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CIVIC SOCIETY

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17.12.22

Dear Sir/Madam,

2022/08496/PA – The Ringway Centre, Smallbrook Queensway - REF 7514007

Thank you for consulting us on the above application. We OBJECT to the proposal and raise the following comments:

- 1) The Birmingham Civic Society is a whole-hearted supporter of the Ringway Centre in its historic form, and is a signatory to the open letter attached herewith. We support the proposals in *Re-Imagining Smallbrook Ringway*, also attached. Several passages are worth repeating in full:

Smallbrook Ringway Centre is one of the most striking and exceptional buildings of the era and represents a very particular response to the conditions of post war, mid-twentieth century Birmingham... Forming a central spine to James Roberts' urban ensemble, the Ringway Centre was conceived as a regional version of London's Regent Street, the first to be built along the ring road. ...Despite years of neglect, the original fabric of the building is largely intact and appears in good condition... Our proposal counters the idea that the building acts as a 'wall' or boundary between the city centre and adjacent quarters. Rather, we conceive it as a border for interaction between areas, providing new uses, amenities and connections.

We would suggest the ideal outcome for the Ringway Centre would be a sensitive refurbishment and extension, of the quality of that employed at The Rotunda, with similarly sensitive improvements to landscaping, with reactivation of the retail / commercial units at ground floor.

- 2) We thank the applicants for briefing the BCS Planning Committee on the proposals before they were submitted, but feel that amenity societies and stakeholders should be involved much earlier in the formulation of proposals, rather than a month or so before submission of the planning application, as was the case here.
- 3) The Ringway is a Grade B locally listed building. Historic England have issued a Certificate of immunity from Statutory listing, but the local listing remains. The Ringway Centre will be included on the Twentieth Century Society's Buildings at Risk List 2022/23. Demolition would be in conflict with policy TP12 'Historic environment' – "The historic environment... includes locally significant assets and their settings in addition to designated and statutorily protected features. It will be values, protected, enhanced and managed for its contribution to character, local distinctiveness and sustainability and the Council will seek to manage new developments in ways which will make a positive contribution to its character."
- 4) The Birmingham Civic Society believes that the proposed demolition of the Ringway Centre is shortsighted, will result in the loss of one of the most important buildings of the era in the City. Following the loss of similarly important buildings such as Central Library, little remains of this chapter in the city's life, and with the loss of The Ringway, Birmingham will have almost obliterated memory of this time for future generations.



- 5) Developments such as the Rotunda, designed by the same architect, demonstrate how with imagination and sensitivity, buildings of this era can be successfully rehabilitated and remain as much loved icons.
-
- 6) The comments below are given on the basis that the existing buildings are to be demolished and the comments are on the proposed development.
 - 7) The proposal is for the total demolition of the Ringway Buildings and its replacement by three residential buildings sitting on podium blocks. The Planning application is a Hybrid application for detailed permission for SBQ3 (the part of the site closest to the Bull Ring) and outline for SB1 and 2. The buildings would be on a podium which would be higher than the existing Ringway buildings. SBQ3 would be 48 floors in height, and SBQ1 and 2, 44 and 56 floors respectively. There are expired consents for two residential towers to replace SBQ1 and 2 at 9 and 26 storeys.
 - 8) It should be questioned why the applicant does not intend to develop the entire site immediately, and for what period the site will be left cleared. This may be many years, in a prime location in the city, providing an embarrassing arrival to New Street Station. It would clearly be of strategic benefit to the applicant to demolish the Ringway Centre, to prevent any future opportunity of its listing, and then to allow the site to lie fallow until such time as they can develop it.
 - 9) Heritage: Setting aside the value of the existing building, the application site is not in a Conservation Area but is within one kilometre of eight Conservation Areas; Colmore Row and Environs, Digbeth Deritend and Bordesley High Streets, Warwick Bar, Steelhouse, Edgbaston, Lee Crescent, Ryland Road and Jewellery Quarter. There are numerous listed buildings within 1 kilometre of the proposal. The proposed development will have a dramatic impact on the city skyline.
 - 10) The applicants have submitted a detailed HTVIA (Built Heritage Visual Impact Assessment) with illustrations showing the impact of the development and its impact cumulatively with other proposals planned across the City. In some cases the impact of the development does not appear detrimental. However, in our view the proposals appear to be very dominant in views from the Hippodrome and to a lesser extent from St Martin's Church (Park Street) and the views are surprisingly noticeable from Victoria Square. The applicants consider the view from St Martin's Church to be Minor-adverse, but we cannot agree with this conclusion.
 - 11) One question is how can the proposal co-exist with Cordia Blackswan's current Thorp Tower application (2022/02803/PA) for a 50-floor residential building behind SBQ1 and Scala House which the Civic Society was consulted on earlier in the year. It would also have implications for any future redevelopment of the Scala House site which is directly on the Holloway Circus Roundabout.
 - 12) The application site is in a highly sustainable location adjacent to the Core Area of Birmingham City Centre and near to the Bull Ring Shopping Centre and New Street Station, and is in the rapidly changing Southside area and close to the proposed Smithfield development area. This will ensure that development of the site will be viable – including repair and sensitive extension of the existing building.
 - 13) Policy: The main relevant policies in the adopted Birmingham Development Plan (2017) are PG1 Overall levels of growth and the need for 51,000 additional homes (2011-31), PG3 Place Making – new development should contribute to sense of place and policy GA1 for the City Centre where the City Centre is the focus for development. The Ringway proposal is in the Southside Area adjacent to the City Centre Core. New residential development is encouraged in the Southside area. We would encourage residential use, reusing or sensitively extending the existing building.
 - 14) Like many City Centre residential developments there doesn't appear to be any affordable housing and the amount of three bedroomed housing is very low 16 units representing 3% of the total units in phase one (the



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detailed application). Given the scale of the development, we would expect a significant proportion of affordable houses to provide some public benefit to weigh against its impacts.

- 15) In relation to Policy PG3 Place Making, it is noted that the rear of the exiting Ringway is a series of dead-ends and yards, however this is a product of the closure of underpasses in the original design, and subsequent development.
- 16) In relation to the three public realm improvements which are proposed Smithfield Steps, Wrottesley Steps and Hurst Plaza would reinstate the north-south links between New Street and Southside - the manner in which the existing building crosses Hurst Street demonstrates a successful strategy for its adaption to reopen these links. However it has hardly been a subject of public outcry that permeability is lacking in these areas, and improvements to permeability provide very limited public benefit to weigh against the loss of the historic building.
- 17) The Podium to the three towers attempts to replicate the sweep of the existing building along Smallbrook Queensway, but this in itself demonstrates the urban value of the existing building.
- 18) Use of the Ringway Centre has been chilled in recent years by the prospect of its demolition, and some tenants such as Fairdeal Music have relocated and remain solvent nearby. It has been suggested that the area attracts crime and is unsafe, but this lack of activation is a product of the uncertainty of the building's future. Tenants such as Snobs nightclub are extremely successful in this location. The suggestion that redevelopment would provide the activation and informal surveillance that is currently lacking is weak, since this could similarly be achieved by commitment to the existing building.
- 19) Loss of a building of this scale, which can be readily repurposed if considered thoughtfully, should not be considered in a time where as a city, Birmingham is moving towards Zero Carbon. We refer to the attached documents for thorough exploration of the impacts of redevelopment and associated policies.

In summary, we OBJECT to the application.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Vaughan RIBA AABC
Trustee and Planning Committee Applications Secretary



the
modernist



Open Letter November 2022

The Ringway Centre - Demolition v. Birmingham's Net Zero Commitment

Dear Councillor Ian Ward and WMCA Mayor Andy Street,

The Ringway Centre, by James Roberts (1962), on Smallbrook Queensway is one of the few Brutalist buildings we have left in the City. Importantly it demonstrates the unique Birmingham Brutalist style developed here in the 1960s.

