said that in order to tackle water leaks across portfolios of commercial buildings, it was essential to “identifying markers for wastage,” rather than do it on a piecemeal basis. Naomi Sadler said that the data on continuous flows showed they were “colossal, and leaky loos are probably where we need to really be going.”

Rich Braid of Cisternmiser said: “One of the challenges with the data is deciding what is really useful, and how is it going to be used in order for someone to take action?”

### Solutions & Sponsors’ Question Time

As well as hoping to “remove barriers” to the rollout of smart metering across the UK (which wholesalers like Thames have



#### DATA IS THE DRIVER

Andrew Tucker of Thames Water (second from right) said that the 73,000 smart meters so far installed in the region’s commercial properties showed that 30 million litres per day was ‘continuous flow’

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### CALL FOR REGULATION

Kate Fletcher from Arup said a Part G covering commercial buildings was urgently needed to drive efficiency measures, and wondered if there were “newer KPIs” than CIPHE guidance to aim for with commercial clients

already made huge strides in doing off their own back, in the absence of mandatory requirements), products are also targeted by the Government’s White Paper. The introduction of a mandatory water efficiency label on appliances from washing machines to showers will show specifiers and clients exactly what water use each is designed to provide. The Government thinks that combined with smart metering, this will save over £125m on “water and energy bills” over the next decade, however the breakdown between commercial and residential projects in that figure is unclear.

We heard from our sponsors, Cisterniser and Delabie UK on some of their key issues, posed in questions to the group by Rich Braid and Aaron Bayfield respectively. These helped to not only give suppliers’ perspective on progressing water efficiency, but they also zoned in on practical issues of supply chain collaboration, and where gaps might exist. Earlier in the discussion, Rich Braid had given the key perspective that retrofit was a particular concern, when it came to robustness of water efficiency specification: “A water efficient product can be replaced with a non water-efficient product in existing buildings, which seems bonkers,” he said.

In his question to the group, Rich asked how innovation was “helping building owners and facilities teams identify leaks earlier to prevent ongoing waste, particularly in older and more complex buildings.” Matt Wilkinson of JLL described the engagement needed across commercial portfolios, which depended on “being able to understand what you want to be targeted, not clear benchmarks because different asset classes will have different requirements for water and different standards, but clear markers on what you should be achieving.”

Kate Fletcher of Arup said that it was worth asking owners “are they meeting the CIPHE 5 (Resource Efficient Design) guide, or are there newer KPIs, and how close are we to that?” She added: “It’s still a good start but still quite a low bar – if you’re doing 100 litres per person per day in a commercial project, then clearly something is wrong.”

Fletcher said that incentives for commercial clients to go beyond appliances to bring in sensible, engineered rainwater harvesting solutions, for example combined with SuDS, were absent.

“Engineers love designing all of that stuff but why should a lender put an extra 300K into a retrofit or development, or a smaller office spend 50 grand? This is where the regulation stick has to come in.” Naomi Sadler said that of the BREEAM jobs she was working on, “in no cases were the external water credits targeting rainwater harvesting.”

Jane Bellard of Weir: The Agency drew focus to the facilities management side, and “trying to close the loop between the person who might see the leak and the person who might be fixing it.” Rich Braid referred to one job where urinal controls had been subsequently disconnected after a refurbishment, as there was no monitoring. James Fisher suggested that facilities users in commercial buildings could be prompted to report if they had seen a leak to bring a link between customers and water efficiency.

Aaron Bayfield from Delabie UK asked the group how manufacturers could “be involved in the management and monitoring of ecological performance in commercial buildings in order to deliver sustainable solutions.” James Fisher said that with a proliferation of “green certification schemes,” could manufacturers “agree a set of core metrics, which they could actually collaborate on, because there’s plenty of bathrooms out there for everybody to get a piece of?”

Tucker and Sadler said that specification of fittings, despite exceptions, wasn’t robust enough, the latter told the group: “We are still trying to manage water like it’s a controlled resource but specifying fittings like it’s 1998 – the only metric is ‘is it shiny?’” Claire Spendley of Waterwise said that on fixtures and fittings, “a water audit can identify that you need controlled urinals, low flow taps, or a recirculating shower.” However, a focus on fixtures wasn’t enough: “It’s people valuing the water, not wasting it, because more water isn’t coming.”

There were citations of investment in innovations such as Propelair toilets on highlighted projects. However Bayfield also said there was a problem of companies buying “as cheap as possible, and people don’t understand the big difference between residential products and commercial; we test our products to half a million cycles before launch.”

### EPCs & BREEAM

The group discussed the potential for regulatory solutions to drive water efficiency, including via EPCs, which are being tightened on energy use in 2027, requiring commercial landlords to hit C as a minimum.

The BRE’s James Fisher described to delegates how BREEAM already includes water efficiency credits, but that the organisation would be working harder to align carbon goals with water efficiency targets. The many commercial sector clients using ESG policies and other sustainability drivers to invest in BREEAM would therefore be able to achieve both using the method.

Some standardisation was required, said Naomi Sadler, in order to achieve the goals: “I want actual materials, numbers, data sheets, and all the manufacturers to sing from the same song sheet.”

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## Regs & water labels

Andrew Tucker of Thames Water said that Defra's Environmental Improvement Plan of 2025 "says they want to get fittings sorted out, look at reuse, and neutrality needs to play a role in future." He explained that this was part of the spur to Thames "jumping on board," with a highly proactive strategy for bringing efficiencies: "Shaping our incentives to be an early adopter, reduced the amount of water that building needs and then offset the rest that you can't do on site by saving it in the same catchment."

He added that the new mandatory water label was intended to be a "lift and shift into Building Regs", but that it should "replace all of the entirely stupid calculation methodologies which need to be ditched," (referring to water use per person metrics). Tucker also said that the new Part G which has been consulted on, would ideally just "be the basics of fittings – each of these products shouldn't have more than this flow rate or this water volume or this pricing, and that all goes with the label."

The likelihood of a 5 billion litres per day shortfall in 30 years is an extremely stark prospect, belying the amount of rain falling out of the sky recently. But commercial clients in particular, and their design teams, need to start becoming aware of their part in solving what is another crisis on the horizon, while in the short term, meter data will tell them just how much they could save using sensible solutions. This round table was another great example of communicating those messages, and we hope that they will be broadcast outside the construction sector.

According to Daphne Doody-Green of the Bathroom Association, "knowledge and awareness" remained the key issue, in terms of gaining traction in all sectors on water efficiency improvements. She said "It's a really exciting time to be in the water efficiency space, because the Government is investing 75 million pounds over the next five years to tell people that this is a big problem." Doody-Green confirmed that the Association's soon-to-launch awareness campaign would include "non household," and this will mean "it's going to be on everybody's agenda."



### SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

It was suggested that reconvening this group in 2027 would be a potential opportunity to create a 'working draft' of a Part G for commercial sector properties

## ROUND TABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **James Fisher, BREEAM:** Smart meters should be everywhere, but we need to use the data smartly and pivot to real in-use performance, not what we think the building will do during design.
- **Andrew Tucker, Thames Water:** Have the outcome of this meeting as a clear list of what policy and regulation changes are needed to become the 'sticks,' and in 12 months we should regroup and review a working draft of a Part G for commercial buildings.
- **Naomi Sadler, SEES:** We need regulation, and products have to state their water consumption.
- **Garry Beaver, Anglian Water:** A tailored version of reframing the risk/benefit for large commercial organisations. Standardised data, and the adoption of stuff that we've already got which we're not making the most of.
- **Kate Fletcher, Arup:** There needs to be a Part G covering commercial buildings. And a way to incentivise FM providers to actually reduce consumption as opposed to just minimising energy.
- **Chris Brooks, Save Money Cut Carbon:** The Water Efficiency Fund will run out, so how can we get business to spend more money or access other funds? And move away from capex to an opex rental or forward earnings type model.
- **Jane Bellard, Weir The Agency:** We could use insurance to protect the very smallest businesses.
- **Liz D'Arcy, MOSL:** Can we prioritise certain commercial properties – the one with high footfall, the leaky loos, and the high users? There is a lot of diversity that needs to be taken into account.
- **Claire Spendley, Waterwise:** Include water in EPCs, as a quick and easy to understand way of demonstrating whether a building is water efficient or not. Mandatory three-year reporting and leak detection for high water users.
- **Matt Wilkinson, JLL:** Make the link back to value – is an asset resilient for the future, if not, it'll pose a value risk and that will drive that change, because it'll get board-level understanding.
- **Aaron Bayfield, Delabie UK:** I think that a Part G would be something that we all agree with.
- **Richard Braid, Cistermiser:** The Building Regulations are key, there's got to be something people can work to and abide by. We need awareness at board level and if you can link water and CO<sub>2</sub>, it becomes more of a stakeholder conversation.

