

forest
bankside urban park

forest
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The approach developed in this framework follows several public consultations and an extensive number of individual interviews with local residents, workers and organisations. We would like to thank all of the people who have given up their personal time to tell us what they value in the area and their ambitions for it. We would particularly like to acknowledge the support from the Borough and Bankside Community Council, Bankside Open Spaces Trust and Bankside Residents Forum.

With special thanks to Helen Firminger, Ken Worpole, Fred Manson, Dalibor Vesely, Catherine Lampert, Philipp Ebeling, Sarah Ichioka, Shibani Bose and John Melmoe of Willerby Landscapes.



executive summary

Bankside Urban Forest is a co-ordinated and strongly characterised urban design framework for the public realm within the area extending from the river edge down to the Elephant and Castle, bordered by Blackfriars Road and Borough High Street. The work has been commissioned by Better Bankside in collaboration with a broad group that comprises the London Borough of Southwark, Tate Modern, The Architecture Foundation, Transport for London, Land Securities, Cross River Partnership and Native Land.

Centuries of overlapping development patterns have created a pronounced 'urban interior' within the Bankside and Borough area that is less intensively developed and used than the more active edges - Blackfriars Road, Borough High Street and the river edge. The construction of the viaducts and Southwark Street have further served to isolate this urban interior from more diverse uses and activities. This quieter interior area is characterised by its scattered small open spaces and strong local identity, and it acts as a counterbalance to the increasingly international, corporate, large-scale developments that are being constructed and planned around its edges.

Bankside Urban Forest responds to these conditions with five principal proposals;

1. **Increasing the opportunities for 'sharing'** - that the existing social and physical relationships between the local 'urban interior', and the rapidly developing edges within Bankside and Borough, are supported and reinforced through significant improvements to the public realm and local amenities, and by increasing the opportunities for social engagement.
2. That **the Urban Forest is the characterisation of this distinctive area of London**, based upon the existing spatial qualities that underpin the area's identity; meandering streets, multiple routes, clearings, clusters of vaulted and canopied spaces.
3. That **evolutionary change takes place** in a coordinated (not piecemeal) way, meshing existing projects and initiatives with new opportunities. Bankside Urban Forest must engage and sustain the commitment of the diverse individuals and groups in the area to take ownership of the projects over the long term.
4. That an **ecological approach to urban regeneration** based on networking, self-sufficiency, and 'economies of small-scale' will create a new sense of urban equilibrium between contrasting economic, social and cultural groups.
5. **A collective project based on shared principles** - that the Bankside Urban Forest establishes a new model for regenerating the public realm in London to attract significant public and private partners and investment.

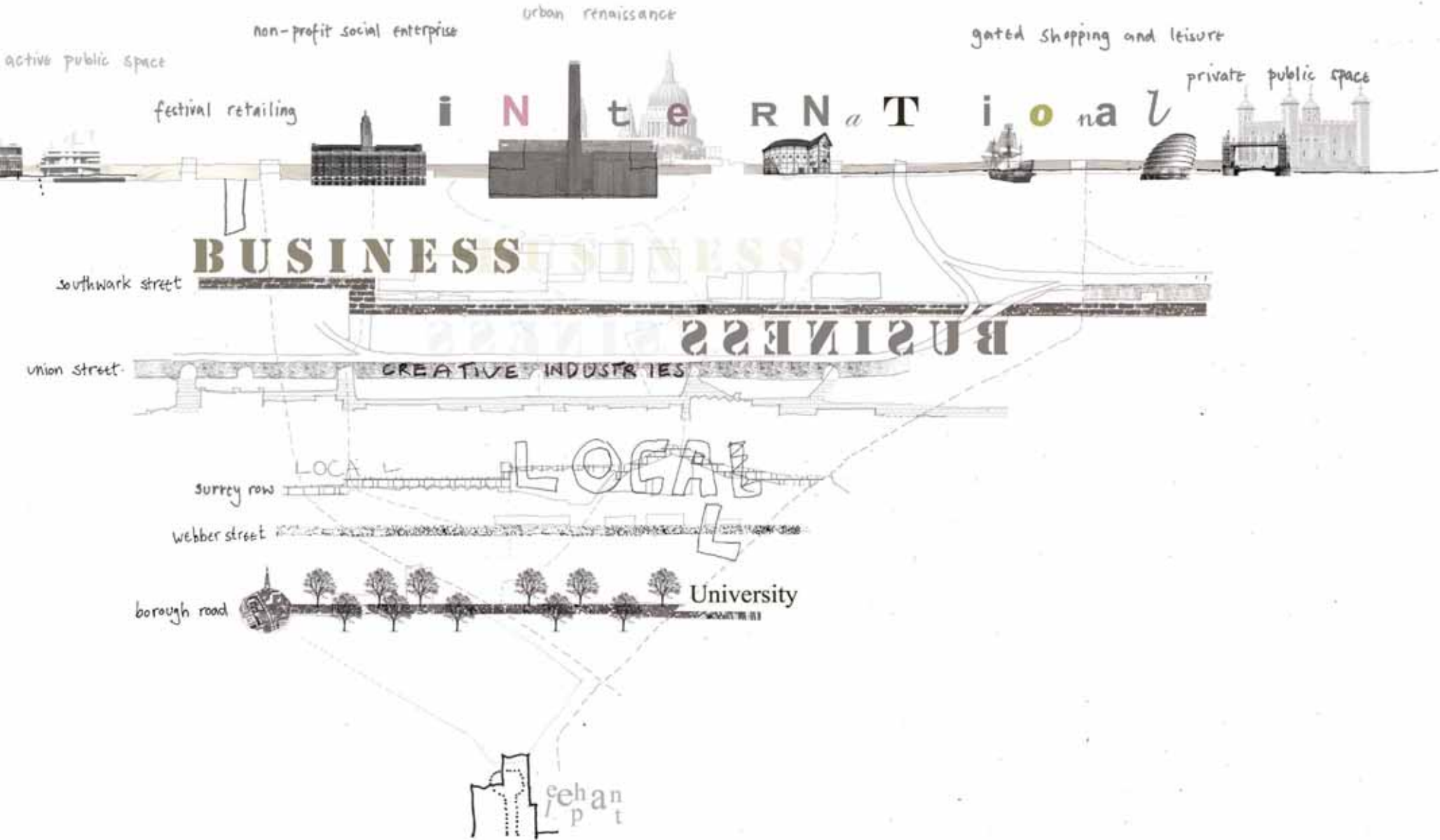
We have identified a number of existing places which bring different people who use the area into contact with each other - 'places of exchange'. These places and the activities that they support suggest sociable uses of the public realm. The framework supports these sociable places by drawing together many existing initiatives by Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST), LB Southwark, Transport for London, the Peabody Trust and private developers. We have proposed several projects that incorporate new trees, vertical planting, public art, hard landscaping and lighting in order to illustrate how the Bankside 'forest' could be realised.

It is intended that the Bankside Urban Forest framework can shape a common imagination between the many different interest groups in the area. This will help to negotiate, informally influence and, in some instances, directly inform projects and secure funding for enhancing the public realm and built environment. It is intended that this framework will be embedded in LB Southwark's emerging Supplementary Planning Document for the area, which is currently out for consultation.

private-public space



'models' of public space.....

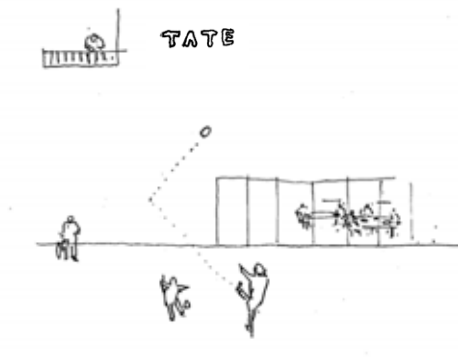


the challenges

The client group; London Borough of Southwark, Tate Modern, The Architecture Foundation, Transport for London, Land Securities, Cross River Partnership, Native Land, and co-ordinated by Better Bankside, selected a team led by Witherford Watson Mann Architects from amongst 11 competitors. The commission focused on the development of a strongly characterised design strategy and framework for the development of the public realm that extends from the river edge down to the Elephant and Castle, bordered by Blackfriars Road and Borough High Street, although it also incorporates important spaces and connections that stretch across these edges.

The original remit included encouraging investment from the profusion of developments around the edges of the area into the more concealed urban interior. This investment will be coordinated through local stakeholders to improve the network of pedestrian and cycle routes, public spaces and developments, in order to enhance the quality of life for people living and working in the area. Among the opportunities suggested by the client group were the improvement of the pedestrian environment through road closures, inferred pedestrian priority and the greening of existing north-south routes. A unified reappraisal of existing public space was to be put before the creation of new spaces. Other suggestions included the provision of public art throughout the area. The client group also asked that the Bankside proposal relate to the Mayor of London's 'urban renaissance' public space strategy and complement studies and projects already planned or underway in the area. The framework was required to coordinate and strongly characterise Bankside's public environment to influence and direct the diverse landowners and developers to contribute to a common ambition.

The winning team was asked to develop design principles, identify specific proposals and draw up a framework to plan action, source funding, and inform responses to future development proposals in the area. Witherford Watson Mann Architects proposed the creation of a new 'urban forest', incorporating extensive tree planting, quiet gardens and a new public space, which together would form a distinct urban quarter and improve perceptions of the area.



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Tate/Bost Garden

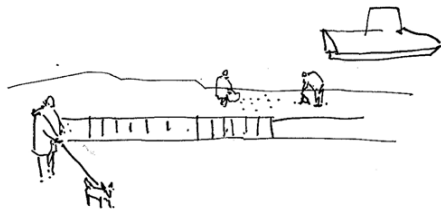


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Flat Iron Square

approach

Witherford Watson Mann Architects assembled a multidisciplinary team to explore the Bankside Urban Forest, a concept developed during a workshop with Fred Manson. Ken Worpoles supplemented Witherford Watson Mann Architects' urban design analysis with a wealth of knowledge about the social and historical dynamics of public space. The photographer Philipp Ebeling documented residents' and visitors' personal routes through the area. Alexandra Rook of PRP Architects led the public consultation through the collection of comments on project postcards, distributed at popular community events such as the Frost Fair and the Bankside Open Spaces Trust carol hour. This consultation was complemented by in-depth interviews by field researcher Shibani Bose, which provided insights into how local people use Bankside's public spaces.



