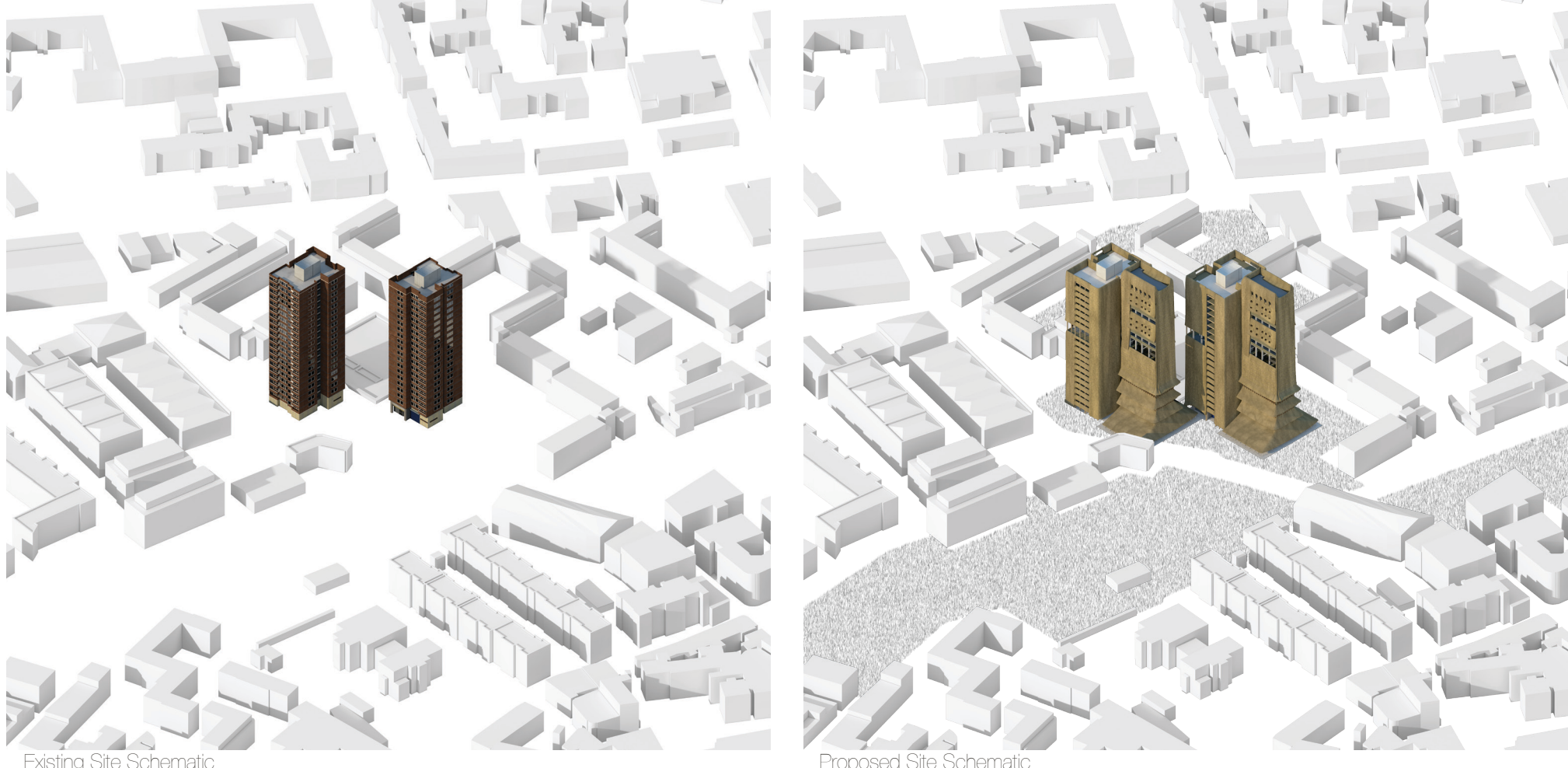


Adaptable Futures

London Thatch

An Adaptable English High Rise Vernacular. Kipling Estate, Weston Street, Bermondsey
To be read in conjunction with the film *London Thatch* <https://vimeo.com/42965962>



In this project I hope to make the case for adaptation, alteration, extension and remodeling as opposed to demolition as an approach to reworking London's decaying tower blocks. The approach that is proposed is specific to the site and context, though the attitude proposed is open enough to be repeated elsewhere.

