

BRILLIANT BUILDINGS

RESTORING OUR ICONS



WILLMOTT DIXON

SINCE 1852

Adding value with heritage

Willmott Dixon is at the heart of a wave of projects to restore the nation's heritage buildings and energise our towns and cities.



In 2016, some £9.6bn was spent on the repair and maintenance of historic buildings in England, according to Historic England¹. That's 20 percent of all repair and maintenance output, and 7 percent of total construction output.

I am pleased to say that many of our teams across Willmott Dixon have been integral to much of this work (see map, right). The following pages share the key lessons we have learned to date so that others can benefit in planning their projects.

Some of the schemes see the renewal of a building for its existing use. Often they involve the augmentation of an existing use, which creates new revenue streams. A dramatic example of this is the restoration of Alexandra Palace's East Wing, which will restore a derelict Victorian theatre and glazed East Court to create a thriving entertainment venue and 'birth-of-TV' visitor experience.

Others involve a significant change of use, such as the repurposing of London's Old Admiralty Building into a new headquarters for the Department for Education (DfE) or, elsewhere in the capital, the transformation of the Commonwealth Institute into a new home for the Design Museum.

The complex task of renewing Grade I or Grade II properties has one thing in common. Heritage projects all aim to add value to the local economy, whether through an increase in visitor numbers or providing space for new homes and businesses. These landmark schemes become a new destination that is a catalyst for further investment.

I am proud to say Willmott Dixon has supported communities across the country to deliver these projects. We look forward to continuing to do so for many years to come.

Rick Willmott, Group Chief Executive, Willmott Dixon

¹ 'Heritage Counts 2017, Heritage and the Economy', Historic England.

For further information on our heritage projects and restoration expertise please visit our website www.willmott-dixon.co.uk

Making a difference on restoration projects

We know how much it takes to successfully restore some of the country's most iconic buildings. Here are just some of our recent projects.



The Design Museum, London

We helped breathe new life into the Grade II-listed Commonwealth Institute building in Kensington for the Design Museum's new home. Our refurbishment experience enabled us to deliver a fast-track 12-month programme.



Department for Education, London

The Grade II-listed Old Admiralty Building in Whitehall is another demanding refurbishment project in a tight city-centre location. Our heritage specialists are creating a stunning new office for the Department for Education.



The Box, Plymouth

This complex project involves transforming several Grade II-listed buildings, including a museum, gallery and church, into a cultural and exhibition centre that celebrates 400 years since the sailing of the Mayflower in 1620.



St Albans Town Hall

This ambitious £7.75-million project is transforming the town's landmark Georgian Grade II-listed Town Hall and Courthouse into a glorious state-of-the-art new museum and art gallery.



Alexandra Palace, London

Our restoration of the iconic Alexandra Palace is uncovering a goldmine of Victorian architecture. We're renewing the Palace's derelict East Wing to turn its former BBC Studios into a 'birthplace-of-TV' experience.



Colston Hall, Bristol

The £20-million redevelopment of Colston Hall has ensured that the 150-year-old, 2,000-seat venue continues as a focal point of the Bristol music scene and as a landmark building for the city.



Darlington Hippodrome

Our team of Grade II and heritage experts restored Darlington's 109-year-old theatre back to its former glory, creating a bigger and better 1,000-seat entertainment venue, as well as an adjacent children's theatre.



Dreadnought Building, London

In this £20-million project we are restoring the Dreadnought Building, a Grade II-listed former naval hospital within a world heritage site, to become a vibrant student hub for the University of Greenwich.



Dagenham Civic Centre, London

Coventry University chose Willmott Dixon Interiors to transform the Grade II-listed Dagenham Civic Centre, the council's former HQ, into the university's London campus, where we created 3,000 learning spaces.



