

## **REVITALIZATION OF CHARLES SQUARE – FINAL EVALUATION**

*Evaluation criteria:*

- A. *Solution of urbanistic relations*
- B. *Landscaping modifications and park design*
- C. *Architectonic solution and solution of public spaces*
- D. *Quality of adaptation / regeneration of listed objects*
- E. *Suitable concept of infrastructure - transport and rainwater management system*
- F. *Efficiency and economy of the solution*
- G. *Expediency in the choice of professional approach – proposed performance*

*The overall average score is 1-7 points.*

### **Rehwaldt LA + BY Architects + PD Filip**

The authors submitted a sophisticated and empathic proposal that uniformly interprets the four important historical layers of Charles Square and creates a clear thematic and spatial framework for the revitalisation, use and future development of the park.

The proposal expressly suggests returning to the medieval openness of the square in front of the New Town Hall and Municipal Court, providing an open space for markets and social events. Indirectly by creating a living space with a café and universal paved area in the southern section of the park. The proposal anticipates a memorial to the bygone Chapel of the Body of God in the form of a permanent light installation, whose final artistic form remains open and which can be another impetus for the revival of public interest in Charles Square. In modern language, the proposal recreates the original mid-19<sup>th</sup> century boundary of the park in the form of a promenade/avenue, creating a unifying element – a variable urban frame – comprised of widened pavements along the perimeter of the park with a new tree-lined promenade, perimeter bench, urban stairway, public restrooms, gardener's area and café. The urban frame serves as a multifaceted element, symbolically and physically delineating the park from the rush of the city. Thomayer's original concept of a closed-off green oasis is accepted by the proposal, yet adapted to the current requirements of life and pedestrian traffic on the square. The authors adopt Thomayer's fundamental matrix but modify and complement it by adding contemporary functions. The proposal more or less preserves perimeter embankments and continues Thomayer's work with plants and vegetation in the gardening tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, updating the park's perception as a showcase of landscape art of its time, through, for example, exhibitions in the central part of the park, with the ambition of involving and strengthening the local communities. Modern history is reflected in the proposal in a playful manner. Visitors will be able to "read" the personal stories of the city's inhabitants in the paving (using Prague mosaic) of the perimeter promenade. (A, B, D)

Although the proposal may seem conservative at first glance, it is not. It brings a whole range of significant positive changes:

The park on Charles Square will be reinstated to its rightful place in the city's structure. The authors have succeeded in inscribing the local character and history of the locality into their proposal. However, they do not address the broader neighbourhood of Charles Square. The proposal creates a hitherto missing piazzetta in front of the New Town Hall, the Municipal Court and St. Ignatius Church, re-integrating them back into the context and space of the square. These areas, along with the central sector in the southern part of the park provide a venue for the regular organisation of events

and for the activity of important institutions based on Charles Square. The paved area with a café, seasonally adaptable fountain and additional playful elements specially designed for Charles Square, will revitalise the southern sector, offering a location with all-day sun. (A, C)

The proposal addresses issues relating to pedestrian passage through the sophisticated redesign of the existing system of paths and sidewalks. The proposal fundamentally shifts and newly formulates entry points to the park in order to facilitate more comfortable passage through the square and the park, while maintaining the integrity of the large lawns that represent a substantial value in the city centre. This decision, however, must lead to a detailed verification of operationally sensitive connectors in further stages of the project, and any modifications should not lead to a change in the spatial concept. Although the approach described above will require more robust intervention into the current structure of the park and its vegetation cover, the Committee evaluated it as highly beneficial in terms of long-term sustainability of life on the square, as it supports both through passage and relaxation in the park. (A, B, D)

