

ARCHITECTURAL DILEMMAS IN GOTHENBURG

Professions and politics in the design of areas of national importance in cultural heritage policy

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Gothenburg city organises a design-developer competition. The site is in the centre of the city, close to Götaplatsen, which is the most significant place in Gothenburg. The following land allocation agreement established in 2017 requires the developer to carry out a parallel assignment for the new design. The developer then invited design teams to compete a second time. However, the architectural offices behind the winning design in the 2016 competition were excluded and could therefore not take part. This is the first critical dilemma in the plan and architecture project. The winner in this parallel assignment is a design team including the same architectural firm that reviewed the design proposals in the first competition. This is the second dilemma. There is a business relationship involved in the process, challenging the ethical code of conduct adopted by Swedish Architects.

After the jury singled out the best solution for the assignment, a new political majority stopped the architecture from being implemented in 2023 due to the design (lack of a classical style) and the choice of the urban design in the contribution (lack of a closed block). Instead, a brand-new solution must be drawn up. This is the third critical dilemma accomplished by a specific policy for architecture and urban design. The rules of the game have been changed.

The findings show how ethical principles intended to steer professional actors have been overrun by politicians demanding a specific architectural style in a different urban form. In this case, the city is acting in the combined plan and architecture project. both as a landowner and organiser of a competition, a co-organiser of a parallel commission, and an authority responsible for the detailed development plan allowing a new use and design of the site.

KEYWORDS

Critical architectural dilemma, Competition, Parallel commission, Cultural value, Architectural quality, Profession, Politics

INTRODUCTION

The location for the story is strategically located in the inner city of Gothenburg in Sweden. The plot is used for parking and will be given new content with housing and businesses. The site is a part of the national heritage interest run by state authorities and regulated in the Environmental Code (Ch. 3, § 6). The National Heritage Board has singled out the inner city as a cultural environment of national interest for protection and preservation (RAÄ, 2024). The park in the area is also seen as a valuable environment by the city, including a theatre, a city library, and a hotel. They are protected in the local preservation program. The power over the site and its cultural environment is shared between the city as the local planning authority and the county board as the state's representative with the task of safeguarding areas of national heritage interests. The County Administrative Board must disapprove detailed development plans that risk significantly damaging national interests. What constitutes tangible damage is a rule in the law that, when applied, must be interpreted in a specific context. In the area, several strong interests meet that want to make their voices heard. For this reason, the design of the plot in Gothenburg turns into a key issue involving several critical dilemmas. Solving the design problem on the site becomes an issue with strong ethical principles, which is highlighted in the article. The ambition is both to make these critical dilemmas visible and to describe the decisive stages in the plan and architecture project.

The story begins with an open design-developer competition organised by the city through the real estate board. The criteria for judging proposals on the site included both urban design qualities and land price. The competition was followed by a parallel assignment with four invited design teams (Göteborgs stad, 2016a; Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2020). This assignment was arranged by the developer, Serneke, in collaboration with the city and Swedish Architects. Serneke is the building actor behind the winning contribution in the design-developer competition. The plan and architecture project become gradually exposed to a political power game that excludes the winning solution produced in the parallel assignment from being implemented (Göteborgs stad, 2023). Quality in design, heritage values, cultural-historical traces, and classical architecture are transformed into competing key concepts in the case.

One of the advantages of studying a plan and architecture project that have been the subject of conflicting interests and debate is that there are traces

left behind by the key players. These remains are understood through close reading of documents based on an analytical framework that puts architecture, professional ethics, and politics in focus. The case shows a critical alteration: the design of buildings in an urban plan pattern lacking historical anchoring on the site of national heritage interest (Acantus, 2021). The study demonstrates that architecture and urban planning are both about power, decisions, approaches, and interpretation of intentions and history, which in turn are visualised through drawings and illustrations. Professional judgements from the competition in 2016 and the parallel commission in 2022 stand against political disapproval of contemporary architecture. Politicians demand the image of 19th-century city at the site.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the article is to describe, show, and understand a plan and architecture project and its critical dilemmas from a professional perspective. The research question in the study involves critical dilemmas in a plan and architecture project. Partly a professional dilemma that concerns ethical principles for members of Swedish Architects who have been suppressed in the planning process; and partly an architectural-political dilemma where the relationship between politics and profession is a fundamental issue in competition processes that aim to implement the winning solution appointed

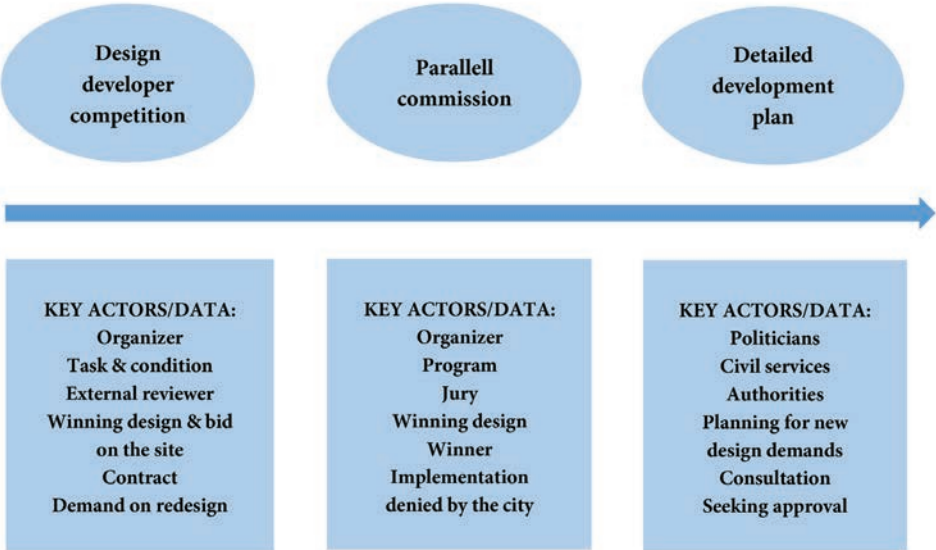


Figure 1: Overview of the three actions (competition, parallel commission, detailed development plan), key actors, and data in the case study.

by professionals. Dilemma in this context refers to the code of conduct and ethical principles adopted by Swedish Architects. The method to investigate the critical dilemmas is based on a case-study approach. An overview of the plan and architecture project includes a process with separate actions, key actors, and data:

The plan and architecture project are investigated as a case study through close reading of key documents, site visits, and analysis of the design, with the support of architectural criticism and cultural compensation. The methodology makes it possible to present a rich story that highlights professional and architectural political dilemmas. By visiting the site, I have been able to understand the case based on its physical context and design proposals. This method provides knowledge in three directions: a) by seeing and carefully observing the site through key concepts; b) by being in, and experiencing the area via my body and senses; and c) by imagining the design submissions on the plot as built environments and judging them based on criteria (Rossman and Rollins, 2012; Lawrenz, Keiser & Lavoie, 2003; Tabačková, 2024). The understanding of cultural compensation in urban design have been developed in research projects. The city planning administration applies compensation as a typical problem-solving practice and to justify exploration in areas of culture heritage. This approach in urban design has been conceptualized in Sweden and Finland (Grahm Danielson, Rönn & Swedberg, 2014; Persson, 2014; Grahm Danielson, Rönn & Swedberg, 2015; Rönn & Grahm Danielson, 2020; Kouzelis, Rönn & Teräviäinen, 2022; Dore, 2023).

