The Complex Regeneration of Post-War Modernism: London's Southbank Centre's Masterplan

Abstract

Post-war modernism heritage is being reassessed, revalued and somehow successfully rehabilitated, even though there are still many people that refuse to accept this analysis.

What is striking in this whole process is that these assessments are only centred on the architectural objects that make up these projects. No attention is given to the urban design, namely the public spaces of these modernist cityscapes, nor do the assessments take into account the user's experience or the designer's aims.

This paper seeks to address this knowledge gap. To do so, It offers a multilayered assessment of the urban design vis-a-vis the designers aims, user's experience and heritage challenges involved in the contested masterplan of urban regeneration of the Southbank Centre in London. Given its iconic status and long history of conservation and regeneration attempts, the Southbank Centre Masterplan provides a productive case to assess different design-led regeneration approaches, to reflect on its achievements and failures, and by doing so it offers new lessons for guiding and assessing future urban design practices in complex post-war heritage contexts.

Keywords: Post-war Modernism, Conservation, Regeneration, Urban Design, Masterplanning, Designers, Users.

Introduction

Since the 1960s British post-war modernism has been victimized by public opinion. Today its fiercest enemy is urban renaissance. Largely unloved, several modernist buildings and cityscapes are being fast remodelled or destroyed to make way for newer, prettier and often commodified spaces, according to new design principles. This has resulted in serious conflicts between conservationists—English Heritage (EH) and the Twentieth Century Society (C20)[1]—and pro-growth local authorities about what gets preserved and why. The former demand the statutory protection and preservation of such modernist landscapes, while the latter request their demolition. However, some cases have proven more complex

than others, involving more resistance to redevelopment. A good case in point is the contested urban regeneration of the Southbank Centre in London, the largest Brutalist structure in the UK, which has been long in the making since the 80s, given the continual listing refusals from the government and the strong resistance partly because of architectural heritage and the informal uses that have been established. In the light of these conflicts there is evidence that its post-war modernism legacy is being reassessed, revalued and somehow successfully rehabilitated, even though there are still many people who refuse to accept this analysis. To date, the improvements made in the South Bank's public spaces have successfully enhanced its public life, making it more attractive and busier. What is striking in this whole process is that these assessments are only centred on the architectural objects that make up these projects. No attention is given to the urban design, namely the public spaces of these modernist cityscapes (While, 2006), nor do the assessments take into account the user's experience or the designer's aims (Forty, 1995). Hence, in the midst of these complex rehabilitations, an evaluation of the urban design vis-à-vis the designer's aims, the user's experience and heritage challenges is becoming very pressing.

This paper seeks to address this knowledge gap. To do so, it offers a multi-layered assessment of the masterplan of urban regeneration of the Southbank Centre between 1999 and 2014, so far the only one to have been implemented. The paper is structured into the following parts:

First, it situates the debates on post-war modernism heritage to offer an understanding of the complexities and challenges involved in conservation and regeneration in such contexts.

Second, it describes the long and troubled history of the Southbank Centre and the failed attempts to redevelop and list it.

Third, it discusses the two main points of resistance to redevelopment: namely, the conservationist bodies and the local community.

Fourth, based on archival research and interviews, it examines the designer's aims and proposals from inception to implementation in order to understand how they worked around the ongoing resistance to change and conservation designations.

Fifth, it explores through ethnographic fieldwork the user's experience, needs and expectations towards the design outcomes.

In the final part, it offers a reflection on this context of complex conservation and regeneration and identifies potential lessons for future regeneration practices.

1. The complex rehabilitation of post-war modernism

Since the 1970s post-war modernism has been the subject of much heated debate, drawing attention in the fields of architecture, planning, geography and environmental psychology. Two narratives have usually been put forward (Relph 1987, Gold 1997). On the one hand, authors from design disciplines, usually its main defenders, argue that it is the most influential architectural and planning movement of the twentieth century. It was the time of great experimentation and innovation and of an unprecedented new generation of emerging typologies, designs and building practice. The fact that it continues to shape contemporary design practices today attests its great influence.

On the other hand, planners, geographers, psychologists and wider public opinion have taken a more critical view. The UK is a country where criticism has been particularly acute, given a strong anti-modernism backlash in the 1970s and 80s linked to a broader rejection of post-war social welfare (Harvey 1989). Their argument is that modernism, despite its social and design merits in terms of post-war reconstruction and ultimately in solving the housing shortage and urban decay, failed to deliver what it promised. The main critiques put forward are that modernism failed to improve the city and its inhabitants' lives or to recognize the damaging consequences of its belief in new technology, technocratic planning, the power of the omniscient architect-planner and the founding design principles of the modern movement—namely, large-scale, non-contextual, rational order, emphasis on movement and material hardness—on the social life of those spaces designed.

Despite these conflicts, there is evidence that the post-war modernist legacy is being reassessed, revalued and in some places successfully rehabilitated.
There has been growing support for the conservation of modernist buildings and cityscape landmarks, particularly of the most iconic buildings, especially since central government decided to extend statutory conservation protection through the listing programme in 1987 to encompass any building at least 30 years old or younger if considered outstanding and under threat (Harwood 2010, Farmer and Pendlebury 2013). Recently, there has also been increasing promotion and celebration of Brutalist aesthetics (Hatherley 2009) and a rising interest and research on the part of academics, particularly from design disciplines, to uncover the overlooked elements of its history, particularly its legacies (Gold 1997). This wave of interest can be seen as a reflection of the growing international interest and activity

in the conservation of recent heritage, influenced since the early 90s by the formation of international organizations such as DOCOMOMO, ICOMOS and APT.[2]

Although this context marks a positive change of mindset towards post-war modernism, our modernist heritage is still facing several conservation and regeneration dilemmas and challenges (While 2006).

First, despite the growing body of knowledge regarding the conservation of twentieth-century architecture, there is not yet any official set of criteria on what, how and why modernist settings should be listed, preserved and renovated, or any consensus about what constitute good practices and precedents in such contexts (Macdonald 2009, Harwood 2010, Becksen 2015). So far the history of conservation and renovation has been written around cycles of architectural fashion where certain styles may be devalued and even vilified one day, only to be highly valued later (Delafons 1997). Parallel to these changing architectural fashions, listing has usually been carried out empirically and superficially, often by insufficiently qualified surveyors (Harwood 2010). Even though there have been some attempts since 1987 to make more rigorous assessments subject to thematic research (i.e. in-depth studies of certain building types), consultation with owners, local authorities and the general public, and evaluation of a range of values (e.g. communal), post-war listing is becoming more difficult to achieve and it cannot prevent major alterations and demolitions (Harwood 2010).

Secondly, there are often conflicts between pro-development and conservation interests over the value of particular buildings. Any move to preserve and rehabilitate these often unfashionable and dysfunctional landscapes is often contrary to the cities' urban growth agenda and interests to modernize their images and attract investment. As Larkham noted (1996), there is a clash of values between capital and aesthetics and historical appreciation, despite the views of English Heritage that economic and taste judgments should not affect listing decisions. However, not all building conservation conflicts with urban growth regimes. There is an increasing national and local demand for heritage—much of the conservation interests are bottom-up—evolving around commodification and consumption of certain historical buildings as unique local economic assets to serve urban leisure, tourism and retail activities (EH 1999). Most of the interest in conservation fits well with the post-industrial renewal strategies (Kearns and Philo 1993).

