

At BentallGreenOak-managed Bury House, Redevelopment is a Social Endeavour





London office building extends support to Aldgate Primary School

The redevelopment of Bury House in London has been a passion project for Ker Gilchrist and Alexander Morris of BGO's London specialist office fund, WELPUT. Their vision for injecting new vibrancy and sustainability into a decades-old building is redefining how people will interact with the exterior and interior spaces of this property in a way that has not been possible before. But their vision extends beyond the building's prime location and out into the surrounding community, where families and children animate the present and future possibilities for this neighbourhood.

"I have worked in Central London my entire life, being part of many developments in the built environment, and it is essential that we always consider the social implications and opportunities available for every development project we undertake," said Morris, Development Director for BentallGreenOak.

The months of ongoing difficulty from COVID-19 has been especially challenging for schoolchildren who are being thrust into an online learning environment that many families are ill-equipped to participate in.

A few blocks away from Bury House, Aldgate Primary School has come face-to-face with the income inequities that threaten to leave many pupils behind. The connection between these misfortunes and a nearby office redevelopment scheme may be hard to identify, but WELPUT's ESG principles are stretching the definition of sustainability to include a social consciousness to their surroundings.

"We are constantly exploring meaningful opportunities for community engagement, whether it is working with local schools, providing focal points for residents and workers within our projects, or securing local employment and training within our development schemes. The last twelve months have only reinforced the importance of looking after each other," said Gilchrist, Managing Director for BentallGreenOak.

The BGO team's latest efforts have drawn on the strength of their relationship with the City Corporation – the municipal governing body of the city of London – to provide a donation of Google Chromebooks that will make their way to Aldgate students who lack the means to acquire this essential piece of technology for the new virtual classroom environment.

“This will massively improve their ability to learn at home. Already we are planning to deliver some sessions which will be streamed live to the children at home, something we simply have not been able to offer before,” said Matt Piper, Chair of Governors at the Aldgate School. Aldgate’s head teacher added to Piper’s comments, referring to the initiative as *“a game changer in supporting the continued education of our children”*.

BGO’s WELPUT team plans to continue its association with the school following the return to on-site learning, working with the

pupils as they seek to catch up on the lost opportunity that has arisen as a consequence of the pandemic. In the meantime, investing in the immediate capacity for schools to deliver lessons in virtual settings has given Gilchrist and Morris a head start on one of the many ways that they will look to foster a lasting social connection to the community.

“Our scheme provides for future community space for the local area as a key theme in the project,” added Morris. *“But because development always takes a few years to come to fruition, it was great to be able to support the local school with home schooling for all their pupils.”*

