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Balancing competing needs for urban office first

Development on constrained, inner-city sites can accentuate the need to balance competing requirements. The priorities of the property developer, planning authority, Transport for London (TfL), future users and the local community all need to be satisfied, for successful execution of the project to deliver value to its myriad stakeholders.

In a recent commission, the added complexity of ongoing construction of a nearby scheme, two red routes adjacent to the site, and the temporary relocation of an electricity substation onto the public footway, all heightened the challenges for Motion's project team.

Frasers Property UK was awarded planning consent for its first urban office scheme at the former Central House in Aldgate, London. The Rowe, on Whitechapel High Street, will deliver 15,000 square metres of flexible office space. According to Design Manager, Jake Walton, "This is an exciting milestone for Frasers Property. Situated between the City of London and the gateway to the East End, the new building will reflect the area's creative heritage while contributing to its modern vibrancy, with contextual references throughout."

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Top of the polls for services to the property development industry

A recent poll among property development professionals has ranked Motion in first place, in recognition of its services to the sector.

In an impressive tour de force, Motion fought off competition from more than 80 contestants to win in the Best Professional Property Services Company category at the prestigious 2021 Surrey Property Awards.



Representatives of the senior management team were presented the

award by writer and broadcaster, Gyles Brandreth, at a black tie gala dinner held in November. Managing Director, Phil Bell, says, "Having supported this event over many years, it is especially rewarding to receive the accolade after what has been a challenging time for the industry. I'd like to thank each and every one of our team for getting us to this point in the company's journey, and to all our clients and associates for lending us their vote on this occasion."

Jason Morgans

Problem solving for all

Associate Director Jason Morgans has been with Motion for three years. He caught up with Insight to reveal what makes him tick, both in and out of work.

What brought you to Motion?

JM I was ready for a change from the large corporate brands I had been working with, and Motion's reputation preceded itself! I enjoyed working in SMEs before, where you have good access to directors and get your teeth into some great projects. When I was ready to make a career change, this seemed like an obvious place.

What do you like most about the work?

JM I like working on larger, multi-disciplinary projects and enjoy the collaborative nature of this job. I also really like problem solving; finding a solution that works for everyone. I can work widely across projects of all types, which gives me really great variety.

What's life like outside the office?

JM I live on the south coast and go out on the water paddleboarding when I can. I've also taken part in a triathlon, and I'm planning to do that again this year. I love live music and festivals.

...and if you could be doing anything else?

JM For me it would either be professional sport or joining a band. On that basis I am not holding out for a change of career just yet!

Strong connections with decision makers

Motion supported the proposals with transport and travel planning, a construction access strategy, and delivery and servicing advice. The team also produced S278 enabling works highway designs for the temporary relocation of a UKPN electricity substation as well as the final public realm improvements, which involved pedestrian modelling and extensive negotiations with TfL.

Jake adds, "The Motion team leveraged strong connections with the various authorities. Their planners and engineers demonstrated they are able to get things moving by bringing together all of the relevant decision makers."

Phil de Jongh, explains, "Servicing will need to be carried out from the back of the development to avoid any impact on the highway. The construction management plan also needed to ensure site traffic could flow freely without impacting on the nearby red routes."

Local arts heritage

The development is located on the former site of the London Metropolitan University School of Art and Architecture. The new building will retain the original modernist 1960s façade, with the addition of a new six-storey extension which will double the interior floorspace. A ground floor café and retail area will provide opportunities for local businesses. The development enjoys good connectivity and transport links, and will run on renewable electricity. The offices have been designed for 'new normal' working practices, with Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) principles underpinning the project, from planning to build.

Motion's delivery and servicing plan will minimise any disruption to traffic on the two red routes flanking the site. The project was also complicated by the construction of an adjacent hotel. Technical Director,



Rethinking Britain's Victorian sewer infrastructure



Director Richard Bettridge reflects on the recent parliamentary debate culminating in a partial government U-turn over an amendment to the environment bill. The proposed change places a heavier duty on water companies to demonstrate a reduction in sewerage overflows over a five-year period.

Roundabout way to unlock new homes

Keeping traffic moving during road improvement works is a regular test of Motion's infrastructure design capabilities. But in one such project in Hampshire, differing levels for a new roundabout layout created additional challenges for the team.

Construction is underway of a roundabout on a busy stretch of the A287, to unlock a residential development in Church Crookham. The complex project has been supported over a seven-year period by Motion, whose services have included detailed design for the roundabout and associated road widening, drainage and attenuation advice, and site supervision.

Martin Grant Homes is building 300 houses at the prestigious Albany Park site, along with a convenience store, sports pavilion, football pitches and public open spaces. The development will be served by a new dedicated access, also designed and supported by Motion. The scheme is close to the Basingstoke Canal and set within 82 acres of woodland, incorporating a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) which will help to conserve wildlife homes and protect nesting birds.

