



Save Canada Life Estate

Save Canada Life Estate – 11 Sept 2026
Formal Representation to the Planning Inspectorate

Application Reference: S62A/2026/0159

Site Address: Maple House, Nos 8-16 (even) & 30-32 High Street and nos 1-7 Princes Parade, Potters Bar, EN6 5BA

Proposed Development: Mixed-use redevelopment across 4 blocks comprising 293 residential apartments (Class C3)

From: Daniel Bone MA Dip Arch RIBA MRTPI MAPM Rtd

Email: [REDACTED]@civix.org.uk

Dear Section 62A Applications Team,

The purpose of this submission is to lodge a formal objection to the design layout of the 293 proposed apartments under application S62A/2026/0159. As one of the original project architects for Canada Life Place, structural engineer colleague Michael Coombs and I have evaluated the structural and architectural mechanics of this site and building extensively. The applicant is attempting to repeat an unviable, strictly single-aspect apartment arrangement across four new blocks across the Canada Life Estate and along the High Street.

Summary

The purpose of this note is to bring to the Inspector's attention severe design failures regarding the single-aspect apartment layouts across the proposed 293-unit redevelopment under **S62A/2026/0159**. Evidence is mounting nationally on the critical issue of residential overheating. The applicant has submitted environmental modelling based on 2016 CIBSE data to justify a default reliance on mechanical MVHR units. The current thinking in the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published on 17 August 2026, mandates a strict "passive design first" approach (Codes CC2 and CC3).

The Structural Link to the 293 New-Build Homes (S62A/2026/0159)

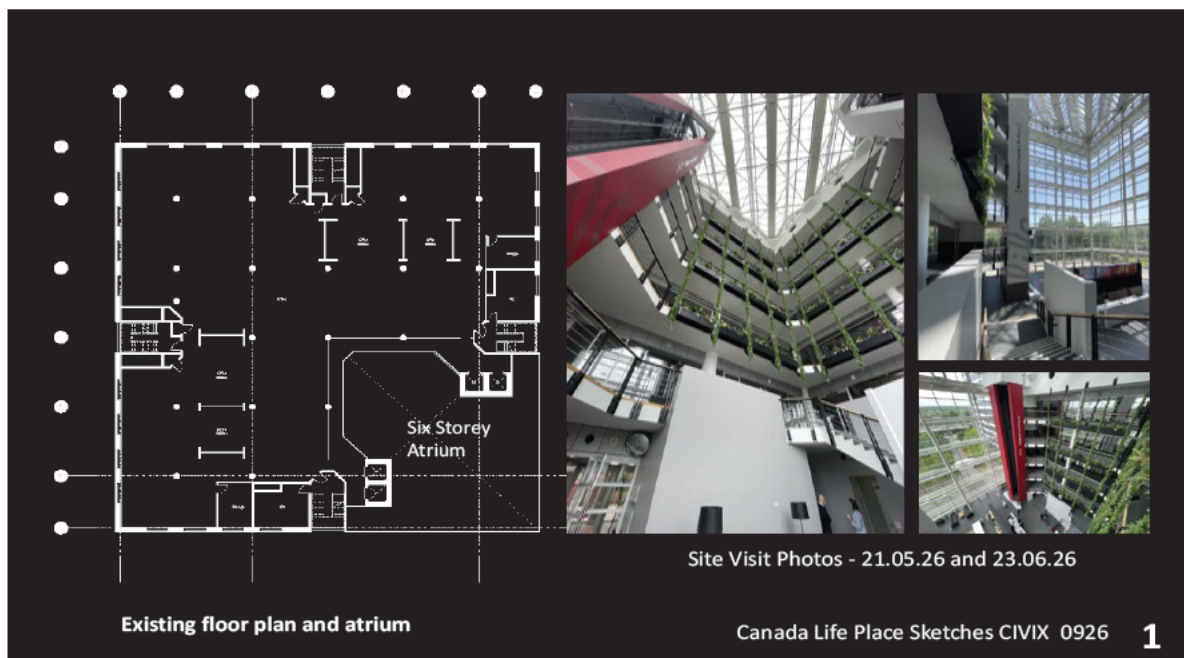
While the technical analysis overleaf references our views on the proposed Canada Life Place retrofit, it is submitted here as a critical precedent for the wider 293-apartment application. The applicant is proposing the same flawed, single-aspect layout logic used at CLP and replicates the unventilated corridor model across the four proposed new blocks.

The applicant claims that Mechanical Ventilation (MVHR) can solve the climate load. Our evidence regarding CLP proves the exact opposite and is supported by recent research quoted by the TCPA. With the removal of the atrium single-aspect apartments are exposed in a superheated courtyard sun trap. The nature-inspired, dual-aspect principles we propose for CLP—based on the Marylebone Square exemplar—should be mandated by the Inspectorate for the new-build blocks if these 293 homes are to be safe and habitable for the next generation.

Our position

As one of the original design team for Canada Life Place 40 years ago, I am writing this note to provide independent expert evidence regarding the fundamental design issues surrounding the proposed layout of the estate. Living locally in High Barnet, four miles from the development, I know this landmark site intimately. Working closely with structural engineers Alan Baxter, Rock Townsend were the original designers, and I was the architect responsible for coordinating the structural and internal architectural integration.

We are in total agreement with the need to retrofit Canada Life Place for residential use for the next generation of the building's occupants. The question to be faced is what is the most beneficial approach to take, one that respects the building's design and makes the best use of its special assets while being the most cost-efficient retrofit for its new purpose. This discussion should also be applied to the design of the site-wide 293 new homes scheme.

