

Commendation

25A Vinery Road, Cambridge

PROJECT TEAM

Architect:
Owers Warwick Architects

Structural Engineer:
Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd

Main Contractor:
PB Doyle

Client:
Vinery Mews Ltd



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Vinery Road is a steel-framed office retrofit project located in central Cambridge, transforming a disused industrial warehouse into a contemporary workspace for small and medium-sized enterprises. Surrounded by two-storey terraced housing, the site posed significant spatial and logistical constraints, requiring a sensitive and efficient design approach.

The new steel structure was inserted within the existing brick envelope to brace the retained façades, support a new roof, and create a mezzanine floor. Designed to follow the profile of the neighbouring unit, the structure includes slender cruciform columns, tensioned roof trusses, and plated beam connections, all exposed and painted black to contrast with timber finishes. The steelwork was carefully detailed to maximise headroom and minimise servicing requirements, allowing the building to function without ceilings and with discreet mechanical and electrical systems.

Engineering challenges included designing the permanent structure to double as temporary works, due to the lack of space for façade retention. New columns provided lateral restraint, while the mezzanine floor acted as a diaphragm, enabling the safe removal of the original roof trusses. The raised tension bars and thin floor construction allowed the mezzanine to achieve greater height than the adjacent unit, enhancing spatial quality.



The design was well considered to reduce the amount of bespoke fabricated elements needed. Rolled steel angles (RSAs) were used for the roof trusses and welded RSAs for the ground floor columns. As the new structure had to match the profile of the other unit, there was a challenge in fabricating to the right height and within the right tolerances. The solution was to introduce a separate section at the head of the columns that support the roof. The splicing of this separate stub onto the columns allowed for on-site adjustment of the height of the roof truss, to match with the adjoining roof.

The steelwork was delivered in small sections to accommodate narrow access routes and assembled using MEWPs and mobile scaffolds. Each phase of steelwork, the boundary columns, roof trusses, mezzanine, and stairs, was sequenced to avoid congestion and maintain progress.

The scheme showcases the advantages of using steel, as a fast assembly material, requires less demand on the workforce compared to a concrete pour, and how small fabricators can contribute to the building preservation effort within a restrained budget.

Vinery Road is a model for adaptive reuse, proving that even modest buildings can be transformed into inspiring, functional spaces through intelligent design, collaborative engineering, and the creative application of steel.

Judges' comment

Vinery Road demonstrates an elegant adaptation of an existing masonry and steel warehouse into a new office. The refined steel frame complements the original structure while enhancing functionality, and the carefully detailed exposed steelwork enriches the architecture. Re-using the existing fabric made the project more sustainable than building new.