The fact that the Twentieth Century Society have included the Ringway Centre in their recently published list of buildings at risk illustrates the national importance of this building. It is included in Birmingham's Local List at Grade B (2013) - 'Structures or features that are important in the city-wide architectural context or the local street scene, and warrant positive efforts to ensure their preservation.'

In an article for the Guardian (12th September, 2022), architecture critic Oliver Wainwright described Smallbrook Queensway as "one of [Birmingham's] most important buildings", concluding with the prospect that "the city could become a model of creative post-war conservation".

The environmental cost of demolition is well documented. When calculating the whole life carbon cost of a building, up to 75% is the building/construction itself. The true equation for the buildings' whole life carbon is:

Embodied Carbon + Operational Carbon + End of life (demolition/reuse/disposal) = Whole Life Carbon

To achieve net zero the city must include a proper calculation, assessment and consideration of a buildings' embodied carbon and whole life carbon in all policy and planning, including any proposed demolition.

Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority have made a number of commitments to net zero, here are a few.

"Birmingham will be "a city that takes a leading role in tackling climate change. This commitment will embed climate action in the council's decision-making process"(Council Plan 2019)

“The plan (Our Future City Plan) sets the vision for the City Centre for the next 20 years. The City Councils R20 initiative is at the heart of the plan that includes a zero-carbon approach to development”

WMCA - *“Ensure our buildings are well designed and our heritage is protected”*

“In 2021-24 we will ‘Encourage businesses in making their own premises energy efficient, in particular in retail units and office buildings” and “Reduce carbon emissions by 13% a year, and for the West Midlands to reach net zero by 2041”

The building cannot and should not remain empty. The Brutiful Birmingham column in the Birmingham Post (24th November 2022) features an alternative vision that retains this heritage building. This repurposing proposal for residential and commercial development, demonstrates how the building can be retained, the energy efficiency of the building can be brought up to current standards and space added in the form of discreet, oval, twenty storey towers that pay homage to The Rotunda (James Roberts, 1965).

We urgently call on the City Council and the WMCA to reject the proposed demolition of this building and advocate for more sympathetic repurposing respecting its heritage value and avoiding the release of large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

Catherine Croft Twentieth Century Society, Director of the Twentieth Century Society

Dr Otto Saumarez Smith Chair of the Twentieth Century Society Casework Committee, Assistant Professor in Architectural History, University of Warwick

Michael Dring The Birmingham Modernist, Senior Lecturer, Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU. Founder of Birmingham Modernist Society

Mary Keating Brutiful Birmingham. Founder of Brutiful Birmingham, Author of *Birmingham – The Brutiful Years*

John Christophers Zero Carbon House

Richard Sapcote Birmingham Civic Society, Chair of the Planning Committee

Matthew Vaughan Birmingham Civic Society Planning Committee

Simon Sturgis AADip RIBA Targeting Zero

Steve Tompkins MBE - HaworthTompkins.(Architects)

Peter St John partner Caruso St John, for and on behalf of Caruso St John Architects LLP

Níall McLaughlin, Níall McLaughlin Architects

Sara Edmonds, ACAN (Architects Climate Action Network) coordinator, Studio seARCH

Andy Foster author, *Birmingham and Black Country Pevsner*

Professor Carl Chinn MBE, Ph.D., F.Birm.Soc. Historian of Birmingham

Libby Harris, Birmingham Friends of the Earth

Imandeep Kaur, Co-founder and director, Civic Square

Dr Matthew Jones Head of the Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU

Prof Rachel Sara Oscar Naddermier Professor of Architecture and Research

Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU

Henrietta Billings SAVE Britain's Heritage

John Forrest (Working Party Chair, Docomomo UK)

Philip Boyle (Co-ordinator, Docomomo UK)

Tom Cordell Docomomo UK

Elain Harwood, author of *Brutalist Britain*

Adrian Jones, member of CABE's national Design Review Panel. Author of *Towns in Britain & Cities of the North*.

Chris Matthews, Conservation Officer for Nottingham City Council Author of *Towns in Britain, Cities of the North and Homes & Places*.

Owen Hatherley, writer, culture editor of *Tribune*'

Sean Burns artist, assistant editor *frieze*

Christopher Beanland author of *The Wall in The Head, Concrete Concept - Brutalist Buildings Around the World* and presenter of Park Date podcast

Oliver Wainwright writer and Guardian architecture and design correspondent

Barnabas Calder, author of *Architecture: From Prehistory to Climate Emergency* (Pelican, 2021), Trustee of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain.

Sarah Ahluwalia daughter of James Roberts

Re-Imagining Smallbrook Ringway

A Counter-Proposal for Adaptive Re-use

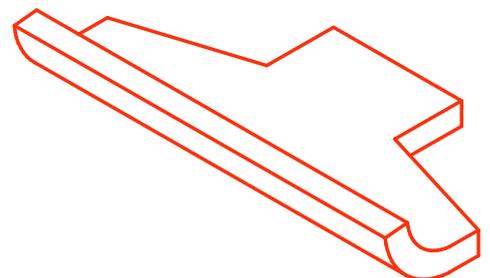


Prepared by Brutiful Birmingham,
Birmingham Modernist Society,
Zero Carbon House with the support of
C20 Society

December 2022



Smallbrook Ringway Centre shortly after opening in 1960, before the pedestrian subway to Hurst Street was removed.

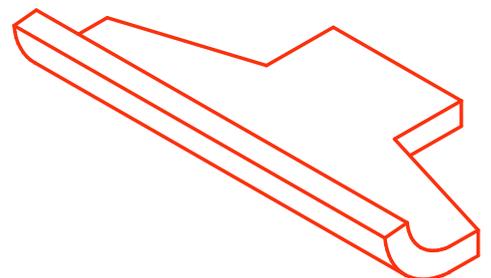


Re-Imagining Smallbrook Ringway

A Counter-Proposal for Adaptive Re-use

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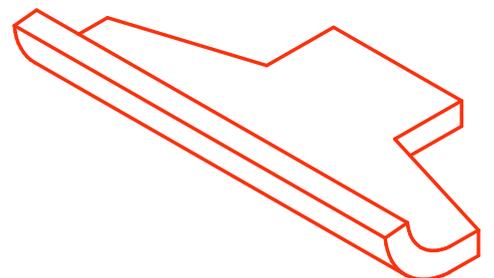
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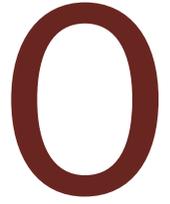
“Two thirds of people in UK want action now to save the planet”. Creative and accountable reuse of existing buildings is one of the most tangible ways of achieving this.

“There needs to be a total shift in mindset and culture – a shift from an extractive, degenerative, linear mindset to a regenerative, circular, low carbon mind set.”

Source: UK Architects Declare Practice Guide (2021)



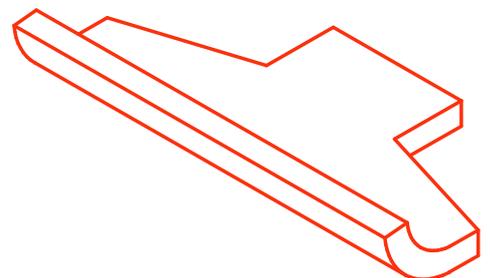
Introduction



This document has been prepared to supplement the open letter of December 2022, and is the result of work by Brutiful Birmingham, Birmingham Modernist Society, Zero Carbon House, C20 Society in consultation with others.

