

City Management Plan workshop briefing notes

Views and Tall Buildings

What are the issues?

Recent years have seen an increase in proposals for tall buildings both in Westminster and across London. The size and prominence of tall buildings means that they have a particularly significant impact on the character of local townscape and views. Westminster has a unique townscape, which includes many famous landmarks, the Palace of Westminster World Heritage Site (Figure 1), key open spaces such as the Royal Parks and a large expanse of river frontage.

The City Council is keen to strike a balance between protecting the many familiar views of this unique townscape and encouraging innovative new development, which will enhance our World City status. The Council recognises that in the right places, tall buildings can make a positive contribution to the London skyline. If sited in the wrong place or poorly designed, they can also be very damaging.



Figure 1: Palace of Westminster World Heritage Site

What have you told us?

- The Core Strategy Issues and Options and Preferred Options consultations and recent consultation on a Supplementary Planning Document relating to views reveal divided opinions on this topic.
- Some developers and landowners have told us that policy should be more flexible, tall buildings should not be restricted to opportunity areas and that other benefits may result from tall buildings, such as the improvement of transport infrastructure, public realm and world class architecture.
- Local residents and amenity societies have told us that they are concerned about the impact of tall buildings on the local environment and that we should strengthen our policy of view protection, and discourage further tall buildings.
- The Parliament select committee view is tall buildings are not critical to delivering economic regeneration.
- Other boroughs would like us to coordinate our policies and have told us locations where they consider tall buildings may or may not be appropriate. Wandsworth, for example, is promoting tall buildings in the Nine Elms (Battersea) area and Lambeth is also promoting tall buildings on the Southbank. Kensington & Chelsea is concerned about the possible impact of tall buildings in Victoria on sites within their borough.



- The GLA and others have told us that our Metropolitan View Guidance makes reference to the height of buildings outside the borough boundaries and that this is beyond the remit of the local authority.
- Consultees have requested that the issue of advertising consent be discussed. It was suggested that the Unitary development Policies on advertisements are too restrictive, complex and subjective.
- English Heritage and CABE have indicated they support our stance on views.
- We have also been told our policies on views and tall buildings must accord with the London Plan.

National and Regional Guidance

PPS1 states that a high level of protection should be given to our most valued townscapes. According to national, regional and local planning guidance documents, new development should respond to local character and protect and enhance built heritage and views.

The Mayor's approach is set out in the London Plan, which outlines the criteria to be used in assessing planning applications for tall buildings. It states that boroughs may set their own local thresholds for tall building policies and identify areas of special character that may be sensitive to tall buildings. The plan also identifies 26 designated London views, 16 of which are relevant to Westminster. The 'London View Management Framework' sets out how these should be managed and is currently being reviewed. Westminster has also identified local views of importance in its conservation area audits and Metropolitan Views Supplementary Planning Document.

English Heritage (EH) and the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE)'s 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' encourages local planning authorities to include specific policies for tall buildings in development plans, identifying areas as appropriate, sensitive or inappropriate for tall buildings. It recommends that local authorities identify elements that create local character, such as streetscape, scale, height, urban grain, natural topography and significant views.



Figure 2: The developer's QVM showing before and after views of the original scheme proposed for Victoria and its impact on views. The scheme was refused and protection of views was one of the reasons for this decision.



The council commissioned a study into tall buildings which suggested that much of Westminster is unsuitable for tall buildings as the predominantly consistent scale contributes to local distinctiveness. Suitable locations for tall buildings may include some sites within the Paddington and Victoria Opportunity Areas.

Tall buildings sited outside Westminster also have a significant impact on views from the borough. Views are also sensitive to the impact of more small scale development and advertisements in their foreground and middleground.

Unitary Development Plan Policy 2007 and Supplementary Planning Guidance

The City council's policies relating to tall buildings and views are set out in Chapter 10 of the UDP 2007. The following UDP policies are all relevant to this topic area are:

Principal policies are DES 3 (Tall Buildings), DES 14 (Strategic Views), DES 15 (Metropolitan and Local Views), and DES 16 (the World Heritage Site).

Other current policies are also relevant to this topic area. These include:

DES 7 relating to townscape management, including public art, street furniture, lighting and paving.

DES 9 relating to development and demolition in conservation areas.

DES 10 relating to the protection of listed buildings and their settings.

DES 12 relating to development adjacent to open spaces, parks, gardens and squares.

DES 13 relating to canals.

DES 8 relating to the display of advertisements.

RIV 1,2 and 5 relating to riverside development and views.

Local Views are identified in Westminster's conservation area audits and the most significant local views are analysed in the emerging Metropolitan Views SPD.

The City Council would like the City Management Plan to cover all of these Unitary Development Plan design policy areas and so these can be referred to at the workshop sessions.



Figure 4-5: Examples of local views in Westminster

Core Strategy Publication Draft 2009 (subject to agreement)

POLICY CS3

The strategic views will be protected from development which breaches the viewing corridors. Similarly, local views in Westminster, including those of metropolitan significance, will be protected from intrusive or insensitive development. Where important views are affected by large scale development in other boroughs, the council will raise formal objections when consulted.

POLICY CS 20 Paddington OA

One site has been identified for a single landmark, high quality buildings. In other locations within the Opportunity Area, the council considers that tall buildings could not be accommodated without detriment to the surrounding townscape.

POLICY CS 21 Victoria OA

There are limited opportunities for tall buildings because of the potential harm to the wider area, including the World Heritage Site adjacent listed buildings, conservation areas and the Royal Parks. Tall buildings may be acceptable in a limited number of suitable locations where the council considers that they will not seriously harm the surrounding area and its heritage assets, and will also deliver wider benefits to the Opportunity Area.

Further Information

The London Plan- Consolidated with Alterations since 2004 (February 2008)

Adopted Unitary Development Plan (January 2007)

Core Strategy Publication Draft

High Buildings Study Westminster City Council/ EDAW (2000)

Draft Metropolitan Views Supplementary Planning Document Westminster City Council (2007)

Seeing the History in the View English Heritage (2008)

London View Management Framework GLA (2007)

Tall Buildings Guidance CABE/ English Heritage (2007)

Parliament Select Committee House of Commons Transport, Local Government & The Regions Committee Inquiry & Report into Tall Buildings September (2002)

The agenda for the Views and Tall Buildings section of the workshop is as follows

What should we do?

Views

1. Which views in Westminster do you consider to be most significant and why?
2. How can we assess what is important about a view? Which elements within views should policy seek to protect and improve?
3. Westminster's UDP currently identifies three levels of view: strategic views, local views of metropolitan importance and local views. Are some views more important than others and how should this be assessed and reflected in policy?

18 mins

Tall buildings

4. What makes a good tall building? What criteria should we use to assess proposals for tall buildings?
5. How can policy respond to proposals for tall buildings outside the borough but which may be visible in key views, such as those of the World Heritage Site?

12 mins

Signs and advertising

6. Should policy control the impact of other types of development as well as signs and advertisements on sensitive locations and significant views?

6 mins

Other issues

7. Are there any other issues that have not been covered above?
8. Are there issues that the Council should be aware of in its lobbying process?

12 mins

Contact

Jane Hamilton, Development Planning Services,
Westminster City Council
12th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London
SW1E 6QP
020 7641 8019 jhamilton@westminster.gov.uk



City of Westminster

PLANNING & CITY DEVELOPMENT

Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP
Planning helpline: 020 7641 2513 www.westminster.gov.uk