# London’s HSBC Tower set to lead a retrofit revolution with innovative reuse plan



The recent AJ Retrofit Live 2025 conference, held in London’s City Brewery, underscored the growing momentum and potential within the building reuse and retrofit sector. Despite a concurrent tube strike, the fourth iteration of this day-long event attracted a sizable audience eager to explore retrofit’s expanding role in architecture and urban regeneration. Industry leaders, including former Stirling Prize winner Annalie Riches, environment minister Mary Creagh, and Stanton Williams director Paul Williams, shared insights that collectively painted retrofit not merely as a sustainability imperative but as a vast opportunity for innovation and community revitalisation.

Central to the discourse was the vision shared by Paul Venner, who oversees the planned refurbishment of HSBC’s iconic Eight Canada Square, originally designed by Foster + Partners. He emphatically stated that demolition must cease, highlighting that repurposing buildings is an age-old practice that modern construction has abandoned too readily. He pointed to Kohn Pedersen Fox’s upcoming transformation of the 23-year-old HSBC tower. This scheme aims to part-retrofit the 45-storey structure into a mixed-use hub, blending workspaces with leisure, education, and cultural venues, including a rooftop viewing gallery—set to be the first public viewpoint in Canary Wharf. Venner described this project as potentially “the poster child in London of repurposing,” reflecting broader industry trends towards extending the lifecycle of buildings rather than replacing them.

Recent reports and architectural sources further detail that this refurbishment, expected to begin in 2027 following HSBC’s lease expiry, will involve removing large sections of the façade to create terraces and introduce green spaces. The development is designed to accommodate a diverse tenant mix and provide sustainable, adaptable environments beyond traditional office functions. This approach aligns with Canary Wharf Group’s strategic shift towards diversifying the area’s offerings to meet evolving workplace and community needs, while also emphasizing sustainability and cultural engagement.

Government support for such initiatives was strongly echoed by environment minister Mary Creagh at the conference. Creagh articulated the government’s commitment to moving beyond the outdated “take-make-throw” economic model towards a circular economy. She highlighted the importance of maximising the value of the country's existing building stock by retrofitting historic homes and infrastructure for the future. Creagh also pointed to grassroots efforts installing air-source heat pumps, which have the potential to substantially reduce household energy bills, and indicated ongoing government work toward systemic changes aimed at prolonging material use.

The conference also showcased practical retrofit examples affirming these broader themes. For instance, Studio Egret West’s work in Croydon used permitted development rights to accelerate housing delivery inside existing 1950s–60s office blocks, avoiding lengthy planning delays. This project exemplifies how policy facilitation can speed up retrofit residential conversions, an essential factor given the rising urgency around housing shortages and sustainability.

Another compelling story came from Hastings, where community-led redevelopment of a derelict historic building into a vibrant hub faced challenges due to the Building Safety Act. Architect Sarah Castle spoke candidly about how the legislation’s unintended consequences significantly increased costs during the project’s final residential phase. Her experience highlights the tension between necessary safety reforms and the financial realities underpinning retrofit work, especially in tightly funded community regeneration projects. Castle advocated a shift in architectural mindset towards welcoming community expertise, fostering innovation in delivery, and sharing knowledge to empower similar projects elsewhere.

Annalie Riches of Mikhail Riches also reflected on lessons from the award-winning Park Hill estate retrofit in Sheffield, emphasising iterative learning from both successes and setbacks. She noted technical complexities such as thermal modelling and condensation risk assessments that are critical to avoiding previous retrofit pitfalls. Moreover, strong resident engagement throughout the process ensured the redevelopment met community needs and fostered genuine attachment, vital for long-term success.

Tim Heatley of Capital & Centric highlighted the transformative power of retrofit in rekindling appreciation for overlooked buildings, stating that simply activating derelict spaces with light and warmth can change public perception within a day. This insight resonates with the broader conference emphasis on architects’ role not only in design but also in engagement and perception management.

Adding a theoretical dimension, David Kohn introduced his concept of “jiu-jitsu urbanism,” which proposes harnessing existing urban energy and materials as resources rather than starting anew. Kohn’s philosophy underscores retrofit’s potential to blend heritage with innovation, aligning sustainability goals with architectural creativity.

