The préfecture de Paris on Boulevard Morland is situated on the banks of the River Seine in the 4th arrondissement. The building, which originally housed city administration, was completed in the early 1960s by the architect Albert Laprade. Together with the Paris-based developer Emerige, David Chipperfield Architects Berlin won a competition to restore and redevelop the site, which was part of a wider city-led urban regeneration initiative, calling for innovative projects for 23 urban Parisian sites. The existing complex comprises a 16-storey high-rise tower flanked by two 9-storey wings, which form a square facing the boulevard. The urban block is closed towards the Seine by a central extension structure and a row of turn-of-the-century buildings.

The concept for the redevelopment of the complex builds up on the existing building fabric, restoring it carefully to accommodate new functions. This reutilisation offers unique opportunities to open up the building, which had previously been overlooked as a closed and introverted complex. The design scheme makes the entire ground and two top floors accessible to the public. The site is integrated into the surrounding urban fabric through the introduction of two new axes: a main axis from north to south, connecting the boulevard with the riverside, which will be transformed to a public riverside park in the near future; and a secondary axis, linking the adjacent streets. A new volume on the boulevard closes the urban block, creating a generous public courtyard, and mediates between the scale of the tower and its surroundings. Towards the riverside, the existing central extension is replaced by a representative new building, enclosing two further public courtyards. Vaulted arcades are introduced to counterbalance the existing rather rigid tectonic structure of columns, which give the building its present character. This new architectonic element establishes a clear, sculptural entrance gesture at entrance level, welcoming visitors and residents into the new complex.

The new ensemble will accommodate a wide spectrum of new usages, including housing, a youth hostel, offices, retail, artist spaces, a food market and child care facilities, breathing new life into a neighbourhood currently lacking in public infrastructure. The two top floors, which are transformed through an inhabitable art installation by Studio Other Spaces (an experimental practice run by Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann in Berlin) will house a publicly accessible bar and restaurant exploiting the unique views over Paris. Together with the architectural interventions, the versatile programme transforms the complex into a lively and open campus, establishing a new public landmark in Paris.