

Architecturally spirited, urbanistically intricate, Urbane Mitte is configured as a complex catalyst for creative discourse and participant interchange. (150)

### **Design Premise**

The establishment of the Park am Gleisdreieck on the vast former rail yards has turned what historically was an industrial and inaccessible part of the city into a popular and desirable public open space.

Located at the hinge point between the Western and Eastern sections of the park the new development around the Gleisdreieck station, with its proposed density and heterogeneous mix of uses, will complement this and turn the whole area into a new centre within the already polycentric cityscape of Berlin.

Functioning rather like a city island, or a city within a city, Urbane Mitte has the potential to create a new urban neighbourhood, an integrated quarter boldly but sensitively knitted into the urban mosaic of Berlin. Urbane Mitte offers a distinctive opportunity to blend new development with the industrial rail infrastructure of the station and the natural setting of the Park am Gleisdreieck.

### **Context**

The site of the future Urbane Mitte am Gleisdreieck, as well as its adjacent areas are characterized by their fragmentation and heterogeneity: Traditional urban fabric to the north; former railway sheds, re-used as Technikmuseum and an event location to the east and south; and with a park and high speed rail tracks to the west.

The site itself is dominated by the listed historic rail station and viaducts, which, with their sculptural qualities now exposed, become the equivalent of "objets trouvés" in their new urban context.

### **Urban Form**

The scheme proposed responds to the heterogeneity of the context by implementing a strong and robust, identifiable urban form that at the same time is responsive to its context and constraints.

The elongated site has been structured with a transversal grid of buildings and streets, thereby allowing for maximum penetration into the site.

The majority of the proposed buildings maintain the traditional eaves height of Berlin, in response to the surrounding fabric, but also to give a uniform elevation and backdrop to the parks. The buildings at the northern end face the western section of the park and extend backwards to span across the future S21. The footprint of the S21 alignment is also replicated on their roofs in form of a depression, thereby creating a string of sunken gardens elevated in the air.

The buildings towards the southern end of the site face the Museumspark and the eastern section of the park. Two towers, located at the hinge point between the northern and southern ends of the site, and placed on either side of the viaduct of the U2, give the new Urbane Mitte a metropolitan scale and confident presence in the larger urban context, particularly in relation to the nearby Potsdamer Platz. They also form a symbolic gate into central Berlin for visitors arriving with the ICE from the south.

### **Public Realm**

A series of clearly defined public spaces form the backbone of the proposal:

A new pedestrian promenade is created alongside the railway arches and is perceived as the primary linear public space, an active internal street that provides continuous access to the re-purposed arched viaduct under the U2 underground line and ground floor uses in the proposed new buildings.

Along the western edge a second promenade is created, which incorporates the existing cycle path and continues to merge with a newly formed "urban terrace" in front of the new buildings directly facing the park. Intermediate streets between the buildings enable porosity from the park deep into the site and vice versa.

Each street is considered as a unique public space and a distinct address to new development.

In addition, a number of squares are knitted into the network of streets and passages.

The northern plaza is formed by new buildings on either side of the continuation of Schöneberger Str. These buildings frame the view towards Lutherkirche and at the same time serve to form the entrance to the site from the existing station and the adjacent quarter around Schöneberger Str and Luckenwalder Str.

A new station plaza will be created around the new entrance to the S21, underneath and adjacent to the railway viaduct of the U1.

A further square is located between the towers, at the bend in the U2 viaduct. This also defines termination point of the pedestrian promenade along the railway arches as well as serving as a representative forecourt for the office tower.

A southern plaza is formed by taking advantage of the area required for emergency access and escape from the rail tunnels. It complements the existing square south of the Stellwerk Plw and creates a centre around which the buildings at the southern end of the site are grouped, including acting as a representative forecourt to the proposed hotel tower. A green wall along the railway tracks will help to control the noise levels in this area.

### **Landscape**

Weaving together the softness of the park with the hardness of the heritage of the former railway yard is the key to the proposed landscaping. "Green fingers" consisting of grass, low vegetation and planters extend from the park into the Urbane Mitte.

A series of sunken roof terraces are formed on top of the new buildings crossing the S21, serving as semi-public break-out areas for the occupants or also as outdoor dining areas for restaurants and bars.

The southern plaza will be landscaped, with a green wall towards the railway lines acting as a protection against the noise.

Extensive greening of building roofs is proposed.

### **Access and Circulation**

Primary access to the site is from the North and South. Access to individual buildings is via the network of side streets, the public realm that occupy the voids between buildings.

#### *Vehicular*

Urbane Mitte am Gleisdreieck is conceived as a car free environment. Areas for underground car parks are earmarked at the northern and southern end of the site, accessed via Schöneberger Str and Trebbiner Str respectively.

Emergency access to the existing specific locations has been retained. Passageways and streets have been designed to allow for emergency and delivery access to all buildings. Drop-off zones have been incorporated in front of the two towers.

#### *Pedestrian*

The urban form was designed to maximize pedestrian permeability. The highest intensity is envisaged to be in the northern part of the site, around the existing and new station entrances and the link from the park to the railway arches. It is also envisaged to open the courtyard of the actual Gleisdreieck arches to pedestrians and offer an additional connection to Schöneberger Str, thereby allowing for cross permeability in East-West direction.

