

Fitzroy Place

Photos: Hutton + Crow

Fund manager: **Aviva** Developer: **Exemplar** Joint Architects: **Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands** Rights of light consultant: **GIA**
 Sheppard Robson

We take a look at Exemplar's emerging new piece of city, Fitzroy Place

The fund manager's account

By Henry Richardson, head of central London offices, Aviva

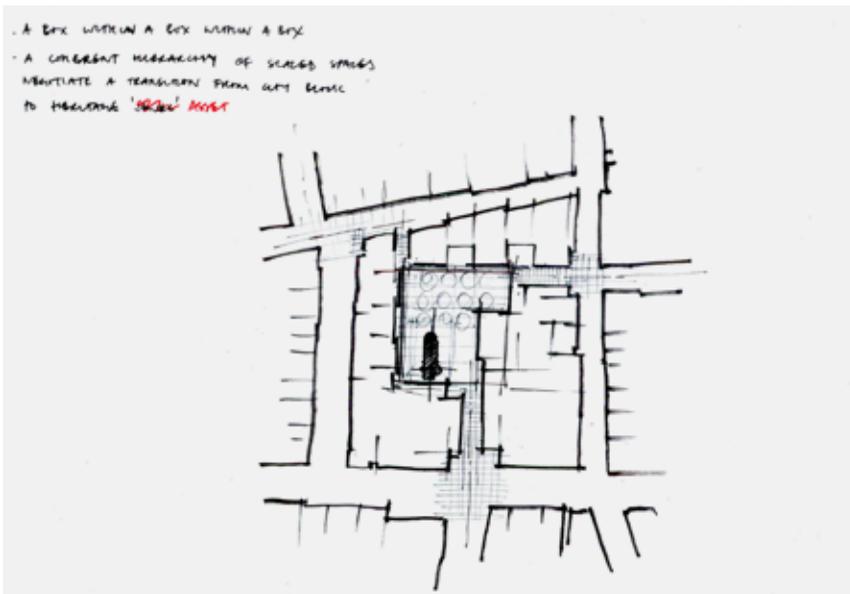


2010 was a very difficult year: the credit crunch caused by the collapse of Lehman Brothers had tipped Britain into recession and the prospects for new development looked bleak.

On the other side of the coin, at Aviva we had successfully developed a number of schemes in central London including Paddington Central (interestingly with the co-founders of Exemplar, Clive and Daniel) during the 2000s and had an instinctive feel that despite many predicting that Britain would enter a prolonged 1930s-style slump the London property market would recover.

We were therefore looking for strategic opportunities: major developments that would be completing when the economy had started to recover and where we could add value through our expertise on large London schemes.

The redevelopment of the former Middlesex Hospital – which became Fitzroy Place – fitted the bill for us. We liked the generosity afforded by having three acres of Westminster to work with – even at a time when it would have been hard to find a speculative funder for 7,500 square feet, let alone 750,000 square feet. We liked the ambition and imagination showed by Exemplar and thought they would be an ideal partner for us – and indeed together we were the only party to bid for both the residential and commercial components of the site as opposed to the rest of the bidders who were consortia of residential and commercial developers.



City block – a hand sketch of the masterplan



Fitzroy Place – a new piece of Fitzrovia

The site was in the hands of a committee handling the assets of the troubled Icelandic bank Kaupthing, and a key move we made was to persuade Kaupthing to remain as a partner and investor in the project – and they have truly been a great partner.

We wanted a true mixed-use scheme, and in that mix of uses to ensure we had every type of residential from high value to

affordable homes. We were excited by the potential of Fitzrovia and we recognised that we could control the risk surrounding the scheme through off-plan sales in the UK and overseas of the project's apartments.

Even during the downturn we could see that in London there would soon be an under-supply of high-quality design-led accommodation ranging from affordable to high value, in an

unspoiled part of the capital.

We also saw Fitzrovia benefiting hugely from the Tottenham Court Road Crossrail station, and Fitzroy Place has formed a key plank in our plan to build more than one million square feet along Crossrail stretching from the City to the West End.