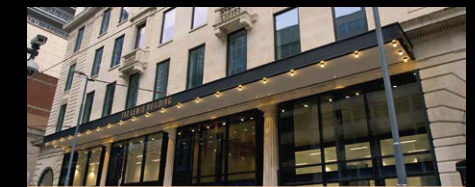
Globe Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees

We are delighted to be restoring another theatre, bringing this beautiful art deco building back as a 3,000-capacity live-entertainment venue, which is expected to boost the local economy by at least £18 million.



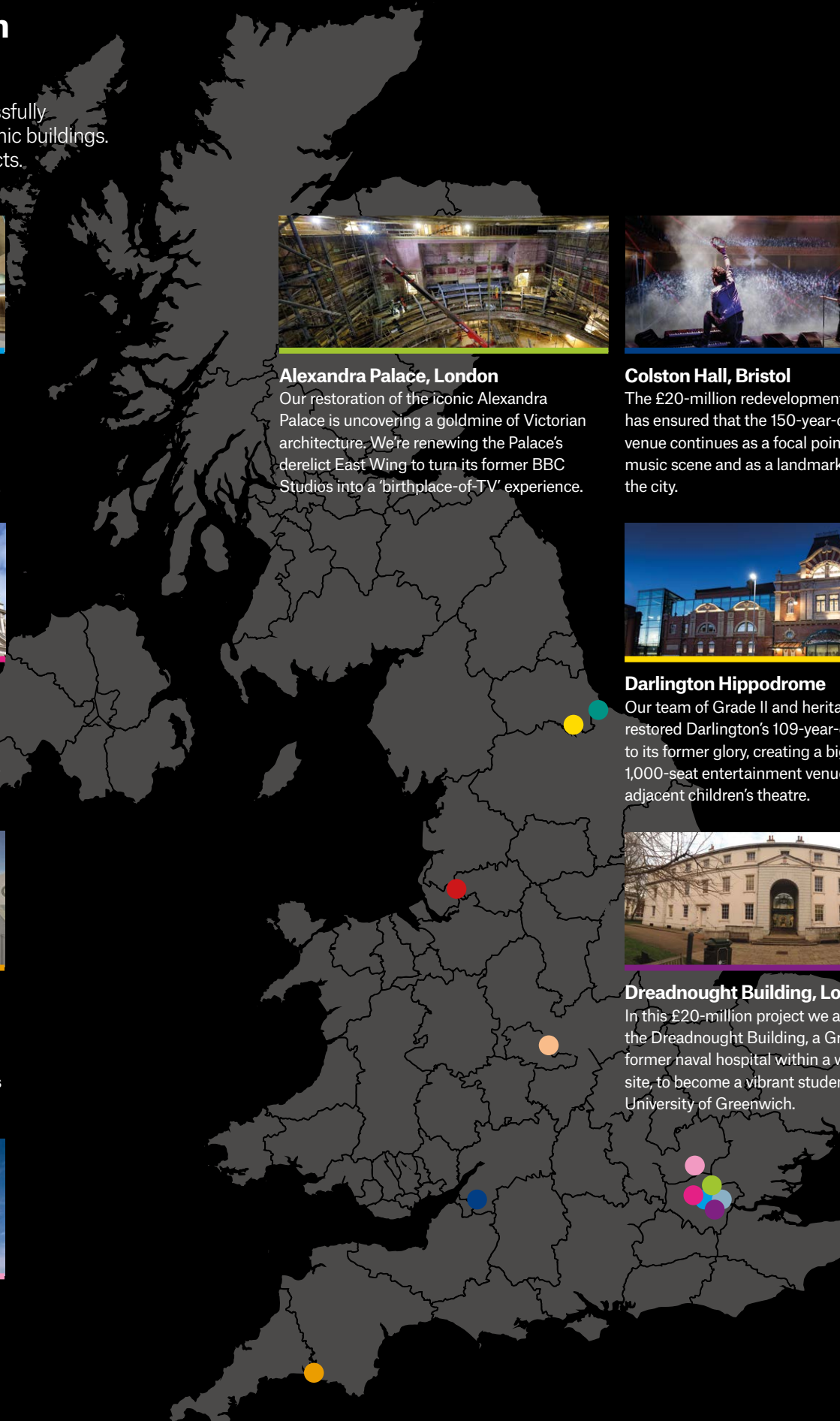
Albert Halls, Bolton

Our Grade II renovation specialists have restored Bolton Albert Halls, part of Bolton Town Hall, back to their former glory. Our award-winning work provides improved restaurant, conference and wedding facilities.