Thirdly, the fact that listing decisions are subject to governmental approval also aggravates the situation, since government support for post-war listing is always shifting. It depends on the parties in power and the national economy (Labour governments have often been more supportive than Conservative ones) and on the degree of contestation of listing decisions—governments have become more wary of supporting listing, particularly of controversial cases.

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Fourthly, conservation-led regeneration is mainly centred on individual iconic modernist settings, particularly focused on the listed ones, and is therefore less enthusiastic about ordinary architecture, particularly social housing and the wider townscapes and their urban design. In this context, post-war heritage can only survive by chance. Its fate is played out in a multi-scaled negotiation over meaning and value in a context of changing fashions, the national legal framework of statutory conservation, different local lobby interests, negotiations over current use value of buildings and infrastructure and the cost of demolition and refurbishment relative to site values (Allan 2001, While 2006).

Fifth, the accepted traditional conservation frameworks are not always applicable, given the modernistic break with traditional architectural forms, planning and use of new materials (Macdonald 2009). The other challenge is technological. Although a lot of progress has been made in advancing new or adopting existing repair methods, the fact that many of these structures have a limited life span leads to the realization that repairs are not possible and demolition is the only solution.

The last challenge is the inadaptability of modernist highly functionalist and artistic designs—how to adapt them to new uses, or to retain significant design features that are materially problematic (e.g. large-scale glazing). An over emphasis on preserving their design authenticity is often one of the main arguments used against their conservation.

The above dilemmas and challenges raise a lot of questions on how we are to achieve consensus in order to mainstream sensitive conservation and regeneration and how designers are expected to work around resistance to both. It is not that we are lacking ideas. There is already a substantial list of proposals (Macdonald 2009). However, not all have been achieved, particularly the following: 1) to broaden the scope of post-war conservation assessments from an archi-centric focus to include both tangible and intangible values that connect the places in question to their context and communities; 2) to develop public awareness about modernist social and cultural aspirations in order to garner more public support and attain more successful listing cases; 3) to balance continuity and change, as in many cases change may be inevitable if places are to survive (iconic places suffer less from that problem but are more challenging to make changes); 4) to create a central database of best practices that have been successful in both conservation and adaptation to new uses.

This paper aims to elaborate two of these proposals: 1 and 4. To do so, given its iconic status and long history of conservation and regeneration attempts, the Southbank Centre (SBC) Masterplan provides a productive case to offer a multi-layered assessment of different design-led regeneration approaches, to reflect on its achievements and failures, and to identify potential best practices for the future.

2.   The long and troubled history of the Southbank Centre redevelopment

London's Southbank Centre (SBC) is not only one of the largest and most iconic post-war modernist cultural centres in Europe, but also one of the most controversial cases of post-war conservation ever. It is large in size, comprising a 30-acre estate located in the south of London bounded by the River Thames, Waterloo Bridge, Belvedere Road, and the London Eye. It consists of an ensemble of four iconic modernist buildings and the public spaces around them. It has a long history of resistance to redevelopment, both from the heritage lobbies and the local community.

One of its buildings is the Royal Festival Hall, the very much praised early modernist building inherited from the Festival of Britain of 1951; the other three are the widely contested and unloved 1960s Brutalist buildings, the Queen Elizabeth Hall (QEH), the Purcell Room (PR) and the Hayward Gallery (HG).[3] There are not many buildings with such a long history of controversies about their value, and which have suffered so many threats of demolition. Interestingly, these controversies may already have been in the making even before the 60s' buildings existed.

The South Bank district itself was for many centuries the place where London consigned all its dirt, rubbish and problematic citizens (Ackroyd 2001). It was only in 1943 that the war-time London County Council (LCC) decided to change the fate of this place. Subsequently, the London Plan of Professor Patrick Abercrombie emerged, designating the South Bank as an area of culture (Grindrod 2013). However, the London plan would only became a reality with the Festival of Britain in 1951, which made the South Bank its central piece (Banham and Hillier 1976). It was here that for the first time the achievements in modern architecture and town planning were presented in Britain.

The Festival helped to change the South Bank's bad connotation. But the controversies of this site were yet to start. After the closure of the Festival, power changed hands from Labour to Conservative, and as the latter saw it as a symbol of the former Labour government, they decided to demolish all the structures apart from the RFH, the only permanent building in the Festival (Mullins 2007).

In 1962, in order to fulfill the Abercrombie plan to make the South Bank a cultural quarter, the LCC decided to expand the RFH with the construction of a late-modernist-style cultural centre, consisting of three 60s' buildings and walkways to connect them. This was to become

the largest modernist site in Britain. The creation of this ensemble was also the stepping-stone to establish SBC as a charitable trust and an independent arts organization in 1988, in the same year that the RFH was listed (Mullins 2007).

However, there was a lot of resistance from the local community to the building of these new structures, because of their dislike of the style of the architecture (Mullins 2007, Street 2011). Hence it was not surprising that, in less than a decade, most of SBC's public spaces were already suffering great neglect and underuse, though it was also the time that a young community of skateboarders would come to appropriate some undercroft spaces. This would lead to a long history of visions and failed attempts to regenerate it, as we will see next.

Fig. 1. SBC site context.

Fig.2. SBC buildings.

Past masterplan visions and failed attempts to regenerate SBC

Over the past 40 years SBC has been involved in a series of initiatives to renovate its buildings and public spaces. The first was an exhibition in the early 70s in the RFH ballroom to promote the regeneration of the area. After this followed the introduction of the open foyer policy following the National Theatre's lead with its generous provision of strikingly designed foyers that are open day and night, which was considered an effective strategy to attract people to come and use its spaces (Mullins 2007).

However, it was only in the 80s that the SBC started to commission well-known British architects to redesign SBC's buildings and public spaces. This is the case of Cedric Price in 1983 and Terry Farrell in 1985 and Richard Rogers in 1993, though the latter was selected through competition. Although all these architects' proposals were very welcome—because of their effectiveness to conceal the grey and monotonous post-war buildings—they were short-lived.[4] They were all very expensive ventures and clearly unsympathetic to the 60s' buildings. Price wanted to create a fun fair, Farrell to re-clad all the buildings and Rogers to cover the whole site with a giant roof. These proposals were very representative of the first architectural attempts of the 80s with a post-modern style that only focused on changing the architectural expression of the development using ornaments or colours (Bech-Danielsen and Varming 1997).

RMA's winning masterplan proposal [1998]: a new design approach

After a long history of failed regeneration attempts, SBC decided it had had enough of architects' ego trips (McCart 2013). Having spent over 5 million pounds in plans and yet achieved no improvement, SBC launched an open international competition to search for a masterplanner with a totally different approach: to get the arts and urban design needs resolved before the architecture; to undertake an incremental rather than a 'big bang' implementation; to secure multiple rather than a single source of funding; and to be inclusive rather than exclusive in developing the plans—the aim was to achieve a wider consensus on the plans.

This was the first time that SBC had had a strong vision for the site. They wanted to create a world-class arts centre for everyone in an attractive riverside setting. They thought this could be achievable as they were already attracting 3.5 million visits a year to their always ambitious arts programme.

As part of their consensus-building strategy, and to minimize costs and maximize certainty, SBC created a taskforce of 25 people representing local, regional and national interests to develop a brief for the masterplan, select a masterplanner and review the progress of the plan (SBC 1999).[5]

The international competition was intense. There were 76 competition entries. The winning entry was from RMA,[6] an architectural practice based in London, which was not yet very well-known abroad but was already highly regarded for its sensitive approach to urban context and architectural heritage.

