



Photography: Robyn Saunders

ARCHITECT HAS DESIGNS ON THE CITY

With a passion for Preston and an eye for innovative design, John Bridge, an award-winning RIBA chartered architect, is working to transform the city of Preston. *Ali Gudgeon* chats to John to find out more

A proud Prestonian whose path to becoming an architect started at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), John is making a name for himself in his hometown with visionary plans for the city. John's dedication to creating vibrant, sustainable spaces has earned him recognition and a reputation for excellence.

Since becoming a chartered architect in 2011 after starting the journey back in

1999, John has led numerous successful projects, including the New Market Facilities in Preston. His expertise in regeneration and conservation has resulted in innovative solutions that blend modern design with historic preservation.

John explains: "Our home in Preston is more than just our base of operations. Our sense of place is a proud part of our identity, and a driving force in our approach. It's central to who we are. The work we do offers an opportunity to take a leading role in the regeneration of Preston, and beyond – bringing purpose and life to environments that were once overlooked or forgotten."

Having won a civic award from the Mayor of Preston for his work on the New Market Facilities, it's a role that John has taken on throughout his whole career.

"Our passion for Regeneration Architecture stems from our empathy for vacant and unused spaces or buildings. It is our strong

internal motivation and imagination that drives us to reignite and restore. The idea is to incorporate new exciting uses that reinvigorate the space or building. This can include restoration and repair with aspects of conservation in listed buildings too.

"The regeneration projects we have worked on provide our practice with an immense sense of pride and reward. We are energised to improve architecture in Lancashire, which will massively enhance the quality of our residents' lives and success of the many businesses that inhabit our red rose county."

Uniquely, all of the team are UCLan alumni, as John wanted to recruit local talent from the city's hometown university.

John believes that architecture should be more than just functional. His work on projects like the Lambert Brother Printworks conversion demonstrates his ability to create unique, inspiring spaces. Another project currently underway is the rebuild of the

Foxtan Centre in the city. The youth and community centre has been knocked down to make way for a brand-new £2.2m building for the city charity, breathing new life into the area for vulnerable adults and young people.

John is also involved with plans to bring the Harris Institute off Avenham Lane back to life. Owners of the Grade II listed building, The Harris Investment Group, want to transform it into a coworking and exhibition space with an art shop, a gallery, and conference and café facilities. Plans have been lodged with the city council.

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Another venture taking shape is the Tram Bridge in the heart of the city. The bridge, which links Avenham Park and Penwortham, was closed in 2019 due to a risk of collapse. John and his team originally designed a futuristic 21st century engineered timber bridge, stronger and tougher than its historic predecessors, drawing strength from curves and multi-joints. The design included elliptical viewing ports to allow visitors to see the river and columns below them! This initial design sparked interest and created a conversation, which resulted in a reformed design being commissioned.

John explains: "The original started life as a timber bridge and only took four months to create, but it only lasted 40 years. It was replaced time and time again until the early 1900s and they went to concrete in the sixties." The bridge was demolished in September this year, making way for its replacement, a £6.6m project which is due to be in place by the end of 2025. "We wanted the new design to be sleek, efficient and sustainable," added John.

"We've tried to create a bridge with a nod to Preston's industrial heritage and I'd hope it will last a lot longer than its predecessor."

John's vision for Preston extends beyond individual projects. He is actively involved in local partnerships and forums, advocating for community-led regeneration initiatives. His goal is to inspire others to join him in shaping a brighter future for the city. "Collaboration, passion and money will make such a big difference," adds John.

"Watch this space for a future event, where you can potentially get involved!"



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