

First look at London's future Design District

A permanent home for the capital's creative industries



The Design District will be a purpose-built creative neighbourhood that will exist in perpetuity.

Dedicated to London's creative community, the new Design District is a permanent hub for makers and thinkers driving forward the fields of design, art, tech, food, fashion, craft and music.

The Design District is a striking and eclectic addition to the city, occupying a one-hectare plot at the heart of Greenwich Peninsula, beside the O2 and NOW Gallery. It will provide space for work, play and cultural pursuits for around 1,800 people in the creative sector.

A brave architectural vision for London's creative future

The urban developer behind the regeneration of Greenwich Peninsula, Knight Dragon, has set out to deliver a purpose-built creative neighbourhood that will exist in perpetuity – a dedicated district to preserve and stimulate the creative innovation and enterprise that has been integral to London's global identity for centuries.



Permanent workspace for the creative industry: open, naturally-ventilated space for 'messy' work in one of Architecture 00's two buildings.

"The simplest and most efficient route would have been to create a symmetrical layout of homogenous, large-scale workspaces, but the Design District will be a richer and more complex neighbourhood, with low-lying buildings sitting cheek by jowl around a series of asymmetric courtyards."
– Matt Dearlove, head of design at Design District and Greenwich Peninsula

Masterplanner Hannah Corlett is determined that the district should be a distinct 'piece of city', embodying the architectural diversity, unpredictable geometry and authentic character found in creative neighbourhoods that evolved organically over centuries.



From left: Matt Dearlove, head of design at Design District and Greenwich Peninsula; Hannah Corlett, masterplanner and founding director of HNNA.

“The Design District shares qualities with the scale and tight grain of pre-industrial inner-city neighbourhoods. The height, scale and massing of the buildings is small and human-scale in relation to the tall, large-footprint masses of the surroundings.”

– Hannah Corlett, masterplanner and founding director of HNNA

16 buildings designed by eight innovative architects

To achieve this, eight architects, including HNNA, have each taken on the design of two buildings, ensuring a range of architectural voices are expressed. Those voices belong to:

- 6a Architects
- Adam Khan Architects
- Architecture 00
- Barozzi Veiga
- David Kohn Architects
- HNNA (previously Assemblage)
- Mole Architects
- Selgas Cano

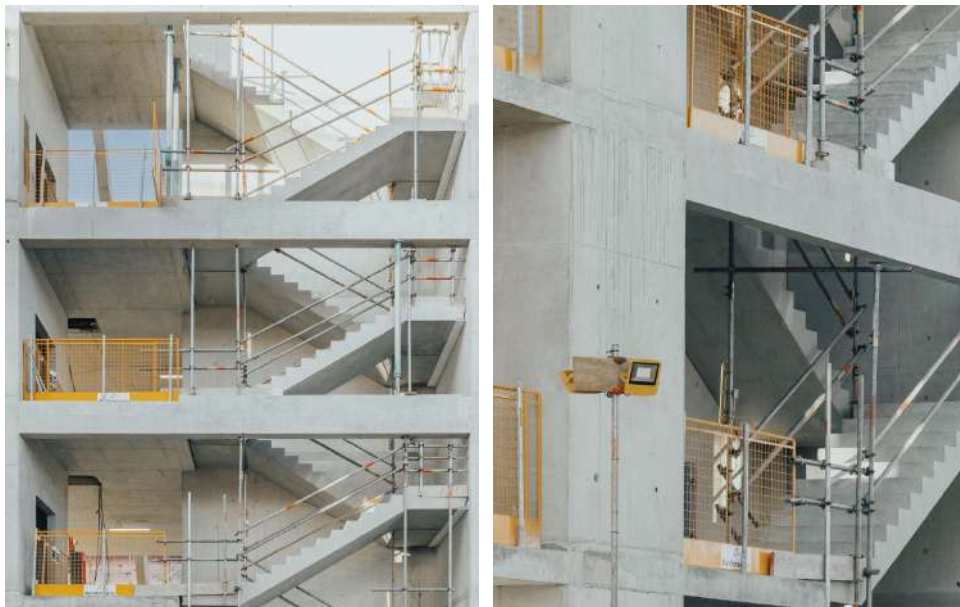
The eight architects were handpicked – there was no competition and no-one turned the invitation down – and asked to design a pair of buildings “blind” from each other, to ensure diversity in the district’s buildings. Through this process, each practice was given the freedom to design independently and individually, without the restrictions that a prescribed materials palette or the design codes usually associated with masterplans might impose.

“This masterplan has the bone structure of the places people naturally like to hang out. Small lanes and courtyards will breed creativity and make the Design District feel neighbourly in a way familiar to London.”