Documents

The story is about a plot that provides both limitations and opportunities for the plan and architecture project to contribute with values and qualities. Four types of documents have been selected for the study. Firstly, *project-specific documents* produced for the design-developer competition and the subsequent parallel assignment. This includes advertisements, a competition program, competition proposals, an evaluation reports, an invitation to an assignment, architecture contributions, a jury report, and a detailed development plan proposal with investigations of the cultural heritage in the area. Secondly, *local governing documents*: these guidelines are adopted by politicians and applied to varying degrees by officials responsible for design and urban planning. This applies to land allocation policy, architecture policy, master plan, and conservation program. Thirdly, *national guidelines and*

regulations in the law: of particular importance in this case the Environmental Code, the Planning and Building Act and the requirements for arenas of national heritage interests, competition rules, and ethical professional ethics programs adopted by Swedish Architects, as well as recommendations for parallel assignments. Fourthly, *articles and debates in the press:* selected data address the relationship between architecture, politics, and professionals that have a direct impact on how city planning administration acts in the plan and architecture project. This is the game plan for critical dilemmas that gradually become clearer through the case study.

The site - location and conditions

The plot is surrounded by a park, a city library, a theatre, a museum, an art gallery, a hotel, and a university department. The area has a cultural environment of national heritage interest and is part of the conservation program for objects of cultural and historical value. The site has previously been used for pleasure and recreation. In 1886, a circus was built on the site, which was in use until 1969. I attended one of the last gigs in the circus building and listened to the English rock band Fleetwood Mac. Since 1994, the site has been used for a two-level parking garage with 287 parking spaces (Fig 2). It is this plot in the inner city that politicians wanted to transform through a plan and architecture project. As the area is part of the national heritage interest as well as the local conservation program for cultural environments, all changes that require a new detailed plan need to be adapted to the cultural-historical values at the site. The County Administrative Board needs to approve detailed development plans in areas of national interest. Power is shared. The city cannot alone decide on the new buildings in the plan and architecture project.

The plot has been the subject of physical planning since 2015 through the decision to announce a design-developer competition, with the intention to transfer the land to the builder producing the best submission. In 2017, a land allocation agreement was drawn up between the property board in Gothenburg and Serneke, the builder behind the winning proposal. Since then, the conditions for the design and the detailed development plan have been dramatically changed through political interventions. According to the 2022 master plan, the recommendation is to supplement the inner city with housing, services, and workplaces (Göteborgs stad, 2024). Orientation for urban design is high-density and mixed use of the land. The master plan also refers to the city's architectural policy, which highlights a development



Figure 2. The site in the invitation 2016 to the design-developer competition. The area contains a park, a two-story garage, a theatre, a city library, and an L-shaped hotel. Source: Göteborgs stad, 2016.

of Gothenburg into (a) an attractive city with a strong identity, (b) a city for people, and (c) becoming a courageous role model in architecture (Göteborgs stad, 2018).

In 2023, the city planning administration received new directives for the plan and architecture project contrary to architectural policy. The renewal of the site must be based on design in a classical style and traditional blocks (Göteborgs stad, 2023). At the same time, the development of the area should be respectful of the site's cultural history, reflect the present, and promote the city's identity for the future (Göteborgs stad, 2024). The detailed development plan ruling the site is from 1947 and prescribes the land to be used only for park and general purposes. Housing with space for businesses on the ground floor is therefore an alteration that requires a new detailed development plan. The park on site is protected as a particularly valuable green environment with the support of the Planning and Building Act (Ch 8, §13). The cultural-historical qualities of the area, its architectural uniqueness, and its importance in the urban space must not be distorted. Since 1997, the plot has been a part of the national heritage interest for the inner city,

protected in the Environmental Code (RAÄ, 2024). The description of national heritage interest in the area extends from the city's founding in the 17th century, including the construction of fortifications, to the 19th and 20th century expansions and urban transformations with associated plan patterns, building tradition, and character. Key aspects in designated expressions of heritage values are the park, its size and functions as public space, the trees, the theatre building, cultural institutions, the architecture, and urban design in terms of history, experience, and visual interaction (Acentus, 2021; Norconsult, 2024). However, the national heritage interest description is all too broad and must be made operational by interpretations and clarifications through special investigation; this is a practice in Gothenburg when development takes place in environments of great importance (Rönn, 2018). In this case, the city planning administration has access to two reports by hired consultants presenting the cultural values of the site. They identify, describe, and assess the impact of the development on national heritage interest. The needed knowledge seems to be at hand.

The mission

In 2015, the real estate office in Gothenburg was assigned by the real estate committee *“to find an actor who, together with the city, wants to develop the site with high ambitions regarding quality and sustainability”* (Göteborgs stad, 2016a, p.1). The officials describe the site as a garage with 287 parking spaces located in a park surrounded by the city library, theatre building, and hotel. The political mission is to draw up a detailed development plan for the area that enables the alteration of the plot for housing with space for business on the ground floor. But first, the organiser must define the nature of the quality issues that should steer the design of the site and the choice of developer for the plan and architecture project. The city must thereafter arrange a design-developer competition including tenders for land as the governing criteria for ranking proposals, and subsequently single out a winner.

Officials at the real estate office estimate that the site has space for 100 apartments and space for business. The official would like to see a higher degree of development. However, volumes and design have to be studied further in the planning process. As a foundation for the development, the real estate office, in collaboration with the city planning administration, put forward seven urban qualities to guide both the design and the assessment of proposals in the competition. The objective is to create an inner-city block for everyday life, learning, experiences, and meetings. The submissions must

show an environment that makes use of the park, creates paths, and improves the site's connections to the surroundings. The design must also emphasise the identity, historical significance, and spatial conditions and promote changing of activities regarding the outdoor climate (Göteborgs stad, 2016b). Finally, climate impact must be reduced. These are soft qualities to be realised in the competition with a high degree of interpretation. Simultaneously, the officials want developers to compete for the land, using price as a means of competing. The site is intended to be transferred to the developer who (a) accepts the competition requirements, (b) fulfils the design qualification, and (c) offers the highest price for the land. Both housing for rent and tenant ownership are to be built on the site.

Land allocation policy

Design-developer competitions for making residential areas for single-family houses have been organised by municipalities since the 1960s and 1970s (Sköld Partner, 1990). This form of competition increased during the 1980s' deregulation of the building sector and the changed focus to housing (Rönn, 2023; Bodström, 1994). Change of tax rules and reducing financial support from government agencies also followed the emerging belief in market forces. The municipalities gradually began to regulate this form of competition in local governing guidelines. In 2007, the property committee in Gothenburg decided to draw up the first policy for land allocation for housing. In the same year, a group of officials travelled to Helsinki on a study visit to learn about the Finnish experiences from the design-developer competition (Fastighetskontoret, 2008). The following land allocation policy is described by the officials as a guideline *"directing the city's will—in terms of housing diversity, ecology, accessibility, social commitments, as well as competition and diversity in the market—is expressed"* (Fastighetskontoret, 2009). The policy is a brief document without references to the competition as a tool for transferring municipally owned land to companies.

