# London plans hybrid ‘urban storage’ that doubles as coworking and community space



London’s streets could soon host a new breed of self-storage: one that sits more comfortably on the urban fabric, doubles as flexible work and community space, and is designed to be legible and welcoming on the high street. The Architecture Journal reports that Architecture 00 and Gibson Thornley, working for developer Compound, are pursuing two such “urban storage” schemes—one in Peckham and one in New Barnet—that would fuse storage with coworking, social space and even light industrial uses. On the ground floor, Pepper argues, the aim is to turn an otherwise back-block use into a public-facing presence; on upper floors, the massing and materials hook into the surrounding context rather than mimic a generic shed. “The sad reality is that a significant proportion of storage units are still used after a major life disruption, such as the death of a relative or breakdown of a relationship. As such, they can be unexpectedly quite emotional spaces,” Architecture 00’s Lynton Pepper told the AJ. His co-creator, Gibson Thornley’s Matt Thornley, adds that the moment calls for change: “We are going through a period of great change and uncertainty within the built environment, and many of the old assumptions no longer hold. Creating clever hybrid buildings offers an exciting opportunity, embracing change and focusing on good design for all that supports the way we live in cities.” The two proposals, the article notes, would provide an “active frontage” and scale-conscious, domestic-feel designs that sit in dialogue with nearby housing and streetscape.

The designers are not alone in imagining a more integrated future for self-storage. A shift is already underway, with municipal planning expectations pushing facilities to blend with their street context through textures, colours and forms that sit comfortably in urban settings. Inside Self-Storage highlights how schemes are becoming camouflaged among offices or retail blocks, with landscaping, parapets and rooflines used to break up scale and reduce visual intrusion. Sustainability and technology are increasingly central: LED lighting, better insulation, solar-ready rooftops and clear energy targets sit alongside smarter access, management and enhanced customer experience. The concept of storage that sits alongside housing and small business is increasingly common in more compact urban cores, a trend the article says is likely to converge with retail and coworking uses. The ideas are not theoretical: Gibson Thornley’s Leon House in Charlton demonstrates a practical, real-world version of the hybrid approach—with generous common parts and entrances designed for coworking and informal gathering, signalling how compact urban living could accommodate flexible, work-ready spaces as part of everyday life.

The commercial and urban planning rationale behind this momentum is clear. Three key factors explain why self-storage is “on the move,” according to a major industry analysis: a persistent quality gap in dense markets where centrally located facilities command premium rents and high occupancy, a surge in conversions and repurposing of existing assets such as retail stores, offices and car parks to speed delivery and reduce planning risk, and a renewed focus on the basics—customer experience, efficiency and energy performance—to stand out in a crowded market. The outlook is regional as well as local: Europe-wide investment growth and rising demand for local, accessible storage that complements growing urban populations are noted by industry researchers. In London and other dense cities, these factors create fertile ground for schemes that blur the line between storage, workplace and community space, turning what used to be a utilitarian back-end into a legible, people-facing front door to city life. The high-tech architectural lineage—exposed services, modular components, and a kit-of-parts approach—offers a vocabulary for such hybrids, though it has also faced critique about style eclipsing substance and human-centred use. In short, while the Peckham and New Barnet proposals are still awaiting approval, they sit at the intersection of evolving urban design, built-form technology and changing expectations about how we store, work and gather in minutes of city life.

In this context, the architecture of self-storage is not merely about containment but about interface—with streets, with neighbours, with the everyday rhythms of the city. If these schemes get the green light, they could signal a broader redefinition of what a storage facility can be: a small, energy-efficient, adaptable hub that serves as a window onto contemporary urban living, rather than a sealed box on the edge of town.

### 📌 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.gibsonthornley.com/projects/leon-house/)
* 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.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/18/superstructure-hi-tech-architecture-1960-1990-sainsbury-centre-for-visual-arts-uea-norman-foster)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.jll.com/en-au/insights/three-key-reasons-why-self-storage-is-on-the-move), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-tech_architecture)

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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> - Self-storage design is shifting away from fortress-like, utilitarian blocks toward buildings that sit more comfortably in urban streetscapes. The article explains that municipalities are demanding more integrated architectural treatment—textures, colours and forms that fit local context. It highlights camouflaged schemes that resemble offices or retail blocks and notes that landscaping, parapets and rooflines are used to break up scale and reduce visual intrusion. Sustainability features such as LED lighting, efficient insulation, solar-ready rooftops and energy targets are discussed, alongside the growing importance of technology for access, management and customer experience. The piece also anticipates increased overlaps with retail, housing, and coworking uses.
3. <https://www.jll.com/en-au/insights/three-key-reasons-why-self-storage-is-on-the-move> - Three key reasons explain why self-storage is on the move. First, a noticeable quality gap exists in dense markets, with centrally located facilities achieving premium rents and high occupancy, especially in London. Second, conversions and repurposing of existing assets such as retail stores, offices and car parks are accelerating, offering faster delivery with lower planning risk. Third, operators are returning to basics: focusing on strong customer experience, efficiency and energy performance to stand out in a crowded market. The article highlights Europe-wide investment growth and rising demand for local, accessible storage that complements growing urban populations.
4. <https://www.gibsonthornley.com/projects/leon-house/> - Leon House is Pocket Living's compact housing project designed by Gibson Thornley in Charlton. The scheme stacks 51 apartments into two five-storey pavilions around a central core, borrowing from local brick vernacular and detailing entrances for cohesion with the neighbourhood. Crucially, the common parts are generous and entrances are conceived for co-working and informal gatherings, signalling a hybrid approach that blends living with shared work and social space. The design emphasises community-making and context-driven materials, showing how compact urban housing can include flexible, work-ready spaces to support contemporary city living.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/18/superstructure-hi-tech-architecture-1960-1990-sainsbury-centre-for-visual-arts-uea-norman-foster> - Forty years of hi-tech architecture traces the evolution of a movement from the late 1960s to Apple Park. The piece explains hi-tech’s core ideas—democratic workplaces, exposure of services and structure, and modular, reconfigurable spaces—while acknowledging criticisms of style over substance. It discusses how researchers and critics view the ’kit of parts’ approach and highlights key practitioners, including Foster, Rogers, Grimshaw and Hopkins, with examples such as the Sainsbury Centre and Pompidou Centre. The article situates hi-tech within broader debates about urban life, sustainability and the balance between technological ambition and human use.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-tech_architecture> - High-tech architecture emerged in the late 20th century as a style that exposed mechanical systems and celebrated industrial materials. Proponents such as Richard Rogers, Norman Foster, Michael Hopkins and Nicholas Grimshaw promoted flexible interiors and a 'kit of parts' approach to building; external services and large, lightweight structures were hallmarks. Early landmark works included the Lloyd’s Building and other technologically expressive schemes. The movement aspired to democratic workplaces and environmental performance, while inviting critique about its visual honesty and sometimes clinical appearance. The article surveys its origins, key figures and notable projects, and maps the ongoing debate about technology-led urban design.
7. <https://hgtv.co.uk/uk-architecture/high-tech-architecture-in-the-uk/> - British high-tech architecture is associated with the key names of Rogers, Foster, Hopkins and Grimshaw and is celebrated for its industrial aesthetics and structural honesty. The page outlines core ideas—exposed services, metal cladding and adaptable interiors—and cites notable UK buildings to illustrate the movement’s evolution. It also discusses the influence of hi-tech on later projects and presents the debates around its appeal and criticisms. Overall, the article provides a readable primer on how high-tech architecture developed in the UK and why it remains a reference point for discussions of technology-led urban design.