

Design Review:  
**Battersea  
Power  
Station**

**Mixed-use  
redevelopment  
of a 38-acre site  
including Battersea  
Power Station  
for retail and  
commercial uses,  
and 3,611 homes.**



# Designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects

London Borough of Wandsworth

Planning reference: 2009/3575; 2009/3576; 2009/3577; 2009/3578

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## Summary

In principle we support the outline planning application. We applaud the retention and re-use of the listed power station as the clear focus of the site. The masterplan is convincing and, following a process of pre-application consultation, we are confident of its robustness. We support the principles of the architectural detail and think the design code, although perhaps over prescriptive in some areas, will be effective. The simple riverside park and the oval form of the landscape and buildings encircling the power station provide a strong setting for the existing building. However, because this is such a complex project, there is also still much that remains to be resolved in detail: we continue to have reservations about the detailed articulation of the massing in relation to the important perception of the dominance of the power station in all views. Because of the density of the development, we would like further reassurance as to the quality of the residential accommodation and ground level environment in heavily shaded areas. We would also like to see the design code for the facades be developed to respond more clearly to orientation. The landscape design of the central sweeping route, The Prospect, and the southern edge of the site need further consideration. We think that these all of these areas of concern should be further developed and refined as reserved matters applications come forward.

With regard to the power station building we support the application for listed building consent in principle. We recognise the enormous complexity of converting this listed industrial building with uses that are not immediately compatible with a monumental solid brick shell, and are impressed by what has been achieved by the design team within the constraints of a very difficult building. The entrance strategy, both at the points of entry into existing power station and the clarity of the circulation within the building itself, would benefit from further detailed development. The comments made on the listed building application, however, constitute suggestions for refinement of an already strong design.

## Masterplan

Overall we think that the masterplan is well resolved in urban design and townscape terms; the plan as a figure-ground, and pedestrian and vehicular access strategy are strong. However, the size of each block is still very substantial in relation to the dimensions of several of the streets and open spaces. We understand that the sunlight and daylight factors are compliant and that the design codes address

how acceptable levels of daylight might be achieved. However, on-going consideration of the detailed articulation of the massing and adjacencies, and internal layouts of the residential blocks, in relation to daylight levels will be needed as the design continues to develop in detail with reserved matters applications for each block. We note that the local authority will need to satisfy itself that conditions in all the flats at the lower levels, particularly those that are single aspect facing north or east are satisfactory; the assisted living block, in particular, appears potentially compromised by poor aspect and daylight conditions. Daylight conditions, sufficient for tree growth in the deep enclosed private spaces and streets, will also be needed.

Although it is at least 25m wide, the relationship between the scale of Hotel Lane to the buildings that front it has created a deep, overshadowed street. While we welcome the reduction in height and refinement of the articulation along its northern edge we still have reservations about the quality of this space. Hotel Lane will be an important point of arrival for many visitors to the site and we suggest that a more detailed understanding of the quality and nature of this space is needed to ensure that it does not feel like the service access and is an attractive street in its own right.

## Architectural form and treatment

The concept of generating continuity of architectural treatment along streets to create long, sinuous terraces is potentially elegant. We are also supportive of the principle of encircling the power station and setting it within a new formal context. We believe that a stronger hierarchy could be created to strengthen the reading of three-dimensional masterplan even further: the dominant terraces are those fronting The Circle and The Prospect, with the remaining streets lower and more subservient in character. The level of detail in the coding is appropriate in giving a degree of certainty and control over the setting of the power station but we would support a stronger hierarchy to the approach that allows more flexibility in the design solutions for blocks that are further from the power station. Although the architectural principles show a great deal of promise, the scale of each façade is huge. The potential for the blocks to become overbearing is obvious and the elevation design will therefore be very sensitive to any reduction in quality. The detailed interpretation and articulation of the façade design principles will need to be developed and refined, and then tested as each reserved matters application comes forward; we hope that the following comments will be considered during this process.

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We recommend that the façade strategy and architectural code are developed to respond more rigorously to orientation. For example, the architecture and landscape design for the east-west routes will have to work harder than that for the north-south spaces, to be successful, because they will be more heavily shaded. Although allowing for a gradual gradation in the treatment from one end to another, the architectural principles for the terrace typology are consistent throughout the site yet the façade to north-facing flats in block RS-4A will need to function quite differently to the south-facing façade to RS-5A.

We have reservations about the treatment of the office block on the western boundary of the site. Although it may be appropriate for this commercial block to have a different architectural treatment to the residential ones, it should support the overarching concept of the terraces and respond to context and orientation more imaginatively in its façade design. We also question the blank gable end walls to a number of the blocks across the site.

The internal arrangement of apartments along a central corridor seems unambitious. We suggest new residential typologies are needed to complement the innovative architectural approach to the facades. The illustrative examples of potential layouts and the block depths presuppose a central corridor solution, which is disappointing.

## **The Power Station**

We believe that the reconstruction and adaption of the external shell has achieved an acceptable balance between transparency and solidity that respects the monumental quality of the brick envelope while achieving workable windows for its new uses. There is also broad support for the form and materials, and positioning of the new additions. We support the approach to the design of the roof-top amenity space, with planting invisible from ground level and the retention of a crisp outline to the building.

As the detailed design develops it will be important to maintain the simplicity of the glazed extensions, which should not compete visually with the existing building. Attention to detail in their design will be crucial and the detailed design will be particularly important at the junctions where new meets old; we support the approach demonstrated within the application. The impact of residents inhabiting their balconies, installing blinds or curtains, and the potential visual clutter that this generates, also needs to be accommodated. The garden apartments that sit above the two turbine hall wings will be highly visible from ground level and, if this is not carefully done, the glazed extensions are unlikely to be the pristine glass boxes suggested in the application.

