A major exhibition on the past, present and future of the City of London as a centre for international trade
As a property developer, an engineer, Alderman for Portsoken — one of the City’s four residential wards, and former Lord Mayor, I feel privileged to have been able to play a small part in the making of what in the 15th century the poet William Dunbar described as “the flower of cities all.”

I am also pleased to support The Developing City exhibition which draws together the essential aspects of the physical development of the City, how it has changed over the centuries and how it needs to change in the future.

Professor Sir Peter Hall, in Cities in Civilization, called London the quintessential city, the city by which all others are measured. Cities are created and maintained by choices and visions. This exhibition studies the choices that have been made in the Square Mile over the centuries and displays the visions of architects for its future.

The City’s buildings and places have been shaped by choices, from the decision of the Roman legion to make a crossing of the river here to the decision to deregulate the financial institutions in the 1980s.

The City has stood at the heart of the world’s trade for hundreds of years and despite the almost total destruction in the Great Fire and severe damage in the Blitz, the City has bequeathed us an amazing architectural legacy. Its continuity is displayed in its rich architectural heritage — the Guildhall, the Mansion House, in the wonderful Wren churches and livery halls, and in the life that goes on inside them.

The City’s pre-eminence could not have been achieved without the skills and expertise of the construction industry, the designers and planners, developers and builders, to deliver the right sort of buildings suited to modern business needs. Nor could it have done so without the ability to grow into the City fringes and Canary Wharf.

The City has always embraced change. In the last twenty five years we have seen an unprecedented flowering of our built environment to meet the needs of a modern global financial centre. I was privileged to work on many of these buildings wearing my property development hat. I am fascinated to see the rich tapestry of ideas developed for the City in 2050 by the teams of architects and consultants in the final section of this exhibition. It gives one great hope for the future!

Alderman Sir Michael Bear
Hon. Pres. London Festival of Architecture
Curator’s introduction

This exhibition is the third in a series of shows that have tracked the development of the City in recent times — the Changing City held in the Royal Exchange in 1994, New City Architecture in Broadgate in 2004 and now The Developing City in 2012.

The first came at a time when the impact of Big Bang and the Corporation’s desire to seek world class architecture could be recognised in the schemes on display. It took place during a recessionary period and there was much discussion then — as there is now — about the role of London as a world city (see pages 22-23). There were concerns — as there are now — about the competition from other financial centres. Then the competitors were Frankfurt and Paris and the location of the European Central Bank.

New City Architecture came at the height of the boom in construction and planning that reflected the City’s pre-eminence in the world’s financial markets. The confidence of the development industry was reflected in the proposals for towers in the City cluster and in the expansion of Canary Wharf. Today the towers that were proposed a decade or so ago are now on site and are already changing London’s skyline.

In the longer term the City is still planning for growth and this confidence in the future of the Square Mile is supported by Bloomberg in their decision to redevelop a large site in the traditional core. Dan Doctoroff, President of Bloomberg, speaking at NLA in June, stated that he was confident both London and New York would remain as major financial centres in spite of competition from Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Meanwhile ways of working are changing, technology is changing, sustainability is a key part of any development and the demands about quality of life — of public spaces and amenities — are growing. New infrastructure in the form of Crossrail will change the City’s relationship with the rest of London and its hinterland; old infrastructure is under pressure as the very soil the place is built on becomes ever more clogged with pipes and wires, services and archaeology. All these issues have a significant effect on the built form, so what will the City of 2050 be like?

We have asked three teams of architects and consultants to come up with ideas that look at the changes that will need to take place over the next forty years or so if the City is to maintain its role as a major business centre. This is blue-sky thinking backed by teams with experience and skill in delivering solutions for business. We hope that their ideas and vision will inform the public debate about planning and architecture as we move forward in a very uncertain economic climate.

Peter Murray, Curator
Chairman, NLA — London’s Centre for the Built Environment
Evolution of the City

Architectural writer and researcher for The Developing City Andrew Mead describes the way the City has changed and developed through fire and pestilence, bombs and financial metadowns.

The story of the City starts on the site of The Wallbrook Building, where archaeologists recently found the remains of what they think was a Roman fort from c.AD43 — the first planned structure in the City. Londinium then went on to flourish as a commercial centre and land was steadily reclaimed from the Thames for its busy port. Despite frequent setbacks for the Romans — Queen Boudicca’s revolt in AD61, a devastating fire in AD100 — Londinium continually recovered, and only in the early 5th century did it finally decline.

