Fitzroy Street

Location
Cambridge

Client
Jesus College, Cambridge

Project Size
6 retail units

Value
£2.6m

Status
Completed April 2005

The redevelopment of a life expired 1950s retail unit for Jesus College, Cambridge, provided an opportunity to establish a high quality landmark that contributes to the improving street scene of this busy urban thoroughfare.

Overview

The project is sited at the western end of Fitzroy Street, a pedestrianised road that links the Grafton Shopping Centre with the centre of Cambridge. Adjacent to the site the street opens into New Square, a grassed open space surrounded by listed terraces that were built in the early nineteenth century. The site was formerly occupied by a modest early 1950s building, which was used at the ground and first floor levels to house retail spaces and a restaurant. The new scheme provides two floors of modern retail space with flexible internal dimensions and layouts. There are six retail units including a single-storey unit at the corner. The long-term economic sustainability of the development was secured by ensuring that there are several possible configurations of occupancy to enable the building to adapt to market needs in the future.

Planning Constraints and Design Approach

The design development was informed by consultation with existing tenants, representatives of college staff, and local residents. Their comments particularly influenced the treatment of the terrace gardens and the rear service areas. The old building's roofscape had been dominated by haphazard additions of roof plant and service ducts while to the rear there was a poorly managed service yard. To avoid such problems with services equipment at the new building, a roof top plant area was provided. This area is surrounded by a stainless-steel clad screen that acts as an acoustic barrier as well as a visual one.

The shop fronts were designed to ensure that a consistent treatment of colour and material was maintained for the entire building. At the ground floor level the front elevation consists

"An elegant and high quality building that demonstrates excellence in urban design."

– Cambridge City Council

of continuous glazing with circular reconstituted stone columns flanking the shop entrances and marking the divisions between the units. Above the shop fronts a continuous band of stone cladding unifies the frontage and provides occupants with a location for signage. The first floor façade comprises alternating panels of brick, stone, and curtain walling, with full-height projecting bay windows separating these panels and providing space for merchandise display.

The height of the building had to be kept low to prevent it from being seen over the rooftops of the New Square terraces, and the main body of the building was also set back at the upper floor level alongside the terraces to prevent their back gardens from being overshadowed.

Listed Building Works

The site is directly adjacent to the listed cottages on New Square, also owned by the landlord. The demolition of part of the existing building that abutted the gable end of the terraced house was proposed as part of the project, with plans to build a new single-storey kiosk alongside it. Another proposal was that the back garden boundary walls of the cottages should be demolished and then rebuilt along new lines, increasing the size of some of the gardens. These walls were built at the same time as the old 1950s building and were in an extremely poor state of repair.

A listed building application was prepared to cover these works, which were carried out in full consultation with the City Council's conservation officer. The building of the new boundary walls and the restoration of the gable end walls was carried out to an excellent standard and utilised reclaimed bricks and lime mortar.

Sustainability

A highly insulated and airtight building envelope was designed to ensure that any mechanical and electrical systems that tenants install operate as efficiently as possible. The external envelope consists of walls using a 140mm wide cavity with full-fill polystyrene blown bead insulation. The average U-value of the overall building envelope achieves a 19% improvement over the Building Regulations Part L 2002. An air leakage rate of less than 7m3/hr/m2 was achieved – a figure comfortably within the allowed maximum.

Reclaimed materials were used for the construction of the new boundary walls and considerable use was made of local suppliers including for two major elements of the external envelope: precast concrete and aluminium cladding.
The principal merit of the project in sustainability terms has been its impact on the immediate surroundings. The previous building on the site was a major nuisance

