Client statement from AshbyCapital

“I am thrilled with the development. It’s an absolute gem of a building and the detailing is very precise and clear. It exudes quality throughout and I think the reception area is particularly effective in its design, choice of materials, scale and geometry. The office floor plates are highly efficient and rational, the ceilings and cladding are very crisp and the lavatories are a clever balance of quality and functionality.”

Peter Ferrari, Chief Executive at AshbyCapital

Introduction

One Bedford Avenue is an office and retail development in London’s West End that occupies a prominent corner site at the south end of Tottenham Court Road close to Bedford Square and the British Museum with the Architectural Association on its rear doorstep.

Delivered for Exemplar in conjunction with AshbyCapital and The Bedford Estates, the new landmark building provides 71,300 sq.ft of high quality office space over seven floors and 13,970 sq.ft of retail at ground and basement level.

The building raises the standard of office and retail accommodation along Tottenham Court Road – a hugely vibrant and increasingly popular area. The Bedford Avenue façade will form a stunning backdrop to a proposed ‘pocket park’; part of Camden’s ongoing West End Project and the retail frontage along Morwell Street will act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the formerly neglected mews.
Form

The form of the building has been sculpted from a single rectangular block, with the angular profiles of the upper floors created in response to Rights of Light analysis. Storey-height precast concrete fins on all elevations are identical but stacked in different orientations depending on the context and solar shading requirements. On Tottenham Court Road the fins are positioned at 90 degrees to the façade to cut out the afternoon sun; on Bedford Avenue four fins are stacked together to create deep reveals that are best suited for the high southern sun, whilst on the north-east facing Morwell Street elevation, which is largely shaded by the buildings opposite, the fins are laid flat against the façade.

Each spandrel has a small continuous drip channel that will shed water from the face of the concrete and help keep the façade clean. This long term view is an important consideration for buildings in busy, polluted urban environments.
View south down Morwell Street. The angular profiles of the upper floors are incrementally cut back in response to Rights of Light analysis.
The cut backs to the upper floors on Morwell Street create accessible and green roof terraces.
From the outset the ambition was to minimise the energy consumption of the building. Establishing the correct relationship of glazing to solid and then mitigating solar heat gain through the architecture were fundamental principles of the design of the façade.

A BREEAM ‘Excellent’ rating has been achieved for the offices by the design and procurement of various sustainability measures. These included green roofs, over 100m² of photovoltaic cells, a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant with the predicted energy performance surpassing Part L 2010 requirements by 41%, and the CHP and buffer storage has been sized to provide two thirds of the annual heating load. The offices’ annual CO₂ emissions are predicted to be 12.4 kgCO₂/m², achieving a band A EPC rating of 22.

The Waterman Group, responsible for structures and building services, have integrated their designs with a fast pace steel frame construction programme, aided by a modular MEP (Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing) design allowing for off-site manufacture to be used wherever possible. This approach has significantly reduced the on-site waste, construction and commissioning costs whilst also simplifying the design for increased reliability.

The building offers an extremely efficient and flexible rectangular floor plate, boasting natural light on three sides and spectacular views at the upper levels. The top four floors all have accessible terraces looking over the Grade I listed Bedford Square to the British Museum and beyond towards the City. The project is designed to an enhanced BCO standard, meeting the functional quality aspirations of the Central London market.
Site history

Following World War II Tottenham Court Road became the main location for the sale of surplus and reconditioned radios and electronics equipment. Shops such as Proops Brothers and Smiths Radios flourished during the 1950-60s which led to the proliferation of electronics retail outlets, a trend which continued well into the 2010s. However the advent of e-commerce, tighter profit margins on electronic goods and the ever increasing rents on Tottenham Court Road have seen the demise of all but a handful of shops selling TVs, computers, radios and the like.

The memory of this disappearing heritage has been captured within the building with subtle and varied references to different aspects of the industry. From the external public artwork to the internal signage, the design reflects this common theme, creating a cohesive narrative throughout that links the building to its historic context.
Materiality

Both inside and outside the palette of materials has been kept to a minimum, with the interior finishes reflecting the refined simplicity and solidity of the exteriors. Different shades of precast and polished concrete to the walls and floors reflect the columns and spandrels of the concrete cladding, whilst the brass wall panels echo the bronze anodised reception and shopfront portals. In parallel with this relationship, the interiors take reference from the materiality of a common circuit board. Black microchips and capacitors influenced the selection of the black ash veneers and polyester powder coated metals, whilst the brass components inform the use of inlaid strips in the floor and the patinated brass wall panels that add elements of colour to an otherwise monochromatic interior.
Reception

Patinated brass wall panels add a characterful warmth and texture to the contrasting cool blacks and greys of the reception. The double-height space is dominated by a full-storey artwork with a labyrinthine circuit board etched into the panels. This design, abstracted from actual circuit boards, conceals the initials of some of the key members of the architectural team. The motif is repeated at the end of the lift lobby with a different, unique, design.

