Temperate House, Kew Gardens
in the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames
planning application no. 13/0907/FUL

Strategic planning application stage 1 referral (new powers)

The proposal
Restoration of the Temperate House including the upgrading of services, creation of a central activity space, an extension between the centre block and the North Octogan, plus the provision of w.c’s, ramps and associated landscaping. Restoration of Evolution House to accommodate a new Engagement Centre. Partial demolition of the existing energy centre to provide a new biomass boiler and the construction of a temporary decant structure (1,200 sq.m plus 66 sq.m service plant) to accommodate the displaced plant collection for the duration of the works. Temporary dismantling and re-instatement of the stone plinths and railings of vehicular entrance from A307 Kew Road.

The applicant
The applicant is Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, and the architect is HOK.

Strategic issues
The principle of temporary development in Metropolitan Open Land is considered broadly acceptable in light of the heritage benefits and the proposals contribution towards the Outer London Economy. Further information with regards to inclusive access, sustainable development and transport is required for the scheme to be considered fully compliant with the London Plan.

Recommendation
That Richmond Upon Thames Council be advised that the application complies with the London Plan, for the reasons set out in paragraph 55 of this report and does not need to be referred back to the Mayor. The Council should, however, take account of the comments made in paragraph 56 of this report.

Context
On 7 June 2013 the Mayor of London received documents from Richmond Upon Thames Council notifying him of a planning application of potential strategic importance to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of The Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor has until 18 July 2013 to provide the Council with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his
reasons for taking that view. The Mayor may also provide other comments. This report sets out information for the Mayor’s use in deciding what decision to make.

2 The application is referable under Category 3D of the Schedule to the Order 2008: “(a) development on land allocated as Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land in the development plan, in proposals for such a plan, or in proposals for the alteration or replacement of such a plan; and (b) which would involve the construction of a building with a floorspace of more than 1,000 square metres or a material change in the use of such a building.”

3 Once Richmond Upon Thames Council has resolved to determine the application, it is required to refer it back to the Mayor for his decision, as to whether to direct refusal or allow the Council to determine it itself, unless otherwise advised. In this instance the application does not need to be referred the application back to the Mayor.

4 The Mayor of London’s statement on this case will be made available on the GLA website www.london.gov.uk.

Site description

5 The application site is located within the south eastern portion of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew World Heritage Site and is covered by the Thames Policy Area. The Gardens are bound to the west by the River Thames, to the east by the A307 Kew Road, to the north by Kew Green and to the south by Old Deer Park. The site comprises the Grade I Listed Temperate House, Grade II Listed Evolution House and the existing energy centre situated to the west in an area known as the Stable Yard. The application material refers to this portion of the site as the Temperate House Precinct, but is formally acknowledged as the Pagoda Vista Zone in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew World Heritage Site Management Plan, 2011. The site is 3.6 ha in size and is subject to the following land designations:

- World Heritage Site
- Metropolitan Open Land (MOL)
- Royal Botanic Gardens Conservation Area 63
- English Heritage non statutory Historic Park and Garden (Grade I)
- Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) of Metropolitan value

6 The application site represents an important heritage asset that contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Gardens, due to the Temperate House being the world’s largest surviving Victorian glass structure built between 1860 and 1889, hence its Grade I listed status and the adjoining Grade II listed Evolution House being the first aluminium botanical glasshouse. Previous restoration works to the Temperate House took place in 1984, however, the condition has again deteriorated and it is now in need of repair. It has recently been included on the English Heritage Buildings At Risk Register.

