Alsop’s creation will shine among gloomy neighbours

Rowan Moore

IMAGES like this seem to be from a bygone era, if a recent one. They speak of a limitless confidence in the ability of developers to knock down drab grey blocks and rustle up shiny new ones. They also speak of a time before Prince Charles re-emerged as an architectural taste-maker.

But it seems there’s hopefulness in hotels these days, and more so than in other areas of property. The 2012 boost will be brief, but a cheap pound, if it stays so over the years, will bring more tourists here. Will Alsop’s shiny bug of a building should improve one of the grimmer stretches of the river. This ought to be a fantastic place already, next to a majestic waterway and close to St Paul’s Cathedral, but it is dominated by cars and gloomy architecture. The Alsop scheme could create a decent pedestrian space at ground level, and presents what is in effect a big glass-fronted balcony to the water.

Its location next to retained Sixties blocks is instructive: the latter are the kind of modern buildings nobody likes, whereas the Alsop project is the kind of modern architecture some people do. Charles will not be one of them but even he might be able to see that the proposed hotel celebrates the fact that it is on the river. It also, as planning rules say it must, stays out of views of St Paul’s.

Alsop, who is one of the more vociferous champions of contemporary architecture in the face of royal attacks, has proposed new buildings for this site before but without success. It’s just possible that the miraculous buoyancy of the hotel business means that this one actually happens.

‘Even Prince Charles might see the hotel celebrates the fact that it is on the river’
Spaceship hotel’ to land by the Thames

Danny Brierley

This is the ultra-modern £250 million six-star hotel being planned for the north bank of the Thames.

The provocative design by Will Alsop, which has been likened to a spaceship, will be built at Puddledock in Blackfriars on the site of a conference centre if City planners give it the go-ahead.

It will have a sheer-glass front looking onto the Thames and use translucent stone to clad the five-storey structure.

The building, which has still to be named, is the latest in the boom in London hotel developments which has been largely prompted by the 2012 Olympics. A planning application has been submitted for this latest scheme by developers Heatherfield Ltd.

A spokeswoman for the project said: “The scheme will create a landmark stand-alone building that is intended to rejuvenate one of the few remaining major development sites in the City.”

The building’s height was limited because of the proximity to St Paul’s. It will include a double-height ballroom for 400 people, a spa, bars and restaurants and a rooftop terrace overlooking the Thames.

The 28,000 square metre hotel would replace the Mermaid Conference and Event Centre and an office building. It will be built on the site of the former Mermaid Theatre, the demolition of which was allowed despite opposition led by actors including Ralph Fiennes.

As part of the scheme a pedestrian link to the Thames river walk will be created, giving it better connections to Blackfriars.

The Alsop scheme is one of many significant developments earmarked for the area. Others include the 557ft Jumeirah Tower and the 43-storey Doon Street Tower.

It is also the latest in a series of planned London hotels. Lord Foster’s designs for the first five-star hotel for Heathrow won planning permission this year.

Six-star: how Will Alsop’s £250 million hotel in Blackfriars, which will have a spa and rooftop terrace, could look when built.

Six of the building’s 13 storeys are underground because the area has height limits to accommodate low-flying planes.

Also being planned is a conversion of a former fire station in Manchester Square, Marylebone, by Andre Balazs, the owner of the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles.

The Swiss Centre in Leicester Square and the former Playboy casino in Park Lane are in the process of being converted into hotels.

Westminster council has given permission for 1,500 extra hotel rooms in the borough in the past year and the hotel building sector shows no sign of being slowed.