

Press release

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New Headquarters for the Greater London Authority submitted for Planning

Foster and Partners have on 7 July 1999 submitted to the London Borough of Southwark their detailed planning proposals for the Greater London Authority Assembly Building.

The significance for London of the Greater London Authority Headquarters cannot be overstated. The opportunity to propose a building of such symbolic importance on one of the most prominent sites on the River Thames is a rare and exciting challenge.

The design has been developed through close dialogue with the Government Office for London and through regular reviews with the Minister for London, Nick Raynsford MP and the Design Advisory Group.

The site is adjacent to Tower Bridge and directly opposite the Tower of London and from it there is an uninterrupted view of St Paul's Cathedral. Our proposal seeks to complement these major landmarks and provide an important link in the chain of attractions lining the south bank of the Thames in Southwark, from the Design Museum, H.M.S. Belfast, and Southwark Cathedral to the Globe Theatre and the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art at Bankside. Located within reach of major public transport connections, the building will be easily accessible via existing underground and bus networks and the future Jubilee Line and River Bus system.

The proposed building will provide approximately 185,000 sq. ft. of space on ten levels. Its principal space on the north side is the Assembly Chamber, including a public viewing gallery with 200 seats. Its flask-like form, rising the full height of the building, is the result of advanced computer-aided analysis by Arup Acoustics. Wrapped around the chamber are offices for administrative staff and Members. These floors will be open-plan to the north and cellular to the south. The eighth floor provides offices for the Mayor, the Cabinet and their support staff.

On the ninth floor there will be a flexible public space known as 'London's Living Room', which can be used for exhibitions or functions for up to 200 guests. The rooftop is also given over to the public, with a roof terrace commanding unparalleled views across London. The lower ground floor houses committee rooms that look out onto an open sunken 'forum' or 'piazza' created by stepped terraces and a ramp that leads to ground level. A public caf, storage and auxiliary services are also housed at this level. Lifts, stairs, toilets and service ducts are located in a central core rising from ground level to the ninth floor.

A Democratic Building

The building will be largely transparent. This will provide spectacular views for the people working in the

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building, but equally it will allow Londoners to see their elected assembly at work. The public has access to much of the building. Ramps that encircle the Assembly Chamber take the public from the ground floor to the viewing platform at the top of the building. The GLA building has, in conventional terms, no front or back - it is omnidirectional. It has entrances facing north and south, with the main public entrance beneath the building, accessed by way of a sunken piazza.

At the heart of the building's expression of democracy is its truly inclusive approach to access. It embraces the most progressive ideas in this area, abandoning the outmoded notion of separate access for people with disabilities. All public circulation throughout the building is via lifts and gently rising ramps, shared by the 'able-bodied' and 'disabled' alike.

A Low Energy Building

The level of energy consumption for heating, cooling and ventilation in a new office building defined by the DETR as the standard for good practice is 53% of that of a typical, high-specification, fully air-conditioned building. The energy strategy for the GLA building will result in a reduction to 25% of the energy consumption of a typical high specification office building. This will be achieved not only through the use of ecologically sound, passive environmental control systems, but also through the shape and alignment of the building. The building's unusual form, and complex geometry, has been generated as a result of thorough scientific analysis, aiming to reduce both solar gain and heat loss via the building's skin, thus reducing the building's energy needs.

Minimising the surface area of the GLA building results in maximum efficiency in energy terms. The building's form is derived from a sphere, which has 25% less surface area than a cube of the same volume. This pure form has been manipulated to achieve optimum performance, in particular to minimise the amount of surface area exposed to direct sunlight. To achieve this the building leans back towards the south where the floor plates are stepped inwards from top to bottom, providing natural shading from the most intense direct sunlight.

Analysis of the sunlight hours falling on every part of the building throughout the year has produced a thermal map of its surface that will be expressed in the building's cladding. Where most protection from the sun is needed a system of shading devices will be employed. Less shading is required towards the north-facing faade, where the glazing for the Assembly Chamber will be clear. Photovoltaic panels will collect solar energy to power bore-hole cooling. The building will be naturally ventilated, with openable windows in all office spaces. Heat generated by computers, lights and people will be recycled. The deep-plan floors allow for the collection of heat at the building's core, which can then be redirected to its periphery. The combination of all these energy-saving systems means that there will be no need for boilers or chillers in the building.

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