Since 2014, land allocation is regulated by law. According to the regulation (SFS 2014:899), municipalities must adopt guidelines that report starting points, objectives, and fundamental conditions for the transfer of land, handling routines, and principles for pricing land. It is a very simple law, one page without sanctions. Despite this, the law has been criticised by municipalities for being an unnecessary limitation on their self-determination. A closer examination of the city's archive shows that land allocation policy in Gothenburg has been the subject of several political initiatives. The policy

dates from 2007 and has subsequently been revised in 2009, 2011, 2014, and 2018. One explanation for the political interests is the 1980s' deregulation of residential buildings. The land became an increasingly important local key resource for residential supply. Another explanation is the need for clarifying the rules of the game and transparency when municipalities transfer publicly owned land to private companies.

Competition is a concept highlighted in the land allocation policy in Gothenburg in opposition to the direct allocation. A worrying pattern emerges here. There seems to be a risk of unauthorised favouring of some companies. Direct assignment of land has no competitors and is only reported internally. Design-developer competitions, on the other hand, are publicly announced on the city's website and distributed to companies. The competition is on one hand typically seen as an example of transferring land to competing developers; on the other hand, officials regard this as a resource-demanding method that should only be used for special cases. According to the policy in Gothenburg, the property committee decides on competitions and land allocation. The officials carry out the design-developer competitions, review the proposals, and select winners. So far, there is a clear division between politics and administration in policy.

The current policy for land allocations in Gothenburg was adopted in 2021 by the city council. Competition for the land through bidding is a main rule of the policy. But there is no detailed regulation of procedure in the policy. The competitions are carried out by officials, and the administration steers the competition through programs, runs the planning process, ranks proposals, and assigns the winners. The land is then transferred to the winning developer through political decision. In the policy, the land allocation is defined as: *"a right for an interested party to negotiate with the city for a specific period of time and on certain given conditions regarding the conditions for the implementation of new development within the current land area that the city owns"* (Göteborgs stad, 2021, p. 5). The implementation of a winning submission is regulated by an agreement between the city and the developer behind the proposal. According to the policy, new buildings must contribute to sustainable urban development from an economic, ecological, and social point of view. This is an overarching goal, which has been supplemented with the following objectives for the transformation of land:

- **Diversity in housing:** The city is looking for a variety of housing in terms of rental and ownership, housing types, apartment sizes, and price levels. The intention is to create the conditions for a socially mixed composition of housing.
- **Social sustainability and social commitments:** The city must consider the building actor's social responsibility when allocating land. The city can, in this case, require social housing, apartments for households with special needs, and space for childcare and elderly care.
- **Ecological sustainability:** The city would like new buildings without a negative impact on the surroundings. The building management must be energy and resource efficient. Climate and environmental impact must be minimised, and the buildings must have a good indoor climate and outdoor environment. Developers must have a long-term quality and an environmental profile.
- **Business space:** The city promotes integrating housing and space for business in the development. The aim is to create a mixed-use site in the city.
- **Competition and diversity in the market:** The city will support good competitive conditions to support the production of housing and business space at affordable costs. A variety of actors—both large and small companies—will be given the opportunity to become established in the same city areas.
- **Economic conditions, stability, and cooperation:** The city is looking for building actors with good finances and stable organisational conditions when transferring land. Consideration must be given to long-term management, leases/ownership for housing, new thinking, engagement, and collaboration to create a good environment. Experience from previous projects may influence the choice of partner.

Method for land allocation

The design-developer competition is a form of competitive operation based on the belief in the market and its ability to meet housing needs. From the 2021 policy for land allocations in Gothenburg, it appears that the city prioritises transferring land via competition in design or by bidding on sites. Transferring public land through direct allocation may only take place “*when the real estate board finds that there are special reasons*” (Ibid., 2021, p. 9). The administration officials must obtain political permission for direct

allocation. This form for transferring land to companies is not available for inspection by citizens and control by competitors. According to the policy, direct allocations do not become reported on the city's website.

When organising a design-developer competition, the real estate office must produce a proposal including assessment criteria for the ranking of submissions, but it is the politicians who finally establish competition conditions and decide on the transformation of land. The policy states that the city may conduct a design-developer competition if there are requests for design qualities, use, and function of the site. This is the case for the plan and architecture project at hand. The policy also points out that the city can have an *“open tender procedure in order to illustrate the willingness to pay for building rights”* and to give the administration a *“better foundation for future valuations”* of the land (Ibid., 2021, p. 9). In this case, design and bidding on sites will then become competitive criteria.

The design-developer competition 2016 has both urban qualities and tenders for the land as assessment criteria. Seen from this perspective, the competition follows the city's land allocation policy in the search for market values of sites. The alternative would have been to report the market value of the site in the competition program and let the companies compete on quality instead of price. In this strategy, the winner will be the company behind the proposal that has the best quality—not the developer with the highest bid. In the architecture and planning projects, the organiser sees the price of the land as a means of competition as well as a complement to the requested urban qualities on the site. This is problematic since quality and price operate at different levels and time frames.

THE DESIGN-DEVELOPER COMPETITION

In 2016, representatives from Gothenburg City present the competition at Mipim in Cannes for an international audience. Mipim is a large annual trade fair for the civil engineering sector. The chairman of the property committee and the property director proudly inform about the plans for the plot and its attractive location (Göteborgs stad, 2016a; Göteborgs stad, 2016b; Göteborgs stad, 2016c). Despite the international presentation, the following invitation to the competition is only in Swedish. As a starting point for the design, the organiser provides urban qualities needed in the city, the block, and the site. Qualities on these three levels of scale are described in more detail in the invitation as objectives for the design and assessment of submissions.

Proposals must be submitted anonymously to the real estate office under a motto.

In the competition program, site tendering doesn't initially appear as a decisive criterion in ranking the submissions. The requirement for anonymity in the competition rather gives the impression that the urban qualities should guide the assessment of contributions that meet the qualification requirements. The companies behind the design of buildings are unknown to reviewers during the assessment. The anonymity is intended to guarantee a fair and professional evaluation. The one who has the copyright to the drawings is therefore secret information, hidden from the reviewers. Steering for outcome should be assessment criteria and quality in design proposals.

Submission requirements and assessment criteria

To be considered qualified in the 2016 competition, the submissions must demonstrate a very good understanding of the site and its conditions (OKK+ & Fastighetskontoret, 2016). This has to be reported in conceptual sketches, illustrations, CVs, project organisation, references, and a description of how the intentions are to be met. The companies should also present their tender for the plot and show how they plan to finance and organise the implementation of the submission. The urban qualities in the design proposals are going to be assessed on the following criteria:

- The site should be considered on several scales.
- The following overall orientations should be considered: inviting lines and logical connections; an inner-city environment with space for everyday life; learning, experiences, and meetings.
- The character of the block should include clear street environments, with attention to the interesting diversity of the park.
- The paths and places on the site should improve connections in the city, emphasise the identity, and constitute a catalyst in the development of surrounding areas.
- The layout, volume, and land use should promote openness and strength in the streets,
- The meeting between buildings and park should be developed based on its historical significance and support a clear spatiality, including openness to changing seasons and alteration of activities.

