

# Arts for all

London's South Bank is already home to the largest concentration of arts facilities in the world. Through the South Bank Masterplan, it is now ready to establish its position as the world's leading centre for the performing and visual arts, whilst at the same time accomplishing a major feat of urban regeneration. **Mike McCart**, SBC Commercial Director, explains the practicalities of moving the Masterplan forward.

*Rick Mather's Masterplan view of the Jubilee Gardens site*  
Computer image courtesy of Visual Artworks (London)

## The South Bank Masterplan

CEO Karsten Witt's recent statement of corporate vision articulated a new challenge for the SBC: to enter a virtuous circle, beginning with investment in the destination in order to increase SBC's potential to attract visitors, audiences, promoters, performers and sponsorship. Specifically, the investment is needed to produce:

- a wide range of excellent performances and exhibitions by world-class artists to excite and challenge audiences of all ages and interests;
- a stimulating workplace for artists, encouraging them to create ground-breaking new work, to develop their talent, to collaborate and share their experiences with other artists and with visitors;
- creative partnerships with other promoters and experts in other disciplines to develop a pioneering and illuminating programme across all art forms;
- a vibrant and welcoming destination open to all.

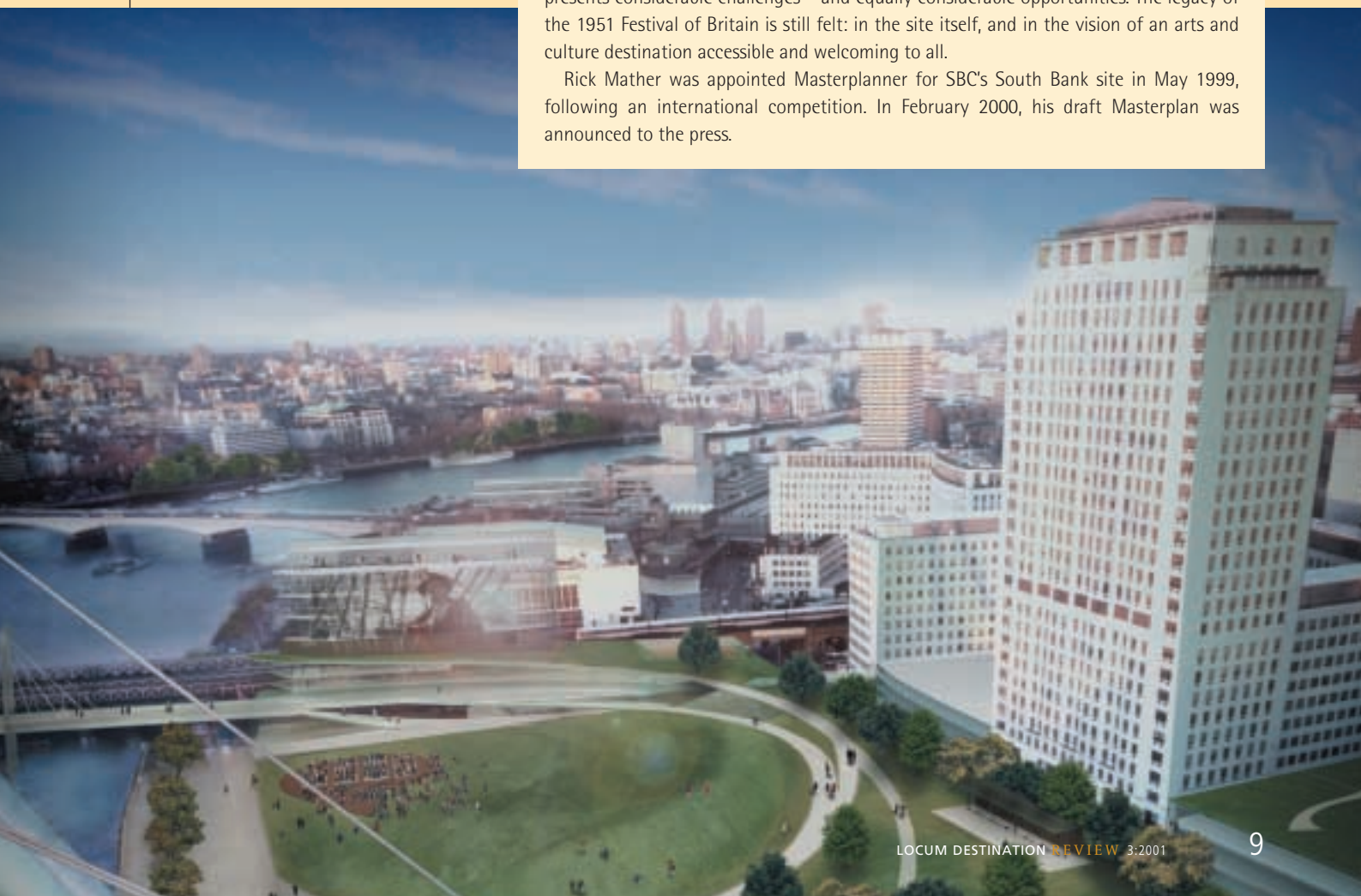
To enter this virtuous circle, SBC needs to create the artistic context for the whole visitor experience, by refurbishing and reconfiguring its site and venues.

## Masterplanning the site

The Royal Festival Hall will be treated first as an (independent) redevelopment project, and architects Allies & Morrison have reached detailed design stage. To avoid disruption to the artistic programme, the work will be phased so that the building continues to function whilst under construction. When the redevelopment is complete, the RFH will boast an acoustically enhanced auditorium and a range of newly configured public spaces populated with a wider range of catering and retail than is currently available.

