

Lingfield Point regeneration, Marchday

Short description of the project

Lingfield Point is a striking business and housing development in the outskirts of Darlington. Starting life as the enormous Patons and Baldwin wool factory in the 1940s, by the 1980s much of the site was unoccupied and in disrepair with no chance of attracting new occupiers. It was bought by developer Marchday in 1998 that set about transforming it into a dynamic place for twenty-first century business. The 107acre site is currently home to major businesses and entrepreneurial companies including Student Loans Company, Capita, Darlington Borough Council and NHS.



Teapot ladies during the Festival of Thrift at Lingfield Point, with the factory building in the background © Sasa Savic, Lingfield Point

What would have happened without this project?

Given the scale of the site, without a developer with this distinctive vision, the land and buildings would likely be in disrepair, unoccupied and derelict.

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

Developer, Marchday adopted a bold and creative approach to the incremental development of the site, repurposing the industrial buildings. Many property companies would have cleared the site and started again but Marchday set about reinventing these Darlington landmarks. An example is Memphis, a 70,000sqft wool

factory building refurbished and converted for Student Loans Company. In 2009 Memphis won the British Council for Offices award for the best refurbished workplace in the whole UK.

One of the reasons the development is so successful is the time and effort gone into creating value by drawing on the history of the site and engaging their new business users and surrounding communities to create distinctiveness and stand out from competitors.

“What you have to realise is that you don’t succeed in a town like Darlington without making a huge amount of effort and doing things better. If you don’t you may as well go home. All our customers (Orchard calls tenants ‘customers’ without a hint of irony) expect a great deal and a great building; we have to give them both, but then it’s, ‘what else’. I don’t know of another commercial scheme that goes so far to help people enjoy their work experience.” John Orchard, Director, Marchday.

Marchday seek to distinguish themselves from other commercial property companies by doing things differently and better. Art works can be discovered across the sites, as can beehives – from which they make their own honey, allotments and cafes. All of which contributes to a very different work environment, which is seen to make staff happier more productive, and helps the resident businesses with their staff retention.

This creative approach to brand identity and visibility is illustrated by the dreaming up of the nationally-profiled Festival of Thrift. This successful event captured the imagination of more than 27,000 people who visited Lingfield Point over the two days last year to have fun learning how to make, reinvent and grow things. “People ask me all the time why we did it. Some see it as frivolous and irrelevant to the world of commercial property. They think we’re mad! We see it as a valuable showcase for everything we’re doing at Lingfield Point ...and it’s a great opportunity to have some fun. We met designers Wayne and Gerardine Hemingway some time ago and they loved the fact that we’d ‘up-cycled’ the original 1950’s wool factory buildings into award winning office space. We took time to weave the heritage of the site (a heritage that is fondly regarded locally) into each building we recreated.” John Orchard, Director, Marchday.

What is the future of the project?

Looking to the future Marchday have worked with creative thinkers and planners to design their own 10–15 year vision for Lingfield Point – the creation of a ‘sustainable mixed community’ which will become recognised as a highly desirable place to live as well as work. This includes plans for ecohomes, sports facilities, healthcare facilities a renewable energy centre providing low carbon heating and power and public green open space. The vision is informed by the desire to create a powerful sense of place through the retention, renovation, and imaginative re-use of the most prominent, characterised elements of the existing factory buildings along with the taller, iconic machine room buildings.

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