

St Paul's warned over human rights

Cathedral bosses urged to consider ethical implications of Chinese granite

Heidi Ancell

The refurbishment of St Paul's Cathedral could compromise the human rights of Chinese workers, a Church of England scrutiny committee has claimed.

The Christopher Wren masterpiece has been given conditional approval to use Chinese granite to replace the crumbling south transept steps under a scheme by heritage architect Purcell Miller Tritton.

But the Cathedrals Fabric Commission — the statutory body that approves applications for Church of England property — has urged cathedral bosses to consider fully the "ethical implications" of the sourcing before work can progress.

The proposed use of the granite was also questioned this week by human rights group War on Want and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings — which has raised aesthetic concerns about the replacement of the existing stone, Poilvaish limestone.

St Paul's has embarked on a

£40 million, seven-year campaign to clean and restore the dome, interior and facades, which will be completed next year.

An initiative to make it more accessible, featuring a new information kiosk by Make Architects, is due for completion next month.

Maggie Goodall, assistant secretary at the commission, revealed that it has yet to be convinced the application for use of Chinese granite is "ethically sound".

"The choice of a remote source of stone from a very different market with potentially different labour conditions and health and safety legislation means that [St Paul's] needs to satisfy itself and us that the ethical implications have been fully explored," she said.

Meanwhile, John Hilary, director of campaigns and policy at War on Want, warned the cathedral to be "extremely cautious" in sourcing materials from overseas.

He added: "If St Paul's wants to embark on a relationship of this nature it needs to be sure that the checks and balances that guarantee the human rights of the



Repairs to Wren's masterpiece risk an ethical backlash.

workers... are in place, which is particularly important for a Church of England property where the ethical consideration will be very high.

"The difficulty is that even supermarkets and high street retailers who have been taking their supplies from China for years find their audits are not picking up

the reality of what is going on."

St Paul's Cathedral refused to comment on the ethical issues involved with the choice of stone but insisted that it had been through a "full approval process" and that Chinese granite was an "appropriate choice" for the location.

Purcell Miller Tritton declined to comment.

Two towers by Ian Simpson in Manchester and Birmingham for developer Beetham have been found to contain hardwood flooring sourced from an illegal logging hotspot, according to watchdog the Environmental Investigation Agency.

The organisation claimed this week that luxury apartments are fitted with a solid Merbau flooring taken from the New Guinea's vulnerable tropical rainforests.

A spokeswoman for Beetham claimed that contractor Carillion had received legal certificates for the timber used in the developments.

Ian Simpson Architects declined to comment.

43-storey Coin Street tower wins go-ahead

Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands controversial Doon Street tower on London's South Bank was narrowly approved by Lambeth Council on Tuesday.

Planning approval for the 43-storey tower and swimming pool complex was passed by two votes to one, despite opposition from English Heritage and former colleagues of National Theatre architect Denys Lasdun, who argued it would upstage the famous building (*News* August 24).

The council also approved other parts of the wider scheme by developer Coin Street Community Builders, including the Allies & Morrison-designed headquarters for the Rambert Dance Company.

During the meeting, Iain Tuckett, group director of Coin Street Community Builders, was forced to defend the height of the tower and its impact on the surrounding area as well as the absence of social

housing within the scheme.

Planning committee member Brian Palmer, who voted against it, described the tower as an "intimidating, looming edifice".

He added: "It will tower above the National Theatre, which is a striking building, and will seem to rise from within its massing."

Objectors at the meeting included the Waterloo Community Development Group and Ian Adams from the Kennington Residents Society, who described the tower as "grotesquely high".

Speaking after the meeting, ex-Lasdun architect Brian Perry said he was "surprised" by the acceptance of the tower. But planning committee chairman Toren Smith praised its "elegant design" and said it was an imaginative scheme that would provide vital leisure facilities.

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Doubt shed on Scottish PFI after £22bn question

Scotland's commitment to PFI appeared to be wavering this week after the executive conceded it would cost the nation £22 billion over the next four decades.

The admission, which followed a parliamentary question, also coincided with the executive's abandonment of a £100 million prison project in Glasgow.

The developments were welcomed by Alan Dunlop, director of Glasgow-based Murray Dunlop Architects. "I wonder how many schools you could design well and build under a traditional contract for £22 billion," he said.

Dunlop also criticised the quality of PFI/PPP school designs, claiming they lacked inspiration and were driven by "bottom-line accountability".

But David Stark, managing director of Keppie, said: "It's a lot [of money] but during the 1960s we built cheaply and didn't factor for maintenance so we've never known the true cost of those programmes."

The Scottish National Party's alternative to PFI/PPP will debut in the next three months but Stark questioned whether the executive has the legal right to scrap it.

Tall order for timber

London's Hackney Council has granted planning for Murray Grove Tower — a nine-storey timber structure which architect Waugh Thistleton says will be the world's tallest timber residential building.

The £3 million scheme includes 29 private and affordable homes, each with its own balcony, and is scheduled to be built within nine weeks.

The building will use a cross-laminated timber panel system, described by the practice as "akin to jumbo plywood", and will feature stair and lift cores, load-bearing walls and floor slabs all constructed entirely from timber.

Director Antony Thistleton said the recent blaze that destroyed two PRP-designed timber frame housing blocks in Hatfield (*News* August 24) had not dented the practice's enthusiasm for timber.

"In most respects [the panel system's] characteristics are different from timber frame," he said. "The material does not need protection during construction."

The facade consists of 5,000 individual black, grey and white panels, measuring 1,200 x 150mm. The panels, made by Eternit, are made from 70% waste timber. The design was inspired by the pixilated images of artist Gerhard Richter.

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Lewisham regeneration scheme goes to planners



The Gateway scheme could transform a "bleak" roundabout.

A £250 million regeneration project masterplanned by Arup in south-east London has been submitted for planning.

The Lewisham Gateway scheme, for Lewisham Gateway Developments, has been two years in the making and includes homes, shops, restaurants and cafés as well as community facilities, a multi-screen cinema and new public spaces.

Project director Charlie Fulford said the scheme would transform a "bleak" roundabout into a scheme which reconnected Lewisham town centre with its train and bus stations.

"This is the most important regeneration project proposed for Lewisham in more than a generation," he said.

If the plans are approved, site preparation works will begin next summer, with architects being appointed to design a number of phases over a six-year period.

Neighbouring Greenwich Council last week announced a competition to redesign General Gordon Square and Beresford Square in Woolwich town centre. The high-profile scheme is a key component of Ken Livingstone's 100 Public Spaces initiative. See www.greenwich.gov.uk