Lewis Building, Birmingham

In this £18-million project we have refurbished one of Birmingham's most well-known landmarks to create 114,000 square feet of grade-A office space in a former 1920s department store.



1. Make the case

There is mounting evidence that areas with an interesting mix of architecture will fare better than those where older buildings have been swept away to usher in the new. The British Property Federation in its 'Heritage Works' toolkit² states that people "gravitate" to areas with historic buildings. "Such enthusiasm for historic urban cores and heritage assets can translate into higher values," it says.

Towns are using restored heritage property as the showcase for the future, bringing vitality to a high street that could be blighted by a decaying property that is ripe for re-use. Bolton Council, for example, invested in significant maintenance works on

the Albert Halls as part of a range of measures aimed to increase footfall in the town centre, says the council's head of corporate property services Joanne Ivison. Meanwhile, new spaces such as wedding rooms and a café area increased revenue for the building.

The refurbishment of Darlington Civic Theatre – rechristened Darlington Hippodrome – includes the creation of a brand-new children's venue, The Hullabaloo. The children's theatre attracted a £1.5-million grant from Arts Council England, while the refurbishment of the main Grade II-listed building won a £4.5-million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Box in Plymouth aims to

create a new visitor attraction, while meeting the council's obligations to care for a number of important archives and allow the public to access those archives more easily (see box, right).

St Albans District Council is bringing back into use its famous Town Hall as a museum and social space to attract new visitors to the city, part-funded by proceeds from a residential development.

And at Colston Hall in Bristol, one of the UK's most iconic musical venues, they are investing in bringing it up to the standard for 21st-century demands.

2. 'Heritage Works, A toolkit of best practice in heritage regeneration', BBF, RICS and Historic England, April 2017.

Below The famous Town Hall in St Albans is being brought back to life as a museum and social space. **Opposite** Plymouth's The Box will house a brand-new visitor attraction and important local archive.



"A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE BUSINESS CASE WAS TO MAKE IT COME ALIVE WITH A VISITOR ATTRACTION THAT CREATES A FOOTFALL. THEN YOU ARE TURNING A NEED INTO A FINANCIAL CASE."

GARETH SIMMONS, HEAD OF CAPITAL STRATEGY, PLYMOUTH COUNTY COUNCIL

The case for The Box

The Box in Plymouth joins up several sites and buildings from different eras to create a new facility that will have a triple purpose: an extended visitor attraction, a home for multiple archives and a way to connect the public more closely with some of the items in those archives.

With a Grade II-listed Edwardian building, repaired and extended in the 1950s; a 19th-century church; and a site that spanned a road, the council had "quite a hotchpotch of different heritage buildings," on its hands, as Plymouth County Council's

head of capital strategy Gareth Simmons puts it. By bringing all this together, the council could extend the city's museum and art gallery, and create storage and display space for archives that range from television and photographic collections to the local records office.

"A significant part of the business case was to make it come alive with a visitor attraction that creates a footfall," says Simmons. "Then you are turning a need into a financial case that says, 'this investment is worth having'."

2. Know your building

An important first step for renewing heritage property is to analyse and understand the building's story and have a vision for how it can invigorate a town's future, says Gareth Simmons from Plymouth County Council, who is leading The Box project in Plymouth (see page 5).