The counter-proposal is intended to encourage debate about the historic built environment in Birmingham, a city that has been synonymous with progress at numerous points in its history. Birmingham once again finds itself at moment of dramatic and profound change, raising urgent questions about the social and environmental sustainability of development, as well as the ongoing dialogue around modernist heritage. The city has lost too many important buildings of this era, and we believe that to reimagine Smallbrook Queensway would establish a global example of responsible stewardship of the built environment. In an article for the Guardian (12th September, 2022), architecture critic Oliver Wainwright raised the prospect that “the city could become a model of creative postwar conservation”.

The counter-proposal consists of the open letter, this document which includes indicative illustrations for the retention and extension of the existing building along with commentary by the group and photographs. It was also the subject of an article in the Birmingham Post (24th November 2022). Of course, there are many options available for the creative and responsible reuse of existing buildings such as this. The group has not been paid or appointed by others to prepare this information. No consultation has taken place with the City’s planning department at this stage. The proposals have not been subject to a development appraisal and would require substantial further work and consultation. However, the proposals have been prepared in good faith with civic and commercial interests in mind in the duty of heritage principles along with social and environmental sustainability.



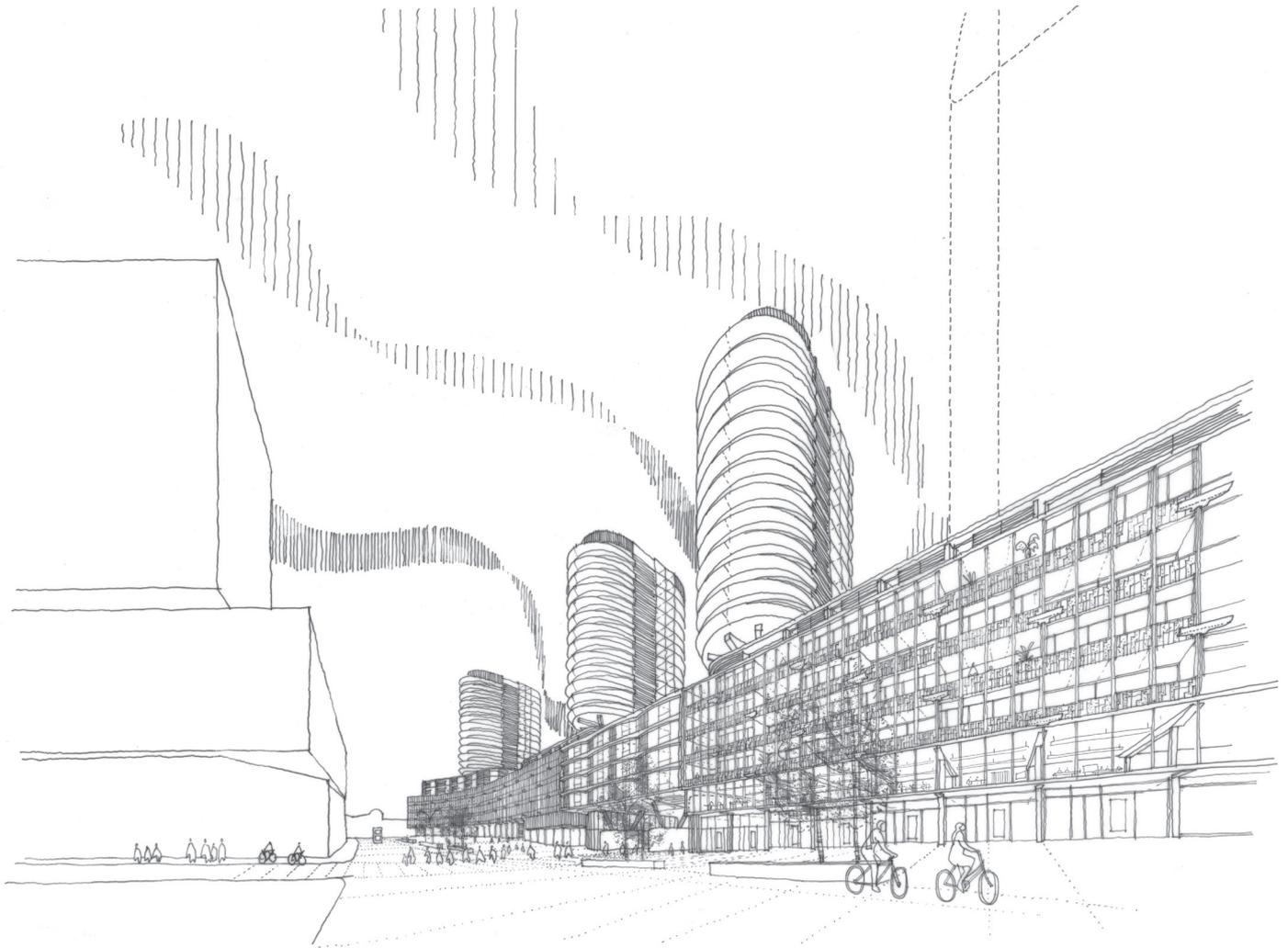
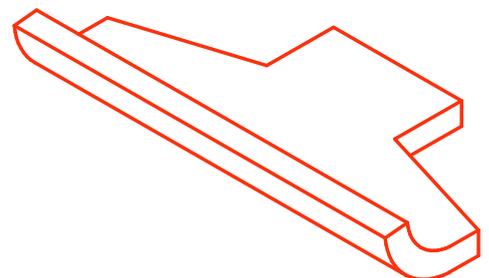


Illustration of the counter-proposal looking towards Hurst Street from Suffolk Street Queensway.

“The city could become a model of creative postwar conservation”

architecture critic Oliver Wainwright In an article for the Guardian (12th September, 2022)



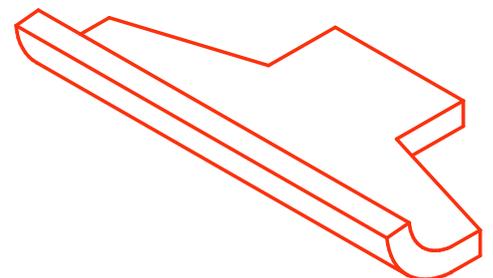
Architectural & Urban Principles of the Counter-Proposal