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# Lighting the way: Transforming spaces through urban regeneration

Lighting is no longer just a functional necessity – it has become a strategic tool that shapes how people experience public spaces. Thoughtfully designed lighting can enhance safety, encourage community interaction, support sustainability goals, and even stimulate local economies. For architects, designers, estate managers, and regeneration teams, this means creating spaces that are not only visually striking but also adaptable and resilient for the long term.

## Sustainability at the heart of design

Modern urban regeneration projects demand more than energy-efficient products – they require lighting that performs beautifully while reducing environmental impact. Advances in LED technology, smart controls, and solar solutions allow design teams to lower energy use and carbon emissions without compromising on quality or aesthetics. But sustainability is about more than efficiency; it's about creating infrastructure that can adapt and thrive for decades, blending seamlessly with its surroundings and enhancing the lives of those who use it.

## The right light, in the right place, at the right time

Today's public spaces are dynamic, and lighting needs to respond accordingly. Intelligent control systems, such as Schröder EXEDRA, provide the flexibility to monitor and optimise lighting remotely in real time; based on footfall, traffic patterns, or specific events. This targeted approach reduces unnecessary energy consumption, streamlines maintenance, and improves operational efficiency – all while keeping spaces safe and inviting after dark. At the same time, responsible lighting practices ensure spill and glare are minimised, preserving the dark sky and character of each urban environment.

## Designing with context & collaboration

Successful regeneration is about understanding people, place, and purpose. Urbis Schröder works closely with councils, city partners and design teams to develop solutions that balance aesthetics, performance, and cost. Every project is approached individually, with careful consideration of luminaire selection,



tailored optics, and heritage-sensitive design. The result is vibrant, welcoming spaces that encourage community use, support economic activity, and deliver long-term value.

## Bespoke solutions delivering 50% energy savings: Guildhall Square, Southampton

Guildhall Square, a cornerstone of Southampton's Cultural Quarter, demonstrates the impact of tailored lighting. As a key public space, the square hosts events, exhibitions, and performances, serving the University of Southampton community and visitors alike. Originally redeveloped in 2010 with modern lighting, paving, and street furniture, it has remained a popular destination for concerts and art shows.

By 2024, aging columns and outdated luminaires prompted Southampton City Council to seek a replacement scheme. Working with installer Utili-light, Urbis Schröder delivered an energy-efficient solution that revitalised the space while minimising waste and installation costs. The VALINTA MAXI CURVE luminaire was proposed for its performance and contemporary aesthetic. To reuse the existing columns, bespoke bracketry was designed, allowing the new luminaires to be securely mounted on the existing metalwork. Whereas unstable columns were removed for testing and reinstalled following successful structural validation. Outdated reflectors and inefficient uplighters were also replaced, improving

uniformity across the square and reducing energy consumption by 50%.

The result is a square that feels safer, more inviting, and architecturally refreshed. Colin Perris, contracting technical services manager at Southampton City Council, praised the outcome:

“The square now has a much better feel for all users and has been architecturally refreshed in appearance. We are incredibly impressed with the solution offered by Urbis Schröder.”

## Tailored solutions for every project

From civic squares and roads to cycle paths and heritage sites, Urbis Schröder offers flexible, sustainable lighting solutions – including grid-connected and – that do not compromise on safety, aesthetics or environmental responsibility. By combining smart design with long-term performance, urban spaces are not just illuminated – they are transformed, prepared to meet the demands of today while anticipating the needs of tomorrow.

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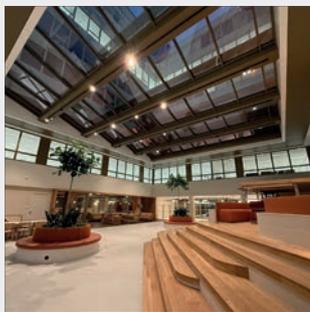
## Edwardian house benefits from sealant tape



ISO-Chemie's thermal insulating and load bearing bracket support system is providing energy efficiency improvements to an Edwardian property in Oxfordshire. WINFRAMER units have been retrofitted as part of an initiative to bring the poorly insulated solid walled house built in 1909 in Oxford, up to current energy efficiency standards, providing better quality accommodation for the homeowner along with long-term cost savings. Passivhaus certified and fire rated to up to 30 minutes, WINFRAMER is a prefabricated installation frame, manufactured to accommodate cavities up to 250 mm that allows windows to be supported independently from the face of the wall regardless of any external cladding being in place. Quick and easy to install, the product's application in Oxford is seen as part of a solution to meet a wider Government strategy to reduce carbon levels in housing that has single skin walls or non-cavity walls - these buildings have a reputation for leaking considerable amounts of energy, heat and sound. The composite WINFRAMER brackets can bear heavy window loads, including bi-fold doors, to provide a reliable, strong and high-performance support frame. Installation is quick with windows attached directly and secured mechanically using either standard fixing screws or fixing lugs in the usual manner.

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## Pyroguard protects French Goodlife project



Pyroguard has been specified as part of the transformation of the former corporate office headquarters of telecommunications company Canal+ into an ambitious mixed-use development in Issy-les-Moulineaux, France. The project introduced new vertical connections, expanded facade elements and a redesigned central patio, all supported by an enhanced steel structure. At the heart of this transformation was the integration of Pyroguard's high-performance fire safety glass, delivering both aesthetic appeal and uncompromising protection. To support the architects' vision of light and openness, 650 m<sup>2</sup> of Pyroguard Protect EI60 fire-rated glass was installed internally to form elegant edge-to-edge partitions around the stairwells, atrium and meeting rooms to provide visual continuity while meeting vigorous fire safety standards. Pyroguard Protect allows maximum natural light to filter through interior spaces while maintaining 60 minutes of fire protection. Its superior acoustic performance and UV stability enhance occupant comfort and building longevity, making it the ideal solution for a development prioritising both design excellence and well-being.

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chose the Sentinel Apex units because they deliver exceptionally quiet operation and low Specific Fan Power, ensuring they met all Building Regulation requirements. The units were also available in a wide range of airflows, allowing us to specify the correct units for each space. In short, they offered the ideal balance of airflow, low noise, and energy efficiency."

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# Delivery under pressure

Samuel Sturgiss at offsite specialist Wernick explores how modular construction is influencing early-stage architectural design, procurement strategy, and sustainability outcomes across a pressurised UK built environment.

The UK construction sector is facing a convergence of pressures that are redefining how buildings are conceived and delivered. From net zero targets and skills shortages to urgent estate replacement programmes across education and healthcare, architects are increasingly required to balance design ambition with certainty of delivery. Within this context, modular and offsite construction is moving from a specialist option to a mainstream consideration, particularly where speed, quality, and predictability are critical.

At its core, modular construction shifts a significant proportion of building activity from site to factory. This change has important implications for architectural practice. Design decisions that might traditionally evolve during construction must instead be resolved earlier, placing greater emphasis on coordination, information clarity, and collaboration across disciplines. For architects, this can feel constraining at first; however, when approached strategically, it can also unlock efficiencies and design confidence that are difficult to achieve through traditional methods.

One of the most significant advantages of modular construction is programme certainty. Because manufacture and site preparation can run in parallel, overall project durations can be significantly reduced. Factory conditions also eliminate many of the variables associated with weather, access constraints, and labour availability. For architects working on live or sensitive sites such as hospitals, schools, or constrained urban plots, this reduction in onsite disruption can be as important as speed itself.

