

News

International attraction: Sheikhha Mozah bint Nasser Al Miskowd, an artist's impression of the modernist building in Chiswick with giant advertising screens, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum



Rival royals in £120m bidding war for giant Octopus block

Jonathan Pryor
Consumer Business Editor

TWO rival royal families are set to go head-to-head in a £220 million bidding war for one of London's most divisive buildings.

The wife of the former Emir of Qatar and the current ruler of Dubai are said to be in talks with the developers of the remarkable Black Russian style London Octopus office block in Chiswick.

The proposed 50-metre-high modernist structure – which will be draped in Britain's biggest advertising hoardings – has been bitterly opposed by locals who claim it will turn Chiswick round about into a garish Piccadilly Circus of the west.

Joint developers London & Earth Estates and Galliard Group will begin officially marketing the building this week. They say it has already attracted international interest because the LED screens covering a third of an acre – three times as much as the Piccadilly Circus lights – will be passed by estimated 300,000 vehicles a day. Six roads pass or converge at the roundabout, including the North Circular, the M4 Chiswick flyover and the A4.

The royal bidders are Sheikhha Mozah bint Nasser Al Miskowd, wife of former Qatari emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the monarch of Dubai and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates.

Stephen Corway, chief executive of Galliard, said that the last condition of the planning consent – a "light management plan" to reduce the risk of drivers

being distracted – was now in place. The potential bidders are waiting for a final report on the technology behind the screens from lighting specialists Tait, which designed the spectacular LED displays at the opening and closing ceremonies of the London Olympics.

Marie Rabouhian, who chairs the West Chiswick and Gunnersbury Society, said the London Octopus was "totally inappropriate" for a residential location close to the Wellesley Road conservation area, Gunnersbury Park and a large cemetery that includes a memorial to Polish victims of the Katyn massacre.

She said: "We didn't think we lived in Las Vegas or Times Square. It will be seen for miles. It is an alien object that might be all right in a city centre or just off a motorway in the middle of nowhere. But we don't want an overhead section of the M4 to be the defining feature of our neighbourhood."

The building, designed by the MAKE architectural practice, won planning permission for London Octopus from Hounslow council in December 2002.

The screens will drape over 46,000 sq ft of office space and the total development is expected to generate at least £10 million a year, mostly from screen advertising. Construction work on the half-acre site is not likely to start until the autumn and will take two years.

Mr Corway said: "The London Octopus is the most futuristic and exciting commercial building ever launched in London. Vast revenue generating advertising boards, cutting edge architecture, a sophisticated multi-functional role, and five-star facilities."