"You must understand the heritage and have people in your team who understand the implications of that heritage," he says. With a complex mix of buildings and eras, Plymouth colour-coded every element with reference to its heritage value, right down to walls and staircases.

This approach helps down the line. Funders and statutory bodies such as English Heritage need to know that important features will be recognised and respected.



3. Plan for what's inside

One essential factor for renewing heritage property are the building surveys. "Do we invest enough early on to truly understand the risks and the actual composition of the building we have got?" asks John Boughton who, as Willmott Dixon's deputy managing director in the South West, has overseen many heritage building projects.

Boughton argues that building surveys should go beyond a structural assessment to consider how the building lives and breathes. "For heritage buildings, you need to capture data around how the building performs before any refurbishment works," he says. "That's something that many projects should consider in more detail."

Above Alexandra Palace is undergoing its biggest-ever refurbishment to bring the East Wing back into use.

Right The distinctive entrance foyer to Colston Hall in Bristol was built by Willmott Dixon in 2009. Now the company is back to refurbish the entire concert venue.



4. Get the right skills

Just as finding people with the right competencies to assess and plan heritage projects is crucial, so engaging the right tradespeople during the delivery phase is a make-or-break requirement.

"Working on a heritage-type project is fundamentally different to a new-build. It can be slower with more bite-size challenges," says Boughton. "You need a supply chain partner who has people with the expertise to recognise that you cannot take drawings at face value, because it's impossible to show every imperfection."

Using local people adds value and quality because they have a connection and pride in the project, says Boughton. "At Plymouth, we got everybody together in a room to talk about what the project means. This isn't just an extension to a museum and art gallery – it's far more important than that. If people have respect for the building, there is a different feeling about the quality you want to achieve."

Established supply chains are crucial, says Willmott Dixon operations manager Sean McNicholas. At Darlington, Willmott Dixon discovered that many of its trusted suppliers had the requisite skills in-house, for example fibre plasterwork, stained-glass window repair, gold-leaf application and even the laying of encaustic tiles, a very rare type of fired clay tiles from the early 1900s.

Each specialist package, says Boughton, should be let according to the task and the size of the supplier. While smaller firms must prove their competence in terms of health and safety, environmental issues and respect for others, processes must be flexible enough to allow them to prove their competencies without some of the accreditations that a larger firm might need. "You need agility within bureaucracy," says Boughton.

Right John Boughton, deputy managing director in the South West, Willmott Dixon.

"THE BOX ISN'T JUST AN EXTENSION TO A MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY – IT'S FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT."
JOHN BOUGHTON, DEPUTY MANAGING DIRECTOR IN THE SOUTH WEST, WILLMOTT DIXON



5. Engage the stakeholders

Any heritage project will bring with it a raft of stakeholders, from elected council members to residential and business neighbours, to community groups, statutory bodies and historic societies. Some of them hold the power to slow down or even derail a project.

The Box was facing a year's delay when a local society opposed the contemporary design of the building's new elements, disagreeing with Historic England's view that new and old should differ visually.

"We had to negotiate," says the council's Gareth Simmons, "explain the opposing view and persuade them not to object. An objection would have meant that the secretary of state, rather than the local authority, would have had to determine the planning application."

For Bolton Council, communicating how and where money was being spent was vital, says head of corporate property services Joanne Ivison: "The biggest challenge was ensuring that the investment was evident to the public. It is often difficult to showcase works such as roofing and heating upgrades that are not seen by the public eye." Regular communication with the council's elected members and via press releases helped to get the message across, she adds. At Darlington, Willmott Dixon operations manager Sean McNicholas used a range of media and events to interact with interested parties (see case study, right).

For those seeking external funding, a clear vision is crucial and must resonate with funders. Organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England want to see more opportunities for the public to access heritage and arts. Simmons highlights the need to build political consensus, not just to secure initial funding but to maintain support throughout the project's delivery.