## Quality manufacturing with rapid deployment

Quality assurance is another area where modular approaches are changing expectations. Factory based production



allows for repeatable processes, controlled environments, and multiple quality inspections throughout manufacture. This can lead to improved consistency in building fabric, tighter tolerances, and enhanced performance outcomes. From an architectural perspective, this supports more reliable delivery of specified details, particularly around junctions, services coordination, and internal finishes.

However, the benefits of modular construction are most fully realised when design teams engage early. Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA) requires architects to consider structural grids, module dimensions, service zones, and transportation constraints from the outset. Early engagement with a modular manufacturer enables architectural concepts to be tested against manufacturing realities, reducing the risk of redesign, cost escalation, or programme delays later in the project.

**Sustainability is another driver accelerating interest in modular construction**



**In higher education, modular lecture and teaching facilities have been delivered within compressed programmes while maintaining high-quality learning environments**

Procurement strategy plays a critical role in supporting this early engagement. Traditional single-stage tenders can limit opportunities for collaboration, whereas two-stage routes, frameworks, or early contractor involvement can allow design teams to work alongside manufacturers as the brief develops. For architects, this collaborative environment can enhance problem solving, support value-led design decisions, and ensure that architectural intent is maintained through to delivery.

Sustainability is another driver accelerating interest in modular construction. Offsite manufacture typically results in lower material waste, fewer site deliveries, and reduced local disruption. Many modular systems are designed with disassembly, relocation, or reuse in mind, supporting circular economy principles. For architects seeking to reduce embodied carbon and support long term adaptability, these characteristics align closely with evolving sustainability standards and client expectations.

**More than a grey box**

Modular construction also challenges outdated perceptions of uniformity or limited design expression. Contemporary systems allow for varied facade treatments, generous internal heights, and flexible spatial arrangements. Modules can be

combined horizontally and vertically to create multi-storey buildings with complex layouts, while still benefiting from standardised components behind the scenes. For architects, this opens up opportunities to balance visual identity with efficient delivery.

Regulatory compliance remains a fundamental consideration. Modular buildings are required to meet the same Building Regulations and sector specific standards as traditionally constructed buildings. In education and healthcare settings, this includes adherence to established guidance on space standards, accessibility, fire safety, and environmental performance. Early coordination between architects, engineers, and manufacturers is essential to ensure that compliance is embedded within the design rather than retrofitted later.

The growing adoption of digital design tools further supports modular delivery. Building Information Modelling (BIM) enables detailed coordination of architectural, structural, and services information before manufacture begins. For architects, this enhances design certainty and reduces the risk of clashes, while also supporting clearer communication with clients and stakeholders.

In higher education, modular lecture and teaching facilities have been delivered within compressed programmes while maintaining high-quality learning environments. In healthcare, modular wards and clinical spaces have supported rapid capacity expansion with minimal disruption to live hospital operations. Commercial and office projects have similarly benefited from predictable delivery and controlled quality, particularly where time-to-occupancy is a key driver.

Ultimately, modular construction is not a replacement for architectural creativity, but a framework that demands earlier decision-making and closer collaboration. For architects willing to engage with its constraints and opportunities, it offers a means of delivering buildings that respond more effectively to today's economic, environmental, and social challenges. As the sector continues to evolve, the role of the architect remains central, shaping spaces that are not only efficiently delivered but enduring, adaptable, and fit for purpose.

*Samuel Sturgiss is senior marketing coordinator at Wernick*

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# Hörmann delivers a complete door solution – inside and out

A contemporary renovation project in Leicestershire has been completed with the installation of a comprehensive suite of high-quality residential doors from Hörmann UK, showcasing the brand's ability to deliver cohesive solutions both externally and internally. The family home features a Hörmann sectional garage door and aluminium entrance door, complemented inside by a range of side-hinged, pocket, and fire doors.

Externally, the property features a Hörmann LPU42 double-sized sectional



garage door, designed with a 42 mm thick door leaf that delivers excellent thermal efficiency – making it an ideal choice for the integrated garage. For added convenience and security, the door is fully automated with a Hörmann Supramatic P motor, operated by two hand transmitters. The door is finished in elegant Silkgrain, perfectly complementing the home's modern architectural style, while the Agate grey (RAL 7038) colour harmonises seamlessly with the external cladding and overall material palette of the property.

A Hörmann ThermoSafe high-performance aluminium entrance door with a glazed side panel was selected to complement and match the style and premium finish of the sectional garage door. The door features a 73 mm thick leaf, delivering excellent thermal efficiency with Thermosafe doors being able to achieve U-values as low as 0.8 W/(m<sup>2</sup>·K). Equipped with the latest multi-point locking systems, it provides enhanced security and peace of mind against forced entry and achieves acoustic



insulation of 30 dB. To harmonise with the garage door and the home's exterior aesthetic, the entrance door is finished in a silk matt Agate grey on both sides and features modern polished stainless-steel handles and concealed hinges for a flawless, contemporary finish.

Internally, the project was completed with a total of 12 Hörmann ProLine Duradecor doors, including nine side-hinged, two pocket, and a 30-minute fire door connecting the integral garage to the living area of the house. Constructed from high-quality timber materials with a vibrant, textured laminated surface, the doors deliver a clean, sophisticated finish that complements the home's modern interior design.

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## Senior supports landmark West Yorkshire regeneration scheme

The regeneration of a historic industrial building in Wakefield is anything but ‘run of the mill’ thanks to an inspired design by Hawkins/Brown and a high-performance fenestration package supplied by Senior Architectural Systems. Part of the group of buildings formerly known as Rutland Mills, which are located close to The Hepworth art gallery, the once derelict property has been given a new lease of life and a new name, with Gradient Mill now providing five-storeys of modern commercial office space.

The new Gradient Mill office building in Wakefield is the latest addition to the ambitious Tileyard North regeneration scheme which has created the UK’s largest creative industries hub outside of London. The new building has been delivered by Morgan Sindall Construction, with Wakefield based specialist contractor Neu-Glass fabricating and installing Senior’s SF52 aluminium curtain wall system, alongside the

manufacturer’s patented PURE® aluminium windows and doors.

Combining a slim frame with strength and thermal efficiency, Senior’s popular SF52 aluminium curtain wall system has been installed to the ground floor level alongside robust PURE® Commercial Doors that provide safe and secure access to the building. On the upper floors, large glazed openings have been created using Senior’s low U-value PURE® aluminium windows which help to minimise heat loss and flood the offices with natural light to create a more comfortable interior space. Smaller window units have been installed to the top floor, which is open to the underside of the steel truss roof, echoing the character of the adjacent mill buildings and providing a dramatic, light-filled workspace.

The project team, led by Hawkins/Brown, has worked hard to repair and retain as much of the fabric of the original buildings as possible. It was vital that the new glazing



units complemented the nineteenth century architecture and a provided an efficient interface with the existing structure.

As a Yorkshire based business, Senior was well placed to meet the demands of such a large and complex contract as all of the company’s products were manufactured in nearby Rotherham and Doncaster, for timely transportation to the site in Wakefield.

01709 772600 [www.seniorarchitectural.co.uk](http://www.seniorarchitectural.co.uk)

## Wraptite® membrane helps to deliver building performance that will be everybody’s cup of tea

More than 12,000 m<sup>2</sup> of a former tea factory is being transformed into a state-of-the-art broadcasting facility for the BBC – and Proctor Group’s Wraptite® membrane is playing a part in bringing “a 100-year-old industrial building back to life for the next 100 years.”

The former Typhoo factory presented a host of challenges that would not be encountered on a new-build project. Arguably one of the most important of those challenges to get right was finding a solution that could deliver a good standard of airtightness while protecting the traditional brickwork superstructure.

Wraptite provides a consistent airtight seal that contributes to meeting a project’s airtightness target. Alongside that, it is also highly vapour permeable and allows the passage of moisture vapour out of the structure.

This is essential for avoiding any increase in condensation risk in buildings of all



types. It is also critical in existing buildings where the moisture transport properties of traditional masonry have to be preserved so the brick work can ‘breathe’ and properly dry out when wet. A vapour closed construction prevents masonry from drying to the inside and increases the risk of mould and eventual decay.

