



Houlton School scoops the Inaugural RIBA Reinvention Award

This brand-new accolade recognises buildings that have been creatively reused to improve their environmental, social, or economic sustainability. It shines a light on 'retrofitting' – increasing the longevity and energy efficiency of existing buildings and reducing the need for demolition and new construction.

The judges commended the Houlton School scheme for its sensitive reimagining of the iconic Grade II-listed Rugby Radio Station transmitter building – once the largest radio transmitting station in the world. The upgraded building now consists of three school blocks arranged around a central courtyard, providing an assembly hall, cafeteria, kitchen, classrooms and spaces for art, music and dance.

The careful conservation and sensitive interventions – including the restoration of degraded fabrics and sourcing of locally produced materials – have created a dynamic learning environment for students, while skilfully retaining the building's industrial scale and grandeur. Brick work repairs and historic window replacements have maximised the building's environmental sustainability. Other notable design features include the bold and playful teal detailing that references the original colour scheme, and careful restoration of the radio station's 'Power Hall', which now serves as the school's cafeteria.



Quality



Innovation



Physical

James McCosh, Principal of van Heyningen and Haward Architects, said:

"We are delighted to have won the inaugural RIBA Reinvention Award. Houlton School shows how our creative approach to the retrofit of historic buildings has delivered the highest architectural quality, enriching people's lives, and minimising carbon emissions. This award recognises a fantastic team effort, with client, consultants and contractors rising to our high aspirations, enthusiastically supported by Urban & Civic throughout, and the real benefits of retrofit."



Simon Allford, Immediate Past President and Chair of the RIBA Reinvention Award, said:

"Creating a new place that fosters a sense of belonging and community is a great challenge that Houlton School successfully addresses – connecting a modern and vibrant new learning environment with the physical and cultural history of its place and serving as a vital bridge from the past to the future."

The architects have skilfully balanced the programme of reinvention with the detailed challenges of meeting both the listing and environmental performance criteria. In the highly regulated worlds of both school design and building codes, this is a significant achievement, and one to be applauded."

As architects strive to minimise carbon emissions by re-using existing structures, exceptional examples of reinvention such as this are ever more important. In this sense, the Reinvention Award heralds a lower-carbon future where, through environmentally intelligent design and the careful husbandry of resources, existing buildings are delightfully reinvented to accommodate new uses."