The City came to life again in AD886 when King Alfred refounded it as Lundenburgh and its growth accelerated with the arrival of the Normans. By 1189 the City had its own mayor and in 1297 Magna Carta recognised its ‘ancient liberties and customs’. Numerous guilds of craftsmen and tradesmen sprang up and evolved into the Livery Companies whose buildings still dignify the streets. Trade networks expanded and with all the mercantile activity came one of the City’s key institutions — the Royal Exchange.

Old St Paul’s Cathedral commanded the skyline, as can be seen in panoramas by artists such as Claes Jansz Visscher. Foreign visitors left valuable written records of architecture and streetlife, as did a longtime resident John Stow in his A Survey of London (1598). These documents of the City are all the more important because they itemise what would soon be lost. After the plague of 1665 that killed so many of the City’s residents came the Great Fire of 1666 that destroyed so much of its fabric.

Among the buildings consumed by the Fire was Old St Paul’s Cathedral and on the south transept of Christopher Wren’s replacement is the single Latin word RESURCAM — ‘I shall arise’. This encapsulates the City’s continual reinvention of itself and also sums up this exhibition. But the City would have looked radically different if the plans for rebuilding it by Wren (or others) had been adopted. Instead the merchants and bankers wanted to get back to business and the medieval street plan prevailed.

After the Fire the City consolidated its financial role, first in the coffee houses of Exchange Alley and then with the emergence of the Bank of England, the Stock Exchange, and Lloyd’s. Providing grand new accommodation for the mayor, the Mansion House signalled the City’s ever-growing prestige. The port was booming and expanded downriver, but the City remained home to many industries and in 1830 still had more than 120,000 residents.

It was during the Victorian period that the City became above all a centre of finance. Joint-stock banks and insurance companies appeared in force and architecturally the streets were a showcase of Victorian eclecticism. The arrival of the railways and the underground transformed the City’s connections with the suburbs and by 1900 its population had shrunk to 30,000 - it was now primarily a place of commuters. The City’s prosperity continued well into the 1920s, but following the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and a run on German banks it plunged into financial crisis in the early 1930s. That decade also saw the controversial demolition of much of Soane’s work at the Bank of England, and conservation was increasingly an issue after that.

Then came the Blitz, and not since 1666 had the City suffered so much damage. German bombing on the night of 29 December 1940 was particularly severe and Fleet Street’s newspapers soon coined the phrase, ‘The Second Great Fire of London’.

In its plans for reconstruction, the City was much more radical than it had been after the Fire, adopting the Modernist concept of segregating traffic and pedestrians on different levels. That scheme was eventually abandoned in the 1970s but can still be seen in embryo along London Wall. Another aim after the war was to re-establish the City as a place where people lived, and two large Modernist housing estates were built in the bombsite wastes of Golden Lane and the Barbican. With revised planning regulations, office blocks became much taller and the City acquired a new skyline.

In 1986 there were major changes in the way the City operated, when dealing on computer screens replaced face-to-face trading in the ‘Big Bang’. This called for huge open-plan trading floors and between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s around a third of the City’s office space was rebuilt. The casualties were often buildings that had been erected after the war, where conservation was not an issue. In the case of the Broadgate complex around Liverpool Street Station, redevelopment involved not just a single property but a whole quarter.

The most symbolic building of this period was Richard Rogers’ high-tech Lloyd’s, which gave the whole City a go-ahead aura. But the true picture was much more complicated, with the balance between development and conservation a source of continual debate.
Bomb damage at Bank Underground Station. Arthur Cross and Fred Tibbs, 1941.

National Provincial Bank, 15 Bishopsgate, 1865

Lloyd's of London. Richard Rogers and Partners
Big Bang exploded on 27 October 1986. The developers of Broadgate, Rosehaugh Stanhope, took the centre page spread in the Financial Times with this iconic photograph by Brian Griffin. It was a technically challenging assignment, according to Griffin, the difficulties of precisely exploding the firework exacerbated by heavy rain. Griffin had hoped it would go off directly behind the crane to create a large cross in the centre of the image. The white figure in the foreground is not a construction worker but the graphic designer Peter Davenport.
London consolidates its position as the world’s Financial Centre and emerges as the first genuinely “Global City.” The competition from New York, Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai is over. London has positioned itself as the capital of a global free trade zone which extends from the US to China. London is no longer one of two world cities; it is the only global city.

