

2023 Wrapped!

As 2023 comes to a close, Firstplan team members are reflecting on another successful year and we would like to thank all of our clients, old and new, for their instructions throughout the last 12 months. The projects that we work on remain as diverse as ever, across a broad range of sectors and covering all parts of the country.

One of the highlights of the year was marking **Firstplan's 20th birthday**, with our party held at the Century Club, London in June. This was a chance for us to celebrate with some of our clients, alongside the consultant teams and architects that we work with regularly.

Firstplan is proud to have **achieved Carbon Neutral status in 2023**, working with Carbon Neutral Britain. Our management team has worked hard to minimise our carbon footprint and ensure that our remaining emissions are offset. We have chosen to partner with the Woodland Fund to contribute to carbon-offsetting projects around the world. Our Carbon Neutral status is an important first step in our efforts to move towards Net Zero, which we have set ourselves the ambitious target of achieving by 2025.



Building on last year, Firstplan has also continued its **community volunteering programme**, and this year as part of World Rivers Day in September our team joined a beach clean on the shore of the River Thames near our central London offices.

As ever, this year has seen a raft of planning legislation and policy changes, which has included, amongst other things, proposed planning reform to manage the way residential dwellings are used for Airbnb's and short-term rentals, the Government's U-turn on plans to scrap nutrient neutrality rules, and most recently, the increase to planning application fees, which came into effect on 6 December 2023.

Arguably the most discussed topic has been **The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act**, which achieved Royal Assent on 26 October 2023 and proposes significant and wide-ranging changes to the planning system. Further consultation and secondary legislation will need to be brought into force and a clear timetable from the Government is still awaited.

Next year is likely to be as eventful as this one, with **new requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain** expected to begin taking effect from January; another new version of the NPPF to digest; and a general election to take place before the end of January 2025 which may lead to further changes to the planning system. We regularly post updates on key policy and legislative changes on our website and LinkedIn channels and are always happy to discuss the implications of these or any other queries our clients may have.

Finally, the Firstplan team has continued to grow this year and we have **welcomed six new members of staff**, ranging from graduate planners to associate level.

Together, Firstplan has continued to increase the number of client instructions and the team has worked on a range of exciting projects and sectors.

Retail & Town Centres

Our retail and town centres team have had another busy year assisting our wide variety of our private sector clients, including securing permissions for new commercial floorspace and advising on strategies to enhance their assets in the context of challenging economic circumstances. For example, we have secured permission for a variety of works for one of our client BlackRock's key sites at Riverside Retail Park, Nottingham, which will result in an improved food & beverage offer, drive-thru units and more flexible uses including food sales across existing units.



Riverside Retail Park, Nottingham (Credit: RGP Architects)

Firstplan is continuing to advise Go Outdoors on new store opportunities and providing planning support to the roll-out of their store refurbishment programme across the UK, securing permissions in Gateshead, Sheffield, Lancaster and Warrington.

Firstplan also began working with Market Place this year, an exciting new retail and street food concept, which is investing in high street locations and has now opened in five locations in London and has ambitious plans to grow further in 2024.

We also continue to develop our workstream providing advice and support to our public sector clients, delivering retail and town centre strategies for Wokingham Borough Council and Rutland County Council, and advising several authorities across the country on planning applications for new retail development.

Employment & Logistics

Firstplan has continued to support a range of clients in the safeguarding of rail freight sites and bringing forward rail-based development. Working closely with the DB Cargo and Cappagh Public Works, Firstplan appeared at the South London Waste Plan Examination in Public and secured the safeguarding of the Chessington Railhead, a key Strategic Rail Freight Site, as a dual-use site for the transfer of minerals and waste. Firstplan has subsequently supported the site operator in bringing the railhead back into rail freight use, having last been used for the transfer of coal by rail in the 1990s. Firstplan has subsequently secured planning permission for Express Concrete for a rail-served concrete batching plant at the Chessington Railhead with construction expected to start early in the New Year.

Over the last 12 months, Firstplan has continued to provide CNG Fuels with planning and strategy advice to facilitate their UK-wide network roll-out of HGV Bio-compressed natural gas refuelling stations capable of servicing all the UK's major trucking routes. CNG Fuels now operates the UK's largest CNG refuelling network, including the world's largest public access station in Avonmouth. This year has seen their network grow across England and Scotland, with Wales' first station opening in November. In this role, Firstplan has advised on sites across 40 planning authorities, as well as pro-actively shaping national policy through representations to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy consultation, and the Department for Transport and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Call for Evidence on

how UK freight and logistics interact with the country's planning system.

Our team is also proud to have secured the crucial consents for Watford Borough Council's Regeneration Team in the redevelopment of Watford Business Park. This £20m major project will help regenerate Watford's key employment hub and set the bar high in terms of quality of design for incoming employment developments. The project has delivered over 6,000 sqm of flexible commercial floorspace across 14 units with attractive landscaping and ample parking. Operators will occupy the new units shortly.

Firstplan was instrumental in obtaining consent for Acme Works in London at planning committee in July for the erection of a nine-storey building with a basement and two-storey link building, alongside the excavation of a basement and two-storey extension of an existing building to allow for 1,031 sqm of light floorspace and 25 new residential homes.



