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Bristol, Bath + Somerset

TCN UK plans 1930s Bristol revival

Period building converted into offices rather than demolished. **Christine Eade** reports

TCN UK aims to restore rather than demolish the 1930s Collett House on a site behind Bristol and Exeter House in Bristol.

The site, known as Temple Gate, comprises three derelict buildings that total 100,000 sq ft: Collett House, Herbert House and a former telephone exchange.

In 2002, former owner Ballymore planned to cram 226,000 sq ft of flats, offices and shops on the site, but in November 2009 TCN UK paid the Irish developer £3.65m for the buildings – almost the same as Ballymore had paid for the now-defunct Railtrack site in 2002. Ballymore made a loss because of the cost of first failing to achieve and then winning the now-abandoned planning consent.

However, despite TCN UK implementing new plans for the site, no one has removed Ballymore's sign on the telephone exchange.

Richard Pearce, chief executive and founder of TCN UK, says Ballymore's proposal would have "maxed out" the 2.8 acre site. He is standing outside the 40,000 sq ft Collett House, the former railway maintenance workshops once destined for demolition by Ballymore.

Conversion is under way on suites that range in size from 400 sq ft to 5,000 sq ft. Prospective tenants will have the advantage of enterprise zone status, which means lower business rates.

"Collett House will have a more industrial feel than Bristol and Exeter House,"



Time machine: Pearce (inset) has restored original 1870s features of Bristol and Exeter House

explains Pearce. "There won't be any parquet floors."

The restoration of Bristol and Exeter House included uncovering the old parquet floors and restoring the balustrades of a grand staircase. In the property's gothic hallway, there is the stern warning on the wall: "Time waits for no one." But time stood still for a decade as Bristolians walked past the 1870s grade II-listed former railway company headquarters to the right of the entrance to Bristol Temple Meads railway station.

Last month Bristol and Exeter House was fully let for the first time since TCN UK bought the buildings. It leased suites to quirky occupiers that have an affinity with Bristol. CrossCountry Trains, dubbed by Pearce as the anchor tenant, has leased 2,500 sq ft for £17.50/sq ft on a 10-year lease. Others include

a ground-floor showroom for sportswear retailer Oakley and south-west administrative headquarters for app provider AlwaysOnMessage.

The line-up suits TCN UK's national image. Rudy Stroink, a Dutch architect, founded Trammell Crow Netherland in 1993, after visiting legendary Texan property man Trammell Crow in the 1980s. Pearce was recruited from investment company European Capital to the UK branch in 2006. Now TCN UK, the company is best known for developing BBC property the Ugli Campus at White City in west London.

TCN UK spent £600,000 restoring Bristol and Exeter House. This year, TCN will demolish the telephone exchange and Herbert House to make way for offices and a hotel. The time may at last be right to take down Ballymore's hoarding. ■