



Városliget Zrt.

Városliget City Park, Budapest, Hungary

In December 2015 the City of Budapest announced an international design competition for the renewal of City Park, the Városliget. The objective of the landscape architecture competition is to transform the main green space of the city, and one of the oldest public parks in Europe, into an extended public green corridor that will provide enlarged opportunities for sports, recreation and cultural activities. The Liget, as it is commonly known, has a surface area of 1.2 km² and was opened as a leisure and cultural park in 1896. It hosts public museums and cultural institutions of national importance, among them the Botanical Garden, the Zoo, the Museum

of Fine Arts and the famous Széchenyi Thermal Bath. Access and connection routes between these buildings and facilities and their service areas have, over the years, substantially reduced the actual green surface of the park. Parked vehicles have become an all-too-common eyesore in what used to be one of Budapest's most popular venues. Moreover the park has gradually deteriorated and its vegetation been denuded and neglected for years. At present only 60% of the park's surface are used as public green space while the rest is occupied by buildings, parking lots and roads. Following the requirements of the competition brief, this

percentage is to be raised to a total of 65%, which means that a significant percentage of the park's surface will have to be reclaimed as public green space for its visitors. The enlargement of green areas entails a redesign of the park as a whole, with great emphasis to be placed on the development of new paths, the instalment of new public furniture and playgrounds as well as a two-kilometre illuminated, circular running track. Nevertheless most existing elements of the park are to be preserved. This includes renovation of existing public furniture pieces, the rehabilitation of the City Park Lake and protection of extant vegetation. Part of the programme laid out by the



organizers of the competition is also the creation of new connections between existing buildings that continue to be used and new ones that are in planning stage. Demands to renovate and redesign the Liget had been strongly voiced in recent years by countless organisations, institutions and residents' associations. The commission entrusted with writing the call for proposals tried to incorporate numerous elements that were put forward in the course of talks with the various players involved in the project. Together with the landscape design competition, the City of Budapest announced a second competition for the design of a new building for

the Museum of Ethnography, housed since 1973 in a complex that was originally built for the Ministry of Justice. An architectural competition, won by the French architect Vallet de Martinis and the architecture firm DIID, had already been completed in 2014; however, the planned site of the Museum was relocated inside City Park and this decision made the announcement of a new tender necessary. Fifteen prominent international and local architecture offices will participate in the competition, among them Herzog & de Meuron, BIG, OMA, Bernard Tschumi, Dominique Perrault and Coop Himmelb(l)au. Two buildings, both designed by

internationally renowned Japanese architects, will be built on the sites of former public institutions that will be demolished. The House of Hungarian Music, designed by Sou Fujimoto, will be constructed in the place of an office building, and the New National Gallery, designed by SANAA, will replace Petöfi Hall, a multi-purpose event building. The entry by SANAA was originally in a tie with a rival proposal by Snøhetta; following negotiations held over several months SANAA's proposal was ultimately selected as the winner. The design will allow to insert the construction of the new cultural buildings in the framework of the overall

Liget redesign concept, which also includes three further new buildings. None of the new constructions will take up public green space. The aim of the ambitious project is to create a leading recreational and cultural venue in Europe, as well as a world-class public building that will make of Budapest a new major point of attraction for art and contemporary architecture. These aspirations are underlined by the decision to include almost only architecture offices of international standing in the competition. Currently only three places in the list of participating firms are filled by Hungarian candidates. The construction of the new

buildings, the complete redesign of City Park's green spaces as well as the renovation of existing buildings in the park, demonstrate the intention of the City of Budapest to turn the Liget into a prime tourist and cultural destination and a unique family park whose appeal will radiate across Europe. The proposals submitted for both competitions will be evaluated by an expert jury of architects and landscape architects, and the results are scheduled to be announced in May 2016. According to current expectations, the park renewal works will begin in 2017 and be concluded by 2019, when the construction of the new museums will be completed.