



Architecture  
Today

282 October 2017

**Mixed-use**

Níall McLaughlin  
Architects: Tapestry

**Forum**

Will Alsop, Peter Baynes, George  
Saumarez Smith, Peter Barber,  
Alessandra Cianchetta

**Works**

Allford Hall Monaghan Morris,  
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

**Focus**

Interiors: Squire & Partners,  
Simon Astridge Architecture  
Workshop, Eric Parry Architects





## Urban Fabric

Níall McLaughlin Architects weaves contextual and historic influences into the mixed-use Tapestry building at King's Cross, finds David Kohn

Photos  
Nick Kane

Tucked away in the north-west corner of London's King's Cross redevelopment, hugging the mainline tracks departing St Pancras station, Tapestry is one of the district's largest new arrivals. Designed by Níall McLaughlin Architects, the building houses 129 flats over 14 floors, but also a multi-storey car park serving the entire 67-acre site, an energy centre and a sports hall. Clad in terracotta-coloured concrete decorated with Egyptian motifs and 1960s op art patterns, and with a village green surrounded by houses on its roof, the project defies easy categorisation. Where to begin?

Níall McLaughlin (born in 1962) set up his practice in 1990 and built his early reputation through several finely crafted houses. When invited by developer Argent to compete for the T1 site at King's Cross in 2007, the largest project in the office was a £1m Alzheimer's Respite Centre in Dublin. In the intervening decade NMLA has become one of the most prolific practices working for Oxbridge colleges, and has delivered critically acclaimed projects such as Bishop Edward King Chapel and housing for Peabody. Tapestry still dwarfs them all, however, and gives a unique insight into the development of the practice.





## Right

Plan of the Kings Cross development with Tapestry outlined in red; site plan.

## Below

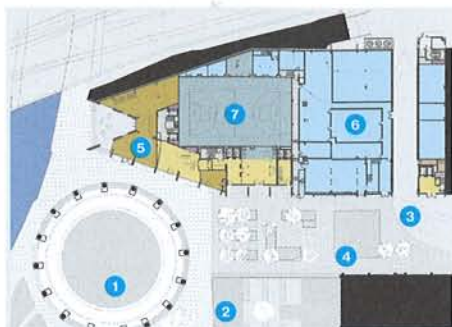
West elevation facing rail tracks; east facade facing housing, a school and a park within a restored gasholder.

## Below right

Facades are given a sculptural quality through the articulation of deep vertical piers with horizontal balconies and bay windows spanning in between.

## Key

- 1 Gasholder
- 2 Plimsoll Building
- 3 Canal Reach
- 4 Thameslink tunnels
- 5 Commercial unit
- 6 Energy centre
- 7 Multi-use Games Area



Argent's masterplan (developed by Allies and Morrison and Porphyrios Associates) dictated that the T1 plot should deal with some of the less commodious parts of the development. Given the bulk of the car park and plant, an elevated mid-city block approach would be destined to fail, and one can imagine at least a couple of alternative design approaches to this problem. First, to celebrate the car park and energy centre in a profusion of ramps and funnels — a beached cruise liner in the manner of the Metabolists, such as Yoji Watanabe's 1972 New Sky Building. Alternatively, to treat these uses as a found condition to build upon, in the manner of Bjarke Ingels' Copenhagen building The Mountain, completed in 2008.





## Right

Isometric diagram showing the mix of uses within the building.

