Arcavia Consulting

ARCAVIA MONTHLY · ARCHITECTURE

September: In the press

A month of architecture news from the Architects' Journal and Building Design, and what it means for the practices hiring into it.

£350m

GENSLER'S RACKHAMS AND TEMPLE ROW MASTERPLAN

10,058

HOMES ACROSS FIVE SCHEMES SUBMITTED OR APPROVED

£18.7bn

VALUE OF ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

Gensler leads the month twice

A Birmingham city-centre quarter and a Royal Docks riverside neighbourhood.

GENSLER · BIRMINGHAM

Rackhams and Temple Row

Gensler has drawn up the masterplan for Sphere Group and Legal & General's £350m scheme on the former Rackhams department store, One Temple Row and 43 Temple Row, in the heart of the city's retail core. It brings more than 500 homes and 225,000 sq ft of office space together with shops, restaurants and cafés at street level and new public space, with around 1,300 jobs attached (Construction Enquirer, 22 September).

Public consultation opened on 24 September ahead of a planning application. The scheme sits inside Birmingham City Council's Central Heart vision, which sets out to turn 17 hectares of underused retail and commercial space into a mixed-use district, and it lands in the same week as the Smithfield office and market competition result covered overleaf.

GENSLER · ROYAL DOCKS

Thameside West, phase one

Gensler has submitted the first phase of Arada's £2.5bn Thameside West to Newham: six towers and 1,500 homes on the southern edge of a 19-hectare site opposite the O2, on what the AJ describes as the longest undeveloped stretch of riverfront in London. The first two blocks will be entirely for social rent, with three- and four-bedroom family homes (AJ, 28 September; BD, 28 September).

The wider masterplan could deliver around 5,000 homes around a 3-hectare park, with about 1,000 new trees, a kilometre of active waterfront and a riverside walk, designed with Planit and Arup. It is being brought forward with the GLA through its land and property company, Arada is involved in a new DLR station for the site, and a start on site is scheduled for early 2028.

£2.85bn

COMBINED VALUE OF THE TWO GENSLER SCHEMES

2,000+

HOMES ACROSS THE TWO, BEFORE THE WIDER THAMESIDE MASTERPLAN

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **Two cities, one month.** Gensler is leading a city-centre quarter in Birmingham and a riverside masterplan in east London at the same time.
- **Mixed use is the brief.** Offices, homes, retail and public realm sit in one scheme, so masterplanning, residential and workplace experience all come into play.
- **Early-stage teams build now.** Consultation and a first-phase submission are when the design team for the next stages is set.

The city core fills up

Two office-led schemes, a regeneration plan and a leadership move.

225,000 sq ft
OFFICES PLANNED AT RACKHAMS AND TEMPLE ROW

17,200m²
OFFICES OVER THE RAG MARKET AT SMITHFIELD

6,750
HOMES IN WOLVERHAMPTON'S CITY-CENTRE PLAN

Birmingham had its busiest week of the year for city-centre design news, and the rest of the region added to it.

Carmody Groarke, working with Adamson Associates, won the design competition for Plot 7A1 at Lendlease's Birmingham Smithfield from 27 submissions, with BIG, David Kohn Architects and Eric Parry Architects on the four-strong shortlist. The building puts 17,200m² of offices above a reimagined 1,850m² Rag Market, facing the Bullring and St Martin's Church, and will be the practice's first work in the city. A planning application is due in early 2027 under the £1.9bn masterplan consented in June (AJ and BD, 22 September).

Wolverhampton approved a city-centre regeneration plan for 6,750 homes, identifying 33 potential development sites (BD, 7 September). In Derby, Howells' plans to redevelop the Assembly Rooms, a music venue closed for more than a decade, received their final approval (BD, 4 September), and KSS won consent to take Nottingham Forest's City Ground from just over 31,000 seats to 52,000 in two phases, with more than 800 supporting comments from local people (AJ, 24 September). Keith Williams Architects submitted plans for a deep retrofit of Hinckley's theatre (AJ, 23 September).