What distinguished RMA's proposal from those in the past is the fact that it presented a totally new way of designing in such contexts. According to Gavin Miller (2013), one of the partners of RMA, unlike previous designers, they tried to work with the existing context and make it work.

Before RMA began their work on the masterplan, SBC undertook a widespread public consultation on the draft brief. This process was unprecedented in either the public or the private sector (SBC Director 2013).[7]

The consultation revealed not only a high level of consensus on a wide range of issues that needed to be addressed—poor accessibility to the site, poor quality of the visitor's experience of the architecture and urban design—but also a few minor disagreements,

particularly regarding the future of the 60s' buildings, and the expected focus on commercial development (SBC 1999). Although these disagreements would never be solved, all the interested parties were able to agree at least on addressing the major problems of the site.

Table 1. The Masterplan Brief in May 1999.

3.   The heritage and local resistance

While the SBC masterplan was in the making, SBC also witnessed a long history of listing refusals and resistance to change from heritage bodies. In the last two decades it has seen its listing refusal four times: 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2012, despite rigorous recommendation by EH and C20.

Professor Andrew Saint had already suggested in his report for EH in 1991 that the case of the South Bank would be highly contentious. He clearly expressed that there were several arguments both in favour and against the listing of SBC. The points in favour were the fact of their comprising the most radical buildings of the 1958-70 period known as Brutalism, and its contribution to the art of organic town planning. The main factors against were the buildings' inflexibility to meet new uses and to adapt without destroying the original design.
Nevertheless, Andrew Saint did his best to put together rigorous recommendations for preserving SBC.

However, the government continued to refuse its listing. According to Tourism and Heritage Minister John Penrose: 'the SBC is not of sufficient architectural or historic interest to merit listing protection at the Grade II under the Planning Act 1990. (…) [There] are aspects (the walkways and Hayward Gallery) which have never functioned as intended, the architecture is poorly resolved, the structures are not unique or groundbreaking and the individuals behind Archigram had limited influence on the building's design' (Fulcher 2010).

In 2012, SBC's application for a certificate of immunity towards the refurbishment of the 60s' buildings brought this lengthy history of listing requests and refusals to an end (C20, 2012). They argued that this was to ensure that they could easily undertake all the necessary refurbishments (Waite 2012). However, many architects and historians do not see this as a lost battle since SBC is gaining increasing international public recognition.[8]

Listing is no longer an absolute requirement, because it is not a necessary means to save these buildings. So far many listed buildings have been substantially altered and demolished without rigorous scrutiny. Catherine Croft, current Director of C20, says that this is the result of a misguided application of EH conservation principles, such as its emphasis on the original design which has been used as an argument to replace significant elements in facsimile or to prevent upgrading for the continuity of use (2010). The exposure of such problems reveals some of the ambiguities of listing and explains why so many practitioners and scholars are increasingly against conservation (2010). However, this attitude was never well received by C20. SBC is a good case in point. Since the late 90s when C20 became its main watchdog, it has been opposing almost any type of change and redevelopment. This resistance was immediately expressed after RMA publicly presented their masterplan proposal. Despite endorsing the proposal, particularly their intention to retain and not demolish the 60s' buildings, they expressed strong reservations regarding the partial removal of the walkways and some additions to the upper levels (C20 1999).

Unexpectedly, EH was less strict about allowing change as long as all the buildings were retained. Their main concern was always the setting of the two Grade II listed buildings, the RFH and its neighbour the National Theatre (EH 2000).

However, C20's resistance would only turn into conflict during the subsequent masterplan phase to refurbish the 60s' buildings when the winning entry of FCBS[9] architects was publicly released and exhibited for public consultation. Their proposal proved very controversial, as besides envisioning the much needed refurbishment of the existing 1960s' buildings and improving the site's poor access and backstage areas, it also aimed to create a 12m-high glass pavilion and a semi-transparent slab-like 'liner' for arts and commercial uses and permanently moving the skaters from the undercroft to a nearby location (Rogers 2013). The last proposal did not come as a surprise, SBC's intentions to develop it having been long known. After all, the skaters' undercroft is the most economically valuable part of the site (Former SBC Project Leader 2013).

Even so, although SBC was able to secure broad cross-party support including the Mayor of London, CABE[10] and even the former LCC architects, a large number of people were not of the same opinion (Jury 2013, Long 2013). Many architects, Londoners and members of the artistic community and, above all, C20 were very wary about the project's ambitious additions, particularly 'their scale, siting and massive visual impact on the existing buildings' and displacement of the skaters, which they saw as 'threatening the communal value of the site' (Ramchurn 2013). As a response to this criticism, SBC said that the public consultation had revealed a higher than 85% approval rating for the winning proposal. C20, however,

considered these results to be misleading, accusing FCBS of providing very few images illustrative of the height and scale of the new proposals (Rogers 2013).

This opposition from C20 would not be the last blow to the project. In the following months, a group of Londoners started an online petition, launched a campaign entitled 'Long Live Southbank' to save the skatepark, and submitted an application to both grant it village green status and list it as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under the Localism Act in order to prevent alterations—though only the latter would be approved by Lambeth Council (Escobales 2013, Ramchurn 2013). In the midst of these events, several high profile public figures also joined the debate to object to the new plans, making their cause stronger.[11]

In the face of this prolonged resistance, in order to resolve the mounting issues surrounding the proposals and respond to the increasing economic constraints, SBC was forced to rethink the masterplan brief and to take the designs back to the drawing board (Stott 2013), as we will see in the next sections on the designer's and user's response.

4.   The designer's response

After the public consultation RMA presented two design reports: the urban design strategy (UDS 2000) where they identified the critiques and problems of the site and proposed an urban design framework with which to solve them; and the Volumetric Study (VS 2000) where they tested the problems and the opportunities with five options. Underlying these studies were two key ideas.

The first was that it was possible both to preserve the old and to build the new. RMA identified both the problems and opportunities of adaptation of the post-war design—blank walls, empty undercrofts and service areas, single use, and a confusing high-level walkways system.

The second was an awareness that to comply with the arts brief—which called for considerable additions and alterations to the 60s' buildings, address the overall problems and critiques to the site, and get support from all the interested bodies, the designers would need to offer a well-informed but neutral response to the site, at least until their studies were complete.[12]

The first masterplan brief (1999-2007)

In their UDS, RMA came up with a preliminary set of four design principles, which they saw as the most sensible guidelines to adapt the buildings without radical change whilst solving the major problems affecting the site (Table 2). These design principles were then developed in greater detail with six options in the subsequent VS report (Current SBC Project Leader 2013). Each option tested different possibilities in terms of the development capacity of the two SBC sites (the Waterloo site encompassing the 60s' buildings and the HCP site[13] and their fit in terms of adaptation, demolition or expansion of the existing structures, with which the gains and losses in amount of public space, flexibility in use and phasing and continuity were then measured.

Table 2. Preliminary Urban Design Principles.

One of the six options envisioned the demolition of all the 60s' buildings but this was obviously not considered seriously, given the high heritage resistance it would involve. All the other options involved sensitive adaption of the 60s' buildings, and flexibility and continuity in terms of use and phasing through effective activation of several unused spaces.[14] None of the five developed options was considered optimal but they would determine in large part the final masterplan brief, which proposed a framework for incremental implementation. This was structured in two phases: the first between 1999 and 2007 prioritized the public realm improvements—the removal and moving of servicing areas to discrete ones, using the spaces gained to create active frontages and new public spaces; and the second from 2007 onwards addressed all the issues related to the demolition and adaptation of the 60s' buildings (Table 3). This incremental approach provided for flexibility of programme and operational continuity of the existing arts facilities and the public's use of the site during the construction (UDS 2000). However, due to rising economic constraints and heritage and local resistance, the second masterplan phase would never see reality, at least in its original form.

