

Architects and engineers behind RMC HQ rally on listing bid

3 JUNE, 2014 | BY LAURA MARK

Ted Cullinan and previous employees of the practice who worked on the award-winning headquarters of Ready Mix Concrete (RMC) building have rallied together in an attempt to save it from demolition



Last night (2 June), architects and engineers who designed and delivered the ground-breaking office complex in Surrey said they were 'surprised' and 'shocked' at the decision to demolish the scheme which only completed in 1990.

Backed by the Twentieth Century Society, Cullinan has applied to have the 24-year-old green-roofed office complex listed to halt its replacement by a Barton Willmore-designed housing development.

Richard Gooden, now a director at 4orm who worked on the RMC HQ project whilst at Cullinan Studios, called for the building to be preserved. He said: 'It is a really important piece of work. The project showed innovation of both landscape and space. It should be preserved.'

While Miriam Fitzpatrick, now a lecturer at University College Dublin who worked on the RMC building while completing her Part III at Cullinan Studios, said the building should be opened again to the public.

'It should be kept for the incredible language of a building in the landscape. This was not often on the agenda of many architects working in the 1980s', she added.

The architects were supported by engineers who had also worked on the scheme.

Engineer Max Fordham heralded the scheme as an 'exemplar of sustainability'. He said: 'The RMC HQ is one of the first single storey office buildings. This enabled it to be naturally lit. Half the energy of a modern office building goes into lighting. This was also one of the first modern offices to not need air conditioning. It is an exemplar for the future.'

Ian Craig, who worked as a structural engineer on the project, added: 'It is a totally original project and you don't get many like that.'

Speaking about the scheme, as he described the building with his trademark sketches, Cullinan said the building was a 'fantastic opportunity'. He added: 'For two years after the building was finished RMC showed people around the building's gardens at weekends. This is the kind of spirit we want to recover.'

If Cullinan's listing bid is successful it will become one of the rare 1990s-built buildings to be listed. Just 0.2 per cent of listed buildings were constructed post-1945.

The single-storey office building is regarded as one of the practice's most important works and set a precedent for low-energy, ecological building design.

FURTHER COMMENTS

Sunand Prasad, co-founder, Penoyre and Prasad

'The decision to list the building will be about influence. Listing is the only way to save buildings like this.'

'If there is a third industrial revolution based on natural systems, then this building is an early essay in how we can solve the problems of the future. It has inspired people.'

'The building suffers from a lack of patronage. There is nobody speaking up from the client side. There isn't a client in support of the building. The client is embarrassed they have a building which is good and different and not like all other office buildings. We need to speak up for the building.'

Chris Twinn, ex-Arup and founder of TwinnSustainabilityInnovation

'This was an eye-opener of a building. You suddenly realised you didn't need all the mechanical services.'

Greg Penoyre, co-founder, Penoyre and Prasad

'We are all supposed to think of Google's offices as clever, but this is much, much cleverer. It creates a whole range of places for reflection. As a workplace it is special and so difficult to repeat.'

'But the building is due for a change. It strikes me that it is exactly how it was when it began but the gardens have the potential to be much richer.'

'This is a rare workplace – a place of reflection. Places like this are needed for serious study. It would make a fantastic university building.'

Previous story (AJ 30.05.14)

Big names throw weight behind RMC HQ listing bid

Ex-RIBA president Sunand Prasad has joined the names backing the campaign to list one of his Ted Cullinan's award-winning projects and save it from demolition

Last month the Twentieth Century Society announced it had written to English Heritage in support of Cullinan's own application to have the Ready Mix Concrete International HQ in Surrey listed. The 24-year-old green-roofed office complex, which sits within the grounds of an early eighteenth century house, is set to be replaced by a Barton Willmore-designed housing development.

Now a gaggle of leading lights have also pledged their support including Brian Ford from the University of Nottingham, Peter Clegg of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, Thomas Randall, a retired professor at Kingston University and John Worthington, a co-founder, DEGW and director of The Academy of Urbanism.

In his rallying call Prasad - a former Ted Cullinan employee - described the building as highly influential and a pioneer of sustainable architecture.

His letter to English Heritage (*see attached*) Prasad said: 'The RMC building, designed after I left the practice, has always stood out for me as being a quite exceptional contribution to the evolution of architecture in England with an influence further afield.'

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The single-storey office building which was completed in 1990 is regarded as one of the practice's most important works and set a precedent for low-energy, ecological building design.

The project, which won an RIBA Award in the same year is set to be pulled down and replaced by terraced housing. Plans were lodged in December for the new scheme by the site's owner Cemex.