Overcoming design challenges

Richard Stibbs, Head of Planning and Technical at Martin Grant Homes, says, "It has been an exceedingly challenging technical design process to meet the requirements of Hampshire County Council highways department, and obtain approval for the temporary works to enable the roundabout to be constructed whilst keeping two-way traffic flowing." He adds, "Motion has been very proactive during our long partnership, dealing with multiple iterations of the design. The team has also maintained very good relations with the contractor, Buxted, in their ongoing site supervisory role."

The original site of the planned roundabout was known as an accident blackspot. The busy route has had to remain open during the roundabout construction, which is due to be completed in late 2022. According to Motion Associate, Shaun Cregeen, "The junction design was further complicated by a two-metre difference in levels. Two-way traffic had to be maintained while these were being built up." The project has also involved diverting vital utility infrastructure.

An incongruity exists which requires sewerage undertakers – water companies – to collect and treat public wastewater flows, even though they do not create them. Furthermore, there is an exponential difference between foul sewer flows and surface-water runoff, though historically the systems that cope with them have been combined. To put this disparity into context, for foul flows, a 150mm diameter pipe laid at a 1 in 150 gradient, could serve approximately 275 homes. Surface-water sewer designs should adhere to the 1 in 1, 1 in 2 or 1 in 5 year rainfall event and no flooding should occur in a 1 in 30 year rainfall event.

Protection of property

Rainfall in excess of modest events will exit the combined sewer system and flood property. This is why old combined systems have needed a 'safety valve' to prevent property flooding. The theory was that the combined sewer overflows (CSOs) were designed to flood areas where little damage could result.

The increase in rainfall severity through climate change, coupled with better understanding of the damage caused to our water environment and wildlife, has exposed the original theory as being highly complacent. We are right to demand significant improvements to the combined sewer systems to prevent further damage, but these will need thorough assessment to explore the design potential. Combined systems have not been designed for developments since the 1960s and future systems are going to be expensive.

However, there is no room for complacency. Climate change makes it imperative that these arrangements are updated and can demonstrate resilience to extreme weather events.

Win-win solution

Larger underground sewers may hold the answer to this conundrum. Yet the complete containment of combined sewage flows underground through oversized sewers, would be prohibitively expensive. One solution could be tanks which would store CSOs and pump them back into the sewerage system when normal capacity returned.

A programme of dealing with CSOs would present a win-win solution, enabling rivers to remain cleaner and treatment plants to be more effective. Either way, a considerable investment would be necessary.

Motion is currently working with industry partners to research ways of dealing with foul sewer flooding and CSOs, so that they have less impact on the environment.

AN EXPERT WRITES...

Competing on an unlevel playing field



Principal Transport Planner, Richard Allman, reviews the challenges faced when unprecedented highway contribution requests coupled with time constraints threaten a development programme. He emphasises the importance of early engagement and a robust, evidence-based approach to negotiation.

Time is money, and failure to reach agreement with the local highway authority for that all-important committee date can have dire consequences for developers. A protracted period of correspondence typically follows, and if officers are unable to respond quickly, negotiations can take place at the eleventh hour. This inadvertently puts developers at a disadvantage and leaves them vulnerable to agreeing inappropriate levels of highway contributions.

Current guidance is open to interpretation and difficult to translate into an appropriate magnitude of contributions or interventions. This creates challenges for highway officers and consultants alike.

Time and money

Where no clear highway contribution framework exists, and as new policies emerge, the methods used for calculating highway contributions can vary widely. In the absence of a thorough understanding of what is 'reasonable,' and the evidence required to prove it, developers can find themselves confronted with the difficult decision of either accepting the requested contribution costs without challenge, or risking delays or a potential refusal on highway grounds.

Whilst applicants can appeal, the process adds further time and costs with no certainty of outcome. Therefore, developers understandably prefer to reach an agreement with the highway authority within the application process and can unintentionally pay over the odds. Regardless of whether developers can afford the additional cost, the financial viability of the scheme may be compromised, and there is the further risk of being seen to be 'paying for a permission'.

So, what can be done to manage this risk? The importance of engaging with the highway authority at the earliest opportunity cannot be underestimated. Opening an early dialogue allows issues to be identified from the outset, affords all parties the time to develop a level of understanding, and demonstrates the willingness of the developer to cooperate.

Of course, early engagement doesn't guarantee agreement or prohibit new issues emerging late in the application process. This is where mature industry experience combined with exhaustive, diligent research can make a valuable difference to the outcome. We achieve this through the provision of robust, factual and reasoned argument, ongoing support and advice, and resilience under intense scrutiny.

World-class retail destination reinvigorated

Redevelopment of the block known as K1 in Knightsbridge is nearing completion, after plans were approved to transform one of the world's most prestigious shopping locations.

