

Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt to refurbish Cullinan gem

By Jim Dunton | 17 January 2018

Practice lands key role on conversion into retirement complex of grade II* RMC headquarters



The roof gardens at Cemex House in Surrey

Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt has been appointed to design the refurbishment of Ted Cullinan's grade II* RMC headquarters as a retirement living complex.

The move follows a high-profile campaign to save the Surrey office complex – completed in 1990 and known as Cemex House – four years ago. Nicholas Grimshaw and Richard Rogers were among those who added their weight to save the building from demolition and replacement with new homes.

BD **reported in October** that global cement, concrete and aggregates specialist Cemex had sold the complex to a developer who planned to convert the structure into housing for the elderly.

Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt revealed this week that it was drawing up plans to “sensitively refurbish” the building for developer Eden Retirement Living, and that it was doing so in close collaboration with Cullinan Studio, Historic England and local planning authority Runnymede Council.

The practice said it had been appointed directly by Eden, for whom it has also **designed a retirement complex in Newbury**.

Practice director David Ayre said the Cemex House scheme would restore the single-storey campus structure, which features extensive roof gardens and integrated landscaping, to its “original grandeur” and extend its life.

“We see the redevelopment as the next chapter for the building,” he said.

“Cullinan’s office scheme was designed to create a setting for four grade II-listed buildings from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and our scheme will extend that composition in the 21st century.”

Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt added that Cullinan was “delighted” with the building was going to be “put to good use again”.



The complex was listed in 2014

RMC was bought by Mexico-headquartered Cemex for £2.3 billion in 2005. The business’ UK president Michel André told BD last year that while the complex was a “great building” it was also

“obsolete” in the company’s eyes and that remaining staff would be relocated to the firm’s main UK office in Rugby in June.

“We had some discussions about whether we could transform it into a European training centre for Cemex but what we need is a national headquarters close to our main operations in Rugby,” he said.

Located at Thorpe, next to the Thorpe Park theme park, Cemex House was designed around an 18th-century grade II-listed country house as well as a 19th-century stable block and half-timbered house.

The building has been lauded as an exemplar office complex. Recommending it for listing, Historic England said: “We have given particularly careful thought to this case which considers the structures and integrated landscape of Cullinan’s ground-breaking scheme for commercial offices, and its response to setting in the Green Belt.” It added that it should be listed “for its high degree of special architectural and historic interest in a national context”.