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Imperial College London teams up with Earls Court Development Company for Climate Innovation Partnership

Plans include use of the 40-acre development site as a testbed for climate tech research and development



The proposals for Warwick Square at the heart of the development. (Earls Court Development Company)

By **Chanté Bohitige**

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Earls Court Development Company, the company formed to oversee the redevelopment of London's Earls Court exhibition centres site, has formed a partnership with Imperial College London aimed at furthering climate innovation.



The company also becomes part of WestTech London, which connects West London stakeholders including Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham councils, plus the latter's industrial strategy Upstream London, to aid innovation in West London. As part of this, the company will also have a renewed focus on climate research and cleantech entrepreneurship, it said in a statement.

The partnership aims to support the UK's net zero agenda. It will do so through the implementation of initiatives including using the 40-acre brownfield site at Earls Court as a testbed for climate tech research and development, with opportunities for academics, spinouts and start-ups to trial their cleantech innovations in real world settings.

Peter Runacres, head of urban futures at ECDC told CoStar News: "We want Earls Court to be the primary destination for live trials and pilots of tech and innovation as part of the drive to reduce the carbon impact of the built environment. This will involve trials pre-construction – which are already underway – as well as during and post-build. This is a really exciting time in the climate innovation sector as it relates to the built environment. Technologies and methodologies are evolving rapidly and we are perfectly positioned to be at the cutting edge of this."

Real-world testing is already being implemented, including mentoring for innovators through the Earls Court Development Company. Pilot projects that have been hosted on the site include a long-term trial of Emissiv radioactive coating, a paint being used on the roof the Earls Court Development Company's office and the Skills Centre next door. The paint, which is being trailed through Imperial's Venture Catalyst Challenge, "is designed to reflect solar heat back into the atmosphere, helping to reduce overheating, improve comfort and mitigate the urban heat island effect," Runacres added.

"One of the first pilot projects under the Imperial partnership is a prototype 'guerilla drain' fitted with sensors that filter and monitor stormwater pollutants in real time. The purpose is to help prevent contamination at source and explore how smarter urban drainage could support cleaner, more resilient cities. This is a good example of the site being used to test infrastructure innovation, not just building technology," he told CoStar.

The exact location of the innovation hub has not been chosen yet, with "a couple of possible locations to chose from," according to Runacres, who said that Earls Court Development Company is "in conversations with potential partners to operate the space."

It will also work with Imperial to support founders through the university's Venture Catalyst Challenge, a competition aimed at students and early career researchers, as well as supporting the university's centre and incubator for climate change innovation, Undaunted. This will include working with Imperial on climate innovation skills development and education.

WestTech London is founded by Imperial and is aimed at connecting stakeholders to unlock West London's innovation landscape by using the links it has to leading universities and research institutions, diverse talent, industrial heritage and transport links. It aims to create jobs, attract investment and drive inclusive economic growth.



Through WestTech London and Upstream London, Earls Court will be linked to other UK innovation clusters to aid Research and Development and economic growth, the company added.

The incubator site will be fully flexible with lab space, maker space and a forum for events and talks. This incubator concept, which is aimed at start-ups which could then scale up and move into permanent space on site, was included in the planning application.

It is predicted that the wider masterplan will generate £3 billion of gross value added each year. The scheme, which is aiming to create climate-resilient district for London, will have around 4,000 homes and 2.5 million square feet of offices centred around a climate incubator largely positioned in Hammersmith & Fulham.

As the climate innovation hub is implemented, the partnership will also help to foster place-based investment in line with the UK Industrial strategy, to produce more opportunities for joint research and development, the company said in a statement.

Alyssa Gilbert, co-director of Imperial's School of Sustainability and Director of Innovation at the Grantham Institute and Undaunted, said: "The built environment is one of the one of the most crucial and urgently needed areas of focus for climate innovation. We know that the collective power of Imperial's entrepreneurial universe is vast and now, thanks to this partnership with Earls Court, our talented students, inspired staff and pioneering founders will have the opportunity to advance their climate innovations in a real-world setting, at one of the UK's most exciting regeneration schemes."

Runacres said in a broader statement: "[T]his is a critical part of our focus on delivering a transformative development at Earls Court. Together, we will create a major new destination for climate innovation, where pioneering businesses, academia and future organisations come together to accelerate solutions to address the climate emergency."

Laura Citron, chief executive of London & Partners, said: "WestTech London is really starting to take root. These partnerships show just how much momentum there is behind creating these vital corridors across the city. And when you look at what's driving that, a lot of it comes down to London's ability to commercialise R&D at scale. That's been a real catalyst for growth in areas like climate tech, where London is genuinely leading the way innovation spa. And that growth is now creating real demand for new kinds of spaces. Earls Court being a great example - it has the potential to become a real home for the green economy. It also shows what's possible when we unlock brownfield land for the innovation economy. There's a lot we can learn from that."

Updated on 4 June to add other stakeholders to WestTech London.

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