# Salisbury Square project reaches excavation milestone amid heritage and sustainability debate



At the recent GE Basements and Underground Structures conference, industry leaders Michael O'Hagan of Keltbray and Stuart Vaughan of Wentworth explored the intricate challenges facing the £300 million Salisbury Square development in London. Featured prominently in their discussion was the construction of a deepened basement within this significant project, situated amid a complex urban environment. The site previously hosted nine different buildings, leading to a varied construction landscape, which further complicated the excavation process.

Significantly, the basement's proximity to a listed building and surrounding structures, notably a public house and the office building at 8 Salisbury Square, imposed stringent requirements on the project team. Built on a foundation of uncertainties, the project's complexities included undetermined service locations around the perimeter, complicating efforts to pile and excavate while ensuring the continued functionality of nearby assets. To navigate these challenges, the team relied on meticulous investigation and collaborative strategies to de-risk the project.

Notably, the Salisbury Square project has embraced innovative sustainability measures, with the City of London Corporation having announced the completion of the first of over 60 geothermal boreholes in July 2023. This system marks a significant advancement as the first standalone heating and cooling infrastructure in the Square Mile, aiming to mitigate carbon emissions and lessen dependency on gas. It aligns with the Corporation’s ambitious Net Zero 2040 target, reflecting a broader industry trend of integrating advanced environmental practices in urban development.

The project, which commenced construction in October 2022, is poised to become a civic landmark. It will feature a state-of-the-art facility for His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service, housing the City of London Law Courts alongside a new headquarters for the City of London Police. Designed by Eric Parry Architects, this ambitious scheme will encompass 45,785 square metres of space, enhancing the existing legal infrastructure while focusing on high-stakes crimes such as fraud and cybercrime.

However, the project has not been without controversy. Critics have raised concerns regarding the environmental impact of demolishing six historic buildings to make way for the new construction. An analysis claimed that this approach could result in an upfront carbon footprint more than 40% higher than a strategy focused on retrofitting. Advocates for sustainability argue that preserving existing structures could be a more effective means of achieving lower emissions and aligning with climate targets.

In June 2024, the City of London Corporation celebrated the project's notable milestone, marking the completion of the excavation phase—a step referred to as 'Bottoming Out.' This achievement underscores the project's commitment to delivering a facility with eighteen courtrooms, merging existing courts in the Square Mile—excluding the Old Bailey—into one central building. As the project progresses towards its 2026 completion date, it embodies the dual imperatives of innovation and heritage preservation in one of London's most critical urban developments.

With the impending completion of this high-profile initiative, the Salisbury Square development is positioned to bolster the City of London’s status as a global hub for business, law, and justice while attempting to address pressing sustainability challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.geplus.co.uk/events/watch-salisbury-square-development-balancing-heritage-and-innovation-16-06-2025/), [[4]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/eric-parrys-justice-quarter-demolition-job-slammed-by-chief-climate-adviser)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.geplus.co.uk/events/watch-salisbury-square-development-balancing-heritage-and-innovation-16-06-2025/), [[2]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/first-geothermal-borehole-completed-on-innovative-salisbury-square-development--the-first-square-mile-scheme-to-use-a-standalone-borehole-cooling-and-heating-system/), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/construction-begins-on-brand-new-flagship-london-court-in-the-square-mile)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/construction-begins-on-high-tech-city-justice-and-policing-hub), [[6]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-celebrates-the-next-construction-milestone-for-salisbury-square-development/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/eric-parrys-justice-quarter-demolition-job-slammed-by-chief-climate-adviser)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-celebrates-the-next-construction-milestone-for-salisbury-square-development/), [[7]](https://salisburysquaredevelopment.co.uk/the-proposal/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.geplus.co.uk/events/watch-salisbury-square-development-balancing-heritage-and-innovation-16-06-2025/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/first-geothermal-borehole-completed-on-innovative-salisbury-square-development--the-first-square-mile-scheme-to-use-a-standalone-borehole-cooling-and-heating-system/> - In July 2023, the City of London Corporation announced the completion of the first of over 60 geothermal boreholes for the Salisbury Square Development. This marks the first standalone borehole cooling and heating system in the Square Mile, aiming to reduce carbon emissions and reliance on gas. The system utilizes deep underground temperatures for energy-efficient heating and cooling, aligning with the Corporation's Net Zero 2040 target. The development will house a flagship facility for His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Services and a new headquarters for the City of London Police.
3. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/construction-begins-on-high-tech-city-justice-and-policing-hub> - In October 2022, the City of London Corporation, the Ministry of Justice, and the City of London Police celebrated the start of construction on a 45,785 sqm civic scheme to enhance the justice system's efforts against fraud. The Salisbury Square Development on Fleet Street will house the City of London Law Courts and a state-of-the-art headquarters for the City of London Police. Designed by Eric Parry Architects, the development is due for completion in 2026 and aims to strengthen London's position as a global centre for business, law, and justice.
4. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/eric-parrys-justice-quarter-demolition-job-slammed-by-chief-climate-adviser> - In October 2021, Eric Parry's planned Justice Quarter in the City of London faced criticism after analysis suggested its construction would emit tens of thousands more tonnes of CO₂ compared to retrofitting existing buildings. The £240 million Salisbury Square development involves replacing six historic buildings with three new ones, including a flagship seven-storey court building for Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Service and the Ministry of Justice. The analysis indicated that the demolition approach would result in an upfront carbon footprint more than 40% higher than a strategy based on reusing existing buildings.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/construction-begins-on-brand-new-flagship-london-court-in-the-square-mile> - In October 2022, the construction of a state-of-the-art combined court began in the heart of London’s legal centre as part of the Salisbury Square Development on Fleet Street. The City of London Law Courts will provide 18 hearing rooms, an increase of 10 on the courts they will replace in 2026. This consists of 8 Crown, six civil, and four magistrates’ courtrooms, focusing on high-level fraud, cyber, and economic crime. The development aims to enhance London's reputation as a global destination for business and investment.
6. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-of-london-corporation-celebrates-the-next-construction-milestone-for-salisbury-square-development/> - In June 2024, the City of London Corporation celebrated the successful 'Bottoming Out' of the Salisbury Square Development, marking the completion of the deepest excavation phase of the project. The development, funded and delivered by the City of London Corporation, is set to become a flagship facility for His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Services (HMCTS). It will include 18 courtrooms, combining all the Square Mile’s existing courts—except for the Old Bailey—into one building, and the new headquarters for the City of London Police.
7. <https://salisburysquaredevelopment.co.uk/the-proposal/> - The Salisbury Square Development aims to create healthy, sustainable buildings in the heart of the City of London. The sustainability strategy includes reducing energy demand through well-insulated façades, high-performance glazing, and low air permeability. Materials from existing buildings will be reclaimed where possible, creating adaptable buildings designed for a long life. The development will incorporate green roofs and biodiverse landscapes, targeting a BREEAM rating of Excellent for the new buildings. The project also aims to improve transport and manage servicing effectively, encouraging sustainable means of transport and leading more active and healthy lifestyles.