- To create conditions for ecological and urban sustainability through low local and global environmental impact, a good foundation for a climate-smart lifestyle and inclusive environment.

The competition generated 13 proposals. OKK+ was hired for the evaluation of the design of the submissions. According to the assessment, only 7 entries meet the requested understanding of the site and the desired urban qualities. The review of the developer's financial and organisational capacity was carried out by PwC Real Estate. One of the contributions that fulfilled the requirements for urban qualities had a higher bid for the plot than the other competitors. The developer behind this submission was selected as the winner. The proposal had been produced by a design team of four companies. Of these, two are builders and housing management companies, Serneke Projektutveckling and Skandia Fastigheter, and two companies are architectural offices, Semrén & Månsson and 02Lanskap (Serneke, 2016). The assessment report summarises the winning contribution as follows:

The project focusses on the centre of the entire large block and places a public square there as the main attraction. The block is a closed space to the surrounding streets by two large brick buildings with business and housing. The buildings constitute a narrow central alley between them, which is said to contribute to a better microclimate. A specification of facade material may seem very early in a market-orientation mode but describes a site-dependent and conscious level of quality. Structurally, the arrangement operates well as a basis for further processing (OKK+ & Fastighetskontoret, 2016, p. 14).

The winning design has tall buildings of varying height in two blocks (Fig. 3a and 3b). The real estate board decides to draw up a land allocation agreement with Serneke. The other three companies in the design team are made invisible. The decision requires Serneke to conduct a parallel assignment for the continued development (Göteborgs stad, 2016a). A parallel assignment is a competition-like operation including invited architects. In this assignment, proposals are developed in dialogue with the client. There is no anonymity. The organiser can review, comment, and steer the design by having dialogue sessions with competitors.

In the government policy from 1980, parallel commission is described as a working method for clients to hire consultants designing proposals with alternative solutions in the same project. The point is to be able to find good solutions through dialogue. *“The client gets the opportunity to change the*



Figure 3a. The winning proposal from 2016 shows a high, dense building on several scales. The brick facades have a modernist style. The park is illustrated with young people who use the green space for socialising. Source: Serneke, Skandia Fastigheter, Semrén & Månsson, and 02Landskap.



Figure 3b. The plan for the winning proposal 2016. The buildings are organised in two open-plan patterns. Walkways and lines of sight point towards the centre of the park, which is called "the green circus ring". Source: Serneke, Skandia Fastigheter, Semrén & Månsson, and 02Landskap.

program and control the conditions during the work process. The work is conducted in an open discussion between the involved parties" (Byggnadstyrelsen, 1980, p. 3). Swedish Architects define parallel commissions in a corresponding way in their guidelines. The possibility of dialogue with invited architects is highlighted as an alternative to an anonymous presentation and assessment of proposals in competitions. The guidelines from Swedish Architects also require financial compensation for architects and have a detailed justification for the working method. Furthermore, their guideline presents a model for how this assignment should be carried out. According to Swedish Architects, two to five architectural offices should be invited to a parallel commission. The assignment may be organised in stages so that the client, through an active dialogue, can steer the architect's work and request different types of processing of the proposals before making the final assessment. The evaluation should be carried out by a group of professionals having the required expertise for the task.

PARALLEL COMMISSION

In 2020, the developer publishes an invitation to a parallel commission for designing the site. The objective is *"to create new housing in a central location, strengthen surrounding streets with new functions on the ground floors, and safeguard safe and accessible paths along and through the block"* (Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2020, p. 4). The parallel commission is to be carried out by Serneke in collaboration with the City of Gothenburg and Swedish Architects. The unit for competition and procurement services at Swedish Architects approves the program after review, markets the assignments, and reports the result on the website. Swedish Architects also point out a member of the assessment group. The first step in parallel commission is the selection of design teams for the assignment. Semrén & Månsson and 02Lanskap were not invited despite the victory in the previous design-developer competition.

Assessment group and team selection

The invitation generated 21 submissions of interest (Serneke, 2021). After review, the developer chose to invite four design teams to design the task: 1) Belatchew Architects & Nivå Landscape Architecture, 2) Kanozi Architects, Mareld Landscape Architects & Antiquum, 3) OKK+, Sandellsanberg Architects & GAJD Architects, and 4) Reiluf Ramstad Architects & Kaminskay Architecture. The purpose of the parallel commission is described in the assessment report as *"to produce, in a co-creative process, a high-quality design proposal for new homes, businesses, parking garages, and adjoining public*

places” (Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2022, p. 3). Responsible for the evaluation of proposals is a committee of professionals with expertise in architecture, urban planning, cultural environment, and project development. Of these, three members are appointed by Serneke. The city of Gothenburg has correspondingly appointed three members. In addition, an independent architect has been appointed by Swedish Architects. It is a qualified group of professionals with broad expertise who have been given the task of ranking contributions in the parallel commission.

Objectives, judging criteria, and winner

The fact that the site is part of the national heritage interest has now become a major concern in the plan and architecture project. The proposals in the parallel commission must be designed and evaluated with respect to their approach and impact on the national heritage interest. This is a clarification due to the fact that the forthcoming detailed development plan making the explanation of the site possible must be approved by the county board. The objectives are now to:

- add new buildings to the block having high architectural quality and a volume that enhances the cityscape and cultural heritage values, as well as having a careful approach to the park in the area.
- create apartments with attractive housing qualities.
- provide good conditions for active ground floors that strengthen experiences at an eye level in the street space and inside the block.
- develop paths through the block primarily for pedestrians and to strengthen the surroundings with places for both activity and recreation.
- strengthen the function of the park and its cultural-historical significance for the city’s greenery strategy.
- manage the cultural and environmental values of national heritage interests on the site and the surrounding area identified as critical points.
- produce a sufficiently strong and robust design concept that can be further developed and implemented without losing its central qualities.

Eight open judging criteria have been set for ranking the solutions. These criteria are: 1) architectural height, 2) relevant approaches to the national

heritage interest, 3) fulfilment of the program for the task, 4) feasibility, 5) sustainability (social, ecological, and economic), 6) functions, 7) development ability of the proposal, and 8) process (understanding of the assignment and ability to develop the proposal). The assignment includes a joint kick-off meeting, a site visit, and two workshops with written comments on the design before the final assessment of proposals.

The assessment committee evaluated the design proposal step-by-step in four meetings. Their statement is presented publicly to the organisers, politicians, colleagues, and the press. The winner is a contribution produced by a team of three architectural offices: OKK+, Sandellsandberg, and GAJD. The review report makes the following statement to the organiser about their design:

Through its strong, unique conceptual approach well founded in the spirit of the place, its architecture, its housing qualities, and its robustness for implementation, the assessment group recommends proposal 'Circusplatsen' by team OKK+/Sandellsanberg/Gjad for further processing and as a starting point for the planning process in collaboration with Gothenburg City. The proposal has its own distinct character that reflects the present but respects and manages the distinctive character of the block. 'Circusplatsen' is a composition with high architectural qualities. It shows evidence of elegant handling of the volumes, where the proposal succeeds in being both large-scale and small-scale at the same time, thereby connecting to the block and its surroundings. The story behind the architecture is strong and conceptual and derives its inspiration mainly from the block when the circus was active (City of Gothenburg & Serneke, 2022, p. 6).

