

Carlsberg

On 1 November 2006 Carlsberg will launch an open international ideas competition for the development of a new city district on the Carlsberg brewery site in the centre of Copenhagen, a site that will be vacated in 2008 when Carlsberg moves production to Fredericia. ARKITEKTEN spoke with Carlsberg Properties director Lars Holten Petersen about his visions and hopes for the new area.

by Birgitte Kleis

Birgitte Kleis: Why is Carlsberg holding a design competition for this new city district?

Lars Holten Petersen: We are doing it because we have a wonderfully exciting project here. We have an opportunity to change Copenhagen by creating a whole new city district. I think that anyone who thinks about it can immediately imagine things it could be exciting to do with the site, and it's important to bring all those good ideas out into the open. That is why we created a kind of forum for public debate in which anyone can tell us what they think we should do – or not do – with the site.

So far, people have sent in 90-100 ideas, and it's really inspiring reading. We have of course received a very broad spectrum of ideas, everything from one suggestion that we turn the site into one big nature kindergarten to a proposal that we build a four-hundred-metre-high building. I would never have imagined that an 80 year old man from Kalundborg would write to us with suggestions about what we should do with the site. It testifies to a very broad interest, and that's really positive. Now we want a professional look taken at all the options and ideas, and we hope we get that from this competition.

BK: Does Carlsberg have any ideas about how the area should be developed?

LHP: Well, we do have a commercial goal – to earn a lot of money for Carlsberg – but we also want to do something that we at Carlsberg can be proud of and which gives us a good image. We are always going to be part of this area, and we're always going to be associated with whatever comes out of it all. That makes it an even greater challenge, because it's not a hit-and-run project we simply make a ton of money on and then travel to Brazil and forget all about it. We still have a presence in the area, and we want to be connected with it. So it has to be something that the city and its residents will like and, seen in a broader perspective, hopefully also something everyone in Denmark will like.

BK: Have you determined how many housing units and business units should be built in the area?

LPH: No, not at all. Everything is completely open. Our own opinion is that it should be an urban district, and the value of an urban environment is that it is an experience for people to be there or live there. It should be the story told in the district that makes it exciting. It should be exciting in a way that attracts people, because we perceive an urban environment to be a place where there are many people. People come to the city for many different reasons: some people because they live or work there; others because they want to shop or have a special experience. So the whole project has to be judged on a basis of whether we can make it exciting and attract as many people as possible.

BK: Gehl Architects put together a proposal showing how the district could develop, and that proposal contains five key words: identity, activity, structure, sustainability and development. What do those words mean in this context?

LPH: The site has a history and an identity, and we don't want to distance ourselves from that – we actually want to add onto it. We want this new district to build upon what was there before. We want to continue the story about the brewer that moved to the Valby area in 1847 and created an urban environment and activity in a place where there wasn't anything but farms, and we want that to be the theme story for the new district. Carlsberg itself changed from being a patriarchal, almost mum-pop-and-children company that took care of its workers to its current incarnation as a multinational group. That's also a story that needs to be told throughout the new district. In other words, we want to link the old times with what is new and forward-looking.

The future of both our society and Copenhagen is about defining how we will make a living in the future. Previously, we made a living from industry, but we can't make both ends meet here that way any more. And then we have to find something new upon which we can build our lives and add to the story that began 150 years ago.

BK: *I suppose you need to be very responsible to open and develop an area that used to be inaccessible to the public?*

LPH: Yes, it's very humbling. We are taking on a huge responsibility, and that's also why we hope to get some proposals that give us a clear indication of how things should be changed and that lay the groundwork for realising the urban area in a way that's fitting.

BK: *You don't build an urban area in one day, you know. Over how many years will it need to be developed?*

LPH: I have a picture of how to build urban areas that anyone – at least anyone with children – will recognise. Before you have kids, you have certain very fixed ideas of how things should be done, and you know exactly what must be done and what mustn't be done. Then when you have children, it quickly turns out that the world looks a little different: it's actually a bit more nuanced than it was before. And at some point you also realise that your kids are growing up and want to do things themselves. As a parent, you can't lock them into the world you want them to be in: you have to realise that they will figure things out for themselves, and they'll be exposed to influences they will have to handle on their own. It's the same with urban areas. You can give them a base and a framework, but at some point they take over and develop on their own terms. We want to set out some values or directions that will characterise the development of this urban area. We reckon there'll be a period of ten to fifteen years in which the area will undergo constant development. It is important that it doesn't stand still, but actually develops in line with the rest of society.