The Box's stakeholder board unusually includes people from the ruling party and the opposition. "Many people would use a project like this to create political advantage, hoping for cost overruns or claiming that the council is spending money in the wrong area," says Simmons.

"Where you have a crystal-clear vision, supported by both political parties, it's far easier for funders to commit. It de-risks the funding and makes it really clear for large-scale national funders."

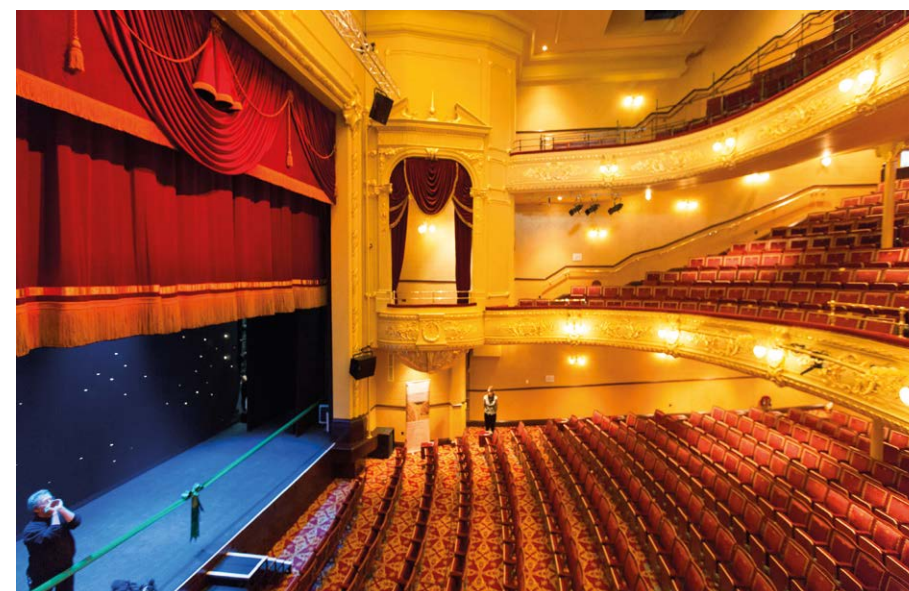


"WE DON'T HAVE ONLY ONE CUSTOMER; WE ARE BUILDING A THEATRE THAT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WILL VISIT EVERY WEEK AND THEY ALL OWN A LITTLE BIT OF IT."
SEAN MCNICHOLAS,
WILLMOTT DIXON
OPERATIONS MANAGER

Main picture Darlington's new Hippodrome theatre.

Right Willmott Dixon's Sean McNicholas.

Opposite The theatre's revamped interior.



Many clients at Darlington

At the start of the project to rejuvenate Darlington Civic Theatre, operations manager Sean McNicholas told his team: "We don't have only one customer, we are building a theatre that thousands of people will visit every week and they all own a little bit of it."

There were many interested local groups, including the Friends of Darlington Theatre and Darlington Operatic Society, as well as individuals. McNicholas and his team showed between 800 and 900 people round the site on hard-hat tour days.

Members of the local community also came to workshops to learn heritage skills such as encaustic tiling or stained-glass making, and McNicholas gave talks and presentations locally. Demonstrating the importance of social media in connecting with communities, the Twitter account that McNicholas set up, DarloHippSite, attracted 1,000 followers.

6. Plan for what lies beneath

Whether a householder or the owner of a large historic building, one of the biggest risks of any refurbishment or transformation project is the unknown – what lies beneath. Unknown means risk and risk means cost.

Depending on the complexity and the extent of the unknown elements, design and build can work for heritage projects. Generally, there will be caveats: parts of the work that cannot be priced until the building has been explored in more depth.

There is general agreement that setting contingencies is challenging and that they should be higher on a heritage project than for a new-build. Willmott Dixon's John Boughton suggests

that costs and rates for all potential unknown items should be agreed upfront.

