

Kársnes - Sustainable lifeline

Conclusion of the Jury, second stage, 7 June 2016

This report contains the conclusion of the jury in the “Kársnes - Sustainable lifeline” competition, held by the municipality of Kópavogur, as a part of the Nordic Built Cities Challenge.

The competition site is centrally located in the greater Reykjavik capital area, with mostly industrial buildings and open landfill. However, it is surrounded by inlets that restrict access to the site. The challenge presented to participants was:

Find means to enhance the connectivity of Kársnes and the Capital Region, that make Kársnes a dynamic and sustainable urban area for people, businesses and the environment.

The jury of the Kársnes competition based its assessment on the 10 principles of the Nordic Built Charter, see <http://www.nordicinnovation.org/nordicbuilt/>

In addition, the Kársnes competition jury applied the following criteria that are specific to the Kársnes competition challenge:

- The impact the proposed solution has on quality of life in Kársnes allowing people and business to thrive in a livable community.
- The impact the proposed solution has on the integration of the capital area.
- The improvements in marine, terrestrial and atmospheric environments as well as the social environment at Kársnes that may result from implementation of the proposal.
- How well the proposed solution demonstrates interdisciplinary cooperation.
- The possibility for implementing the proposed solution swiftly (i.e. within a few years).

In the second stage, participants were asked to give special attention to the following aspects:

- Innovative solutions, that are likely to generate interest in Kársnes and make it a memorable place for residents and visitors as well as to inspire new thinking in urban development.
- Sustainability, especially with respect to mixed uses, low environmental impact, diversity and social integration.
- Connectivity, in the context of mitigation of the impact (such as traffic) that additional housing will inevitably have in the established neighborhood on Kársnes and other nearby areas.

The members of the Kársnes competition jury are:

Guðný Björk Eydal, Professor of Social Work, University of Iceland

Hrafnkell Proppé, Director of planning for Greater Reykjavik

Karl Benediktsson, Professor of Geography, University of Iceland

Thor Sigfússon, entrepreneur and founder of the Iceland Ocean Cluster (chairman)

Thóra Kjarval, architect, Kópavogur Planning Office

The jury met on 27 May, 31 May and 2 June 2016 to assess the four entries that were developed further in the second stage. The first observation was that all the proposals are strong and well thought out,

meeting the criteria set out in the competition programme. The jury's examination was then focused on how well the criteria are integrated into each scheme in a balanced and synergistic way, in order to provide a comprehensive and realistic strategy for Kópavogur in the development of Kársnes.

The jury was unanimous in its decision that entry number 345058 "Spot On Kársnes" should be awarded the second stage prize.

The jury agreed on the following remarks for each entry:

345058 "Spot on Kársnes"

The proposal's strategy is both bold and dynamic, responding well to the challenge, with respect to connectivity within the capital region, the accessibility of Kársnes and quality of life within the new neighbourhood. The overall strategy is furthermore strengthened with a variety of interesting and innovative elements that make the area attractive, memorable and livable. The scheme adapts well to the existing buildings and streets. It is robust in the sense that it remains strong, even if some of its features are not realized.

By proposing two bridges, connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport within the entire capital area is radically changed. Each bridge is also supported and justified by a strategy that expands its role. The bridge across Fossvogur becomes part of a swimming pool, uniquely placed among the many swimming pools in Iceland. The other bridge, across to Bessastaðanes, is part of a car-free island that would be a novel addition to the capital area.

Density, especially at the western end, is fairly high, which raises concerns about increased traffic to and from Kársnes. However within the scheme, priority is given to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport instead of private cars. The mixed uses and new connectivity options are conducive to good social integration.

The harbour area is well thought out with diverse spaces for a variety of activities. The pedestrian walkways from the harbour to the north side of Kársnes, over the canals and between buildings with mixed uses, make a pedestrian's journey both interesting and diverse.

This proposal presents a strong and strategic vision for the future development of Kársnes.

141676 "Sólborg"

The authors of "Sólborg" focus on quality of life and smart use of resources, basing their strategy on the ability to adjust to residents' needs, the site's setting, neighbourhood participation and environmentally friendly lifestyle. Ample green areas are intertwined with housing, creating a variety of public spaces, some of which are covered with glazed roofs and heated with geothermal water. The sustainability aspects are sound and well presented. Overall, the scheme is modest and appealing but quite uniform, especially in housing typologies, and better uses could have been made of the specifics of the site.

492730 "Harbouring life"

The team defines clear goals for the design of the scheme, compatible with the criteria stated in the competition programme. Kársnes is seen as an innovation hub with an Experimentarium and space for light industry, presenting a logical response to the presence of the two universities on the Reykjavík side. Housing is diverse and at a modest scale, both in size and the number of units. The physical aspect is guided by three pedestrian axes, forming a triangle with major attractions at its vertices, and each axis is

given a thematic label, “play”, “nature” and “culture”. While these axes are interesting, they appear superimposed on the urban fabric with little influence on the adjacent areas.

484335 “Evolve Kársnes”

The scheme places great emphasis on nature and ecological assets and suggests an interesting framework for organic growth in the area in a visually appealing presentation. Overall, the scheme is green, flexible and fine-grained. However, the wetland park and the western edge are artificial and raise questions about whether this is the best use of the land, given that it is mostly a landfill of rocks and gravel. The proposed bridge is a focal point and a landmark, a destination by itself. While the presented strategy of gentle evolution is easy to implement, the guidance it provides is also weak.