7 The Temperate House Precinct area shares similar landscape characteristics as the wider Kew Gardens site, albeit slightly more open in nature with the glass houses situated in an open grassed area, and surrounded by mature trees. There is a significant level change of 1.9m across the site as the Temperate House sits raised on a terrace; a feature of the original Victorian landscape design.
As the application site is within the larger Kew Gardens boundary, the application site can be accessed publicly from the formal site entrances at the Main Gate, Kew Green, the Victoria and Lion Gate and the Brentford Gate on Ferry Lane. Security-controlled vehicular access is possible from the A307 Kew Road via the Oxenhouse Gate located on southern boundary of the gardens, however, this is for the purpose of the Kew Garden’s estate maintenance team, servicing and emergency vehicles. The site is served by bus route 65, with the closest bus stop located adjacent to the site entrance on Kew Road. Consequently, the site has a public transport accessibility level (PTAL) of 2 on a scale of 1 to 6, where 6(b) is the most accessible.

**Details of the proposal**

**Temperate House**

The application proposes the comprehensive restoration of the Temperate House and its plant collection, including improvements to the internal layout and a small extension between the Centre Block and North Octagon.

**Evolution House**

The repair and conversion of the Evolution House to create an Engagement Centre as part of the Temperate House Precinct Project to provide a multi-purpose space for the Royal Botanic Garden Kew’s outreach programme.

**Temporary Decant Structure**

In association with the above restoration works, the application seeks permission to erect a temporary ‘decant’ structure of 1,200 sq.m. and supporting building services plant space of 66 sq.m. immediately to the east of the Temperate House, to temporarily house the existing plant collection whilst works are carried out. Upon completion of the restoration work the decant structure would be dismantled and removed. The applicant has submitted two options for the design of the structure, one with a pitched roof and the other with a barrelled roof. Both iterations have been considered as part of this consultation.

**Landscaping and Servicing**

In addition to the restoration and conversion works, landscape works are proposed to provide improved access to the glass houses addressing the substantial level change, particularly for wheelchair users, including the upgrading of the existing path network and stone steps in the vicinity. The proposals also seek to upgrade the heat and power network that serves the two glass houses by providing a new biomass boiler in the existing Boiler House in the Stable Yard. To enable vehicular access to the site, the stone plinths and railings at the Oxenhouse Gate will be dismantled. The entrance will be reinstated on completion.

The applicant anticipates that the works would be complete by 2018, at which point the temporary structures would be dismantled and removed and the Oxenhouse Gate entrance reinstated.

**Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance**

The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Principle of Development  **London Plan**
- Green Belt/MOL  **London Plan**
For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan in force for the area is the Richmond Upon Thames Core Strategy 2009, the Development Management Plan 2011 and the 2011 London Plan.

The following are also relevant material considerations:

- The Revised Early Minor Alterations to the London Plan.

**Principle of Development**

The applicant considers that the temporary decant space, the element that triggers a consultation to the Mayor under the category 3D of Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008, constitutes permitted development under Class A, Part 4 (Temporary Buildings and Uses) of the General Permitted Development Order 1995, as it is a moveable, operational structure essential to support the restoration project and will be removed on completion of the works. In light of this, the applicant has queried the necessity of a referral to the Mayor. GLA officers have consulted the Council on this issue and at the time of writing this report, the Council were not able to confirm whether the decant structure constituted permitted development. Furthermore, given that the applicant has applied for this temporary element of the project as part of the planning application and given the proposals sensitive and strategic nature, the GLA has agreed to proceed with a formal response in accordance with the above Order.

**Metropolitan Open Land**

As described above, the application site is designated Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). London Plan policy 7.17 part B states that “the strongest protection should be given to London’s Metropolitan Open Land and inappropriate development refused, except in very special circumstances, giving the same level of protection as in the Green Belt.” The National Planning Policy Framework gives further guidance in paragraphs 89 and 90 on what constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt, however, the proposals for a temporary decant structure as part of the Temperate House Precinct Project does not fall within any of the defined categories. It is therefore for a case of assessing whether very special circumstances exist in these circumstances. The applicant has sought to justify that such circumstances exist in the context of the heritage benefits, horticultural needs and tourism benefits. GLA officers have considered each of these circumstances as part of the assessment.
Floorspace schedule (submitted Planning Statement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Existing GIA (sq.m.)</th>
<th>GIA to be lost (sq.m.)</th>
<th>Proposed GIA: including change of use (sq.m.)</th>
<th>Net additional GIA on completion (sq.m.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Temperate House</td>
<td>4,800</td>
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<td>6.65</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution House</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stable Yard</td>
<td>310.52</td>
<td>54.26</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decant Structure</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Heritage Benefits

