

CONSULTATION DRAFT HISTORIC ENGLAND ADVICE NOTE 4: TALL BUILDINGS 2020

RESPONSE FROM LONDON FORUM OF AMENITY AND CIVIC SOCIETIES

WHO WE ARE:

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies (London Forum) is an umbrella group for more than 100 amenity and civic societies across London and on behalf of our members, we comment on consultations by the Government, Greater London Authority and other bodies, like Historic England (HE) whose advice/guidance influence London's built environment.

OUR EXPERIENCE

London Plan 2000-

London Forum has been an active participant at successive London Plan EIPs, have fought, in the 2016 Plan, to get the policy which applied to architecture to make a positive contribution to be replicated in the policy for tall buildings. We failed. The latest London Plan, although the heritage policies were much improved over the 2016 Plan, no longer has any strategic policy for the location of tall buildings.

English Heritage/CABE 2007/2015

London Forum has contributed to the development of successive drafts of this guidance. We supported the progressive improvements to the guidance, such as the need for strategic policies for the location of tall buildings as policies for assessing impact and were pleased to see the emphasis on them making a positive contribution to the streetscape, townscape and the skyline.

NLA Tall Buildings Surveys (2014-)

London Forum has been alarmed by the growing "planning pipeline" of tall buildings projects, whether in the pre-application stage through to outstanding consents and completions. We have been commenting to NLA since the 2014 Survey and to successive surveys about the fact that unimplemented consents never seem to expire, there is no evidence on renewals or material starts, beyond recording the main use. The survey seems to be a promotional document, with a strong self-congratulatory tone, with a reluctance to remove unimplemented/unimplementable/ unviable projects for fear of offending developers.

Whilst the database seems to be a ragbag of pre-application proposals, applications, consents, projects under construction and completions, there is no information on lapsed consents, renewals or determination of material start being made. It is an accumulation of projects of differing status. Although it does distinguish between locations and whether it is commercial, residential, etc, it provides no data on floorspace, number of housing units let alone affordable housing. The best that can be said is that provides a snapshot of new consents, schemes under construction and completions. It is helpful headline figure for developers but says little about the cumulative impact of tall buildings on London. London Forum has commented on this but these issues but have seen little improvement in its analytical value in policy terms.

Casework

London Forum focuses on national (NPPF) and regional (London Plan) policies rather than fighting individual planning cases. Nevertheless, through working with local societies, we are very aware of the emerging issues, including:

- the changing roles of the Mayor and the Secretary of State;
- the degree to which successive mayors have called in cases involving tall buildings, and have allowed all but one of the schemes that were called in since the 2008 call-in powers were introduced. This demonstrates pre-determination due to a promotional approach (Mayor Johnson and Sir Edward Lister) and interventions to promote housing, especially affordable housing (Mayor Khan). Both mayors have given little weight to heritage matters or the impact on the local communities, when determining cases involving tall buildings. Policies in the NPPF, the London Plan and the Local Plan, on which the borough has relied to justify its intention to refuse, are ignored or misinterpreted by the Mayor's planning staff. That is in contrast to Secretary of State call-ins, which determine cases from scratch, where a significant proportion of cases are refused, mayoral call-ins are almost unanimously granted to a point that suggests that mayoral call-in amounts to pre-determination; and
- the use of wide-angle lensed cameras for providing "verified views" which are highly misleading if they are intended to be interpreted and to convey to decision-makers – see more detail below.

Recent issues

Some of the most recent issues that have arisen include:

Lack of strategic planning in the "Intend to Publish" New London Plan to guide tall buildings to the most appropriate locations in London:

- it fails to define preferred locations for tall buildings, whereas the 2016 version of the London Plan provided this and required boroughs to plan for it (Policy 7.7E);
- it provides a more detailed assessment criteria which we welcome, but, unlike the Mayor's "A City for All Londoners", fails to consider the impact on communities;

Mayoral call-in of developments involving tall buildings: This includes:

- Over-riding any borough Local Plan policies and guidance which identify appropriate and inappropriate locations for tall buildings;
- Putting limited weight on heritage issues clearly; and
- Misinterpreting locational choices, such as treating proximity to a neighbourhood centre as if it were a London Plan town centre.

New Landscape Institute Guidance on verified views:

The "industry standard" approach of using 24mm wide-angle lenses for all views of the existing and proposed situation distorts the views.

The [revised guidance by the Landscape Institute](#) issued last September, strongly recommends a 50mm lens the default lens for almost all verified views, with the exception of close-up views of tall buildings, in which case a 35mm lens might be appropriate. The days of using a 24mm wide-angle lens for **all** verified views, which pushes tall buildings into the background and grossly underestimates the impact of these buildings, have been overtaken by the latest LI guidance and all new major applications submitted since last September should be using a 50mm lens, and exceptionally 35mm for close-up pictures in addition.

We are aware of applications where these 24mm wide-angle “verified views” have deceived members of the planning committee, members of amenity societies and, of course, members of the public, as to the likely impact of the proposed building. This issue was raised by:

- LB Hounslow and HE’s barrister, Richard Harwood QC at the public inquiry on the Chiswick Curve (July 2018);
- London Forum at the London Plan EiP (March 2019); and
- objectors to the Kensington Forum Hotel called-in application (July 2019).

See the attachment, presented at the Kensington Forum Hotel hearing, which shows the difference between using a 24mm lens and using a 50mm lens, which is the closest to what the human eye sees.

All of these cases pre-dated the LI Guidance, but none of the cases that we have seen have changed the practice of using 24mm wide-angle lenses for verified views and will continue to do so as it is to their benefit to do so, until HE advice is aligned with the latest LI advice.

