



FEILDEN FOWLES

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS RELEASE

CHARLIE BIGHAM'S FOOD PRODUCTION CAMPUS

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Emerging from the cliffs of a limestone quarry in Somerset, the first phase of the masterplan of a new campus for Charlie Bigham's has now completed.

Feilden Fowles Architects' masterplan addresses the 22-year old company's anticipated expansion over the next 20 years, allowing Bigham's, which is renowned for producing high quality, oven-cooked meals, to expand out of London.

This inaugural milestone – a 6500 sq m food production campus – marks the arrival of Charlie Bigham's West. The company will retain its production space in west London for recipe exploration and research and begin the move of its production to the Somerset campus.

In its expansive and untouched rural setting, the project presents an opportunity to examine and update the industrial typology. The £17m contract also has enabled the practice to exercise their talent for designing sensitively in the landscape on a much larger scale than to date (the site measures 18 acres).

Phase 1 of the masterplan includes a gatehouse and a production space, comprising a kitchen and offices with a capacity for 300 production staff and 50 office staff. Immediate future phases include a further two kitchens (tripling capacity) and a dispatch building. The 10-year masterplan extends to include a visitor centre, pavilions in the landscape where employees will have their lunch break, lagoons to extend the sites biodiversity and ultimately a Bigham's Academy. It will transform the extraordinary disused Dulcote Quarry into a thriving campus allowing Bigham's to grow organically over the long-term, in a collegial setting that promotes well-being. The scheme aims to deliver an exemplary workplace environment encouraging employee connections across all buildings and a working culture that promotes healthier lifestyles

Through careful curation, Feilden Fowles' masterplan responds to the unique environment and the attendant ecological considerations by dividing the site, and locating production and service buildings – kitchens and infrastructure – along the south, allowing the natural landscape at the north to thrive, protecting the existing ecology, a nesting spot for peregrine falcons and great crested newts. Key to this organisation will be the insertion of a central, pedestrian street linking all buildings, and promoting walking and interaction between employees. Viewing the new structure from the west approach, the strong horizontal form has a distinctive profile of iron-oxide red saw-toothed roofs that mimic the profile of the cliffs high above, with lighter timber structures receding into the rock face. The pitched roofs are asymmetrical to accommodate north-facing roof lights to bring constant, even daylight deep into the office and production plan.

Constructed from a steel frame exoskeleton and insulated with Kingspan panels, the project has employed tried-and-tested construction methods to maximise efficiency and minimise impact on the landscape.

The colour palette has been driven by the rich tones of the quarry and is used to subtly to distinguish the different functions of the spaces within: the ground floor production spaces are clad in a light grey, microrib insulated panel; the plant and storage space is a deep red, sinusoidal panel, and the offices are overclad with rough sawn Siberian larch.

Inside an open plan office with adjacent meeting rooms overlooks the quarry wall. On the same floor, a communal light-filled canteen offers views into the triple height production space beyond. At the centre of this plan is a development kitchen, where new recipes are tried and tested.

The generous production floor with 5m high ceilings has been space planned to streamline the production flow – goods arrival, storage, preparation, cooking, packaging and dispatch – in a linear arrangement. The space will accommodate 10 production lines running simultaneously. A double height space at the centre of the plan brings together the office and production staff through a visual connection at the moment that the cooked ingredients are assembled. The nicknamed ‘heroic space’ celebrates both the food and the Charlie Bigham’s community.

The design prioritises well-being through abundant natural light, natural ventilation, and expansive views of the surroundings. Passive ceiling vents and openable roof lights draw air through the building and allow the offices and communal spaces to be naturally ventilated. The design celebrates the extraordinary environment of the surrounding quarry by placing expansive windows at the end of each primary axis through the production floor, so that there is always a view out and a visual connection back to the landscape.

All employees – whether office or production staff – will enter the building via a generously-scaled, timber entrance tower – sharing the same sequence of entry, a strategy to encourage a collaborative and nonhierarchical atmosphere between co-workers.

The building has won an RIBA South West Award and was pronounced RIBA South West Building of the Year 2018.