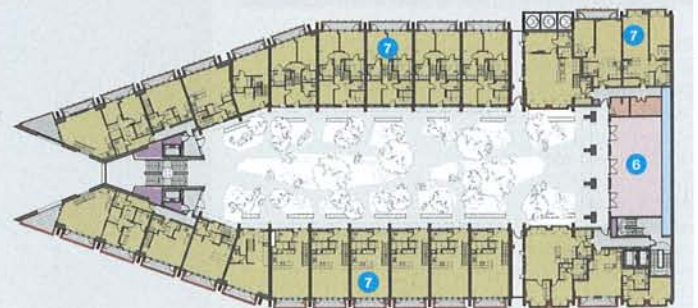
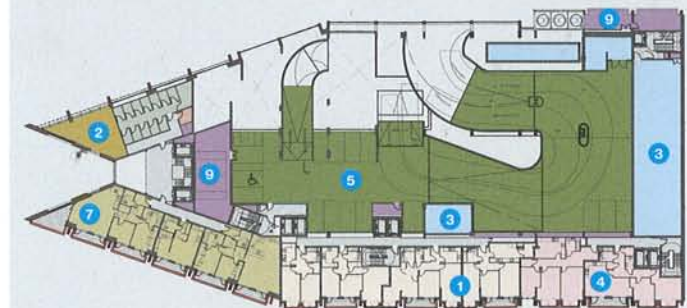
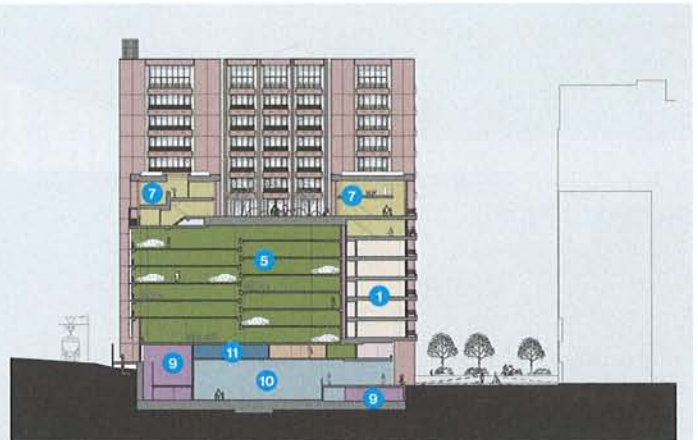
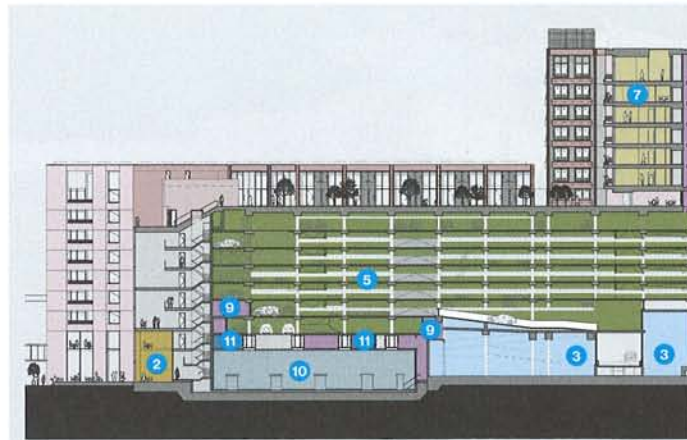
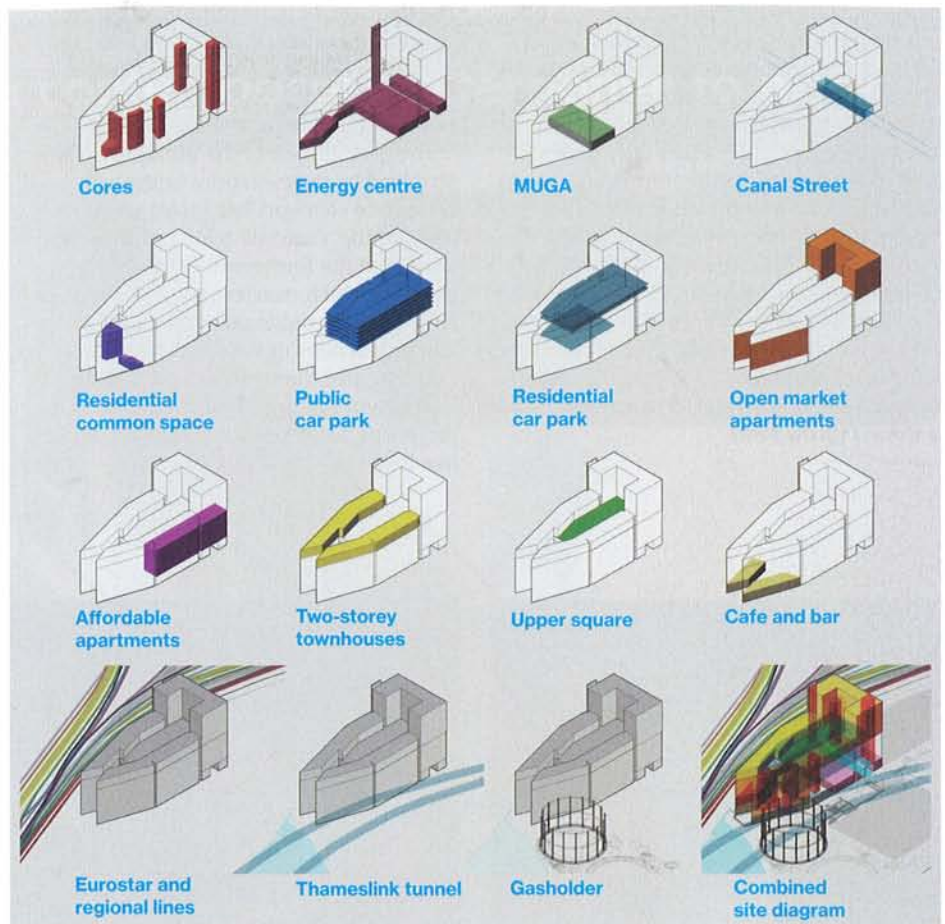
## Below