Acme Works, Hackney, London

Working jointly with Colliers, Firstplan prepared a comprehensive Alternative Sites Assessment in support of a detailed planning application for a new state-of-the-art global headquarters campus for Frasers Group Plc on a 112ha site in the West Midlands which was submitted in September. The integrated campus includes logistics space, offices, R&D space, hotel, and leisure facilities.

Firstplan is excited to be supporting Tradestars in the growth of their new co-warehousing workspace concept. Their first site in Hackney launched in November 2023 with more locations planned to open in 2024.

Restaurant & Food Delivery

Firstplan has continued to assist the rapid expansion of Burger King with new sites across the country, including Bath, Sheffield, Staines, Basildon and Liverpool, in both town centre and retail park locations.

Firstplan continues to act as retained consultants for Five Guys, and 2023 saw Firstplan secure permission for Five Guys' second drive-thru. The proposals included the conversion of a vacant service station restaurant on the A11 at Barton Mills, with significant highways and logistical challenges, but Firstplan and the project team secured approval after lengthy negotiations, and we are delighted to see the restaurant trading well. We look forward to what 2024 brings.

We have also assisted Popeyes as they seek to enter the UK market, which has included high street and drive-thru formats. This has included Popeyes's first four drive-thrus in Rotherham, Northampton, Glasgow and Cardiff.

Highlights in the restaurant and food delivery sector also include securing consent for a new Alberts Schloss bar on behalf of Mission Mars, in the former Rainforest Café located on the ground floor of the iconic Grade II-listed Trocadero building at Piccadilly Circus, London. We also obtained planning and listed building consents to enable the opening of a new "Box" Bar in Nottingham on behalf of Arc Inspirations.

Firstplan has continued to work with retained client, Dishoom, and 2023 has seen work progress on bringing the company's smaller 'Permit Rooms' concept to new cities, including Brighton, which opened earlier this year.



Dishoom Permit Room, Brighton

Hotel & Leisure

Firstplan continues to work with Cheyne Capital to support the development of Taxi House sited along Grand Union Canal in Westminster, London. This major project will deliver 332 hotel rooms across 12 storeys along with flexible working spaces, retail, leisure facilities and replacement facilities for Westminster City Council.

Working with Padium, Firstplan obtained planning permission for a padel sports facility in Canary Wharf, London, comprising seven padel courts, changing facilities and associated café and retail space alongside advertisement consent for external signage. A follow-up planning application for an additional external court was also granted planning permission, with the padel courts opened for business in Autumn 2023.



Padium Padel facility, Canary Wharf

This year has seen the delivery of multiple Everyman Cinemas, perhaps the most exciting at Marlow, another Grade II* Listed Building, at the heart of the town centre. The converted court house incorporates two screens and a fantastic lounge space at first floor level. Firstplan provided planning and listed building advice throughout, securing the necessary permissions to facilitate Everyman's fit-out.

Residential

Firstplan continues to provide planning support to Dominus at Hammersmith's former Magistrates Court in delivering a 17-storey, 713-bed student accommodation building with new public realm areas.

A highlight this year for Firstplan was advising on and leading a complex planning strategy to secure

a variety of planning consents and subsequent prior approvals to secure the conversion of former light industrial buildings into nine new residential flats in Teddington in the London Borough of Richmond.

Firstplan was also instrumental in securing planning and listed building consents for an infill residential dwelling within a tight space in the back garden of a Grade II-listed house in Kennington, London. We have also worked on a new 'backland' development to deliver 6 new residential units adjacent to a railway line in Ealing, London, successfully addressing issues of amenity, heritage and highways.

We look forward to expanding our work in these sectors into 2024.



KMK Kinderzimmer, Walton on Thames



Former Magistrates Court, Hammersmith

Community

We are proud to have played a crucial role in securing planning permission in October for a new archive centre at Canning Town Library within the London Borough of Newham.

This year has continued to be a busy year for the expansion of Children's nursery settings. We have continued to aid the development of N Family Club with a large number of new sites, including in Reading, Maidenhead, Bushey and Beckenham, London. We have also assisted KMK Kinderzimmer with its entry into the UK market by obtaining planning permission and several listed building consents for all its first four settings in Walton-on-Thames, Berkhamsted, Muswell Hill and Gloucester Road in London. We have also expanded our experience by working on three Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) schools working with Melrose Education. We have also begun work in the tuition centre sector.

Firstplan continues to act for Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) on a range of exciting projects. In 2023, Firstplan secured permission for extensive works at their main campus in High Wycombe, including a large new atrium, extension and winter garden. Works continue at the landmark Grade II listed Brunel Railway Shed adjacent to High Wycombe station, as BNU look to deliver a multi-function space for use by all, and at the Grade II* Missenden Abbey, where a new restaurant incorporating a large extension, outdoor space and bar is proposed to enhance the facilities.

In 2023, Firstplan worked closely with Canary Wharf Group to deliver various projects, including a new nursery with an external playspace at Wood Wharf and the occupation of a basement-level car park at Cabot Circus for Flip Out.

As we await all that 2024 has to offer, we would once again like to thank our clients and the many consultants and architects that we work with for another rewarding year.