

Contributor

CLAGUE ARCHITECTS

Three clear Kent trends have emerged which are regularly crossing the desks of the teams at Canterbury-based Clague Architects

This year and beyond looks set to be about repurposing major retail sites in our towns and cities; bringing forward commercial property schemes for the SME market; and supporting strategic residential schemes in Kent and the wider South East.

The internet has brought a revolution to the high street, in some cases dealing a body blow as major retailers vacate significant sites. Changing consumer habits combined with the need to cut costs has forced household names to reduce their bricks and mortar presence. The result is a pressing need to repurpose many of our town centres in order to sustain strong local economies – and this will require landowners and local authorities to work together.

Once the nation of shopkeepers, independents have given way to multiples and department stores, but there appears to be the opportunity to go back to the future. A Clague project demonstrating the ongoing evolution of city centres and need to protect the retail offering is Guildhall Quarter, Canterbury.

January 2020 will see Debenhams vacate 93,000ft² of retail space, with the vast majority of its second floor unused

for many years. The Guildhall Quarter proposals include repurposing the ground floor into 12 individual units with its commercial viability delivered by developing 70 apartments above – and will be considered by Canterbury City Council.

The consensus is that, despite the current economic uncertainty, demand for commercial space earmarked for SMEs remains strong, especially if it offers good connections to the M20 and M2. However, supply has faltered. The move to residential has held back commercial development, but there is a growing recognition of the need for greater allocations of employment space, including starter units, warehousing and last-mile logistics to support online retailers.

Set to capitalise on the £100m+ investment in Junction 10a on the M20, Waterbrook Park, a GSE Development has secured permission for 4,650m² of industrial space in four units, along with 7,650m² over nine blocks at Joseph Wilson Industrial site at Whitstable for GW Developments. These schemes, each designed by Clague, all offer flexibility and capitalise upon their strong road connections.

The housing market continues to be key element of the county's property market. However, many local authorities are facing the need to increase their quantum and rates of housing delivery to ensure their Local Plans remain NPPF compliant. As a result, a number of large schemes are coming forward, ranging from the 15,000 new homes anticipated for Ebbsfleet, alongside the 8,500 earmarked for Otterpool Park,

each with high level Government and local authority support.

Demand for Clague's strategic residential masterplanning remains strong with clients increasingly looking to prioritise placemaking and future-proof these new areas by enthusiastically incorporating new schools, public open space, access to the countryside. It is creating a sense of place that will appeal to new residents who want far more than just a house. At Clague our understanding of what has made successful places and communities helps us, our collaborators and clients to create new communities that will have a long term appeal in an uncertain market.

Small housebuilders and developers still play an important role in the local market. Many sustainable schemes continue to come forward, including from the likes of Esquire Developments, which recently secured approval for 72 units alongside four commercial units and nursery in Cliffe. Further afield, a Clague designed scheme for a 35 unit village infill site at Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire was considered at appeal to be appropriate to the Conservation Area and AONB, providing much needed new housing in an extremely popular commuter village.

Design remains an important factor, and Clague's heritage architecture expertise is increasingly being called upon to ensure the scale and character of the housing is consistent with its historic context and at the same time delivers for modern day living.



Herne Bay Commercial View.

PHOTO: CLAGUE ARCHITECTS