#### *Bicycle*

The existing bicycle path has been maintained along the western edge of the site. Public bicycle parking will be provided around the station entrances. It is also proposed to incorporate bicycle parking facilities into the new buildings.

### **Local Differentiation**

The existing site conditions and the urban context stipulate the emergence of three zones areas, each with their distinct characteristics:

The northernmost area will have the greatest urban intensity, with its two station entrances, full frontage to the park, shortest distance to cross the park from the west, the refurbished railway arches and courtyard, as well the potential of various events held in the adjacent buildings along Schöneberger Str and STATION Berlin, penetrating into the site.

This area will have a high concentration of retail, restaurants, bars and clubs in the ground floors of the buildings, especially around the new urban terrace towards the western park and the railway arches. Its open spaces are envisaged to be used for temporary events / markets, fairs etc on a regular basis. Also, functions such as a cinema or theatre could be located in this area.

In case the site is developed before the S21 line is built, the voids left in the buildings will create a series of generous covered spaces which could be used in a variety of exciting ways, from temporary events like markets or fairs filtering into the site, to a dedicated Art Promenade of galleries and artists' studios.

The area adjacent to the south has no direct access or visual connection to the park at ground level, due to the ICE railway line emerging from the tunnel. It will also be affected by the noise of the railway. It is further away from the station entrances and is overall assumed to have a less active ground floor. Facilities associated with a work campus for contemporary creative industries like multifunctional incubator spaces, meeting facilities, auditoria and maybe workshops and other related services could be located here. This area also incorporates the office high-rise building with a publicly accessible rooftop bar.

The area furthest south opens towards the Technikmuseum and the sport fields beyond. It has been primarily earmarked for residential, community and leisure use. A second tower contains a proposed hotel and private flats at upper levels.

Private flats are also located in the upper floors of the buildings, oriented towards the park of the Technikmuseum and away from the noise of the railway. Offices, or possibly less noise-sensitive live/work units, could be directed towards the West. Sports and leisure facilities as well as community related uses will be placed at the lower floors and help activating the new square formed.

### **Plots**

Building plots have been structured to be delivered flexibly and independently, before or after the construction of the S21. Building volumes accommodate the proposed alignment of the S21 line. Buildings would span over the safeguarded 'clearance zone' if delivered before construction of the S21. The alignment of the S21 is formally acknowledged by the articulation of building volumes as it slices through the site. This gives rise to an adjustment of building form whilst creating an opportunity for internal aspect of landscape and green roofs. A total of 11 no. building parcels have been envisioned with generous spaces between parcels.

### **Grain**

Overall building flexibility and adaptability has been considered paramount when articulating building layout and form. Buildings are comprised of 9m wide end layers structured around a central core layer. Cores are generally accessed on both sides of the building, via the public spaces in between buildings. The address and identity of individual buildings is per street, the East/West gaps between volumes.

Building height has been limited to 22m for the last occupy able floor level over the majority of the site. Gaps between buildings comply with the 0.4 proportion between width and height of building. Spaces between urban buildings are set at 11.5m.

Preliminary structuring of floor heights suggests first floor at approximately 6.0m above existing ground, all subsequent levels are proposed at 4.0m floor to floor to accommodate full flexibility in building use: office, workshop, residential and other uses.

Current trends lead to the creation of highly adaptable and flexible accommodation that can be used for present intended uses, living, live/work studios or more conventional office environments, however can be transformed into any mix of the above easily and quickly. Space may be needed or wanted for a wide range of uses or intended purposes but these must adapt to changing circumstances and/or future demands.

### **Building Accommodation, Use and Adaptability**

Critical for the success of Urbane Mitte is the need for a highly robust, highly secure high-speed data systems connection that enables a vast array of work scenarios to be undertaken quickly and securely. Any building system must accommodate these requirements and enable secure systems monitoring and upgrade. Both the urban layout and building structure accommodates maximum versatility in the planning and design of the components. Building placement provides for easy access from ground level, individual floors are equally accessible and flexible. Building services and data infrastructure are both flexible and adaptable to varying scenarios.

Complementary to the highly versatile living and working environment is the need for the 'office' facilities to contribute to the interchange and interface of activity. Increasingly, to respond to creativity and complexity in the working environment, a multifaceted mix of spatial environments that provide varying working modes is sought after to stimulate and/or modulate the creative process. Building typology is easily adaptable to physical and cultural changes in workplace and lifestyle. Diversity of use and spatial complexity, future hybridisation is accommodated ultimately through flexibility in design and planning of the building.

A small proportion of 'living' specific accommodation is provided on site however planning building space is easily adaptable within the development. Additionally, a substantial amount of residential accommodation is within walking distance, within a short cycle ride or within quick access via the U1, U2 and proposed S21 lines. Accessibility is a positive feature of Urbane Mitte.

Currently these 'digital native' workers require not only the technology and systems to support their work but demand a complex mix of supporting facilities and green space to enhance their lifestyles. Public facilities and other supporting uses contribute to a vibrant living and working environment. The overall environment public and private is considered collectively each contributing to a greater whole. Leisure, entertainment, 'chilling', relaxation zones, café and bars, eating/restaurant, cinemas, sport/exercise and shopping enable a 'sustainable' urban neighbourhood to be formed and encourage 24 hour vibrancy.