Table 3. Final Urban Design Principles and design proposals.

Fig. 3. New Southbank Square before 1999 and after 2007 (from top to down).

Fig. 4. Queen's Walk Riverfront before 1999 and after 2007 (from top to down).

A new design strategy since 2011

The implementation of the first phase of the masterplan in 2007 was considered a great success (DEWG 2011, Welch 2014). It significantly improved SBC's public spaces, making them more attractive and busier. However, it also put the 60s' buildings under great pressure. Their outdated facilities can no longer meet the rising cultural demand.

Given this context, SBC was forced to rethink their regeneration strategy (McCart 2013).[15] To do so, they commissioned from DEGW[16] a feasibility study on the current artistic and audience standards, and the preparation of a new masterplan brief. Underpinning this brief was a new vision of inhabiting rather than building with regular ephemeral temporary and economical installations.[17]

The Festival of Britain celebrations in 2011 provided an excellent opportunity to test and develop this vision. In it were combined small-scale physical interventions—e.g. new stairs, field undercrofts and terraces—with a broad range of temporary uses—e.g. ticketed and free events to exhibitions, and participatory projects covering a wide range of arts. Given its great success, SBC decided to replicate the festival model every year and make permanent some of its physical interventions, such as the roof garden. According to McCart, this new approach was a demonstration of the importance of testing ideas before making any physical shift (2013).

Fig. 5. Temporary uses during the Festival of Neighbourhood in 2013.

5.   The user's perspective

To complete the multi-layered assessment of SBC's regeneration, an ethnographic post-occupancy evaluation study was also undertaken during the spring and summer of 2013 to analyze limitations and opportunities that the design interventions posed for the social use of the site.[18]

Two types of location were the object of study: locations subject to intervention between 1999 and 2007, indicated in the plan as retrofitted and new; and locations partially retrofitted or awaiting intervention, indicated as in progress, as highlighted in Table 4. For the purpose

of this paper, only the locations that faced more resistance to development—the skaters' undercroft and the high-level walkways—are discussed.

Table 4. Locations retrofitted, new and in progress.

Skaters' undercroft

Fieldwork confirmed that the skaters' undercroft is indeed one of the few spaces to fulfil SBC's original design (Borden 2013). It is where unplanned uses are still allowed to occur. More than a mere social space for skaters and BMXers of all ages, it is also a space for hanging out for the local artistic community.[19] This has been possible mainly because its design has remained largely unaltered.

However, we cannot deny that its uses have been considerably affected, if not in scope at least in terms of activity level, by the ongoing permanent and temporary design interventions at the riverfront. They have made it a very popular public space in central London. However, the fact that only commercial activities—e.g. cafes and shops—have been added to its new active frontages means that it has not yet seen a substantial increase of stationary optional and social activities. People usually only walk past it to go to the nearby touristic destinations, the Tate Modern and the London Eye. Not many people stay, unless there are big events going on such as the summer festivals. When these occur, the riverfront often becomes congested. People can hardly walk along. As observed during the Festival of Neighbourhood in 2013, this is explained by the fact that too many pop-up installations were placed at the riverfront: a garden exhibition, a beach, several food trucks, and occasionally a food market during the weekends. Nonetheless, these uses have significantly diversified the type of activities. More people stopped and sat along the ledges of the pop-up beach and the pop-up gardens, came to people-watch the crowds and the skaters in their activities, and to hang out with their friends.

The skateboarders, however, were not very satisfied with the festival activities (Woods 2013). Not only has their space of action been substantially reduced—e.g. with the introduction of a fence along the perimeter of the undercroft—but also they were placed at the centre of attention 'like animals in a cage'. The same happened in other locations, particularly the new reclaimed Southbank Square, where the over-use of temporary uses have also been constraining and displacing several unplanned uses—e.g. arts performance practices.

Altogether these findings are very elucidative of the positive and negative sides of the interventions undertaken thus far. The positive side is the achievement of a good balance between conservation and change. All the permanent interventions have significantly enhanced the life of all the riverfront spaces without major changes to the original design. The negative sides are the rising economic pressures facing this masterplan, which are visible in the commercially focused active frontages and over-use of temporary uses. Although such revenue-generating strategies are becoming commonplace in regeneration practices to pay off the huge investments involved, designers should at least consider how to identify more balanced strategies that can allow both planned and unplanned activities by not filling all ground-floor unused spaces with programmed activities, thereby allowing space for open, free, unprogrammed, unplanned activities to take place.

Fig. 6. The skaters' undercroft.

High-level Walkways

During fieldwork, focused attention was given to two particular walkway locations: the walkway segment between the QEH, PR and HG at level one and the walkway segment at level two, the roof terrace. These two walkway levels have since the 1980s been considered doomed to failure—given their difficult wayfinding—and subject to several proposals of redevelopment to enclose or remove them in order to increase the amount of useful space; some subtractions have already taken place. However, fieldwork observations proved quite revealing. Both walkway locations were the locations within SBC where more social, optional and unplanned activities were observed, with or without temporary uses.

Fieldwork observations and interviews revealed that the level-one walkways have always been quite well used. Some residents said that they had always used them when they were kids as their playground and now their children were doing the same (anonymous interviewee 2013). This was the location where a greater number and variety of activities were observed, from informal and unplanned activities[20] (e.g. unplanned social encounters among strangers) to transgressive behaviours[21] (e.g. parkour, skateboarding and jogging) and activism[22] (e.g. dance performances). According to Gehl (1971), the existence of such activities, which are the most demanding upon the built environment, attests to a certain

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extent the design quality of these spaces. A closer examination of their design reveals that several spatial qualities are at play: circulation spaces with great spatial variation in terms of layout and views; a lot of edge spaces along the circulation spaces where people can sit or lean, and children can play; a variety of public art with the double function of seating spaces and props; and, most important of all, a lot of space that allows many different activities to coexist without obstructing one another.

The level-two walkways, with the roof terrace as their central piece, constitute a recently gained public space, which was the result not of redevelopment but of simply having been opened up for public access during the festival celebration in 2011. According to Shan Maclennan, SBC's Creative Director (2013), this idea took its inspiration from Archigram's original design.

Since it opened permanently, it has become an instant success. It is one of the top destinations at SBC for drinking, picnicking, and sunbathing, even if sometimes it is quite crowded, especially during good weather. But as observed, unlike the riverfront, people do not seem to mind being among such a high density of people. Evidence of this is that people usually stay there for whole afternoons.

This success actually came as a surprise, given this level's visual and physical inaccessibility—its high location and stair-only access. But the reality proved otherwise, with people having no trouble finding it.

In-depth spatial analysis shows that the roof terrace offers circulation spaces with a variety of views towards the river; a variety of seating spaces from movable chairs (according to Whyte, the type of seating space that allows high social flexibility) to long fixed benches at the edges of the circulation spaces (good for groups and individuals); and artificial grass, the most popular seating space and the space that worked best as a social mixer. All types of people, from groups to individuals, who came there felt at ease to socialize, get some sun, or simply rest.