Motion provided extensive pre- and post-planning transport and infrastructure advice and support during a collaboration with real estate company, Chelsfield, over several years. Associate Shaun Cregeen explains, *"Following planning approval, Motion was also retained to design and manage the temporary and permanent S278 highway works. Construction involved several challenges due to the constrained location, and required close liaison with relevant authorities to minimise impact on the travelling public."*

The 340,000 square foot scheme will deliver enhanced retail space at street level, new offices and 35 residential apartments with a rooftop garden and restaurant. The entrance to Knightsbridge underground station has also been relocated. Motion Director, Neil Jaques, reports, *"High-end fashion retailer, Burberry, now occupies the corner unit on the junction of Brompton Road and Sloane Street. Works outside the shop, including footway widening, have been carried out to improve pedestrian access."*





Tomorrow's all-electric future today

Advice to directly address the climate emergency agenda is being provided by Motion and energy innovator SNRG. By planning integrated sustainable mobility and renewable energy options, the proposition will be delivered through the e-mobility, community and energy SNRG Hub, centrally located within new neighbourhoods.

SNRG Hub will provide a focus for cafés, co-working spaces, gyms, dark kitchens and other local facilities including those for later living. The intelligent micro-grid, 'SNRG SmartGrid', will connect homes and businesses, renewable generation including solar panels, and battery storage to lower peak network demand.



SNRG Hub will facilitate EV car clubs, e-bike and e-scooter services, and last mile delivery. Sustainable travel will be encouraged in all its forms, as public transport services including electric buses, Park & Ride and community taxis, also benefit from its own energy generation and optimisation.

Tackling cost, complexity and carbon

The benefits will accrue at the land, community and individual household levels. Housebuilders will be able to focus on construction, not the underlying technology, and local communities are able to have a stake in the assets and their governance.

Energy consumption, mobility and community services will be provided through a single, easy-to-use mobile app for residents. Motion Director Andrew Whittingham believes that bringing together energy, transport and community in a physical hub, with an app-based platform, is the obvious way forward. He says, *"This concept meets the challenges at a practical level and is proving to be attractive to planning authorities wrestling with climate change."*

According to Richard Scott, SNRG's Chief Design Officer and co-founder, *"Many businesses have the know-how, but SNRG acts as an aggregator, harnessing several innovations and disciplines for the planning and construction of new developments."*

Brownfield land optimised with transport advice

A resolution to grant planning permission has been agreed for 160 new homes in Frimley Green, Surrey. The Berkeley Homes Limited development will make a significant contribution to Surrey Heath Borough Council's Five Year Housing Land Supply. The scheme also gives new life to 3.4 hectares of brownfield land, making efficient use of an underutilised site.

The successful application enables Berkeley Homes to build upon a portfolio of developments in the Surrey Heath area, offering a mix of flats and houses ranging from one- to four-bedroom accommodation, including affordable homes. The scheme will also deliver well-designed open spaces, with private and public amenities including a dedicated Local Area of Play.

Transport planning support was provided by Motion for the application. Heidi Perrin, Development Manager at Berkeley Homes explains, *"This is a busy site accessed off a*

two-way single carriageway 'B' road, adjacent to a public country park and industrial premises. Concerns were initially raised about the impact on the wider highway network, the proposed parking allocation per household, and the risk of overspill parking."

Heidi continues, *"Motion presented comprehensive and easy-to-understand evidence to council officers and local resident groups to alleviate any doubts. It was reassuring to have their wealth of independent experience on the consultancy team."*

Motion's Managing Director, Phil Bell, says, *"The development was demonstrated to be accessible by*



a range of transport modes, which have the potential to reduce reliance on the private car." He adds,

"The site also benefits from local amenities and, as such, is an exemplar of the walkable neighbourhood concept."





Making sense of water neutrality

Developers wishing to build in the Sussex North Water Supply Zone may be required to produce water neutrality statements for new residential schemes. Motion Director, Neil Jaques, is currently advising several clients about this latest challenge.

Water neutrality requires new developments to avoid exceeding the previous total water use volumes. Demand for water in proposed developments can be significantly reduced, possibly by up to 85 litres per person per day. The use of water-efficient fixtures and fittings, grey water recycling or rainwater harvesting, can all contribute to demand reduction. But Neil cautions, *"Provision of potable water is necessary for drinking, cooking and bathing, and cleaning rainwater for these purposes is not usually advisable due to the prohibitive costs."*

An alternative option is to offset water usage against existing demand on the development or in the wider area. If existing water demand is high, it may be possible to fully offset future demand against the existing use. In the absence of an existing development, or where current water demand is low, further offsetting would

be required.

Retrofitting council-owned properties or commercial buildings is possible for water demand offsetting. However, strategies need to be set out by the relevant planning authorities to provide more guidance for housebuilders. Developers could, for instance, be required to buy credits through a scheme. They may also be required to contribute through Section 106 agreements. Any such scheme could take several months to be established.

Neil adds, *"It remains to be seen how this issue will develop, but it is clear that it will require a coordinated approach between developers, water companies, consultants and planning authorities to ensure that applications are not unduly delayed."*

For further details or a one-to-one consultation about water neutrality, flood risk or sustainable drainage, email njaques@motion.co.uk

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Ask Motion – If you would value a preliminary discussion about the traffic, travel, infrastructure, drainage or flood-risk issues associated with your development project, why not give us a call on 01483 531300?

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A new dawn