

# A NEW LIFE

**Shadow of its former self** What are the environmental issues that arise when refurbishing an old building? By *Piers Wehner*



**Basilica, Leeds:** the original 1960s structure (far left); and the revamped version today (left).

**Tricorn Centre, Portsmouth:** before being redeveloped by Centros Miller it was voted the nation's least favourite building three years in a row



They are the bane of every urban streetscape. Amid the Georgian terraces, the regiments of shop fronts and sensitive modern developments, there it will be, jutting out above the rooftops like a jagged and rotten tooth – the 1960s concrete block.

One fine example of this unloved and often unlovable memento of brutalism was the Tricorn shopping centre in Portsmouth. Although festooned with accolades and architectural awards when it was built

in the late 1960s, it swiftly became loathed by the local population and anyone who visited it. Before its demolition in 2004 and subsequent redevelopment by Centros Miller, it had been voted the nation's least favourite building three years in a row.

But moves are being made by industry figures, including Louise Ellison of the Investment Property Forum and RICS president Graham Chase, for the re-use of old buildings to be considered before new build is

mooted. The industry, in the name of environmentalism and sustainability, is being urged to reconsider the ugly sisters of the 1960s and 1970s.

They should not be demolished, but re-used and recycled. Opinions have led to polarised stances. Some see it as unnecessary, naïve and extreme.

Others hold to the view that suspending development on new buildings would be a valuable step in the climate change tackle. It would force existing buildings to be re-used.

But, Andrew Gardner, a partner at DLG Architects – which specialises in transforming these ugly ducklings into graceful swans – says the revitalisation of 1960s buildings is not just a necessity but a great opportunity.

Gardner says that, environmentally, re-use avoids wasting the building's embodied energy. But it also makes good commercial sense by avoiding demolition and rebuild.

“There is a more positive take on this which, it seems, is being

overlooked,” says Gardner. “Rather than viewing new development or re-use of existing building stock as a necessity, we should take a fresh look at these buildings, to appreciate and capitalise on their virtues.”

Re-use of existing buildings is preferable from an environmental standpoint, but that doesn't have to mean foregoing the advantages of new build, either from the point of view of optimising energy efficiency and sustainability, nor from the point

of view of modern office design.

“One stumbling block is that the buildings may not be able to tick the necessary boxes to classify as grade A office space,” says Gardner. Many do not achieve the BCO's technical criteria – ceiling heights for example.

“But given the right approach, these offices can provide something more exciting to many occupiers than many grade A buildings. The potentially limiting view that precludes non-grade A buildings as desirable offices