In terms of how we work together, we have clearly defined roles, and with Exemplar as developer and

Team list

Main Contractor:
Sir Robert McAlpine

Architects:
Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands and Sheppard Robson

Residential Interior Architect:
Johnson Naylor

Landscape Architect:
Gross.Max

Heritage Architect:
Caroe & Partners

Project Manager:
GVA Second London Wall

Cost Consultant:
EC Harris

Services Engineer:
Aecom

Structural Engineer:
Ramboll

Planning Consultant:
DP9

Daylighting / Rights of Light:
GIA

Highways:
Arup

Aviva Investors as fund manager we collaborate well. There are quarterly board meetings, client meetings once a month and we speak to each other every day. Because demolition had already taken place, Fitzroy Place's completion later this year will be relatively quick. But the fact that it has still taken five years shows that major central London development really is a long-term game. ■

The developer's account

By Michael Bucknell, development director, Exemplar



It's not often you can start with a completely clean slate on a 3-acre central London site – we took on a site which had already been cleared, a blank canvas, but with a huge responsibility to deliver something truly special for Fitzrovia, an area which we know and love, having been

headquartered here for a decade.

We wanted the scale and architecture of the buildings to be appropriate to the area and provide a related but varied appearance with an articulated roofscape. We felt the best way to achieve this was to appoint two complementary architects, which we achieved with Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands and Sheppard Robson. We required two office buildings to provide a range of occupational options and optimal investment lot sizes and for the office buildings to address the most appropriate street, being Mortimer Street.

'The overriding aesthetic across the scheme was to be understated'

We also wanted to create both private and affordable homes of generous size, great efficiency and sensible proportions. We felt too that it was important to move away from the 'cookie-cutter' approach to residential development which is so prevalent to create units of varied types and individual nuances. While this provided the design and construction teams with no shortage of challenges, and was perhaps not the cheapest option, we feel it is key to providing the product we wanted and I think the sales success of the residential has justified this approach.

The overriding aesthetic across the scheme was to be understated but to focus on quality natural materials and craftsmanship, whether it be an office reception, WC, residential interior, landscape or wayfinding signage. Honesty and integrity is key to everything we do and Fitzroy Place needed to exemplify this. We designed our marketing material to avoid



Living in the city - CGI of how the amenity space and residential will look on completion

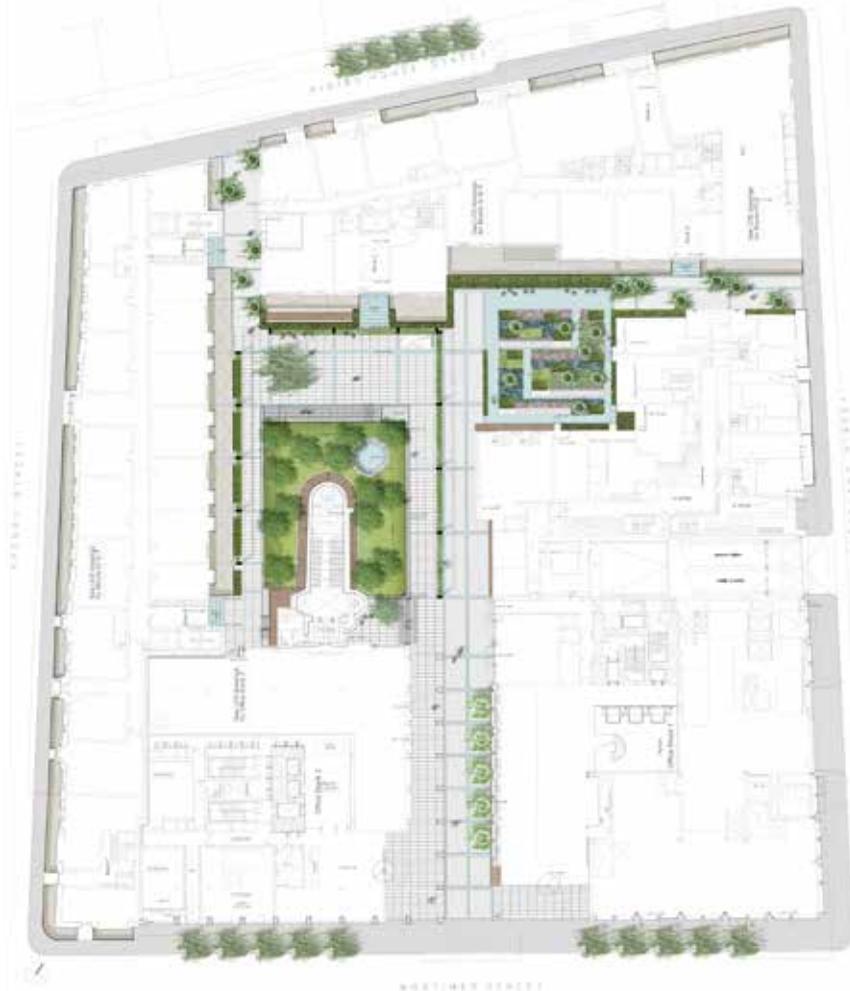
glossy CGIs showing beautiful people rowing in the Thames or show-flats incorporating small furniture and doorless doorways – to instead have a marketing suite which would feel like your living room, incorporating all the real fixtures and fittings from the scheme. Everything should be tactile – purchasers should be able to feel our scheme and be involved.