19 It is clear that the Grade I Listed Temperate House is in need of restoration with the glass house’s recent inclusion on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register, with a ‘poor’ condition status. The primary aim of the proposals is to provide essential restoration and repair work to the Temperate House and it is therefore supported in principle. However, in order for the restoration work to be carried out, it is necessary for the majority of the historic plant collection that is currently housed in the glass house to be removed to avoid any potential damage. To facilitate this, a 1,200 sq.m. decant structure (plus 66 sq.m. building services space) is proposed to provide a temporary location for the plants for the duration of the works. The suggested location is immediately to the east of the Temperate House and it will be dismantled and removed on completion of the restoration project which is anticipated for 2018. As a result there will be no net increase in built footprint in this area of MOL once the project is complete.

20 Whilst, the necessity for the relocation of the plant collection for the duration of the works is understood, it is acknowledged that the proposed structure will have a significant impact on the open nature of this area of MOL during this five year period and it is therefore necessary to weigh the benefits of the proposals against this temporary impact. The proposals will enable the much needed restoration of an ‘at risk’ Grade I Listed heritage asset and the repair of a Grade II Listed structure helping to not only secure a long-term future for the glass houses, but will also contribute towards the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value of the wider World Heritage Site.

21 Therefore, on balance, it is considered that in the context of the proposals’ overall contribution towards the preservation of nationally and internationally significant listed structures and the resultant conservation benefits to the wider World Heritage Site, the principle of providing a temporary decant structure on the MOL for the duration of the works, is therefore supported.

Horticultural Needs

22 Officers note that the design of the decant structure has been developed in consultation with horticultural experts at Kew, which is welcomed. The applicant has stated that the proposed temporary structure has been designed to provide the minimum floorspace required by the displaced plant collection. The Temperate House currently provides approximately 4,800 sq.m of floorspace, with the proposed temporary decant structure proposing 1,200 sq.m (plus 66 sq.m.
plant). The temporary decant structure represents a substantially smaller structure in comparison and the effort to minimise its size and therefore impact are welcomed.

23 It is understood that the consideration of alternative sites for the decant structure has formed part of the proposals’ development. Alternative sites included land adjacent to Syon House and land close to Kew Palace. Both of these sites were dismissed on their distance from the Temperate House. Consideration was also given to temporary storage at Kew’s garden in Wakehurst, West Sussex. However, the transportation of the plant specimens over such a distance was considered to be potentially detrimental, and furthermore it was considered to be too far from the experienced horticultural maintenance team at Kew.

24 Officer’s understand that the proximity of the decant structure to the Temperate House is important to minimise the opportunity for damage to the fragile plants, which contribute to the site’s heritage value. The applicant has provided evidence of further site analysis stating that the proposed site to the east of Temperate House is one of the only areas unconstrained by tree canopies or root protection areas that could accommodate the structure.

25 On balance, it is therefore accepted that the site immediately to the east of Temperate House is most suitable for the proposed decant structure. Furthermore, the proposed location of the temporary structure, whilst temporarily intrusive to the open nature of the Pagoda Vista Zone, would ensure that the construction works would be contained within the Temperate House Precinct, thus allowing visitors to enjoy the rest of Kew Gardens without disruption.

Tourism Benefits

26 In addition to the restoration works, the Temperate House Precinct Project proposes improvements to the existing access arrangements, rationalisation of the internal circulation routes of the Temperate House and the creation of a new Engagement Centre in the Evolution House. These works are aimed at enhancing the visitor experience and Kew’s education and outreach programme and ultimately raising Kew Gardens’ profile as a tourist destination. The applicant anticipates that on completion of the works in 2018 the improvements will encourage a 5% increase in gate paying visitors over the historic 1.1 million visitors per annum (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions). It is considered that such improvements will contribute to London’s visitor economy and more specifically support the Outer London Economy in accordance with the strategic aspirations of London Policy 2.7 and is therefore welcomed.

