The Fleet River Channel

Liberating London’s Lost River as a new Low-Line Park

Of all the lost rivers that still flow in subterranean London, the Fleet has left the greatest mark on the cityscape. Its final tributary is directly under Farringdon Road and New Bridge Street from St Paul’s to the newly enlarged Backfitters Station. The last portion of the river was covered in 1790 before which it was an industrial conduit to wharves. Today the road is bleak, cavernous and rather empty, along which only Ludgate Hill provides a respite of animation. This is where a bridge once crossed linking Fleet Street to St Paul’s. The Fleet River Channel would reintroduce the shallow stream in a cutting one storey below street level with pedestrian footpaths at other sides connected to street level by steps, lifts and to each other by stepping stones and bridges. Traffic would cross on two new bridges. The stone-faced cutting walls would be a canvas for an eclectic sequence of planting and public art that was in intentional contrast to the ordered hard-nosed commerce at street level. The Channel would be a calming, romantic escape inspired by the informal ornamental oasis used by guerrilla gardeners and ‘pavement pimps’ in transport corridors elsewhere in London and beyond. Engravings and soundscapes would bring the river’s history to life and lighting both underfoot and in the undergrowth would bring the space to life after dark. Restoring the visible flow of water southwards and creating a path alongside would encourage the great flow of Thames-side pedestrian traffic north to Southwark.

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