Our approach meant that every detail was critical. For example, many developers let their retail units after everything else has been let – and then

just accept the highest bidder; for us, the restaurant at Fitzroy Place would never feature a Carluccio's or Jamie's Italian – nothing wrong with them per se but they're so not Fitzroy Place. Instead, following a long search we targeted a chef from Angela Hartnett's Murano, and then an operator with a similar vision to ours, which we found with Cubitt House. The result, Percy & Founders, is pure Fitzrovia and just fantastic.

Five years down the track, the development is now nearing

completion. Only two of the 235 private apartments remain available, the 140,000 sq ft 1 Fitzroy Place has been let as the new European HQ for the Estée Lauder Companies and 2 Fitzroy Place is receiving keen interest following its launch in February. More importantly, the scheme looks beautiful and is something we're extremely proud of. It's so satisfying to see that all the effort put in by the huge FP team is being recognised and appreciated by those owners and occupiers who will be calling Fitzroy Place home. ■



Masterplan, showing public space and routes through

The joint architect's account (1)

By Alex Lifschutz, director, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands



In 2011, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands was appointed by Exemplar to elaborate Sheppard Robson's masterplan into a contextually sensitive scheme for Fitzroy Place. The design draws on the distinctive identity of Fitzrovia, respectful to nearby listed buildings and engaged with the materiality and quirky character of the area.

Fitzroy Place is a hugely significant development, delivering 289 affordable and market homes, 220,000 sq ft of offices, new shops, restaurants and community space set in a new public square. Once the architectural vernacular had been established, the project was split between the

two practices. Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands designed an office building at 2 Fitzroy Place at the front and two large apartment buildings forming three sides of the site, while Sheppard Robson took charge of the larger office building at 1 Fitzroy Place and an adjacent residential block.

Fitzrovia's distinctive character has emerged from its historic ownership – small pockets of land, developed in an ad-hoc manner. This resulted in an intimate street pattern intersected by alleys, walks and yards. It is quite distinct in feel from the ordered streets and squares of the adjacent 'great estates' of Bloomsbury and Marylebone. The large bulk of the Middlesex Hospital, which once stood on this site, was sold to fund the new PFI hospital half a mile away at UCL and the old buildings demolished, with only the unconsecrated hospital chapel left standing in the centre of the site and retained the facade on Nassau Street.



