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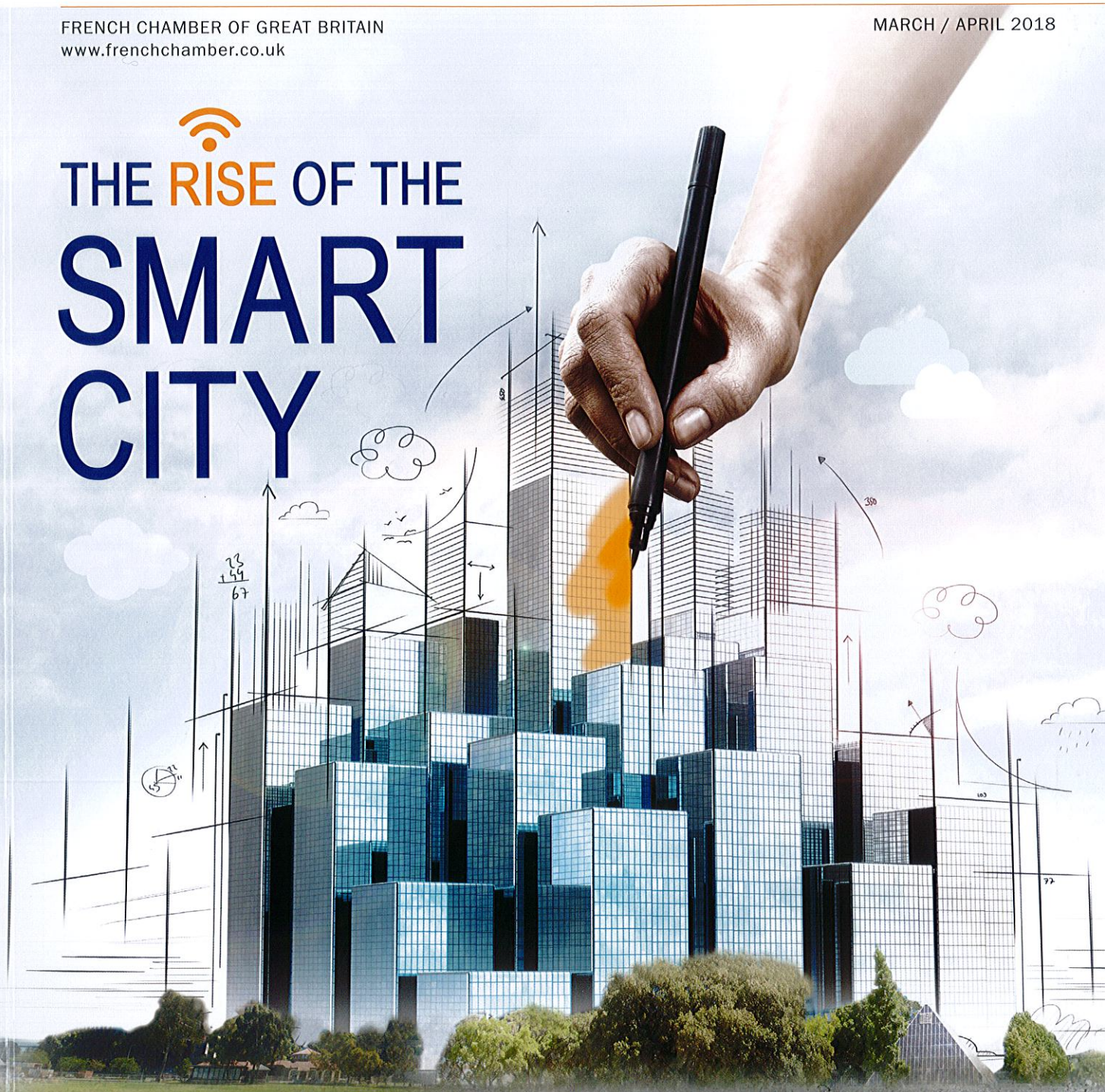
THE RISE OF THE SMART CITY



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Five minutes with **M. Tamara Box**, Managing Partner, Reed Smith; **French Embassy**: A new plan for French schools; Interviews and analysis with architect **Michel Mossessian**, London's Chief Digital Officer **Theo Blackwell**, and much more...

The Urban Campus

Smart cities must develop in natural and organic ways, and the campus offers just such a model of development, says **Michel Mossessian**, *Creative Director and CEO of* **Mossessian Architecture**

The idea of an urban 'campus' seems foreign to the often illogical and mismatched streets of London. But the development of once underused industrial wasteland in London's King's Cross represents a new approach to city planning in the capital.

There are now more than fifty new buildings on the 67-acre plot, including Google's new headquarters, and the rumoured new Facebook headquarters. The site boasts more than 19,000 flats, plus 26 acres of public space – and crucially a university.

According to the architect Michel Mossessian, the King's Cross approach to city planning and building should be central to smart city development.

'There are two paradigms when it comes to retrofitting cities like London for the future. Either you build up, or you build out,' says Mossessian, whose firm Mossessian Architecture designed two buildings for the site, including the 'S2', the 190,000 sq ft offices of Deepmind, Google's recent AI acquisition.

'My priority, when asked to contribute two new buildings, was to develop spaces that both convey a strong sense of their own identity and express a relevance to, and continuum with, the public realm,' says Mossessian.

'Too often, public space is merely regarded as an absence,' he says. 'I like to view public space as an entity in itself, and more importantly, as an opportunity for presence.'

The campus model

While isolated tall buildings are often the norm in London developments, Mossessian notes the campus model offers greater potential to smart cities that need to prioritise health and wellbeing, as much as infrastructure, service and energy efficiencies.

'The solution for many of the issues facing cities is to create clusters where we can concentrate people in liveable and workable areas,' says Mossessian. 'You multiply the uses of the public space in a natural way.'

It is a notion that forms a large part of the architect's design philosophy, which he describes as 'architecture that adds value and benefits society "beyond buildings."'

'Whether large- or small-scale, my view is that architecture is primarily a medium for conversations around people, life and places with a long term sustainable future,' says Mossessian.

The tradition of urban campuses in Britain mainly encompasses provincial universities in the model of Oxford or Cambridge. Campuses are also a model for the working environments in Silicon Valley, whose companies are now occupying offices in King's Cross.

The new development at King's Cross clusters buildings like a campus

'The model of the university campus works on many levels, and it fosters interaction creatively and socially,' says Mossessian. 'Universities are incubators for culture and innovation.'

According to Mossessian, it was a stroke or genius (or possibly luck) that the plans for King's Cross included a university at the heart of the new development – an unusual step in a city where developers are often more attached to their margins than they are to civic or cultural institutions.

The pride of place of the new University of the Arts London – and its public square and fountains – signals a departure from the norm. According to Argent, the company that manages the site, establishing a university on the site defined a creative and lively tone, and was instrumental in attracting Google as tenants.

Mossessian agrees: 'It represents a paradigm of happiness and knowledge coming together. It also creates a paradigm for research and a start-up economy, which can come from the concentration of happy people living and learning together in these scenarios.'

It seems clear that there is an appetite for new models of city planning – we will have to monitor the evolution of King's Cross to see how these new ideas play out. ■

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