Altogether these findings reveal that, despite all the ongoing proposals to redevelop the walkway spaces, it does not take much effort to improve these spaces because they do function well and are very much valued by their users. A bit of grass, planting and some benches are just enough to make these spaces more attractive and inviting. Therefore, it seems more sensible to try to retain them and keep their original design, rather than to continue to cut them away. Otherwise, they will only become more dysfunctional.

Fig. 7. The East Wing High Walkways.

6.   Reflections and lessons for future urban design practices in complex post-war heritage contexts.

By placing urban design, the designer's aims and the user's experience, three elements often overlooked in the assessment of post-war modernist heritage, at the centre of analysis of the ongoing regeneration of the SBC masterplan, this paper offers a renewed understanding of the benefits and challenges involved in the conservation and regeneration of modernist cityscapes and several lessons for urban design practice, and it does so in three ways.

First, it proposes a valid multi-layered assessment of conservation and regeneration practices. By combining extensive archival documentation of the design process to understand how designers worked around heritage resistance with an ethnographic post-occupancy evaluation study to include user responses to the built outcomes, it offers a more in-depth, objective and unbiased assessment of the design interventions than architecture-centric surveys alone, that focus only on the physical objects.
By doing so, it demonstrates its effectiveness to achieve a more robust assessment than the single and subjective views of architectural experts and to deal with complex contexts of conservation and regeneration. It does so in two ways. One is by contextualizing the designers' aims and proposals to understand how they worked around the different points of resistance. The second is by assessing the quality of the design based on its social performance, i.e. on the body of the actual users themselves, because only they can tell us about the limits and opportunities of the urban design and the elements that are really important for people's use.

Second, this paper brings optimism for the conservation and regeneration of post-war modernist cityscapes. It shows that, despite the perceived limitations of post-war designs, they have qualities that are worth preserving and improving. This finding problematizes and re-evaluates the dominant theories and critiques concerning post-war masterplans and by doing so asks us to develop more informed decisions regarding their conservation and regeneration.

The in-depth ethnographic assessment of the social performance of both retained and adapted public spaces of the South Bank presented in this paper shows that post-war modernist masterplans are not necessarily dead, rigid or unchangeable entities, defying the dominant masterplanning theories (Jacobs 1961, Alexander et al 1977). They can still be shaped by their users, improved by the designers, and thereby generate new meanings and uses. For such a continued evolution to occur, modernist cityscapes, like any other, need to have an urban design that offers possibilities. The South Bank is a good case in point. It leaves us grounds for optimism about post-war modernist urban design. It shows that people can change the design conventions of use of many of these spaces, particularly of those less purposefully designed, such as the high-level walkways that were simply meant for walking, by consolidating new uses of a more informal or unplanned nature. These findings put into a new light the legacies of post-war modernist masterplans and public spaces, showing us that there are certain advantages in a space being empty and large-scale. Eventually perhaps, these characteristics become preconditions that can allow more freedom for both adaptations and informal appropriations to take place.

Finally, this paper offers several lessons for future urban design practices in complex post-war heritage contexts.

The first lesson is that a more balanced approach between conservation and change leads to better and finer results (Allan 2007, Bech-Danielsen 2015). Although some traditional conservationists will obviously continue to resist it, there is a growing consensus among both historians and practitioners that not only is it more environmentally and socially sustainable, because it re-uses spaces and takes on board the user's experience and meanings and best fulfils the desired outcomes and interests of conservationists and pro-development parties, but it is also historically more sensitive as it respects the intrinsic qualities and values of the original design.

The second lesson is that the designers play a key role in achieving a balanced approach between conservation and regeneration. RMA was a good case in point. Their work was fundamental in balancing the different needs of the project (i.e. repairs, improvements and adaptations) and interests of the various stakeholders involved (i.e. owners, conservationists and users). For many practitioners their design intervention should be considered a good practice (DEWG 2011, Welch 2014). They engaged in substantive urban and architectural analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the spaces under consideration, and used their creative skills to improve their performance. Although some conservationists will probably reject this analysis, because not all design interventions proved

sensitive to the original design, there is an increasing consensus that a design practice that achieves the right balance between change and conservation should be recognized as good practice in conservation and regeneration terms (Allan 2007). Even so, the definition of what makes a good balance will always lead to unresolved tensions particularly between elite and popular views. In practice or theory, there is no right or perfect balance. Every case is different, and will require different judgment calls to establish those points of balance. But at least it is considered that an ideal balance is achieved if a design is able to upgrade the space to meet contemporary standards, to change without loss of heritage, and to allow flexibility of use (Allan 2007).

The third lesson is that if we want to achieve better-informed decisions in the future we need to continue to identify best practices and principles.

Although some conservationists and practitioners have already taken the initiative of assembling successful precedents and classifying types of contexts of conservation (Allan 2007, Harwood 2015), they have only focused on architectural practices of listed buildings, dismissing urban design practices, and iconic but unlisted examples, which are often the most difficult and contested cases, and lacking detailed examination of the principles that work well. Therefore it is hoped that the assessment of SBC presented in this paper will serve as a good starting point in this respect. Because it examined a successful practice where a sensible balance between change and conservation was achieved, it identified the design principles that were key to activate the public spaces and respect the original design and by doing so suggest potential best practices for the future.

The first was the removal of service areas from the public realm, which was key not only to liberate unused and undervalued public spaces but also to solve the difficult relationship between pedestrians and cars and significantly increase the amount of public space, creating three new attractive public spaces—Southbank Square, Festival Square and Riverside Square.

The second was the introduction of active frontages, which was instrumental to activate all the main pedestrian routes of SBC. However, in order to achieve the intended outcomes, their design needs to be appropriate to the location and users' needs. They cannot be simply designed as continuous glass façades as they may compromise the quality of the visual experience, making it more monotonous and less varied, or be filled only with commercial activities, as they may compromise or displace unplanned, informal and creative uses.

The third was the use of temporary uses and events, which proved to be the most flexible and economical approach to activate some of the South Bank's public spaces. This finding might be a good lesson for other modernist spaces elsewhere, especially when economic interests conflict with conservationists' concerns. However, it was also shown that temporary uses did not always have positive outcomes. They may constrain and displace certain optional and unplanned activities, particularly if they do not allow enough space for these activities to take place, and may cause situations of congestion and discomfort if they are over-used.

The fourth was to retain the original design of spaces that are still useful or meaningful, which was from the outset the most contested design strategy. After all, there was a lot of pressure to find extra space for income generation and to expand the arts programme. But the fact that the designers have seen the potential in keeping some of these spaces has also revealed the benefits of preserving them. Some of the spaces that have kept their original design are those that people like the most. These findings provide strong arguments that, in such situations, these types of space should be kept unchanged.

Although many dilemmas between conservation and regeneration will remain unresolved, this paper offers significant evidence that we ought to continue to undertake more in-depth assessments of successful precedents because only then will we be able to provide more informed lessons and design toolboxes to guide and assess future practices. The research presented here provided a good start in this direction. However, as it was built on a single case study, it has obvious limitations. Further assessments are needed with a wider range of case studies not only to expand on these findings but also to continue to sensitize people that 'preserving all or nothing' approaches are no longer valid practices.

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Interviews

(Excluded for the review process)

Endnotes

[1] English Heritage (EH) is a registered charity that looks after the UK's National Heritage Collection including historic buildings, monuments and sites; and The Twentieth Century Society (C20) is a membership organization which campaigns for the conservation of the best twentieth-century architecture. It was founded in 1976 as the Thirties Society and is now recognized by government and has a statutory role in the planning process.