God in the details – sketch of the retained Grade II* hospital chapel



Facades are 'irregular and expressive', emblematic of the area

Fitzrovia's urban grain is emphasised by its architecture – tightly packed individualistic buildings cluster tightly together in this singular district. A closer inspection reveals two broad building types: older, smaller, ornate residential buildings in red brick and white stone, many with Arts and Crafts features contrasting with more recent, large white concrete and stone Modernist buildings that once housed car showrooms and garment workshops.

We came up with a simple concept to guide the building design so the streetscape could be understood without the architecture being obvious, distinguishing between finer grain 'red' brick residential buildings and larger scale 'white' stone commercial buildings. In the masterplan the white office buildings are on the main road, Mortimer Street, with red apartment buildings lining the quieter streets.

Our design code called for facades that are irregular and expressive, emblematic of this intimate and intriguing part of

London. Buildings have distinct front and rear elevations and, while the code of red and white holds true on the street elevations, light-coloured brick and stone has been used on the courtyard side to brighten the new public square. This light stone also provides a setting that highlights the red brick Neo-Byzantine architecture of the retained Grade II* hospital chapel, which has been restored as a community facility, the Fitzrovia Chapel.

The exterior language of 2 Fitzroy Place is a bold, clear and original riff on the character of Fitzrovia. As with all the other buildings in the development, 2 Fitzroy Place has an articulated base, middle and roof and is divided into clear vertical bays relating to buildings in the neighbourhood. These architectural devices provide proportion and human scale.

'Tightly packed individualistic buildings cluster tightly together in this singular district'

The materials of its structural frame – precast concrete pilasters with inset red brick – are influenced by the elevation of 10 Mortimer Street, the handsome Grade II listed brick and stone building adjacent to 2 Fitzroy Place on its south-west corner. The architecture of the chapel was the inspiration for the distinctive vaulted roof that crowns the building and is visible from around the surrounding district. Vertical fins provide sun shading and privacy; the building has a dynamic quality, altering in transparency as one moves along its facades.

Crucially, the entire ground-floor perimeter of 2 Fitzroy Place is animated by active uses. A shop, the office reception, a large restaurant and the chapel and courtyard, give the building a bustling, animated base that adds hugely to the existing vitality of Fitzrovia. ■

The joint architects' account (2)

By Dan Burr, partner, Sheppard Robson



We were involved from the outset of the project, designing the initial masterplan and massing for the development, which offered us a remarkable opportunity to work with an entire city block in London's West End.

Working closely with Exemplar, we established a strategy for two office buildings aligned to Mortimer Street, with residential buildings arranged around the perimeter to form a central courtyard; this was designed to be a formal 'urban room' and an appropriate setting for the listed chapel.

By optimising the configuration of the residential blocks, we were able to form a large L-shaped space accessed by relatively narrow passages, balancing permeability with a sense of containment. We orientated the commercial uses to the street frontages, and conceived the courtyard as a tranquil counterpoint to the busy streets of Fitzrovia.

Implicit within the masterplan was the idea of a 'family' of buildings – an agglomeration of distinctive blocks that are sensitive to the urban grain of the adjoining streets – that achieve a sense of individual identity and character, while maintaining a feeling of cohesion throughout the development.

In collaboration with LDS, we identified some design rules and a palette of materials based around white precast Portland concrete and

a range of bricks that complement the variety of colours and textures found in the surrounding streets. The aim was to create buildings that were clearly contemporary in character, but definitely 'of' Fitzrovia.

One Fitzroy Place is the larger of the two office buildings on the site, and incorporates an atrium and ground-floor retail space along Mortimer Street and Cleveland Street. The main facade of the building is composed of a regular array of vertical floor-to-ceiling windows, ensuring elegant proportions, while the solid panels are infilled with Portland 'roach' stone (a nod to the Economist Building) and finer-grain, long format blue/red bricks to the flank elevations. The splayed infill panels sit within a carefully crafted precast Portland-stone frame, adding depth and orientation so the building is perceived differently in oblique



The offices' brick and stone facade



The offices are designed so that they are perceived differently in oblique views



'A remarkable opportunity to work with an entire city block in London's West End'

views depending on the direction of approach.