With no possible change in the current traffic situation, the proposal makes the decision to widen the pavement along the western boundary of the park, which is currently inadequate due to the location of tram stops there. Also a new tree alley is planted along this wider pavement. The Committee sees the widening of this space as very beneficial in terms of movement on the square, but points out that this requires intervention in power lines owned by the Prague Transport Company (DPP, a.s.) and will affect a number of large trees along the western embankment. Given that the oldest generation of trees on Charles Square is nearing the end of their life-cycle, the removal of some of these trees opens the opportunity for the renewal of the entire segment of vegetation cover on the western perimeter. At the same time, this will allow the quicker establishment of the new tree-lined avenue, which will form a fully-fledged promenade along with the western embankment. However, such intervention will only be possible if it is sufficiently justified as part of the calculated and progressive renewal of the entire tree layer on Charles Square. (A, B, C)

The proposal has a clear idea of the composition of plant species and the internal structure of vegetation cover, which is completely in line with the Thomayer concept. For example, it focuses on the use of lilacs, which were a characteristic element of the identity of Thomayer Park. It defines the chief plant species that are to be preserved, as well as those that will be newly introduced into the park. The proposal establishes the correct ratio between see through ground cover, shrubs and tree layer, which is a key to creating a natural landscape in the park and relevant for biodiversity. (B, D)

A wide perimeter bench is an important element, which confirms and strengthens Thomayer's definition of the park's boundaries in relation to adjacent streets, physically defines existing and new entry points to the park and manages the flow of pedestrians, while simultaneously protecting vegetation planted on the perimeter embankment. The bench offers seating along the entire promenade. The Committee long debated the question of whether the bench did not also represent an undesirable barrier in some places, and the views in the Committee were contradictory. Therefore, the architectural detail of the bench, which must support the natural integration of the bench into the space, so that it seen as a clear and welcoming interface between the street and the park along its entire its length, and not as a barrier, will be decisive. Street furniture in the park has a clean, sparse design, utilising existing benches, new mobile stands, chairs and tables; contemporary, medium high lamps will reduce light pollution. The Committee praises the deliberate work with street furniture and small-scale architecture, which serves as an efficient instrument in clearly defining the park, the promenade and their mutual relationship. (B, C, F)

The proposal offers a traffic solution for the eastern street through well-aimed minor measures, such as a change in parking from diagonal to perpendicular, alignment of the road and pavement, and by unifying the surface in front of St. Ignatius Church. These simple measures will result in the required improvement of the ‘residential’ quality of the street. The proposal analyses the construction of underground parking, including the placement of ramps and parking capacity, but expressly advises against it. The ‘residential’ quality of perimeter streets may be further enhanced by gradually reducing the number of parking places over the next thirty years. (A, E, F)

Rainfall management is addressed schematically in the proposal. The proposed principles need to be further elaborated and verified. The lower hygrophilous layers along the outer wall of the embankment cannot be implemented in all required areas. Similarly, to the form and nature of locations designated for the retention and permeation of water in the middle of lawns. (B, E)

The proposal is also praised for its moderation, elegance and local Prague expression. It offers a clear view of how to enhance the square, the urban framework and the central park. It creatively works with typical local motifs and stories inscribed into the detail of the promenade using Prague mosaic, with playful elements in street furniture and a return to the tradition of lilacs. (A, D, F)

The strength of this proposal lies in the manner in which it was produced, resembling a manual. It is variable, and can adapt to reality well, assuming unavoidable changes in natural elements and people’s requirements for the use of the park over time. By placing emphasis on a management plan and care for the park, the proposal communicates that the functioning of the park in the city centre cannot be based on strong architectural intervention alone, but must also rest on the programme within the park and adequate care. The proposal perceives the park as an open public institution which creates its programme in cooperation with local players and the general public. The authors have incorporated the proposal into a broader programme framework and declare that actual revitalisation does not begin or end with reconstruction. This approach may be considered contemporary and progressive. The authors’ approach to the process, their choice of techniques and clear communication proves that they clearly understand the architect’s role in the process of revitalising a heritage landscape site in the city centre to the maximum possible degree. (F, G)

***The overall score is 5.86 points.***