In addition to regular conversations with the client steering group, the Witherford Watson Mann Architects team conducted interviews with key stakeholders, including community organisations such as the Bankside Open Spaces Trust, property developers and local politicians. These interviews helped to inform a list of projects that are proposed or currently underway throughout the area. A number of additional key projects were proposed and scoped up by Witherford Watson Mann Architects in conjunction with the client steering group and other stakeholders.

Peter Brett Associates analysed the transport feasibility of the proposed key projects, in particular the pedestrian and cyclist priority schemes. Intelligent Space's modelling of pedestrian movement and way-finding patterns further helped to shape Witherford Watson Mann Architects' priorities for intervention. Finally and crucially for the implementation of the forest strategy, quantity surveyors Bucknell Austin developed a schedule of estimated costs and identified funding sources for the key projects.

The Witherford Watson Mann Architects team reviewed relevant documents, including previous studies of the Bankside area and broader London-wide policy guidance. The framework was developed in parallel with, and informed by, the emerging Supplementary Planning Document and Cleaner Greener Safer Initiative.

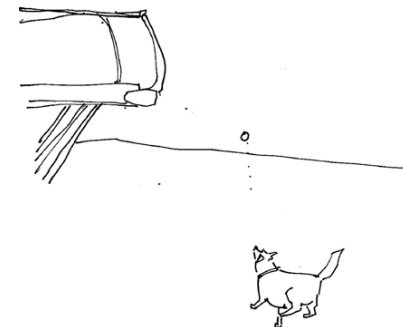
Projects Mapping

The project map and schedule on pp 57-62 collects together all projects known to be currently underway or proposed within the study area. It is a live document that will be updated by a projects officer appointed by the client group. In addition to enabling the tracking of individual projects, the project map will help community groups to finance public projects by strategically targeting Section 106 funds anticipated from larger private developments. It will also encourage private initiatives that, although they may not create traditional public space, nevertheless contribute to the forest. The projects officer will also act as a liaison between interested parties, communicate the strategy to the wider community, and oversee the implementation of the key Forest projects. In consultation with Tate Modern the project officer will develop and facilitate the Forest's public art commissioning and outreach strategy.

The scoped up key projects provide opportunities to secure short term under-spend or long lead-in funding as their initial design principles, technical issues, constraints and costs have been considered. Different local stakeholders should be responsible for delivering these key projects over the longer time period based around the funding, ownership and management criteria.

Exhibition

A series of public exhibitions were held over the period of a month in April 2007 at four venues: the John Harvard Library on Borough High Street, the Jerwood Space on Union Street, the London College of Communication at the Elephant and Castle and Tate Modern on Bankside. These venues allowed as many people as possible to see the approach and proposals, and encouraged their comments and ideas in order to be feed them into the framework. It was intended that the exhibition would provide an opportunity for people to commit their support by joining the 'Friends of the Forest'; the next step in ensuring that the ownership of the Forest is entrusted to the local community and stakeholders.



"Bankside needs more green spaces and places for kids to play. If the children didn't have Mint Street Park and Red Cross Gardens, they would have nothing. Places like this should be preserved."

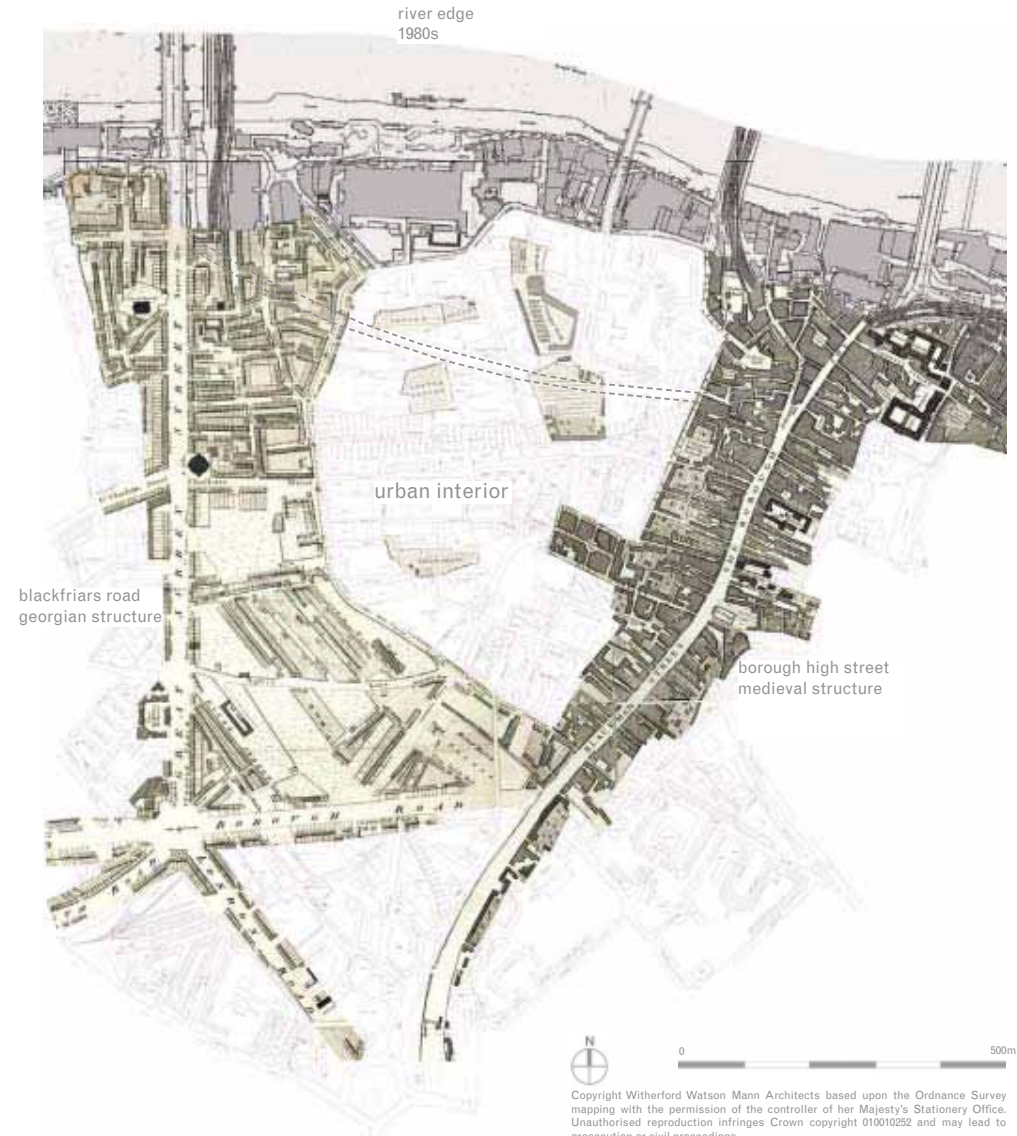


analysis

the urban interior

The social and physical characteristics of Bankside and Borough reflect the area's historical location in relation to the City of London. The foot of London Bridge was a place of great intensity, but no formal structure, being a meeting place for travellers and pilgrims upon leaving or entering the City. St Saviour's offered a place of sanctuary (earlier St Mary Overie and later to become Southwark Cathedral) and the monastery, St Thomas's, developed into a hospital. The market that originally occupied London Bridge was relocated to the 'Triangle', once the churchyard of St Margaret's. Development in the area was not based on any formal models and was broadly linear, following the approach to London Bridge and the river edge. In 1769 the completion of Blackfriars Bridge led to a more formal urban model of tenement blocks and squares. The middle ground or 'urban interior' remained free from any identifiable structure or development, being 'loosely' occupied by tenter grounds and vinegar yards.

The marginal use of the urban interior and its separation from the river edge was cemented by the construction of the viaducts and Southwark Street. This physical disconnection was reinforced by the change of use along the river edge through the 1980's and 90's. Large scale commercial, institutional and leisure uses rapidly replaced the grain of the wharfs. This pattern of development has continued with increasing intensity and is evident in the latest planning applications for large scale, high-rise office, residential and cultural buildings.



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pedestrian movement

Pedestrian movement is not always a reflection of the most direct route between places. It reveals complex, often sub-conscious, decisions; where other people are, things of interest, noise levels, presence of vehicles, what can be seen ahead and so forth. A few hours spent in Bankside and Borough demonstrates that for local residents and workers many of the quieter or less trafficked roads are favoured.

Visitors' experience of moving around Bankside and Borough however, reflects the distinct change between the busy activity around the edges and the more secluded urban interior. Truncated views, reduced activity at ground level, narrow pavements and the dark viaducts that criss-cross the area give the sense of having moved 'off track', raising feelings of anxiety and fear that prevents many people from exploring the area's rich heritage and open spaces.

Understanding and supporting people's natural wayfinding is therefore more than an issue of signage. It is how the layout of the streets and spaces affect what people see when exploring the street network, as well as the buildings and spaces that they see during their journey and which attract them along specific routes. Visibility analysis is a measure of how much space pedestrians can see as they move around at ground level.

For Bankside, the visual field open to pedestrians as they move around the street network has been measured using a computer programme. This calculates the visual field available to pedestrians for wayfinding at every step of any possible journey within the network, creating an overall measure of visibility of pedestrian space for the entire centre. A map of visibility in the study area is shown on this page. The visibility of the individual pavements is shown as a spectrum, where the areas in red have the longest views and the areas shown in dark blue are the most secluded.



dominant land use

Bankside and Borough's urban interior remains notably distant from the activity that characterises its edges. The severance caused by Southwark Street and the railway viaducts serves to isolate the interior from colonisation by external uses. This interior is mostly occupied by businesses. The lack of more diverse activities over different times of the day adds to the sense of it being concealed or 'buried'. The meandering road layouts and larger plot sizes within the interior present an inherent resistance to comprehensive redevelopment and formal urban planning. This resistance to larger-scale change has however resulted in some noticeably beneficial conditions, particularly in that it has supported a strong sense of local identity through the community's long-standing commitment to the area. This is reflected directly in the high proportion of residents that have lived here for all, or most, of their lives and the number of local initiatives that to some degree characterise this area.

The adjacent diagram includes some of the recent planning applications that have either been granted or submitted, where this will significantly affect land-use. It is therefore assumed that either these schemes, or alternatives with similar land-uses to them, will be constructed.



evening and night time land-use



----- urban interior

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A study of building use allows us to understand how the area functions and indicates how particular types of pedestrians will inhabit the area and the type of activities that will transpire.