For the office building, we devoted considerable attention to tuning the building to the demands of the modern working environment. The office floors are organised around a nine-storey atrium with the core logically located back-to-back with the adjoining residential block. Natural light is therefore evenly distributed, while the 9x12-metre grid – with perimeter spans of up to 13 metres – ensures uninterrupted flexible workspace.

'We were particularly concerned to move away from the sterile, anodyne character of many "spec" office spaces'

We were particularly concerned to move away from the sterile, anodyne character of many 'spec' office spaces and wanted to create architectural continuity between the interior and exterior. The refined brickwork of the facade is also used to clad the main core contrasting with frosted glass decks to the lift lobbies.

We took similar care to design the residential block from inside to out. The plan form results from the careful composition of generous well-laid-out apartments. Layouts are predominantly dual-aspect optimising light and views while maintaining privacy for the occupants. We created a wide variety of apartment types, including duplex flats lending a 'bespoke' quality that underlines the individual character of the scheme.

Apartments facing the courtyard benefit from large sliding panels adjoining the balconies, so the living spaces can open up and enjoy a strong connection to the courtyard and views to the listed chapel – the focus of a new convivial public space in the heart of Fitzrovia. ■

The rights of light consultant's account By Simone Pagani, GIA



Occupying an island site in Fitzrovia, one of London's 'next' areas, Fitzroy Place comprises commercial and residential elements, including apartments articulated around an internal central courtyard.

Fitzroy Place represents an excellent example of the process of optimising amenity in denser urban locations.

GIA, the multi-disciplinary surveying and design consultancy, has worked on the scheme since 2007, consulting on rights of light (a legal easement), daylight and sunlight impacts on neighbours, party wall, and significantly, internal daylight and sunlight design.

In the early stages, Fitzroy Place constituted a ground-breaking rights of light case, encompassing 41 different interests where GIA agreed deeds of lease (though typically many projects now have at least double this amount!).

These rights of light interests were transferred when Exemplar and Aviva took over development in 2010, submitting new planning applications

proposing similar bulk and massing, albeit 25 interests had to be negotiated or re-negotiated. While a significant challenge, we came within timescale and budget on all of these rights of light deals.

However, perhaps the most significant challenge was the focus on quality of light for the proposed residential units. The onus was on putting forward a case in planning to optimise internal amenity, which was simpatico with the case for the mass and bulk required for the scheme.

GIA is focused on optimising amenity in denser urban locations. The property industry overall emphasises the importance of urban density, but sometimes lets the quality of the amenity lag behind.

There are ways to avoid quality compromises, by undertaking refinement and optimisation procedures, using specialist and bespoke software, 3D computer simulations and strategic advice to inform the design development. This approach adds value for the developer, de-risking the planning process while delivering the highest standards of amenity possible.

For Fitzroy Place, Exemplar has invested in this approach from the beginning, and developer and agents have put a lot of weight behind a vision for private amenity.

GIA's task was to ensure maximum daylight within each apartment,

working with Sheppard Robson and Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands on a process of refining and optimising the layouts, the apertures, the balconies, the finishes and the glazing, and subsequently reviewing the internal layouts with the interior designers.

Key to our approach, working within the London Housing Design Guide on private amenity and quality, was advising on the best positioning for each balcony, which in a standard configuration would have taken away light from a living room. We wanted to strike a balance between light amenity outside and indoors. As the daylight guidance recognises that the living room is the principal area to enjoy light, in many of Fitzroy's units the balcony fronts the bedroom, though successfully

'Fitzroy Place represents an excellent example of the process of optimising amenity in denser urban locations'

accessed from the living areas also. This was designed as an elegant architectural solution and a strategic move to maximise daylight which, coupled with the adoption of winter gardens, allows for extended views out and use throughout the year.

Notably, this keen focus from the developers has ensured that the affordable provision also enjoys indoor daylight amenity that is at least as good as the private. ■



Making light work – GIA's work aims to strike a balance between light amenity inside and out