

Refurbishment and its advantages



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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years there has been a large increase in the refurbishment of old and vacant properties in preference to constructing new builds. Some of the reasons for this may be:

- legislative reasons i. e. if a property is a protected structure and there is no choice but to renovate it.
- During the boom there was so much money that people could afford to own a second home and invested money in refurbishing older houses with the intention of selling to make a profit or renting.
- Or the advantages to be gained by opting for refurbishment rather than a new build project.

1. 1 What is Refurbishment?

There are a number of definitions for refurbishment, for example “

Refurbishment is the process of major maintenance and minor repair of an item, both aesthetically and mechanically.”

A very broad definition of the term is ‘ work undertaken to an existing building’. However, refurbishment schemes can take many forms and may be undertaken for a variety of different reasons.

Another definition for refurbishment is Extending the useful life of existing buildings through the adaptation of their basic forms to provide a new or updated version of the original structure. (Riley, Cotgrave 2005)

The amount of work that is required in order to achieve these definitions stated above will be very different on different projects, and will depend on:

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- The condition of the existing structure
- The shape and size of the existing structure
- The location of the structure
- The intended use of the structure
- The amount of work required to the existing structure to enable compliance with current Building Regulations
- Whether the building is listed, either who
- Adequate funding for the works
- Whether or not the works can be carried out safely.

(Riley, Cotgrave 2005)

Some other terms, which are used instead of, and also in conjunction with the term refurbishment, are:

1. Conversion – The use of the building may be altered but the structure will remain the same.
2. Renovation – The process of restoring or improving a structure
3. Restoration – The process of bringing a building back to its original state
4. Retrofit – the use of new and more modern systems in an existing building.

Refurbishment is difficult to define as it could include one or all of the above elements, but as the dissertation continues there will be different aspects of refurbishment discussed thus leading to a greater understanding of the term.

1. 2 The advantages of Refurbishment

1. 2. 1 The availability of buildings suitable for refurbishment

Advances in modern day lifestyle, in terms of work and leisure, have led to larger numbers of buildings becoming outdated and redundant. In effect this has produced a large number of buildings which are ideal for refurbishment projects, or even conversion to suit new uses. (See Appendix A, Fig 1 – Fig 6)

1. 2. 2 The quality of buildings suitable for refurbishment

In a large amount of the cases, the buildings themselves are structurally sound and well constructed, this, for some people tends to be deciding factor in favour of refurbishment. You should never judge a book by its cover is a common phrase but often a book with a poor cover is never opened.

However in some instances when the buildings are surveyed in detail, and, the potential developers and buyers are dealing with well constructed and structurally sound buildings. These buildings in turn provide a perfect basis for refurbishment to be carried out.

1. 2. 3 Shorter Development Period

One of the main advantages of refurbishing a building ahead of a total new build is that in most cases, new accommodation is available in a much shorter period of time.

If a total demolition and construction of a structure is planned instead of refurbishing, the structure then generally it will take a considerably longer time period to carry out.

This may not always be the case, for example, if the building needs to be structurally altered and also if the building is unstable then it could prove

that a demolition and new build would be the best option as refurbishing a building such as this would be very time consuming and expensive.

In general, it is believed that in most cases the time which is spent on a refurbishment job (including pre contract planning and planning permission) is only a half to three quarters of the time which is needed to complete a demolish and new build construction.

Because of the time saved on the refurbishment of the structure there are financial rewards such as; the shorter development period reduces the cost of financing the scheme and also the client receives the building sooner which he in turn receives revenue sooner from renting etc (Highfield, 2000)

1. 4 Planning permission is not always necessary

A big positive aspect of refurbishing a house or building is that in some situations planning permission is not needed, for example. Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, planning permission is required for ‘development’. However, Section 4 (h) of the Act states that “ the carrying out of works for the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of any building which affect only the interior of the building, or do not materially affect the external appearance of the building’ does not constitute development”. (www. irishstatutebook. ie).

Works like these do not constitute development. Therefore if a house or building is being refurbished internally and nothing is being carried out on the exterior of the house then there may be no need to get planning permission for the works.