An overview of the land-use in the area helps to gauge the broad mix of activities that take place and indicates how particular pedestrian users might inhabit the public spaces at different times.

Between 4pm and 9pm there is a significant amount of pedestrian activity to and from public transport, particularly London Bridge, Southwark and Waterloo Stations. With the exception of the residential areas, there is generally a slow progression of movement away from the river. The riverside continues to attract footfall well into the evening, but later activity is confined to the residential areas and the early hours of business at Borough Market.

1. From 4-6pm the area is diversely used by residents, workers and visitors. There is a particular concentration along the riverside and around London Bridge Station.

2. From 6-9pm the riverside continues to be a popular area and there is a high level of movement along Borough High Street. In general, however, there is a shift away to the south and west as office workers return home. To the north, movement is focused on the routes to the rail stations and river crossings. Activity in the Borough area becomes concentrated within the residential areas.

3. From 9pm-12am the activity levels drop significantly with the exception of Borough High Street, Borough Market and Guy's Hospital.

4. From 12-6am there is little general movement and activity is localised to residential areas, Borough Market, hotels and Guy's Hospital.

institutional players

The area and its urban interior must serve a number of primary functions to ensure its long-term endurance and identity within competing London districts. The railway stations, Guy's Hospital, Borough market, Southwark Cathedral, London South Bank University, Tate Modern and the Globe Theatre represent a diverse range of cultural and business interests. Between them, these 'institutional players' have the potential to support an active public realm over long periods of the day and week, a necessity not just in social and economic terms, but also in contributing significantly to the passive surveillance and use of small open spaces. It is important to resist seeing these highly specific and self-interested institutions as autonomous, and to understand how they can each contribute to a 'common' programme for the public realm and social engagement.

'Any primary use whatever, is by itself relatively ineffectual as a creator of city diversity. If it is combined with another primary use that brings people in and out and puts them on the street at the same time, nothing has been accomplished. In practical terms, we cannot even call these differing primary uses. However, when a primary use is combined, effectively, with another that put people on the street at different times, then the effect can be economically stimulating: a fertile environment for secondary diversity.'

Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of American Cities*



local networks



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Throughout the course of this project we have sought to understand something of the relationship between the urban interior and the developments around the perimeter. We employed a photographer, Philipp Ebeling, for a week, and asked a wide range of local people to show him around, and to take him to the places they value. We also employed an interviewer, Shibani Bose, who conducted around 30 extended interviews with local residents, councillors and committed individuals. This work has provided us with an insight into the web of relationships that exist between residents, businesses and visitors. It is this network that the framework seeks to build on. As Richard Sennett has said; 'the city's diversity of urban life becoming a source of mutual strength rather than a source of mutual estrangement and civic bitterness'.

Some of the spatial relationships between residents and the local places they frequent have been taken from the interviews and visualised on the adjacent drawing. The red dot locates the person interviewed and the lines connect them to places they mentioned where they often went. What was surprising was the number of local people who mentioned the importance of the river edge as a place where they liked to go, despite the increasingly 'international' character of it. Shibani Bose's summary and analysis of interviews with local residents and workers is on page 19.

hidden places

'To lose oneself in a city- as one loses oneself in a forest- that calls for a quite different schooling. Then, signboard and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its centre.'

Walter Benjamin, A Berlin Chronicle

The columned canopy of Borough Market, flickering lights of the trains, ruins at All Hallows, golden deer, Cross Bones Graveyard, long shadows from latticed bridge structures, shrine of the Most Precious Blood, hanging vegetation in Playhouse Court, Clink skeletons and deep viaduct arches all contribute to the sense of 'losing oneself in the city'. The scattered 'special places' or clearings make manifest the long history of informal development in an area beyond the laws of the City; an incremental series of individual aspirations and isolated opportunities. The presence of this condition is so strong within Bankside that it is reasonable to say that it is characteristic of the area. It forms part of Bankside's identity.

'This stretch of the Thames...is to other watersides or river ports what a virgin forest would be to a garden. It is a thing grown up, not made. It recalls a jungle by the confused, varied, and impenetrable aspect of the buildings that line the shore, not according to a planned purpose, but as if sprung up by accident from scattered seeds. Like the matted growth of bushes and creepers veiling the silent depths of an unexplored wilderness, they hide the depths of London's infinitely varied, vigorous, seething life'.

Joseph Conrad, The Mirror of the Sea



map identifying locations of places with special physical characteristics



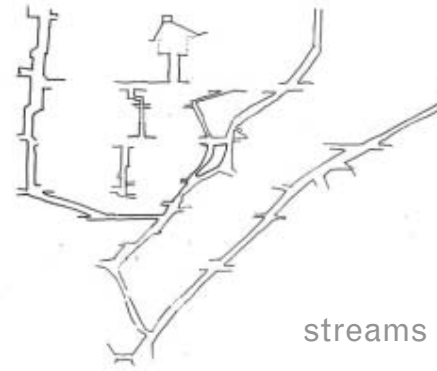
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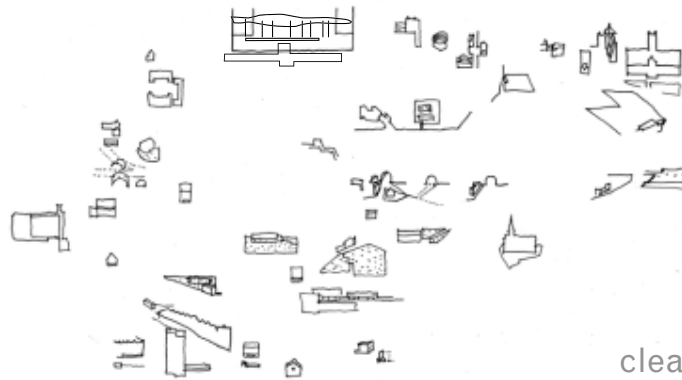
spatial types: rides, streams and clearings



rides



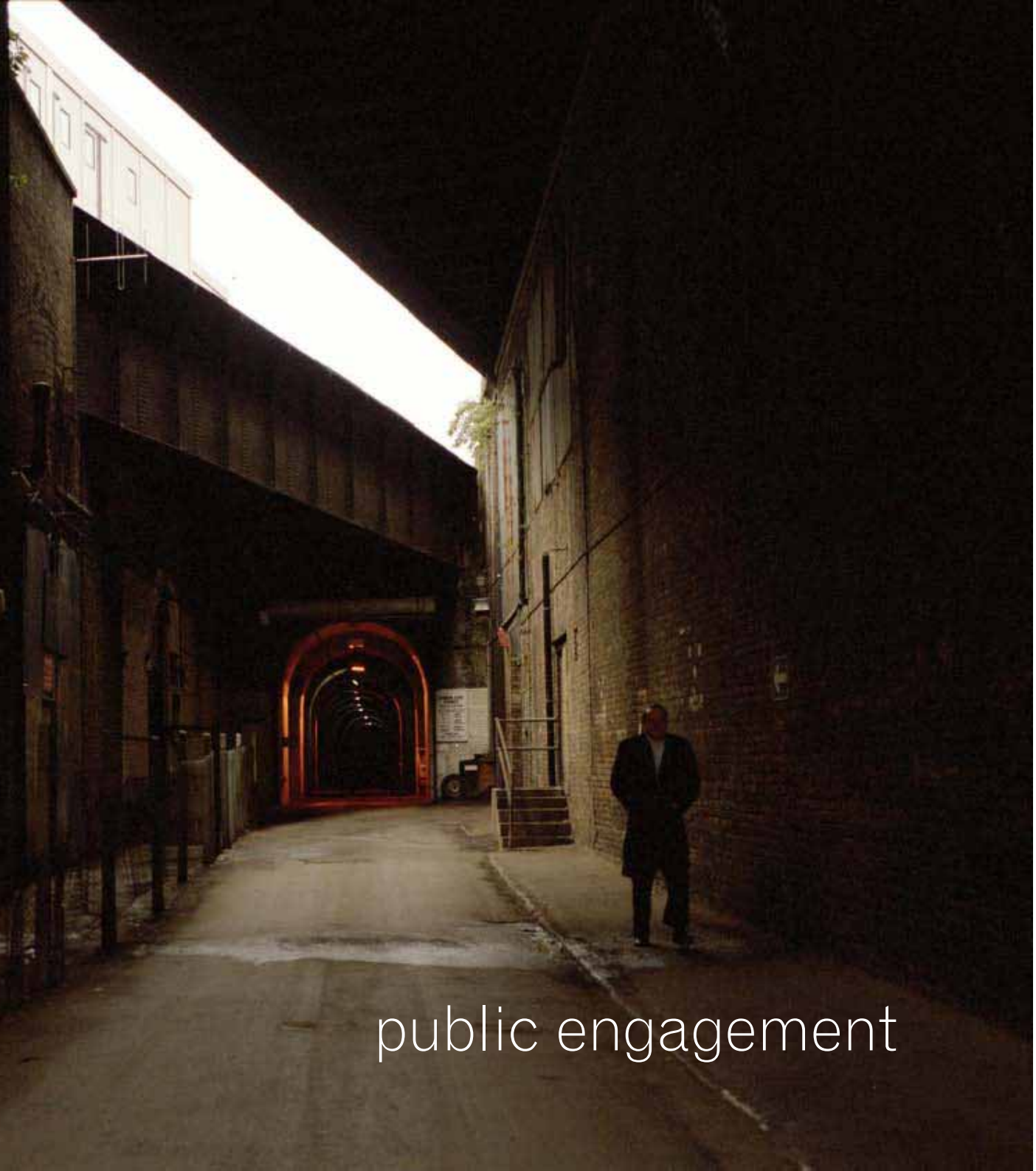
streams



clearings

Through our walks and analysis of Bankside we have defined three identifiable spatial characteristics or 'types' as a way of characterising the diversity of spaces and places. The east-west streets are mostly routes across the area: we have termed these 'rides' after the straight routes often cut through the Royal hunting forests. Scattered spaces, widened streets, small gardens and historic places we have likened to 'clearings', since they are recognisable places, by which people navigate the area or chose to meet and sit, to play, reflect, eat a sandwich or read. These 'clearings' often have a relationship to some of the more sociable places and activities in the area which we discuss later in the report as 'Places of Exchange' (see page 27). The rides and clearings are bound together in an intricate, subtle network by the more meandering north-south 'streams' – the oldest pathways and roads of the area.