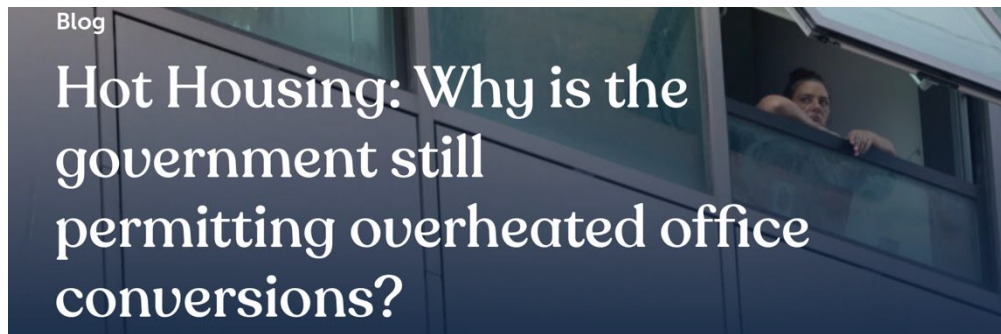


The building is an exemplar of late twentieth century commercial architecture. And it remains in the best of conditions due to its meticulous design, excellent construction and the highest quality of maintenance by Canada Life over its first 40 years of commercial use. Reshaping its future necessitates the new owners understand and appreciate the asset they have acquired.

The reason for this note is to restate and reinforce the concern that my structural engineer colleague and myself hold regarding the proposed changes to the building by Chase New Homes. It is particularly important that these misgivings are urgently considered as we

understand that the removal of the atrium and granite cladding is imminent, following Full Planning Permission being granted on 6 August 2026¹.

We consider the housing layout proposals in the Prior Approval conversion office to residential scheme² to be flawed and there should be an immediate review of the issues commented on by us and also raised in the recent article by the Town and Country Planning Association – *Hot Housing: Why is the government still permitting overheated office conversions*³.



The Town and Country Planning Association highlights nearly half of residents living in flats converted from office blocks and industrial buildings via Permitted Development (PD) experience severe summer overheating.

Although the planning permission is locked, a Section 73⁴ application can be used to vary the design details of the consent and this we believe should be considered.

¹ Ref to **26/0764/FUL** External alterations to facade and fenestration, removal of rooftop plant enclosure, and associated landscaping works. <https://www6.hertsmere.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=TG2BXAIFMVL00>

² **25/1764/PD56M Prior Approval** Change of use from Class E (commercial) to 74no. Class C3 (dwellinghouses). <https://www6.hertsmere.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=T71TZPIFJAC00>

³ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/hot-housing-why-is-the-government-still-permitting-overheated-office-conversions/>

⁴ A [Section 73 application](#) under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows you to alter or substitute the approved architectural plans or design conditions of an existing planning permission, resulting in a **new, standalone planning permission** that runs alongside the original one

The Hertsmere Position

The Council's own climate change and sustainability strategy⁵ requires all effort to be applied to devise passive design solutions before it is found to be acceptable to install energy demanding air conditioning. The newly revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published on 17 August 2026, explicitly elevates passive design principles and resource conservation into a core part of the national decision-making process reference **Code CC2 (Passive Design & Form Factor)** and **Code CC3 (Overheating & Adaptation)**.

The **Hertsmere Borough Council** targets sustainable development through its overarching framework, the **Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy (2025–2030)**. Adopted by the Cabinet, this strategy coordinates directly with the emerging **Hertsmere Local Plan** to drive zero-carbon growth across the borough. Hertsmere implements its passive design mandate through specific core mechanisms:

Passive Energy & Thermal Control Hierarchies

Hertsmere expects development proposals to incorporate active solutions only after exhausting passive measures.

- **Orientation and Solar Gain:** Design proposals must prioritize layout optimization, building orientation, and natural daylighting to minimize winter space-heating demands while preventing summer overheating.
- **Fabric-First Approach:** High-efficiency insulation, optimized air permeability rates, and thermal mass are systematically mandated to trap or buffer internal temperatures sustainably.
- **Overheating Mitigation:** To combat the urban heat island effect, developers must utilize natural cross-ventilation, solar control glazing, window reveals, balconies, and internal or external shading.

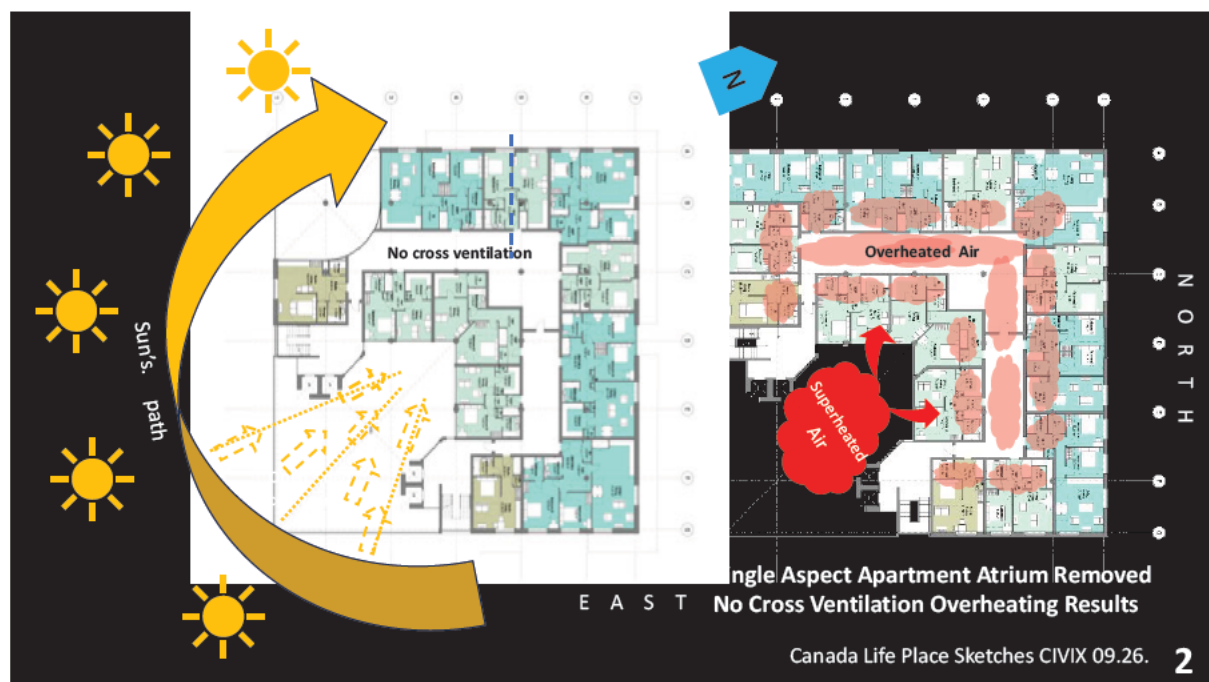
Urgent Decision Making

The most important choice to enable the passive design solution (Page 12) that makes sense financially **requires the retention of the atrium**. The original function of the atrium for Canada Life was central to the economical delivery of the optimal working environment balancing airflows for the optimal performance of the office space. The atrium is iconic and has the facility to continue its role as a passive design feature in the retrofit for residential use. It makes no sense to destroy it. **But the Chase New Homes was awarded the authority to remove the atrium with the grant of planning permission 26/0764/FUL on 06.08.26.**