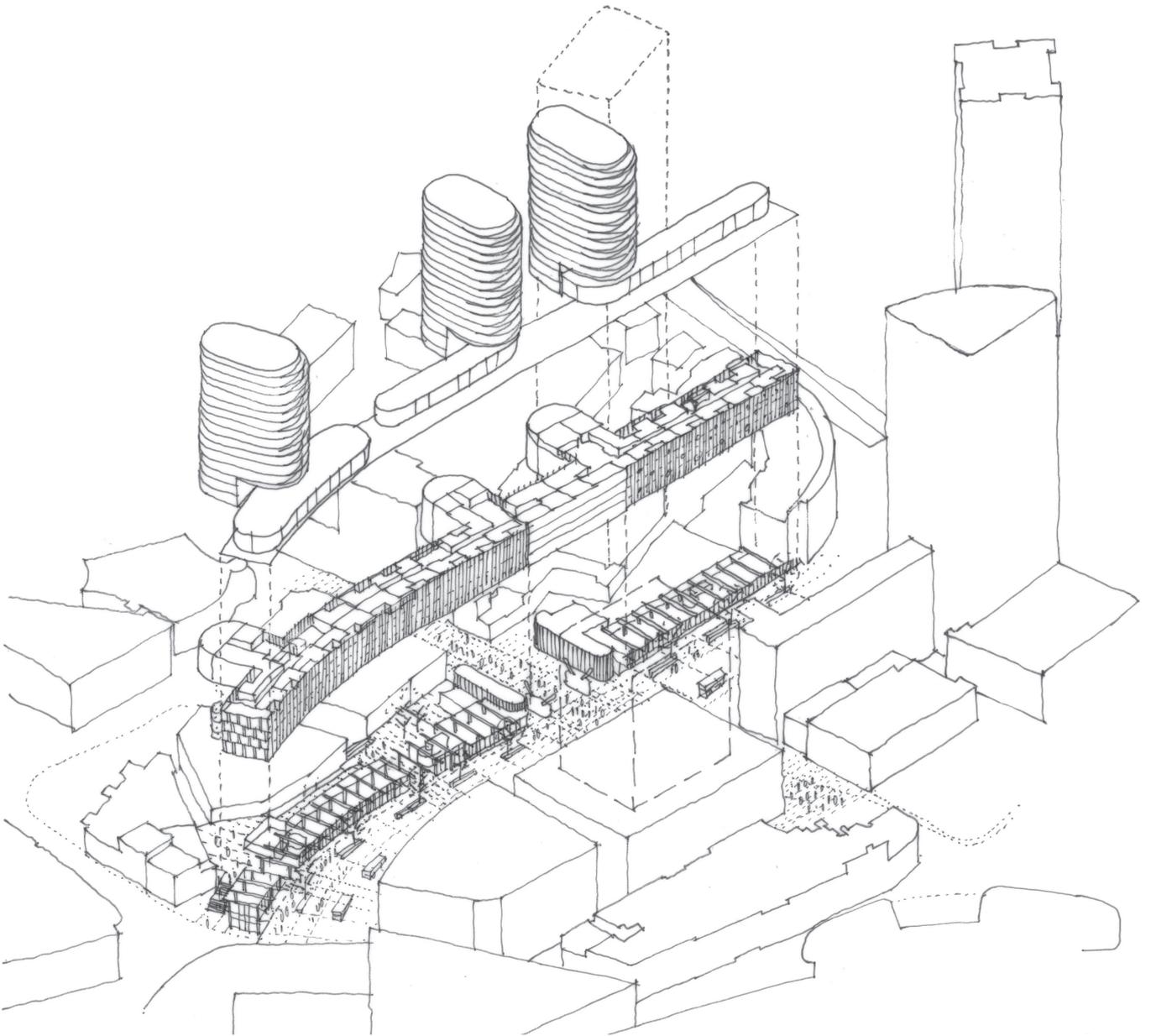
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Smallbrook Ringway Centre is one of the most striking and exceptional buildings of the era and represents a very particular response to the conditions of post-war, mid twentieth century Birmingham. Built between 1958 and 1960, it was one of a number of buildings which addressed the need for renewal according to changing patterns in living, mobility and the application of new technologies. The city had long been blighted by traffic, and the inner ring road and accompanying development of its margins was seen as a necessary measure. Forming a central spine to James Roberts' urban ensemble¹, the Ringway Centre was conceived as a regional version of London's Regent Street, the first to be built along the ring road. Forming one whole side of the street, the building's horizontal articulation and lively patterned façade reflected the dynamic movement of the road, providing retail destinations along its length with offices over. Despite years of neglect, the original fabric of the building is largely intact and appears in good condition. Of particular note are the cast concrete light sconces, spandrel panels and close centred vertical mullions that recall the *art brut* and *op art* movements.

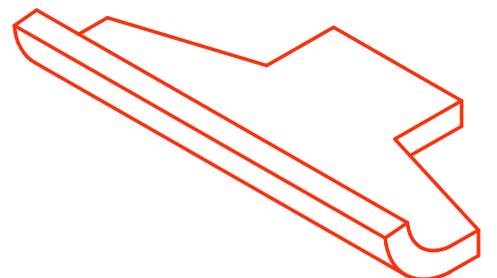
Our proposal counters the idea that the building acts as a "wall" or boundary between the city centre and adjacent quarters. Rather, we conceive it as a border for interaction between areas, providing new uses, amenities and connections. This aligns with the City's Birmingham Design Guide: Healthy Living and Working Places City Manual (2022). At ground level, we propose a reordering of Smallbrook Queensway and Hurst Street to provide more accessible space for pedestrians and cycleways in a landscaped street, linking through the block to Dudley Street and Wrottesley Street via reinstated accessible passages lost during the original development. Double height retail units with contemporary frontages make use of the vertical depth of the site with further basements available for car parking and cycle storage, though given the sites proximity to a range of transport options we would advocate for minimal parking provision. The dramatic bridging to Hurst Street is reimagined with new ground floor frontages that replace the ad-hoc additions, creating a sense of location and a gateway to the Gay Village and Chinese Quarter beyond.

¹ Roberts also designed the two 32 storey towers the Sentinels (1968-71), Bethel Presbyterian Church of Wales (1968), the adjoining Scala House (1962-64), the Albany Hotel (1962) opposite, and the nearby Rotunda (1965).





Axonometric Illustration of the counter-proposal.



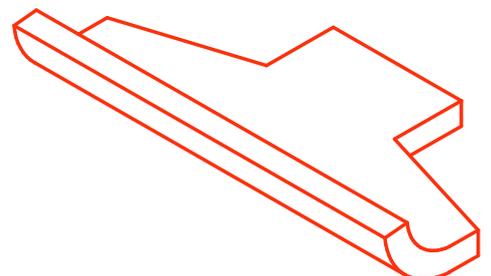
Architectural & Urban Principles of the Counter-Proposal

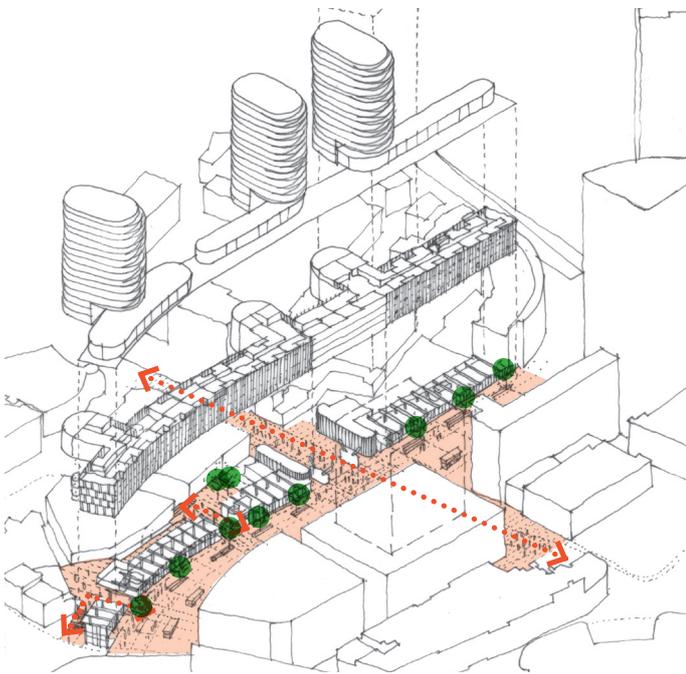
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At the heart of the counter proposal is a change of use to residential apartments ². By reusing the existing upper four floors and creating three new towers behind and over, we envisage around 450 apartments of varying types and size, accessed from four entrances from Smallbrook Queensway. By retaining as much of the existing fabric as feasibly possible, and working with existing floor levels and circulation, our scheme reinforces the spatial and material qualities of the building whilst retaining the embodied carbon of the existing structure.

