

## 2022 London Conference / Extension Day - A relaxed walking tour through the 9 Elms Corridor to Battersea Power Station

### Background

In 2018, SOM's London Office received an **AIA International Region Merit Award / Urban Design** [AIA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS / Merit Award for SOM's Covent Garden Plan — AIA UK](#) for its work on London's New Covent Garden Master Plan, covering a previously neglected, part industrial/part wasteland that stretches from Vauxhall in the east to the Battersea Power Station in the west.



The area – often referred to as the '**Nine Elms Corridor**'- includes the new US Embassy, a state of the art sky pool, a number of new residential, high rise projects and a linear park. It culminates in the icon Battersea Power Station – a £9 billion (at least) major new development, a more or less total new community built around a destination venue. Four years on from SOM's Design Award, significant progress has been made on the area, but it remains a work in progress – it is still in 'transformation mode'. [Vauxhall Nine Elms | Transforming London \(nineelmslondon.com\)](#) / [Nine Elms - Wandsworth Borough Council](#)

Unfortunately - although lauded by the International Design Awards jury - the reality of 9 Elms is not currently living up to its initial hype. In Mar 2021 – in celebration of the Sky Pool Opening – the *My London* magazine ran a damning review of the area entitled, '**Empty Show Homes and Tasteless Luxury: Nine Elms is the Worst Place in London**'. <https://www.mylondon.news/lifestyle/lifestyle-opinion/empty-show-homes-tasteless-luxury-20205796> / [Nightmare on Nine Elms: Huge development's struggle to find buyers | Evening Standard](#)

There have subsequently been other similar media comments, but not ALL of them negative. In Aug 2022, National Geographic ran a more positive review, '**Is this London's most exciting new district?**'. <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2022/08/is-this-londons-most-exciting-new-district-the-inside-guide-to-battersea-power-station> It is worth seeing the area and questioning why it has started out with such a bad reputation and whether it will improve as it matures.

### Getting To And From Battersea / 9 Elms

The outstanding transport links to the 9 Elms area has been largely responsible for its 'transformation'.

- By Train – Vauxhall is a train station between Waterloo and Clapham Junction, on a route leading to SW destination suburbs such as Surbiton, Richmond, Kingston, etc .
- By Underground - There is an underground station at Vauxhall (Victoria Line) and one at Battersea Power Station (Northern Line).
- By Bike – The trafficless Thames Path covers much of the distance between Vauxhall and Battersea, with Santander Bike rental either end.
- By Boat – There are Uber terminals at both Vauxhall and Battersea Power Station with service to Westminster and farther down river.

### Start of Tour

The Tour will start at **10:30** at the Vauxhall Bus Station directly opposite the entrance/exit to both the train station and the tube station.

The Tour will take 1 ½ to 2 hours and will be circa 2.5 miles long. We should be able to make our lunch venue – Megan's at Battersea Power Station – for 13:00.

**FOR ALL QUERIES, PLEASE CONTACT LORRAINE KING AT [Secretary@aiuk.org](mailto:Secretary@aiuk.org).**



## Along the Way

- 0) Bonnington Square & Gardens (Squatters/1980s) – This is a ‘secret’, late Victorian residential square behind Vauxhall Station that was due for demolition in the 1980s when it was taken over by squatters, who eventually were allowed to stay. It is a good example of how a determined, architecture-less community can transform a rundown neighbourhood site into something desirable – with a little bit of help from a few plants. [Bonnington Square - Wikipedia](#) / [Bonnington Square, SW8 \(theundergroundmap.com\)](#) OPTIONAL - THE MAIN WALK WILL NOT COVER BONNINGTON SQUARE



- 1) Vauxhall Bus Station (Arup Associates/2004) – This is an early example of a civic building powered by solar panels. Unfortunately, it is placed in the centre of the Vauxhall gyratory – London traffic at its very worst. Controversial plans to demolish the building (listing status has been denied) and re-configure the area, inclusive of a new high rise development by Zaha Hadid Architects, have been agreed. [Vauxhall bus station - Wikipedia](#) / [Vauxhall Cross island – Zaha Hadid Architects \(zaha-hadid.com\)](#) / [MP blasts 'ridiculous' plan to demolish Vauxhall bus station | London Evening Standard | Evening Standard / https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/vauxhall-gyratory](#) (Download the consultation report)

