

ST MICHAEL'S SQUARE, CROYDON

Croydon is London's largest borough and boosts some of the top retail and commercial centres in the Capital, along with the greatest range of homes, the largest youth population and numerous green spaces, covering a third of the borough. The West Croydon Masterplan details how Croydon will become one of the top London boroughs for enterprise, making it a unique brough of opportunity for those who choose to live and work in the area.

West Croydon is one of London's most accessible areas and is a key transport hub for South London due to its excellent train links, bus routes and London's only tram system, making it an excellent area for investment. West Croydon Station provides connections into London via the London Overground and National Rail connection the station to both London and Gatwick.

London Square's development at St Michael's Square provides 240 new homes, a new public square with locally commissioned public art and improved footpaths and public spaces around the scheme. St Michael's and All Angels Church is the centrepiece for West Croydon, through the opening of West Croydon Station.

THE SCHEME

St Michael's Square has been designed to be an environmentally sustainable place, using a complementary mix of uses, which include both affordable and private housing, transportation, landscape, building form and design, energy, materials, water and waste management.

The project provides 240 residential homes across two towers, 55% of which are affordable. Tower A comprises of 132 units of affordable housing for Clarion Housing Group and Tower B has 108 units for private sale.

There is landscaping around both tower blocks and a new central square created between the towers. A public art piece was commissioned with the theme of community and belonging and the winning piece, 'the Kaleidosteeple' can be found in the centre of the square. Tiles, created by the public will form the base of the artwork.

Five new commercial units form the base of the two towers and as well as existing shops. Four of the previous shops on Station Road had to be retained. These have been stripped and structurally refurbished and now serve as the frontage for some of the commercial units.

Both towers were designed with high quality architecture to a simple, elegant and efficient design encompassing natural durable materials, high quality finishes with smaller visual texture and variation, depth to the façade and generous openings.

Tower A will have 174 residential long stay cycle spaces and Tower B will hold 177 residential long stay cycle spaces.

The scheme is aiming to be car free with only 65 car parking spaces on offer. Focusing on additional needs and aiming to reducing carbon there will be three disabled spaces all with electric vehicle charging points. Additionally, two spaces will be provided within St Michael's Church car park, both of which will be accessible parking.

The vision was to create a cluster of buildings that have their own identities yet form a family with others through their footprint, height, form or materials.

The appearance of the scheme is driven by the desire to respond to the divergent content of the site as it sits between the low-rise residential area to the north west and the retail areas to the south and large commercial buildings to the east.

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RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

The design is two simple towers with a stone base to reflect existing street scale.

It is punctuated with vertical glazed element that on one tower results in a cruciform shape to reflect the church and on the other tower a simple vertical element that bisects the building. Next to each window there is a precast concrete panel with a motif showing the stained glass window from the church.



PUBLIC REALM

The new central St Michael's Square will provide a new public space for residents to socialise, relax and engage with the built and natural environment around them.

The addition of a locally-commission piece of public art brings a sense of community and belonging to the square. The intention of the artwork is to change people's sense of place and their way of viewing the world around them. It was hoped the art would encourage the public to look up and engage more with the built and natural environment surrounding them.

A competition was held with artists invited to develop an artwork proposal. The artists were interviewed by a stakeholder panel who then submitted a shortlist of artists who would submit their final proposals to the selection committee. This committee was formed of numerous stakeholders including: London Borough of Croydon, London Square and Clarion Housing Group.

The winning project, the Kaleidosteeple, indicates a spatial concept – A Kaleidoscope and the steeple of St Michael's Church. The idea is for it to relate people to St Michael's Square community and the environment, through the act of observing. The artwork is inspired by the world of construction and specifically, scaffolding structures and the interaction between architecture and the city.

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The Kaleidosteeple forms a visual centre piece in St Michael's Square. Its mirrored faces reflect Croydon's landscape and the aluminium scaffolding pieces (painted white) support it. The light design and colours related back to the lightness of air and skylight while the material relates back to the urbanity and growth energy of Croydon.

