



Richard Pearce: "We told the BBC, 'We can do this, we've got the experience'"

2009 means that the doughnut is widely expected to be turned into a hotel – which would benefit from its location next to the Westfield shopping centre.

However, this is just one of the ideas being considered. Richard Pearce, director at the UK arm of trendy Dutch developer TCN, is hoping that the developers bidding on TV Centre will be keen to enlist his help to turn the site into a media hub.

Pearce has direct experience of one of the BBC's most recent property tenders in the area – that for the smaller 60,000 sq ft Centre House, a block of tired BBC offices across the road from the main Television Centre site.

Sitting in Piano House, a Victorian warehouse that has been reinvented as TCN UK's first media hub in Brixton, south London, Pearce recalls the tender process.

"We got together with communications agency jprecreative and said to Chris Kane at the BBC, 'We can do this, we've got experience and all the skills you need to turn Centre House into a multimedia village,'" he says.

Kane set the pair a test – to return in a month and give him a presentation about the things that made Soho a London

centre for media and how they could bring these elements to Shepherd's Bush.

Pearce's presentation focused on the fact that despite high rents and poor connectivity, Soho has a critical mass of media organisations that makes others want to base themselves there, as well as a trendy atmosphere.

Bring that critical mass and that buzz to Wood Lane, and you have got a media hub.

Kane seems to have been impressed. After taking part in an official procurement process, in November 2010 the BBC signed a deal to form a joint venture with the pair to refurbish and operate the building. TCN and jprecreative took a 15-year lease on the building, which they then fitted out using a formula already used by TCN in Amsterdam, Brixton and Bristol (see box). Under the terms of the joint

venture, the jv also passes 15% of income from the property to the BBC.

The offices, now rebranded as the UGLI Building, opened in January as a modish, low-cost centre aimed at small- and medium-sized media and creative companies. By March the building was fully let despite the fact that no letting agent was employed.

Tenants at the UGLI Building can rent space ranging from 130 sq ft to 10,000 sq ft for as little as £10 per sq ft or £185 per room per month. In return, they are offered little by way of an expensive refurbishment, but rather the chance to be part of a cluster of like-minded businesses with links to the BBC.

Yet other property experts are sceptical about the idea of rolling out the UGLI Campus concept across the much larger TV Centre. "I don't think it could work in the same way," says one insider. "The UGLI building deal was done on a turnover lease. For TV Centre, the BBC are looking to release a big chunk of capital."

Yet whatever decision the BBC bosses make this week, surely the organisation cannot help but glance across the road to take inspiration from "one it made earlier".

TCN: A SPECIALIST IN TRENDY TRANSFORMATIONS

TCN was founded in 1994 by Dutch architect Rudy Stroink with US developer Trammel Crow and initially focused on trade centres in the Netherlands. The private developer has a portfolio worth €800m.

In 2004, TCN masterminded a project to turn the 1.5m sq ft 1950s-built TV studios of Dutch national broadcaster NPO at Hilversum, outside Amsterdam, into a media park after an initial procurement. TCN bought the site for €100m on the proviso the broadcaster would take a nine-year lease on the site. The developer then re-focused the site as a private

sector-led park aimed at creative industries.

"The [Hilversum] media centre is ugly and old and we love it because it's all about the people and how they interact," says Pearce.

Pearce set up the company's UK arm in 2006 and bought a 40,000 sq ft Victorian warehouse in Brixton, south London. The company has rebranded it as Piano House and refurbished it to expose original architecture, attracting charities, and start-up creative and media companies. TCN is also refurbishing the 2.8-acre Temple Gate site next to Bristol Temple Meads Station.