

30 Duke Street, St James's: Delivering circularity from principles to practice

By Frank Blande, Head of Sustainability at GPE

As 30 Duke Street St James's reaches practical completion, we are celebrating the many ways circular economy principles have been embedded throughout the design, procurement and construction of CD&R's new Mayfair office. By increasing reuse, lowering embodied carbon and reducing reliance on virgin materials, the project demonstrates how circularity can deliver both environmental and commercial value.

GPE's sustainability ethos has always been to apply best practice across our entire portfolio, not just at our flagship projects. Our approach has ensured that we identified the critical levers for driving circularity throughout the development of 30 Duke Street, a playbook that began on our previous developments and will continue to evolve for future projects.

In many ways, construction teams have always used circular thinking: keeping what works, repairing what can be repaired, finding new uses for existing materials and avoiding unnecessary waste. Indeed, at our recent 'Seeing is believing' event, Graham Longman, our project architect from Make Architects, pointed out that buildings and materials have long been adapted, repaired and repurposed as a matter of course.

The challenge now is to reintroduce those instincts into a modern industry shaped by linear processes, complex risk allocation and tightly managed programmes.

So, what were the all-important building blocks that led to success at 30 Duke Street?

A project team with a clear mandate from a committed client

The circular economy principles start in the brief, with the ethos embedded from the first day of a project. When circular outcomes are introduced after a scheme is already designed, the most impactful opportunities are lost. By then, major decisions on massing, structure, specification, programme and procurement are often already locked in.

Putting circularity at the front and centre from the outset, ensures our architects, engineers, contractors, deconstruction specialists, surveyors, project managers and suppliers the licence to think differently. Circularity is then a shared delivery objective rather than a bolt-on aspiration.

Starting with what we already had

The first question we asked was not, 'What new materials do we need?' Instead, we asked, 'What do we already have, and how can it be reused in the new development?'

Early reviews of existing materials were not just tick-box exercises. They were a chance to identify value, understand what was possible and ensure that the wider team came on that journey.

At 30 Duke Street, the team looked not only to the existing building, drawing on learnings and reclaimed materials from across our portfolio. We had already made a strong start on our circularity ambitions: dismantling 2,000 tonnes of steel from an existing building in the City of London, then testing, treating and storing it offsite for reuse at 30 Duke Street and other sites.

The team was also encouraged to identify additional materials that could be reused. Opportunities identified included the reuse of 34 tonnes of Portland stone that was already on site, avoiding the quarrying of 60 tonnes of new stone. Over 12 tonnes of glazing was also collected by the manufacturer Saint Gobain to be repurposed into its Glass Forever scheme.

Marginal gains across the board

It is not just about the big wins. Applying a marginal gains approach was also key: reusing materials not only to reduce carbon and reliance on virgin materials, but also to create cultural and historical connections, more distinctive design and commercial value within the new building. Historic mosaic tiles from the former French Railways House, where 30 Duke Street now stands, were therefore carefully recovered and integrated into the new development, which, together with the marble integrated into the beautiful reception space, now provides a connection to the building's history and identity for future generations to enjoy.

Collaboration is the real innovation

Collaboration was central to the project's success. It can be tempting to wait for silver bullets to solve sustainability challenges, whether through new materials or technology. While these have their place, the most impactful processes in the design and construction of 30 Duke Street St James's were those where people worked together, engaged up and down the supply chain to identify the art of the possible. Without that mindset, some of the circularity options pursued within this project would never have got off the ground.

The result:

We have created a building that:

- has helped us establish and refine our approach to measuring circularity through the GPE Circularity Score;
- is on target to achieve embodied carbon of 521kgCO₂/m², exceeding the requirements of local planning authorities and our Roadmap trajectory;
- meets our customer's aspirations, providing column-free spaces thanks to the reused steel, with natural light from all sides of the building, in a central London location. This was evidenced by the record-breaking rent secured at the time of the lease agreement, well before the development was completed;
- helped secure a headlease regear from the Crown Estate, through close collaboration between GPE and Crown Estate teams deliver key sustainability outcomes; and
- delivered stronger partnerships deep into our supply chain, which we are reaping the benefits from as we deliver other circular projects such as The Delft, The Alfred (Whittington House) and The Courtyard Building.

Circularity is not only an environmental imperative as we develop buildings in an increasingly resource constrained world, but also a commercial imperative to ensure that we develop buildings that meet high customer expectations. Through the GPE Circular Economy Focus Group and the development of our own Circularity Score*, as well as more recent involvement in the Circularity in Practice initiative, inspired by His Majesty the King, we want to accelerate the adoption of proven circular solutions, encouraging others to work together, develop good practice, reduce waste and make better use of resources. The process doesn't need to be perfect; it just needs to start with a clear client mandate and commitment from the team and supply chain to reuse and innovate throughout the development process.

Thanks to our supply chain: Mace, Elliott Wood, Make, Keltbray, JF Hunt, William Hares and others.

*For more detail on the GPE Circularity Score please see [GPE reveals Circularity Scores for its London developments | GPE](#) and [GPE announces a new circular economy target in the form of a Circularity Score | GPE](#)