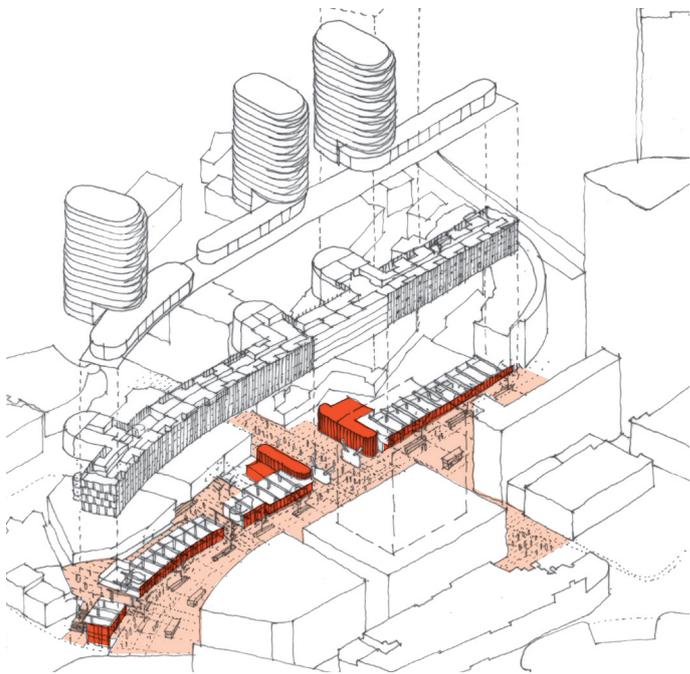
The principles are discussed in further detail in section 3, but our proposal advocates consideration of the whole life energy efficiency of overall building, through improved façade performance, the avoidance of high-embodied-carbon materials such as aluminium, and the provision of a layered façade to control the interior environment through balconies and winter gardens to apartments. The towers are kept to 20 storeys both on grounds of construction and structural efficiency and to promote social cohesion – the taller the residential building the more difficult it becomes to build and maintain a sense of community. Our scheme also takes account of the city centre location and it's available social infrastructure, countering what we believe to be overdevelopment in the submitted scheme. The diagrams on the following pages outline these main principles.

² The principles of residential accommodation would be designed to meet and exceed nationally described space standards (2015).

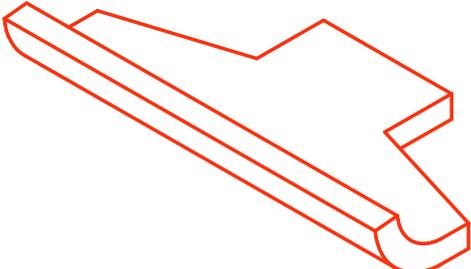




New passages provide accessible routes from a landscaped Smallbrook Queensway through the existing ground floor to Dudley Street and Wrottesley Street, with Hurst Street prioritised as a pedestrian link to New Street Station and Victoria Square beyond.

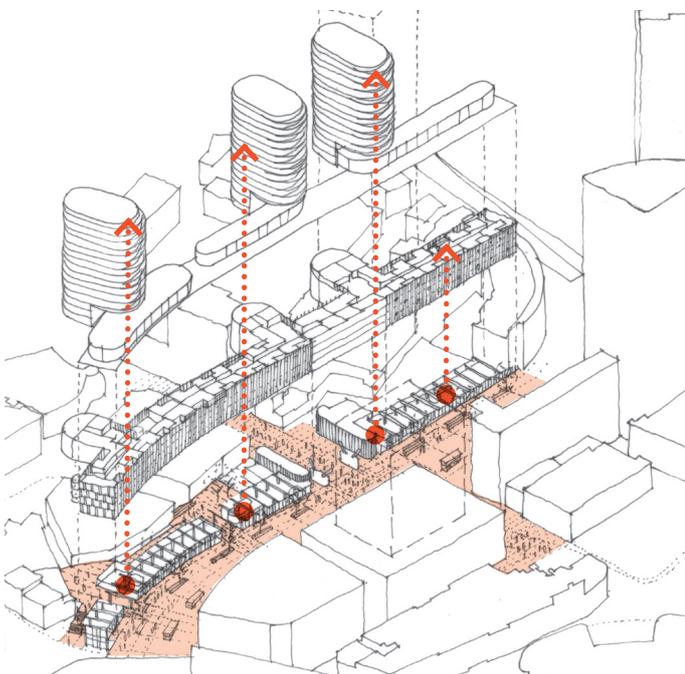


Smallbrook Queensway and the junction to Hurst Street is reanimated with new commercial frontages.

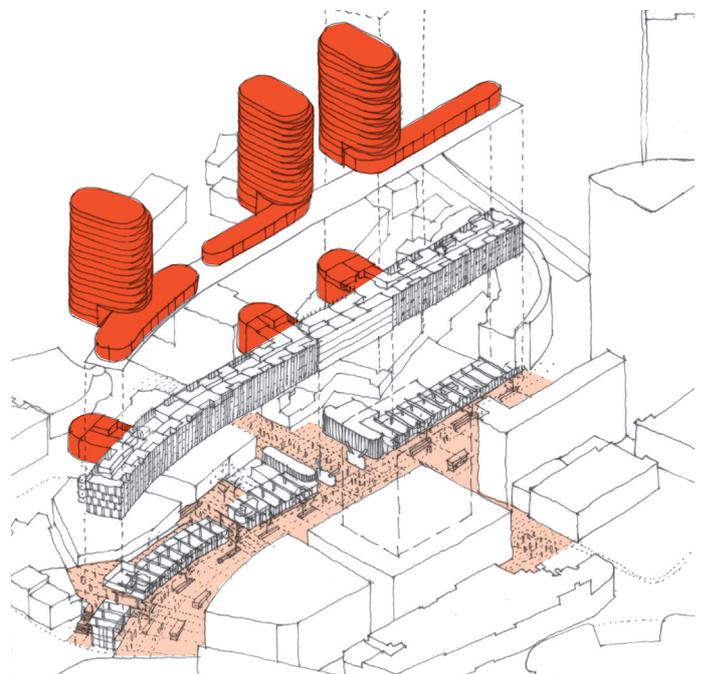


Architectural & Urban Principles of the Counter-Proposal

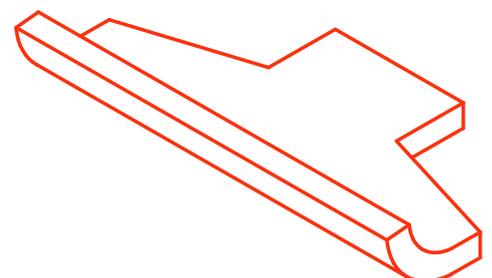
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Residential entrances line a reanimated Smallbrook Queensway, where possible reusing existing lift and staircores, to link to the towers which rise behind the existing building.



Three new residential towers rise behind the existing building, which together with two storey rooftop extensions provide around 450 apartments.

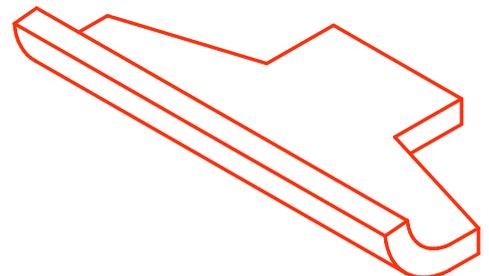




David Rowan ©

“The best piece of mid-C20 urban design in the city”

Andy Foster in *Birmingham Pevsner* (2005, p.201)



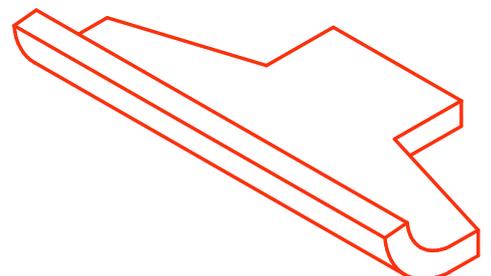
The Twentieth Century Society have provided the following assessment of Smallbrook Ringway;

“The Ringway Centre is a very important part of the post-war cityscape of Birmingham. It is an impressive Brutalist building and historically significant as the first part of the post-war inner ring road development. Its inclusion on Birmingham’s local list and identification as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset is recognition of its heritage value. Great weight should be given to its conservation of the Ringway as a unique heritage asset.

