

PLANS TAKE SHAPE TO MOVE THE CITY OF KIRUNA

The city of Kiruna, in the north of Sweden (founded 1900, population approx 18,200), is about to undergo one of the biggest urban transformations of our time. The entire city will be moved approximately two miles east. This is a huge challenge, provoking anxiety and anticipation among the citizens of Kiruna. It is also a unique opportunity to transform the city for the better. It requires careful strategic planning and close consultation with the entire community to harness a collective memory whilst creating a common vision for the future. Unprecedented in its ambition the project raises the question: is it possible to move a city to a new location and build anew whilst preserving the unique identity of the city and its residents?

The city of Kiruna has to move. A vast body of iron ore is being extracted at Kirunavaara on the western border of the city, causing deformation and subsidence effects which will soon reach the city centre. The state-owned mining company, LKAB, which founded the town in 1900 and is now the largest iron producer in Europe and the greatest energy consumer in Sweden, will fund the relocation of the city in order to sustain mining activity at Kirunavaara up until the year 2033.

In February 2013 White arkitekter working with Ghilardi + Hellsten Arkitekter won an international competition for a 20-year masterplan of Kiruna's phased relocation by 2033. Challenging the Municipality's brief White is taking a much longer view and has initiated a 100-year masterplan with the aim to create a sustainable model city, a city with a diverse economy that is less dependent on the world market for iron ore.

This week LKAB and the Municipality of Kiruna announced the first phase of that masterplan, with LKAB pledging an investment of €415.5 million for the development of the new town centre. Construction of phase 1 will commence in June with estimated completion in seven years.

MOVING THE CITY

White's vision for the transformation of Kiruna will take place in phases. A series of projects will allow the city to 'crawl' along a new urban belt to its new home. This belt, focused around a central street Malmvägen, will link central Kiruna to the nearby settlements of Lombolo, Tuolluvaara, the airport and the mine at Kirunavaara. The character of the former Kiruna will be retained through the re-use of materials from demolished buildings, and some of the culturally significant built elements, including a historic church, will be relocated unaltered. The old Kiruna will be gradually phased out and once the town becomes more vibrant further to the east, the community will relocate.



AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY

The relocation presents an unparalleled opportunity for Kiruna to transform itself into a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable city. The new development will be designed to a carbon neutral agenda. A denser more intelligent plan, equipped with meeting places and cultural amenities, will promote public life, broadening the male dominated demographic of Kiruna's past, allowing a more diverse community to settle and thrive. Kiruna has the fastest-growing rate of small businesses in Sweden and after years of population decline it now has a huge demand for new housing. New housing developments will be built in addition to the 3000 homes that will be relocated.

The physical relocation of the city centre and the social dimension of the process are the project's greatest challenges. Kiruna's climate and location present further challenges. Located 140 km/87 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Swedish Lapland, Kiruna is extremely remote. It has a sub-arctic climate where the sun never sets in summer and never rises in the winter and temperatures can plummet to -22°C. The new masterplan will utilise resources efficiently, harnessing the enormous amounts of waste heat generated by the mining activity, combined with wind turbines to generate energy and recycling infrastructure to reduce freight and waste.

THE NEW URBAN PLAN

The first phase of the masterplan is a new civic square, which will be home to Kiruna's historic clock tower as well as a new travel centre (2018), facilitating connections between old and new, and a new city hall, The Crystal, designed by Henning Larsen Architects (2016). Phase 1 will also comprise a new library (2019) and swimming pool (2016) and by 2021 the Kiruna Church will be carefully demounted and reconstructed on the new site.

Extending out from the central civic square and the central axis of Malmvägen, neighbourhoods will form prongs or 'urban fingers' into the surrounding arctic landscape so that residents are never more than three blocks away from nature.

EVERYONE INVOLVED

Central to White's strategy are the citizens of Kiruna. A continuous dialogue between the Municipality, masterplanners and residents of Kiruna is vital to the success of the transformation. White's methodology, conducted by in-house social anthropologists headed by Viktoria Walldin, is exploratory, to reach beyond the expected and realise desired outcomes. Engagement with the community has informed the masterplan, and an ongoing dialogue will be implemented in the following three ways: formal and informal discussions and feedback with the community; a proposed Kiruna Biennale to exhibit the vision for the city and host events to share the story; and the Kiruna Portal, an extra-large communal shop and 'build it yourself' facility and construction recycling depot, where remnants of the old city can be reused, recycled and retrofitted into the new.

The relocation of Kiruna has been in debate for over ten years since LKAB alerted the city to the deformation effects of the mine. The ratification of the masterplan and LKAB's investment in phase 1 mark a significant milestone in the redevelopment of the town. It means that the citizens of Kiruna no longer have to put their lives on hold and can start planning their future.

Mikael Stenqvist, Partner at White and Lead Architect on Kiruna, said:

'We are delighted to be making the first steps in our Kiruna plan. Kiruna will be like a walking millipede, crawling, moving slowly with a thousand feet a few kilometres east.'

Kirster Lindstedt, Partner at White and Lead Architect on Kiruna, said:

'We are expanding the city eastward rather than creating a new satellite city. This will ensure that Kiruna remains a coherent city throughout the process.'

Viktoria Walldin, Social Anthropologist, White, said:

'The Municipality of Kiruna wants to make this the most democratic urban transformation in the world. The city plan is for a hundred years and the conversation with the residents of Kiruna needs to be for a hundred years as well.'

Eva Ekelund, Land and Development Manager, Kiruna Municipality, said:

'I hope that the citizens of Kiruna think in 30 years' time that we have made a modern and attractive town which still retains the identity of the Kiruna of our past. If we can reach that then we will have succeeded in the process.'

Kiruna 4-ever, a vision for the new Kiruna, will be exhibited at the following architectural festivals this summer:

IABR 2014 Urban by Nature, the sixth edition of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, 29 May - 24 August 2014.

14th Venice Architecture Biennale exhibition "Time Space Existence" at Palazzo Bembo and Palazzo Mora, 7 June - 23 November 2014 (Preview 5 - 6 June 2014).

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White Arkitekter

With over 60 years' experience in architecture and masterplanning, White Arkitekter is Scandinavia's leading architectural firm and, with around 600 employees, one of Europe's largest. White's expertise encompasses architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and interior design, with an emphasis on making sustainable architecture that contributes to building a sustainable society. The practice's commitment to creating a balanced society is reflected in its composition, which includes a team of anthropologists working collaboratively to interpret community needs to inform White's designs.

White has had an active role in the internationally acclaimed city developments of Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm and Western Harbour in Malmö.

In 2008 White International was established to bring innovative and sustainable design to the UK, across Europe and the rest of the world. In the UK, White's Royal Pavilion, Southend Pier has won a 2013 RIBA East Award and 2014 RICS Award. In New York City, White won the FAR ROC [For a Resilient Rockaway] international competition in October 2013. In Oslo, White is designing the harbour promenade, one of the key elements of Fjordbyen, Oslo's major urban development project of the early 21st century.

In Sweden the practice is working on Stockholm's New Karolinska Solna, a £1.3bn hospital, which will also be Europe's greenest.

www.white.se/en

The logo for White Arkitekter, featuring the word "white" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "e" is stylized with a circular element at its end.