"I don't want Bankside to turn into Manhattan. Height is the main issue. There are more and more housing towers and office towers coming up here, which spoil the view and the sunlight for everyone. I feel like soon we won't be able to see the sky!"



public engagement

residents - what is special about bankside

by shibani bose

Bankside is ordinary, Bankside is exotic

Bankside is not grand to most that live there. In spite of the area's rich and varied history and its place in London's plans for growth, there persists a sense of normality about everyday life in Bankside. Some have described this in terms of scale, saying that small enterprise and ownership characterise the place. This is seen to be under threat from large, monolithic built envelopes of housing and corporate office space, which would disenfranchise smaller, traditional stakeholders.

The small businesses have an important place in the daily lives and paths of many local residents, and seem to be touchstones of a 'community'. While there cannot be said to be only one community in all of Bankside, a sense of kinship with fellow residents is greatly valued. Most residents are sympathetic to one or other 'community organisation', regardless of their level of participation. Many cite this level of community engagement as their favourite thing about Bankside.

Others have noticed the absence of a 'theme' in Bankside. Living there is a 'real' activity, and not a role playing exercise to fit into a grand narrative about the city. Ordinary lives are lived out here, complete with families, children, schools, churches and jumble sales. This is however seen as poised to change with upcoming development. In fact there is already a nostalgic vein in residents' conceptions of Bankside's character – old pubs have reportedly been 'jazzed up', and fish 'n' chip shops turned into bars, where children cannot be taken for a fry up on Sundays.

While 'small', 'community', 'real' are qualities threatened, by default, wherever regeneration is market-led, it may be useful to privilege these stated values while framing the public realm strategy for this particular area. The worst case scenario for local residents in any development site is a complete takeover of all forms of decision-making by economic forces. Only a strong network of community groups can resist this. While such a network already exists in this area, the forest can strive to strengthen this by spatially underpinning the community's strength. It can do this by making community and public space paramount. Design

decisions can be aimed towards increasing the possibility and convenience of social interaction.

A sense of the secret and the exotic is recognised about Bankside by its residents, at the same time as its normality and 'small' ness. Even as they express a need to preserve certain eccentric and unusual places (such as the garden in the Church of the Precious Blood) by creating awareness about them, residents are very wary of exposing them completely for public consumption. Putting them on a map, for instance, with directions to find them and tour guides to show one around them, would change the very quality of these place that make them special. A public realm strategy for this area would therefore need also to avoid the trap of 'Disneyfying' what is hidden, historical, secretive or quaint about Bankside. Also, these places are not inanimate objects of beauty; each 'treasure that you trip over' quietly belongs to someone and is cared for on a daily basis. It is therefore a huge challenge for the architects of the forest to avoid alienating these small and sometimes silent stakeholders, even as they strive to save and enhance the spaces themselves.

Diversity

The word diversity often arises in these conversations about Bankside, in three senses – diversity of form, population and experience. Along with a mix of uses and sizes, built forms of many different types are found here and this is a much appreciated characteristic of the place. Speculative development in the area is seen as a hazard to this diversity, tending towards monotonous facades and large monolithic built forms that fail to engage one at ground level. The forest should strive to allow and promote physical diversity, and possibly preserve much of the existing diverse form of Bankside.

The diversity of people that live in it is part of the essence of Bankside. Benefiting from historical waves of change and migration, the presence of different skin colours, tongues, occupations, lifestyles and bank balances may be the reason why so many residents feel 'accepted' here. There is a definite sense of tolerance between very different kinds of people, be they long term residents or more transient populations. A resident gives direct evidence of this tolerance in the form of her account of a confrontation with drug abusers in Nelson Square, saying that



©Philip Eckling

Church of the Precious Blood

the fact that the square wasn't gated gave her the confidence to approach the wrongdoers and argue with them about their use of this shared open space, instead of simply calling the police or avoiding the square altogether. Similarly, another resident specifically says that the upcoming Tate community garden shouldn't be gated off, or operated on a registration basis, so that people other than registered local residents can use it. All residents have their own little worlds in Bankside – their own particular life styles and daily routes, often varying widely from each other, but overlapping each other spatially. Coupled with the fact that in general people in Bankside have shown extraordinary levels of non-insularity, it may not be too big a leap of faith to pre-empt causality; i.e., to say that the visibility of different life histories being played out in close proximity to their own, makes the residents especially tolerant of each other. Development in this area must not be allowed to take away this daily visibility of differences between different groups, which is likely the basis of this easy tolerance. Different groups should not be segregated from each other, and chance contact should be promoted, to maintain the camaraderie between social groups which may otherwise, and in a different setting, antagonise each other.

Diversity of experience in Bankside largely stems from its mix of populations, and is represented in the interviews as widely divergent views on everything from food to street lighting. A public realm strategy for Bankside would need to recognise that there are actually several different publics here, several different points of view, and that they are all valid.

People are mostly fair

The people interviewed have consistently shown a very balanced view towards development. Most have accepted that progress and change are necessary and good, even as they lament the loss of old forms. As they have shown themselves to be sensible, largely unbiased people, with well-formed opinions, the forest strategy would benefit from openness to their views.

Specifically, the aesthetic aspects of development along the riverside are well appreciated, as is the connectivity between the different riverfront locations – both of which are relatively recent changes. Development is also welcome when it adds facilities to the area, such as shopping, better lighting and paving.



©Philipp Ebeling

Children on the way home from school

The specific, widely-criticised threats are those of uncontrolled height, loss of view lines, loss of old buildings and a general loss of solitariness, as more and more people throng to Bankside.

Bankside image

It is interesting and instructive to see the image of Bankside borne by those who know it best. As development has a continuous impact on this image, knowledge of residents' image of Bankside would sensitise the public realm strategy as to how it can preserve, change or enhance parts of this image.

The boundary of the Bankside Urban Forest matches closely that of the Cathedrals Ward, and a few residents do recall these boundaries when imagining 'their' Bankside. But on the whole the Bankside triangle is not a widely accepted definition, or a coherent entity in people's minds. Most residents automatically relate the name of 'Bankside' to the strip of walkway next to the river between Blackfriars and London Bridges. Others cite Southwark Street as the southern edge of Bankside, while a few extend the definition to Union Street, saying that everything south of that is the 'Borough'. In order to effect change over the entire area, the boundaries of 'Bankside' need renegotiation, which can be achieved by spatial decisions made in the public realm strategy. The Bankside triangle can be demarcated and amalgamated through strategic design interventions.

The elements of Bankside's image vary between respondents. Tate Modern, the railway infrastructure, and the River Thames are the most popular icons. An important element of some interviewees' mental picture is the fact that the area is strewn with historical artefacts – in the form of architecture, old establishments or even in some small physical component of a building or park – the presence of the past in the present of Bankside is thus greatly valued. A surprisingly large number of residents cite a vision of historic Bankside as their 'image' of the place, while a few fondly describe the area's theatrical tradition as the outstanding picture in their mind. Diversity of forms, sizes and populations comes up again here.

Local initiative, local politics, and a complete picture

The interviews have shown that there are many small local initiatives in Bankside which fall under the mantle of public realm works. Being mainly bottom-up efforts, these are limited in scope,

funding and outreach. But they are a valuable resource for a public realm strategy to incorporate, as well as actionable projects to take forward.

On the flip side, as it is such an interesting area, there have been many attempts at 'urban designing' Bankside. However, they have all come to nought but paper. Residents resent this, and some are even cynical about consultation now, feeling that they have been milked for their opinions time and time again, on whose basis no action has ever been taken. Also, the amount of interest in and onus on development in Bankside has exponentially multiplied the number of actors involved in it at any level. Managing the interests of stakeholders at so many levels, in different sectors, with several overlapping remits is a great challenge.

A public realm strategy for Bankside can be truly effective only if it has knowledge of local initiatives, a vision to unite them fruitfully, an understanding of the fragmented politics involved in the area, as well as an awareness of previous, unsuccessful attempts at strategising development here, and possible reasons for the same. As residents repeat, *'This place is great, there are some great ideas; it just needs someone to tie it all together'*.



©Philipp Ebeling

Nelson Square Gardens

*There are several special places and points of interest –
but interesting bits of this area tend to be quite isolated from each other.*



bankside urban forest

the bankside urban forest

an introduction to the concept by ken worpole

An ecological approach to public realm strategies

'If forests appear in our religions as places of profanity, they also appear as sacred. If they have typically been considered places of lawlessness, they have also provided havens for those who took up the cause of justice and fought the law's corruption. If they evoke associations of danger and abandon in our minds, they also evoke scenes of enchantment. In other words, in the religions, mythologies and literatures of the West, the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray.' Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, 1993

This proposal imagines the Bankside public realm strategy based on the vision of an urban forest rather than a park. There is an important difference. The term park originates with the Latin *parricus* or French *parc*, both meaning enclosure. The early English deer-parks were royal hunting grounds and strictly policed, whereas the forest has always been regarded as a place of liberty and without distinct boundaries.

Since then 'forest space' has acquired a set of architectural and topographical associations with a sense of open-endedness and permeability, a place that can be entered or exited at any point at its edges, and which visually changes and re-configures itself as the traveller moves through it. Because of their organic origins, forests offer a multiplicity of paths, routes, changes of direction, as well as clearings, copses, streams, rides and allées. *'A person should be able to walk through a forest on the way from home to work,'* the architect Alvar Aalto once said.

Thus there are great strengths in respecting the existing labyrinthine set of streets and settlements, which inspired the idea of the Bankside forest. Local residents interviewed for this study have confirmed the importance to them of the distinctive irregular street patterns of the area.

'Walking around in Bankside, you get glimpses of far off buildings through narrow alleys and cracks. They aren't much, but these occasional eccentric views should be preserved.'

'I go to Nelson Square by the back-doubles – past the greengrocer, past the betting shop, I cut through all the little back alleys.'

Though the forest idea introduces elements now associated with 'greening the city', and largely determined by ecological imperatives - to counter CO2 emissions, to lower ambient temperatures, to increase surface water retention and avoid flooding - there are equally important social and economic imperatives in the forest strategy too. By adopting a more ecological approach to public realm strategies, there are greater opportunities to support local economies and conserve historic street patterns and connectivities. The forest idea is not based on centre-periphery spatialities and economies, but on equitable networks of livelihood and exchange.