The migration of the financial service sector out of the City of London continues, and the City has been undergoing a dramatic evolution. This reinvention has enabled it to reposition itself as the global centre for trade and commerce.

The boundary of the ancient City has been reinforced creating a hub for commerce and trade, free from the historic obstacles of local law and custom. The City of London is now neutral ground, a visa-free zone, managed by the Corporation under new global trade laws and is now the global regulation centre for the world’s commercial markets. The post-war development of the City created a “ring of opportunity” around the historic core and has provided the perfect platform for adaptation and redevelopment in order to take the City to this next stage of evolution.

The City has returned to its historic position as a diverse mercantile centre, the years of financial and professional service dominance over. The City is now home to the prevailing technology, media and telecommunications sectors, the pharmaceutical companies, fashion, music and art – all exist alongside the lawyers and bankers.

The ‘Newspapers’ have returned, as new media companies move to Fleet Street and software developers have immersed themselves within the City’s core permeating from the City fringes they inhabited for the last 30 years. The City has become home to the world’s great exchanges, where human contact is once again prized above all else in this 24/7 global trading ecosystem. The historic system of livery companies has also undergone a great renaissance, as world expertise clusters to deliver the full range of business and trade within the City walls.

Within this construct we see a City without private transportation, where underground rail, road and servicing is fully maximised releasing valuable opportunities for the creation of new public open space above – a series of linear parks providing a new inner city greenbelt. Conservation policy has remained high on the planning agenda preserving the historic City core within an intense framework of development. A new mixed use, super high-rise zone on the Aldgate fringe towers over the historic eastern cluster, and sensitive refurbishment of the former meat market at Smithfield has been completed, and a continuous park connects all five regenerated districts. The City is finally reconnected with its river, the barrier of Upper Thames Street, which dislocated the City from the river in the 1960s, is finally removed and a third new linear park connects the River Fleet Park in the west to the restored moat of the Tower of London in the east. The traffic and utility infrastructure is placed below ground providing world class infrastructure that secures the City’s place as the business capital of the world.

The completion of Crossrail and the upgrading of the Tube stations within the Square Mile have been supplemented by other key pieces of public transport infrastructure. A series of new airport terminals in each of the new City districts provide direct links to the remote runways located in the Thames Estuary. Crossrail Three and Crossrail Four have been completed, linking Liverpool Street with London Bridge and Moorgate with Waterlo.

As the City continues to reveal more of its history, the gradual restoration of the River Fleet as a major new park running from the Thames to Hampstead has now been completed, and a continuous park connects all five regenerated districts. The City is finally reconnected with its river, the barrier of Upper Thames Street, which dislocated the City from the river in the 1960s, is finally removed and a third new linear park connects the River Fleet Park in the west to the restored moat of the Tower of London in the east. The traffic and utility infrastructure is placed below ground providing world class infrastructure that secures the City’s place as the business capital of the world.

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The De-carbonised City

A Vision for 2050

by John Robertson Architects / Arup
The team led by John Robertson Architects and Arup has taken an analytical and structured approach to its plans for the City in 2050. Using Arup’s Drivers of Change methodology – a research-based programme developed by the firm to help its business and clients identify the factors which will affect the world in the future – the team has designed a scheme that reflects not only the future of the City’s built environment but also its culture and character, and its relationship with people.

Drivers of Change has given the design team a strong brief to respond to, resulting in a radical, but plausible, vision. Key highlights of the scheme include:

- A de-carbonised City Core with pedestrianised streets, and a mix of uses including retail, residential and more green space.
- A nomadic workforce less tied to desks and making greater use of the City’s new green spaces.
- This new approach to work results in more intensively occupied real estate. By 2050 the City accommodates 50 per cent more workers albeit occupying 25 per cent less space.
- A new river park is created and cross river traffic increases significantly with new cycle and pedestrian bridges linking the City to transport interchanges, retail, leisure, cultural centres and residential south of the river.
- A new cultural quarter emerges in Smithfield.
- The east of the City sees huge development with a masterplan for a new financial centre in Aldgate that extends from the Tower of London to Broadgate. The master plan envisages a new generation of low/zero carbon buildings on a larger scale than anything ever seen in the City before.

To assist with the vision the John Robertson Architects / Arup-led team has collaborated with upcoming architectural practice DG7 and were joined by British Land, CBRE and Land Securities.