# London’s first Roman basilica reshapes 85 Gracechurch Street tower plans



The City of London has granted planning permission for two new towers in the Square Mile, including a significant development at 85 Gracechurch Street that underwent design revisions following a major archaeological discovery. This site revealed the remains of London’s first Roman basilica, dating from the late 1st century AD, altering the trajectory of the proposed office scheme and adding a notable historical layer to the project.

Initially, Woods Bagot had planned a 32-storey tower for 85 Gracechurch Street, but archaeological investigations carried out by Museum of London Archaeology uncovered substantial Roman ruins on the site, including well-preserved foundations and walls constructed from flint, ragstone, and Roman tiles. These remains are part of the basilica that once formed the civic heart of Londinium, encompassing political, judicial, commercial, and social functions. This discovery is exceptional in shedding light on Roman London's early development and the brief use of the forum it was part of, providing crucial insights into the lives of its inhabitants and the city’s ancient urban fabric.

In response, the scheme was revised and resubmitted in April 2025, reducing the tower’s height from 32 to 30 storeys to accommodate the archaeological findings. The updated design incorporates a permanent public exhibition space within the basement to showcase the basilica ruins, creating a bridge between past and present. The plans also include enhanced public hall, retail, and event spaces, alongside a public viewing deck overlooking nearby Leadenhall Market. The goal, as explained by Woods Bagot, is to foster a dialogue between the historical significance of the site and contemporary office use, transforming the building into a place where visitors and workers alike can engage with London's Roman heritage.

The developer, Hertshten Properties, alongside Woods Bagot and the Museum of London, intends to commemorate the basilica’s location through a visitor centre integrated into the tower, making the Roman remains accessible to the public. The basilica possibly represents the Tribunal area where magistrates and political leaders convened, emphasizing the site’s former role as a centre of governance and civic administration. The project is scheduled for completion by 2030, pending final planning approvals and further archaeological excavation.

This development is part of a broader trend in the City of London where new construction projects increasingly intertwine with archeological preservation efforts. The careful balancing act between urban growth and heritage conservation highlights the unique challenges of building in one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities. The Gracechurch Street project exemplifies this, aiming not only to provide modern office space but also to enrich London’s public realm by fostering greater understanding of its ancient roots.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-and-fletcher-priest-towers-get-green-light-from-city-planners/5136976.article), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/38df5698485f50bfc00c487b1fb246ec)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins), [[3]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/roman-basilica-uncovered-at-85-gracechurch-street-set-to-feature-in-woods-bagot-office-scheme/5134374.article), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/38df5698485f50bfc00c487b1fb246ec)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins), [[5]](https://www.woodsbagot.com/journal/past-meets-future-the-vision-behind-85-gracechurch-street/), [[6]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-shrinks-leadenhall-tower-after-roman-discovery)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/38df5698485f50bfc00c487b1fb246ec), [[5]](https://www.woodsbagot.com/journal/past-meets-future-the-vision-behind-85-gracechurch-street/), [[6]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-shrinks-leadenhall-tower-after-roman-discovery)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-and-fletcher-priest-towers-get-green-light-from-city-planners/5136976.article), [[2]](https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins), [[6]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-shrinks-leadenhall-tower-after-roman-discovery)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-and-fletcher-priest-towers-get-green-light-from-city-planners/5136976.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins> - In April 2025, Woods Bagot submitted revised plans for a high-rise at 85 Gracechurch Street in the City of London, reducing the tower’s height from 32 to 30 stories following the discovery of significant Roman ruins on site. The archaeological find, uncovered by the Museum of London Archaeology, includes 1st-century AD foundations and walls from a Roman basilica, part of ancient Londinium’s civic centre. The new scheme now incorporates a public exhibition space in the basement to permanently display the ruins, along with enhanced public hall, retail, and event spaces. The project is scheduled for completion by 2030, with a planning decision expected this summer.
3. <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/roman-basilica-uncovered-at-85-gracechurch-street-set-to-feature-in-woods-bagot-office-scheme/5134374.article> - In February 2025, archaeological investigations at 85 Gracechurch Street in the City of London uncovered significant remains of the first Roman basilica, part of the wider forum that once formed the political, judicial, commercial, and social centre of Roman London. The remains, which include foundations and walls constructed from flint, ragstone, and Roman tile, are proposed to be incorporated into an updated development scheme for the site. The updated proposals seek to reduce the height of the development to 30 storeys and incorporate an exhibition space within the basement to display the Roman remains. A public viewing deck overlooking Leadenhall Market is also proposed as part of the revisions. The planning application is expected to be submitted in spring 2025, with further archaeological excavations planned ahead of construction.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/38df5698485f50bfc00c487b1fb246ec> - In February 2025, archaeologists in London uncovered the remains of a Roman basilica dating back to 78-84 AD during preparations for a new 32-story office building at 85 Gracechurch Street. The basilica was situated in the ancient city known as Londinium and served as the political, social, and commercial heart of Roman London. The discovered foundations are exceptionally well-preserved and highlight the Roman influence on London's early development. The developer, Hertshten Properties, plans to preserve and display the remains in a visitor center as part of the new tower project. This significant discovery adds to the limited but fascinating insights into Roman London, complementing other remnants like sections of ancient wall, parts of an amphitheater, and a Mithras temple. This site could provide crucial information about the lives of Roman Londoners and why the original forum was only in use for 20 years before being replaced.
5. <https://www.woodsbagot.com/journal/past-meets-future-the-vision-behind-85-gracechurch-street/> - In April 2025, Woods Bagot discussed the impact of the discovery of London's first Roman basilica on the design of 85 Gracechurch Street. The remains were uncovered during initial archaeological investigations by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) after planning permission had been granted for a new development on the site in October 2023. The foundations are thought to be within an area of the Basilica known as the Tribunal, where magistrates and political leaders would have made major decisions about the government of London. The unveiling of the basilica has had a transformative impact on the project, leading to adjustments such as rearrangement of structural columns and a reimagined basement design into a new event and exhibition space for the public. The project aims to create a dialogue between the past and present, offering experiences that allow people to connect with the site as both a contemporary building and a site of ancient ruins.
6. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/woods-bagot-shrinks-leadenhall-tower-after-roman-discovery> - In February 2025, Woods Bagot redrew and reduced the height of its proposed 32-storey office tower in the City of London after the discovery of a Roman basilica on the site. The scheme to build new office space and demolish a 1930s office building on a plot neighbouring Leadenhall Market was originally approved by City of London councillors in October 2023. The consented plans included an exhibition space and a public hall. Updated proposals show that Woods Bagot has reduced the height of 85 Gracechurch Street by two storeys and relocated a proposed exhibition space on the ground floor, where the important Roman remains have been discovered during excavation work. The London Museum will be involved in what Woods Bagot describes as a new historic and immersive experience for London, providing a permanent public display, events space, and an immersive experience. A planning application is due to be submitted this spring, with completion scheduled for 2029/30, depending on approval and further excavation work.