

■ Visiting the site of the former Riley's building in Princes Street, Ipswich, which is to be demolished to make way for a new base for Birketts are, from left to right, Martin Sylvester, David Ellésmere, Graham Humphry, Jonathan Agar, Jane Riley, Colin Kreidewolf and Helen Pluck.

Photo: LUCY TAYLOR



Current base is in one of town's oldest commercial areas

Birketts is set to move out of its existing offices in Museum Street in Ipswich in early 2018 – but what will happen to those buildings has still to be decided.

The historic buildings in one of the oldest commercial parts of the town are listed so any changes will have to be sympathetic. But it is thought likely that they will end up being converted into homes – which is, ironically, how they started before the company was established in the mid 19th Century.

Jonathan Agar from the company said: “Benjamin Birkett started out working in his front room and then he took over the house next door and then expanded again and again – that’s how the whole business started there.

“The buildings are all listed, in many cases inside as well as out, so there are limits on what could be done with them but I



■ Birketts' offices in Museum Street are expected to be converted to homes

think the likelihood is that they will eventually become homes.”

Ipswich Council leader David Ellesmere said the authority would be working with Birketts

to try to come up with a suitable use for their current and was confident there would be considerable interest in the historic buildings.

Town's bright new business district signs up another big employer

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One of the biggest employers in Ipswich has outlined plans for its new £12m headquarters in the heart of the town's business district.

In a move that will see Birketts signing a 25-year deal with the borough council, the law firm will be right at the heart of the developing Princes Street business hub, which will see 6,000 people working in the area between Ipswich railway station and the Cornhill.

Its new offices, which should open at the start of 2018, should provide accommodation for more than 250 staff – and give the 153-year-old company real presence in its home town.

It will be based in a five-storey office block that is being built by Churchmanor estates with investment from the borough whose new investment company is putting up the £12m capital cost of the project.

Birketts will rent the building on a 25-year lease which will be the equivalent of a 1p saving on council tax rates.

Jonathan Agar from Birketts said it was important for the company to bring together its employees in a single location in Ipswich. He said: "We will be in modern, open-plan offices and have a real presence in the business centre of the town. We have modern offices in Norwich, Cambridge and Chelmsford and it is really good to work in."

The company will employ 257 staff in its 50,000 square-foot Ipswich offices, nearly half its total workforce.

Mr Agar said: "We are an East Anglia company but we are very much Ipswich-based and we are delighted that we will soon have a new headquarters in our home town."

Demolition work has already

Birketts

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Jonathan Agar, Birketts

started on the site that was previously Riley's Pool Centre – and was originally the John Grose garage.

The new development will cement the Princes Street area as the business hub of the town – it is next to the Suffolk Life headquarters and near the new Connexions business centre.

Birketts is opposite the new offices for Archant – publisher of the *East Anglian Daily Times* and *Ipswich Star*.

When existing employers including Willis, Axa, and the government offices in St Clare House – along with council offices in Russell Road – are considered this part of the town now has more than 6,000 jobs associated with it. And there is more to come – the former Drum and Monkey pub and garages are also due to be redeveloped for offices in the next few years.

The borough is also looking for a new use for the former nightclub near the Princes Street bridge.

Council leader David Ellesmere said: "This is a real boost for the town and we are delighted to have been able to help Birketts with this significant development."

