

building urban confidence

A new generation of architects are working to shape our perceptions and expectations of workplace architecture, demonstrating the power of design to positively influence workplaces or broader urban environments.

“ We have worked closely with Sir Robert McAlpine and EPR Architects to create a contemporary building that will serve the current and future needs of our business whilst being as environmentally responsible as possible.

Seamus O’Loughlin — VP Global Real Estate & Workplace Enablement, EMEA

One John Street, American Express’s purpose built new development in Brighton and Bernard Weatherill House, Croydon are both landmark buildings by EPR Architects that have been catalysts for urban regeneration.

One John Street played a pivotal role in Brighton & Hove Council’s overall masterplan for a new commercial quarter in the city. Bernard Weatherill House is bringing forward the future of council buildings and forms an integral part of the CCURV bid, a council regeneration programme that will see £3bn of investment in the centre of London’s largest borough.

There are many parallels between these two developments despite the backdrop of private and public sectors. The buildings have been united by a shared vision founded on the principles of inclusivity, transparency, flexibility and sustainability. Quality is also a common thread, with Sir Robert McAlpine working on both builds and ensuring joined up thinking between client, contractor and design team.

One John Street

The AMEX House offices in Brighton had reached the end of their life span, and EPR Architects were briefed to ‘design a high quality office building that would offer large flexible floor plates with high levels of servicing to meet 21st century business needs’. As the largest private employer in Brighton, American Express was keen to communicate their commitment and long-term investment in the town.

The building is very much a contextual response to the local area and wider surroundings. Working closely with Brighton & Hove Council, EPR wanted not just to fulfil, but to also expand on existing aspirations for employment-led regeneration of the area. They were keen to challenge assumptions about ‘operations hubs’ and create a vibrant and positive environment for staff that turned the traditional hierarchical workplace structure on its head. The staff restaurant isn’t in the basement, it’s on the 6th floor — everyone enjoys the stunning views of Brighton and the South Coast.

EPR faced a number of significant challenges. The site is steep and the building needs to be relatable to its surroundings while still visible from key heritage sites. Attention to reducing the overall impact of the building is evident in each elevation — one such detail is the coloured cladding facing the neighbouring school, which reduces overlooking, adds vibrancy and provides a distinct nod to the colourful terraced houses on the street.

Sustainability and responsibility are at the heart of this building. EPR worked closely with town planners to achieve the highest possible BREEAM score. Some of the building’s extensive ‘green’ features include: all excavated chalk removed and taken to fifteen different local sites for re-use; American Express working closely with the neighbouring school and funding vital improvements; a public artwork using decorative ceramic tiles produced with artist Kate Malone, who worked with the school, the Deaf Association, employees and the consulting team.

One John Street is a true expression of architectural design that challenges the status quo, and represents more than just a building in an urban area in need of some positive energy. It is hoped that this building will continue to fuel the positive and prosperous regeneration of this part of Brighton.

Bernard Weatherill House, Croydon



Bernard Weatherill House

This same positive regeneration has been instigated by the construction of Bernard Weatherill House (BWH), Croydon Council’s new state-of-the-art HQ. BWH has set a benchmark, both for Croydon and as an open, accessible and integrated council workplace. The building forms part of CCURV (Croydon Council Urban Regeneration Vehicle), a joint venture between London Borough of Croydon and John Laing, focused on regenerating the area.

EPR were briefed to consult with the Council on a broader regeneration strategy for the area, as well as create a building that would act as a catalyst for the regeneration of Croydon town centre; instigate a change in working culture; deliver an improved customer service experience; impact on sustainability targets; and appeal to the public and encourage them to engage with their council. The council’s vision for BWH was to ‘create a building for the community that transforms the

traditional perception of council offices into that of a thriving civic centre’. Challenges included maximising the potential of a tight existing site, supporting 2,700 staff through the change, and the need to complement the neighbouring listed Town Hall building.

From a social perspective, BWH has raised the bar in their mission to engage the public. The central atrium encourages people to interact with council life: whilst going about their business, visitors can see staff at work around them and feel very much part of a council that is focused on doing a job. The community space on the lower ground floor houses meeting and conference facilities, and was recently a home to flood refugees following the UK’s dramatic storms.

Croydon Council’s intention is to lead by example in sustainable development. Designed with sustainability

“ Key to the success of Bernard Weatherill House was working closely with EPR Architects to ensure the building met our requirements. We are delighted with the outcome. The design and intelligent use of space has given us the flexibility to deliver better, more integrated services to our customers for years to come.

Paul Thomas, Communications & Change Manager, Croydon Council

The Council’s relationship with the public is also a positive one thanks to the transparent and inclusive approach made possible by the investment in BWH. Much-needed regeneration has been kick-started in the area, which will gather pace when the old building is knocked down for redevelopment. EPR are currently working on a conversion scheme that will see the old Nestle building developed into a new residential scheme, part of the ongoing regeneration of the area kick-started by Bernard Weatherill House.

These two buildings demonstrate the power of architecture in the urban landscape, and how it can bring about dramatic social, cultural and societal change.

Bernard Weatherill House and One John Street went against the grain: EPR Architects were bold in their expression and took responsibility for their far-reaching impact. Despite the private/public sector contrast, both have an important job to do — locally and within a broader context. And, in spite of the many challenges facing them, they have surpassed expectation.

Both have made a huge difference to the people that live and work in and around these areas, and represent a positive energy that breathes new life into our urban centres so that they become commercial and community hubs we can be proud of.

EPR Architects
+44 20 7932 7600
architects@epr.co.uk
www.epr.co.uk

Follow us @
www.twitter.com/EPRArchitects
www.linkedin.com/EPR-Architects
www.facebook.com/EPRArchitects