

# Gran San Blas Sur Madrid

*Barrio Amposta Distrito San Blas-Canillejas*



The proposed area consists of two urban plots that are part of the Gran San Blas neighbourhood, in the southeast of Madrid close to the M40 ring road and the R3 radial highway. The site was originally developed in the 1970s as a residential area supported by some commercial activities and social infrastructure. This type of development is very common in Madrid's suburban areas, developed during the 60s, 70s and 80s of the last century.

Today, these suburban areas present similar problems. The space functionality has changed: many of the commercial retail outlets have been converted to residential units and the area is dominated by large sites hosting public infrastructure (e.g. schools, toilets). Some of the facilities have been abandoned, bordered up and degraded – generating the perception of an unsafe environment. Alongside this, the inter-block spaces between residential units, originally designed as places for meeting and social unity present deterioration, enhancing the perception of insecurity.

This competition aims to provide an opportunity for students to investigate possible solutions to resolve these issues, common to many of the residential suburban areas throughout Madrid. For this competition, students should focus on developing solutions for the sites in Gran Blas Neighbourhood. However, interventions should be considered and designed in a way that they could be implemented in other similar areas.

The proposals should focus on improving public spaces, creating new green areas, investing in safe and attractive cycling and pedestrian routes, proposing new activities and minimising the use of private vehicles. In addition, there is scope for improving existing buildings by adapting them to increase their energy efficiency. Proposals should provide solutions to urban voids, reinforcing the multifunctionality of urban space and installing greenery in a new and productive way. They should work towards developing a resilient neighbourhood adapted to new paradigms and realities that have emerged in recent years and as a result of the COVID crisis.



## Approx. site area:

19 hectares. 5 hectares correspond to the infrastructure category (schools, toilets, etc.), 9000 square meters to sports and 1 hectare to green areas.

## Demographics:

The area has 4905 inhabitants with hardly any growth in the last 5 years. Average age is 45. 12% of single-person households are made up of a single woman over the age of 65. Unemployment rates are almost double the city average. The percentage of immigrant population (12%) is below the city average.

## Priority areas & main City expectations:

Proposals should focus on:

- Addressing the lack of green areas in the site;
- Improving the built environment to increase buildings energy efficiency
- Creating pedestrian and bicycle paths, shifting away from private vehicle dependence
- Promoting new activities and local commercial spaces in the interior of the city blocks
- Rethinking the functionality of the facilities that currently serve as barriers between the new growths and Greater San Blas.

## Presentation of the site



*Figures 1 and 2. Location in the city and orthophoto*

The proposed redevelopment site is in Gran San Blas, a neighbourhood in the east of Madrid. The neighbourhood emerged between 1957 and 1959 as a result of the *Plan de Urgencia Social de Madrid* (Madrid Social Emergency Plan), where more than 10,000 homes were developed and connected to the city by the extension of Arturo Soria Ave, now known as Avenida Institución Libre de Enseñanza. It is the largest, and most representative, social housing development of the era.

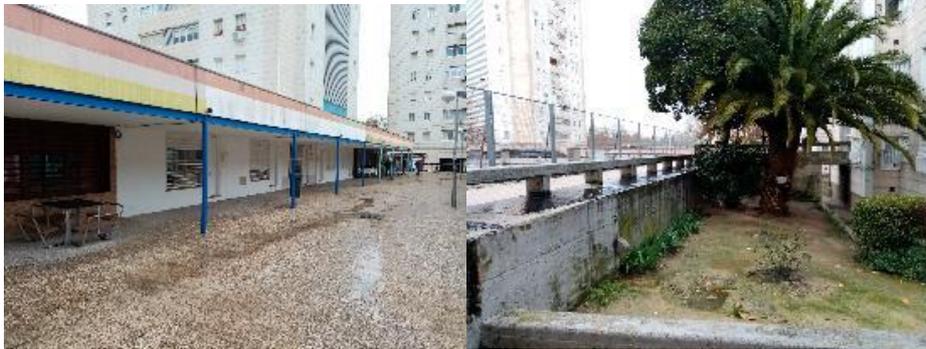
This city was originally developed as individually designed, laid-out and built plots, which lacked cohesion and of varying urban designs. The main aim of the Gran San Blas site was to develop a welcoming urban space to make it easy for new citizens of Madrid to move from the countryside to the city. The result was a large urban development, where huge plots of open-block design residential buildings are interspersed with large infrastructure plots. These act as internal borders inside the

neighbourhood and provide small commercial areas and shopping galleries to make up for the lack of shops in most of the buildings.