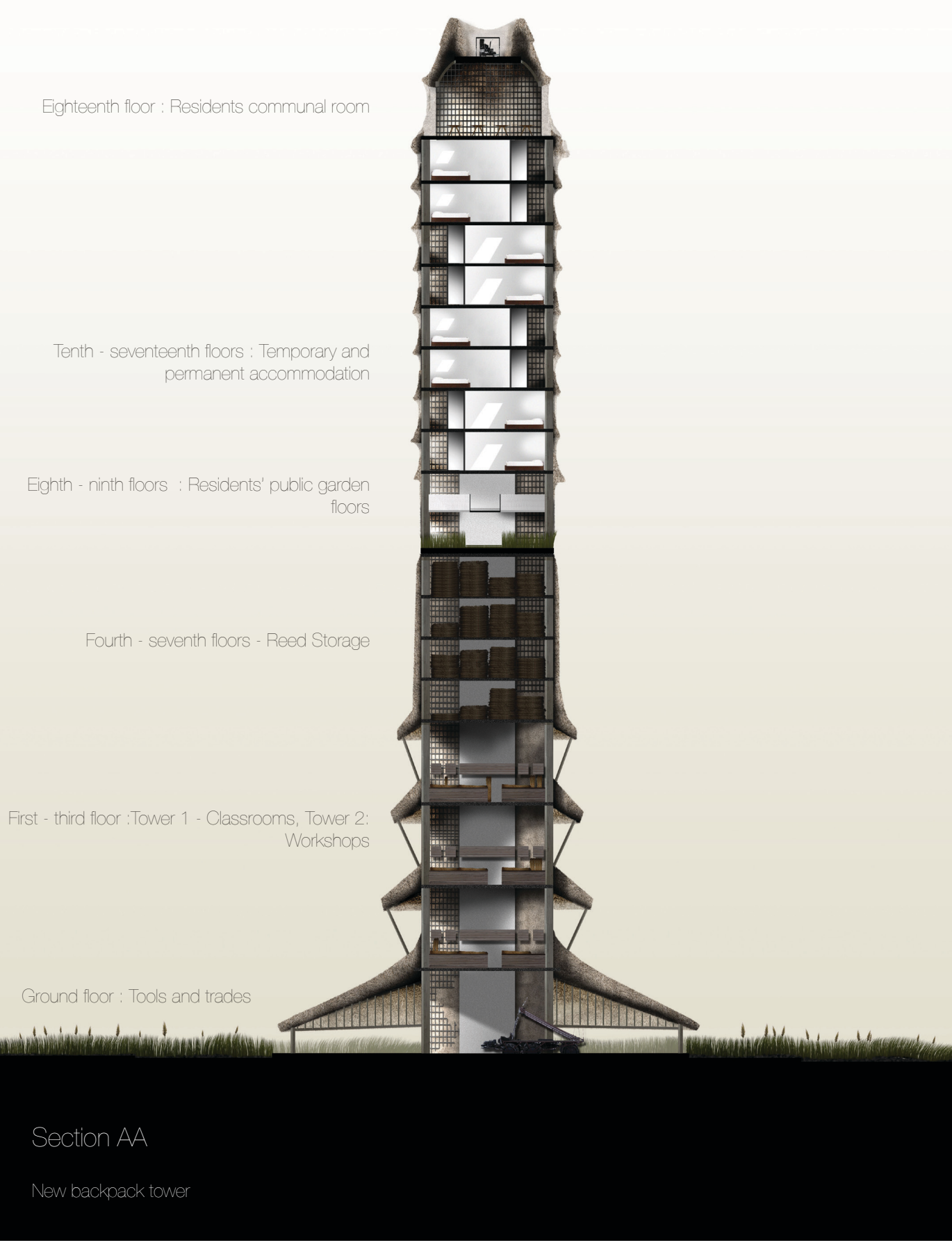
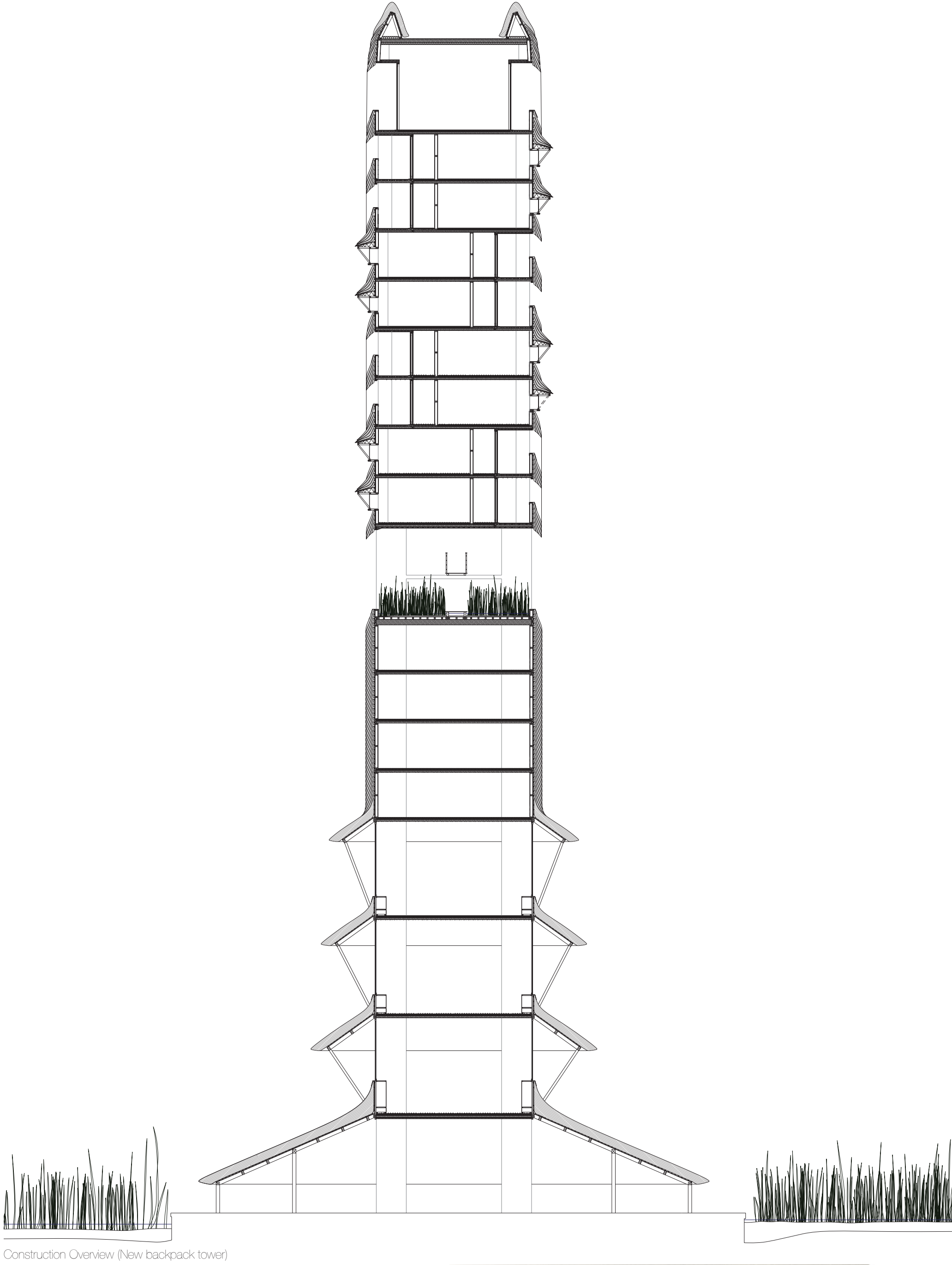
London tower blocks are lively communities, with groups of residents who on the whole don't wish to move or be moved. It is essential to remember this when designing for the renovation of the buildings that the residents live in.