To ensure the local community were involved with the project, workshops took place to design tiles which would form the corner of the planters on the art piece which would be based on imprinting of botanical elements. The local community was able to help with the tiles, and during the workshop they were invited to create their own tiles and play with the botanical imprinting. The flora elements used are ones which are commonly found within Croydon. The tiles were clay fired tiles, which created a marbling effect.

This interactive art piece will not only create a protected space for reflection and socialising but will encourage locals to engage with the world around them.

SHARED PRIVATE AMENITY

The scheme includes a shared private amenity space in both buildings. Tower A had an indoor space, while Tower B will have indoor space and three shared roof terraces. These roof terraces will provide residents with secure shared social amenity spaces that will include sensory plants and roof gardens. The terraces will be designed to encourage flexibility in their use and for those of all ages, with seats and space to relax in.

Each residential unit contains a private winter garden, providing an amenity space for residents all year round.

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DESIGNING OUT CRIME

A key principle of the project was to design the buildings and any space associated with them, to be as safe and secure as possible. The buildings face outward and project into the public realm and all entrances at ground level will have maximum natural surveillance. Footpaths and cycleways are of generous width and have a suitable landscape setting to avoid creating a narrow corridor which could be perceived as threatening. Access to buildings and private space is controlled. The landscape has been designed to avoid the creation of secluded areas.

ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The development aims to achieve excellent sustainability credentials with low carbon emissions and includes improved glazing for temperature regulation and an improved air permeability rating. Gas fired CHP (Combined Heat Power) systems serve both towers, through a site wide district heating system. This is combined with solar PV panels, which cover 150 sq m of the towers, providing on-site renewable energy.

The entire building façade is constructed from pre-cast panels, bringing to the development efficiencies and carbon reductions associated with modern methods of construction.

The inclusion of winter gardens and the solar control measures reduce the energy consumption of the towers passively. The whole house ventilation systems with heat exchanges reduce energy consumption and the gas fire CHP will produce heating and hot water to significantly reduce carbon emissions.

The development will have water efficiency devices installed to help reduce water consumption and the green roofs will reduce the runoff with SUDS installed.

BIODIVERSITY

The biodiversity strategy has been developed to give residents the opportunity to experience the local environment in as many forms as possible, by planting predominantly native species to provide foraging areas for pollinators and other priority species, as well as numerous fruit and seed-bearing trees and shrubs.

The scheme includes green roofs, with native planting species and will be low maintenance without automated irrigation. The substrate depth will vary around the gardens to provide multiple habitats. These habitats will include bat boxes, a range of bird boxes to encourage a wider variety of species as well as insect hotels.

CONSIDERATE CONSTRUCTORS SCHEME

The St Michael's development is registered with the CCS, a national initiative operating a voluntary Code of Considerate Practice committing sites, companies and suppliers registered with the scheme, to care about appearance, respect the community, protect the environment and secure everyone's safety while valuing the workforce and promoting best practice.

The development received an initial score of 39/45 followed by a further three audits resulting in full marks of 45/45, proving the development is following best practice in all aspects.

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SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Through the development phase, working with Croydon Commitment and London Square's supply chain, the scheme provided seven apprenticeship and five traineeships to local people.

The development team were involved in a number of initiatives to support the local community, including sponsorship of the Queen's Jubilee Veterans Lunch in 2022, careers events at John Ruskin College and Legacy, Croydon Youth Zone, the provision of free skills and online taster courses through our partnership with the Workers Educational Association and attendance at the Meet the Employers Event with Croydon Voluntary Action, in partnership with Croydon Association for Young Single Homeless (CAYSH).

In November 2023, the project team proudly accepted a CCS Leading Lights Award for community engagement, for their reducing re-offending through skills and employment scheme. Transforming lives by creating opportunity and hope, London Square in collaboration with Croydon Works and multi-award- winning social enterprise The Skill Mill, designed a meaningful work experience initiative to support the rehabilitation of young ex-offenders.

As part of the St Michael's Square Project, the initiative was designed to reduce re-offending and increase employability through engagement, participation and education. The chaperoned two-week placement gave four young people, aged between 16-18, a chance to experience a live construction site and learn about various trades and career options. Feedback from participants was extremely positive and we hope to continue the initiative to promote construction careers and host more work placements in the future.