The exploitation is higher this time, including 130 apartments, business space, and an underground garage with parking for cars and bicycles as compensation for the demolished parking garage on the site. The architecture demonstrates a contemporary design in a varied and playful connection to the park (Fig. 4a, 4b, and 4c). The assessment committee reports several well-designed passages, paths, and sight lines in the block. The façade in bright colour shows relief effects in the material. The architecture is described in the assessment report as a balanced wholeness of volumes and expression. On the ground floor, there is space for business-facing passages that invite activities and togetherness (OKK+, Sandellsandberg, GJAD, 2021; Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2021; Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2022).

Stadsrum

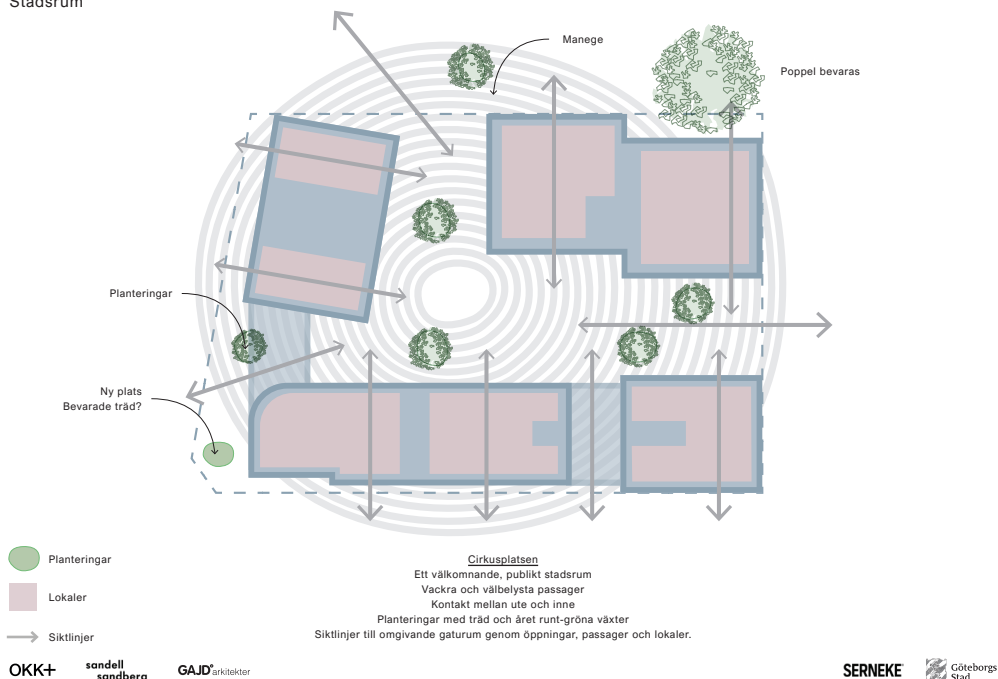


Figure 4a. The plan pattern in the winning contribution 2022. The buildings are symbolically placed on a circus ring as historical reference. Lines of sight and walking lines are marked as arrows. Source: OKK+, Sandellsandberg Architects, and GJAD Architects.

Ethical principles

The assessment committee does not comment on the exclusion of Semrén & Månsson and 02Landskap in the parallel commission. Their winning proposal in the previous competition is made invisible. Another critical issue of professional importance concerns the selection of the design team. OKK+, which has been hired to evaluate the contributions in the design-developer competition, participated in the parallel commission. Nor is this fact commented on by the assessment committee. According to the ethical code of conduct adopted by the Swedish Architects (www.arkitekt.se), an “*architect who is offered to complete, develop, or change another architect’s work must... personally notify this person.*” The architect must not take part in contexts that may undermine trust in the professional role. If there are personal interests or commitments that may affect the role of an independent expert, the client must be informed and the rules for approved architectural competitions state that “*anyone who is an associate or otherwise... is in a close relationship with a member of the jury*” is excluded from participation (Sveriges Arkitekter, § 4).



Figure 4b. The architecture in the winning proposal is designed as cubes with varying scale and bright facades in a design language inspired by the activities on the site. Source: OKK+, Sandellsandberg Architects, and GJAD Architects.



Figure 4c. The facades have a modernist design without ornamentation. Source: OKK+, Sandellsandberg Architects, and GJAD Architects.

These ethical principles apply to architects participating in the plan and architecture project, both in the role of the designer and as the expert in judging the contributions. But it is not because of ethical considerations that the developer interrupts the collaboration with OKK+, Sandellsandberg, and GJAD and again turns to Semrén & Månsson. The reason is instead a strong political dissatisfaction with the winning design in the parallel commission appointed by professionals. The City Planning Board decides that the plan and architecture project must be reworked (Göteborgs stad, 2023). The winner may not be implemented even though the architecture refers to the circus building on site. The politician demands that the design of the site must look like an image of a city from the end of the 19th century.

According to the City Planning Board, the officials must draw up a detailed development plan having classical architecture in a closed block. From right to left, politics unites in the requirement for a new focus. It is a very clear directive from 2023 that the administration must apply. Of course, this political request has created a critical debate in the press as well as internal tensions in the city between politics and officials. Architecture and urban design must follow a specific historical style in Gothenburg. Design development stops in time. The facade should have a classic appearance. This drama is carried out within the architectural policy, which on the other hand still states that the city wants to become attractive by *“investing in really good architecture... actively participating in the development of architecture through pilot projects... initiating architectural competitions and place-making activities”* (Göteborgs stad, 2018, p. 4). This policy is supposed to transform Gothenburg into an appealing city with a strong identity, a city for people, and a role model in architecture. How these intentions, values, and qualities are to be interpreted is determined by the same politicians that have given the plan and architecture project a new orientation, leading to classic facades in a closed block at the site.

THE REVISION OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE PLANNING PROJECT

In 2024, the city planning administration presents an extended, detailed development plan with new illustrations by Semrén & Månsson and Mareld Landskapsarkitektur (Göteborgs stad, 2024a; Göteborgs stad, 2024b). As the site is part of the national heritage interest, the detailed development plan must be approved by the county board. For this reason, the city planning administration hired consultants for two investigations of the impact on

the national heritage interest. The first investigation identifies, describes, and specifies qualities and cultural values in the area (Actanhus, 2021). The second investigation analyses the impact of exploitation, the degree of negative effects on the national heritage interest, and how damage should be judged. (Norsconsult, 2024). The task is to draw the line between a permissible negative impact on the cultural values and unauthorised tangible damage to the national heritage interest in the area, which is a too negative consequence of the exploitation.

To mitigate the negative impact on reported cultural values and architectural qualities, the city planning administration starts the detailed development plan by presenting the purpose and conditions in a positive manner. The plan and architecture project is intended to enable new housing and business, add urban qualities to the area, and create accessible paths in the inner city. Cultural-historical values and architectural qualities will be ensured, according to officials. The design of facades in the illustrations and attached regulations is intended to safeguard architectural qualities as well as a classic expression and a closed block of the site. The goal is to fit the design to the surrounding buildings.