A typical new-build project sees Wraptite installed to the external face of a sheathing board that is fixed to the structural frame. Maintaining the outward appearance of the old tea factory and its existing brickwork meant applying Wraptite to the internal face

of the masonry.

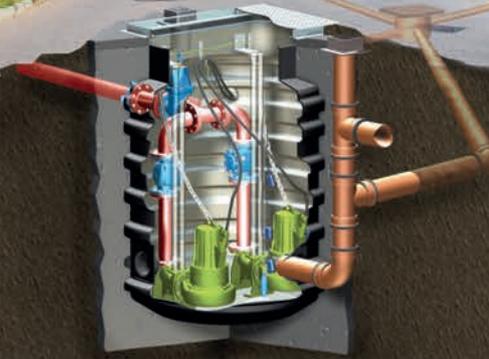
The job of installing Wraptite in this relatively uncommon way fell to specialist contractors CG Reynolds, whose work package included the steel frame system, partitions and ceilings as part of the Category A fit out.

As a self-adhered membrane, a key feature of Wraptite is that it can be installed without the substrate needing to be primed.

“Proctor Group came to site a lot,” said Steve Upton, operations director at CG Reynolds. “They were proactive and gave a lot of support.”

Broader support began in the earliest stages of the project and encompassed all aspects of the project team, starting with the architects. The Proctor Group technical team was involved with initial discussions about material choices.

01250 872 261  
[proctorgroup.com/products/wraptite](http://proctorgroup.com/products/wraptite)



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# Unlocking the value of EPDs

Marvyn Candler at Lignacite explores why Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) are now under increasing scrutiny – and how robust, independently verified data supports evidence-based specification and credible carbon reduction in architectural design.

**E**nvironmental claims in construction are increasingly questioned by clients, planners and stakeholders. As net zero commitments move from ambition to expectation, architects are under growing pressure to demonstrate that material choices are supported by verifiable evidence. Environmental Product Declarations, commonly referred to as EPDs, provide just that.

For many practices, EPDs are familiar documents. But familiarity does not always translate into understanding. As client, planner and regulator attention increases, it is no longer enough to simply reference an EPD in plans. Architects need confidence in what the data represents, how it has been produced and what that means over the life of a building.

This shift is being reinforced by wider regulatory and cultural change. The Building Safety Act has sharpened the focus on accountability and documentation, while sustainability reporting has moved beyond intent statements towards measurable outcomes. Industry guidance and planning policy increasingly expect whole life carbon assessments to be underpinned by quantified data. In this context, environmental claims and whole life carbon must be measured from the outset and remain defensible long after a project's completion.

## Understanding EPDs

Before going any further, it's important to define what an EPD is. An Environmental Product Declaration is a standardised summary of a product's environmental impact, based on lifecycle assessment methodology. The results are independently verified and presented in a consistent format, providing transparent data on factors such as embodied carbon, resource use and emissions, and allowing meaningful comparison between products.



However, an EPD is not a performance label or a sustainability rating. It does not declare a product to be good or bad. Instead, it provides verified data that enables architects to make informed decisions based on project priorities, context and design intent.

It's worth mentioning that the source of an EPD matters as much as its content. Not all declarations are produced to the same standard. Independent verification, reputable programme operators and clear system boundaries are essential if data is to be relied upon. Without these, comparisons become unreliable and confidence in specifications is undermined.



In practice, verification involves independent accredited assessors scrutinising the underlying data and assumptions, requesting supporting evidence where needed and challenging any claims that cannot be substantiated.

### Lifecycle support

Architects are increasingly expected to justify material choices at early design stages where decisions have a large impact on the total embodied carbon of a project. EPDs support this process by providing comparable data that can be integrated into decision making. Used correctly, they allow teams to identify where material substitutions or specification changes can deliver meaningful reductions.

Lifecycle stages A1 to A4, covering raw material extraction through to transport to site, are particularly significant when assessing embodied carbon. These are the stages most influenced by material choice, yet they often receive less attention than how a building performs once it is in use. Robust EPDs bring this detail into focus, enabling a clearer understanding of the upfront carbon impact.

This is especially relevant when considering materials that are treated as standard or interchangeable, such as concrete blocks. In reality, variations in sourcing, manufacturing processes and transport can result in substantial differences in embodied carbon figures. Evidence based data challenges assumptions and highlights opportunities that might otherwise be missed. Increasingly, there are low-carbon block options available, but it's important to ensure that claims are supported by verified data.

### Accreditation agenda

EPDs also play an important role in supporting whole-life carbon assessments and environmental assessment frameworks, such as BREEAM – the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method – which is widely used to benchmark the environmental performance of buildings. These increasingly rely on verified data, reinforcing the importance of robust information at the specification stage. While an EPD alone does not secure credits, it provides the verified information required to support compliance and demonstrate intent. More importantly, it strengthens the credibility of sustainability narratives presented to clients and stakeholders.

## Architects are increasingly expected to justify material choices at early design stages

As expectations rise, architects are being asked not only to reduce carbon but to prove how those reductions are achieved. Specifications supported by third-party verified data reduce the risk of later challenge and provide clarity when decisions are revisited during procurement, construction or post-completion review.

EPDs do not sit in isolation, either. They fit alongside accreditations for responsible sourcing standards, such as BES 6001, quality management systems and transparent supply chains. Together, these elements support a rigorous approach to specification that aligns environmental ambition with practical delivery. Products supported by independently verified EPDs and BES 6001 certifications with strong scores (i.e. Very Good or Excellent) can help projects achieve higher BREEAM ratings.

This joined up evidence base is becoming more important as sustainability considerations are assessed not just at the planning stage, but throughout procurement, construction and post-completion review. In this context, the ability to demonstrate how and why materials were specified carries growing weight, particularly on complex projects.

The conversation around environmental claims isn't going away. If anything, it's intensifying. As reporting requirements tighten and industry understanding matures the architects who can confidently read, question and compare EPDs will find themselves better equipped to defend decisions, secure client confidence and deliver projects that withstand scrutiny long after completion.

This isn't about adding administrative tasks. EPDs offer architects greater control over carbon outcomes and stronger evidence to support design intent. In an environment where sustainability claims are being questioned more rigorously, verified data becomes a strategic advantage. The practices that embrace this now will be specifying with clarity and credibility while others are still catching up.

*Marvyn Candler is SHEQ manager at Lignacite*

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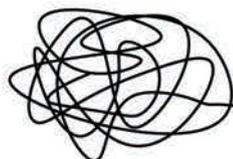
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# Ventilation is no longer in the background

Dave Harding of Gilberts Blackpool looks at the raised profile of ventilation systems, which is leading to a better appreciation by architects of their importance.

It's refreshing to see how the means of heating and cooling a space are now being considered an integral part of the design aesthetic. No longer integrated into the background as far as possible, but proclaiming its existence loud and proud.

Ventilation is, after all, an invisible yet fundamental element of the building design, be it new build or refurbishment. It makes a building that works well for its intended purpose, one where occupants enjoy spending time.

The commercial reality is that it can make or break a business, for example poorly ventilated offices impact staff morale and performance and therefore profitability while inadequate ventilation in a leisure venue means odours and a drop in visitor numbers and spend.

As architects, you have to include it. So make it work for you!

The detail of the aesthetics comes down to talking – communicating with building services consultants and manufacturers. You'd be surprised at what design features can be incorporated to enhance your design concept, whether it be to conceal the ventilation or make it stand out.

For example, we've helped specifiers conceal air supply and extract within wooden panelling, disguised it as corporate branding and helped it stand out both internally and externally by coating it in a primary colour or designing a bespoke face plate that features the company name. None of these would have been possible without that initial conversation.

However, before you reach that level of detail, you have to determine the strategy.

Pushed by the demand for sustainable strategies, there is a rise in natural ventilation, using planned air paths through the building with air being drawn in and exhausted through the facade – usually through vents in the windows or





## Linear grilles and diffusers offer huge design potential

ventilation louvres. Changing the profile or size of the louvre, or making it a different colour, can have a surprising effect on the external aesthetic without detriment to the performance.