Residents of existing estates in London are wary of regeneration. Too frequently they have been left out of the process, and communities displaced, with little chance of returning to their homes after regeneration has been completed. The residents of the Haygate Estate a few minutes walk away have been subjected to this kind of treatment. Though this is not universal, residents are justifiably wary of significant change to their communal buildings.

The character of Bermondsey has changed enormously over the past few decades; once located visually by the brutalist presence of Guy's Hospital, the world's tallest hospital, it is now marked by Shard London Bridge, for the moment at least, the tallest building in the European Union. These two buildings accurately reflect the social changes to the area, as well as the changing architectural and urban character of Bermondsey. The welfare statism defined by Guy's is reflected in Bermondsey's social tenure, with 39 000 rented and 16 700 leasehold homes under ownership of the council with a waiting list of 19000, representing London's biggest council housing landlord. Alongside this, the Shard was approved in 2003 at the height of the financial bubble of the 2000s, representing London's overbearing and somewhat disturbing obsession with international finance. The shift in London's workforce from the secondary to tertiary sector, has caused many to be left behind, with little or no opportunity to work. The decline of the industries on which Southwark relied caused by the political decisions of the 1980s and the deregulation of the City on the opposite bank of the Thames brought about 'development opportunities' in the area, although the regeneration of the Thames bank and the gentrification of the high street has done little to replace the opportunities provided by the old industries that were lost.

The public spaces around the towers are underused and undervalued. High rise development has typically been built with open green space around it, to retain the density of a site, whilst maintaining accessible public amenity space around it for use by the residents. The amenity space around the towers is constrained, and the open space dull and lifeless. The area given is not large enough for the flats and the result is that it is underutilised.

My proposals seek to address these problems, to help to resolve some of the tensions inherent in the nature of the existing estate, and to suggest a different way to approach the regeneration of London's tower blocks.



An adaptable, thatched approach

The proposals seek to achieve a maintained and adaptable architecture which promotes a skilled method of construction and restores a skilled trade south London.

The project proposal is for a building that facilitates the adaptation of the existing towers, over time. The project allows for a phased redevelopment of the existing towers, providing on site temporary accommodation for families displaced by the construction process. The existing towers will be extended laterally, on a new structure, to increase the living space of the existing flats, and provide private outdoor amenity space for each, improving the quality and amount of space in each of the flats.

Alongside this, a school of Master Thatching is proposed, which will teach local residents a skilled, traditional construction method, the resources and students for which will be used to apply and maintain a new thatched facade for the existing towers. Local people who are in need of work will be able to gain skills, and maintain the existing built environment. The school will train students, maintain the buildings, and promote building using natural materials in the city.

Finally, a constructed wetland of reeds will provide the materials required for the new thatching industry in Bermondsey, as well as filtering and cleaning effluent from the towers before it is disposed of in the Thames, and creating a pleasant, diverse functional landscape around the estate, in the location of an underused outdoor amenity space.

The project has four main programmatic elements:

- Workshops/classrooms for the maintenance of the buildings;
- School of Master Thatching;
- Storage for harvested reeds;
- Public gardens for the residents at ground level and within the building;
- New homes for temporary accommodation and new residents;
- Communal spaces for residents meetings and events.