⁵ <https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/environment-bins-and-recycling/climate-change/climate-change-and-the-council>

The removal of the atrium will not only represent the loss of a key existing resource (and in the process add gratuitously to the carbon content of the retrofit) but it will be an unnecessarily risky and costly operation. Additionally, it will expose the once internal architectural facades of the building to the external climate, requiring enclosure of the unique glass lifts and weathering of the internal elevations, adding further cost items to the conversion.

Worse still, the exposure to the tracking sun on the south facing elevation will create a sun trap likely to generate superheated air, in similar conditions experienced to this summer. Thus making air conditioning essential, with all the installation, maintenance costs and the risk of complete breakdown in keeping with forecast future energy outages, meaning the apartments will be uninhabitable.



In this case, the Council's Environmental Health Officer would have to act under the Housing Act 2004 with the reputational damage to the Council and local area. But another disastrous outcome would be the wasted opportunity in the form of 21st Century Luddism, and the chance to devise an industry leading retrofit solution and showing the Council could deliver for the benefit of local citizens both sustainably and financially.

However, it is the next steps for the project that involve the careful consideration and approval of Building Control to check the approved scheme for the development phase, that are the subject of this note and in connection with the Council's duties in this regard. The approval of Building Control will be the test of the process of recovering the initiative for the compelling voices of sustainable passive design.

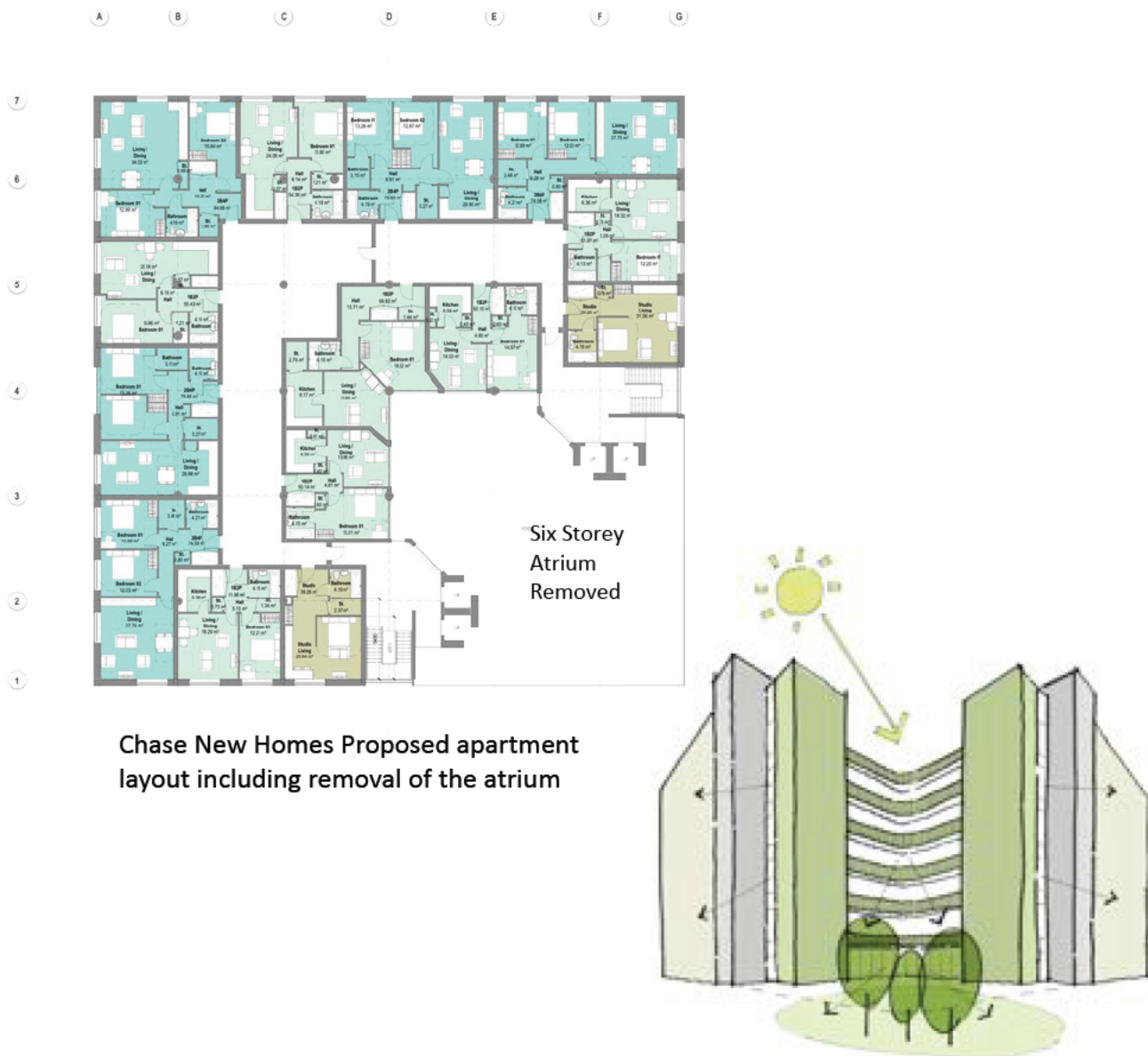
The rest of the Canada Life Estate

At the time of writing, I am aware of the proposals for the remainder of the Canada Life estate being the subject of planning application, **S62A/2026/015**. Briefly viewing the block plans indicates that the use of single aspect apartment arrangement will mean that overheating is likely without the introduction of cross ventilation or air conditioning.