The Ringway Centre will be included on the Twentieth Century Society’s Buildings at Risk list for 2022/23 which is a campaign that receives national press attention. The Society has long considered the building to be a major post-war building in Birmingham and continues to strongly oppose proposals for its demolition.”

C20 Society cite several paragraphs from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) along with the Birmingham Development Plan (BCC, 2017) in support of their assessment. These are included in Appendix 1.

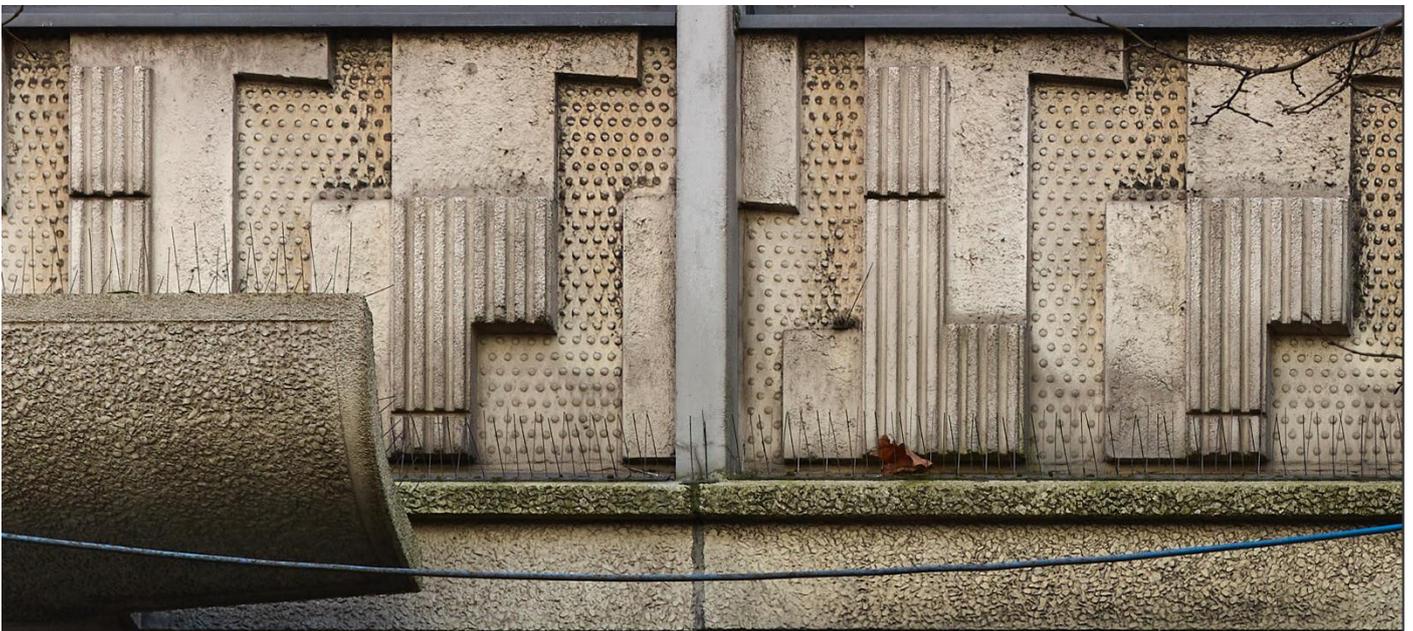
Additionally, the building has received many plaudits over its lifetime, these are included in Appendix 2.



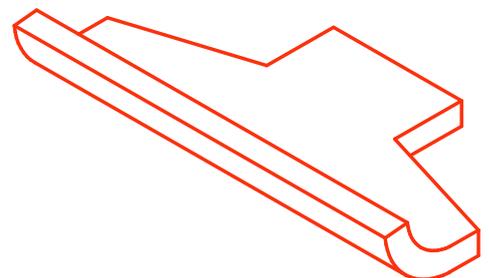
“In the UK, 49% of annual carbon emissions are attributable to buildings.”

“A significant portion of the built environment in 2050 (c. 80 percent) already exists and will need an equal amount of attention by the industry, in order to fulfil our responsibility towards the climate emergency”.

Source: LETI (London Energy Transformation Initiative) *Climate Emergency Design Guide*



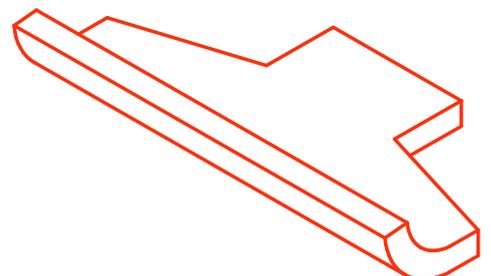
David Rowan ©



Until recently, the conservation of architecture was based upon aesthetic and historical aspects of a building alone. Buildings were valued on the basis of their appearance and their history. These aspects themselves were narrowly defined. Firstly, for a building to qualify for conservation it had to be designed in a “high art” manner: vernacular buildings did not qualify. Secondly, to qualify for conservation, the older the better: only fairly recently did mid-20th century buildings come to be considered for statutory listing. Both of these aspects have since become considerably wider in their scope. Smallbrook Queensway is now locally listed as a significant heritage asset; therefore City policy is for it to be “valued, protected, enhanced” as its contribution to local distinctiveness and character is widely recognised and documented.

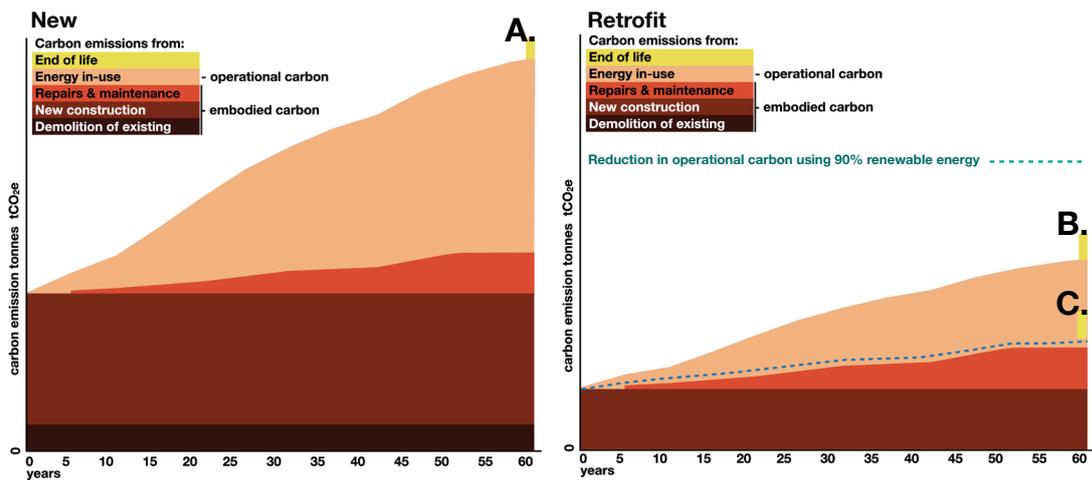
The climate emergency has introduced a radical new criterion for architectural conservation: carbon retention. The demolition of an existing building and its replacement by a new building both release large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. Buildings and construction are responsible for 49% of UK CO₂ emissions. As a result, there is an increasing demand that existing buildings be retained and repurposed, rather than be replaced. The Architects’ Journal *RetroFirst* campaign cites former AIA president Carl Elefante’s statement that “The greenest building is the one that already exists”, exemplifying this demand.