Figure 5a. Proposal by Serneke, Semrén & Månsson, and Mareld adapted to the new political directives. The design has a classic expression in a closed block. Source: *Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Lorensbergsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Göteborgs stad, 2024.*



Figure 5b. Proposal by Serneke, Semrén & Månsson and Mareld expressing the buildings facing the park. Source: Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Lorensbergsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Göteborgs stad, 2024.



Figure 5c. Proposal by Serneke, Semrén & Månsson and Mareld showing an urban environment from the end of the 19th century having a classical design expression. Source: Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Lorensbergsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Göteborgs stad, 2024.

The implementation of the detailed development plan appears as an overarching objective and steering condition (Rönn, 2018). The city planning administration has bridged conflicting demands and competing interests by three actions. Firstly, the detailed development plan refers to requirements regarding densification and a mixed-use town in the general plan. Secondly, the plan and architecture project has been revised according to the political design demand of 2023. Thirdly, the detailed development plan has been renewed to find acceptable damage to the national heritage interest at the plot. The city planning administration states that the exploitation will have to moderate large negative consequences on the environment, mainly through the impact on the cityscape, cutting down of trees and losses of the park as urban space. However, the impact does not reach a level of tangible damage. This understanding of conducted investigations has the implementation of the revised detailed development plan as starting point. A critical fact suppressed: there has never been a classical architecture in a closed block on the site (Acantus, 2021).

The development breaks the cultural history on the plot. As compensation for the negative impact, new trees must be planted in the area for minimising losses, both in the park and in the surrounding streets, and the design will be regulated in detail to ensure architectural qualities (Göteborgs stad, 2024b). The administration put forward several positive effects as results of the exploitation, such as new homes, urban qualities, and space for businesses on the ground floors, strengthened streets, and space that will provide more life, safety, and visibility. The courtyard in the new residential block is also assumed to have a recreational function. By having half of the residential rooms facing the courtyard, the apartments will be able to meet the guidelines for noise. In the summary, the administration finds the suggested alteration feasible by compensation. The plan and architectural project has been sufficiently adapted to identified cultural values, and compensation for damage to the national heritage interest means that remaining obstacles are seen as bridged (Fig. 5a, 5b, and 5c).

Two cultural environment investigations

The first investigation was carried out in 2020-2021 and aimed to deepen knowledge about the cultural and historical values of the area. The target was to provide an analytical basis for the planning, scope, scale, and design of the intended alteration of the site (Actantus, 2021). The consultant conveys a historical understanding of the area as an integral part of a larger urban

context. Of great importance was identifying character-creating features of the site and its immediate surroundings, including visual traces and cultural-historical expressions. The park, the theatre building, and the interior of the hotel are part of the city's preservation program. The relation to values and qualities in the national heritage interest is reported as critical points: the park's extent and function as a public urban space, the trees in the area, the theatre as a protected building, urban expansion and its architectural arrangement, the block expressing historical experience, and the visual interplay on the site. Character-creating features in the area are reported as:

- Asymmetric plan form and organic development
- The urban plan pattern violates the location and volume of the buildings in the inner city
- Varied buildings and architectural design
- Buildings with several functions
- Besides the parking garage on the site, the buildings in the area have brick facades and plaster in yellow and light colours
- The theatre building has its main entrance facing the park and is not directed towards the streets surrounding the block
- There are rows of trees around the block
- The walkway in the block connects two central streets in the area.

The historic role of the block in the inner city emerges as a key issue in the investigation. The buildings in the block have been *“deliberately excluded from the traditional urban planning ideals with closed symmetrical city blocks. Instead, the block has acquired a distinctive character as a historic park environment with lower, separate, located buildings in a varied design”* (Actantus. 2021, p. 3). The building *“represents a structure that deviates from the typology of the surrounding city”* (Ibid., p. 3). The closed block in the derailed developer plan is thus seen by the consultant as a clear violation of the historical urban plan pattern and a significant negative impact on the national heritage interest. The consultant does not use tangible damage, but in the overall assessment, it is emphasised that the exploitation is a huge challenge in sharp conflict with the foundations of the national interest.

The second investigation is carried out in 2024. The aim was to describe the effects and consequences of exploitation on the cultural and historical values in the area (Norconsult, 2024). The investigation should particularly

highlight the impact on the national heritage interest and the risk of tangible damage. This work method in the investigation refers specifically to a handbook published by the Sweden National Heritage Board for handling the national heritage interests in areas exposed to alteration. Also, the guidelines by the Environmental Protection Agency for assessing tangible damage have been consulted in the assignment. The conclusion in the second investigation is that the damage is acceptable according to the environment code. The consultant also states that the county administrative board in this case decides whether the detailed development plan significantly harms the national heritage interest too much or not.

To legitimise the conclusion of acceptable damage, the consultant has a paragraph describing the methodology and key concepts behind the statement. The assessment has been guided by concepts: impact, effect, and consequence. The cultural value in the area is defined as high, moderate, and low. Tangible damage to the national heritage interest occurs in this methodology if the exploitation has a significant negative impact on protected cultural environments attributed with high value. The degree of impact is tested through visual analyses of sight lines in illustrations produced in the plan and architecture project. There are small, moderate, and large negative consequences for protected cultural environments. But the second investigation does not consider that the negative impact reaches the criterion for tangible damage. The decisive obstacle is thus removed, even if the detailed development plan nevertheless causes damage to the national heritage interest. To reduce the negative effects of the detailed plan, the city planning department presents compensatory measures aimed at enhancing the experience of the park and its historic character. This represents the final step for getting the detailed development plan provided by the county administration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research question and its two critical dilemmas will be summarised and discussed in four overall conclusions.

1. The design-developer competition

Initially, the property board in Gothenburg is responsible for the plan and architecture project. The politicians decided in 2016 to have a design-developer competition. They want to find quality in design and a developer. Officials at the real estate office produce assessment criteria, submission

requirements, and conditions that design teams must meet (Göteborgs stad, 2016a). A critical dilemma is involved in the competition from the start. There is template demanding that the winning developer carry out a parallel commission. Already in the early phase, there is a surprising condition that will influence the future. The organiser intends to dissolve the best design team and end the business relationship among the companies making the top-ranked design proposal. Instead of keeping the design team behind the winning submission, the development of the site must be exposed to a new competitive assignment organised as a parallel commission. This procedure should be seen as an abuse of the competition as a tool for design, creativity, and innovation, even if the competitors are informed by the organiser. To promote quality, the municipality of Norrköping has, in contrast, tried to keep the design teams behind the best proposals in two design-developer competitions. In the competition programs, the organiser states that the winner has *“no right to change the architect or redesign the proposal without approval from the municipality”* (Municipality of Norrköping, 2022, p. 9).

A second critical dilemma is that the organiser intends to weigh long-term urban qualities against the price of the land. The competition in 2016 contains bids on the plot. The real estate office state will award the building actor who (a) meets the design requirements, and (b) offers the highest price for the land (Göteborgs stad, 2016a). This explains why Serneke is pointed out as the winner. Alternatively, the organiser could determine the market value of the site through an external expert, and then report a fixed price in the competition program. The quality of design would then steer the outcome. Both architectural offices and developers prefer a fixed price for sites in competitions since this provides much clearer conditions (Rönn & Koch, 2022a; Rönn & Koch, 2023). At a fixed price, participating design teams would have competed on design quality instead of tenders for the plot. At high probability, the long-term qualities, formulated as urban criteria, had gained greater importance in the competition with fixed price in the competition program. The architecture in the winning proposal shows a solution with high exploitation of the plot and buildings that vary in scale in two open blocks. There are high-rise units in an urban U-shape and the design has clear lines of sight. The proposal highlights the park's accessibility as an urban space for social activities.