We question the small footprint, oval plan and rigid alignment in plan and section of the lightwells through the office levels. Their effectiveness in drawing natural daylight into the offices and potential to generate a perception of connection and spaciousness is not demonstrated. We suggest that fewer, larger and less regular voids might be more effective functionally and generate more spatial variety and interest within the office accommodation.

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A clear entrance strategy for this building is important. Arriving at the perimeter of the building there are multiple points of entry and a very long building perimeter; unless carefully handled, visiting the power station building could be a frustrating experience. We recommend that the shell of the existing building should not be cluttered with unnecessary canopies and signs. A clear hierarchy in the treatment of the entrance points and landscape will help to guide those visitors who are unfamiliar with the site. The sequence of entry within the building itself is not yet fully convincing. The connection between the entrance lobbies at the north and south of the building with the turbine halls seems relatively pinched by the positioning of vertical circulation cores. The northern entrance lobby provides a clear definition for the internal route to the event space but the southern entrance, which will be a main entrance for those arriving by Underground, feels underplayed in comparison. We would also like to see more evidence of a consistent approach to the landscape and public realm design that ties together the routes from the external plazas, through into the internal public realm of the power station turbine halls.

We are encouraged to see an approach to the internal fit out of the power station that draws on the strong character and atmosphere of the existing building. A sense of connection from inside to out and from past to future is key to the project's success. As the detailed design develops we would encourage the team to be consistent in this robust attitude to detailing throughout the power station. We suggest that, where possible, new structure and found brickwork are left exposed, and that new fit-out materials are chosen and detailed to complement the character of the power station. For example we like the bold, coffered pre-cast concrete soffits shown in the typical office space visualisation.

## **Landscape design**

We support the key landscape design principles, in particular the creation of a strong riverside park setting for the existing building. The openness of the design gives an appropriate scale and flexibility to the space and creates a good setting to the power station.

We are comfortable with the use of water in the ellipse around the power station but have some reservations about extending water down The Prospect to the south because it may reduce the impact of the water of The Circle in marking the significance of the power station. However, we think that the concept of a parkland space using water within a more garden-like setting - in contrast to the formal use of water around the listed building - could be successful, but needs further development. The function, identity and relationship of The Prospect to the other two key routes, the High Street and Hotel Lane, and the experience of being in this space, are not yet clear within the application. The drop-off space at its southern end appears rather ungenerous given the opportunity to admire the grand framed view of the power station from this vantage point. Some more consideration of how people will arrive and congregate at this point would be beneficial in refining the design.

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We remain unconvinced by the detailed treatment of the southern edge of the site along Battersea Park Road. While the scale of the buildings and the level of permeability of the site from Battersea Park Road feel appropriate, the integration of Battersea Park Road needs to be fundamental to the design. The treatment of the public realm currently lacks coherence and the incorporation of the green route set out in the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area Planning Framework is not clear in the planning application.

### **Environmental strategy**

We continue to applaud the proposed environmental strategy for its strategic approach both within and outside the site. The strategy is both ambitious and pragmatic and gives us comfort that the developer is taking the issue of sustainability seriously. We agree that reducing energy demand by passive measures should take priority over the addition of technological solutions. We suggest, however, that there might be more consideration of centralised waste and recycling. We also think that sustainability issues should be built into the design codes and that this issue is represented within the monitoring and delivery team; design and sustainability are inseparable.

### **Planning process and implementation**

We support the process of an outline application with design guidelines as a logical solution to the design of such a large and complex site, to be implemented over a number of phases. As each reserved matters application that comes forward will be a substantial project in its own right, we would like to request that we are given the opportunity to comment individually on all of them.

The design codes are comprehensive documents that provide a very explicit degree of control over the design of the buildings and landscape. We support their status as part of the application rather than supplemental documents. Technically we believe that the codes have captured the key design principles and will deliver the project as intended. However, we think that both codes could be more succinct. There is some repetition and overlap with the design and access statement and there would be benefit in distilling the information into more concise documents that are easier to use for both development control and coordination of design teams. Because the scheme is large, complex and will be delivered over many years it is important to clearly communicate the key guiding principles. Therefore, summaries that give the user an overview of the codes might also be helpful, as would a comprehensive 'regulating plan'. We are pleased that a clear procedure for dealing with variances from the codes is being established that will allow the codes to act as a robust benchmark against which alternative design proposals can be judged rather than an inflexible design standard.

The place-making code provides a high degree of control over the landscape design. However, whereas variety in the architectural approaches across the site may enhance the development, we think that there is real benefit in continuity across the landscape design and seamless interfaces between the different streets and spaces. We therefore

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wonder whether a single reserved matters application for the entire landscape design might be more appropriate than a design code and help to avoid the potential for a piecemeal approach.

We suggest that certain elements of public realm and infrastructure should be delivered early in the process, for example, the extension of the river walk. We also recommend that a strategy for temporary landscaping should be part of the planning application and that the environment for residents at each stage of the phasing is carefully considered.

### **Conclusion**

We support both the outline and listed building applications, in principle, which we think form the basis of an achievable long-term development proposal for the site. Inevitably for a development of this scale and complexity there are areas that require further resolution. We are, however, impressed by the ability of the design team and the robustness of the masterplan and application documents. We note the commitment of developer and design team, throughout the lengthy engagement with CABE, to respond to comments in their endeavour to achieve an intelligent and well resolved strategic and detailed design. We, therefore, consider that that these issues can be resolved through conditions on any approvals and development of the design for reserved matters applications.

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