On the people side, Adam McPartland left Glancy Nicholls Architects, where he was joint managing director and whose portfolio includes the 51-storey One Eastside tower, to lead Ridge's architecture practice in the Midlands (BD, 21 September). It is the lead move in our Q3 senior moves register.

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **Birmingham's office pipeline is moving.** Rackhams and Smithfield 7A1 were both announced in the week of 21 September and both head for planning.
- **Regional leadership is in demand.** Ridge hired a practice leader to run architecture in the Midlands, the kind of move that reshapes a studio around it.
- **East Midlands work is broad.** A stadium, a listed music venue and a theatre retrofit call on very different design skills.
- **West Midlands teams have a long runway.** Planning dates run into 2027, and Wolverhampton's 33 sites follow behind.

The homes are moving

Five large schemes submitted or approved, and policy pulling the same way.

THE FIVE LARGEST HOUSING SCHEMES SUBMITTED OR APPROVED IN SEPTEMBER

SCHEME	HOMES	ARCHITECT AND STATUS
North West Cambridge	**3,800**	Hawkins\Brown for the University of Cambridge; approved, with 100,000m² of academic and employment space
Beckton Riverside, phase 1	**2,977**	JTP for St William; outline consent from City Hall, first phase of a 10,000-home masterplan
Thameside West, phase 1	**1,500**	**Gensler** for Arada; submitted to Newham, first two blocks for social rent
York Central, phase 1C	**1,014**	Haworth Tompkins, Cartwright Pickard, Whittam Cox and 3D Reid; approved
Forumside, Edgware	**767**	Studio Egret West for Gracie Group; submitted, 523 flats and 244 co-living units
Total	**10,058**	**Homes in five schemes in one month**

Behind the five, Studio Egret West lodged its revised masterplan for the final 6.5 hectares of Battersea Power Station, up to around 300,000m² of residential, commercial, leisure and cultural space, and Dowen Farmer won approval for 200 council homes in an earlier phase of the same site (AJ, 2 and 15 September). Pilbrow & Partners' Vauxhall Square, with a 69-storey residential tower, was approved (AJ, 9 September).

Policy is pulling the same way. A draft Small Sites Design Code for London, written with RCKa, sets out when infill housing is acceptable in principle and is open for consultation until 4 December (AJ, 23 September). The new NPPF opens residential gardens to development under set conditions, final new town locations are due by the end of the year, and Andy Burnham used his conference speech to promise the biggest council house building programme since the post-war era (AJ, 10 and 30 September; BD, 3 September).

10,058

HOMES ACROSS FIVE SCHEMES SUBMITTED OR APPROVED IN SEPTEMBER

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **Scale is coming through.** Four of the five schemes are phases of larger masterplans, so the work runs for years.
- **Masterplanning and residential delivery** are the skills these schemes will be hiring for, from concept to reserved matters.
- **Small sites have a route.** The London code gives smaller practices a clearer path to infill work.
- **Council housing is back on the agenda,** which brings public-sector clients and their frameworks with it.

Growth, ownership and scale

Results, a transatlantic tie-up and the value of the sector.

HOK UK, YEAR TO 26 DECEMBER 2025

MEASURE	2024	2025
Turnover	**£16.4m**	**£20.9m**
Pre-tax result	**–£0.69m**	**£0.90m**
UK project turnover	**£6.7m**	**£7.9m**
Rest of world turnover	**£8.6m**	**£12.0m**
Employees	**116**	**113**

HOK's UK business grew turnover 28% and returned to profit on higher project activity in architecture and planning, with the fastest growth outside the UK and Europe (AJ, 10 September). Conran and Partners became DLR Group's first European studio: its five partners stay on as principals and become shareholders in the employee-owned group, both studios keep trading under the Conran and Partners name, and all 75 designers in London and Hong Kong can buy into employee ownership (AJ, 25 September; BD, 24 September).