In summary, the AJ Retrofit Live 2025 event crystallised a shared vision across industry, government, and community actors: retrofit is essential for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The planned transformation of London’s HSBC tower vividly illustrates these principles in action, while case studies from across the country reveal both the opportunities and challenges ahead. As retrofit gains prominence, architects are called to deepen their expertise, embrace collaborative approaches, and lead innovations in project delivery to fully realise retrofit’s massive potential in shaping resilient, vibrant urban futures.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6358bfe9-fcbe-4777-9e09-0c4c00f537c8), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/jul/18/canary-wharf-hsbc-tower-bank-exit), [[4]](https://www.bdcnetwork.com/home/news/55166091/kpf-unveils-design-for-repositioning-of-norman-fosters-8-canada-square-tower-in-london), [[5]](https://www.archdaily.com/1019374/kpf-set-to-transform-foster-plus-partners-designed-hsbc-tower-in-londons-canary-wharf), [[6]](https://www.hospitalityinvestor.com/development/canary-wharf-office-tower-become-sustainable-mixed-use-building)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways), [[7]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/6358bfe9-fcbe-4777-9e09-0c4c00f537c8> - In July 2024, the Canary Wharf Group (CWG) announced plans to redevelop the HSBC tower at 8 Canada Square in London. The project aims to transform the 45-storey office building into a mixed-use facility, incorporating leisure, entertainment, education, and cultural attractions. The redevelopment includes creating terraces by removing sections of the building's façade, making it more adaptable for various tenants. The initiative is part of CWG's broader strategy to diversify Canary Wharf's offerings beyond traditional office spaces. Construction is expected to commence in 2027, following HSBC's departure in 2026.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/jul/18/canary-wharf-hsbc-tower-bank-exit> - The Guardian reported in July 2024 that the Canary Wharf Group plans to repurpose the HSBC tower at 8 Canada Square into a mixed-use building after HSBC vacates in 2027. The redevelopment, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox, involves removing large sections of the building's façade to create terraces and incorporating leisure, entertainment, education, and cultural spaces. This transformation is part of CWG's effort to adapt to changing work patterns and attract a diverse range of tenants to the area.
4. <https://www.bdcnetwork.com/home/news/55166091/kpf-unveils-design-for-repositioning-of-norman-fosters-8-canada-square-tower-in-london> - Building Design+Construction highlighted in August 2024 that Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) unveiled plans to redevelop the 8 Canada Square tower in London. The design includes removing large sections of the building's façade to introduce green terraces and transforming the office space into a mixed-use facility. The project aims to create a sustainable, multi-use building that caters to modern occupancy demands and is expected to commence in 2027, following HSBC's departure.
5. <https://www.archdaily.com/1019374/kpf-set-to-transform-foster-plus-partners-designed-hsbc-tower-in-londons-canary-wharf> - ArchDaily reported in July 2024 that Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) plans to transform the 8 Canada Square tower in London's Canary Wharf. The redevelopment involves removing large parts of the 42-storey building to introduce terraces and additional functions, aiming to create a sustainable mixed-use building. The project is set to begin in 2027, after the expiry of HSBC's lease, and is considered one of the largest transformations of an office tower into a mixed-use facility.
6. <https://www.hospitalityinvestor.com/development/canary-wharf-office-tower-become-sustainable-mixed-use-building> - Hospitality Investor reported in July 2024 that the Qatar Investment Authority and Canary Wharf Group plan to redevelop the former HSBC office building at 8 Canada Square into a mixed-use facility. The redevelopment includes workspaces, leisure facilities, education, and cultural attractions, with a focus on high sustainability credentials. The project is set to begin in 2027, following the expiry of HSBC's lease, and aims to create a vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood in Canary Wharf.
7. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/embrace-the-massive-opportunity-aj-retrofit-live-2025-key-takeaways> - The Architects Journal reported on the AJ Retrofit Live 2025 conference held on 10 September 2025. The event featured discussions on the future of building reuse and retrofit, with speakers including Annalie Riches of Mikhail Riches, environment minister Mary Creagh, and Stanton Williams director Paul Williams. Topics covered included the importance of repurposing existing buildings, the role of architects in retrofit projects, and the impact of legislation like the Building Safety Act on redevelopment projects.