

ADONIS/BIRMINGHAM POST FEATURE/LOZELLS CHURCH/07.12.08 –

LABOUR OF LOVE – LOZELLS CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

A £4.15 million new-build church being constructed on a site that played a pivotal role in the history of British football is set to offer a beacon of light to one of the most deprived areas of Birmingham.

Steel framework for a new church and community centre in Lozells, which is being built on behalf of the New Testament Church of God is already in place. On completion, the church's 300-strong congregation- who have been operating from a temporary base since their former building was scheduled for demolition in 2005; will enjoy magnificent, purpose-built premises, designed to have both spiritual and functional appeal.

The construction company behind this ambitious project is Midlands-based Adonis Construction. The company faces a particularly unique challenge in building the church, which is situated in the heart of a conservation area on the corner between Lozells Road and George Street.

Unusually, the new structure is projected to occupy the entire 2400m² site; meaning the construction team has had to adopt an innovative new way of working. Uniquely, Adonis is creating the structure from the inside-out and storing all building materials and equipment- including a 34 metre mobile crane, within the confines of relatively small site perimeters.

Construction manager Ed Lawley said: "This is a challenging project and it's interesting to reflect on how much the construction industry has changed since the original church was built. Luckily, we have the benefits of modern technology to draw on and it's this, plus our team's expertise that's enabling us to deliver this innovative project to deadline."

Adonis is on schedule to complete the project within its 48 week timescale but its work will see it realise a vision- a labour of love that has taken years of meticulous planning.

The New Testament Church of God's quest for a modernised building began back in 2000, when it realised its 19th century place of worship was facing severe structural challenges.

Initially, it was hoped the original church building, which played a significant role in history of British football and indeed, the history of Birmingham itself could be refurbished. However, a

detailed survey revealed that ongoing maintenance of the building and the costs associated to renovate the property in order to comply with the current regulations were insurmountable.

Known as the Aston Villa Methodist Church when it was built in 1865 the church made history when in 1874, congregation members decided they needed a winter sport to fill the cold months when they couldn't play cricket. They opted for football and Aston Villa Football Club was born.

In later years, congregation member William McGregor's inspiration and vision led to the formation of the world's first club league in 1888, revolutionising the way football was played forever.

Designed by Paul Henry Architects, the new church highlights the delicate balance between the past and the present. Illustrative of this, is the fact 21st Century regulations unheard of back in 1850- such as disability laws, have been rigorously adhered to.

Sensitive to the site's unique historical significance, Senior Pastor Bishop Derek Webley was keen to ensure the church preserved a bond with Aston Villa as well as meeting the needs of a modern congregation.

The finished design is what principal architect Paul Henry describes as: "Simultaneously modern and traditional, inspired by the spirit of the old."

Certainly, the blueprint is not short of divine inspiration.

Basic features take their inspiration from traditional ecclesiastical design: ceilings are high; windows are elevated, whilst building materials are locally sourced and sympathetic to the surrounding 19th century terrace streets.

The building will also feature interesting twists on classic design: deepening panes of blue tinted glass replace more traditional stained glass windows; whilst four spires flanking the corners of the angular building, provide a modern take on the steeple.

Inside, a commemorative stone laid in the original church back in 1878 will offer visitors a clue to the site's historical significance whilst 21st century audio and design technology ensure space is maximised so that every worshipper will have optimum visual and audio access to the altar.

In total, the new church will seat 1000 worshippers in a two-tiered auditorium.

For Adonis' chairman Neville Clements, the project is not only representative of Adonis' ongoing diversification since they established their name as a leading player in the construction sector more than 30 years ago, but symbolic of a growing trend.

He said: "New-build church projects are a growing phenomenon. There appears to be an increasing number of community groups with the spending power to fund building work and this has coincided with a growing catalogue of community buildings whose upkeep has become financially unviable. Our challenge is to work in partnership with these organisations to create new landmark buildings fit for the 21st century and we're proud to be associated with projects that have such a beneficial impact on the community."

For architect Paul Henry and his team, who have already worked on a number of Midlands-based community projects, including the refurbishment and renovation of an existing church at Blackheath for Kingsway International Christian Centre, interaction with the Lozells community throughout the entire project is key.

Paul explained that: "To an extent, London-based companies have a reputation for being a bit "gung-ho"; just getting the job done and disappearing.

"But for us it's vital to work closely with the community and the people who govern it.

"We have been involved with this particular project for the past eight years- which is a long gestation period by any standard and it is amazing to see the church finally taking shape.

"The feedback we've had has been inspirational and I'm confident the finished church will be absolutely breathtaking and a real asset to the community."

Senior Pastor Bishop Derek Webley could not agree more and is eagerly anticipating the finished project.

He said: We look forward with great anticipation to the completion of our new Church Complex which will indeed be an asset to this community in 2009 and for many years to come.

"I commend all the respective parties involved for their professionalism, dedication and good working relationships which have kept this project on course."

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