The Proposals from Chase New Homes

I, and my colleague, structural engineer Michael Coombs, submitted comments regarding the proposal by Chase New Homes to retrofit the building. We did this formally within the consultation period through the council's planning portal. These comments are attached to this document as Appendix 1.



Chase New Homes Proposed apartment layout including removal of the atrium

Unfortunately, our objections were not considered sufficiently significant to sway officers; the recommendation was made to approve the planning application as submitted. This is unusual for change of use on this scale. When such a wide-ranging building conversion proposes fundamental alterations, these matters would actually be the subject of planning conditions. There was no comment or consideration made in the Delegated Report with regards to the environmental performance of the proposed apartments nor whether the design would be acceptable.

Without appropriate planning conditions being applied it cannot be assumed that as submitted in Prior Approval the apartment layouts will be capable of complying with Parts F or O of the Building Regulations.



The developer's approved layout - which removes the central atrium to create a single-aspect, south-facing courtyard configuration - presents a severe, predictable risk of lethal summer overheating.

Planning permissions are locked - statutory enforcement duties are the responsibility of Environmental Health and Building Control.

Six Storey Atrium Removed

Research by UCL Bartlett School of Planning has found nearly half of residents in deregulated Permitted Development housing conversions report overheating in the summer.

The heatwave in large parts of the UK over the last few days has been a stark reminder of the growing challenge of keeping our homes cool.

For those people living in flats converted from former office blocks and industrial buildings this challenge is even greater.

UCL Bartlett School of Planning, in partnership with the TCPA, has been reviewing the health impacts of living in such buildings, converted through Permitted Development (PD) deregulation - which is when buildings are changed to residential use without the need for full planning scrutiny. TCPA 26.05.26

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/hot-housing-why-is-the-government-still-permitting-overheated-office-conversions/>

Proposed Floor plan - Prior Approval

Canada Life Place Sketches CIVIX 0926 3

Single aspect apartments are prone to overheating as reported by the TCPA in May 2026⁶. If the current proposals from CNH for Canada Life Place were to have been occupied during this year's summer, extraordinarily stressful living conditions would have resulted, even with the assistance of mechanical ventilation. Subject to future technical assessments it is likely the only answer to overheating would be to equip all apartments with air conditioning.

How to deal with the retrofit of Canada Life Place

There is another way to design the apartments to become dual aspect, allowing natural ventilation to maintain acceptable living temperatures with the supply of fresh air. We have been assessing how this can be achieved and both Michael Coombs and I made reference in our comments to the application proposal. The Marylebone Square development illustrated on pages 10 & 11 represents a recent example of how normally problematic single aspect apartments have been transformed with the creation of a central circulation courtyard which acts as a vertical chimney enabling stack air circulation. We propose the adoption of these principles as the potential answer to the creation of passive designed habitable apartments for Canada Life Place.

⁶ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/hot-housing-why-is-the-government-still-permitting-overheated-office-conversions/>

The Marylebone Square Principles

The Canada Life atrium courtyard is capable of being retrofitted to use the same nature-inspired natural ventilation and airflow system as **Marylebone Square**, Sketches 4 & 5

Marylebone Square



Exemplar Case Study

A passive design exemplar - a central courtyard apartment design utilising passive air cooling - completed 2023

The Marylebone Square courtyard uses an advanced, nature-inspired natural ventilation and airflow system. The five-level atrium relies on open sides at the ground level and a large, glazed glass canopy roof to promote continuous, natural fresh air circulation. The courtyard's environmental design relies on a mix of structural features and sustainable tech to control the climate:

- **Natural Airflow:** Breezeways and open venting replace traditional dark, stuffy corridors. This allows air to sweep naturally between the street, the inner courtyard, and private apartments.
- **Temperature Moderation:** The open-air design, combined with planted greenery and a central water feature, helps moderate the environment, keeping it slightly warmer in the winter and breezier in the summer.
- **Active Air Quality:** The airflow system works alongside building-wide HEPA filtration in the lifts and common areas. This constantly pulls in fresh, clean air and dilutes airborne germs.
- **Biophilic Design:** Inspired by classic conservatories, the open system not only refreshes the air but reduces energy demand by promoting cross-ventilation throughout the entire Marylebone Square block
- **The Canopy Roof:** Controls the airflow and allows daylight to pierce through all five storeys.
- **The Inner Atrium:** Acts as a giant chimney, driving the natural ventilation system upward.

Engineering Services

- **MEP Services (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing):** HDR engineered the natural ventilation and courtyard airflow mechanics.
- **Structural Engineering:** Alan Baxter Associates (ABA).