The **specific site** for the proposed redevelopment, **known as San Blas J and San Blas K plots**, is located to the south of Gran San Blas and has a physical, morphological, social and economic border in the district. It is an interstitial space that separates the district's new developments from the so-called Gran San Blas – a huge urban space that covers a large part of the Simancas, Hellín, Arcos and Amposta neighbourhoods. This urban area, which totals approximately 20 hectares, comprises all of the abovementioned elements: high-rise residential blocks, commercial spaces, large infrastructure plots, etc., which currently present the abovementioned challenges. The **goal** for Students Reinventing Cities is to tackle this problem in an original, innovative, multidisciplinary way. Students should propose solutions incorporating a *masterplan or other similar tool*, with key goals and solutions to develop and enhance the neighbourhood.

Some of the **most relevant aspects to consider for proposals are:**

- The residential area is made up of 90 medium-quality plots, according to land survey data. It forms an intricate open-block landscape which is very hard to read and interpret. This can result in a perceived lack of security and fear.
- The area's non-residential land essentially comprises small areas (of approximately one hectare) classed as green spaces, and about five hectares of facilities (approximately 1.5 hectares of which are disused or underutilised).
- In terms of mobility, the area can be accessed via the M-40- and R-3 motorways. Two main roads form the perimeter of the area: Avenida Institución Libre de Enseñanza and Avenida de Guadalajara. There is also good access to public transport via metro line two, with an important interchange hub in Plaza de Alsacia, on Avenida de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza.
- Continuing with mobility and in connection with the target structure, one aspect to consider is that there is on average one vehicle per household, amounting to approximately 1,750 registered vehicles. Since none of the residential buildings has a garage, there is a high volume of private vehicles parked on public roads.
- Lastly, we must bear in mind that every residential space is defined not only by its buildings, but also by the social reality that exists in it. In this case, the population is 4,905, with a density of approximately 245 inhabitants per hectare. At present, the dependency ratio is 52.9%, which is somewhat lower than the city as a whole. There has been a progressive reduction in the average household size, which stands at 2.72 members in 2020. However, it is important to stress that 15% of these households are single-person households occupied by people over the age of 65, mainly women. This figure has increased sharply in recent years. One significant socio-economic problem in the area is the unemployment rate, which is almost 20% for women and over 17% for men.
- We cannot ignore the effect of COVID-19 on the environment. Despite not being one of the worst-affected areas – with a cumulative incidence of around the city average –, in certain periods the rate has exceeded more than 800 cases/100,000 inhabitants.



Figures 3 and 4. Interior spaces in the redevelopment area

## City climate priorities and environmental issues to address

For years Madrid has been aware of the global climate emergency and has positioned itself in various international media as a strong advocate of the fight against climate change with a commitment to a sustainable, green, and emission-free future.

**The focus for urban redevelopment projects in Madrid is to reduce the heat island effect, increase green spaces and wooded areas, and create agro-ecological production spaces.**

In this regard, among its most significant actions, Madrid is working on promoting **green infrastructure**, prioritising pedestrian routes and **redesigning the city on a human scale**. The city is also seeking to rewild empty spaces in open-block neighbourhoods and vacant non-residential plots on urban land.

Additionally, the area in question is covered by Madrid's *Estrategia Hábitat Sureste* (Southeast Habitat Strategy). Its goal is to ensure that the development of the southeast area is a zero-emission process, supported by three fundamental pillars: energy efficiency, green infrastructure/ nature network, and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) – mobility-oriented development of public transport.

**The selected area is perfect as an urban laboratory, where we can experiment green and sustainable action in an urban space** where artificial surfaces dominate and landscaped spaces have been phased out. Proposals should likewise include public spaces which integrate the presence of private vehicles with priority pedestrian and cyclist use.

In terms of built space, proposals must prioritise the renovation of buildings and existing infrastructure, together with the development of new uses and flexible activities, e.g. following tactical urban planning practices.