There are exceptions to this rule of course, such as mentioned in section 4h of the Act which states that if the use class of the building changes then planning permission is required. For example if someone decides that it wants to refurbish the interior of a house to become a shop or pub but no works are being carried out externally, planning permission will still be required. (M Taggart, 2008)

1. 5 The large amount of structures available for refurbishment.

Because of the constant developments in technology, design, quality, appearance and performance in the building industry, people's desires for houses and properties have also developed with the market leaving many structures which are lacking in these areas abandoned, obsolete and redundant. As most of these houses and buildings are structurally sound and built in great locations they provide lots of potential opportunities for the public to undertake refurbishment projects.

Once it was believed that it was necessary to move into towns and cities so as to be closer to everything such as shops, factories, amenities etc, and because of this many people decided to leave the countryside and move closer to the cities. This left many properties empty in the countryside. Nowadays however the times have changed and people are trying to move away from all of the hustle and bustle of towns and cities, and are instead moving out to the peace and serenity of the countryside. The large number of abandoned properties in the countryside provides ideal opportunities for people to refurbish the properties into modern homes in lovely surroundings, and for a much lower price than demolishing and rebuilding. (Highfield, 2000)

1. 6 Environmental aspects

As we all know, these days we are constantly hearing about the effects, problems and concerns of global warming. The experts keep telling us that it is because of the world's huge consumption of energy we need to re-use, re-place and re-cycle our present resources much more so as to decrease our rate of using up our energy resources and to slow down global warming.

Whenever a building is recycled, by opting for refurbishment rather than demolishing and rebuilding the structure then a large amount of energy is being saved by avoiding the need to extract raw materials and convert them into a replacement building. Smaller scale refurbishment, for example; when the existing structure and the external building envelope are retained, will clearly yield the greatest energy savings, but even the more drastic renovations, where larger scale refurbishment takes place involving the structural aspects and the refurbishing of the outer leaf will mostly use up considerably less energy resources than the choice to demolish and rebuild.

(Highfield, 2000)

Even though this may only seem like a very small saving of energy compared to the overall consumption of energy, if a lot of projects are refurbished instead of being demolished and rebuilt then a lot of energy could be saved.

1. 7 Aesthetic/ Architectural advantages

Another advantage of choosing a renovation project is the aesthetic and architectural advantages that can be obtained if attractive older buildings are chosen to refurbish. The reason for this is because a lot of older houses

and buildings were constructed with highly expensive materials, natural materials, high quality and skilled workmanship. All of these factors contribute to a very attractive façade to the exterior and interior of the building. An example of the architectural quality that an older building has is when you see an old house, with the outer leaf of the house being constructed using cut limestone

(Highfield, 2000)

If a refurbishment project is undertaken on a house or building that already has highly architectural and aesthetic qualities such as

- Skilled workmanship
- Antique furniture and fittings
- Highly attractive façade
- In the vicinity of other architecturally attractive properties
- Expensive materials

Then these qualities along with the proper carrying out of the refurbishment work, could add to the financial value of the house or building when the works are finally completed.

1. 8 The financial cost involved in the refurbishment project.

On renovation projects the overall cost of financing the actual scheme will mainly depend on the following factors.

- The cost of the renovation works
- The duration of the scheme
- The level of interest rates prevailing at the time of the scheme

As we well know the financial cost of any type of construction project is of huge importance, so in a renovation project the financial aspect can have a major advantage over other options. In a large number of renovation projects the total interest payable on the money borrowed will be much less than that for a new build because of the lower overall costs and the shorter development periods of renovation and refurbishment projects. Because of the way that the interest rates are increasing in the past year or two it would prove much cheaper to choose a renovation option

(Highfield, 2000)

1. 9 Availability of existing infrastructure

When a refurbishment project is being carried out, the contractors can, in a lot of cases, use the existing infrastructures, which are in place, such as:

1. Water services
2. Electricity
3. Gas mains
4. Waste water connection
5. Cables and telecommunication

These infrastructures would not be available if for example a new build was chosen on a green field site. The availability of these infrastructures can prove to be very beneficial financially to the client as there is no need for the services, which are aforementioned above to be installed

Other than the direct financial savings that are being achieved, there are indirect savings to be achieved such as, the development period being further shortened because of the infrastructure already being in place

whereas this time saving would not be available if no infrastructure was in place.

References

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