

PROFESSIONAL COMMENT Joseph Mansour

Met station sell-off brings prime London locations to the market

The sell-off of police stations generates opportunities for innovative London developments. Advances in technology and communication mean fewer people now report crime directly to their local police station, altering the operation of modern policing.

As a result, the Metropolitan Police is concluding what has been a two-year property sell-off to modernise London policing in order to save an estimated £85m a year in running costs. The force plans to replace the disposed stations with more mobile "contact points" in cafés, libraries, supermarkets and post offices. This is a sensible approach: there is no longer a need for a police station on every corner in London, especially as many are Victorian properties, which are expensive to run.

The move brings a number of interesting buildings across the capital to the market in quick succession, causing a stir among developers and prompting competitive bidding circumstances. The sites are in many locations, with something to suit every buyer: from a modern development of 50 apartments in prime central London to a single premises conversion on the outskirts of zone 4.

The buoyant London property market led to capital received far exceeding expectations, which delivered extra cash to reinvest in frontline policing.

Closing unneeded and unused police stations is considered controversial, but by putting the staff before the property, Met had an opportunity to equip London's police force with modern mobile technology required for 21st-century policing.

The main challenges for buyers keen to redevelop a former police station is to use the space effectively and recognise these buildings were built for policing and offices rather than for residents. It is important not only for developers and architects to understand the construction and design restrictions, but also to appreciate the local context with a considered streetscape that complements existing façades.

Selling the stations enabled a host of exciting and diverse new developments to come to fruition across the capital. The schemes are aimed at various sections of the market, creating new homes and enhancing neighbourhoods and local communities.

Additionally, free schools were established in six of the former stations, giving a new lease of life to what was an outdated police resource. It is a little-talked-about but highly successful revolution.

Joseph Mansour is managing director of Mayfield