Canada Life Place Sketches CIVIX 0926 **4**

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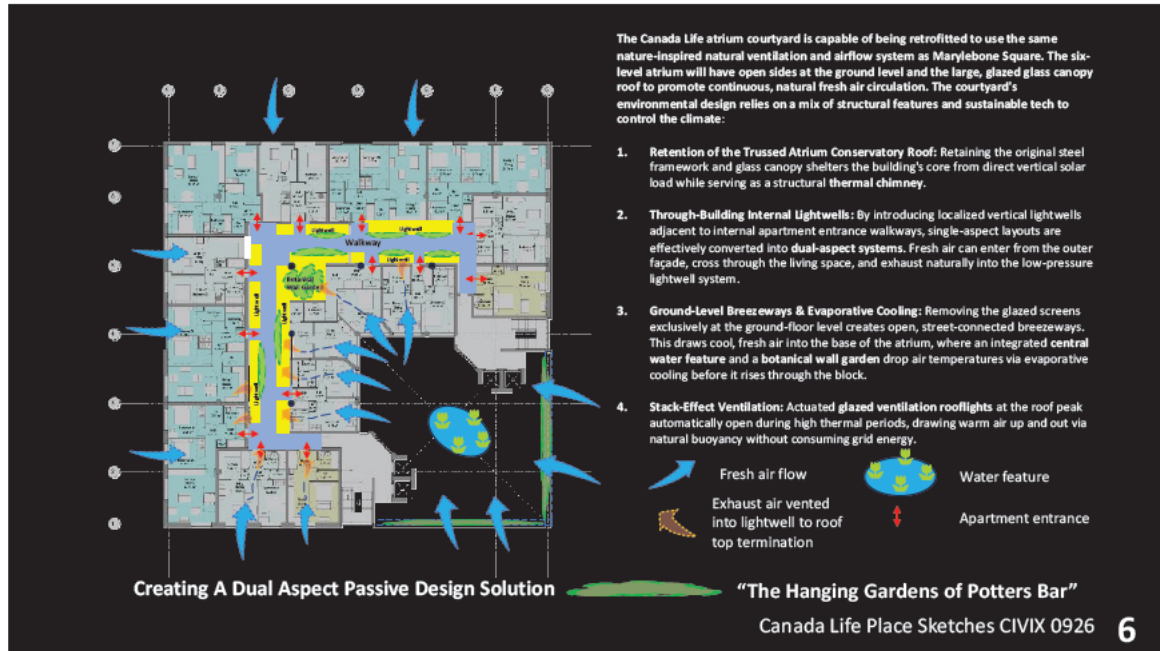
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[Concord London - Marylebone Square FPV Drone Fly-Through](#)

Canada Life Place Passive Design Approach

The six-level atrium should have open sides at the ground level and the large, glazed glass canopy roof to promote continuous, natural fresh air circulation. The courtyard's environmental design would rely on a mix of structural features and sustainable tech to control the climate as described:



- Retention of the Trussed Atrium Conservatory Roof:** Retaining the original steel framework and glass canopy would shelter the building's core from direct vertical solar load while serving as a structural **thermal chimney**.
- Through-Building Internal Lightwells:** By introducing localized vertical lightwells adjacent to internal apartment entrance walkways, single-aspect layouts are effectively converted into **dual-aspect systems**. Fresh air can enter from the outer façade, cross through the living space, and exhaust naturally into the low-pressure lightwell system.
- Ground-Level Breezeways & Evaporative Cooling:** Removing the glazed screens exclusively at the ground-floor level creates open, street-connected breezeways. This draws cool, fresh air into the base of the atrium, where an integrated **central water feature** and a **botanical wall garden** drop air temperatures via evaporative cooling before it rises through the block.
- Stack-Effect Ventilation:** Actuated **glazed ventilation rooflights** at the roof peak automatically open during high thermal periods, drawing warm air up and out via natural buoyancy without consuming grid energy.

There are many design studies and computer modelling exercises to be prepared to confirm the design ideas presented here. But the passive design solution we consider financially and sustainably appropriate **will only be possible with the retention of the atrium**.

Appendix 1

Michael Coombs and Daniel Bone Comments on Planning Application 26/0764/FUL

1822/10/MC/mw

Comments on Planning Application 26/0764/FUL

29 June 2026

I was the structural engineer who designed Canada Life Place in 1985 and oversaw its construction.

The building is of exceptionally high quality and even today appears to be in the same condition it was when it was completed and handed over to Canada Life around 40 years ago. Together with the adjacent Tower (Maple House) the building is iconic within the urban landscape of Potters Bar. It can be seen from the M25.

The repurposing of the building for residential use is, in principle something I support, but I do not support the proposals put forward by Chase New Homes. These disrespect the intent of the original architectural concept and the inherent value of the high quality building. The designers of the scheme demonstrate no imagination and no desire to achieve residential units of quality. The entire proposition represents a lost opportunity to meet Hertsmere's brief of achieving very high quality.

At the most fundamental level, the deep office floors are arranged with a central corridor serving single aspect naturally ventilated apartments. The corridors are not naturally lit and are unventilated. It would be simple in structural terms to introduce new vertical lightwells and ventilation shafts in the centre of the floor plates to bring natural light into the corridors and act as natural ventilation shafts. The size and position of these shafts will be determined by the way the structure is working and the circulation and apartment layout can be tailored to suit them. This would mean that the residential units could be dual aspect and have effective cross ventilation. A recent project by Concord London at Marylebone Square is an exemplar of how to achieve this. The slab penetrations at Canada Life Place cannot be linear as at Marylebone Square but can achieve similar ventilated and naturally lit corridors.

[Concord London - Marylebone Square FPV Drone Fly-Through](#)

The atrium is a very important part of the overall architectural composition of Canada Life Place and its complete removal destroys the special character of the building. It is in excellent condition and is designed to be easy to maintain. One can understand that having the entire volume enclosed might require costly air-conditioning to be retained, but this would not be needed if, for example, the glass of the atrium walls were removed to make it an external environment. Additional ventilation could be introduced in the roof glazing if this proved to be necessary.

One consequence of removing the atrium is that the lifts, which have glass backs and afford views out over the Hertfordshire countryside as they rise up their shafts, become external and have to be enclosed and provided with roofs. This destroys their original architectural design concept (which is special) and removes what could be an enjoyable experience in accessing the upper floors of the building. The existing granite clad elevations of the building are of very high quality and appear to be in excellent condition. To describe them as dated is odd and to replace them with brick is wasteful, environmentally harmful and architecturally questionable. Obviously, it will be necessary to replace the windows with units that can open for ventilation, but with appropriate design the existing window openings and cladding arrangement can be retained.

The justification for the proposals in the covering letter from Barker Parry is shallow and disingenuous. It needs to be challenged. There is mention of a Design Review Panel. They should be asked to look critically at the proposals in the light of my comments. I would be very pleased to meet them, to discuss the points I make here.

Canada Life Place is iconic within Porters Bar and is bound up with the town's development. Architecturally it is an important example of a state-of-the-art office building of the 1980's by Rock Townsend, a significant practice within the UK at that time.

Repurposing the building for residential use is not unreasonable, but a much more imaginative design is needed that respects the inherent quality and architectural form of the existing building.

I strongly object to the proposals.

