# Roman ruins delay London tower development as heritage takes centre stage



The development of a 30-storey tower at 85 Gracechurch Street in the City of London, designed by Woods Bagot and managed by Hertshten Properties, is facing a significant delay of up to 12 months due to ongoing archaeological investigations following the discovery of a 1st-century Roman basilica on the site. The full scale of these ruins, uncovered beneath the existing structure, remains unknown, which has complicated timelines and forced the developer to pause excavation and construction works until specialists can complete their investigations.

Originally, the project had envisioned partial retention and reuse of the 1930s Art Deco façade of the existing building. However, following the design reassessment prompted by the archaeological discovery, the façade will now be completely demolished. Woods Bagot argued that retaining the original frontage was incompatible with the proportions of the new design, while reusing reclaimed stone was considered inappropriate due to concerns over visual inconsistency and weathering. Instead, the practice plans to recreate a "scholarly reproduction" of the façade using suitable materials and detailing, although this approach has raised concerns among City planning officers about the impact on the surrounding Leadenhall Market Conservation Area, where the original frontage was seen as positively contributing to the area's heritage.

The discovery has led to several revisions to the planning consent. Notably, the City of London granted approval to a revised scheme in July, which reduced the tower’s height from 32 to 30 storeys and introduced a public hall and exhibition space dedicated to showcasing the Roman ruins. This move reflects a broader effort to preserve and publicise the site’s archaeological significance, which has been described by Historic England as a discovery of national importance linked to the earliest known basilica in Roman Londinium and its civic forum.

Project management and specialist teams involved include Mace, now confirmed as the construction partner, as well as Gardiner & Theobald (project managers), Shaw Corporation (surveyors), Turner & Townsend (quantity surveyors), Arup (multi-disciplinary consultancy), Sweco (M&E consultants), DP9 (planning specialists), and Robert Bird (structural and geotechnical engineers). Given the archaeological priorities, Hertshten Properties has restructured the development into two distinct phases: initial demolition and basement slab removal to allow for the digs, followed by the tower’s construction after the archaeological work is complete.

The revised planning approach aims to manage the delays linked to potential further discoveries that could extend excavation times. As such, there remains uncertainty about when superstructure works can definitively commence. Hertshten intends to amend an earlier 2023 planning consent to avoid delaying the project further, as a more recent 2025 consent has not yet reached its final approval stage. Demolition of the existing building is anticipated to begin next year, with the entire development, set within the Leadenhall Conservation Area adjacent to the Grade II-listed Leadenhall Market, targeting completion around 2030.

Beyond the new office space, estimated at roughly 235,000 sq ft, the scheme will include cultural and public amenities such as a heritage garden managed by the Museum of London, equipped with multi-functional and VR capabilities. This feature is designed to enhance engagement with the city's Roman past, directly connecting the community to the remarkable archaeological find beneath their feet.

The discovery and ongoing preservation efforts at 85 Gracechurch Street underscore the complex intersection of urban development and heritage conservation in one of London’s most historically rich areas, illustrating how modern architectural ambitions are adapting to embrace and celebrate the archaeological treasures of the past.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article) BD Online, [[3]](https://www.building.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-city-tower-set-to-be-built-by-mace-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138844.article) Building.co.uk
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article) BD Online
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article) BD Online, [[7]](https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins) CTBUH
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.macegroup.com/news/mace-appointed-on-landmark-development-next-to-the-iconic-leadenhall-market/) Mace Group, [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article) BD Online
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* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.estatesgazette.co.uk/news/hertshtens-32-storey-city-tower-gets-the-go-ahead/) Estates Gazette, [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c8edzjezdy0o) BBC News
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article) BD Online, [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c8edzjezdy0o) BBC News

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article> - The developer of Woods Bagot's 30-storey tower at 85 Gracechurch Street, London, faces a 10-12 month delay due to archaeological investigations of a 1st-century Roman basilica discovered on-site. The full extent of the ruins is unknown, and the delay's duration depends on excavation progress. The project has been revised to include a public exhibition space for the ruins. ([bdonline.co.uk](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-woods-bagots-city-tower-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138845.article?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.building.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-city-tower-set-to-be-built-by-mace-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138844.article> - Hertshten Properties' 30-storey tower at 85 Gracechurch Street, designed by Woods Bagot, is facing a 10-12 month delay due to archaeological investigations of a 1st-century Roman basilica discovered on-site. The full extent of the ruins is currently unknown, and the delay's duration cannot be confirmed until excavations are complete. ([building.co.uk](https://www.building.co.uk/news/developer-facing-12-month-delay-on-city-tower-set-to-be-built-by-mace-while-dig-investigates-roman-ruins/5138844.article?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.macegroup.com/news/mace-appointed-on-landmark-development-next-to-the-iconic-leadenhall-market/> - Mace has been appointed by Hertshten Properties as the construction partner for the 30-storey mixed-use tower at 85 Gracechurch Street, designed by Woods Bagot. The development, located within the Leadenhall Conservation Area and adjacent to the Grade II Listed Leadenhall Market, will replace a 1930s office building with approximately 235,000 sq. ft of state-of-the-art office space. The project is targeting BREEAM Outstanding rating upon completion and is scheduled for completion in 2030. ([macegroup.com](https://www.macegroup.com/news/mace-appointed-on-landmark-development-next-to-the-iconic-leadenhall-market/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c8edzjezdy0o> - Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of a Roman basilica beneath an office block at 85 Gracechurch Street, London, during preparations for a new tower. The discovery has led to revisions in the building's plans to showcase this 'monumental piece of London's history' as part of an immersive experience delivered in partnership with the London Museum. The exhibition is expected to open by 2029-2030. ([feeds.bbci.co.uk](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c8edzjezdy0o?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.estatesgazette.co.uk/news/hertshtens-32-storey-city-tower-gets-the-go-ahead/> - Hertshten Properties' 32-storey mixed-use office tower at 85 Gracechurch Street has been approved by the City of London Corporation. The development will replace a 1930s office building with 376,737 sq ft of new offices and will feature a heritage garden and public hall. The heritage garden, on the fifth floor, will be run by the Museum of London and will feature planted woodland and a multi-functional cultural space, with VR capabilities. ([estatesgazette.co.uk](https://www.estatesgazette.co.uk/news/hertshtens-32-storey-city-tower-gets-the-go-ahead/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins> - Woods Bagot has submitted revised plans for a high-rise at 85 Gracechurch Street in London, reducing the tower’s height from 32 to 30 stories following the discovery of significant Roman ruins on site. The archaeological find 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. ([ctbuh.org](https://www.ctbuh.org/news/design-revisions-for-londons-85-gracechurch-street-will-preserve-roman-basilica-ruins?utm_source=openai))