Charlie Bigham said:

“I am delighted that Charlie Bigham’s ambitious new production campus has been named RIBA South West Building of the Year. The award recognises the uniqueness of this project in trying to ‘humanise’ the typical tin shed industrial park, reflecting Charlie’s vision that to make great food requires a happy team.

Staff Wellbeing therefore drove the design, breaking down the scale, maximising connections back to the dramatic quarry landscape, bringing natural light deep into the plan from its saw tooth roof and placing great emphasis on the collective, social spaces, forming a generous rooftop terrace and cafeteria at the centre of the building.

Any great project begins with a good client and we have enjoyed working closely with Charlie and his team to realise their vision for what a contemporary food production campus can be.”

FACTS AND CREDITS

Address	Dulcote Quarry, Dulcote, Wells, Somerset BA5 3PA
Site area	18 acres
Gross internal area	Phase 1: 6,500 sqm
Construction value	Phase 1: £17 million (excluding land value, production equipment)
Schedule	Appointed Jan 2016; Construction: Oct 2016–Nov 2017
Client	Charlie Bigham's Ltd
Architect	Feilden Fowles
Design Team	Edmund Fowles, Elli Farrant, Rory Allen, Ben Higham
Project Architect	Elli Farrant
Structural Engineer	Pre-planning: Structure Workshop
Post planning	PEP Civils and Structures Ltd
Services Engineer	TSL Projects
Civil Engineer	PP Construction
Landscape Design	Grants Associates
QS	TSL Projects
Building Contractor	TSL Projects
Photography	© Max Creasy

NOTES TO EDITORS

Charlie Bigham's

High-quality food company Charlie Bigham's is recognisable to shoppers across the UK. The business began in Charlie's kitchen in 1996. With the company's existing production kitchens on the edge of London are reaching capacity, Bigham's acquired Dulcote Quarry in Wells, Somerset, and approached Feilden Fowles in 2015 to produce a masterplan to enable the business to expand over the next 20 years. The company's commitment to quality and excellence in its products extends to the design of its spaces, reflecting its core belief that the highest quality food can only be produced in a high-quality working environment.

www.bighams.com

Dulcote Quarry

Dulcote had been a limestone quarry, active between the early to late twentieth century. The iron-rich stone provides a dramatic topography, with the northern cliff face extending over 50 metres above the quarry floor.

Feilden Fowles

Feilden Fowles is an award-winning London-based architecture practice, founded in 2009 by Fergus Feilden and Edmund Fowles. The practice specialises in delivering socially and environmentally sustainable buildings across a variety of sectors, and aims to make architecture that is rich in character and distinct in identity. Their projects often interpret historic, cultural or vernacular references to generate clear concepts with a legible diagram. Structural integrity and tectonic expression drive the detailed design process to deliver buildings that are at once robust and well built.

Current commissions include a new visitor centre at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, currently on site; the Fraternity Project at Carlisle Cathedral; the ongoing strategic masterplan for Ralph Allen School, Bath; a new dining hall at Homerton College, University of Cambridge; and student accommodation at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford.

Built works to date include arts and cultural buildings, educational projects, heritage, workplace and residential. Examples include: Charlie Bigham's Food Production Campus in Somerset; The Lee Centre, a £1.75 million Applied Learning Centre at Ralph Allen School in

Bath; the Fitzjames Centre, Hazlegrove School; the London headquarters for watch brand Uniform Wares; and Waterloo City Farm, where the practice's new award-winning studio is located.

The work of the practice has been recognised with a number of awards, including RIBA Awards in 2018 for Waterloo City Farm and Charlie Bigham's Food Production Campus; Commendation in the New London Awards Mayor's Prize 2018 for Waterloo City Farm; 2017 RIBA London Awards and 2017 Wood Awards winner for Feilden Fowles Studio; 2014 RIBA National Awards and 2015 Civic Trust Awards for The Lee Centre, Ralph Allen School.

The practice received the inaugural Young Architect Award in the American Institute of Architects (AIA) UK Excellence in Design Awards in 2015 and BD's Young Architect of the Year Award 2016.

www.feildenfowles.com



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