The planned replacement for the Smallbrook Ringway building with three very tall towers has two features which particularly disqualify it in terms of carbon emissions. One is the huge amounts of excavation which the three towers would necessitate. Excavation, the accompanying large amounts of steel and concrete used in the foundations, and the tanking of the excavated surfaces, rates extremely highly in terms of carbon emissions. The other feature is the three tall towers themselves (44, 48 and 56 storeys), both in terms of the energy- consuming materials required to construct them, and in terms of their energy consumption in use.



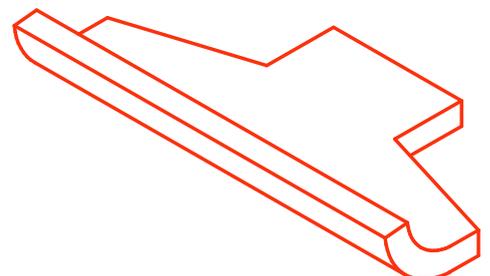
The true equation for the building's whole life carbon is:
 Embodied carbon +
 Operational carbon +
 End of life (demolition/reuse/disposal) =
 Whole Life Carbon.

Smallbrook Ringway: carbon emissions over 60 years



- A. Planning application: demolition and new construction to Building Regulations.**
- B. Counter-proposal: energy-efficient retrofit with extensions and alterations.**
- C. As B with renewables supplying 90% of operational energy.**

Indicative illustrations of the cumulative carbon emissions over 60 years. The counter-proposal retrofit (B) is likely to have much lower carbon carbon emissions than demolition and new buildings (A). When coupled with renewable energy (C), whole-life carbon could be further reduced to a small fraction of (A). Note these comparisons are indicative, and require verification with a detail scheme, but show the significantly reduced carbon emissions inherent in a low-energy retrofit.

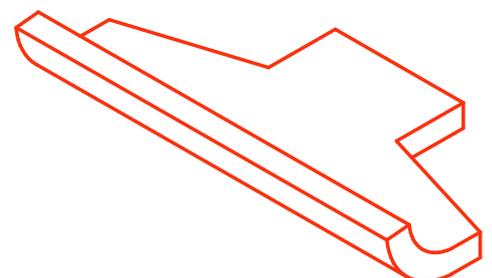


Tall buildings are disproportionately inefficient in their use of resources, when compared to lower ones. Firstly, the taller the building, the more concrete and steel is needed per square metre of floorspace provided. The manufacture of concrete and steel generates huge amounts of carbon. Secondly, the taller the building, the greater is the consumption of electricity per square metre of floorspace. Buildings over 20 storeys high can consume 2.5 times more electricity per unit of floorspace than a seven-storey building.

The proposed demolition is inconsistent with national and local policies. *Birmingham Development Plan* targets 60% carbon reduction by 2027 - ahead of Government plans - and therefore rightly requires “the highest sustainability standards” including carbon reduction. In particular, the Plan supports “initiatives and opportunities to mitigate the effects of climate change by seeking the reuse of historic buildings ... to reduce carbon emissions and secure sustainable development”. National Planning Policy (NPPF) also requires “radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions” through “the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings”. Best practice recommendations align with and reinforce these policies.

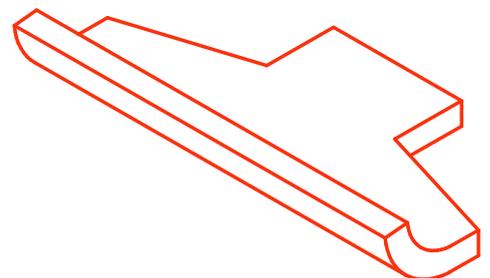
Examples include the LETI *Climate Emergency Design Guide*'s first “primary action”, to “build less”, asking “is a new building necessary”? LETI's *Embodied Carbon Primer* prioritises “making use of the site and retrofitting existing buildings rather than building anew.”

Policies and recognised standards cover all carbon emissions, both “operational” (day-to-day energy use) and “embodied” (construction including materials, transport, maintenance, repair, etc). The true equation for the building's whole life carbon is: Embodied carbon + Operational carbon + End of life (demolition/reuse/disposal) = Whole Life Carbon. As the graphs above demonstrate, up to 75% of the whole life carbon impact of a building can be the embodied carbon in the building/construction itself. When this is properly included, demolition and extensive new construction are revealed as particularly damaging, as they would both cause large and immediate “spikes” in carbon emissions. Far from reducing carbon, as City and UK policy requires in the next few years, the proposals would result in a significant increase in emissions.



“What is at issue at this public inquiry in 2022 is, are we acting as if there is a [climate] emergency? In my view, throwing a huge carbon bomb unnecessarily into the atmosphere – as this project proposes to do – is definitely not acting like there is an emergency. It misunderstands the urgency of our situation. What the science tells us is that what we do in the next eight years is critical.”

Julia Barfield, Public Inquiry into demolition and replacement of M&S building, Oxford Street, November 2022.



An energy-efficient comprehensive retrofit of the Ringway buildings would be significantly lower carbon than the proposed demolition and new building. Retrofit of the existing building could still achieve energy performance better than Building Regulations standards. The counter-proposal demonstrates that retrofit would not preclude significant extension, if required. In contrast with imaginative deep retrofit of these heritage buildings, wholesale demolition and rebuilding - even to BREEAM standards - would represent “business as usual”: a wholly inadequate response to climate targets and policy. The UN Secretary General said recently “we are on a highway to climate hell, with our foot still on the accelerator”. The counter-proposal signposts another way forwards for this unique area of Birmingham.

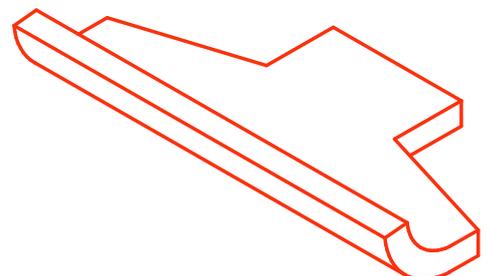
So in summary, both of the criteria that demand a conservation approach to development – the architectural/historic quality criterion, and the new carbon criterion – are met in the case of the Ringway building counter-plan. In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that there is also a third argument for the building’s retention and conversion. Just as we require a stable temperature on earth in order to sustain human life, currently threatened by global warming, there is evidence to show that a stable physical environment is also necessary to sustain a stable existence. An environment which is constantly in flux, which Birmingham’s physical form notoriously is, is more likely to produce alienation in those who live inside it. Physical stability has its correlation in psychological stability.



John Christophers ©

Ringway from the north, looking south down Hurst Street towards the Hippodrome.

The “Rainbow Bridge” to the LGBTQ+ & Chinese Quarters frames the existing pedestrian and cycle routes with a thoughtfully conceived gateway. The counter-proposal includes new ground floor uses to replace the ad-hoc additions. The existing building does not block this important route, but celebrates it with a vibrant piece of city.



Appendix 1

Policy and Guidance for the Historic Environment that informed Twentieth Century Society Assessment

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) includes;

- Paragraph 189: 'Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance [...] These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.'
- Paragraph 197: 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'
- Paragraph 203: 'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'
- Paragraph 152: 'The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate [...] It should help to [...] encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings'.