However, it's not always possible to choose the greenest of all ventilation strategies, resulting in a growth in decentralised mechanical ventilation, whereby the air movement – the heating and cooling – is targeted to where it is needed, rather than the traditional 'whole building' approach. It's a technique that is growing in popularity, as so many of today's projects are refurbishment not new-build, meaning we have to work with what is there. But it poses a challenge to re-purpose and achieve the higher regulatory levels of ventilation and air quality required today compared with yesteryear, and to do so sustainably.

With careful selection of the air delivery units (ADUs – the grilles and diffusers) – it really can be exact. Depending on your choice, some diffusers deliver their air via a number of individual nozzles within the face plate, each of which can be individually directed. How's that for pinpoint precision and no wastage?

Whichever ADU is chosen, it can enhance the design aesthetic, whether chosen to blend into the building fabric (ceiling, wall), or be a stand-out feature.

Swirl diffusers can now feature bespoke fascia plates, to the extent you could include corporate branding or logos therein. Coanda plates (needed for exposed ceiling applications to optimise the omnidirectional

air distribution) can similarly be a bespoke design: you can even back light them!

You are not restricted to RAL colours: it is possible to add effects such as metallics and woodgrain. The same personalisation can be extended to grille face plates too, printed or coated to reflect the corporate identity. Linear grilles and diffusers offer huge design potential.

Varying the width of the slot can make it look like the diffuser is floating. And while its name may imply a straight line there's no reason why you have to stick to that. Going for a curve can cost-effectively add a dramatic effect to the interior, a wow factor, highlighting an architectural feature.

A little thought as to the positioning and discharge direction of linear diffusers can also positively influence the ambience: CBRE used this strategic approach in its Liverpool offices, with slots discharging vertically by large glazed areas to maintain a clear view across the city; above the internal glazing and office entrance, the same model of diffusers have been set to horizontal airflow to eliminate any adverse draughts nor temperature change differential as people come and go.

As I said earlier, it's only by talking, bouncing ideas around, that you can begin to fully appreciate just what is possible, how elements that you may have viewed as a necessity but not a contributor to your design can make a significant difference to its success.

*Dave Harding is sales & marketing director at Gilberts Blackpool*

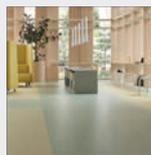
## A staple component in homes since 1966!



West Fraser's CaberMDF can be sawn, drilled, shaped, and routed cleanly with minimum fuss and looks good as the smooth surface of the panels is ideal for painting, veneers, or paper foils. CaberMDF Trade is a versatile, lightweight board. CaberMDF Trade MR offers the same benefits but with the added advantage of moisture resistance. Where there is a need for premium quality, CaberMDF Pro provides incredibly consistent density, ensuring cutting and routing need minimal finishing. CaberMDF Pro MR offers moisture resistance. The ultimate product in the range is CaberMDF Industrial which is moisture resistant and designed specifically for the production of high-grade furniture and fittings.

[uk.westfraser.com](http://uk.westfraser.com)

## Forbo introduces bio-based vinyl collection



Forbo Flooring Systems is proud to introduce a new sustainable vinyl solution – Sphera Elite b+. Containing 43% recycled and bio-based content in its PVC, Sphera Elite b+ takes the manufacturer's commitment to people and planet even further, with a low embodied carbon and increased recycled content. Forbo has also

refreshed its wider Sphera collection with updated colour palettes, each reflecting modern design trends. With low emissions, phthalate-free manufacturing and a high volume of recycled content, the Sphera collection contributes to better indoor environments.

01773 744 121 [www.forbo-flooring.co.uk/sphera](http://www.forbo-flooring.co.uk/sphera)

## Style returns to deliver ExCel's Phase 3 movable wall solution



For over two decades, Style Group has supported the evolution of London ExCeL Exhibition Centre, delivering large-scale movable wall solutions across all three phases of development. Style installed additional Dorma Hüppe Variflex systems to support ExCeL's demanding exhibition and conference programme. The manual movable wall provides exceptional flexibility, acoustic performance up to 55 dB, and seamless integration with other partitioning systems through the venue, reinforcing ExCeL's position as one of Europe's premier large-scale event venues. Style's ability to deliver continuity across all three phases of expansion ensures consistent operation, appearance and performance throughout ExCeL's extensive internal spaces, allowing layouts to be rapidly reconfigured to suit events of varying scale and function. The specified Dorma Hüppe Variflex solution is a manual, top-hung system renowned for its robustness, reliability and long service life – key considerations for a venue operating at this intensity. With acoustic performance of up to Rw 55 dB, the system enables multiple events to take place simultaneously, maintaining privacy and minimising sound transfer between adjacent halls and conference spaces.

[sales@style-group.co.uk](mailto:sales@style-group.co.uk)

## Balancing beauty and durability: Tile of Spain's guide to shower tiling



As bathrooms become wellbeing-focused spaces, the shower is now a key design feature rather than simply functional. According to Maria D Arráez, director of Tile of Spain UK, choosing the right ceramic surface is essential to achieve both performance and style.

Ceramic and porcelain tiles are ideal for showers due to their water resistance, durability and low maintenance. Modern manufacturing techniques allow realistic stone, marble and concrete effects, offering a premium aesthetic without the upkeep. Unlike natural stone, porcelain is non-porous, stain-resistant and requires no sealing, making it perfect for busy bathrooms.

Large-format tiles create seamless, spa-like schemes with fewer grout lines, while textured finishes, mosaics and bold colours add character. Careful layout and grout choices further enhance the overall look.

Combining technical reliability with creative flexibility, today's ceramic tiles enable architects and designers to craft shower spaces that are both practical and expressive.

[comunicacion@ascer.es](mailto:comunicacion@ascer.es) [www.tileofspain.com](http://www.tileofspain.com)

## Why uncontrolled urinal flushing is undermining commercial water efficiency strategies



As pressure mounts on commercial buildings to reduce operational water consumption, uncontrolled urinal flushing remains one of the most overlooked sources of avoidable waste. Water saving expert Cisterniser, is warning that without proper flushing control, wider sustainability strategies risk falling short. Industry estimates suggest that a single uncontrolled urinal can waste tens of thousands of litres per year, undermining broader efficiency strategies designed to reduce a building's environmental footprint. "In washrooms with high urinal usage, traditional timed systems simply don't reflect how buildings are actually used," says managing director Richard Braid. "They flush whether someone is there or not and over time, that continuous discharge becomes a hidden operational cost." Demand-controlled systems tackle this directly and solutions such as Cisterniser's Direct Flush activate only when required, using water in response to occupancy rather than a fixed cycle and delivering immediate, measurable savings. The efficiency gains also extend beyond urinals, as Easyflush Direct is fully mains-powered and built for durability, reducing maintenance demands and avoiding the seal degradation and leaks often associated with traditional WC mechanisms.

0118 969 1611 [www.cisterniser.co.uk](http://www.cisterniser.co.uk)

# Complete wetroom protection with Marmox

**W**aterproof floors, flexible basins, and integrated storage solutions for modern wetrooms

Designing wetrooms that stay dry, comfortable, and visually clean begins with selecting the right base. Architects, specifiers, and contractors need solutions that combine reliable waterproofing, thermal performance, and flexibility to accommodate a variety of layouts and project types. Marmox provides a complete wetroom system – featuring the reworked Showerlay, Multiboards, Tileable Basins, and Niches – offering a fully integrated toolkit for both residential and commercial applications.

At the heart of the system, the Marmox Showerlay forms a durable and adaptable foundation for any wetroom. Redesigned from the surface down, the panels now include a 100 mm fleece overhang, simplifying the formation of tanking joints between floors and walls for faster, more secure installation. Each panel is fully trimmable on all sides by up to 100 mm, making it simple to accommodate irregular layouts, tight corners, or unconventional spaces without compromising performance. The integrated drain system has also been upgraded to offer both convenience and design versatility. Architects and designers can now specify either point drains – centrally located or offset – or linear drains. Linear drains are available in a tileable version, providing a seamless appearance while maintaining high functionality. Drain grates come in a range of finishes including black, white, copper, gold, and stainless steel, allowing the wetroom's aesthetic to be tailored to the overall design scheme without sacrificing practicality.