Long section; cross section; second- and eighth-floor plans.

When the development is complete, Tapestry will terminate a long terrace of buildings curving around the north perimeter of the site to York Way.

## Key

- 1 Affordable residential
- 2 Commercial unit
- 3 Energy centre
- 4 Shared ownership residential
- 5 Car park
- 6 Circulation
- 7 Open market residential
- 8 Leisure centre
- 9 Plant
- 10 MUGA
- 11 Bike storage





### Below

Residential balconies; seating area within residential circulation at the southern end of the building.

### Bottom

Market-sale townhouses with internal courtyards, and interior design by Johnson Naylor (phs: Edmund Sumner); entrance to houses from the seventh-floor square.



Perhaps what can also be observed is the redeployment of different strategies within McLaughlin's earlier work at this greater scale, which hints at future possibilities. The timber house in Wandsworth, the Fishing Hut in Hampshire or the Carmelite Prayer Room in Dublin, for example, share several concerns. First, the precise use of technology to create enclosures. Second, the clear distinction of parts within a hierarchy that lends the structures a high level of legibility. Third, the deployment of the first two in creating layers of spaces that can mediate between the public and private spheres. The Tapestry building demonstrates the scalability of the practice's approach, and how the same level of control exercised over intimate domestic spaces can be brought to bear on a programme of such complexity, and on a structure of such mountainous proportions. If this is how McLaughlin handles T1 at Kings Cross, think what he might do with a Heathrow T6. **▲**



### Project team

#### Architect

Níall McLaughlin  
Architects

#### Structural engineer

Ramboll

#### M&E/sustainability engineer

Waterman Building  
Services

#### Cost consultant

Gardiner & Theobald

#### Contractor

Kier Construction

#### Interior designer

Johnson Naylor

#### Executive architect

Weedon Partnership

#### Landscape architects

Dan Pearson Studio,  
Townshend Landscape  
Architects

#### Client, project manager

Argent

### Selected suppliers & subcontractors

#### Concrete cladding

Techrete

#### Glazing systems

Glass Solutions