Michael Coombs M MSc DIC FStructE MConsE

Comments on Planning Application 26/0764/FUL

Background

I was one of the project architects working at Rock Townsend designing Canada Life Place in the mid 1980s. I was responsible for coordinating the interior's design, working closely with the appointed structural and MEP engineers.

The design evolved over several years with the architects working in close collaboration with senior management and staff at Canada Life, developing and testing Canada Life's brief and aspirations. The building was to be a new statement of the company's corporate values. The architectural design process and the resultant building would embody these ambitions.

Creating this new European headquarters for the company was necessary to radically change the restrictive plan form of previous Canada Life offices. The challenge was to develop a corporate HQ fit for the age of 'open plan' – a modern social office working environment defined by the concept of 'Bürolandschaft'.⁷ The building had to provide the corporate 'sense of place' on a more human scale 'appropriate to its setting', and 'welcoming'⁸ to visitors and workers alike. The pivotal architectural concept to achieve these aims comes in the form of the acclaimed atrium which has become an enduring landmark in Potters Bar. 'This atrium acts as the metaphorical and functional hub of the building; its dual-purpose is to augment communication and company unity.'⁹

Rethinking the company's workforce requirements in the 21st Century has created the need to change business location and thus make Canada Life Place redundant for office purposes. The building is being offered for retrofit for residential use and I agree with this repurposing. The building, after nearly 40 years of everyday use, is in fine shape and is testament to the quality of its construction, detailed design and specification and to the care taken by Canada Life facilities management team.

Observations

The question now faced is how to retrofit the building for its proposed residential use while retaining its architectural qualities. Since the 1980s the functional requirements for buildings have been to meet new standards and regulations relating to safety, climate change and resource depletion determined by the need to meet sustainable development and net zero targets. The challenge for today is to develop high quality, well ventilated, low energy demand apartments respectful of the architectural qualities of the building. And it makes economic and sustainability sense to retain the aspects of the building that have these embedded.

Proposed layout - the single aspect apartments are likely to be problematic in meeting the requirements of Part O Building Regulations. Creating lightwells in circulation areas and making the apartments dual aspect offers the opportunity for cross ventilation: an example

⁷ The design philosophy behind Bürolandschaft focuses on the natural flow of information and people rather than strict departmental boundaries.

⁸ Quote John Townsend Interior Design Magazine

⁹ Op cit

is here <https://marylebonesquare.com/news/concord-london-completes-marylebonesquare/>.

Atrium - its complete removal would damage the integrity of the building's design and lose a communal covered meeting space for future residents. A better considered response would be to carry out studies to retain the glazed trussed roof and supporting framework, and with the removal of the atrium's side glazing, model how induced air movement across the space could support the cross ventilation of the apartments facing into the atrium.

External cladding - the Spanish pink granite cladding is an integral part of the composition and character of the building and there seems no reason for brickwork to replace it – there being no signs of degradation of the cladding on site visits in June 2026. Replacing the granite would be an unnecessary cost and wasteful use of materials.

Window design - the proposed remodelling of the façade's strong geometric design to provide side hung casement windows has no beneficial architectural quality. Retention of the existing window openings offers the opportunity to develop a window replacement that provides shading solutions to reduce solar gain and glare, as well as ventilation measures for each elevation's orientation.

Conclusion - I support the idea of retrofitting Canada Life Place for future residential use but the focus should be on repurposing the building's existing and functioning assets to create quality homes and not the discarding and resulting waste of serviceable parts of it.

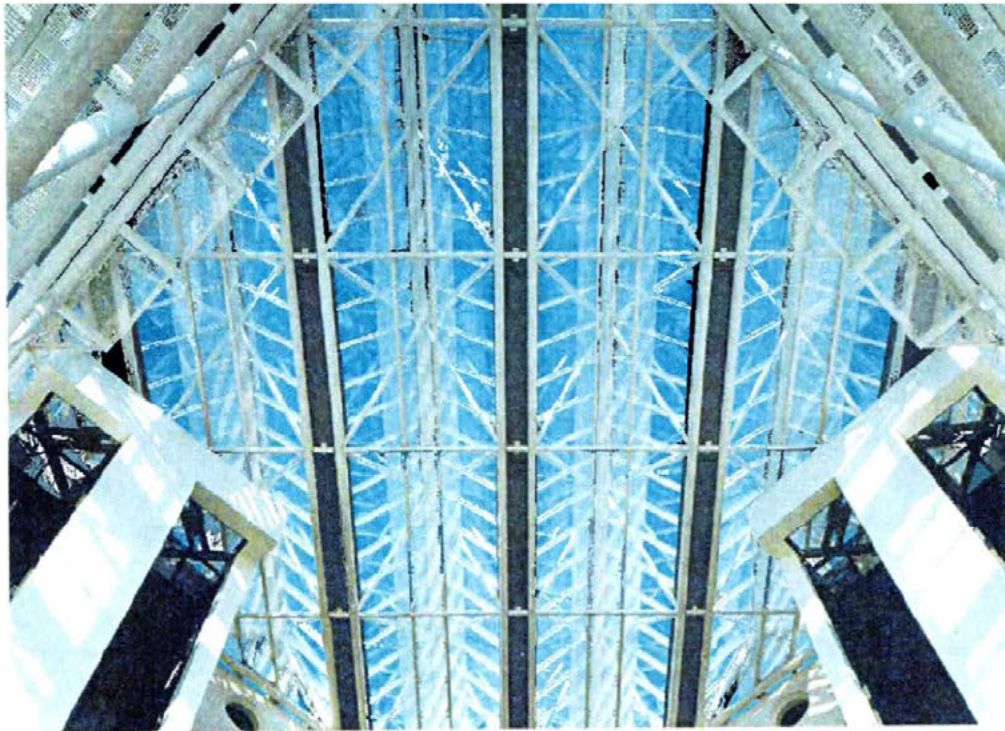
I strongly object to the current proposals.