Foster + Partners kept the top spot in Building's top 50 architects, now employing more than 600 architects, 30 more than a year earlier (BD, 18 September). Hawkins\Brown had a strong month, with the Cambridge consent, a green light for its Glasgow riverside vision and plans for student towers in Stratford (BD, 17 and 30 September). DLA Architecture added Neil Matthews and Tom Dobson to its board ahead of its 50th year, and AKT II rebranded as Tyréns AKT (BD, 2 and 16 September).

£18.7bn

ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT DESIGN, 2023, UP FROM £14.5BN IN 2019

THE DESIGN COUNCIL'S READ

The Design Economy report puts the discipline's exports at £9bn, and the share of designers working in firms of more than 500 people at 28%, up from 18% in 2020. North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset, and the Cotswolds are the emerging clusters outside London (AJ, 7 September).

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **International work is carrying growth** for the practices with a global footprint.
- **Ownership is part of the offer.** Conran and Partners staff can now take equity in DLR Group, worth raising in any senior conversation.
- **Larger practices are taking a bigger share** of the workforce, and they are the ones hiring at scale.

Registration, learning and the rules

ARB's first compulsory CPD year, new routes in, and room to build in the City.

85%+

ARCHITECTS COMPLIANT IN ARB'S FIRST COMPULSORY CPD YEAR

24%

SHARE OF RECORDED LEARNING ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

2

TALL-BUILDING ZONES CLEARED IN CITY PLAN 2040

More than 85% of architects met ARB's CPD requirement in its first compulsory year, and 270 were removed from the register. Compliance among those recording through MyARB reached 98% after follow-up, and 95% in the sample of those using the RIBA platform. Environmental sustainability made up 24% of recorded learning, followed by fire and life safety at 18% and design at 17%. ARB says the next step is to move the scheme from compliance towards value for architects, with the programme maturing by 2030 (AJ, 30 September; BD, 29 September).

Earlier in the month ARB introduced routes to registration that do not require a Part 1 (BD, 11 September), which widens the ways into the profession for people already working in practice.

In the City of London, the housing minister withdrew his direction on the City Plan 2040 after inspectors found its tall-building contours justified. The corporation expects to adopt the plan before the end of the year, with at least 1.2 million m² of new office space planned across two tall-building zones (AJ, 28 September; BD, 25 September). RIBA also agreed to publish carbon data for its Stirling Prize shortlist (AJ, 14 September).

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **More people can qualify.** A Part 1 is no longer the only way onto the register, so practices have more ways to grow their own architects.
- **Sustainability leads the learning.** It was the most recorded CPD topic, a useful read on where architects are investing their time.
- **City office work has certainty.** With the plan heading for adoption, the tall building pipeline in the Square Mile can move.

Recognition for reuse

Retrofit dominated the awards, and UK practices won abroad.

SEPTEMBER'S AWARDS AND COMPETITION RESULTS

PRACTICE	RESULT
shedkm	AJ Retrofit Practice of the year, two category wins, and a RetroFirst-inspired housing award for a car park-to-homes conversion
IFDO	AJ Retrofit of the year for Eagle House, Hastings, a 1860s building turned youth hub, common room and workspace
Caruso St John	One of four RIBA International Prize finalists, for the Royale Belge transformation in Brussels
RSHP	Won Valencia's new Central Station from a 13-strong shortlist
Carmody Groarke	Won Birmingham Smithfield Plot 7A1 from 27 submissions
Farshid Moussavi	2026 Soane Medal, to be presented at the Royal Academy on 24 November
Studio Octopi, Bennetts Associates, Collective Architecture	Shortlisted for the Doolan Prize, all three for reuse of historic buildings
Allies and Morrison	Consent, with Asif Khan Studio, to revive the Barbican's Sculpture Court in the £230m renewal

The AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards named 18 category winners from nearly 110 shortlisted projects, with OnSide as Client of the year (AJ, 24 September). Public-sector work continued alongside: FaulknerBrowns was picked for Brentford's leisure centre and approved for one in Dublin, Bond Bryan submitted plans for the 7,800m² BRIT North performing arts college in Bradford, and AtkinsRéalis submitted its town hub for the 10,000-home Northstowe new town (AJ, 14 to 29 September).