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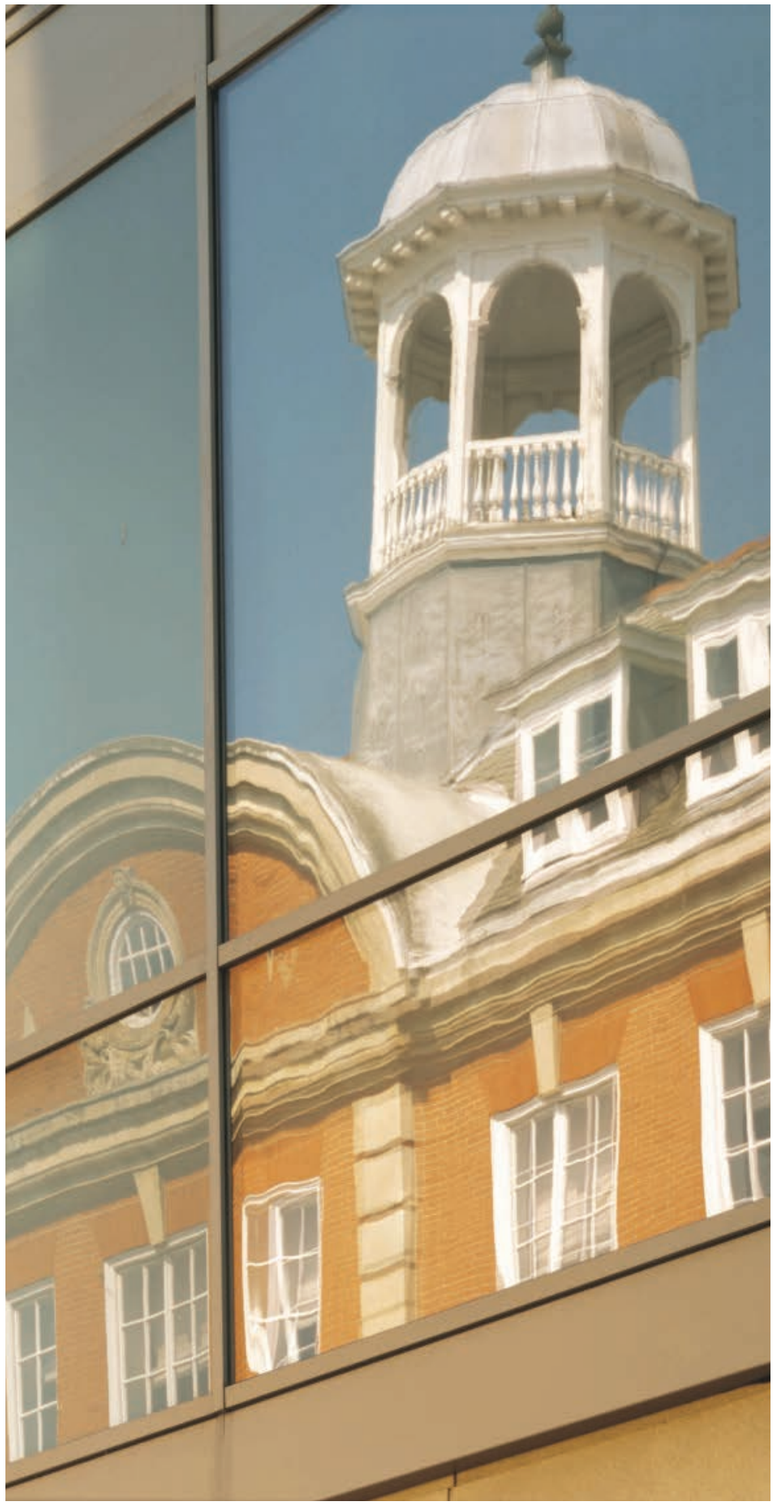

to local residents; the poor quality mechanical and electrical plant at the rear of the building was a source of noise and light pollution, and a restaurant located close to the residential properties would emit fumes and odours. As part of the redevelopment it was decided that all external plant equipment would be located within a rooftop enclosure to screen the equipment from view and also assist in the attenuation of sound, while filtration was provided to deal with the problem of fumes and odours.

By improving the local environment the building has made a positive contribution to the social sustainability of the area. In economic terms it is a flexible building that can be reconfigured in a numbered of ways and has generous floor loading capacity that should ensure that it has a long and useful life.

Access

Two key aims of the redevelopment were to improve access to the site for pedestrians, cyclists, and the mobility-impaired, and to ensure that the shops could be serviced without major disruption to neighbouring residents and businesses. All shops have level access both at the main front entrances and at the rear goods entrance doors, and the first floor areas are served by DDA compliant lifts, ensuring accessibility for wheelchair users. The new service yard also includes three disabled parking spaces intended for use by wheelchair-dependent shop workers, if required.

The rear service yard of the previous building was used for deliveries, refuse storage, and car and cycle parking, while also serving as a right-of-way to the back gardens of the adjacent cottages. Access to the yard was not controlled and as a result it became the site of unauthorised parking and a focus for vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, as well as making the cottages more vulnerable to burglary. The installation of a code-operated gate has addressed these problems and had made possible the provision of secure and covered cycle parking for staff. Residents of the adjacent cottages have retained access to the yard and can use it to take bicycles etc. through to their back gardens. There is ample space for small delivery vehicles to turn around and for a refuse vehicle to reverse in.

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