"If you have a proposed solution, an approximate scope of works, a price for that and a rate for the various elements, the customer is at least properly equipped to make decisions," he says. "If you break it down, provide clarity and a schedule of rates, people can manage their value and costs."

Getting this right is just as important for the contractor as the client, says Boughton. "When you are a contractor, one of the biggest costs to your business is time. Most of our costs are people. When a job stops and we are not redeploying those people – that's no value to a customer and it's not

something we want to do."

At Plymouth, the complexity of the project made it an unattractive proposition for a design and build contract, says the council's Gareth Simmons. "We did soft market testing with a number of contractors and the consensus was that if the risk profile is too high they wouldn't touch it in the design and build process.

"To make the project possible we went to a traditional contract to de-risk it for the construction market." Plymouth used the Southern Construction Framework with its two-stage tender process, to attract bids.

Bolton and Darlington councils engaged Willmott Dixon at an even earlier point via the Scape

framework. "We did consider a traditional procurement route initially but, because the employer requirements were not clear at this point, we wanted a construction partner who could bring the buildability factor whilst working with the client team to produce a solution that met the needs of the council and the community," says Bolton's Joanne Ivison.

An additional benefit of the Scape route, says Ivison, are the goals linked to the local economy. "The works exceeded the original targets for social engagement and allowed apprentices to flourish in their employment, which is all key to adding to the Bolton Council vision of increasing economic prosperity," she says.



"THE WORKS EXCEEDED THE ORIGINAL TARGETS FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND ALLOWED APPRENTICES TO FLOURISH IN THEIR EMPLOYMENT."
JOANNE IVISON,
BOLTON COUNCIL

7. Manage uncertainty – minimise costs

Perhaps the biggest remaining challenge for any heritage building project is the cost and the cost uncertainty. It is often far cheaper to tear down an old building and replace it with a new one – for buildings without a listing, that is frequently what happens.

Plymouth County Council's Gareth Simmons, who has overseen many refurbishment projects, would like others to follow Willmott Dixon's lead and offer new solutions for dealing with risk. "The construction industry does not cope well with refurbishing buildings because it does not cope well with risk," he says. "From a customer's perspective, we just see prices being incredibly high because risk is priced at a very high premium. We don't see the value of that. We are paying for risk upon risk upon risk."

Willmott Dixon's John Boughton believes that the earlier a contractor is involved in the process, the easier it is to work out where the real value in a project lies for the client, what scope of works is achievable within a given budget, and to run 'what-if?' scenarios to aid decision-making.

There is another vexing question relating to heritage projects: what is the real value to society that we deliver by improving these buildings and allowing more people to use and appreciate them? Experts are still trying to get a handle on this. Historic England quotes a 2014 study by social impact specialist Simetrica, which equates the wellbeing value of visiting a heritage site to £1,646 a year – greater than the social benefit of participating in sports or the arts.

Perhaps once we can better express and quantify the benefits that a diverse built environment delivers, we can focus on the whole-life value that a heritage project delivers, rather than focusing only on capital costs.



"IF YOU BREAK IT DOWN, PROVIDE CLARITY AND A SCHEDULE OF RATES, PEOPLE CAN MANAGE THEIR VALUE AND COSTS."

JOHN BOUGHTON,
WILLMOTT DIXON IN THE
SOUTH WEST

Opposite Bolton Town Hall was procured via Scape.

Above Winston Churchill's former office at the Old Admiralty Building, London.



Left The team at the Old Admiralty Building, London's Whitehall.

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Willmott Dixon is a privately-owned contracting and interior fit-out group. Founded in 1852, we are family-run and dedicated to leaving a positive legacy in our communities and environment. Being a large company means we can create a huge and lasting positive impact on our society. This is not only done through what we build and maintain; it's achieved through the fantastic efforts of our people who make a major contribution to enhancing their local communities.

www.willmottdixon.co.uk
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