The RFH is just one element of the SBC's domain, which extends from the London Eye, over Jubilee Gardens and Hungerford Car Park, to take in the much maligned 1960s buildings housing the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery, the *bfi*'s current home under Waterloo Bridge, and parts of the IMAX undercroft. This inherited site presents considerable challenges – and equally considerable opportunities. The legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain is still felt: in the site itself, and in the vision of an arts and culture destination accessible and welcoming to all.

Rick Mather was appointed Masterplanner for SBC's South Bank site in May 1999, following an international competition. In February 2000, his draft Masterplan was announced to the press.





## Public consultation

There has been widespread support expressed for Rick Mather's draft Masterplan in a unique public consultation exercise, one of the largest ever undertaken at Masterplan stage in the UK. The consensus was that this was the best plan to date to be put forward for improving the South Bank. Strong support was expressed for:

- extending the park (Jubilee Gardens);
- developing a new and enlarged *bfi* Film Centre, which will include a new National Film Theatre, *bfi* National Library, Museum of the Moving Image and educational facilities;
- redevelopment happening quickly;
- using landscaping to integrate the whole site;
- giving top priority to access for all throughout the site;
- and having a strong overall plan, since the development is to be phased over a number of years.

The consultation exercise included the distribution of 250,000 consultation leaflets, 13,000 of which were distributed to Lambeth and Southwark residents, a citizens' forum, and several workshops independently run by Opinion Leader Research, including some for children. The responses, irrespective of whether they were from audiences, visitors or local residents and workers, demonstrated that the draft Masterplan had met the eight priorities identified by the public as essential in consultation for the Masterplan brief. The most popular aspect of the plan was its proposal for increased amounts of attractive, open, green space.

As a result of this popular support and the changes taking place in the area, including the popularity of the London Eye and Shell's intention to bring forward proposals to develop the Shell Centre, SBC has decided to proceed with developing this part of the site first. This will include the *bfi* Film Centre and a new concert venue. This will provide continuity of concert provision when the Queen Elizabeth Hall/Purcell Room site is redeveloped.

## Architectural competitions

SBC is launching two international competitions to select architects. The first is for a landscape architect for the whole site. The significant extension of the gardens and the landscaping between arts buildings on the whole site requires a new public competition. The new contract replaces the current contract awarded to West 8 in 1998 following a similar public competition. West 8 advised Rick Mather on the concepts for that part of the draft Masterplan.

The landscape architect appointed will join Rick Mather's Masterplan team, which also includes Alan Penn of Space Syntax Laboratory at University College, London, whose role is to ensure that easy, direct and safe pedestrian movement is achieved, and the architect David Bonnett. David was responsible for an Urban Access Audit for the South Bank. His appointment to the team reflects the importance of disabled access to the Masterplan and the demand from the public that it be given top priority.

The second competition will be for an architect for the Hungerford car park/Jubilee Gardens site, who will design the new

concert hall, shell and core for the *bfi* Film Centre and the multiplex cinema, as well as the 'gateway' building, replacement car parking and the edges of the park. Together with Rick Mather, the architect will look at issues in relation to elevating the park including:

- height and contours;
- the permeability, entrances and security of the park;
- the form of the edges of the park;
- the concert hall's relationship to the park;
- views across the site from the surrounding area;
- the pedestrian link from Waterloo to Hungerford Bridge;
- and how the site will be serviced.

SBC is exploring with Shell and their joint venture partners Lend Lease an integrated Masterplan for both sites; a common landscaping strategy and design; complementary schemes; coordinated strategies for transport, servicing and retailing; coordinated project management and construction; and a shared commitment to the early opening of the re-landscaped Jubilee Gardens.

SBC has also been looking at the economic prospects of bringing forward the Jubilee Gardens/Hungerford car park site development. Funding is expected to come from the National

## Funding

Lottery, private donations, capital contributions from the arts-related office building, and the proposed multiplex cinema on the Hungerford car park site. Funds for non-arts elements such as the park, Queen's Walk and pedestrian routes would come from regeneration budgets and contributions from neighbouring commercial developments.

The Arts Council of England has indicated that up to £25 million will be available towards the arts component of the Masterplan, subject to applications meeting the Arts Council's criteria. The Royal Festival Hall, a Grade 1 listed building, has received an in-principle commitment of £12.5 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund for its renovation and refurbishment.

## Retail strategy

Work is also underway on a retail strategy looking at how retail can bring mixed use to the site and be developed to support the arts experience, re-enforce the South Bank as a cultural destination and complement other retail in the area.

Locum Destination Consulting's retail strategy paper (completed December 2000) argues that the mix of commercial and cultural elements on the South Bank should itself define 'cultural retail' for the visitor. This is not about retailing culture, but about creating an urban environment with a plethora of artistic, retail and catering choices for the visitor.

A strong and appealing commercial offer, consistent with the SBC brand, will support the arts programme and bring the site to life. SBC can already compete as an integrated cultural destination on an international scale. Now it can take the next leap forward and redefine the cultural destination's reach and relevance, both architecturally and commercially.

The redevelopment of the South Bank destination will be significantly strengthened if supported by unique, high-quality retail that is thematically connected with the aspirations of the SBC. Such retail will contribute to the palpable 'sense of place' and will emerge as a commercial destination in its own right, co-located and intertwined with the world-class arts and culture destination already existing on the South Bank.