BK: *Have you considered how you can create physical cohesion between the site and the surrounding city? Today there's literally a wall around the site.*

LHP: There is a wall, or at least a customs barrier, around the site, so the only entrance today is along Ny Carlsberg Vej. What we describe to each other is opening the site up - and of course we are not going to have a fence - but we also need to find a way that this new urban district can communicate with the neighbourhoods around it. The Vesterbro and Søndemarken districts, the Vestre Kirkegård cemetery and the very traditional residential neighbourhoods of Valby circle the Carlsberg site, and one of the major challenges will be to design a scheme that has quality of its own but also gives a boost to the neighbouring areas. We see the site as a future new urban centre, but to play a role it should of course be in harmony with its surroundings. We don't want it to be an isolated island like the Forbidden City in Beijing, but an urban environment openly connected with its surroundings while also reflecting the fact that it is pointing forward.

BK: *Will it be an urban area with tall buildings, and will its building density be like that of Vesterbro or Valby?*

LHP: The building density will be like it is in Vesterbro, maybe even higher. But we don't want it to block traffic like Vesterbro does, so we hope all cars will stay below ground. We don't want them just to be parked underground; we want them to drive underground, too, to make the area attractive. In our opinion, heavy traffic ruins a city. We actually think we can build an urban environment that is denser than Vesterbro but seems much more open, friendly and accessible.

BK: *You mention 'social sustainability' in your description of the competition. Does that mean there will be all different kinds of housing?*

LHP: We want the area to provide room for as many different people as possible so that the district isn't just reserved for people with a certain income level or people of a certain persuasion. Carlsberg is a company that wants to have a dialogue with everyone about its products, and we want this new urban area to be festive, folksy and fun. We want there to be happiness and activity.

BK: *What kind of references do you have in mind: the Ørestad district or Freetown Christiania?*

LHP: Definitely not Ørestad. I'm actually thinking of Christiania, matching a freetown with modern buildings in a modern city, but with the same liveliness and diversity.

BK: *Will there be room for schools and businesses, too?*

LHP: Absolutely. We don't want it to be a residential neighbourhood. That wouldn't be urban in my mind. It's okay to have housing in the area, but it must be on the city's terms, unlike, for example, Havnestad, where things are the other way around and you could actually justify asking if there is any urban element left. In our conceptual framework, an urban district is a confrontation in the positive sense of the word: you are constantly in contact with other people and exposed to things you perhaps didn't quite expect, and you meet people who are strange and exciting. You are confronted with things all the time, and that's what you experience when you're in an urban environment. It is boring if an urban area is predictable: cities should constantly expose you to new perspectives.

BK: *When will you launch the competition?*

LPH: We will launch it on 1 November, and entries must be submitted by the end of February. Then we hope to have a decision somewhere around 1 April.

BK: *You're launching it as an open international design competition, but I've heard you also invited a number of non-Danish architectural firms in advance?*

LHP: We pre-invited BaumanLyons Architects of the UK, Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden Architects and Urbanists of Canada; WEST 8 from the Netherlands, Germany's Behnisch Architekten and, lastly, Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue from Spain.

We don't doubt for a second that all the good Danish firms will enter the competition, but the City of Copenhagen wants to make sure that top names outside Denmark with an analytical approach to urban planning participate as well.

BK: *What will be the carrot for those who win?*

LHP: It's the chance to be our advisor or consultants all the way through in developing this new urban district. We also intend to launch design competitions for each of the individual sites when we get to the point where we want to start building.

BK: *How large an area are we talking about?*

LHP: We have 33 hectares. Of course, there are a few areas that are especially vulnerable, for example some parks that can't be developed. There are also some listed buildings we have to leave alone, but we need to put them in the whole context. The listed buildings are very different. There are also some buildings that are not listed but could perhaps be used for something new. Finding out how to do that will be one of the challenges.

BK: *Should the name of the new district be Carlsberg?*

LHP: Yes, we think that's a good idea.