– Adam Khan, director of Adam Khan Architects

Designed for affordability

The only significant stipulations were that each building should keep to a clear footprint to maintain the cohesiveness of the streets and public spaces, and that each architect should try to maximise affordability for tenants through all aspects of the design – for example, the brief required that each building had a single lift core and stair so that the floorplate dimensions would allow for natural ventilation, which reduces costs and energy consumption. These constraints forced the architects to think more creatively.



Single-core stairway, inside 6a Architects building, designed to maximise floorplate dimensions and affordability for tenants.

A unique environment to stimulate creativity

The result is a collection of truly extraordinary architecture in conversation, which replicates the complexities and contrasts of a creative city.

“We wanted to ensure that the district reflected the diverse architectural styles and embraced the ‘wit and mess’ that one often finds in

neighbourhoods that have grown organically over time. The challenge was to do that from scratch in one go and so we wanted architects who would look at the project through a very individual lens. Even though they would work from the same brief, we felt they would bring a great sense of individuality to their buildings.”

– Matt Dearlove, head of design at Design District and Greenwich Peninsula

This bold and playful combination of forms, colours and styles, stimulate the imagination – the ideal environment to inspire creative thinking, collaboration and bold new ideas.

The individual visions of multiple architects have created moments of serendipity – snippets of dialogue between buildings that could never have been planned or predicted with any other approach.



6a Architects' neighbourly decision to slope the front of their buildings gave light and views to surrounding structures and co-working yards.

For example, the contoured roof of Selgas Cano's transparent market building at the entrance to the site is unexpectedly paralleled in the undulating surfaces of HNNA's adjacent, all-white façade; whereas 6a Architects' neighbourly decision to slope the front of their harlequin-patterned building has gifted Barozzi Veiga's structure with a view across the central courtyard to its counterpart. The design of the outdoor areas is the work of Copenhagen-based landscape architects Schulze+Grassov.

“Good urban design considers how people, buildings and open spaces relate to each other. The Design District reinvents the idea of the city for the 21st century: a medina of buildings each with their own character, but sharing a

common DNA and approach to the public realm. Rather than forcing context and conformity upon its buildings, the Design District liberates them – it has a built-in eclecticism that is distinctly British. The open spaces are the glue that holds the district together, connecting buildings and encouraging interaction between businesses. The co-working yards at the heart of each cluster reference the working yards of the Industrial Revolution, with signature trees in each courtyard that will blossom at different times, so occupants will be exposed to the rhythm of the changing seasons as they work.”

– Oliver Schulze, founding partner at Schulze+Grassov

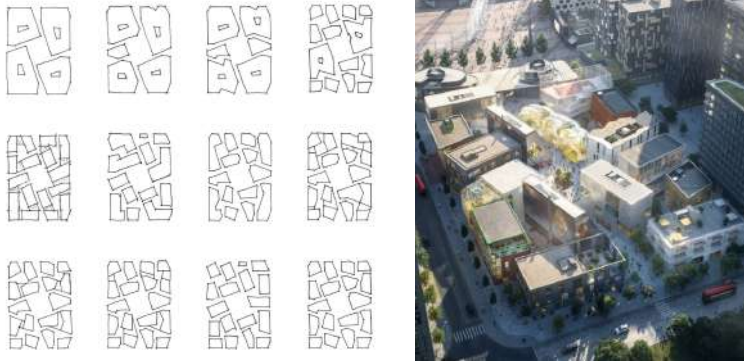


Spaces for meeting and working with neighbours in shared courtyards designed for all types of making and social gatherings.

Thanks to the irrepressible individuality of the architecture, the coherence of HNNA's masterplan and the shared landscape design, the Design District will have a clear sense of identity, an engagingly organic character, and a dynamic creative energy reflecting that of its tenants.

An intimate, eclectic alternative to 'big architecture'

HNNA's masterplan arranges the 16 buildings in four loose clusters, each with a shared courtyard at the centre, and a fifth, larger, courtyard area in the heart of the site. These public spaces are linked by an asymmetric network of pedestrian lanes, angled to disrupt sight lines and cultivate a sense of discovery and surprise as you navigate your way through.



From left: Sketches by HNNA show the evolution of the masterplan, which places buildings cheek by jowl to create a network of alleyways and courtyards; CGI of completed vision by Design District.

A refreshing counterpoint to the 'big architecture' that dominates the City, the tightly clustered low-rise buildings are designed to be human in scale, cultivating an atmosphere of intimacy akin to pre-industrial inner-city neighbourhoods that develop naturally over time.

"The continuity yet diversification of the buildings is deliberate and strategic. Variation and individualisation of building character is encouraged and supported, in a frame. This approach leverages the logic of the contemporary city: heterogeneity of feel, variety of offer, architectural pluralism, and yet cohesiveness in the whole."

