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PopUp City: a missed opportunity

Posted on March 25th, 2010 by sustainability



I love temporary uses like those presented in *PopUp City*. Ideas for re-using vacant urban sites which opened yesterday at the Building Centre in London. However, this exhibition comes too late and is totally anti-climatic.

What started out as an inspired initiative by British Land - a design competition for temporary uses for its Leadenhall site in the City (location of Richard Rogers' stalled 'cheesegrater') - never came to fruition. And now we have the exhibition - originally intended for last autumn - in place of competition winner *Mitchell Taylor's* inventive proposal for allotments and a City Farm. Imagine harvesting rhubarb during your lunch break in the City...

That's what Mitchell Taylor proposed, and the judges went for it. Piers Taylor explains, 'Our aim was to make our City of London environment responsive, adaptive and accommodating to more than the monoculture of big business. Instead of an enormous hole, occupants of the surrounding buildings - the Lloyds building, the Gherkin - would look down on an abundant, verdant and productive garden. We designed a scheme (with SEED Landscape) where you could pick blackberries as you walked down Leadenhall street, tend an allotment at lunchtime, eat soup made with fresh ingredients grown on site, picnic on a wild flower bank, and collect your vegetable box on the way home. There would be black chickens on red soil laying brown eggs, a fungi garden, radishes, strawberries, rhubarb, seasons, weather and, well, life.'

The winners had several meetings with the developer to iron out how to set up and operate the farm and how to wrap it up if the market bounced back. Time and the planting season slipped by, and now British Land has said they will not proceed because the project would give the wrong signal about the recovery of the market. Even one season of the clever proposal, which was costed at £125,000, would have created a buzz and lots of good will about the place.

The exhibition, which runs until April 14, is still worth a look in. Thirteen proposals are featured, including a series of viewing platforms by runner-up *Carmody Grooke* (last image below).



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