

Letters

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before publication

POWER PICTURE

I am writing concerning the image of Rafael Viñoly's proposed tower for the Battersea Power Station site (published on www.architectsjournal.co.uk, 08.12.08), recently produced by Battersea Power Station Community Group (BPSCG).

It looks awful and at first view you'd think it couldn't possibly be accurate. Indeed, the PR man for developer Real Estate Opportunities (REO) complains in the piece that the image is 'completely wrong' and accuses us of being irresponsible. As one who worked on the photomontage, I'm confident that the image is about right.

In any case, I recently wrote to REO on behalf of BPSCG, inviting the developer to produce its own image, or – better still – to place a CAD file of their tower in a virtual model of London so that everyone can assess its true impact. To date, REO has not done so, and I would like to extend this invitation to them again now.

Even if it turns out that we were wildly wrong and the tower is only half as high as shown, it's still not going to be acceptable

sticking up behind the Palace of Westminster. It will be pointless for REO to submit the scheme for planning permission in 2009, as it says it intends to do, as it's clear that the government is not going to allow it.

The private sector has proved itself to be systemically incapable of bringing about the successful repair and redevelopment of Battersea Power Station since it closed in 1983.

You will recall previous owner Parkview procrastinated for 13 years and walked away with £250 million of speculative gain in 2006. With its unfeasible tower, certain to be held up in the planning system, REO seems to be playing the same game.

Given the failure of these companies to rescue the Grade II*-listed building, there is now a strong case for the redevelopment of Battersea Power Station to be done as public works. Such a project would give employment to thousands of construction workers in the depths of the recession.

We proposed that the building could house the new Energy Technologies Institute when it was founded in 2007. I can think of at least two other cultural organisations currently looking for

extra space. The vacant site around the station offers considerable scope for new public housing in various forms of tenure.

An unlikely plan? Not compared to that shown on BPSCG's photomontage.
Keith Garner, London SW11

JOE BLOGGING

The rules seem pretty clear about what you can and can't do without planning consent – in theory. But when it comes to an actual house – with real walls and boundaries it doesn't seem to be so easy.

My local authority thinks that the definition of 'rear wall' is open to interpretation and needs clarification from 'above'.

So I put the circumstances to the man on j.bloggs@communities.gsi.gov.uk. The first response I received was: 'Thank you for your enquiry. The department is unable to comment on individual planning applications. Your local planning authority will be able to advise.'

When I rephrased the problem in general terms, the reply came back: 'The department is unable to give a definitive interpretation