



the
modernist



Open Letter November 2022

The Ringway Centre - Demolition v. Birmingham's Net Zero Commitment

Dear Councillor Ian Ward and WMCA Mayor Andy Street,

The Ringway Centre, by James Roberts (1962), on Smallbrook Queensway is one of the few Brutalist buildings we have left in the City. Importantly it demonstrates the unique Birmingham Brutalist style developed here in the 1960s.

The fact that the Twentieth Century Society have included the Ringway Centre in their recently published list of buildings at risk illustrates the national importance of this building. It is included in Birmingham's Local List at Grade B (2013) - 'Structures or features that are important in the city-wide architectural context or the local street scene, and warrant positive efforts to ensure their preservation.'

In an article for the Guardian (12th September, 2022), architecture critic Oliver Wainwright described Smallbrook Queensway as "one of [Birmingham's] most important buildings", concluding with the prospect that "the city could become a model of creative post-war conservation".

The environmental cost of demolition is well documented. When calculating the whole life carbon cost of a building, up to 75% is the building/construction itself. The true equation for the buildings' whole life carbon is:

Embodied Carbon + Operational Carbon + End of life (demolition/reuse/disposal) = Whole Life Carbon

To achieve net zero the city must include a proper calculation, assessment and consideration of a buildings' embodied carbon and whole life carbon in all policy and planning, including any proposed demolition.

Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority have made a number of commitments to net zero, here are a few.

"Birmingham will be "a city that takes a leading role in tackling climate change. This commitment will embed climate action in the council's decision-making process"(Council Plan 2019)

“The plan (Our Future City Plan) sets the vision for the City Centre for the next 20 years. The City Councils R20 initiative is at the heart of the plan that includes a zero-carbon approach to development”

WMCA - *“Ensure our buildings are well designed and our heritage is protected”*

“In 2021-24 we will ‘Encourage businesses in making their own premises energy efficient, in particular in retail units and office buildings” and “Reduce carbon emissions by 13% a year, and for the West Midlands to reach net zero by 2041”

The building cannot and should not remain empty. The Brutiful Birmingham column in the Birmingham Post (24th November 2022) features an alternative vision that retains this heritage building. This repurposing proposal for residential and commercial development, demonstrates how the building can be retained, the energy efficiency of the building can be brought up to current standards and space added in the form of discreet, oval, twenty storey towers that pay homage to The Rotunda (James Roberts, 1965).

We urgently call on the City Council and the WMCA to reject the proposed demolition of this building and advocate for more sympathetic repurposing respecting its heritage value and avoiding the release of large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

Catherine Croft Twentieth Century Society, Director of the Twentieth Century Society

Dr Otto Saumarez Smith Chair of the Twentieth Century Society Casework Committee, Assistant Professor in Architectural History, University of Warwick

Michael Dring The Birmingham Modernist, Senior Lecturer, Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU. Founder of Birmingham Modernist Society

Mary Keating Brutiful Birmingham. Founder of Brutiful Birmingham, Author of *Birmingham – The Brutiful Years*

John Christophers Zero Carbon House

Richard Sapcote Birmingham Civic Society, Chair of the Planning Committee

Matthew Vaughan Birmingham Civic Society Planning Committee

Simon Sturgis AADip RIBA Targeting Zero

Steve Tompkins MBE - HaworthTompkins.(Architects)

Peter St John partner Caruso St John, for and on behalf of Caruso St John Architects LLP

Níall McLaughlin, Níall McLaughlin Architects

Sara Edmonds, ACAN (Architects Climate Action Network) coordinator, Studio seARCH

Andy Foster author, *Birmingham and Black Country Pevsner*

Professor Carl Chinn MBE, Ph.D., F.Birm.Soc. Historian of Birmingham

Libby Harris, Birmingham Friends of the Earth

Imandeep Kaur, Co-founder and director, Civic Square

Dr Matthew Jones Head of the Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU

Prof Rachel Sara Oscar Naddermier Professor of Architecture and Research

Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, BCU

Henrietta Billings SAVE Britain's Heritage

John Forrest (Working Party Chair, Docomomo UK)

Philip Boyle (Co-ordinator, Docomomo UK)

Tom Cordell Docomomo UK

Elain Harwood, author of *Brutalist Britain*

Adrian Jones, member of CABE's national Design Review Panel. Author of *Towns in Britain & Cities of the North*.

Chris Matthews, Conservation Officer for Nottingham City Council Author of *Towns in Britain, Cities of the North* and *Homes & Places*.

Owen Hatherley, writer, culture editor of *Tribune*'

Sean Burns artist, assistant editor *frieze*

Christopher Beanland author of *The Wall in The Head, Concrete Concept - Brutalist Buildings Around the World* and presenter of Park Date podcast

Oliver Wainwright writer and Guardian architecture and design correspondent

Barnabas Calder, author of *Architecture: From Prehistory to Climate Emergency* (Pelican, 2021), Trustee of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain.

Sarah Ahluwalia daughter of James Roberts