## Other expectations for the site's redevelopment

The urban space of this competition presents other challenges linked to the structure and layout of the built space. These include cul-de-sacs, poorly lit passageways, and platforms of different heights connected by stairs. This causes accessibility issues and widespread concerns about security, accompanied by social conflict and exclusion. Therefore, the urban design must aim to create a simple, straightforward, accessible, secure and more gender-equitable environment. This should be balanced with economic improvements (through "green", "blue", "growth" or smaller-scale economic initiatives); public-private partnerships (PPP); social improvements, such as hubs for educational integration, cultural and leisure activities and urban and landscape strategies to enable more flexible urban uses and help define the urban identity.

There are also opportunities to improve the urban layout of the interior spaces of the so-called mega-block. The open space in the east (Argenta St.) has considerable potential as a local square, as it is centrality located, accessible and offers reasonably good visibility from bordering streets. The area is also very well-served by key public infrastructure: Preschool & primary education, library or cultural centres, a health centre within 500 metres, municipal sports facilities, and even a nursery school. However, the area lacks shops and further transport infrastructure is needed to reduce congestion on the public highway and between spaces.

Proposals could therefore promote mixed-use development, providing activities which are also compatible with residential development. This could help breathe urban life into the environment, and enhance the small commercial centre in the area, which is currently run down. Although the objective is to limit the use of private vehicles, the redevelopment must take parking needs into account so the feasibility of an underground residents' car park (PAR) could be assessed.

### Specific city planning rules and regulations

The proposed site is one of various projects under the *Estrategia de Regeneración Urbana* (Urban Regeneration Strategy) rolled out by the *D.G. de Planificación Estratégica del Ayuntamiento* (City Council's Office of Strategic Planning). These projects include the *Itinerario Estructurante Recentralizando San Blas* (San Blas Redevelopment Roadmap) proposal and the *Área de Oportunidad de la Calle Argenta* (Argenta St. Area of Opportunity)

The *Itinerario Estructurante Recentralizando San Blas* (in green in Figure 7) is composed of different routes that run through the different blocks (known as "plots") of Gran San Blas. It aims to promote the centrality of the civic square, an urban area well-placed to become the site with the most unique identity in the south of the district. These cross-routes, running from north to south and east to west, converge in the square. This provides the only link between the different plots which are poorly interconnected with one another. The routes were planned with the opportunity for coexistence and socialisation, and redeveloping them and recovering the space for pedestrians, in mind.

In the *Área de Oportunidad de calle Argenta*, whose perimeter is marked in black dots in Figure 7, vacant plots are allocated for use as infrastructure and green areas. Under the *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de Madrid* (General Urban Development Plan for Madrid, PGOUM) change of use is required for their acquisition, which is difficult to achieve. The large amount of space used for informal car parking, unpaved ground and lack of activity in the area provides an opportunity for redevelopment and revitalisation.

Finally, it should be noted that the site comes under the *Plan Especial de Incremento y Mejora de las Redes Públicas* (Special Plan for the Extension and Improvement of Public Networks). This plan aims to clarify ownership and redevelop empty interlocking spaces as pedestrian areas, thus enhancing their use as quality public spaces that can be re-vegetated or host activities to meet the local needs. At the same time, it specifies the commercial use of main squares and ground floor spaces, which have gradually become residential, leading to the loss of uses that are in high demand in the area. Lastly, it details the size and location of the large facilities that often comprise large urban barriers, and streamlines the definition of vacant plots.

Please bear in mind that the abovementioned planning instruments are included in the technical-legal regulations of the current *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana de Madrid* (General Urban Development Plan for Madrid, PGOU 97), and more specifically in its sections relating to zonal planning regulation 3.1.a, due to the building typology of the area.

In addition to the urban planning regulations, there are other city plans which can serve as a reference for the proposal: *Plan de Infraestructura Verde y Biodiversidad de Madrid* (Madrid Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan), *Plan de Calidad de Paisaje de Madrid* (Madrid Landscape Quality

Plan), *Plan de Movilidad Urbana Sostenible de la Ciudad de Madrid* (Madrid Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan).



*Figure 5. Urban Regeneration Strategy Roadmap*

### **Language requirements**

Documents for the registration and presentation of the final project can be submitted in English or Spanish.