[2] DOCOMOMO (International committee for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the modern movement) is a non-profit organization devoted to the conservation of modernist heritage; ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-governmental international organization dedicated to the conservation of the world's monuments and sites; and APT (Association for Preservation Technology) is a cross-disciplinary organization dedicated to promoting best technology for conserving historic structures and their settings.

[3] The Royal Festival Hall was designed between 1948 and 1951 under the auspices of the LCC, including as lead designers Leslie Martin, Edwin Williams and Peter Moro; and the 1960s' buildings, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery, were designed by the GLC's Architects' Department between 1963 and 1968 (two of its architects were part of the infamous Archigram).

[4] Price's 1983 scheme featured a pedestrian bridge over Hungerford Bridge to Waterloo Station, a new terrace overlooking the river in front of the RFH, a giant vertical fun structure in the centre of Waterloo roundabout and an ice rink in the Shell building. Farrell's 1985 scheme envisaged the strategic demolition of the QEH, PR, and HG, except for the core of the auditoriums and galleries, to then wrap them with new 1951-style façades. In 1993 the government encouraged SBC to launch a competition to appoint a masterplanner and to apply for funding from the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was on this occasion that the Architecture Foundation decided to organize an exhibition entitled 'Building the South Bank: Architectural projects for the South Bank 1753-1993' calling for a shift of focus from the buildings to the public spaces. The winning proposal was by Richard Rogers with a design that was a visual nod to the 1851 Crystal Palace, a giant glass canopy covering the whole site to create a microclimate for outdoor performances.

[5] The SBEG (Southbank Employers Group) is created and starts meeting. They are instrumental in shaping the current development trajectory of SBC in an age characterized by public-private partnership working and the search for regeneration consensus.

[6] RMA, Rick Mather Architects, is an architectural, masterplanning and urban design practice based in London. It was founded in 1973 by Rick Mather, an American architect, and since his death in 2013 has been led by two partners, Gavin Miller and Stuart Cade.

[7] They distributed 55,000 summaries of the draft brief, including 13,000 to residents in the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. Artists, audiences, access groups, local residents and employers were also consulted and six citizens' workshops were independently run by Opinion Leader Research.

[8] This is attested by local and national campaigns that have been organized to support its conservation, particularly from the architectural profession–one leading architect is the star architect Zaha Hadid–or even by international events, such as the decision by the World Monuments Fund to add the complex in 2012 to their 'Watchlist' of endangered modernist buildings, at C20's instigation.

[9] FCBS stands for Fielden Clegg and Bradley Studio.

[10] CABE is now called Design Council.

[11] Among them was Nicholas Hytner, the Director of the National Theatre.

[12] To do so, they provided a comprehensive site analysis well supported by the advice of several consultants' and an extensive consultation process, and kept neutrality when presenting their solutions for the 60s' buildings.

[13] HCP stands for Hungerford Car Park.

[14] They envisioned filling all the ground-level undercrofts with animated façades and main entrances and moving the existing service areas from main routes to new and more discrete service lanes. In addition, some of them also foresaw the need to rebuild the Purcell Room rather than adapt it, since the planned expansion was too great (from 400 to 1100 seats) in the existing HCP site.

[15] This change of strategy was very much influenced by Jude Kelly, the newly appointed artistic director in 2005. She was the main person responsible for initiating a series of commissions of temporary artistic interventions in both indoor and outdoor public spaces (Interviewee Maclennan 2013).

[16] DEWG was their former architectural consultant during the competition brief.

[17] This vision revisited the spirit of the 60s' buildings and the festival model of programing temporary events rooted in SBC's origin as a festival site.

[18] It included discreet naturalistic observation to identify the actual patterns of use in the selected locations, walking interviews with the users to collect detailed descriptions about their expectations and needs, and spatial analysis to examine the spatial conditions of the studied locations.

[19] Since the 70s it has been a mecca for skateboarding, a social and learning space and a site of pilgrimage for skateboarders globally.

[20] The activities that happen without being intended by the design.

[21] The activities that are ruled or designed out.

