

First look at Earls Court's £8bn regeneration

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The developers behind the £8 billion Earls Court regeneration plan today laid out their vision of a “best of London” classical landscape of crescents, squares and parks.

The detailed design of the first phase of the scheme - requiring the demolition of the famous exhibition centre - were revealed today for the first time ahead of submissions to Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham councils.

A new “lost river park” covering five acres will run through the middle of the site and follow the line of the submerged Counters Creek stream. Just over three acres of the park will be open to the public.

Landscaping will be carried out by top gardener Andy Sturgeon who was awarded “Best in Show” at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2010. He will oversee planting of 450 new trees and 20,000 new flowers and shrubs.

There will also be two crescents, garden squares and a new public space the size of Sloane Square.

Gary Yardley, development director at developers Capco said: “We are trying to create the quality of the best green spaces you find in London, it is a modern interpretation of the best parts of local areas in Kensington, Chelsea and Fulham.”



There will also be a new high street running east to west through the 77 acre site.

The details were revealed after Capco said it would contribute more than £450 million to a package of “Section 106” community facilities including a primary school, a leisure centre, health facilities and 750 affordable homes.

Capco has already started work on one part of the project called Lillie Square where more than 800 new homes on what was a car park will go on sale in the New Year. It is expected to start knocking down the art deco Earls Court concert and exhibition venue in 2015.

The scheme, which is expected to take at least 15 years to complete, has proved hugely controversial with residents on two council estates that will have to be demolished, with residents rehoused in new blocks.

Campaigner Jos Bell said: “These extra hanging baskets and trees are just a figleaf to make the whole scheme appear green. But the fact remains that it will destroy community infrastructure and is already destroying key elements of the local economy.”

Hammersmith MP Andy Slaughter said: “Boris Johnson and the Conservative-controlled Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea Councils are destroying communities, skilled jobs and historic sites to please their developer friends and speed up the social cleansing of west London. An integrated community that includes people from every walk of life will be replaced with a soulless development.”

A legal challenge to the scheme brought by residents failed last month but more court attempts to block it are thought likely.

Cllr Andrew Johnson, H&F Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “All council tenants and resident home owners on the estates are being offered new homes in the redevelopment. Many people tell us that they are looking forward to this and the other neighbourhood improvements. Talk of ‘social cleansing’ is ludicrous.” ■