© Philipp Eitelberg

Resting in the Tate Park

The Bankside Urban Forest proposal is not primarily a tree-planting or soft-landscaping scheme, though it has elements of both. In essence it is a long-term programme of modest interventions in the connectivity of Bankside and the fine grain area south of Southwark Street, attempting to stitch together the larger neighbourhood through a series of pedestrian-friendly changes to the road pattern. It will also act as a cohesive device, quietly signalling to residents, visitors and others that they are entering and inhabiting a distinctive urban realm, characterised by diffuse elements of greening, a network of low-key pocket parks, courtyards and sanctuary spaces, historic meeting places, as well as significant places of economic, social and cultural exchange (Tate Modern, Borough Market, Southwark Cathedral, Guy's Hospital, local schools and shopping streets, London South Bank University).

This is to be accompanied by improvements to the buildings, courtyards, and streetscape through the creation of new pocket parks, more naturalised school playgrounds, plantings, window boxes – many of them to be undertaken by existing community groups and small businesses – and other street improvements which will give the area a sense of place-integrity whilst retaining the very mixed economy and social nature of the area. It builds on the pioneering work of the Bankside Open Spaces Trust. A new programme of artists' commissions is also envisaged.

Such improvements build on the history and character of Bankside, which has often resisted comprehensive redevelopment in the past. As Gillian Tindall has written in her recent history of the area, 'The House by the Thames' (2006):

'Plans (for large government buildings) have indeed been mooted for sections of London's south banks at various times, and one or two of them have actually been built a little further up the river, but Bankside itself has remained untouched by grandiose urbanism.'

This accords with Shibani Bose's conclusion, that 'Bankside is not grand to most that live there.' The scheme has grown out of a strong sense that local residents perceive the area described in the scheme as being 'calm', 'safe', and enjoying a strong sense of local identity already. It also draws on historical precedents, when Bankside's early growth still possessed many rural qualities, when it was, according to Tindall, 'a popular, if marshy place for clandestine encounters (where)... it was said that the tree-cover was so dense that even on moonlit nights 'one man cannot see another'.

It is not the case, however, that labyrinthine means dangerous, as local residents confirm. Conventional public space strategies are often informed by safety concerns which suggest that large open spaces, and long straight vistas, must invariably feel safer. Yet many people find large, hard surfaced landscapes threatening by their sheer lack of incident and anonymity. Local residents around Bankside find no contradiction between describing the area as feeling safe, along with praising the irregular network of streets and back doubles. What they do fear, however, is the 'Manhattanisation' of Bankside north of Southwark Street, and the forest concept is one which it is intended will weave human scale and engaging pathways and networks linking old and new Bankside together.

In addition to strengthening the historical jigsaw of spaces and places, the forest concept also introduces a slowing down of time, based on the experience of irregular pathways and frequent and engaging visual incident. Straight lines and open vistas can evoke time as something to be endured, whereas a public space strategy based on creating the conditions for exploration, diversion, meandering and discovery, can aid a sense of timelessness or absorption in the flow of time as a pleasure in its own right. Indeed the pocket parks such as Paley Park in New York offer precisely this unexpected, and therefore much appreciated, hideaway.

The Bankside Urban Forest therefore:

- Creates a distinctive new urban habitat based on elements of greening and the creation of a multiplicity of small scale spaces and place, for residents, workers and visitors alike;
- Supports and connects existing key places of exchange to each other, strengthening local economies and educational opportunities, and breaking down 'threshold' barriers between corporate and community partners;
- Helps ameliorate harshening environmental conditions such as air pollution, ambient air temperatures, creation of more shade;
- Supports a whole range of small scale community and business initiatives to create their own little sections of the forest, so that in the end people will be able to tell the wood from the trees;
- Knits together old and new, high and low rise, major and minor throughways, through a distinctive urban livery of self-generated green initiatives;
- Softens the divide between day and evening economies by avoiding an over-concentration of eating and drinking activities in one area;
- Introduces an element of playfulness to the public realm, being child-and family-friendly in its approach to street safety, and integration of pocket parks and play spaces into the streetscape;
- Creates a new sense of urban equilibrium between contrasting economic, social and cultural elements, through a distinctive place-making programme
- Pioneers an ecological approach to urban regeneration based on networking, self-sufficiency, and 'economies of small-scale'.

Lessons from Docklands

It has been salutary to observe how the City of London responded to the challenge presented by the growth of Docklands, what at the time was deemed to be the new model for large-scale urban regeneration. Rather than emulating its big, brash, broad brush scale of operations, the City chose instead to invest in its pocket parks, in beautifying alleys and courtyards, in cultivating good relations with family businesses and local pubs. It realised that office-workers and residents appreciated living in an environment that still seemed human scale, and offered continuing surprises and discoveries in its street pattern and local economy.

Urbanists have for some time now been drawing attention to the 'over-scripting' of public space in many modern urban regeneration schemes, so that all conflicts and loose ends are designed out of the development, and the public are organised into patterns of use and timetables decided



Blue Fin Building seen through Viaduct Arch

elsewhere. This disallows for that sense of wandering, of going off-piste, and of discovering a neighbourhood or district by serendipity. The very qualities for which we admire historic European towns and cities have often been designed out of new urban quarters in the UK. The Bankside Urban Forest resists this over-inscription of public space. The notion of the city as a forest is not a new idea, but it has always been retrospective. The idea of creating forest-like conditions as the basis for a new kind of urban public realm, builds on the past, but also embodies the new ecological imperatives for making cities more sustainable environmentally, economically and socially too.

Great buildings gain strength from fine-grain settings

At the heart of the Bankside BID is Tate Modern, though the area also provides a home for Southwark Cathedral, Borough Market and Shakespeare's Globe. The development of Bankside 1, 2-3 may have the effect of consolidating the institutional feel of the area. It could be argued that the area is top-heavy with national and international attractions which would benefit in the long term from being integrated into a more close-grained urban quarter, where thousands of people also live and work and support local amenities and services. If Tate Modern is a 21st century cathedral, then it could benefit from more cathedral-like surroundings consisting of fine grain streets, small squares and stopping places – in the tradition of French and Italian cathedrals, integrated into a finely woven urban fabric. This, the concept of the forest can help make happen.

Administrative boundaries rarely coincide with historic, topographical or cultural boundaries in urban zoning or governance questions. This raises issues of long-term economic and cultural sustainability. Popular attachments run long and deep in matters of place and history, and even developments of two or three generations previous can still be felt as having destroyed the organic unity of a particular district or urban quarter, which regeneration projects may over time wish to restore. The Bankside BID area needs to avoid the dangers of exacerbating the divide between the riverside area and its historical hinterland south of Southwark Street.

At present Southwark Street resembles an urban canyon (not unlike Farringdon Road, or even the scale of More London compared to the scale of Tooley Street on the opposite side). There are bridges across this canyon for railways but not for pedestrians. Residents interviewed south of Southwark Street expressed fears that further development at Bankside may unwittingly destroy the historic urban fabric of the area.

'I don't want Bankside to turn into Manhattan. Height is the main issue. There are more and more housing towers and office towers coming up here, which spoil the view and the sunlight for everyone. I feel like soon we won't be able to see the sky!'

'The buildings are getting higher and higher. They just keep going up and up they may well end up taking away the skyline soon.'

The urban forest strategy addresses this issue directly by weaving a series of threads across Southwark Street, bringing the historic urban grain of alleys, courtyards, pocket parks, community gardens, grottoes into the BID area.

The Bankside BID designation raises such issues. On the map the boundaries are clearly and tightly drawn by three principal roads – Borough High Street, Southwark Street and Blackfriars Road - and to the north by the River Thames. Yet such boundaries have the effect of enclosing what is largely a collection of industrial, commercial, corporate buildings, along with large swathes of public housing.

The BID area can surely only gain in strength by making connections to this rich historical hinterland, where there are many fascinating streets and alleys, courtyards, pocket parks, taverns, religious settlements, and workshop buildings, which offer a counterpoint to the larger scale development of Bankside, which tends to be on a block basis. There is also a danger that were the BID area to be regarded as now constituting a new cultural quarter, within its present boundaries, then the intensification of the evening economy in this small area alone could lead to problems now seen in other tightly bounded cultural districts such as Dublin's Temple Bar.

For while there is much to be drawn on in the long history of Bankside itself as a place of entertainment, theatre, and pleasure gardens, immediately south of Southwark Street, there are additional stories to be told of social reform – Octavia Hill's cottage housing programme at Red Cross Way and Ayres Street, for example – as well as educational reform in the work of Joseph Lancaster in Borough Road, whose name is also commemorated in Lancaster Street.

Today this larger area is becoming a place with a renewed identity, as fringe theatre spaces are being developed, parks and green spaces (badly needed) are being restored, and many former industrial buildings are being converted into small business units.

One of Bankside BID's most successful initiatives to date has been working with local businesses on developing green travel plans. The area is sufficiently well-connected to main line railway stations, bus services and pedestrian routes to become a model of a safe, permeable pedestrian district. This can only be strengthened by extending pedestrian and cycleway connections into surrounding areas, to gain a critical mass of walkable space, eventually connecting up to the Elephant and Castle, another area of considerable investment and development.

The concept of regeneration has been at the heart of urban policy for several decades now – but what does it mean, and what are its limitations? The conventional notion is that historic urban areas affected by planning blight, economic failure or community fragmentation can be brought back to life again by large building programmes, whether of new industries, offices, housing developments or cultural facilities. It is assumed that social and economic benefits will immediately flow outwards from a new investment in property and institutions. However, this is not always the case. Rather like an organ transplant, the host environment can sometimes reject or turn its back on the new development, leaving it isolated, or requiring it to take the form of an enclave community.

The urban forest is based on the idea that those responsible for regeneration schemes have to appreciate the very real benefits which flow the other way, from the host community to the new development and its inhabitants and users. Thus the forest slowly encroaches on the new development and integrates it by degrees into the historic ecology of the terrain. So rather than Southwark residents feeling that their fine grain pattern of urban living and community is going to be crushed by high-rise development bestriding the whole area, the urban forest strategy builds on the richness and intimacy of the existing communities integrating the new developments at Bankside into the wider urban fabric.