[22] The practices that redefine the meanings and uses of places.
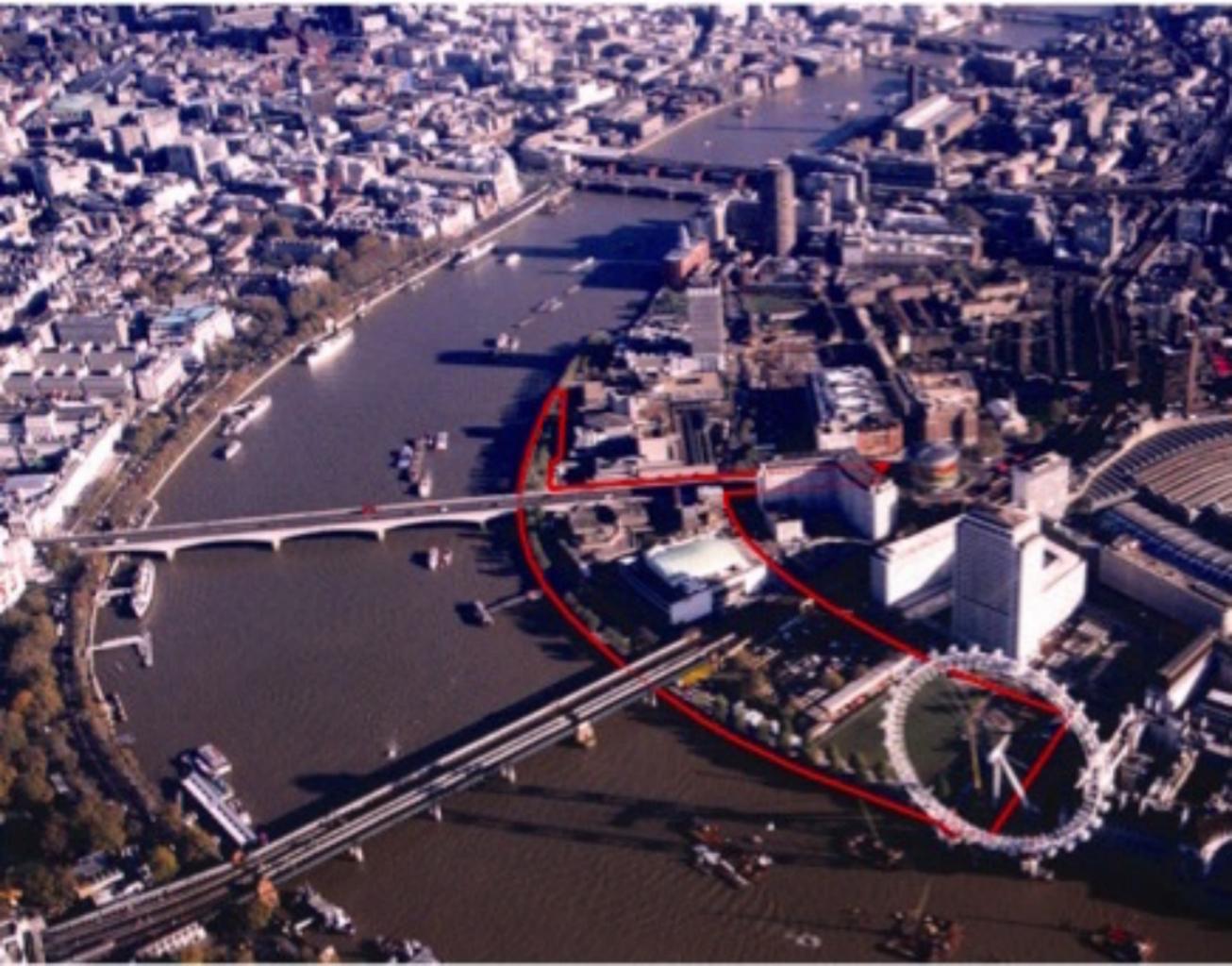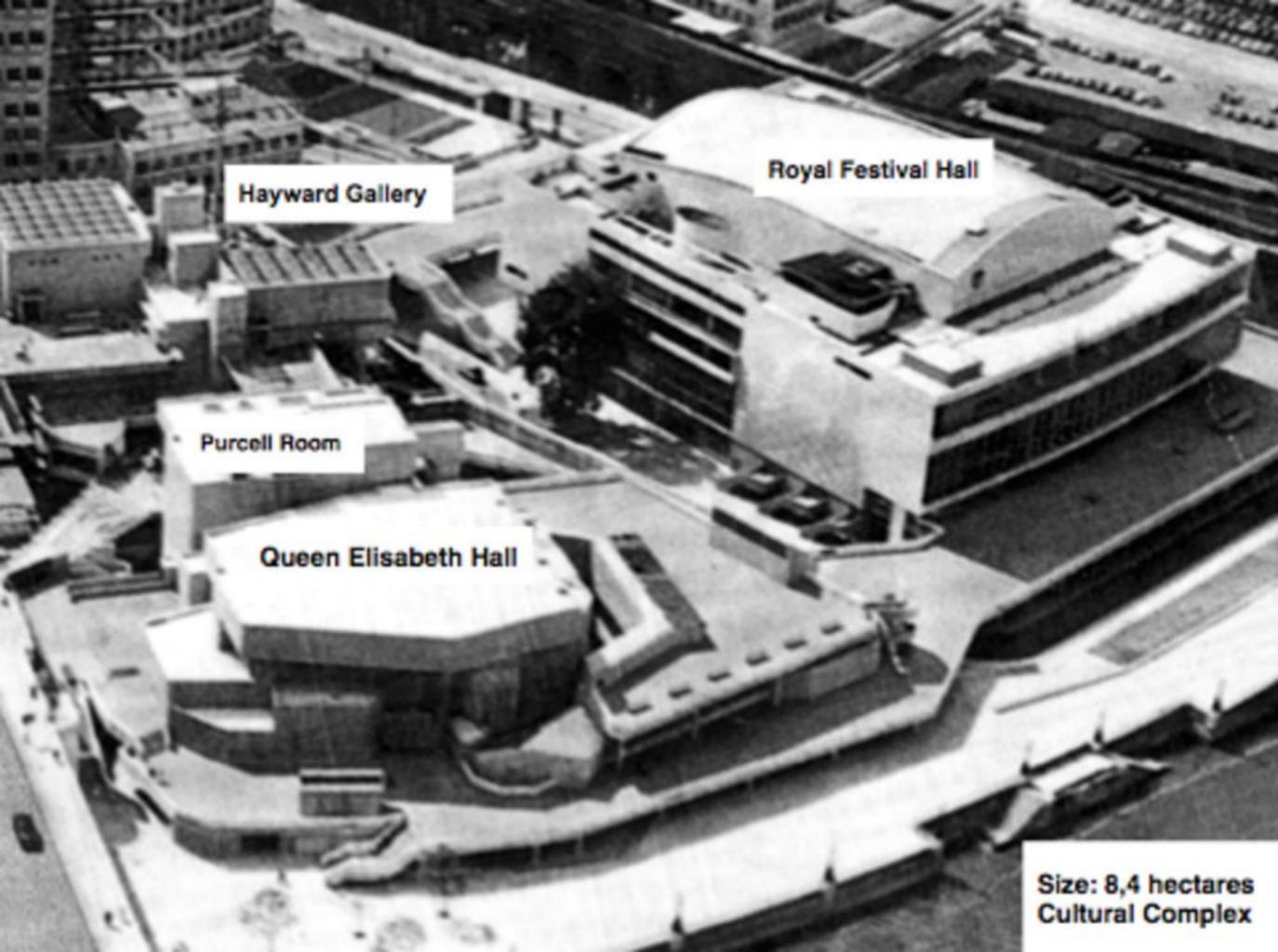
Hayward Gallery

Royal Festival Hall

Purcell Room

Queen Elisabeth Hall

Size: 8,4 hectares
Cultural Complex

1. Taking as a given the 'removal of all existing National Film Theatre (NFT) and Museum Of Moving Image (MOMI) accommodation from underneath Waterloo Bridge'.

2. Resolving 'the difficult problems of access for pedestrians, cars and goods vehicles' (covered in UDS).

3. 'Accommodating: the substantially augmented activities of the *bfi* Film Centre (Fe)', the Hayward Gallery (HG), the Queen Elizabeth Hall (QEH) and the Purcell Room (PR)'.

4. Making provisions for the additions noted in the brief the National Film and Television School (NFTS) and a 20 screen multiplex (including four screens for the expanded National Film Theatre as part of the *bfi* Film Centre.

5. Maintaining the existing number of parking spaces (as requested by the SBC) by building new make up parking to replace any lost in re-development (380 spaces).

6. Identifying extra space for income generation activities to ensure the long-term sustainability of the complex.

1. re-establish the ground-level as the principal level of pedestrian movement. Primary pedestrian routes and entrances and public activities of the buildings are brought down to ground level;

2 High-level walkways would only be retained where they link the bridge routes to the ground. Others would be removed or transformed to Riverview terraces opening off the buildings.