Complementing the floor system, Marmox Multiboards provide waterproof, thermally insulated boards suitable for walls and floors. Lightweight yet robust, Multiboards are easy to cut and shape around corners, plumbing, and structural features, making them ideal for both new builds and refurbishment projects. By reducing condensation and supporting underfloor heating systems, they contribute to warm, comfortable, and energy-efficient wetroom environments. Multiboards' thermal performance ensures that floors remain comfortable underfoot while also helping to maintain consistent room temperatures.

For layouts requiring bespoke solutions, Marmox Tileable Basins provide both flexibility and style. Available in four

designs with consistent dimensions (770 x 485 x 100 mm), basins include either chrome or black bottle traps. The Infinity version conceals the drain completely, creating a smooth, uninterrupted surface, while the Linear Drain version channels water discreetly for a minimalist look. The Push Plug version allows traditional filling, and the Flat version doubles as a shelf, either standalone or in combination with other basins, offering practical options for creative layouts.

To complete the system, Marmox Niches provide integrated, stylish storage. Available in two sizes – 1200 x 400 x 150 mm and 600 x 300 x 100mm – these niches fit seamlessly into walls, offering practical solutions for toiletries, decorative elements, or accessories, and enhancing the overall wetroom design.

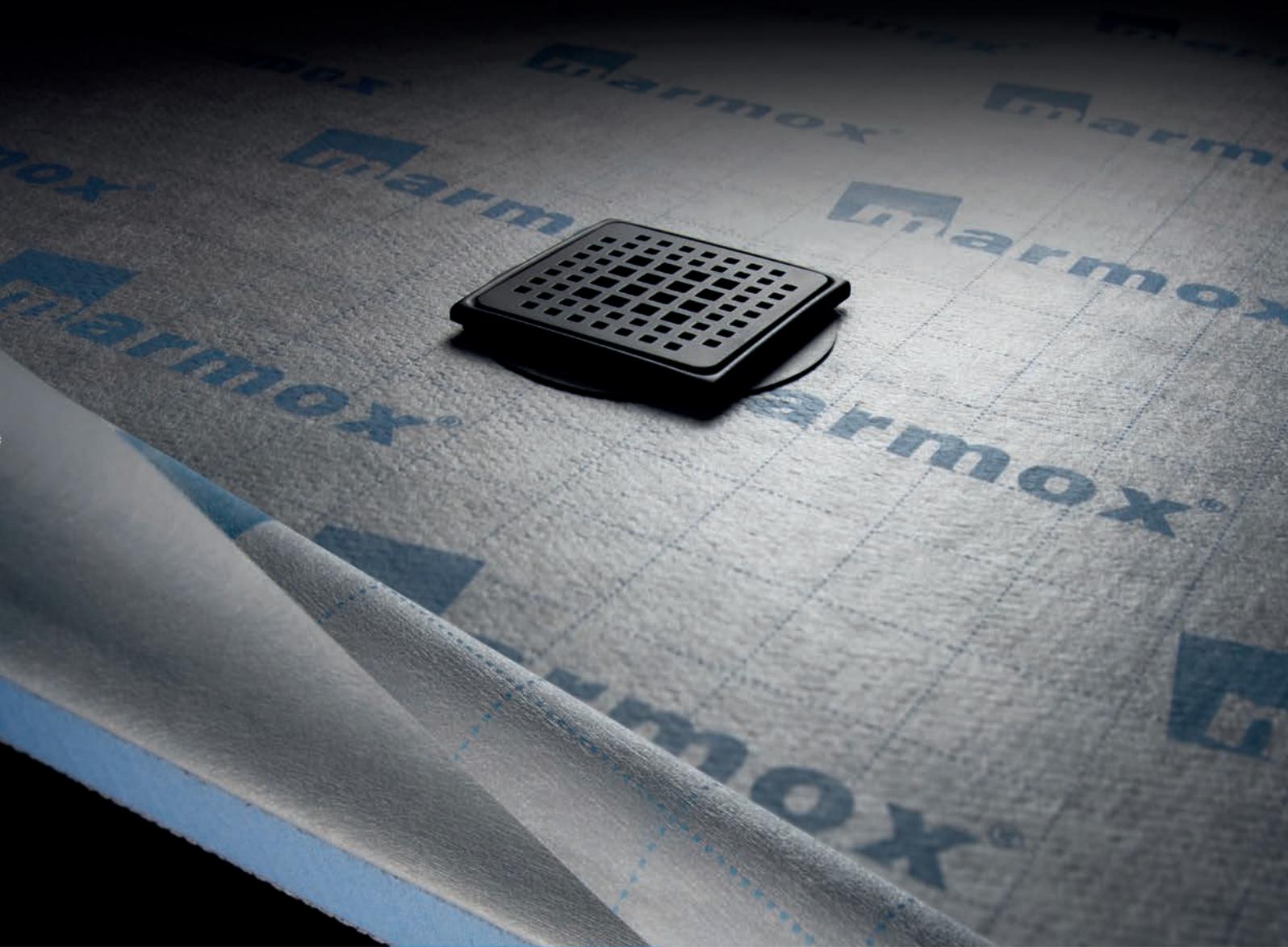
Together, the Showerlay, Multiboards, Tileable Basins, and Niches form a comprehensive, specification-ready wetroom solution. Flexible drainage options, trimmable panels, thermally insulated walls, and versatile accessories make it possible to design and install wetrooms efficiently while maintaining high standards of aesthetics and durability. Whether for a compact ensuite, a luxury wetroom, or a full bathroom renovation, Marmox ensures that every wetroom remains dry, comfortable, and built to last.

01634 835290  
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Linear Basin With Support Brackets

# Showerlay Wetroom System Reworked from the surface down



Fully waterproof. Engineered for modern wetroom layouts.

# Efficient shower systems for sports and leisure facilities

Horne's Dušo shower column offers a streamlined, resource-efficient approach to communal shower provision in sports and leisure facilities, education environments and other high-use wet facilities.

Designed as a compact, pre-plumbed shower column, the Dušo neatly combines the shower control and hydraulic actuation within a single vertical unit. Pre-assembled and tested under controlled factory conditions, its final installation can be planned, costed and delivered more predictably on site. This approach reduces installation time and cost through minimising pipework, fittings/connections and wall penetrations typically associated with conventional multi-shower installations.

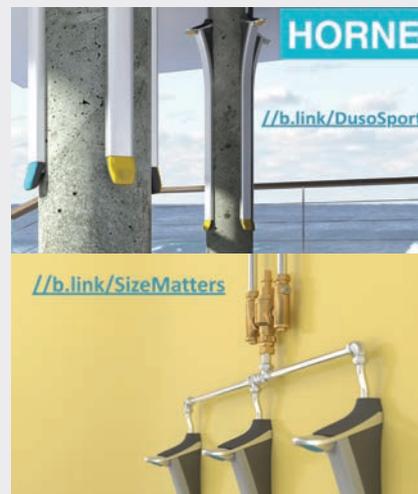
The Dušo's compact footprint is enabled by its hydraulically simple design that supports an efficient water system layout. By shortening the mixed-water dead-leg and incorporating timed shut-off (60 or 30 second cartridge)

with integrated flow regulation (8 L/min), the Dušo helps reduce both water consumption and the energy required to heat it.

System efficiency can be further enhanced by supplying pre-mixed warm water to a group of Dušo columns from a single thermostatic mixing valve (TMV). Up to three Dušo can be supplied from a single Horne 15 TMV, while the higher-capacity Horne 20 can feed up to six outlets simultaneously. Reducing the number of mixing valves simplifies pipework layouts, lowers capital costs and reduces ongoing maintenance requirements.