This is why the concept of 'Places of Exchange' is crucial to the urban forest: these are meeting places where Bankside workers and visitors inter-act with local residents and the workers and owners of the many small businesses which thrive elsewhere in the district. Such places of exchange include Tate Modern, Southwark Cathedral, Borough Market, South Bank University, as well as local schools, shopping streets, and pockets of evening activity such as pubs and restaurants which create new local economies in the forest. Places of exchange allow not just

trading, but also opportunities for different groups living, working or visiting the community to inter-act. There is evidence already of new local connections, as in the Borough Market food-training programme which will impact on local schools by providing fresh ingredients as well as culinary expertise.

Not only do these 'places of exchange' need a spatial presence, but they need a temporal presence too. Borough Market now successfully crosses the time boundary between weekdays and weekends, operating as it does each Friday and Saturday. Below Southwark Street, churches, pubs and cafes maintain an evening and weekend timetable.

A cultural quarter with historical depth

One of the lessons from Jan Gehl's work in Copenhagen on increasing the social life of historic areas, is to avoid over-concentration, and to encourage the spread of bars and restaurants across a wider area. Gehl's own report on London's public spaces and public life, *Towards a fine City for People* (June 2004), noted an absence of children or elderly people in the streets, compared with other European cities, possibly linked to the fact that 'until now the pedestrian has been largely invisible in the planning process.'

What has been evident – and to a degree unique – from the surveys of residents, is that all age groups feel generally safe in the area, though children may be disallowed from crossing the major boundary roads such as Borough High Street, Southwark Street and Blackfriars Road. The forest concept is at heart a child-friendly strategy, over time creating a streetscape that is interesting, human scale, safe and – most importantly – initiated and managed at a local level by the participating schools, businesses, churches, community groups.

The idea of playfulness as a key ingredient of contemporary urban life is now established – indeed Tate Modern's large Turbine Hall installations seem to have been designed for family playfulness in mind. The idea of locating parks and dedicated play areas close to great art galleries and museums – as a way of signalling cultural democracy and popular accessibility – is now common too. This is why we are keen to see a significant and original play environment incorporated into the large forest element immediately south of the Tate Modern. This could humanise the approach to Tate Modern from the south for children and their families living south of Southwark Street, and indeed act as a major encouragement to 'cross the threshold' from the urban interior on to the riverfront itself.

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam opens its southern doors on to the large Museumpark, which has extensive play facilities for all ages which are used daily by visitors and the children of local residents. Great works of public art such as the 'Mikado' construction at Malmo by Adriaan Geuze, create a powerful sense of history and occasion, meaningful to both adults and children alike. Crossing boundaries involves both spatial and typological forms.

This offers real funding opportunities, as it is known that the larger arts and cultural funding agencies, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, are looking for evidence of strategic co-operation across boundaries, rather than supporting 'islands of consumption' which leave areas of inner residential London untouched.

places of exchange

supporting and extending existing places of exchange

There are a number of existing places within Bankside and Borough which in differing ways have the capacity to bring people who do not know each other into contact, places which 'suggest' social engagement between different racial, ethnic and class communities, where people can express differences of opinions and find mutual support, where civility can flourish – Places of Exchange.

The Places of Exchange Southwark that we have observed are:

Southwark Cathedral, which hosts its religious community and many public events including those based on liberal politics.

Borough Market not only provides a shopping environment but also an important social one, generated by the enthusiasm and commitment that comes from specialist high quality producers.

Cathedral and St Joseph's Schools necessitate social contact between parents through the dropping off and collection of children, and after school events. Little Dorrit Park and Redcross Gardens provide critical support to this type of contact, forming informal open spaces that are frequented after school as a counterpoint to the formality of the school's programme.

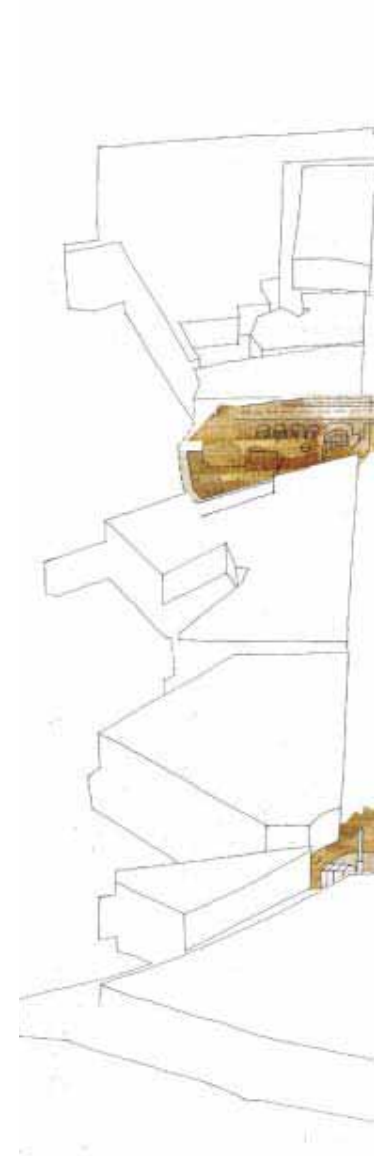
The Great Suffolk Street local precinct provides local business shops which include a florist, green grocer, butcher, cafe and chip shop.

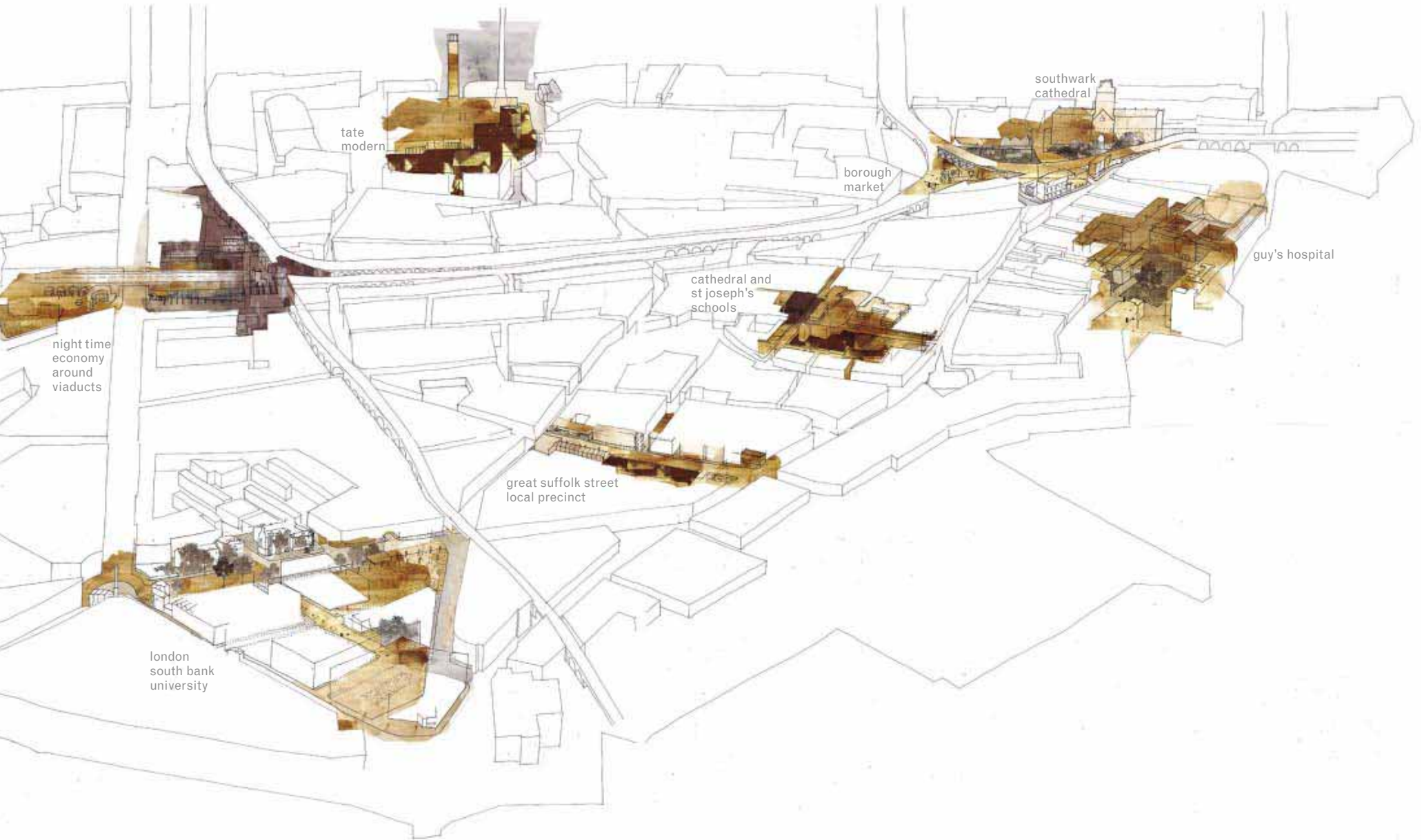
London South Bank University supports a significant educational community and hosts a spectrum of debates and lectures.

The emerging night-time economy around the railway viaducts at Blackfriars Road supports the increasing number of new workers and residents in the area. This activity is likely to increase further with the construction of large scale offices, residences and hotels nearby.

There is a significant opportunity to create a completely new 'place of exchange' on the south side of Tate Modern. The necessity for a place that has this capacity to bring people in contact with one another is particularly important here as this area is going to be shared by both the existing community and a significant number of new residents and workers.

Places of Exchange are often supported by, and indeed support, the scattered network of small open spaces, parks and gardens. The public realm must therefore contribute further to underpinning these more diverse and sociable places by improving the connections between them to form a more coherent and pedestrian orientated ground.

