

> special report

Recipe for retrofit

Chris Thompson discusses the necessary ingredients for a successful commercial retrofit

For many developers, landlords and businesses, retrofitting offers an attractive solution to the challenge currently faced by the non-domestic sectors to reduce their carbon footprint. To satisfy legislative requirements, employee demands and expectations on reputation, companies should be considering building upgrades, rather than focusing on the development of new stock.

Retrofitting is not always the cheapest option and is a commitment, but one that developers need to be investing in.

SUCCESS STORY

In October 2010 Citu unveiled its most ambitious project to date: Greenhouse based in Leeds (as seen on the cover of the April/May issue of *Greenbuild*). Greenhouse is a low-carbon mixed use development, featuring an array of technologies.

Originally a 1930s workers hostel called Shaftesbury House, Citu bought the development in 2004 after realising the potential in the building's existing shell, making it ideal to retrofit. Since then to the project has won the UK Green Building Council's sustainability award for best refurbished building, beating the likes of the Victoria and



The 1930s workers hostel, Shaftesbury House, before the refurbishment project

There's no point constructing a building and claiming its green credentials, without people being able to understand why. ●●

Albert Museum in London.

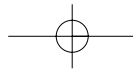
This was the challenge I'd been waiting for to prove sustainability is achievable in old stock, but the key with Greenhouse was in pushing the boundaries and making a lasting mark on the industry with the development.

Shaftesbury House was part of the modernist era and the building used methods of construction and modern housing concepts considered revolutionary at the time, which improved the standards

of living for thousands of people during its time as a hostel.

With this legacy, it seemed fitting to make that building part of Greenhouse, a part-refurb, part-newbuild development, which has capitalised on technology and harnessed natural resources, to produce a true homage to working with the environment.

Compromising of 166 apartments, an apart-hotel, conference centre and 15,000sqft of office space, generating commercial demand was paramount.



Greenhouse is now a low-carbon mixed use development

And whilst the commercial property market was still stalling across the UK, within the first two months of Greenhouse's launch, seven of the 12 offices were let with daily interest in the remaining.

We found that businesses based at Greenhouse appreciate the building embraces sustainability and it's that which has ensured the commercial element has been, and continues to be, a success.

It's all very well promoting to office workers that they work in a sustainable retrofit, reducing their business' carbon footprint, but energy-efficient measures need to be visible and communicated to tenants and stakeholders to ensure they are used effectively.

All commercial buildings have different requirements and these need to be considered when retrofitting. People working within the building need to see where the energy savings come in and buildings that claim to be green need to show this. There's no point constructing a building and claiming its green credentials, without people being able to understand why. Owners and occupiers need to be driven by cost-savings to change their behaviour and work together with the building.

Greenhouse's history is celebrated within the development, with pictures of Shaftesbury House in its glory, its demise, and images of the transformation on display in the entrance. The architectural decisions and energy-saving

processes are made apparent to all workers, so they understand why features such as a heat pump, wind turbines, solar panels and rainwater harvesting benefits them as a business, as well as the environment.

HITTING TARGETS

It takes education and understanding to ensure a non-domestic retrofit is a success once the architects and builders have left. If office staff understand how to work in the building so it reaches its full energy-saving potential, retrofitting will be a key player in reaching the carbon cutting targets.

Education, a more defined strategy, incentives and stimulating a demand in the market are key elements in reducing the carbon footprint of the commercial property sector. Our key challenge is to deliver low-carbon refurbishments of existing buildings that can deliver people's needs in a much less energy-hungry manner and teach them how to work with their office building so it can reach its full low-energy potential.

If we can do this we've got a chance of making some way towards the government's ambitious targets. This is not a quick win, but one anyone involved in can be very proud of, as it's crucial for the future.

Chris Thompson is managing director of Leeds-based property developer Citu

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