

Acclaimed architect unveils £75million project for Ipswich

By Duncan Brodie

PLANS for an iconic £75million development which could create up to 500 jobs in the Ipswich Waterfront regeneration area were unveiled this month by one of the UK's most acclaimed architects.

The St Peter's Port development, on the vacant "island" site between College Street and Star Lane, involves three hotels, plus retail, office, leisure and residential elements.

A 450-space car park will also be created beneath the development, with the construction of the entire scheme likely to take at least two years.

The scheme is the work of Piers Gough, a partner in CZWG Architects and the man responsible for a string of award-winning buildings in London and elsewhere.

His plans for the Ipswich site involve a wave-like curtain wall of green glass, back-lit for maximum impact, and public access through an arcade aligned with the historic churches of St Peter and St Mary at the Quay at either end.

Braceforce, the developer behind the scheme, has been in discussion with Ipswich Borough Council over the future of the site for 15 months and is optimistic of securing planning consent by the end of this year.

Although operators for each of the hotels have already been signed up – thought to be the first time three



The proposed development will include three hotels.

separate companies have agreed to share a single site in the UK – the timing of construction depends on other potential tenants committing themselves.

However, with expressions of interest from the retail and leisure sectors said

to exceed those received at the same stage for the successful Cardinal Park development nearby, it is possible that work could start on-site next

year with completion as early as 2008.

The one, two and three-star hotels are expected to employ around 300 people between them, with the other commercial elements within the scheme likely to result in another 150 to 200 jobs.

The residential apartments will be a mix of market-price and affordable housing, which could eventually include some student accommodation if demand grows from the proposed university campus nearby.

Besides serving residents, visitors and workers within the development itself, the car park will also be available to those visiting other parts of the Waterfront, including the multi-storey Cranfields Mill scheme nearby on which work is about to start.

As with the Cranfields site, the mix of uses proposed under the St Peter's Port scheme is designed to ensure the area remains vibrant throughout the daytime and evening.

Piers Gough said that while many developers, with an eye to the bottom line, went exclusively for residential use, Braceforce had provided an opportunity for a much more interesting and "grown up" scheme.

He acknowledged that the scheme took some of its design cues from the black

glass Willis building in Ipswich, one of the early successes of Norman (now Lord) Foster.

However, the green hue of the glass was intended to link the new building to its location close to the river while the back lighting would make it "less mysterious" and more open than the Willis building.

Mr Gough added that, while the building could be described as "refreshed modernism" in character, it also sought to respect the historic churches which

heavily influenced the site's "sense of place".

Harder materials, complementing the flint of the churches, would also feature in the external appearance of the development while the layout of the site would link the churches themselves as well as creating an important linkage between the waterfront area and the town centre, he added.

The largely 17th Century former Burtons building, which forms part of the College Street frontage of the site, is Grade II-listed and is being retained for future conversion.

The neighbouring Grade I-listed Wolsey Gate – remnant of a doomed ambition of Cardinal Wolsey to provide his home town with a college to



A model of the St Peter's Port, Ipswich, development.



PHOTOGRAPH ANDY ABBOTT

The St Peter's Port development site from the roof of the EADT building.

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rival Oxford and Cambridge – is owned by the borough council and does not form part of the development site although the area behind the gate will eventually be accessible to the public from the new development.

John Di Carlo, group sales director at Braceforce, said: "We are delighted to have secured the services of Piers Gough. He is undoubtedly one of the most creative architects of our time and his originality shines through in his handling of our site.

"It is our belief that his design for St Peter's Port will deliver a unique building for Ipswich and will contribute towards the successful regeneration of this historic part of town, in a careful yet exciting way. Who knows, in time we think it will receive national if not international acclaim.

"While our plans are, necessarily more modest than Thomas Wolsey's to make Ipswich a seat of educational excellence to rival Oxford and

Cambridge, we believe St Peter's Port will come to be regarded as an area of design excellence – a defining local landmark linking the town centre and the waterfront.

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Among the guests at the launch were Ipswich MP Chris Mole who welcomed the mix of uses proposed for the development and the way in which it combined modern and historic buildings.

Bob Feltwell, chief executive of Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, said the additional hotel space would meet an established need which was likely to grow further when the nearby university campus development was completed.

The additional car parking space would be another benefit of the scheme, although it highlighted the need for the local authorities to improve the general infrastructure of the area, he added.

Architect, Piers Gough with a model of the St Peter's Port development in Ipswich.