The organiser presents the design-developer competition of 2016 at the international real estate event at Mipim in Cannes. The object must have been

to attract international players and to put Gothenburg on the map. However, if the city truly wanted to spread the information to a wider circle of worldwide companies, the invitation should have been in English and not just in the Swedish language. This is also a critical aspect of the competition. The used language expresses a local nature in the competition, which is reinforced by the presentation of the design-developer competition in Swedish taking place at the Elite Hotel Park Avenue, which is directly adjacent to the site.

2. The parallel commission

This assignment contains two professional dilemmas. The parallel commission starts in 2020 with a pre-qualification and is completed in 2022 by the selection of the winner. The initiative in the plan and architecture project has now passed from the real estate office to the developer and the city planning administration, which, on behalf of politicians, shall make a detailed development plan for implementing the winning design. In a joint venture with the city planning administration and Swedish Architects, Serneke as developer invites architects to the parallel commission and picks out professionals for judging submissions and singles out a winner. Swedish Architects select one member to the assessment committee. The dilemma here concerns one of the invited design teams. The same architectural office that evaluated the proposals in the previous design-developer competition is part of the constellation of companies that are invited into the parallel commission. This fact raises questions about competing on equal terms. According to the law (SFS 2017:900), disputes can arise if a related party participates in decisions, or if there is another special circumstance that gives reason to question impartiality (§16). Because OKK+ had been hired as an expert in the architecture and planning project, the assessment group should have looked closer into the matter.

The ethical code of conduct adopted by Swedish Architects demands that members of the association don't participate in assignments that could undermine trust in their professional role. An architect must inform the client if there are personal interests that could affect their position as an independent expert. At the same time, the architect should be a professional advisor and safeguard the clients' interests, which in this case was a development of the park guided by a vision for the design that *"captures the place and the present, with anchoring in the past with a view to the future"* (Göteborgs stad & Serneke, 2022). As there were several architects in the parallel commission, operating as process leaders, members of the assessment committee, and an

external expert guarding professional practice, both the administrative law and ethical code of conduct are applicable in the case. From this point of view, the invitation of the design team to the parallel assignment stands out as a critical dilemma in the plan and architecture project.

Another professional issue concerns the composition of the assessment committee and the anchoring of the winning design in the city as being a planning authority. Safeguarding the implantation of the proposal through the participation of the city architect and the city gardener in the assignment proved insufficient. An alternative way to anchor the best solution becoming implemented is to include politicians in the assessment committee. This is a practice both in architectural competitions and design-developer competitions. The jury may have politicians' representatives as the majority and the opposition to point out conflicting interests. The underlying idea in this strategy is that politicians should feel ownership of the winning proposal and support the implementation. For example, the city of Gothenburg conducted a competition in 2016 aimed at affordable housing with altogether six politicians on the jury (Rönn, 2016). The winning proposal was implemented. Kinna, a municipality in the Gothenburg region, has also conducted a design-developer competition looking for new housing, including two politicians in the jury (Rönn & Koch, 2022b). The professional objection to this type of anchoring is that politicians are laymen in architecture, lacking design competence. For this reason, politics should only initiate competitions, while officials should prepare the competition program and be responsible for the assessment of contributions. Ranking design proposals is seen as a professional task from this perspective. This division of responsibilities was cancelled by the politicians in the plan and architecture project as they stopped the winning design from being implemented, which in turn demonstrated that the composition of assessment committees is a key issue in competitions as well as in parallel commissions.

3. Political requirements on the detailed plan

The City Planning Administration highlights two sources behind the politicians' intervention in the work on the detailed development plan with the resulting changed mission. Firstly, the 2022 master plan, which recommends the inner city be supplemented with housing, services, and workplaces. The master plan calls for mixed-use and high-density buildings in the centre location (Göteborgs stad, 2023; Göteborgs stad, 2024b). Secondly, the 2023 decision prescribes a new orientation of architecture and urban

design—quality through a classic design and closed block. The city planning administration had to draw up a new detailed development plan for the site. The orientation for a classical architect has been preceded by public criticism from the politicians in Gothenburg combined with a new organisation of the city and alteration of internal management of the administration. Officials were no longer invited by politicians for advice in the same way as before (Arkitekten, 2024). In the press, politicians call contemporary architecture dull examples of glass boxes and square buildings having stripped-down and boring facades (Andersson & Enström, 2020; Ädling, 2018). Architects find the return to 19th-century cities as an expression of populism and ignorance. Johannes Hulter, on the other hand, who is a leading politician in Gothenburg, understands the demand for classical architecture as a matter of democracy. He wants to have a design that is appreciated by the inhabitants (Architect, 2023). This intention is then turned into a specific style.

The plan and architecture project are an illustrative example of a genuine contradiction between politics, competence, and the design profession. There is no one-size-fits-all solution according to this case study. Legitimate long-term interests must be weighed against each other in a responsible manner when designing new buildings in sensitive cultural environments. The site and its history are a given starting point for the architectural work, which is highlighted in policies by both local and national authorities. The limit for political control in this case is tangible damage to the national heritage interest, regulated in the Environmental Code, which, in the event of a dispute, may become interpreted by a court.

4. Cultural environment compensation

Since 1987, the system of national heritage interest has been a part of the Planning and Building Act. The idea of protecting valuable environments against exploitation. The local level must be monitored in this perspective. The system of national interests has repeatedly been criticised by municipalities for creating uncertainty in planning and being difficult to apply in practice (SKL, 2011; SKR, 2022). In 2014, as a response to the criticism, the Swedish National Heritage Board published a handbook about the national heritage interests in planning processes (RAÄ, 2014). Negative interventions in valuable heritage areas that cannot be avoided must be compensated, according to this guideline. However, exploitation must not significantly damage national heritage interests. It is a starting point in planning that is difficult to put into practice since the national heritage interest often is expressed too generally.

The city planning administration hired two companies to investigate how the plan and architecture project affected the national heritage interest in the area. The investigations present conflicting conclusions.

The fact that the plan and architecture project damages the national heritage interest is well documented in this case. There has never been classical architecture on the site in a closed block. Even if one of the hired consultants argues that the exploration does not reach the level of tangible damage, the intervention still needs to be compensated because of the impact. The risk of the county board rejecting the detailed development plan must be prevented. The solutions are compensation (Fig. 6a and 6b). The City Planning Administration reduces the damage in this case through the following strategies:

- **An old tree in the park is protected in the detailed plan:** A tree that is particularly valuable for the cityscape is protected in the detailed development plan because of the exploitation. This tree may only be removed if there is a safety risk.
- **Expanding the planning area for including planting of new trees:** The planning area is changed to include compensation measurements. The expanding area makes it possible to plant new trees in the block as a “green” action. New trees of varying sizes are going to replace trees that are removed because of the exploitation. The streets will have an appealing cityscape through creating a single-sided avenue in the planning area.
- **Detailed regulation of the design of new places and additional buildings:** Both buildings and public places on the site must be carried out with high architectural quality in terms of detailing, processing, choice of materials, and colour. The buildings are from five to seven stories tall and must harmonise with the character and surrounding area. Facades must mainly be of brick with a shaped finish against the roof. Stone and plaster are permitted to a limited extent. The façade facing public space must be clearly marked and have a detailed ending towards the roof. The windows above the entrance floor should be symmetrical and express a vertical dimension. Balconies must be grouped vertically. The roof must be designed as a gable roof. A flat roof is allowed towards the courtyard. Domes, eaves, and bay windows must be designed according to special instructions.

