

The innovative Interview Tom Goodall

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Tom Goodall started out his career at London-based architecture firms Wilkinson Eyre and Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands. He is now Senior Projects Director at Argent and oversees the residential element of the Kings Cross development. To date some 650 houses have been delivered with another 1,350 in the pipeline (of which 350 are under construction). He is also working on an Argent Related project in Tottenham Hale in partnership with Haringey Council.

Tom Goodall is taking part in 'the Argent interview' on 26 January at 17:30 in Olympia National Hall.



What materials or technologies are you researching at the moment?

We are spending a lot of time looking at different and innovative ways of construction such as CLT and modular construction in order to speed up the delivery of housing. The future of residential does rely on some form of modularity in my view. There is a bit of a misconception that some of this stuff results in a low-quality product, which is something we are looking to challenge.

Which recent architecture project has captured your attention and why?

Trafalgar Place, the dRMM project shortlisted for the Stirling Prize. It used intelligent architectural interventions in terms of the massing and the form of the buildings, as well as clever brickwork, to make what could have been a very blank façade very interesting. The units were great inside and it was an aspirational product delivered at a reasonable price that meant it was affordable to lots of people. For me it is what the future of housing architecture in London should look like.

Which architect (living or dead) would you like to sit next to at dinner and why?

I think the person who has inspired me the most is probably Arne Jacobsen. I went to St Catherine's College years ago and was impressed by the level of detail of design, the kind of almost pure arrogance of an architect who says I am going to design the plates, the knives and forks, the chairs, the lamps, everything. There is something lovely in that commitment to detail.

The theme of this year's ARCHITECT@WORK is water, an element that is integral to the Kings Cross redevelopment for instance. What is the significance of water in architecture projects?

At Argent we are big believers in the impact of water, particularly in the public realm. Eventually Kings Cross will have 15 different fountains in public and private areas. I think water is great as a landmark and has a powerful civic focus. One of the things you have to be careful about however is the burden that water features can cause in terms of maintenance. There is nothing more depressing than a fountain that is not working. We are obviously also lucky at Kings Cross because of the canal, while Tottenham Hale has those amazing marshes and reservoirs. I think often it's about trying to make sure more people can experience what's already there rather than trying to put new stuff in.

What will you be talking about at ARCHITECT@WORK?

I will be talking about the importance of place-making and, above all, ground floors. People spend a little bit of time looking at the tops of buildings, zero time looking at the middle and virtually all their time looking at the bottom of buildings. You can make the most fabulous building in the world but if you mess up the ground floor it all falls to pieces. It's something we obsess about.

Shouldn't sustainability just be a given at this point or is it still worth talking about?

Sustainable urban development in terms of reduced energy usage and embodied carbon should absolutely be a given. The part of it that is often forgotten is the life cycle costing. How much energy does this building consume when it's in use? How much does it cost to maintain? Is it easy to maintain? We should be designing places that people don't want or need to knock down and start again in 50 years. I also think putting the spaces between buildings ahead of the buildings themselves is critical. Granary Square is a good example of this. If you design a good square it will be there for thousands of years, if you design a good building you might get 100 years out of it. When it comes to rebuilding it's much easier if you have got the spaces between the buildings and the place-making right.

words by Giovanna Dunmall

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