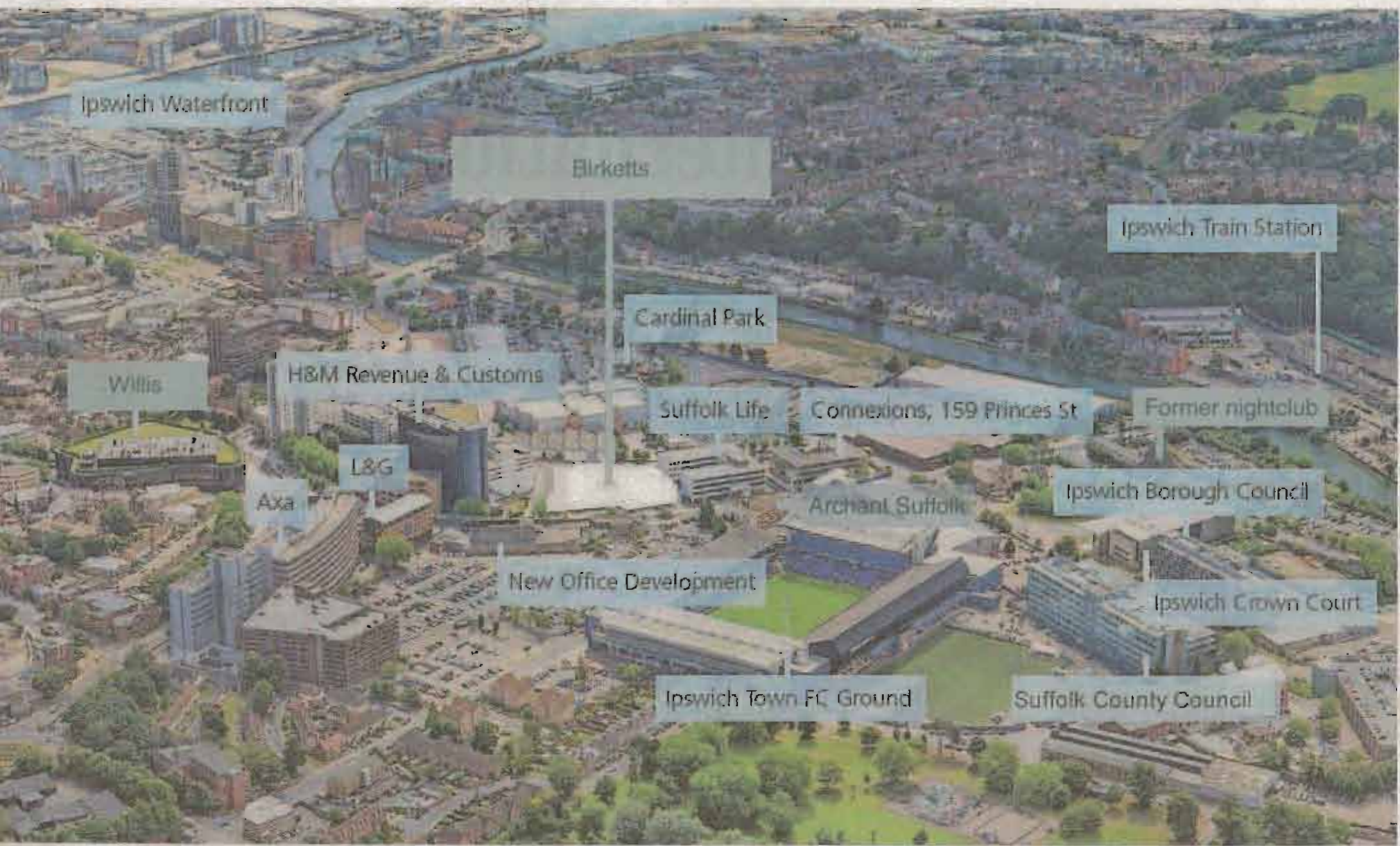


■ The former Riley's building which is being demolished to make way for Birketts



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local NEWS



How the new Ipswich central business district is shaping up with the soon-to-be-opened Archant building, Suffolk Life and Connexions and the proposed Birketts building

Low council firm leads investment

New council firm leads investment



■ An artist's impression of the proposed Birketts offices in Princes Street, Ipswich

Ipswich Borough Council has set up a new company to help encourage investment in the town – and to provide finance for major business projects.

It has created Ipswich Borough Assets as a council-owned company that will invest the authority's capital reserves in a bid to boost investment – and provide a better return for council taxpayers.

Council leader David Ellesmere said that by financing the £12m cost of the new headquarters and then taking on the freehold of the site, it would be guaranteed a good rental income for the next 25 years.

He said: "This is doubly good for the town – it provides us with a new revenue stream that will be guaranteed for the council and is not dependent on the government. If we put money into banks

or bonds there isn't much of a return at the moment!

"And it encourages investment where it is needed – in this case encouraging a major employer to stay in the town centre and move to new premises in the heart of the business district."

Other councils around the country have created similar companies to help with regeneration. The office is being built by Churchmanor Estates whose development director Graham Humphrey said: "We have been working with council companies like this elsewhere and it is very useful to support projects like this."

Mr Ellesmere said the council would be looking to support other developments of a similar nature in the years ahead – both in the town centre and on other sites in the area.