3 Major pedestrian routes are lined with animated facades;

4 Servicing is off new service lanes and removed from the main street, Belvedere Road, and from the new squares.

| Urban Design Principles	Design proposals	Implemented Design Proposals
1.Improve accessibility, legibility and public open space.	(1) the removal of the service road from the Riverside facade of the hall, (2) the creation of a discreet new production and catering servicing route for the Royal Festival Hall alongside and within the arches of the Hungerford viaduct, (3) the creation of a second discrete servicing route, currently on the west of the Hayward Gallery, to be relocated using the undercrofts adjacent to Waterloo Bridge.	Only the first two proposals were implemented in the first phase of the masterplan. The third was left for the second phase related with the refurbishment of the Hayward Gallery.
2. Ground-floor re-established as the principle level of pedestrian movement.	(1) to put primary entrance at the ground level and (2) retain only high level walkways where they link the bridge routes to the ground, and remove or transform the others into river view terraces.	The first strategy was refused in a later phase by the SBC in the 2012 masterplan brief. with the second strategy only one segment was removed in 1999. This the case of the Belvedere Road high-level walkway in front of the Royal Festival Hall forming the basis for the new Southbank Centre square. The other segments expected to be removed in front of the entrance of QEH and in between the QEH and PR and HG were left for the second phase of the masterplan for during the refurbishment of the 60s buildings.
3. Greater mix of uses aimed at bringing a richer blend of visitors to the site over longer periods of the day.	insertion of activities that would complement the cultural activities and the daily needs of the users of the area.	The level of mix use was not increased as it was planned as only commercial uses were added. This was the result of the downturn after the recession in 2008 which led to a market oriented approach.
4. Activate unused space, blank facades or service areas throughout the site with active building frontages.	Their initial proposal was to activate all the main pedestrian routes.	the level of mix use was not increased as it was planned as only commercial uses were added. This was the result of the downturn after the recession in 2008 which led to a market oriented approach.
5. Improve linkages between public open space, cultural facilities, public transport, highway networks, and other key destinations looking beyond the limits of the Southbank Centre site.	(1) reinforcing legibility by lining streets with active facades, and this also the aim of the fourth principle, and limiting the number of major routes by creating a concentration of activity along them– the greater use and better security. (2) creation of five new connections: (a) Hungerford pedestrian bridge connection, (b) new stairs leading up Bridge link walk, (c) stairs leading up to new link walk, and (d and e) two new waterloo bridge connections	The first strategy was implemented. The second only partially as only the first two were considered priority.
6. Create major new open spaces to form place-making landmarks.	(1) The festival square is a new grand route between Southbank Centre Square and the Golden Jubilee Bridge lined with active frontage (2003). (2) The new Festival Square is a tiered landscaped plaza was developed to connect Royal Festival Hall Level 1 with the river and it is also lined with a new active frontage at level 1 of the Royal Festival Hall. (3) The Southbank Centre Square is defined by Belvedere Road and the South Front of the Royal Festival Hall and was the result of the removal of the high-level walkway in its front. (4) the River link square between RFH and 60s buildings.	Only the first three were implemented in the first phase: the festival square, the new Festival Riverside and the Southbank Centre Square. The fourth public space which was not implemented: when the service area is relocated to the undercroft adjacent to waterloo bridge, it will be pedestrianized and the space increase by cutting some portions of the walkways of HG/ QEH.

VIEW (before)

VIEW (after)

VIEW (before)

VIEW (after)
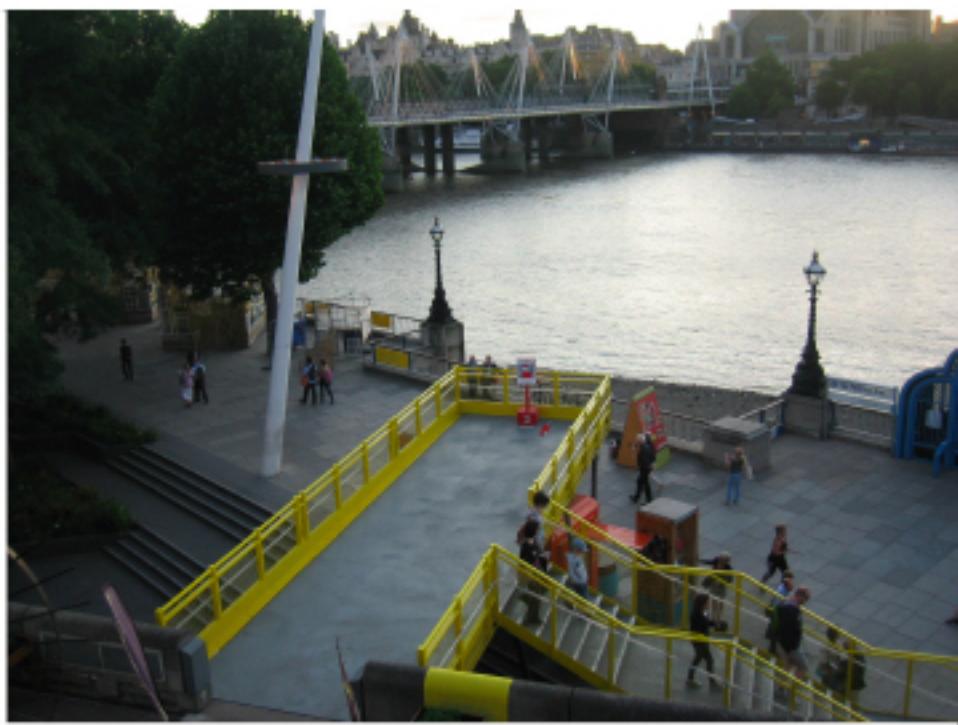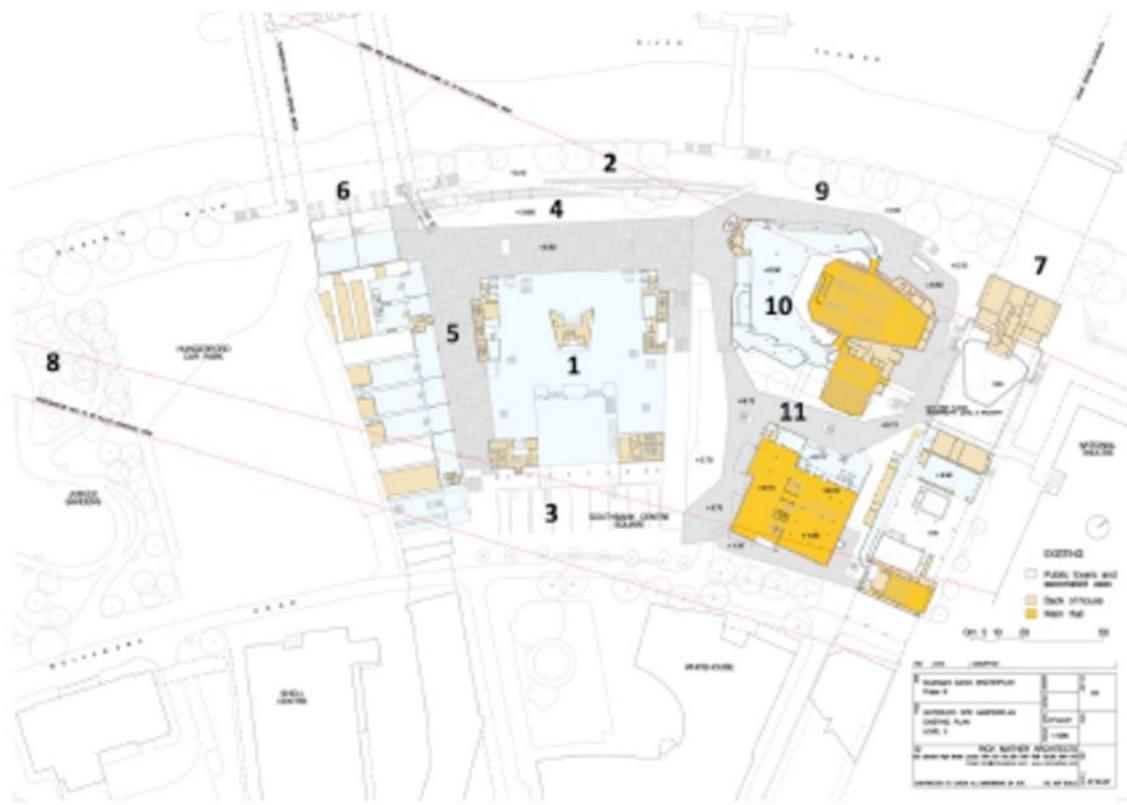
Selected locations for study:

Retrofitted:
1. RFH indoor foyers (multi level spaces)
2. Queen's Walk (ground-floor)

New:
3. Southbank square (ground-floor)
4. Festival Riverside Landscape (ground-floor)
5. Festival Square (1st floor)

In progress:
6. Space beneath Hungerford Bridge
7. Space beneath Waterloo Bridge
8. Jubilee Gardens and Hungerford car park
9. Skaters Undercroft spaces
10. QEH/PR/HG (festival wing) foyer spaces
11. High-walkway spaces