

MEDIA RELEASE

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WOODS BAGOT DESIGNS HOTEL FOR CENTRAL LIVERPOOL

Plans to revive and extend a Grade II listed building into a four star-plus hotel designed by international architecture practice Woods Bagot were submitted to Liverpool's city planners on May 13.

The Watson building (situated next to Lewis's on Renshaw Street) and the neighbouring former Rapid Hardware paint shop, were acquired by Central Regeneration Limited Partnership, a joint venture comprising Merepark and Irish developer Ballymore, in late 2007.

The 70,000 sq ft Watson building will be extended onto the site of the former Rapid Hardware paint shop to form a 170,000 sq ft, 180 bedroom, four star-plus hotel designed by Woods Bagot. An international hotel operator has already been secured. The scheme's approval would secure a further £50m investment for the city centre.

If approved, the joint venture partners will be rejuvenating the mainly unoccupied Watson building, making full use of the seven floors and adding an eighth and ninth. The basement will provide underground parking for 16 cars, accessible from Cropper Street.

Stephan C Reinke RIBA FAIA, Managing Director of Woods Bagot, the architects behind both Central Village and proposals for the Watson building commented: "The plans for this culturally significant site are all about the business of place making. Designing a quality hotel is integral to regeneration, as attracting tourists to Central Village would allow the location to develop as a truly mixed use scheme for Liverpool.

"Merepark and Woods Bagot are committed to regenerating this important part of the city - the urban fabric of this site where Ropewalks and Mount Pleasant meet at the historic Newington Crossing date back as far as the late 1700s. The architectural composition that is part of this planning proposal plays on the classical ordering of the adjacent building with an exuberant 21st Century companion."

This planning application follows Merepark and Capital and Counties' £105m proposal to transform the Lewis's building into a 'full and vibrant mixed use leisure destination'. A decision on this scheme, which will see the building's frontage cleaned and its original features retained, is expected later this year.

Ian Jones, director of Merepark, part of Central Regeneration commented: "Working closely with our architects, Woods Bagot, we have developed a scheme which responds well to the local surroundings and provides another dynamic link to Central Village. Sustainability is at the centre of our vision and we're confident that this proposal, combined with our plans for the Lewis's building and Central Village, will result in an exciting mixed-use quarter that brings new purpose and opportunity to the city."

A planning decision is expected by mid-Summer and if successful, Central Regeneration hopes to be on site before the end of 2008.

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For further information contact:

John Williams, Mandate Communications
Tel. +44 (0)20 7379 5000; Mb. +44 (0)7930 508 296
Email John.williams@yourmandate.com

Beth Nicol, Mandate Communications
Tel. +44 (0) 20 7379 5000; +44 (0)7875 705 732
Email Beth.nicol@yourmandate.com

About Woods Bagot

International design practice Woods Bagot provides its clients with innovative design solutions that are both functional and inspiring. This is demonstrated by the successful delivery of a range of high profile projects within the commercial workplace, hospitality, mixed-use, education and science sectors.

Established in 2001, Woods Bagot's London studio now has a dynamic team of over 100. Since its inception, its young, integrated team has developed a diverse portfolio of significant projects including:

- Piccadilly Tower, Manchester
- Liverpool Central Village
- Minthis Hills Resort, Cyprus
- ANZ London
- Rolls building, London
- Walkers Cayman Islands

Central Village

Merepark and Ballymore will begin work on the £110m first phase of the £160m Central Village development in coming months. Considered one of the city's largest regeneration schemes, it comprises a 25 and 20-storey mid-rise residential buildings. The project will include over 400 apartments and will be anchored by a four-star plus hotel and a ground and first floor leisure and retail offering will run along a new spectacular water feature.

Lewis's Building

- Merepark and Capital & Counties submitted their planning application for the Lewis's building in February 2008.
- Subject to planning approval, the striking frontage and 'Liverpool Resurgent' statue will be cleaned and a new glazed canopy and shop fronts included along Renshaw Street and Ranleigh Street.
- Plans for the interior of the nine-storey, 420,000 sq. ft building include a new open pedestrian street which leads out onto a new plaza and connects into the Central Village development and the Ropewalks district beyond.
- Overall, the scheme is expected to create 500-1000 new jobs, subject to the final tenant mix.
- There will also be provision for a number of retail, food and drink outlets at ground, plaza and upper plaza levels, allowing for at least two large tenants with major street frontage. A music venue will be situated in the basement, with a large bar close-by on the lower ground level, both accessible from Renshaw Street. On the upper floors there will be a multi-screen cinema and a three-star boutique-styled hotel.
- Lewis's went into administration in February last year, and was sold to Vergo Retail Limited as a going concern. Speaking about Vergo Retail, the current tenant in the Lewis's building, Ian Jones of Merepark commented: "Vergo Retail Ltd is our tenant and we are in discussions with them."
- The Lewis's building is one of Liverpool's best known landmarks, rebuilt in neoclassical Portland stone after the Luftwaffe destroyed it in the 1941 Blitz.

About the developers

- Merepark is a North West based developer whose high-profile schemes have included the Quadrangle development on Manchester's Oxford Road, the Piccadilly Tower and Central Village, Liverpool.
- Ballymore is one of Europe's largest property development and investment companies. It is privately-owned with principle offices in Dublin and London. It currently has over 4.5m sq.m in development across Europe – the UK, Ireland, The Czech Republic, Germany and Slovakia.
- Capital & Counties is Liberty International's UK non-shopping centre and international business, with £1.8 billion of investment properties. The company comprises retail and office properties in the UK and USA. In the UK, Capital & Counties specialises in the optimisation of value through creative and proactive asset management, imaginative refurbishment and redevelopment.