The patinated brass and concrete-clad reception space pays homage to Tottenham Court Road’s electronics heritage.
Offices

The office floorplates are simple and highly efficient. The steel columns have been left exposed and painted black to match the lift fronts and stair core doors. This creates a legible hierarchy in the space and provides interest in an otherwise vanilla box.

The fritting pattern at low level on the glazing is reminiscent of a QR code but its origin evolved from the history of The Bedford Estates. Woburn Abbey, the home of The Estates’ archives was also the billet for many of the Naval Wrens working at the top-secret code breaking centre at Bletchley Park. Working with a quantum physicist at UCL the artist, Lilah Fowler, developed a quantum key that will decrypt an encrypted page of text from one of the Commonplace books of Francis Russell, the fourth Earl of Bedford (1687 – 1641). This has been manipulated and transformed into the fritting pattern, linking the history of the site to a potential post-digital world of quantum computing.

Fritting and shadows on mullions (level seven office floor overlooking Tottenham Court Road, left).
Level six view across rooftops towards the British Museum (left) and level two office floor plate (top left).
Clockwise from top right: vanity detail with electronic soap and towel symbols; female washroom; cubicle interiors.
Signage

The wayfinding signage and vanity mirror icons have appropriated symbols from electronic circuit diagrams. The resistor motif, for instance, has been used to indicate a staircase and a modified diode icon represents the male and female toilet symbols. These reoccur throughout the building from the cycle store to the shower rooms, washrooms and on all the main doors.

Clockwise from left: changing room vanity area; female changing room; shower cubicle; circuit diagram and symbols.

At ground floor, on the façade glazing, the manifestations are in Morse code; two rows of graphics spell out the name of the street and 'mind the glass'.
The front-of-house staircase with Morse code balustrade and inlaid brass nosing detail.

Stairs

More reference is made to Second World War surplus equipment and code breaking in the balustrades of the main staircase. The metal verticals have been spaced in such a way that if a stick were run across them they would repeat two phrases in Morse code; ‘up and up...’ on the inside of the stair and ‘down and down...’ on the outside.
“Our knowledge is nothing but the glass of our own imperfections”

Francis Russell, 4th Earl of Bedford (1687-1741)

Public art

The Commonplace books of Francis Russell, the fourth Earl of Bedford, are again referenced in the public artwork by Lilah Fowler on the Bedford Avenue façade. In this instance a single quote “Our knowledge is nothing but the glass of our own imperfections” has been translated into binary code with yellow and blue LED neon lights representing ones and dark reveals representing zeros. The LED light strips are integrated into the concrete columns between fins, with the yellow light facing toward Tottenham Court Road and the blue facing Bedford Square, changing the appearance of the building depending on the direction of approach.
“The Avenue has exceeded expectations, raising the standard of office accommodation in a vibrant and increasingly popular area. From the contemporary art installation on the building’s exterior, which reflects the area’s heritage, to the impressive lobby and the clear open floor plates which are flooded with natural light, this is a world-class building designed and built to world-class standards. Top-of-the-range facilities for cyclists and a BREEAM Excellent rating also give the building strong sustainability credentials. A major letting to Skyscanner highlights that The Avenue is not just a beautifully designed building; it also works commercially, attracting interest from major occupiers.”

AshbyCapital and Exemplar
One Bedford Avenue
London W1

London: Rawstorne Place, London EC1V 7NL
T +44 (0)20 7520 3300 • E mail@bennettsassociates.com

Edinburgh: 3 Boroughloch Square, Edinburgh EH8 9NJ
T +44 (0)131 667 7357 • E edin@bennettsassociates.com

Manchester: Amazon House, 3 Brazil Street, Manchester, M1 3PJ
T +44 (0)161 674 0135 • E manchester@bennettsassociates.com

www.bennettsassociates.com