Daniel Bone MA Dip Arch RIBA MRTPI MAPM Rtd

6 July 2026

Appendix 2

OFFICES



Photograph by Neil MacLeod

MAKING A NEW LIFE

INTERIOR DESIGN

Nine years in the making, Canada Life's new HQ, nestling next to the old, brings a breath of corporate image-making to the wilds of Potters Bar. [REDACTED] looks it over and talks to architects and designers, Rock Townsend, who have been there since the beginning

A swift tour of Canada Life House, the insurance company's old headquarters building in Potters Bar, is a deeply depressing experience. A standard example of misplaced 'sixties' modernism, the faceless tower block dominates the town but makes neither an attractive corporate statement nor an effective working environment by current standards. So when planning its new offices, the old building gave senior managers an acute understanding of the qualities they needed – and those they didn't. The result, called Canada Life Place and developed on the site next door, has just been

completed – and it makes a refreshing contrast to its partner.

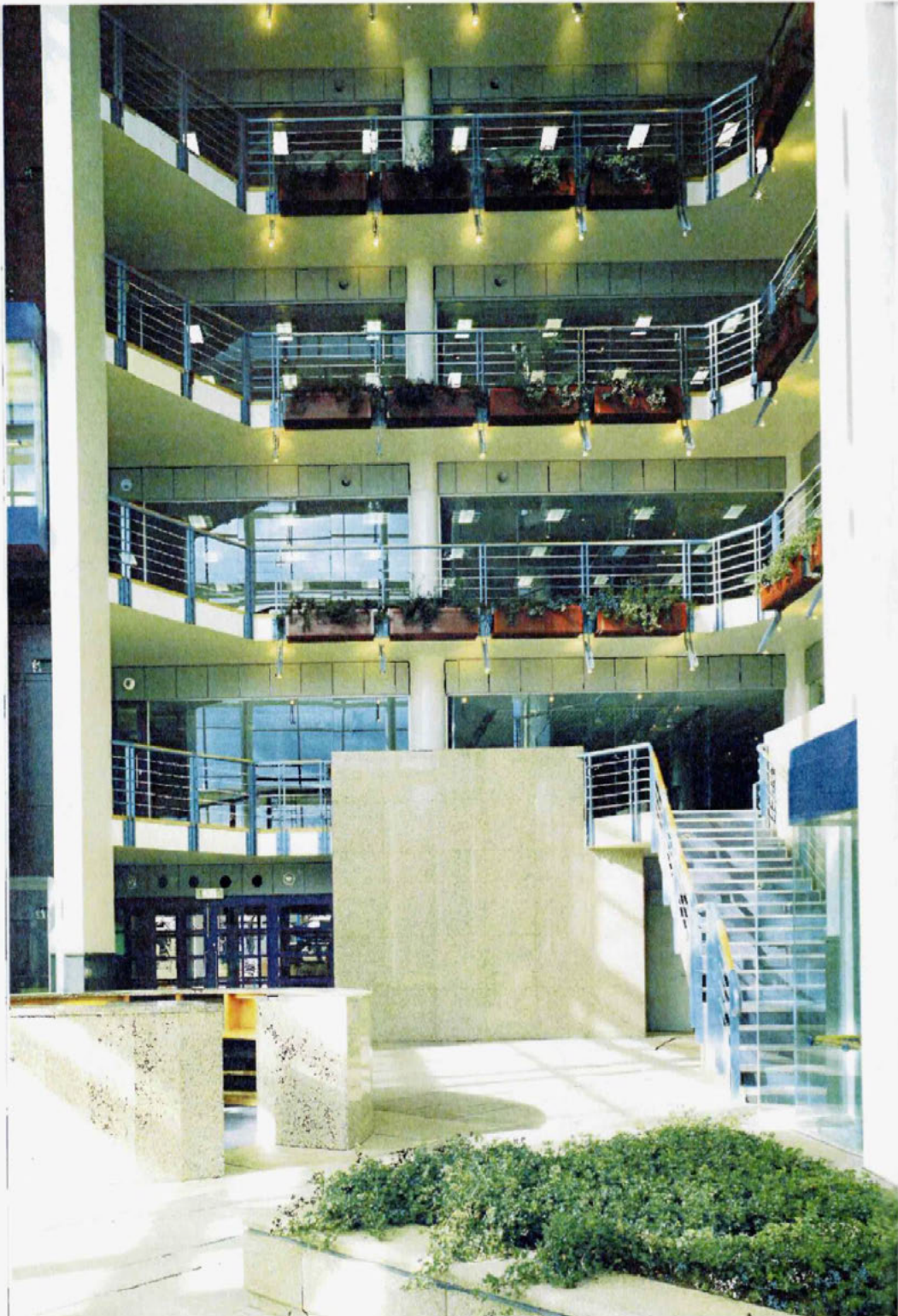
The architects and designers were Rock Townsend – the company has been involved in the scheme since its inception in the late 'seventies. Explaining the new building's rationale, partner [REDACTED] stresses that visual impact was still an important priority. But this time round the corporate 'sense of place' had to be on a more human scale 'appropriate to its setting' and 'welcoming' to visitors and workers alike. Just as important, the new environment had to provide the functional benefits to its users that its predecessor manifestly lacked. Catering

and other amenities have been improved, while the shallow uncomfortable spaces and isolated compartments of the tower have been replaced by deep space, open plan offices.

The solution is a 'cube' block of 120,000 square feet with four floors of offices, a first floor restaurant and a ground floor area for service facilities and computer room. The most radical difference between the two offices is most evident in their respective reception areas. The old one is dull and dowdy, conveying nothing but dreary impersonality. Visitors to Canada Life Place on the other hand encounter Rock Town-

Rock Townsend's tour de force at Canada Life Place – this vast 'conservatory' atrium which canopies the entire south east quarter of the cubic building

This atrium acts as the metaphorical and functional hub of the building; its dual-purpose is to augment communication and company unity



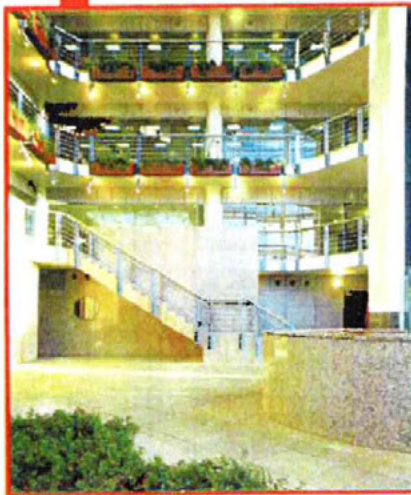
OFFICES

send's tour de force, the full-height atrium – or more accurately a conservatory – which occupies the entire south east quarter of the building.