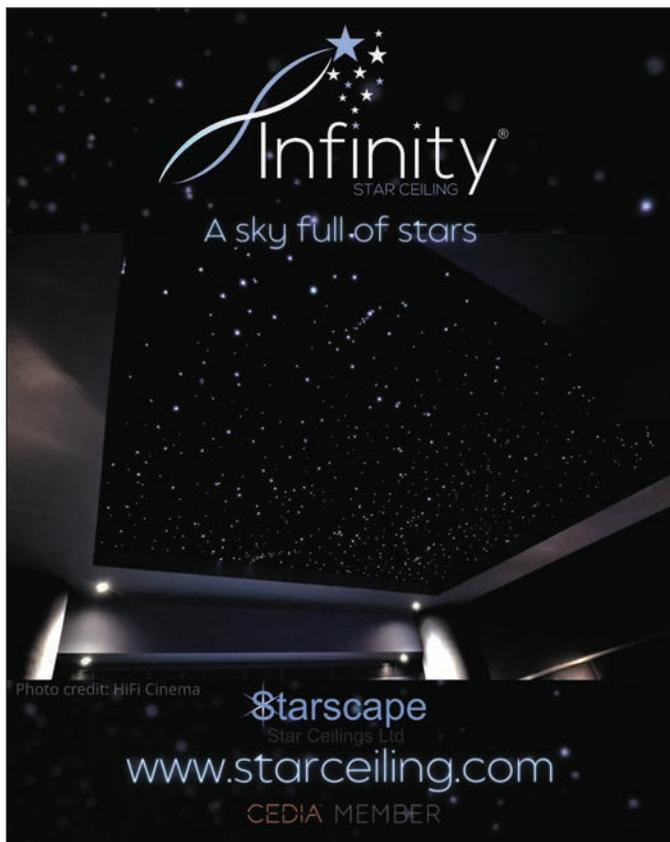
To support 'group' system design, Horne provides a useful valve sizing calculator, helping architectural technologists and building services engineers determine the optimal capacity thermostatic valve for a given number of shower heads.

Durability and ease of maintenance are central to all Horne designs. A protective inlet strainer helps safeguard performance and can be easily cleaned during routine servicing,



while the availability of low-cost spare parts supports long service life and optimised whole-life value. Dušo BIM models and product data are available on NBS Source, enabling straightforward integration within digital specification platforms such as NBS Chorus and Revit.

01505 321455  
[b.link/NBS\\_Horne\\_DusoSportShower](#)



## Reduce showering costs and impact



Recoup Waste Water Heat Recovery for Showers (WWHRS) saves up to 60% of the energy per shower use. Shower heat energy goes down the drain, WWHRS extracts that energy using it to preheat cold water that feeds the shower and/or water heater.

This significantly reduces hot water demand, saving money, energy and emissions. No user interaction, no planned maintenance, no change to shower experience. Recoup has a WWHRS solution for any shower space.

01379 844010 [recoup.co.uk](#)

## Relaunch of Pocket Door Pro Fire Rated



P C Henderson have recently relaunched their popular Pocket Door Pro Fire Rated system, expanding the certified specification to include a range of new features such as self-closing and soft close functionality. Designed to meet the growing demand for high-performance and space-saving door solutions alongside enhanced fire safety compliance, Pocket Door Pro Fire Rated is certified to BS EN 1634-1, achieving E30 standards and offering 30 minutes of fire protection when installed with an FD30 rated door as part of a compliant door assembly.

0191 377 7345 [www.pchenderson.com](#)

# An uplifting message for drainage in conversions

Amanda Mills at SFA Saniflo discusses how lifting stations can prove an effective method for discharging waste from buildings in change of use projects.

One of the most crucial elements of reconfiguring an existing building for a new purpose is the drainage infrastructure. Many change-of-use projects involve older, often redundant, buildings that were originally built for a completely different purpose. Today, the requirement for building new homes means that many large-scale conversion or refurbishment projects focus on apartments, which means the inclusion of wet areas, such as kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms, for every unit within the project.

## Why consider a lifting station?

Lifting stations are often a vital component in successful commercial to residential schemes. They offer the ability to discharge grey and black wastewater whilst minimising the need for disruptive and expensive structural alterations, such as cutting floors or lowering ceilings to install new drainage runs.

A correctly specified lifting station enables designers to choose the optimum space and place for wet areas which may increase the number of viable units within the building's footprint. They also help to minimise the need for excavation, avoids the relocation of drainage connections and the installation of new service pipes, helping to reduce overall construction costs and shortening project timelines.

They facilitate the conversion of basements that would otherwise be impossible to convert, by overcoming gravity limitations. Wastewater can be pumped up to higher level drainage systems making it possible to install sanitary facilities below sewer levels.

With a huge range of models on the market designed for projects large and small, a lifting station can be installed inside – in plant rooms, underground garages, basements etc – or outside (and





underground) if required. As long as correctly specified, they meet Building Regulations for safe and compliant wastewater regulations when gravity drainage isn't achievable.

Modern lifting stations feature smart and 'classic' control boxes, automatic operation, non-return valves and alarm systems and there are also models with twin pumps to provide fail safe operation. Single or three phase versions are now increasingly available, whilst some manufacturers offer an innovative radar system that uses high-speed electromagnetic waves to measure the water level inside the lifting station, rather than a float.

It is important to check volumes, heads and flows for every project and manufacturers will have in-house technical support that can advise on the correct solution. More often than not, a site visit will be required to establish the optimum product and installation location and it is also advisable to choose a manufacturer with exceptional warranty, local parts supply and established after care.

*Amanda Mills is marketing manager at SFA Saniflo*

## Advanced to Showcase Connected Fire Safety Solutions at The Fire Safety Event 2026

Advanced will be exhibiting at The Fire Safety Event 2026, taking place from 28-30 April at the NEC, Birmingham, where the company will showcase its latest intelligent fire and life safety solutions designed to support safer, smarter buildings.

Visitors can find Advanced at Hall 4, Stand D85, where the team will be demonstrating a range of connected fire and life safety solutions, including SmokeGo, EvacGo and AdvancedLive.

SmokeGo, Advanced's new dedicated smoke control solution, has been developed to make smoke control simpler, faster and fully compliant across a wide range of applications. Approved to EN54 Parts 2 and 4, SmokeGo provides reliable automatic and manual control of smoke control fans and dampers, with intuitive configuration and clear system operation to simplify installation, commissioning and ongoing management.

Also on show will be EvacGo, Advanced's evacuation alert system designed to support



compliance with BS 8629 in residential buildings. Built using proven MxPro 5 technology, EvacGo provides fire and rescue services with clear, simple control of evacuation alert zones, supporting safe and effective evacuation strategies.

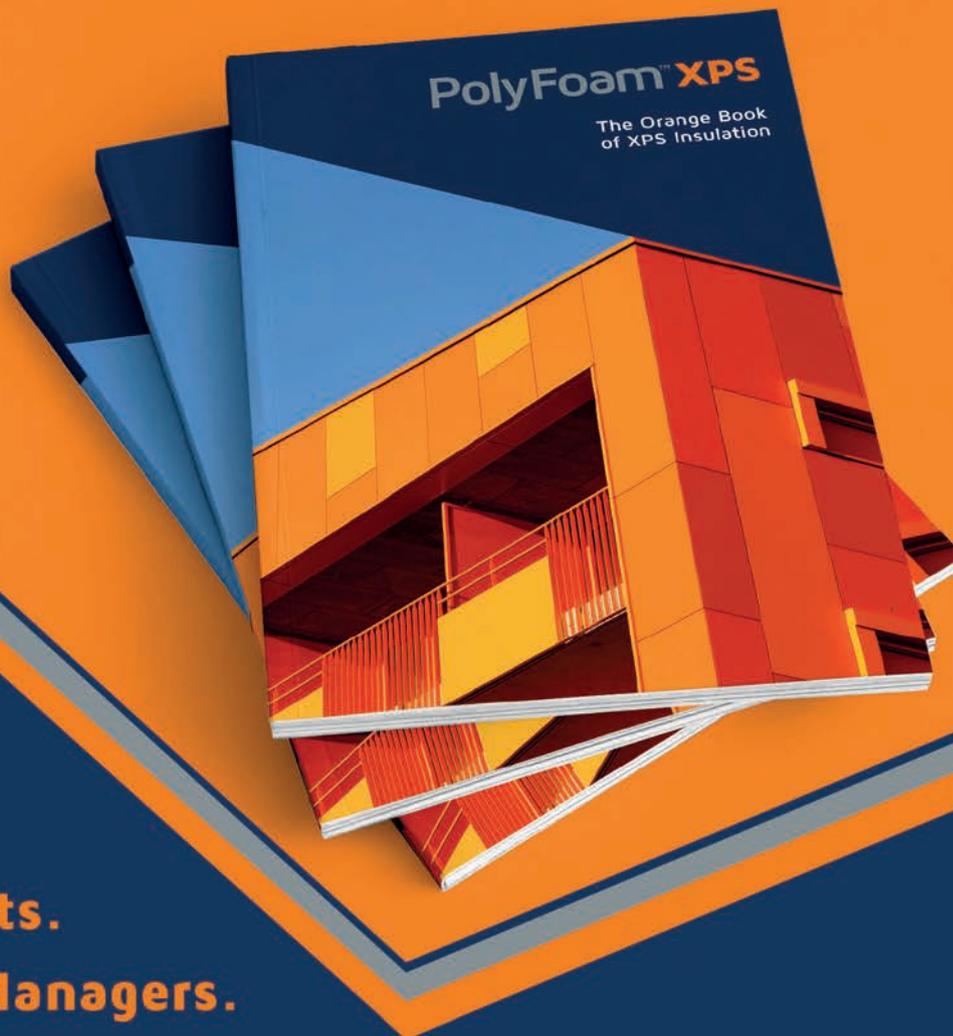
Throughout the event, the Advanced team will also be delivering live demonstrations of AdvancedLive, the company's secure, smart, real-time platform for monitoring and managing Advanced fire systems.