- 2) Thames Tideway Tunnel / The ‘Super Sewer’ – (Currently under construction) – There are 3 or 4 construction sites along the route from Vauxhall to Battersea PS for the new London Super Sewer. This engineering work deserves some attention as a major part of London’s infrastructure past and present. There is a proposal to make the temporary works at Chelsea Bridge into a permanent mini park allowing – rare - access to the riverfront for residents. [Thames Tideway Scheme - Wikipedia](#)



- 3) Vauxhall Bridge (A Binnie/1906) – A generally unloved Thames Bridge, although graced with grand Edwardian statues. Ben O’Looney (one of our Conference Tour Guides) loves it. It has now become one of the major cycling routes into London, with a complex set of cycle paths at either end – evidence of adapting to new transportation requirements. [Vauxhall Bridge - Wikipedia](#)

- 4) MI6 Headquarters ‘SIS Building’ (Sir Terry Farrell/1993) – Across Vauxhall Bridge is a building by Terry Farrell in his prolonged postmodern mode. The building was famously ‘blown up’ in the James Bond movie Skyfall but was also featured in Spectre. This is spy territory. MI5 is close by, north of the Thames and a little down river. [SIS Building - Wikipedia](#) The blowing up sequence can also be googled.



- 5) St George Wharf and Tower (Broadway Malayan/2014 (Tower) - After several years, St George Wharf sort of grows on one and the local restaurants are good places to meet spies both MI5 & 6; however, there is not much else to say about the development except that the Tower was hit by a helicopter in 2013 in fog during construction. The Thames is a major helicopter route in and out of the city.



At very low tide, it is possible to see the vestigial foundations of a Neolithic walkway/pier circa 3000 to 1550 BC, built into the marshy riverbanks apparently for votive offerings to the local gods. The famous Battersea Shield – discovered near by - is in the Museum of London.

- 6) Crown Reach (Nicholas Lacey & Partners/c1960s) – Across the river, the much more elegant Crown Reach provides an example of what riverside living could be like. Its main street façade (away from the river) has an interesting, curved feature. There does not appear to be any immediately accessible media references to Crown Reach despite its attractiveness – just marketing/rental info. In earlier versions of this Tour, Crown Reach was mis-allocated to Denys Lasdun, but further research revealed it was designed by the not well known architectural firm, Nicholas Lacey & Partners. [https://www.ribapix.com/crown-reach-grosvenor-road-london\\_riba34215](https://www.ribapix.com/crown-reach-grosvenor-road-london_riba34215)



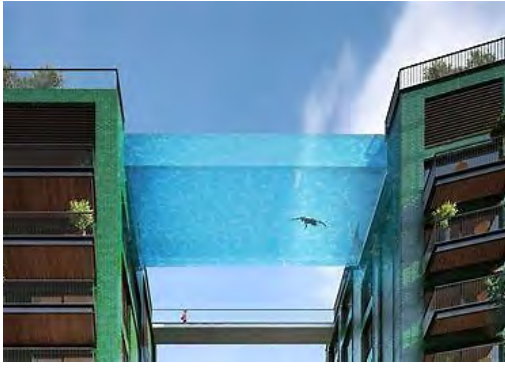
- 7) Brunswick House (1700s) – Hidden amongst all the new development in the area is a grand, late Georgian mansion house and architectural salvage yard now a venue for hire. [Brunswick House | The fabulous Georgian mansion in Vauxhall](#)



- 8) Nine Elms Square (SOM/2020s) and One Nine Elms and Demac 'Jenga' Tower (both KPF/2020s) – The Vauxhall end of the 9 Elms Corridor has been taken over by a cluster of American designed high rise residential/hotel units. <https://nla.london/projects/one-nine-elms> / [Nine Elms Square - gqdesign /](#) <https://damactower.co.uk/en/about-damac-tower/> <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/versace-goes-to-vauxhall-fashion-house-to-design-interior-of-jenga-tower-10363330.html>

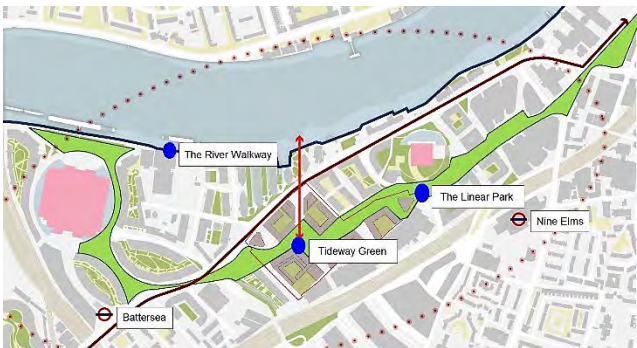
- 9) US Embassy (Kieran Timberlake/2016) – President Trump refused to visit the new London Embassy as he said it was in a low quality neighbourhood. Although it does not quite live up to the Saarinen designed Embassy in Grosvenor Square, there is some potential for the area. The landscaping of the area around the security moat is well done. [New Embassy Design Concept | U.S. Embassy & Consulates in the United Kingdom \(usembassy.gov\)](#) / [AIA RIBA Keynote Lecture 2018 — AIA UK](#)