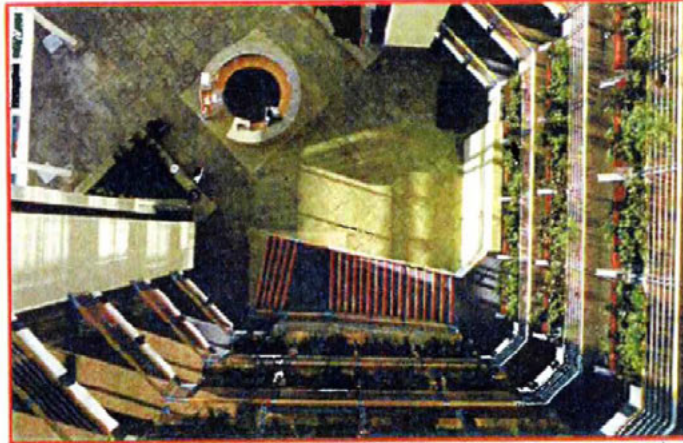
The very word 'atrium' can often produce a groan of recognition from designers these days – a standard design cliché for speculative offices. Often serving little purpose, except as light wells, they can often seem little more than jaded, 'me too' symbols of corporate power. Rock Townsend's, though, has a different feel. Metaphorically and functionally the hub of Canada Life Place, the impact of its soaring vertical space is all the more telling because of its tapering, 'low key' form, which gradually decreases in height from the entrance on the west side of the building.

The conservatory itself has a purity of form that is a refreshing change from the clutter that often characterises similar spaces. Simple materials at ground level – the acid-etched paved concrete floor, circular reception desk in porrino granite and non-excessive planting – don't distract the visitor.

Instead, the eye is inevitably drawn up by the smooth vertical lines of the white steel columns of the atrium wall – seemingly built of straw – and the imposing, white concrete lift shafts. Townsend, as he says is 'a modernist, not a post modernist', but this is not a soulless area. Touches of colour from the maroon planters and quirky detailing for the metallic blue balustrading provide an edge of warmth and familiarity throughout.



Conservative use of plants break the monotony of the tiers whilst the beech hand rails and metallic blue balustrades are designed to 'make an event of a trip from floor to floor'



As well as bringing light into the deep interior, the atrium provides a poised corporate message so clearly absent in the old HQ. But Townsend is keen to stress that it is not a 'dead space', designed as he puts it to 'con' people into thinking they have a better working environment. Here it has been conceived as a 'circulation hub' which aims to enhance communication and company unity. Walkways around the 'L'-shaped offices on the top four floors allow workers regular respite from the stress of their working area as they take 'short cuts' through the exhilarating atrium space either to the far end of the departments or to the lifts.

The design team were able to include this additional focus at the building's heart only by adding extra perimeter staircases, which allow for the 'total evaluation' of the building. But even these have been used to advantage. Whereas a visit to the gloomy stairwells in the core of the old building is, as [redacted] puts it, a 'culture shock', the comfortable staircases in Canada Life Place have been designed to 'make an event of a trip from floor to floor'. Each one provides stimulating exterior views through impressive full-height windows.

The office interiors themselves provide an opportunity to gauge the benefits of space planning tailored to the needs of a specific end user, rather than just an indeterminate lessee. [redacted] explains that the close, long-term relationship with Canada Life allowed him 'to work from the inside out' – a hackneyed phrase, perhaps, but used with some justification here. While some fundamental/s of the modern office – raised flooring and cable management – were taken as read, a 'user group', convened early in the design process, provided 'invaluable feed-

back' into other elements of the design, such as 'paper flow', acoustics, air-conditioning and lighting.

The result is an environment identical – except for minor details – on the top four floors. But this impressive sense of corporate efficiency is achieved, in [redacted] words, 'without making people feel as if they're working in a paper mill'. The designers' modernist impulse, so clear in the conservatory area, is evident in the crisp, clean lines of the working areas and the predominant use of restrained shades of blue and grey. But throughout the building, quirky little touches of detailing and warmer colours are sparingly and effectively used. The blue balustrading, the plum coloured Carrington carpet and touches of red on perimeter stairs all offset the coolness of the overall colour palette. Similarly softer materials and textures – such as 'school desk' beech for hand rails – allow people to 'rub up against the familiar'.

The furniture too makes its contribution to the 'gentle' side of the building's personality and again shows the advantage of working closely with a client developer. Chosen with the help of the user group, the soft textures of the George Harvey system will provide, as [redacted] says, 'the comfort employees expect and deserve'. Just as important though, colours and shapes are in harmony with the overall theme, unlike the furniture in so many speculative developments, which can shatter the coherence of an interior design.

The emphasis on employee well-being applies to the catering area too. The first floor 'canteen' for 220 'covers' would match many commercial restaurants in design quality. Its feel is 'deliberately different' from the office spaces and perhaps a little

Looking down on the high life in Potters Bar; the tapered towering space haloing the circular porrino granite reception desk, (top) as viewed from the apex of the atrium

The top four office floors are filled with the 'gentle' George Harvey workstations whilst the first floor houses the up-market staff 'canteen'



grander. An atmosphere of light airiness is created by the extensive use of full-height glazing, giving views onto the pleasant landscaping that surrounds the building and, through a striking, curved glass wall, onto the entrance area too.

As a totality then, the interior projects a corporate image of Canada Life entirely at odds with that im-

plied by the bleak building next door. That office suggests an organisation which [redacted] says, 'doesn't care about its staff'. In contrast, the Canada Life Place project leaves an impression of a close-knit team that has created both a striking corporate statement and efficient workspaces – but without ever forgetting that worker's needs must

come first. [redacted] sums it up neatly: 'Everyone's standard of living has improved enormously over the last few years. Shouldn't they have a standard of working environment to match?'

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