AdvancedLive provides users with complete system visibility anytime, anywhere via computer, tablet or mobile device, helping them monitor system status, receive real-time alerts and manage maintenance more efficiently. Visitors will also be able to preview further enhancements planned for the platform, designed to extend its role within smart, connected fire systems.

By bringing together fire detection, smoke control, evacuation and system intelligence, Advanced's presence at FSE 2026 will highlight how connected solutions can support improved visibility, faster response and more efficient compliance across modern buildings.

Advanced looks forward to welcoming visitors to Hall 4, Stand D85, where its team will demonstrate how connected fire safety solutions are helping to create safer, smarter built environments.

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# Stannah Lifts delivers safer handling and enhanced efficiency at The Harris

The Harris in Preston, Lancashire, has significantly improved operational efficiency and staff safety with the recent installation of a Stannah dumbwaiter.

Faced with the frequent challenge of moving heavy and fragile items between floors, The Harris Cafe needed an efficient solution that would provide a dedicated internal access route, removing the need to manoeuvre goods through public areas.

First opened to the public in 1893, the Grade I listed building has stood as a cultural landmark in Preston for over 125 years, hosting world-class exhibitions and collections that have inspired generations.

The Harris has recently undergone a £19 million redevelopment designed to restore, reimagine and revitalise The Harris for the 21st century, creating a more welcoming and accessible environment while preserving its rich heritage.

The transformational Harris Your Place project has been possible thanks to the generous support of its funders and partners, including The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Preston City Council, the UK Government's Towns Fund, Arts Council England and Lancashire County Council, alongside contributions from trusts, foundations and individual donors.

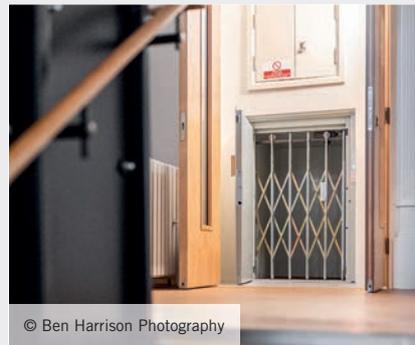
## The work

The refurbishment project included repairing the building to restore its architectural appeal while upgrading its infrastructure for modern use. This involved refurbishing 18 galleries, a new cafe with the installation of a Stannah Microlift dumbwaiter, plus visitor shop and event venue, as well as improving accessibility and enhancing visitor experiences.

Accessibility has been central to the design, with new circulation routes and inclusive features ensuring that every visitor feels welcome and represented.

Preston City Council has led the project in collaboration with Conlon Construction Ltd, who oversaw the major structural works, and HUB Build, responsible for the interior fit-out. Buttress Architects served as lead architects for the restoration, while Ralph Appelbaum Associates developed the overall design strategy and visitor experience.

Direct Access provided accessibility consultancy to ensure inclusive design across



© Ben Harrison Photography

all spaces, with Ridge and Partners LLP and Focus Consultants supporting the project's delivery and quality assurance. Stannah Lifts managed the installation and provides ongoing maintenance of the dumbwaiter.

## The solution

Stannah Lifts recommended a floor-level loading Microlift as the most effective solution for The Harris Cafe. Unlike traditional dumbwaiters that load at waist height, the floor-level Microlift allows items to be transferred directly on and off the lift using small trolleys, roll cages or pallets. The floor loading design significantly reduces the need for strenuous lifting and drastically lowers the risk of back injuries and other manual handling-related accidents. Its impact is being appreciated by staff.

The Microlift dumbwaiter features a galvanised steel supporting frame that can be erected quickly with minimal on-site building work and does not require a load-bearing shaft. With a 100 kg capacity, the Microlift 100B model provides fast and reliable transport of goods between floors, offering a cost-effective way to mitigate manual handling risks while improving operational efficiency.

To complement the surrounding environment, the Microlift car and landing entrances are finished in a durable grey baked-enamel coating, delivering both functionality and a clean professional appearance.

## The results

The installation of the Stannah Microlift has delivered significant improvements in providing safe loading, transporting goods to the first and second floors of galleries

and exhibitions.

By providing a dedicated internal route for transporting heavy and fragile items between floors, the dumbwaiter has made it easier for staff to manoeuvre goods, reducing manual handling risks and improving safety.

Fitted with a modern VVVF (Variable Voltage Variable Frequency) drive system, the Microlift delivers improved energy efficiency without compromising performance or lifting power. This advanced drive technology ensures smoother operation, reduced power consumption and lower long-term running costs.

As a result, the Microlift now facilitates reliable and controlled movement of goods between floors while offering a quieter, more efficient and energy-efficient solution for the client's daily operations.

Timothy Joel, assistant director, head of culture for Preston City Council, shares: "The installation of the new floor-loading Microlift dumbwaiter from Stannah Lifts has greatly improved café operations and ensures safer handling of bulky items. It's safer for our staff, streamlines workflows, and allows us to focus on further improving operational efficiency."

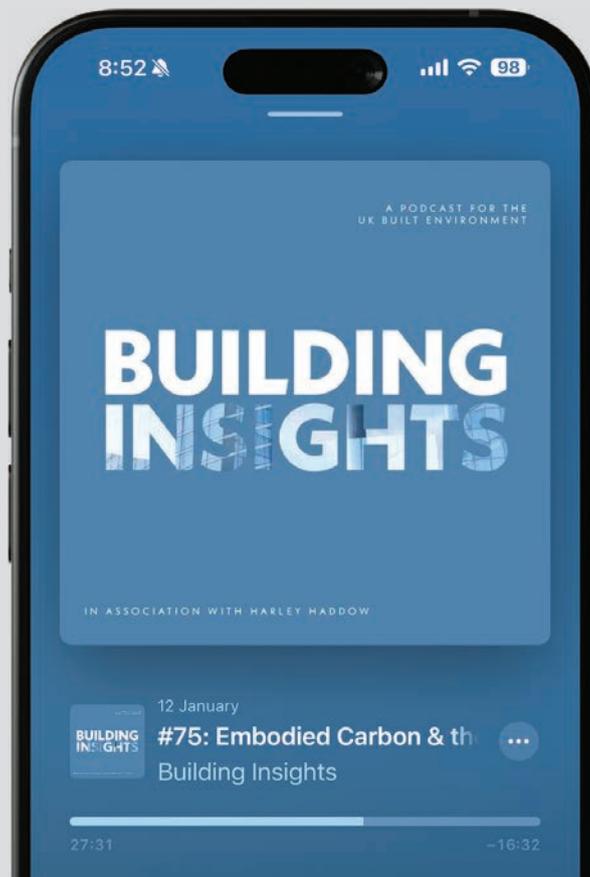
With the redevelopment complete and operational logistics improved, The Harris is now better equipped to manage high visitor numbers and support its growing programme of exhibitions and events. As a result, the refurbished building is expected to attract an additional 100,000 visitors each year, building on its existing annual footfall of 350,000.

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