- 10) Sky Pool (HAL Architects with Arup Associates/2021) and Linear Park (Allies & Morrison/2021) and Arch 42 (Projects Office/ 2021) – Although, most of 9 Elms was once semi industrial waste land, it is now an area of luxury residential units . There is also a fair amount of ‘affordable housing’, but part of the condemnation of the area is the fact that luxury and affordable do not mix well. The Sky Pool – for example - is off limits to the latter. [London ‘sky pool’ among wave of ever more implausible designs | Swimming | The Guardian / Transparent Sky Pool provides "a swim like no other" between London towers \(dezeen.com\)](#)

The recently opened segment of the Linear Park between the housing and the US Embassy offers a surprising respite from the intensity of the 9 Elms Corridor currently under construction. However, the Linear Park on Nine Elms is just beginning to be visible. It seems a long way to go until the promised walk from Vauxhall Bridge to the Battersea Power Station really takes shape. [About - Nine Elms Park](#)



The design for Arch 42 was based on a community led competition. The arch’s rejuvenated link to the extensive residential neighbourhoods ‘on the other side of the tracks’ is a practical success of the Master Plan. [Winners of Nine Elms Arch 42 design announced | Nine Elms on the South Bank \(nineelmslondon.com\)](#)



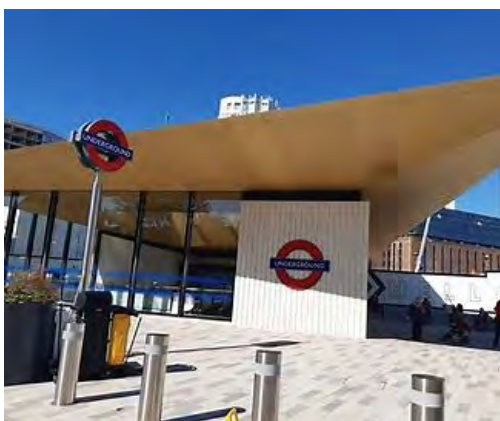
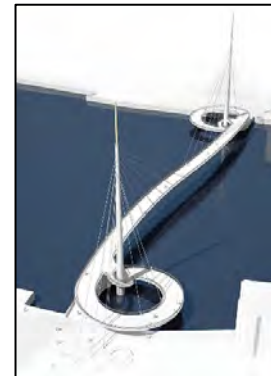
- 11) Riverlight Development (Rogers Stirk Harbour/2013 to 2017) – Richard Rogers’s development was one of the earliest to take advantage of the trend for riverside living, with its 6 residential blocks that look exactly like one would expect a RR building to look. There were stories at the time that the developer wanted to remove the many houseboats along the river, remnants of past industrial heritage, but fortunately for the character of the area the houseboats remain. [Riverlight Quay Development | Rent & Buy | LiFE Residential](#)

- 12) Dolphin Square (Gorden Jeeves & Oscar Faber/1938) and Westminster Boat Base – A few years ago, ‘notorious’ Dolphin Square was labelled the ‘worst address in London’, given its linkage to a paedophile ring and possible murder. However, the story has been proven spectacularly false and Dolphin Square can now sink back into oblivion, albeit as a class residence often by politicians, as it is within Parliament’s ‘division bell’. Pevsner lauded it. [Dolphin Square - Wikipedia](#)



Dolphin Square (private) and the Westminster Boat Base and adjacent park (public) have access to the riverfront - which is limited in Central London. One of the negatives of early pedestrian bridge proposals (see below) would be to eliminate (or curtail) access to the Boat Base – a charity to train local children in boating skills – and to the adjacent park.