Birmingham Development Plan (2017). Chapter 6, 'Environment and sustainability', TP12 'Historic environment':

- 'The historic environment [...] includes locally significant assets and their settings in addition to designated and statutorily protected features. It will be valued, protected, enhanced and managed for its contribution to character, local distinctiveness and sustainability and the Council will seek to manage new development in ways which will make a positive contribution to its character.'
- 'Initiatives and opportunities to mitigate the effects of climate change by seeking the reuse of historic buildings, and where appropriate, their modification to reduce carbon emissions and secure sustainable development - without harming the significance of the heritage asset or its setting - will be supported.'
- 'Innovative design which retains the significance of the heritage asset(s) and is integrated with the historic environment will be encouraged.'

The Ringway Centre is a Non-Designated Heritage Asset of high significance and great weight should be given to its conservation. There should be a strong presumption against demolition.

Appendix 2

Published Texts on Smallbrook Ringway Centre

The building was and continues to be highly reviewed in newspapers, architectural publications and in discussions about modern architecture:

- In an episode of Front Row on BBC Radio 4 focusing on Brutalist architecture (25/10/2022) John Grindrod – the architectural historian and author of *Concretopia* and *Iconicon* – spoke of his admiration for the Ringway as part of a post-war 'landscape', built up around the inner ring road by a local architect. Grindrod declared 'I think it's an amazing building', with 'interesting details' and sense of 'fun' to the design.
- Owen Hatherley's *Modern Buildings in Britain* (2022, p.311) notes that the building's "terrific, sweeping curve conveys an excitement to the pedestrian as well as the driver, with a rhythm of abstract concrete reliefs and Corbusian bullhorn canopies, as the cars charge down towards tunnels and overpasses beyond", highlighting its metropolitan character.
- In an article for the Guardian (12th September, 2022), architecture critic Oliver Wainwright described Smallbrook Queensway as "one of [Birmingham's] most important buildings", concluding with the prospect that "the city could become a model of creative postwar conservation".
- In *Public Ways, Private Means: James A. Roberts, J. L. Godfrey and speculative development along Birmingham's Ringway 1956-64*, architectural historian Geraint Franklin singles the Ringway Centre out as a major building in the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham and important piece of 'carchitecture', enjoyed by pedestrians and motorists alike (Twentieth Century Architecture, Vol. 14, 2020).
- According to Dr Elaine Harwood (architectural historian and senior architectural investigator at Historic England), Roberts pioneered British commercial Brutalism at Smallbrook Ringway (original name of the building), placing it amongst some of the most important post-war buildings in Britain. In her seminal book *Space, Hope and Brutalism* (2015, p.323), Harwood noted that the "ribbon-like" building had been "described as 'the longest shopping frontage in the country' and an early example of a speculative modernism whose 'op art' textures easily admitted signage, window displays and frequent alteration."

- Adrian Jones and Chris Matthews's *Towns in Britain* (2014, p.64) state that Smallbrook Queensway is "by far the best" section of the Inner Ring Road scheme, noting that "it was conceived as a boulevard rather than a motorway and is on a grand scale with arcaded shops". They add; "the careful massing of the blocks, the subtle curve of the street and the deeply modelled facades with super trough uplighters make this an underappreciated masterclass in urban design."
- Andy Foster's *Birmingham Pevsner* (2005, p.201) highlights Smallbrook Queensway as "the best piece of mid-C20 urban design in the city", designed on a "grand urban scale, and a good balance between thin concrete mullions, bands of windows, and relief panels. Projecting concrete trough uplighters give it excellent relief".
- Ian Nairn's essay on Birmingham in his *Nairn's Towns* (1967, republished 2013, p.5) noted that "there are not nearly enough architects like Mr Roberts, particularly in the provinces, and he does much more than produce projects with ideas. The best building besides the ring road, the Ringway Centre, is his. To go and have a look at the delicate yet strong details of the concrete piers and beams that carry the Centre over Hurst Street is an education in what modern architecture could and should mean but so rarely does". (See also 'Britain's Changing Towns 1: Birmingham' in *The Listener*, 20 June 1960).
- In an *Architectural Review* article, *Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester* (August 1960), Nairn wrote that "The sum of rebuilding in the three largest English provincial cities [ie., Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester] is just two decent big buildings – Ringway Centre in Birmingham and Albert Bridge House in Manchester [...] the one really hopeful building in Birmingham is Ringway Centre [...] the total effect, easily apparent here, is to create a wall with gates in.'
- The *Daily News London* (22 September 1960) described the then new Ringway as 'good [...] imaginative design with tidy street manners'. And the *Birmingham Daily Post* (25 August 1960) wrote that it was 'the most important factor in the new Birmingham of which Smallbrook is such a promising example'.

Appendix 3

Selected References on Carbon and the UK Built Environment

ACAN Architects Climate Action Network. The carbon footprint of construction
https://www.architectscan.org/_files/ugd/b22203_c17af553402146638e9bc877101630f3.pdf?index=true

Architects Declare Practice Guide (2021)
https://www.architectsdeclare.com/uploads/AD-Practice-Guide-2021-v1_3.pdf

Architects' Journal RetroFirst campaign
<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/retrofirst>

IPCC. Sixth Assessment Report: Mitigation of Climate Change
<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/>

LETI Low Energy Transformation Initiative. Climate Emergency Design Guide
<https://www.leti.london/cedg>

LETI Low Energy Transformation Initiative. LETI Embodied Carbon Primer
https://b80d7a04-1c28-45e2-b904-e0715cface93.filesusr.com/ugd/252d09_8ceffcbaafdb43cf8a19ab9af5073b92.pdf

RIBA Royal Institute of British Architects. Embodied and whole life carbon assessment for architects
<https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/whole-life-carbon-assessment-for-architects>

RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge (2021)

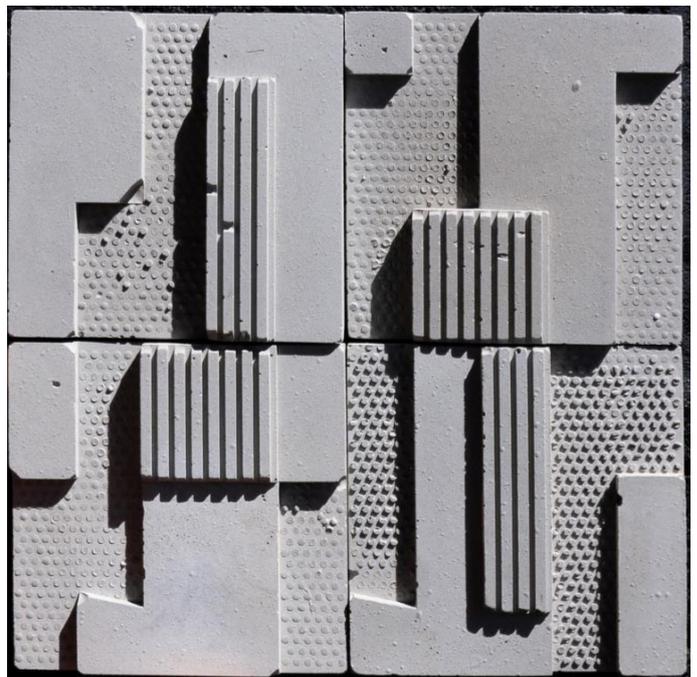
<https://www.architecture.com/-/media/files/Climate-action/RIBA-2030-Climate-Challenge.pdf>

Save Britain's Heritage. Evidence presented to Public Inquiry, Marks & Spencer Oxford Street
November 2022

<https://www.savebritainsheritage.org/news/item/837/SAVE-Britains-Heritage-Evidence-Documents-MS-Inquiry-October-2022>

United Nations. Secretary-General's remarks to High-Level opening of COP27 07 November 2022

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-11-07/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-opening-of-cop27>



Cast tiles based on the facade of Smallbrook Ringway by Birmingham creative studio Spaceplay. The studio has an international reach and Smallbrook is widely celebrated as an icon of modernist architecture. © Spaceplay



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