27 Whilst these specific improvements will not have an impact on the openness of MOL as they remain internal of the existing building footprints, they are only enabled by the temporary relocation of the Temperate House plant collection. The long-term strategic benefits of the project to the Outer London Economy and it’s tourist offer as a result of the project provide further very special circumstances that outweigh the temporary impact on MOL as a result of the decant structure.

Summary

28 The Temperate House Precinct Project offers substantial benefits to the experience of visitors to the Royal Botanic Gardens and more strategically, London’s visitor economy. The project will see the restoration of the Grade I Listed Temperate House structure which is on the English Heritage Buildings At Risk Register and the Grade II Listed Evolution House, thus contributing to the site’s World Heritage status. It is also accepted that the provision of a temporary decant structure is necessary to enable these works and to realise the benefits discussed. The temporary impact on the openness of the MOL is acceptable in light of the long-term strategic benefits of the proposal. However, the decant structure should be removed as soon as possible on completion of
the works and the site restored in order to minimise the duration of the temporary impact on MOL. This should be secured by planning condition.

29 Officers are content that ‘very special circumstances’ have been justified in this case and therefore the principle of temporary development in this area of MOL is generally acceptable.

Heritage

30 Due to the sensitive nature of the site, it is understood that the proposals for restoration works have been developed in consultation with English Heritage, this is welcomed. The primary aim of the development is to provide urgent restoration works to the Grade I Listed Temperate House, which represents the largest remaining Victorian glass structure and the modernisation of its services to secure a long-term future for the glass house. In addition to the Temperate House, some minor repair work to the Grade I Listed Evolution House will be undertaken, including internal alterations to accommodate the new Temperate House Engagement Centre. The alterations will be structurally independent of the existing building and reversible, thus respecting the historic building fabric. This is supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 7.8 which aims to “identify value, conserve, restore, re-use and incorporate heritage assets where appropriate.”

31 The proposals also include improvements to the accessibility of the Temperate House, upgrading of the existing path network and a revised approach to internal circulation routes and spaces. The improved accessibility coupled with the creation of a central activities zone in the centre of the Temperate House and the revised, more spacious pathways will enhance the visitors’ opportunity to appreciate the listed structure and is generally supported in accordance with London Plan Policies 7.8 and 7.10.

32 Whilst the principle of the restoration works and landscape improvements are supported, officers note that the setting of the listed heritage assets and the wider World Heritage Site will be temporarily compromised for the duration of the works. It is proposed that the listed buildings will be encapsulated in an ‘enviro-tent’ for their protection during the restoration process. Furthermore, as discussed above, a substantial temporary decant structure will be erected immediately to the east of Temperate House to accommodate the displaced plant collection for their protection, thus further compounding the impact on the setting of the glass houses and this portion of the World Heritage Site. It is important to note that both the ‘enviro-tent’ and decant structure will be dismantled and removed on completion of the works, scheduled for 2018.

33 However, for the reasons explained in the above section, these measures are necessary to enable the restoration and alteration works and secure a long-term future for the glass houses. Whilst it is accepted that there will be a significant temporary impact on the setting of the listed buildings and this portion of the World Heritage Site due to the enabling works, on balance, the proposals will make a positive contribution to Kew Gardens’ Outstanding Universal Value on their completion and removal of the temporary structures. The short-term heritage impact of the proposals in this area of the gardens is outweighed by the long-term strategic objectives and benefits of the Temperate House Precinct Project and is acceptable.