- 13) Proposed Wandsworth to Pimlico Pedestrian Bridge (Robin Snell & Partners /2018) – Wandsworth Council (representing the south bank of the Thames) has proposed a pedestrian/bike bridge across the Thames to Westminster (representing the north bank) between Pimlico and 9 Elms. A major design competition for the bridge was held with participation from all of London’s major architects. The project has been very poorly received by the residents of Pimlico/Westminster, but multiple public consultations have established a ‘preferred’ (‘no bridge’ was not an option) design and location. The project is currently in abeyance. [Preferred location identified for Nine Elms Pimlico Bridge - Wandsworth Borough Council / Nine Elms Pimlico Bridge](#)

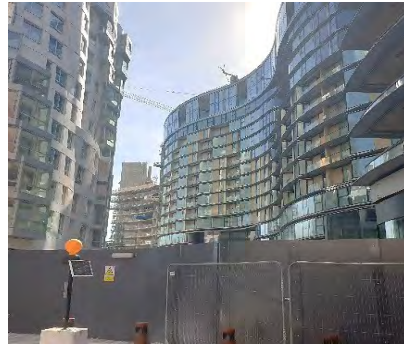


- 14) Battersea Power Station Station (Sir Nicholas Grimshaw/2021) –The BPS station, one of the newest in London is rather grand. This station is expected to open up the area to future development and to make access to the iconic Power Station easier. Not all the comments so far are positive. As typical in London, there are already complaints that the line did not continue to Clapham Junction, one of the busiest stations in Europe and without an underground connection. [Battersea Power Station tube station - Wikipedia](#) / [Nine Elms tube station - Wikipedia](#)

- 15) The Battersea Power Station (T Halliday & GG Scott/1935 & 1955 / Foster & Wilkinson Eyre & James and Dorner Field Operations (NY High Line architects)/2021) – Although Practical Completion was granted in late August, the official opening is now scheduled for **14 Oct. We will – unfortunately – NOT be able to go inside.** [Battersea Power Station /Battersea Power Station, London SW11 - Bing video / https://batterseapowerstation.co.uk/news/article/battersea-power-station-unveils-newly-restored-control-room-a / Battersea power station: conquering the Everest of real estate | Features | Building < This last link is a good summary of Battersea Power Station](#)



- 16) BPS Residential Phase 1 (Gehry & Foster/2022) – To make the Battersea Power Station Development financially feasible, the developers have had to cram it full of housing – luxury units (the associated affordable housing is across 9 Elms from the underground station) are everywhere, including on top of the station itself. They have also brought in star architects to raise the quality from some of the mediocre results both downriver and upriver from the Power Station.



17) Churchill Gardens Estate (Powell & Moya/1960s) – Churchill Gardens – the first high rise public housing in the UK - was built after the war in a bomb damaged area. In 2000, it won the prestigious Civic Award for the best public building in the previous 40 years. It was chosen simply because it did well what it set out to do - provide exemplary designed public housing. Churchill Gardens was originally heated via BPS, but now has a rare London district heating system. Pevsner compared it unfavourably with Dolphin Square. [Powell & Moya | The Modern House A to Z of modern design / Churchill Gardens - Wikipedia](#)

18) Western Pumping Station (Charles Henry Driver & Joseph Bazalgette/ 1870s) - The Western Pumping Station is not as beautiful or as famous as Driver’s other pumping stations, Crossness and Abbey Mills – Victorian masterpieces. It sits mysteriously on the edge of the Thames and has served London for over a hundred years lifting its waste up to the level of Bazalgette’s engineering masterpiece, the original London sewer. [Western Sewage Pumping Station, Grosvenor Road © Alan Murray-Rust :: Geograph Britain and Ireland](#)



## THE DESTINATION VENUE / Circus West Village



The main walk ends by the river façade of the Power Station at one of the largest new public spaces in London. It is a good place to end the walk and take refreshment.

The developers have tried every trick of their trade to entice visitors to the area – including fountains, vistas to the river, seating areas, sculptures and – of course – copious restaurants, retail shops, entertainment units, and exercise stations. They also hold frequent events - outdoor movies, light shows, retail fairs, pop up stores, street parties, etc.

## Optional for After Lunch

Battersea Park / Royal Hospital (Sir Christopher Wren/1680s) / Chelsea and Albert Bridges (1937 and 1873) – The park takes hours to explore, but the Thames Path to



the Peace Pagoda allows a glimpse of Cheyne Walk and Wren’s Royal Hospital. The Pagoda was set up by ‘Red Ken’ Livingston, the pre 2008 London mayor, because London ‘didn’t have one’. It sits incongruously between two of London’s iconic bridges – Chelsea, a no nonsense, classic suspension bridge, and Albert, a ‘pretty’, well-loved but poorly designed bridge. [Battersea Park - Wikipedia / Royal Hospital Chelsea - Wikipedia](#)