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AJ RETROFIT & REUSE AWARD CATEGORIES, FROM NEARLY 110 SHORTLISTED PROJECTS

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- **Retrofit is where the recognition is.** The Retrofit awards, the Doolan shortlist and the RIBA International finalists all rewarded reuse.
- **UK practices are winning abroad,** with a station in Valencia and a finalist in Brussels.
- **Conservation and adaptive reuse skills** are the ones these results point to, and they are a narrower pool than the job titles suggest.

Where this leaves us

The Architects' Journal and Building Design, 1 to 30 September 2026.

Rackhams and Temple Row, Gensler
Construction Enquirer, 22 September

Thameside West phase one, Gensler
AJ and BD, 28 September

Birmingham Smithfield Plot 7A1
AJ and BD, 22 September

Wolverhampton city-centre plan
BD, 7 September

Derby Assembly Rooms, Howells
BD, 4 September

City Ground expansion, KSS
AJ, 24 September; BD, 25 September

Hinckley theatre retrofit, Keith Williams
AJ, 23 September

Adam McPartland to Ridge
BD, 21 September

North West Cambridge, Hawkins\Brown
AJ, 30 September; BD, 21 September

Beckton Riverside, JTP
AJ, 9 September

York Central phase 1C
AJ and BD, 11 September

Forumside Edgware and Battersea, Studio Egret West
AJ, 9 and 15 September

Battersea council homes, Dowen Farmer
AJ, 2 September

Vauxhall Square, Pilbrow & Partners
AJ, 9 September

Small Sites Design Code
AJ, 23 September

NPPF and residential gardens
AJ, 10 September

New towns and council housing
BD, 3 September; AJ, 30 September

HOK UK results
AJ, 10 September

Conran and Partners and DLR Group
AJ, 25 September; BD, 24 September

Building top 50 architects
BD, 18 September

Hawkins\Brown in Glasgow and Stratford
BD, 17 and 30 September

DLA board, Tyréns AKT
BD, 2 and 16 September

Design Economy report
AJ, 7 September

ARB CPD report
AJ, 30 September; BD, 29 September

ARB routes to registration
BD, 11 September

City Plan 2040
AJ, 28 September; BD, 25 September

Stirling Prize carbon data
AJ, 14 September

AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards
AJ, 24 and 29 September

RIBA International Prize finalists
AJ and BD, 17 September

Valencia Central Station, RSHP
AJ, 17 September; BD, 18 September

Soane Medal, Doolan Prize
AJ, 24 and 29 September

Barbican Sculpture Court
AJ, 22 September

FaulknerBrowns, Bond Bryan, AtkinsRéalis
AJ, 14 to 29 September

METHOD

Every article the two titles published between 1 and 30 September 2026 was indexed with its date, more than 250 in all, and the stories carried here were read for the figures quoted. Building Design articles sit behind a subscription, so items sourced to BD alone are taken from the published headline and standfirst. Rackhams did not feature in either title in September and is taken from Construction Enquirer. Figures are as published.

WHERE THIS LEAVES US

September put more than 10,000 homes into planning across five schemes, moved two office-led schemes in central Birmingham towards planning, and rewarded retrofit at every awards table it reached.

The common thread is that the work is arriving in phases, over years, and at a mix of uses. The practices resourcing it are looking for masterplanning, residential and reuse experience at the same time.

If any of this bears on a role you are holding, tell us and we will give you our read on the market for it.

ARCAVIA ARCHITECTURE MONTHLY

This review runs every month. The October edition also carries our Q3 senior moves register, the Gensler case study and *The route to studio director*. george@arcaviaconsulting.com