Urban design

34 The applicant has stated that the design of the temporary decant structure has been developed in consultation with the horticultural experts at Kew Gardens and represents the minimum space required to accommodate the displaced plant collection, in order to minimise the impact on the MOL, this is welcomed. The proposed scale and massing does not raise any strategic design issues.
It is proposed that the steel framed structure is to be clad in either polythene or polycarbonate in order to meet the necessary horticultural requirements. Given the operational nature of the temporary building and its immediate context within the vicinity of the existing glass houses, this is accepted. The applicant has submitted two design options for the roof of the decant structure; a barreled roof and a pitched roof. Both options are identical in footprint and 10m at their highest point which remains well below the roof line of the Temperate House. Neither of the two roof designs raise any strategic concerns.

In summary, the proposals do not raise any strategic design issues.

**Inclusive Design**

The aim of London Plan Policy 7.2 is to ensure that proposals achieve the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion (not just the minimum). The proposals to make improvements on the existing access arrangements to Temperate House and Evolution House and the upgrading to signage and the existing path network are therefore welcomed.

The provision of a pair of symmetrical, gently graded ramps on the western side of the Temperate House plinth will provide full step-free access to the glass house via the western main entrance and address the substantial level change between the two buildings and is therefore welcomed.

Due to the historic nature of the buildings the main entrance doors to both glass houses are very heavy and cumbersome to use, therefore, the provision of power assisted doors on the main entrances is welcomed. The provision of accessible WC’s in both buildings is also welcomed. However, further thought should be given to the layout to the proposed accessible WC in the North Octagon to with regards to the functional relationship between the WC pan and the door.

To ensure that wheelchair users are fully integrated into the new tiered seating proposed within the Temperate House Engagement Centre (aka Evolution House), further consideration could be given to the design of the bleacher seating. For example, by integrating a raised dais and ramp section into the lower sections of the retractable bleacher seating unit, this would ensure good views by those behind as well as for the wheelchair user who remains within and part of the audience and not within the performance area (see figure 29 on page 59 of Sport England Design Guide for Accessible Sports Facilities 2010 [http://www.sportengland.org/media/30246/Accessible-Sports-Facilities-2010.pdf](http://www.sportengland.org/media/30246/Accessible-Sports-Facilities-2010.pdf)).

The proposals put forward in the submitted Access Strategy offer substantial improvements over the existing situation and are welcomed. However, it is disappointing that step-free access remains focussed on a single entrance, and that other entrances, particularly those on pedestrian desire lines, have not also been improved. Whilst, the constrained nature of the site as a result of the heritage status of the Grade I and II listed glass houses and their settings is understood, consideration should be given to the safeguarding of the other entrances for future improvement.

**Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation**

As discussed in paragraph 12, the Temperate House Precinct Project proposes upgrades to the existing energy centre located at The Stable Yard. As the upgrades do not propose any significant permanent new build structures, the carbon reduction targets set out in London Plan Policy 5.2 do not apply. The applicant has broadly followed the energy hierarchy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the proposals put forward in the submitted energy assessment are acceptable.
Due to the listed status of the glass houses, it is accepted that no interventions can be made to the fabric of the buildings to increase their energy efficiency. However, a range of service upgrades are proposed to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions of the refurbished buildings. These include the replacement of the heating system, the prioritisation of natural ventilation with the exception of the use of mechanical ventilation in the toilet facilities and in the main activity area during scheduled events, and efficient lighting and controls. All of these services will be connected to the integrated building management system to ensure effective operation and to allow energy monitoring.

Due to the nature of the application and its surrounding context, it is not envisaged that there will be an opportunity to connect to a district heating network in the future. The applicant has investigated the feasibility of Combined Heat and Power (CHP), however, due to intermittent nature of the heat load, CHP is not proposed. This is accepted in this instance.

The applicant is proposing to install a 190 kW biomass boiler to provide the base load for space heating to the glass houses. New gas boilers are also proposed to meet the peak loads and as a back-up in the event of the failure of the biomass system. The small domestic hot water demands will be met by electric heaters at the point of use, however, the applicant should investigate whether this can be provided by gas ‘point of use’ heaters.

