

URBAN SPLASH CITY APARTMENTS

Organisation	Urban Splash Ltd
Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and creation of a need for high quality housing within an inner city.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide security for residents that is design-led, yet practicable and robust.
Tools/Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working closely with residents and feeding back post-occupancy experience into future design decisions. • Continual self-learning to improve design inputs.
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to draw upon both current and past experiences of residents. • Highly committed sales force that continually strives to add value to completed building projects. • Partnerships with local authorities and police in the early planning stages.
Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting safety, without portraying inner city living as a dangerous option. • Design interventions should suit a wide demographic mix.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to offer high quality accommodation that instils a sense of security to its residents. • Security considerations are finely balanced with elegant design; there is not a large disparity between the two issues.
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design integrity can be maintained without detriment to issues of safety and security. • Post occupancy appraisals by buildings users are a rich source of information for future projects. • Well-designed apartments help regenerate under-utilised areas of inner cities.

Synopsis

A well-known and much respected property development company, Urban Splash has literally transformed the cityscapes of Manchester and Liverpool through its stylish apartments, secure from burglary and theft. This case study focuses on the Britannia Mills apartment complex, where an open courtyard, secured by the surrounding apartments and a security-controlled entrance, create safe communal space. The large windows, balconies and walkways in the courtyard area ensure visibility and create opportunities for interaction with other residents. Specially designed features such as lights and plants, combined with high ceilings results in a stylish living space. Protected by a stone-filled wall next to a canal and a security controlled entrance, vehicles can be left relatively safely in the car park. With the success of such designs, inner city living is fast becoming a desirable option, considered affordable, convenient and exciting. Loft apartments and regeneration policies are also helping attract a broader range of residents into inner city areas and improving their prosperity.

Background to Urban Splash City Apartments

Tom Bloxham and Jonathan Falkingham, who identified a market for well-designed, mixed-use developments in the central areas of Liverpool and Manchester, set up urban Splash in 1993. They were convinced that the many redundant or under-utilised historic buildings in the cities had a real future and could be suitably adapted for new and exciting uses. The company has been recognised nationally with a series of awards for design, conservation and regeneration, in particular the Smithfield Building on Oldham Street, Manchester. This case study focuses on its Britannia Mills development, which is the first phase of the three-stage £50m Britannia Basin development in Castlefield, Manchester. Originally, it was one of a series of six mill buildings, being used as a sawmill then cotton mill. It is adjacent to an inlet, which was ideal for transporting materials direct from the ships in Liverpool along the waterways. In 1959 English Abrasives took over operations on the site, where they manufactured similar products until 1991, when the site was finally closed. This case is based on an interview with Craig Owen, Sales Director, as well as visits to Britannia Mills and a nearby site, where luxury interior designs and technology were being developed.

Design Process

Parking

Britannia Mills is adjacent to the central canal network, thus affording the residents a greater sense of security by providing a physical barrier to the rear of the building. A strong, yet relatively inexpensive boundary encloses the site, which comprises a wall of granite stones held firm within a secure wire mesh frame. This serves two functions: firstly, it provides a clear demarcation between public and private space, thus deterring unauthorised access by increasing the risk of entry and enabling management and residents to retain security over the site. Secondly, if graffiti is sprayed on the wall, the wire mesh can be opened up and the individual stones cleaned-up. So, cleaning the wall can be executed relatively quickly and effectively.



Figure 1: Wall made of stone filled wire

Entering and exiting the car parking area is via a hand-held magnetic fob that opens the gates automatically, thus significantly reducing the threat of car theft and theft from the residents' vehicles, whilst making it convenient for legitimate users. The car park is overlooked by apartments and well illuminated, which provides an extra sense of vehicle and personal security for the residents. All keys are allocated to a specific individual resident and, in the event that someone moves home, the key is returned and accounted for.

Apartments

The apartments surround a central courtyard, entry to which is through a swipe-card operated door, specially designed to close quickly and securely behind the resident.



Figures 2 and 3: Door to apartment closed (left) and open (right)

The large windows facing the inner courtyards have shutters protecting those on the ground floor from burglary. As well as improving surveillance, the courtyard, large windows and balconies, all provide opportunities for interaction as people move outside of their apartments. Such opportunities to connect and form a community are essential for ensuring that entry to the block is monitored and any criminal or suspicious activity reported.



