# London architects test a softer, high‑street self‑storage model for neighbourhoods



Two London-based practices are quietly testing a new direction for self-storage, aiming to prove that the sector can sit more happily within city life than the stark, edge-of-town blocks it has long defined. The Architects’ Journal reports that Architecture 00 and Gibson Thornley have pitched two urban-storage schemes to Compound, the developer, with visions for Peckham in south London and New Barnet in north London. Rather than separate huts sprawled along unnamed industrial parks, these proposals bring storage onto the high street and pair it with co-working, community space and light industrial uses. Architecture 00’s five-storey Peckham scheme is designed to sit on a cleared plot along a busy corridor, offering an active frontage, planted decks and a ground-floor legibility that aims to invite passers-by in. Pepper emphasises a shift toward a “domestic rather than industrial feel,” a move intended to make the building read as part of the neighbourhood rather than a fortress on the outskirts. In New Barnet, Thornley’s low-rise proposal for Gibson Thornley likewise seeks to repair the street frontage by matching height and rhythm to surrounding homes, and by adopting a metallic and precast concrete palette inspired by High-Tech architecture. Both schemes are pitched as flexible, energy-efficient hybrids capable of accommodating evolving uses and a variety of users, from local residents to start-ups seeking a public-facing address.

The broader design conversation around these schemes is less about size and capacity and more about how storage can be beautiful, durable and integrated into urban life. Industry commentary and project reviews describe a shift away from “soulless” or hostile facilities toward façades, massing and landscaping that help such buildings sit comfortably within streets and communities. The New Shape of Self-Storage argues that municipalities increasingly demand sophisticated façades, active frontages and a streetscape that blends with its surroundings, with multi-storey urban facilities and varied materials helping to camouflage storage as a legitimate urban element. Across these discussions, the prospect of combining storage with retail, workspace or community uses features prominently, creating facilities that function as welcoming, legible parts of the city and are equipped with energy-efficient systems and advanced access technology. With co-located spaces on the high street, Pepper notes, small and micro businesses that grew during the Covid era now seek public-facing presence, while the rise of compact urban living makes on-demand storage an everyday utility rather than a last resort.

Design writers emphasise both the architectural opportunity and the practical hurdles of pursuing such mixed-use, street-facing storage. The practical logic is clear: these schemes are intended to be flexible—able to adapt to changing work and living patterns—and to contribute to local economies by activating ground floors and providing accessible, user-friendly interfaces for customers. Bruce Jordan’s A New Dawn for Self-Storage Design argues that the industry has moved beyond utilitarian back rooms toward architecture-led projects that demand curb appeal, ground-floor activation and clear visualisations to engage planning authorities and nearby communities. In parallel, the sector’s move toward lifestyle storage—with transparent façades, street-facing entrances and pedestrian-friendly public realm—is paralleled by calls for smarter planning and, in some cases, the repurposing of existing urban buildings to overcome zoning and cost barriers. The mixed-use approach is being framed as the next frontier, with robotics and automation at the ready to support dense city sites and dynamic customer needs.

A broader market arc supports these architectural ambitions. GlobeSt highlights a growing appetite among investors for adaptive reuse of existing buildings as a route into urban self-storage, noting that roughly 191 million square feet of storage space has been created via repurposing since 2014–2023, led by cities such as Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. The upside, industry watchers say, includes lower upfront costs, faster market entry and the ability to fit climate-controlled units and on-site services into sites with established transport links. Taken together with the architectural interest in canopies, trellises and other street-ready devices, the story is less about building bigger sheds and more about designing storage as a visible, well-designed element of the urban fabric—one that can host a workforce, a community hub and a flexible home for possessions, all within walking distance of daily life.

Referencing this broader shift, ArchDaily’s Design Depot illustrates how storage projects can range from subtle interior systems to bold urban interventions, underscoring that storage can be a design feature in its own right. In the context of the UK proposals, the lesson is clear: well-designed storage that looks outward to the street and inward to user needs has the potential to reframe what a lock-up can be, from a temporary necessity to a long-term civic asset.

Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/thinking-inside-the-box-why-the-self-storage-revolution-will-be-well-designed), [[4]](https://www.insideselfstorage.com/mixed-use-projects/mixed-use-development-the-next-frontier-for-self-storage)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/thinking-inside-the-box-why-the-self-storage-revolution-will-be-well-designed), [[2]](https://www.insideselfstorage.com/facility-design/the-new-shape-of-self-storage-facility-design-arcs-toward-beauty-durability-economy-and-sustainability), [[5]](https://www.insideselfstorage.com/mixed-use-projects/exploring-a-mixed-use-approach-to-self-storage-development)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.insideselfstorage.com/facility-design/a-new-dawn-for-self-storage-design), [[6]](https://www.globest.com/2024/10/31/investors-embrace-adaptive-reuse-for-urban-self-storage-projects/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/thinking-inside-the-box-why-the-self-storage-revolution-will-be-well-designed> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.insideselfstorage.com/facility-design/the-new-shape-of-self-storage-facility-design-arcs-toward-beauty-durability-economy-and-sustainability> - Inside Self-Storage’s 'The New Shape of Self-Storage' explains that storage architecture is shedding its dull, fortress-like image in favour of buildings that are beautiful, durable and capable of integrating with surrounding streets. Municipalities increasingly demand more sophisticated façades, massing and landscaping, leading to 'camouflaged' storage that sits comfortably in commercial or residential contexts. The piece highlights the shift to multi-storey urban facilities, varied materials and active frontages, while addressing energy efficiency, climate control and advanced access technology. It also notes opportunities to combine storage with retail, workspace or community uses, creating facilities that serve as welcoming, legible parts of the city.
3. <https://www.insideselfstorage.com/facility-design/a-new-dawn-for-self-storage-design> - Bruce Jordan’s 'A New Dawn for Self-Storage Design' argues that self-storage has moved from purely functional back-office assets to architecture-led projects. It traces a transition from plain, industrial façades to varied massing, materials and street-facing fronts, including canopies and trellises that enliven the street. The article discusses curb appeal, ground-floor activation and the need to engage planning authorities through clear visualisations and sensitivity to context. It also notes technology-driven trends, with digital leasing, mobile credentials and on-site kiosks shaping the customer experience, and the broader move towards flexible offices or work hubs alongside storage schemes.
4. <https://www.insideselfstorage.com/mixed-use-projects/mixed-use-development-the-next-frontier-for-self-storage> - This Inside Self-Storage feature surveys how self-storage has evolved from rural, single-storey facilities to urban mixed-use schemes that sit beside retail, offices and homes. It highlights Chicago’s Clybourn Galleria and similar conversions, showing how storage can be embedded in vibrant corridors. The article argues that mixed-use helps address planning challenges, unlocks higher rents and creates pedestrian activity. It promotes 'lifestyle storage' with street-level entrances and windows, while emphasising compatibility with surrounding architecture and streetscape to ensure the scheme sits well within its urban context.
5. <https://www.insideselfstorage.com/mixed-use-projects/exploring-a-mixed-use-approach-to-self-storage-development> - Exploring a Mixed-Use Approach to Self-Storage Development discusses how architects and developers pursue mixed-use layouts to access prime urban sites. It notes planning and zoning hurdles and the need to persuade communities that storage can sit alongside retail, offices or housing as a 'good neighbour'. The piece advocates lifestyle storage with transparent façades, street-facing entrances and pedestrian-friendly public realm, and stresses principles of compatibility, functional efficiency and long-term flexibility. It also mentions robotics and automation as potential enhancements to make dense urban storage viable.
6. <https://www.globest.com/2024/10/31/investors-embrace-adaptive-reuse-for-urban-self-storage-projects/> - GlobeSt reports a shift in urban self-storage toward adaptive reuse of existing buildings, driven by zoning constraints and high development costs. Citing StorageCafe, it states that about 191 million square feet (roughly 9%) of self-storage space has been created through repurposing since 2014–2023, with Chicago, New York and Philadelphia leading. The article emphasises the appeal of lifestyle storage, lower upfront costs and faster market access, noting how repurposed retail and industrial sites can accommodate climate-controlled units and on-site services while benefiting from established transport links.
7. <https://www.archdaily.com/965783/design-depot-30-projects-that-explore-diverse-storage-solutions> - ArchDaily's Design Depot compiles 30 projects illustrating diverse storage design approaches. It ranges from hidden storage integrated within interiors to wall-mounted and elevated systems, exposed shelving and movable mechanisms in retail, and mechanical solutions in large‑scale spaces. The article demonstrates that storage can act as a design feature, rather than a mere utilitarian backroom, and shows how material choice, scale and flexibility allow storage spaces to function across homes, offices and commercial contexts. It also highlights the potential for storage to contribute to interior architecture and urban design through inventive typologies.