Based on the information provided in the submitted energy assessment, the applicant is expecting a 25% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions compared to the emissions of the existing buildings. This is generally supported in the context of the site’s constraints.

**Transport**

No new cycle parking has been proposed as part of this application and it is unclear whether cycle parking is available at present. TfL would strongly encourage the applicant to provide cycle parking in accordance with London Plan standards for staff and visitors in order to promote sustainable transport.

TfL requests that a Delivery and Servicing Plan (DSP), as referred to in the London freight plan, which identifies efficiency and sustainability measures to be undertaken once developments are operational, is submitted to and approved by the Council. In addition, TfL requests that a Construction Logistics Plan (CLP), which identifies efficient and sustainability measures to be undertaken while developments are being built, is submitted to and approved by the Council in conjunction with TfL before construction work commences on site. Both of these should be secured by way of planning condition. The applicant should also provide swept path analysis drawings to TfL, showing construction vehicles entering and exiting Oxenhouse gate when the pillars have been dismantled.

TfL notes that existing travel plans and workplace travel plans are already in place for the wider Kew Gardens site; however TfL would like to see these updated to include the regenerated features on site, and then submitted to Richmond in conjunction with TfL for review. TfL expects the final travel plan(s) to be secured, monitored, reviewed, and enforced through the Section 106 agreement.

**Community Infrastructure Levy**

The Mayor has introduced a London-wide Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to help implement the London Plan, particularly policies 6.5 and 8.3. The Mayoral CIL formally came into effect on 1 April 2012, and it will be paid on commencement of most new development in Greater
London that was granted planning permission on or after that date. The Mayor’s CIL will contribute towards the funding of Crossrail.

51 Due to the nature of the proposals the application is not liable for a CIL payment.

Local planning authority’s position

52 At the time of writing the local planning authority’s position was not known.

Legal considerations

53 Under the arrangements set out in Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor is required to provide the local planning authority with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. Unless notified otherwise by the Mayor, the Council must consult the Mayor again under Article 5 of the Order if it subsequently resolves to make a draft decision on the application, in order that the Mayor may decide whether to allow the draft decision to proceed unchanged or direct the Council under Article 6 of the Order to refuse the application. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor’s statement and comments.

Financial considerations

54 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

Conclusion

55 London Plan policies on Metropolitan Open Land, Heritage, Urban Design, Inclusive Access, Sustainable Development and Transport are relevant to this application. In general, the application complies with these policies for the following reasons:

- **Metropolitan Open Land**: The principle of temporary development in MOL is acceptable in light of the long-term strategic economic and heritage benefits. However, the temporary structure should be as small as operationally possible and dismantled and removed as soon as possible to reduce the impact on the openness of the MOL.

- **Heritage**: On balance, the temporary impact on the setting of the world heritage site and the listed glass houses is acceptable in light of the long-term conservation benefits of the enabling works. However, the temporary structure necessary to enable the restoration works should be as small as operationally possible and dismantled and removed as soon as possible to reduce the impact on the setting of the World Heritage Site.

56 Notwithstanding that the application generally complies with the London Plan, it would be improved by the following changes

- **Inclusive Access**: The access improvements to the site are welcomed. However, further consideration could be given to enabling step-free access from the other entrances in the future and the functional design of the bleacher seating for wheelchair users.

- **Climate Change**: The energy strategy is broadly supported. However, the applicant should investigate whether the small domestic hot water demand can be provided by gas point of use heaters, rather than electric.
• **Transport**: The applicant is strongly encouraged to provide cycle parking in line with London Plan standards. A Delivery and Service Plan and a Construction Logistics Plan should be submitted to the Council for approval in conjunction with TfL and secured by planning condition. TfL would like to see the Travel Plan updated to reflect the proposals and submitted to the Council, in conjunction with TfL, for review and secured by planning condition.

The Mayor does not need to be consulted again on this application.

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