Figure 4: Courtyard

The interior of the apartment block is light and the bare-trunked plants create a pleasant atmosphere without providing a place in which people could hide.

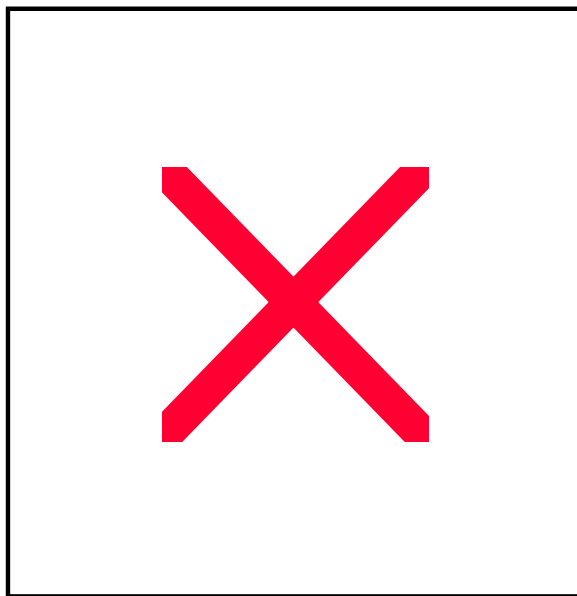


Figure 5: Interior of apartment block

The heavy, plain doors to the apartments are stylish, yet secure and attractive lights along the walls add to the modern atmosphere. The lift to the upper floors is see-through, thus improving visibility.

Technology

Within a nearby development, buyers are offered the option of several different interior designs. The most expensive of the designs includes a computer security system linked to CCTV cameras in the car park that enables the occupant to check upon the security of his/her vehicle. The computer also operates the curtains and lights, thus allowing the occupant to mask the fact that the apartment is unoccupied. The system works automatically, using light sensors to determine whether it is day or night and thus whether curtains should be open or shut.



Figure 6: Computer security system in the apartment

Consultation

Urban Splash has a policy of learning lessons from previous projects and therefore seeks feedback from current residents, which is documented and taken into account during new developments, as Craig Owen explains:

“...We are constantly in touch with residents, listening and acting on their comments, which is so important to us when designing future developments”
(Sales Director).

Post-occupancy feedback and intelligently capturing the users' experiences of the building is vital to continually adding value to the way architects and designers design and develop refurbishment projects. This continual process of iteration and fine-tuning of design solutions contributes to the overall success of the project.

Impact

Since the 1990s, Urban Splash has managed to combine stylish and elegant living accommodation with the need to understand and provide for strong and robust security considerations. Incidents of crime and criminal activity within Britannia Mills are rare, due to the thoughtful provision of both direct and subtle crime reduction elements. Thus, Urban Splash apartments built within inner city areas are considered highly desirable and sell very quickly.

Lessons Learned

This case study illustrates how Urban Splash has taken a design-led approach to reducing incidents of crime. Rather than achieving Secured by Design Status through adherence to defined principles and documented design procedures, it has taken a more creative and user-centred approach to designing out crime. Urban Splash has relied heavily upon users' feedback which has been communicated through close consultation with the after-sales department. The improved understanding of homeowners' needs and safety requirements has been used to inform subsequent refurbishment projects. This is part of the organisation's philosophy of constantly adding value to the buildings, without losing sight of security, safety and aesthetic considerations. The ability to create a safe environment enables companies to develop areas of the city previously considered undesirable.

References, Related Case Studies and Further Reading

Sunday Times Magazine Editor (2000) '*Block Magic*', Sunday Times Magazine Editor, 26th March.

Liverpool Echo (2000) '*Tom's Labour of Love*', Liverpool Echo, 11th October.

The Times (2000) '*A Classy Mix of Old and New*', The Times, Section 2, 11th October.

MEN (2000) '*Making a Splash with Urban Regeneration*', Manchester Evening News, 15th November.

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Classification Index

Ekblom's crime classification	Misappropriation (theft), misbehaviour (criminal damage).
BCS crime classification	Theft, criminal damage.
DAC	Protecting people and properties
Primary motivation	Transformation of inner city areas into somewhere safe and pleasant.
Type of designer	Architect
Approach	Creativity and Learning
Sector	Private housing
Location	Apartments
Author	David Hands

DAC Urban Splash