

Press Release
Monday 3 July 2012

Oculus transforms Store Street's Crescent into a Temporary Urban Park, 4 – 12 July



An under-used car-park in the heart of the West End will be transformed with 7,000 military-grade sandbags into a temporary urban park for 10 days this Summer as part of the London Festival of Architecture.

The installation, named Oculus, designed by Roz Barr Architects and engineers Ramboll, sponsored by Derwent London, the Arts Council and the London Borough of Camden, is the latest in a series of temporary interventions in Store Street's South Crescent driven by NLA and The Building Centre to test ideas for the future use of this small but significant piece of public realm in the heart of the West End.

The launch of Oculus marks the start of public consultation on the London Borough of Camden's proposals to permanently remove parking bays from South Crescent and free it up to become a permanent and much-needed public space for Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia. These proposals have been developed with the support of local stakeholders and tenants in the Store Street area as well as installation sponsors Derwent London.

Peter Murray, Chairman of NLA and Trustee of The Building Centre, said: "The start of this consultation is a major milestone in transforming the Crescent into a much-needed public open space. The London Festival of Architecture in 2010 was instrumental in proving this was achievable at a low cost and with Oculus we are continuing that process of testing ideas for how the Crescent may be used and enjoyed by its various communities in the future. We wouldn't be here without the support and vision of a large number of local organisations and individuals."

Roz Barr, Director of Roz Bar Architects, said: "The idea of a paving of sandbags was a response to the brief of building a temporary space in the city. We wanted to use a ready-made material that could through a new application form a new paving surface and seating area. The notion of using hessian sandbags – an object usually associated with either war or flooding – became appealing because of the World War II Eisenhower Centre in the twin Crescent at the other end of Alfred Place. It's all about 'making' – crafting a space through a material application and creating a new public space."

Benjamin Lesser, Development Manager of Derwent London, said: "This is a fantastic piece of urban art for the Festival but more importantly it shows how an existing piece of urban public realm can be converted from a car park into a much more enjoyable space for local communities. Derwent London have recently collaborated with Camden Council to investigate how more public open space can be delivered in Fitzrovia and are very proud to support Oculus which clearly demonstrates how this can be done."

The hessian sandbags will be used as a low-cost, ready-made building block to transform the Crescent with a newly crafted surface; creating a series of spaces, seating and a 120-seat amphitheatre topped by a suspended pool of water. The suspended pool, created from a steel ring supporting a membrane of transparent material filled with water, will frame distorted views of the trees, buildings and sky above the amphitheatre and lends the installation its name – Oculus.

Oculus will be built in just three days by local architects, engineers and contractors and dismantled again in just a couple of days. The sand used in the installation will be donated to Camden Parks for use in playgrounds throughout the borough.

Oculus will be open to the public from Wednesday 4 July to Thursday 12 July – local office workers, residents, and visitors are encouraged to use and enjoy the space to rest, recharge and play. A programme of free events – tai-chi, soap-box talks and performances – will be open to all. Full details are available at www.newlondonarchitecture.org and www.buildingcentre.co.uk

/ends.

Notes to Editors

Oculus is sponsored by Derwent London and supported by the London Borough of Camden and using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, as part of the London Festival of Architecture - <http://www.lfa2012.org/>

Full details on the installation and accompanying events programme can be found at www.newlondonarchitecture.org or www.buildingcentre.co.uk

The Oculus design team would like to thank the following organisations for their invaluable support: **Paul Mitchell Sacks**, construction company **The Carey Group**, and architectural and structural metalworkers **Littlehampton Welding Ltd**.

NLA – London's Centre for the Built Environment

NLA was founded in 2005 as London's Centre for the Built Environment – an independent information resource and a forum for discussion and debate for professionals, public and politicians. Since that time it has successfully established itself as a major focus for discussion about architecture, planning, development and construction in the capital with a year-round programme of events, publications and exhibitions, and a core mission – bringing people and ideas together to shape a better city. www.newlondonarchitecture.org

Derwent London plc

Derwent London plc is the largest central London focused REIT with an investment portfolio of 5.4 million sq ft (501,000m²), valued at £2.6bn as at 31 December 2011. The Group is one of London's most innovative office specialist property regenerators and investors and is well known for its design-led philosophy and creative management approach to development. Most of its properties are located in central London, with a specific focus on the West End and the areas bordering the City of London. Landmark schemes by Derwent London include the Angel Building EC1, Arup Phases II & III W1, Qube W1, Horseferry House SW1, Johnson Building EC1, Davidson Building WC2 and Tea Building E1. Derwent London came fifth overall in the 2011 Management Today awards for 'Britain's Most Admired Companies' and also won the 2011 Estates Gazette Property Company of the Year – Offices award. In 2011, Angel Building was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize following its RIBA London 2011 award and has also won numerous accolades from organisations such as the British Council for Offices, the British Construction Industry and New London Architecture. The Maple & Fitzroy development in Fitzrovia W1 also won a 2011 RIBA London and New London Architecture award. www.derwentlondon.com

The Building Centre

The Building Centre is an independent forum dedicated to providing information and inspiration to all sectors of the built environment. The Centre, in Central London, is open to the public six days a week and offers a varied programme of educational talks, training courses and informative exhibitions aimed to educate and spark debate. As a hub for the UK's construction industry, many designers, manufacturers, industry charities and trade associations are proud to call The Building Centre their home. It is a place where you can meet others, develop knowledge and join the ongoing debate about the built environment. www.buildingcentre.co.uk

For further information please contact **Debbie Whitfield at NLA** on debbie@newlondonarchitecture.org or 020 7636 4044