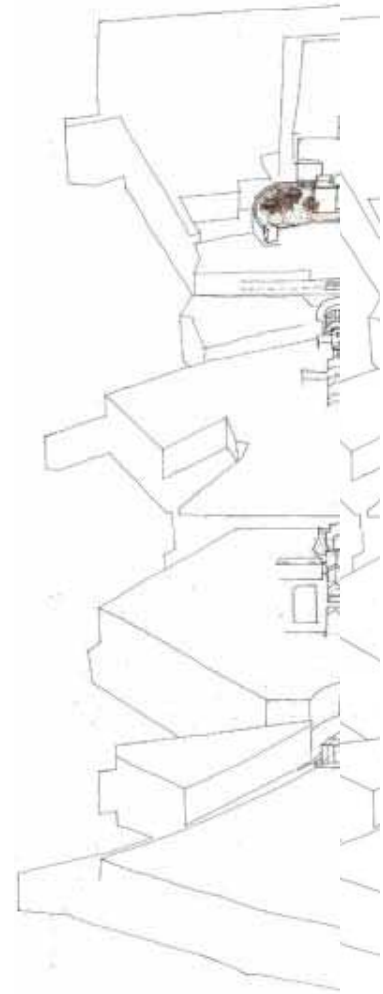
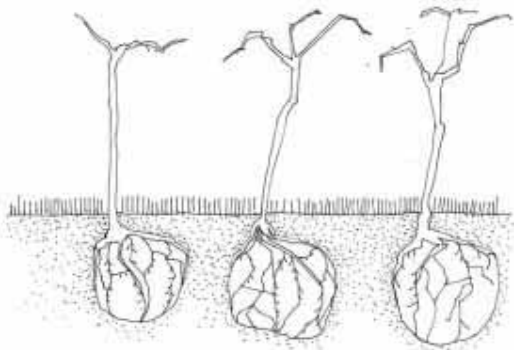


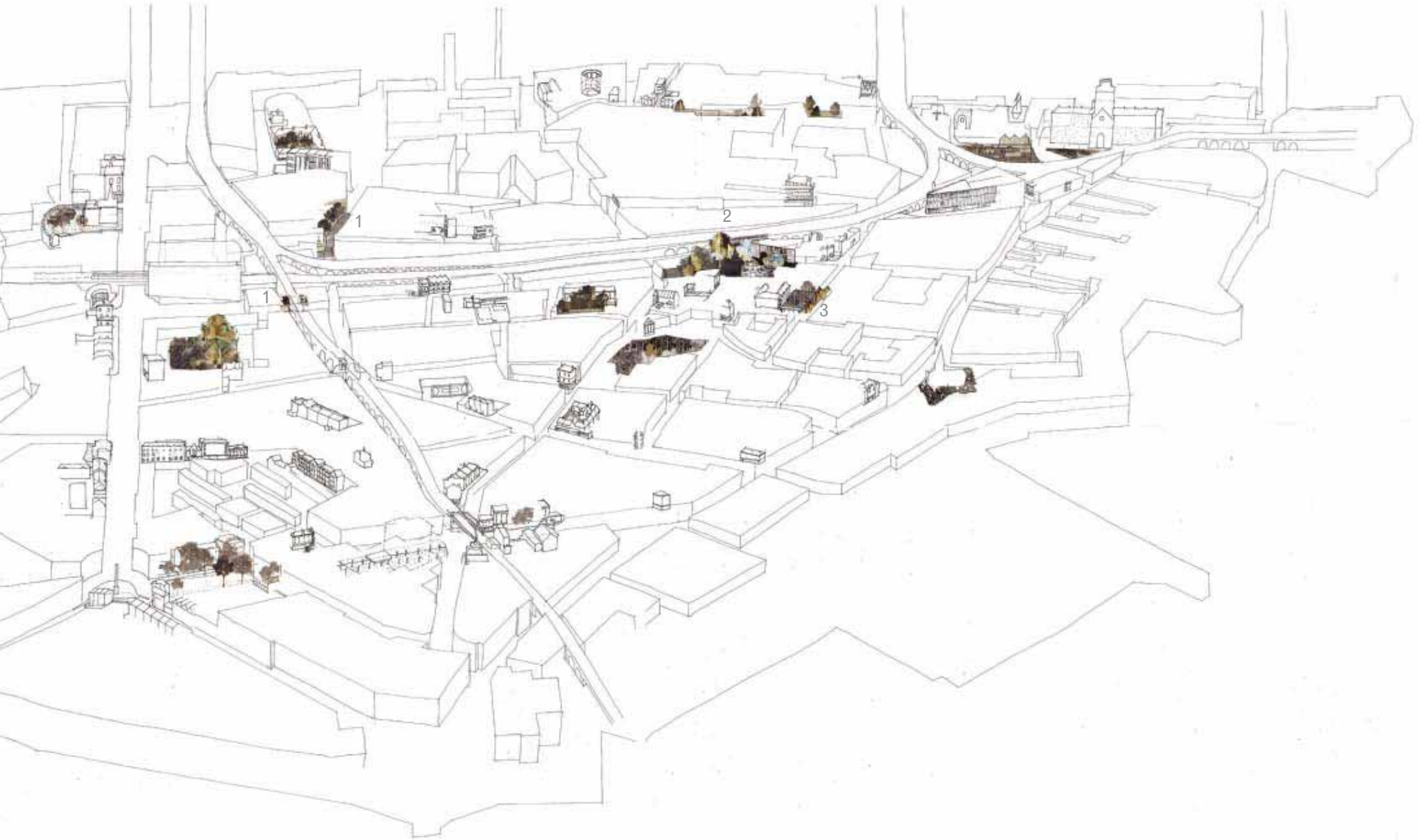


the seeds of the framework

existing clearings and special places intensified

The columned canopy of the market, flickering lights of the trains, ruins at All Hallows, golden deer, Cross Bones Graveyard, long shadows from latticed bridge structures, shrine of the Most Precious Blood, hanging vegetation in playhouse court, Clink skeletons and deep viaduct arches all contribute to the sense of 'losing oneself in the city'. The nature of this labyrinthine terrain establishes the roots the Forest. The scattered 'special places' or clearings are buried deep within the network of East-West rides and long meandering North-South streams. The framework weaves these fragments of the forest into a co-ordinated but loose structure. To these existing fragments we have added a number of illustrative projects (pp38-48) to demonstrate the spectrum of interventions that can be made within this structure. These are the 'seeds' of the forest and although they include elements of tree-planting and soft-landscaping, there are important social and economic imperatives too.

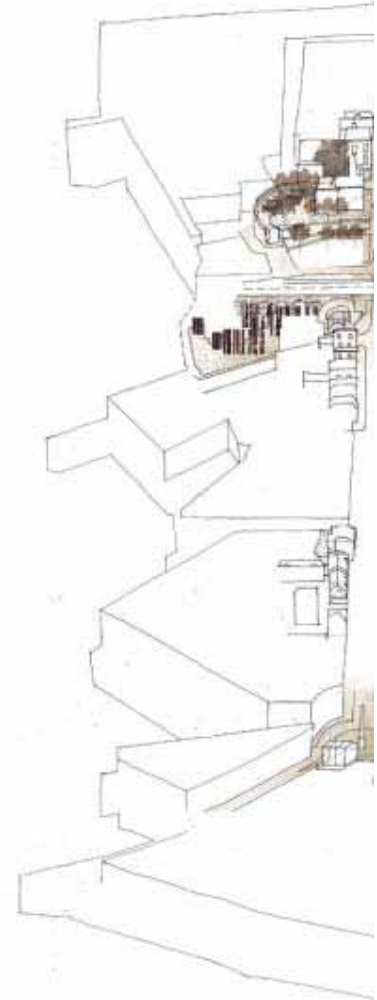
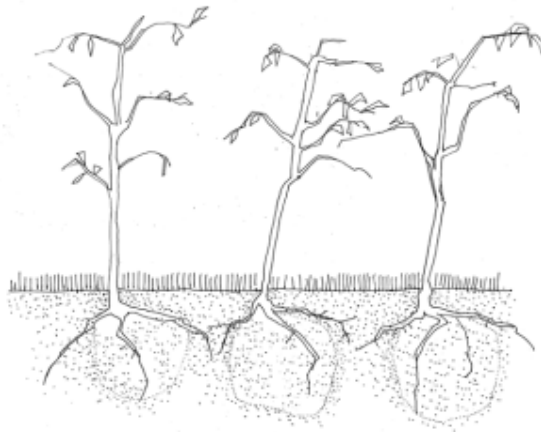