– Hannah Corlett, masterplanner and founding director of HNNA

150,000 sq ft of workspace for 1,800 creatives open this autumn

Throughout 16 buildings will be versatile spaces, specialist workshops, studios, meeting rooms, pop-up sites, food and drink venues, destinations for leisure and cultural activity and even a rooftop multisports court – everything needed to nurture a vibrant creative community.



Only eight minutes from London Bridge, and within viewing distance of the O2, the Design District offers world class workspaces and destinations for culture.

A broad range of businesses, including ambitious start-ups, individual makers, and household-name enterprises are preparing to move in later in the year, taking the unique opportunity to be inspired by extraordinary architectural surroundings.



Mole Architects has designed two timber buildings that provide incredible environments for London's creative industries.

"The Design District is a bold experiment to introduce London's cultural vitality to a new piece of city."

– Hannah Corlett, masterplanner and founding director of HNN

In partnership with the GLA, purpose-built for affordability

One of the Design District's founding objectives is to provide affordable workspace to creative businesses of every scale. To achieve this, the team worked closely with the Mayor's Office and have secured recognition as an affordable provider by the Greater London Authority.

Aiming to start at £7 per sqm, rents will be scaled depending on the workspace to be rented and the size and needs of the tenant, and be reviewed regularly. In order to deliver a site-wide blended-rent target of £25 per sqm, larger organisations will be able to occupy buildings at commensurate rents that will reduce the rental burden on smaller businesses. This is designed to create an ecosystem of businesses of varying sizes, each contributing according to its means, and ensure that any individual or organisation that wishes to be part of the district can afford to find a home here and benefit from this unique creative environment.

"We have a determination to eschew that lazy 'follow the herd' thinking that so dominates new developments. As the Greenwich Peninsula project is twice the size of Soho it deserves fresh and bold thinking. Not that the creative industries are new. Quite the opposite. They have defined what is great about the UK and London for centuries. In no small part they have made London the global city and tourist destination it is today. Yet starved of cash and quality places to create, the sector has become a difficult career choice for so many. So we are going to play our part in changing that, by providing extraordinary workspaces at incredible value rents. Not temporary. Not tokenistic. Not cynical. The Design District is a real place for real people to take their ideas and create real things."

– Richard Margree, CEO Knight Dragon

Notes to editors

For more details, images, interviews and site visits, please contact Rupert Evans-Harding at designdistrict@zetteler.co.uk.

Although construction is currently paused in response to Covid-19* the Design District is aiming to complete the first few buildings to receive the first tenants later this year.

About Design District

At the heart of Greenwich Peninsula, the Design District is London's first permanent, purpose-built hub for the creative industries. A collection of 16 unique buildings designed by a team of eight leading architects, the District is designed to support an ecosystem of 1,800 creatives, encompassing individual makers, industry leaders, ambitious start-ups, ground-breaking enterprises and celebrated international studios.

designdistrict.co.uk

@designdistrictlondon

About HNNA

Founded by architect Hannah Corlett, HNNA (formerly Assemblage) is a London-based, female-led studio of urban designers and architects who combine research and practice to reconsider how cities are designed. As well as the masterplan for the Design District, HNNA's international projects have included designing the new Iraq parliament building and housing settlements for UN HABITAT and developing the Mayfair neighbourhood plan for Westminster.

hnna.co

***In response to Covid-19 the Design District construction site was closed on Tuesday 24 March ahead of government ruling**

The public health challenges we are facing in the UK, across Europe and around the world are unprecedented, and we must all play our part in slowing the spread of Covid-19. Design District is responding accordingly.

The health and safety of teams, contractors and community remain its priority, as always. The Design District's developer, Knight Dragon, has been in continuous dialogue with construction partners as they adapt working practices to align with guidance from the World Health Organisation and UK government.

As a result of the new measures put in place earlier this week, Knight Dragon's construction partners have concluded that they are unable to continue working without compromising the guidelines around social distancing. As a result, all construction sites across Greenwich Peninsula were closed on Tuesday 24 March ahead of government ruling. The Design District fully supports this decision and is doing as much as it can to support the safe and efficient closure of the site.

Knight Dragon will continue to monitor the advice of the UK government and health officials closely as the situation evolves and offer support to construction partners at this unprecedented and challenging time.

For the latest advice on COVID-19, please visit the National Health Service, UK Government, or World Health Organisation website.

Links to more information on the architects

- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/6a-architects
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/adam-khan-architects
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/architecture-00
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/barozzi-veiga
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/david-kohn-architects
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/hnna
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/mole-architects
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/selgascano
- designdistrict.co.uk/architecture/schulze-grassov