Postscript

The Twentieth Century Society is hosting a talk by Ted Cullinan followed by a discussion about the demolition threat to the Ready Mix Concrete Headquarters (now Cemex House) in Surrey next week.

The event will be held at Cullinan Studio, 5 Baldwin Terrace, London N1 7RU (near Angel tube) on 2 June 2014, between 6.30pm - 8.30pm.

Tickets: £5.00 in advance www.c20society.org.uk.

Previous story (AJ 07.04.14)

C20 Society backs calls to list Cullinan-designed office

The Twentieth Century Society has backed Ted Cullinan's campaign to list one of his award-winning projects in a bid to stop it from being demolished

The society has written to English Heritage in support of Cullinan's application to have the Ready Mix Concrete International HQ in Surrey listed. The 24-year-old green-roofed office complex, which sits within the grounds of an early

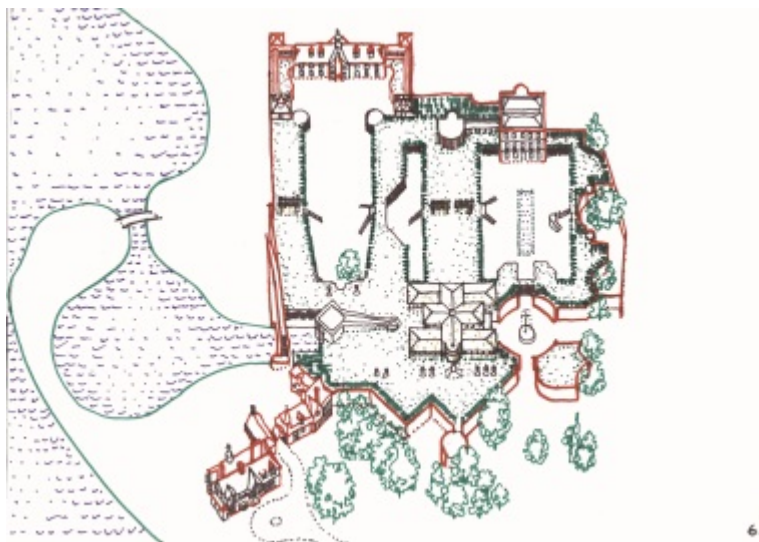
eighteenth century house, is set to be replaced by a Barton Willmore-designed housing development.

Henrietta Billings, senior conservation adviser at the Twentieth Century Society, said: 'This award-winning office complex deserves to be listed. It is an innovative response to a very sensitive setting - a remarkable design that manages to make the offices almost vanish into their roof garden and courtyard enclosures'

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Previous story (AJ 07.4.14)

Cullinan-designed office faces demolition

Ted Cullinan has attempted to stop the demolition of one his RIBA award-winning projects by applying to get it listed

Plans have been revealed which could see the Ready Mix Concrete International HQ in Surrey (pictured) pulled down and replaced with terraced housing.

In an attempt to halt the building's demolition Cullinan Studio has submitted a listing application to English Heritage. If successful it will become one of the rare nineties-built buildings to be listed. Just 0.2 per cent of listed buildings were constructed post-1945.

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one of the practice's most important works and set a precedent for low-energy, ecological building design.

The building was sold to cement company Cemex in 2005, which commissioned the feasibility study to demolish the office complex.

COMMENT FROM TED CULLINAN

The Ready Mix Concrete (RMC) Headquarters Building is the building in which the ideas that have always interested and inspired me are most thoroughly combined in a single work.

Its setting is an historic one, of one early eighteenth century house, its nineteenth century stable block and a nineteenth century half-timbered and gabled house typical of the Thames Valley. All had been more or less wrecked with additions over the years.

We restored the three houses and re-set the first two in courtyards generated from the width of their classical frontages; these courtyards being made out of new office, social and sports accommodation for RMC. The half-timbered Arts and Crafts house was left more freestanding, only loosely connected to the other accommodation and used for training.

The new accommodation makes the garden courts and has gardens on top of it which fulfil 3 functions: they contribute to the super insulation of the buildings and the temperature flywheel effect; they can be enjoyed by the occupants; and they provide a good view from neighbouring St Anne's Hill as asked for by the local people and planners. So the whole scheme allowed me the great pleasure of seamlessly continuing the landscape, gardening and building, a thing I'd always longed to do.

Before RMC I had done many buildings which were well insulated, passive solar and so on; but RMC was the first which combined heavy heat-storing roofs, high insulation and underfloor trickle heating and ventilation.

Spaces and places inside and out interpenetrate with one another, and each leads to another one or two.