- **New housing and space for businesses contribute to a living environment in the city:** The public character of the block is maintained through businesses on the ground floor facing the park and surrounding streets. Lack of living qualities such as daylight and sunlight are weighed against the need for new housing in the inner city, which is seen as more important. The area is exposed to noise from cars, buses, and trams, which can't be avoided in the area. A closed block on the site is described as a design strategy for reducing disturbances from traffic. By building larger apartments, it becomes possible to turn half of the rooms towards the courtyard.
- **The risk of tangible damage to the national heritage interest is downplayed using hired consultants:** The national heritage interest description for the inner city is comprehensive and open to interpretation. The description becomes the subject of a critical review, and the impact on cultural-historical values has been analysed in a

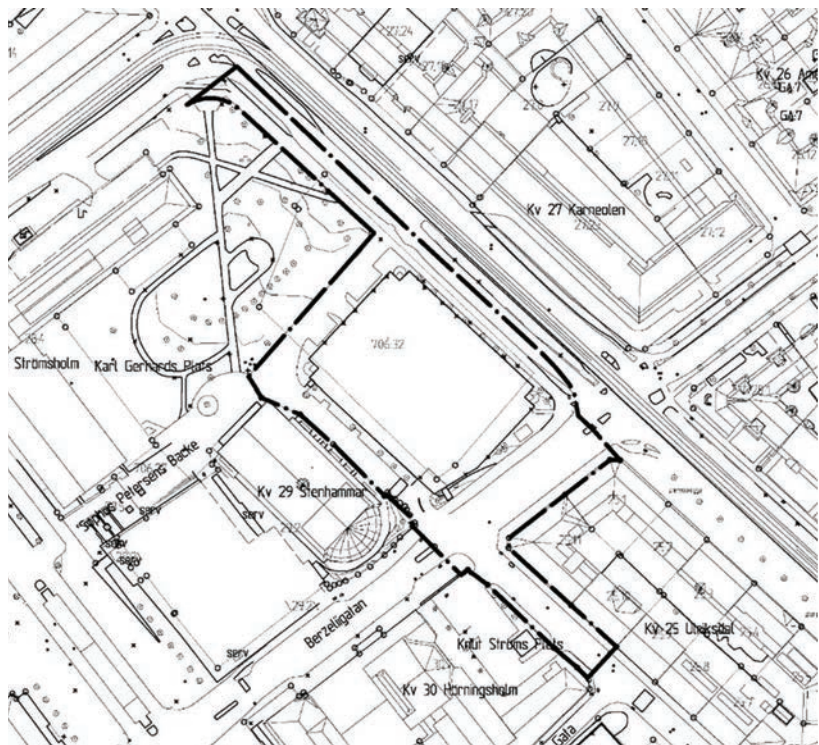


Figure 6a. The expanded planning area in the 2024 detailed development plan. Trees lost are compensated by new ones in the streets. Source: Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Lorensbergsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Göteborgs stad, 2024.

selection of visual tracks in the area. The consultants convey partially different statements of the environment on the site and its urban plan pattern. The exploitation changes to the land use, the asymmetric plan pattern, and the historic diversity of buildings on the site. Instead of commenting on this fact, the city planning administration chooses to highlight that the detailed development damage to national heritage interests ranges from a small negative effect to moderate and large negative consequences. This is understood as acceptable impact. According to the officials, the effect mainly concerns the park, the cityscape, and the readability of the environment (Göteborgs stad, 2024b, pp. 88-89). But this effect is not considered tangible damage. The detailed development plan can therefore be assumed to be accepted. The fact that the plan and architecture project has a closed block that deviates from the cultural history of the area is hidden in expanding wordings and interpretations.

The county administrative board will finally decide whether the compensatory measures by the city planning administration end up having an acceptable impact on protected national heritage interests. In 2024, the

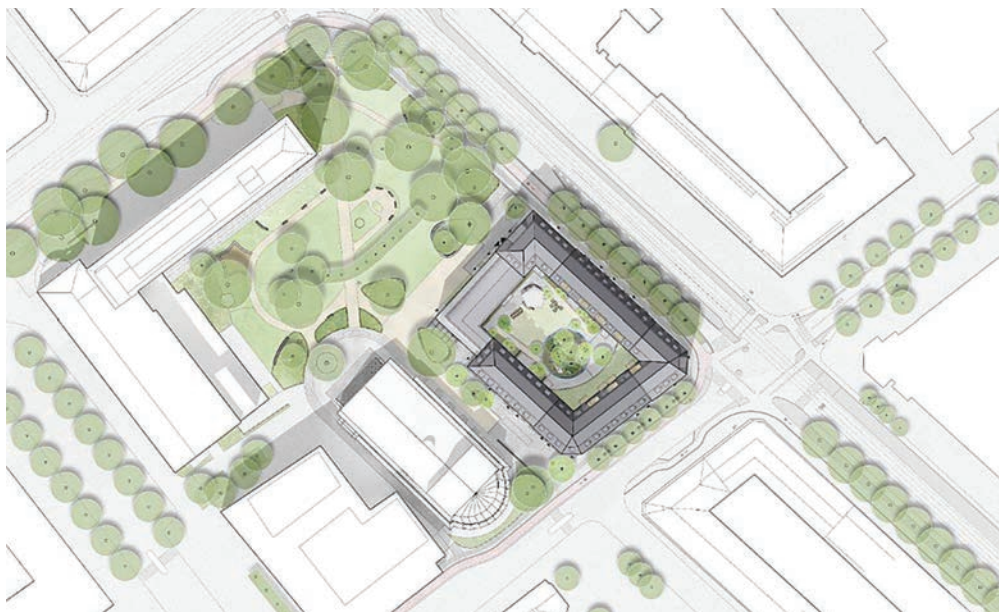


Figure 6b. Illustration from detailed development plan 2024 shows the settlement surrounded by new tree planting through compensation. Source: *Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Lorensbergsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg*, Göteborgs stad, 2024.

county administrative board assessed the plan proposal. The impact on the national interest seems to be greater than what it appears to be in the plan description, according to their statement. The county administrative board sees significant damages to the protected national heritage interests and requests a clearer account of how cultural values are to be taken care of and reported damages are minimised from the city. The limit for the politicians' exploitation of the site is the Environmental Code's prohibition against tangible damage to the national interest. How this legal regulation in law should be interpreted in this case reflects several professional dilemmas for experts in the municipal administration, authorities, and private companies that have the cultural environment as their field of assignment.

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