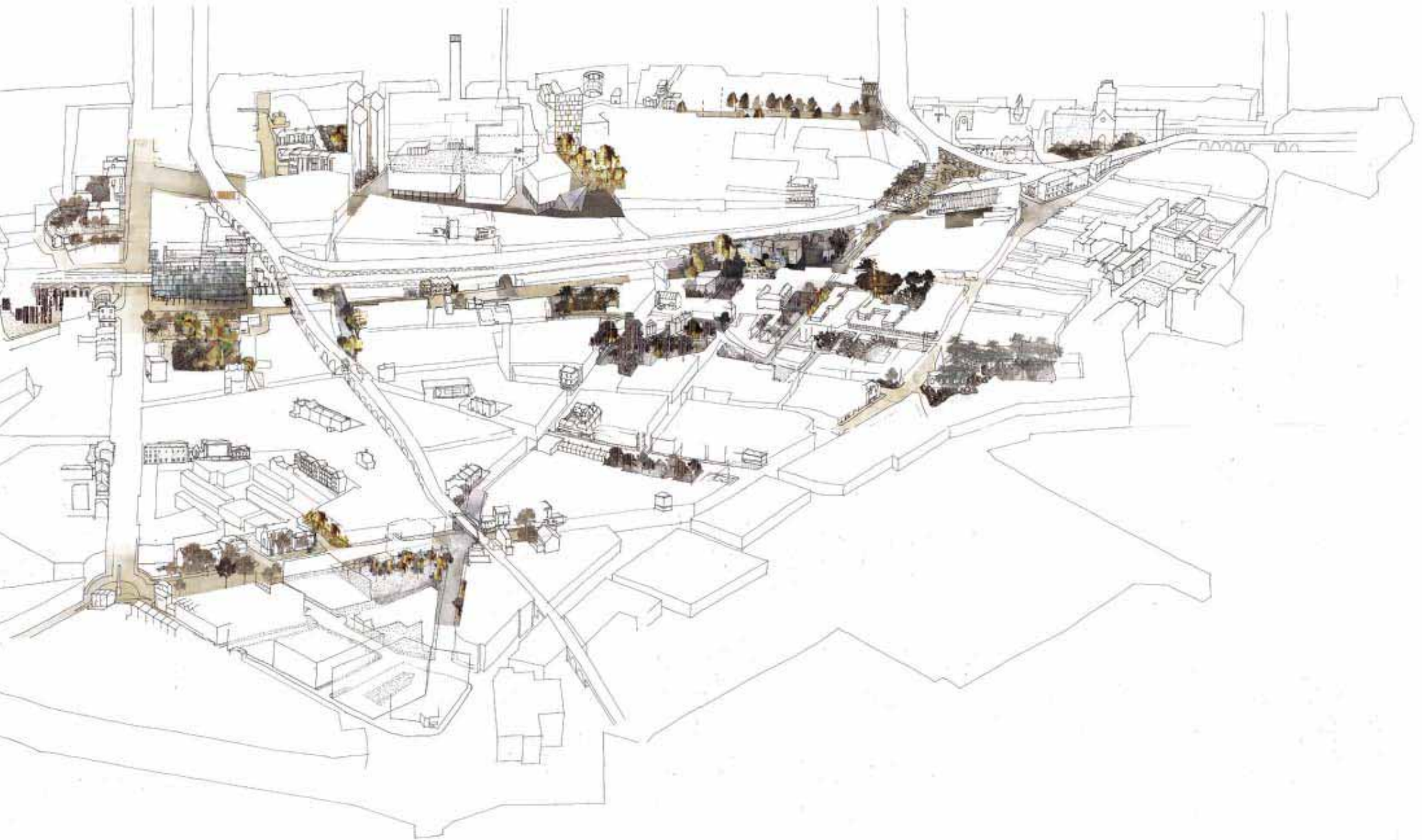


spreading roots

the existing spaces and new projects begin to connect

As the current initiatives and seedlings become visible, new developments can begin to respond to the forest. This is an evolutionary and fragmentary process that works as much by influence as it does through more formal mechanisms (such as planning and section 106 negotiations). A series of more complex interventions can progress, such as detailed proposals to embed Southwark Street into the Forest, negotiations to open access and develop the railway viaducts, re-configuring parts of the University, agreeing key thresholds with emerging designs for Borough High Street and Blackfriars Road and extending Borough Market. These developments do not aspire to creating another Covent Garden. Their focus lies in supporting a working part of London, where the market, Tate Modern, the Jerwood Space and London College of Communication are pursuing cultural programmes amongst the stations, hospital, University and local businesses. The emphasis is not on beautification, but rather how the public realm can 'work harder' and be occupied and shared by more different players, more ages.

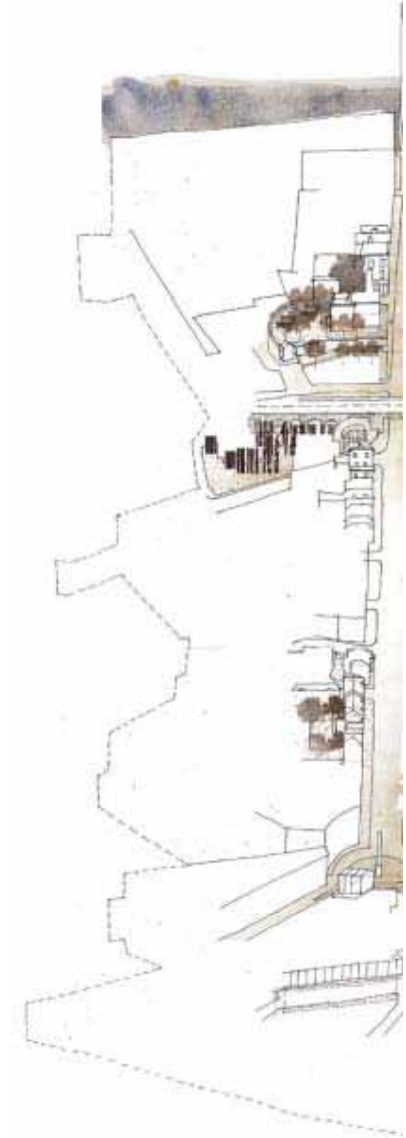
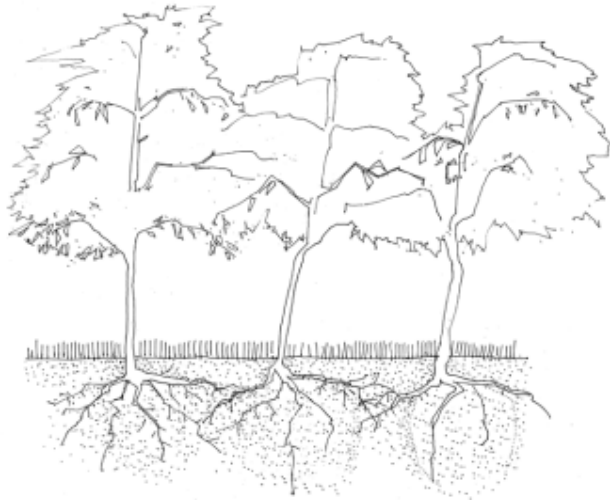


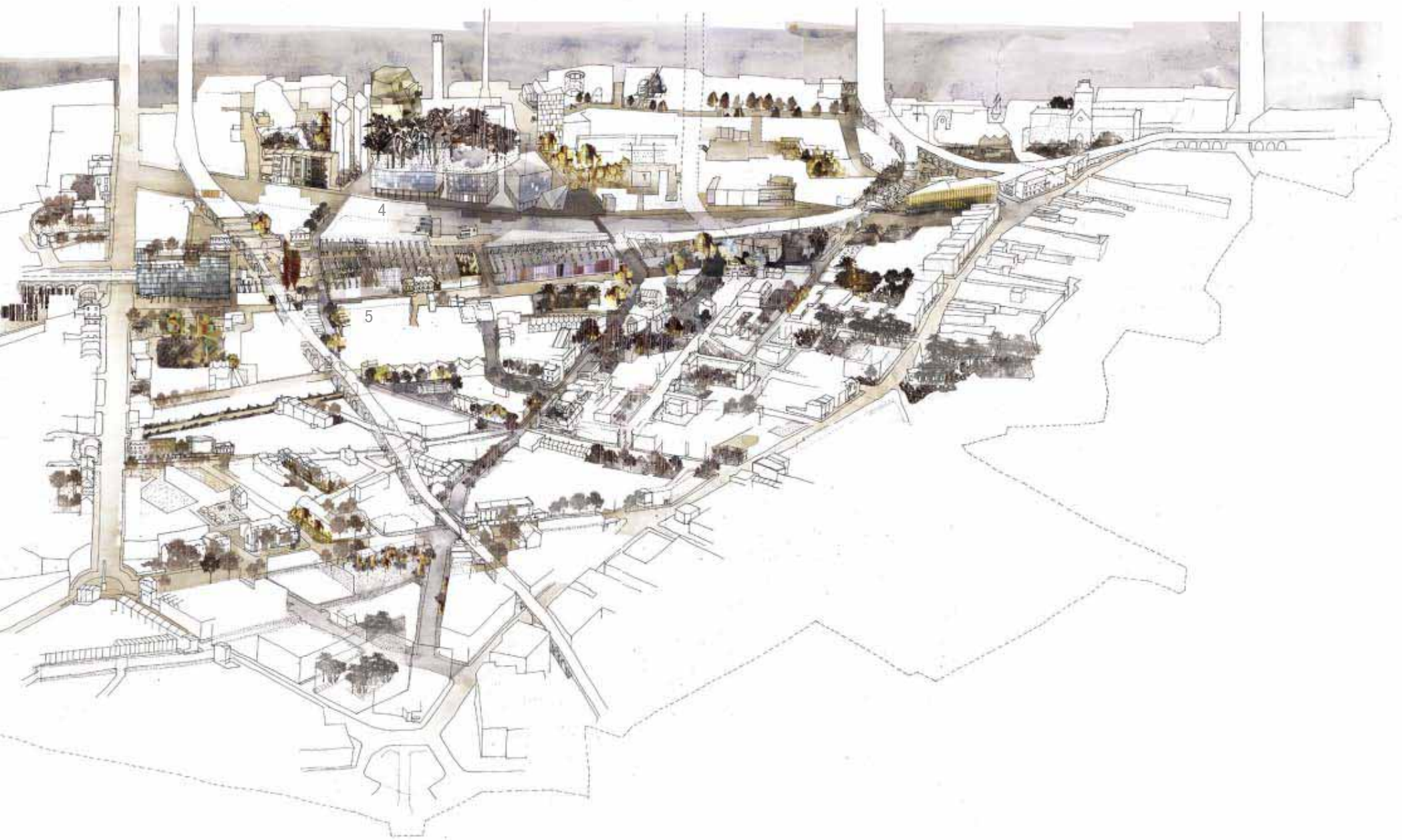


maturing of the framework

active edges and urban interior are meshed

As the forest begins to mature as an idea, significant new areas and spaces are 'unlocked' and brought into life, for example, Tate Modern playground, Cross Bones Graveyard, a quarter of a million square feet of viaduct arches, Mint Street Park and London South Bank University Square. The roots and social influence of the key players begin to extend and embed themselves into the urban interior of the forest. The thresholds suggest exploration, the rich history and local identity are embedded and intertwined, streams and rides improve access to new facilities, jobs, clubs and spaces. The intertwining of the roots serves to make a robust and resilient quarter of the city.





tools of the forest

The spatial typologies that form the public realm in the Bankside Urban Forest can be responded to with a variety of 'tools' that support their spatial identity and the overall characterisation of the area.

Rides – formal man-made cuts through the forest

More formally planted large tall trees in lines that define edges and opening to the sky.
Absence of low-level planting.
Linear lighting in sequence to work with trees to form an orderly edge.
Clay ground (dry).



rides

Streams – naturally formed, meandering and varied

Informal planting with clumps of multi-stemmed trees of a shorter species.
Presence of low level and vertical planting.
More varied spacing and types of light fitting.
Presence of bedrock, stone paving with special polished surfaces (wet).



streams

Clearings – places marked by special conditions, fallen trees, confluence of rivers

Places of orientation in the forest, where information is available.
Special and specific conditions that needed to be respond to differently.
Openings defined by taller trees, vertical planting or occupied by lower trees.
Huts, shelters and places of rest are located.
Places where the sky is more present.
Places where artists can realise their work, places of reflection and pause within forest.



clearings

Pathways – local routes, passages, alleys

Linear more intimate spaces with a pedestrian and cycle focus.
Cut across and connect different spatial types.
Trees and low level planting, but not formally structured.
Lower level lighting to mark out the path.
Places to sit and rest.



pathways