

# Willmott Dixon: Stockport interchange development is an employment lifeline for local people

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**Willmott Dixon** is rolling out an upskilling programme to give young people in Stockport employable skills for the construction industry.

The company has created a Building Lives Academy on-site that is providing qualifications including Health & Safety in Construction Level 1 certification and a CSCS card following an intensive four-week course.

The first to benefit are ten people from Stockport aged between 18-25 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Some recently left the care home system and are looking for a pathway to a long-term career, so the training gave them valuable on-site experience as well as employability skills they can build on to find construction sector jobs.

One Building Lives Academy student, Cain Powers-Evans from Stockport, said the course has made a real difference: "It's transformed my confidence. I wanted to go into landscaping or bricklaying and I didn't know much about construction, but it's been a really good experience. I enjoyed the course. I learned lots about the health and safety aspects and I really enjoyed the on-site work experience placement."

In addition to work experience, site visits, health and safety training and achieving their CSCS cards, Building Lives Academy students get advice on managing personal finances and budgeting skills as well as CV writing support and interview practice.

The training is being run alongside Groundwork Greater Manchester's Stockport sustainable futures construction programme, funded by the Prince's Trust. Willmott Dixon will run more employment and training programmes, with future ones aimed at local military veterans as well as people with disabilities, so they can gain construction skills, experience and support into employment.

The Building Lives Academy initiative is a key element of Willmott Dixon's commitment to ensuring the interchange development delivers lasting benefits for people in Stockport and Greater Manchester. This includes working alongside supply chain partners in Stockport to create 40 local jobs and upskilling a new generation of construction professionals through apprenticeship and trainee programmes.

Anthony Dillon, managing director for Willmott Dixon in the North West, said:

"The interchange will be a transformational gateway and biodiverse space for the people of Stockport. Yet it's impact will be even more far reaching; it will leave a legacy of investment, skills and opportunities through our Building Lives Academy programme.

"So many of our senior team in Greater Manchester have enjoyed a long and rewarding career in construction because they were given an opportunity, like these students. Whether our Building Lives Academy students go on to pursue full-time careers in construction or are inspired to go on to further education, we're delighted to offer them a positive experience and a place to develop valuable employability skills."

Stephanie Hevingham, employment coach and tutor at Groundwork Greater Manchester, said: "Working together with Willmott Dixon to deliver this course has allowed the learners to experience what life on site is really like and the types of careers available.

"They have thoroughly enjoyed every moment and have gained some lifelong qualifications. These types of partnerships are crucial for helping young people into work and be able to sustain employment."

Chris Barnes, Head of Projects Group at TfGM, said: "We are delighted to be working with Willmott Dixon to not only deliver a state-of-the-art transport interchange but also provide young people with the opportunity to gain valuable skills and experience in the construction industry."

Cllr Colin Macalister, Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration at Stockport Council, said: "The creation of Stockport Interchange is a fantastic opportunity for some of our young men and women in the borough to start their careers on a transformational development in the heart of our town centre. Being able to start their careers on a project such as this will enable our youngsters to develop some valuable skills as they begin their working life."

Procured using the Pagabo Major Works Framework and due to open in Spring 2024, the transport interchange – delivered in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), Stockport Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) – will incorporate a modern, fully accessible and covered passenger concourse with seated waiting areas and 18 bus stands, providing capacity for future growth in bus services.

A major feature of the scheme is the two-acre rooftop park which will improve leisure and recreation opportunities in the town centre and create more green space for everyone to enjoy. As part of the wider Greater Manchester Bee Network vision, there will also be new cycling and walking routes connecting to the train station, as well as to the Trans Pennine Trail and town centre.

As part of the wider development, residential partners CityRise will deliver a landmark residential development comprising 196 high-quality apartments to provide new homes in the heart of the town centre and help tackle the need for future housing.