London Forum strongly recommends that this issue be addressed directly in the revised/new HE Advice Note 4, by aligning with the LI Guidance.

LONDON FORUM’S COMMENTS ON DRAFT ADVICE NOTE 4:

We recognise that this document covers England as whole and reflects the content of the National Planning Policy Framework. Like most national documents it studiously avoids the extreme pressures and special circumstances in London, such as:

- the high land values and the extreme pressures, and policies, that have increasingly led to much higher densities and to tall buildings;
- the large areas covered by conservation areas, the high of number of listed buildings and other historic assets, such as four World Heritage Sites, parks, gardens and cemeteries;
- the huge overhang of, as yet, unimplemented planning consents, those still under construction and those completed since the previous year;
- the absence of any strategic policy for the location of tall buildings; and
- the growing community concerns about the speed, scale and nature of change that tall buildings are having on London’s character, townscape and skyline, plus the overloading of local infrastructure which results in many of them not being sustainable developments. No one seems to take ownership of tackling the strategic and cumulative impact of tall buildings in London.

Historic England’s role

London Forum is very concerned that Historic England’s resources have been significantly reduced and, following some major losses on appeal, has been obliged to reduce its capacity to comment on all but the most strategic cases, such as those affecting World Heritage Sites. Thus, the absence of an Historic England (HE) objection, boroughs and especially the Mayor have interpreted this as “no comment”.

London Forum's concerns:

London Forum is particularly concerned about:

- **the lack of recognition of the specific circumstances in London**, in terms of the size and number of tall buildings, their impact on London's heritage (World Heritage Areas, conservation areas, listed buildings – including those locally-listed – and parks, the character and context of local areas and London's skyline). The new Advice Note 4 is therefore generic, focuses on the impact of individual proposals, much like the Mayor's latest London Plan, and the cumulative impact of successive Mayors of London who have, despite their London Plan policies, have in effect promoted tall buildings and continue to do so, through:
 - directly encouraging individual applicants; and
 - declaring Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks which were not subject to scrutiny process before being adopted and whose guidance on height of buildings was regularly exceeded (cf Isle of Dogs, Vauxhall/Nine Elms/Battersea Opportunity Area).
- **the failure of successive London Plans to provide consistent guidance on a strategic plan-led approach to the location of tall buildings.** The latest London Plan which, unlike the 2016 London Plan, abandons any strategic approach to the location of tall buildings in London. It has extended the criteria for assessing the impact of tall buildings on heritage assets and on the physical impact on the character and context, and has allegedly delegated to London boroughs the task of identifying appropriate locations for tall buildings, but then completely disregards the borough's refusals of tall buildings by calling in such cases for yet taller buildings.
- **the failure of successive mayors either to intervene on cases adversely affecting World Heritage Sites or, where they have intervened, have allowed them to be approved.** This has been the pattern with successive mayors since the introduction of Mayoral call-in powers in 2008. This has led to the Secretary of State becoming the backstop (as in the case of the proposed development called the Chiswick Curve) or, as recent decisions have demonstrated a new phenomenon of "competitive call in" where cases are refused by the borough, called in by the Mayor and, when he has negotiated an enlarged scheme, he decides to allow the scheme, and then the Secretary of State calls in the case. This phenomenon causes huge pressure on all the parties, from the developer, the local authority and, above all on the local community.
- **the failure of London boroughs to identify areas where tall buildings might be acceptable.** This was first proposed in the Greater London Development Plan through the Urban Diagram and then rediscovered in previous English Heritage/CABE guidance. Unfortunately, many London boroughs have not undertaken the analysis and therefore do not have an effective evidence base to support refusal. However, even when this analysis has been undertaken, the Mayor, although the borough's policy to manage tall buildings is supported by evidence, calls in cases and appears to give little or no weight to a boroughs evidence-based policy,

KEY ISSUES

The London Forum **strongly welcomes and endorses** this new Historic England Advice Note 4 on Tall Buildings. It is a great improvement on the two previous editions, embraces changes in national policy and guidance, but it still does not recognise:

- **the role of civic societies and local communities** in contributing to the formulation of both policy through the local plan and/or neighbourhood plan, and to guidance, such as conservation area appraisal and conservation area management plans and supplementary planning documents, such as urban design frameworks, planning briefs, as these documents are central to creating the context of planning for tall buildings. Indeed, the document does not cover all of these documents (see para 3.2);
- **the need for early community engagement in the pre-application stages of developing proposals for tall buildings**, with both the developer and the local planning authority and through the design review process (see section 4);
- **the impact that tall buildings would have on local communities – the “social” impact – especially where proposed tall buildings are significantly out of scale with local character and context.**
- **the need for clear policies in local plans, as well as guidance, that specify views and vistas to be protected, as well as height limits, and identify existing buildings where a lower, better designed building will be sought on redevelopment; and**
- **embrace the latest Landscape Institute guidance for providing verified views** with a clear understanding that a 50mm focal length lens should be the default option, and only in exceptional circumstances, such as close up to tall buildings, should a 35mm lens be used. (see para 4.8)

London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

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Submission with suggested changes in red text follows.

HISTORIC ENGLAND DRAFT ADVICE NOTE 4: TALL BUILDINGS 2020 with London Forum's suggestions in red text:-

Introduction

- 1 Tall Buildings and their impacts
- 2 National Planning Policy
- 3 Tall Buildings and the Development Plan
- 4 Making a Planning Application
- 5 Assessing Proposals

Summary

This Historic England Advice Note updates previous advice produced in 2015, based on the English Heritage and CABE guidance from 2007. It seeks to guide people involved in planning for, designing, and assessing proposals for tall buildings so that these may be delivered sustainably through the development plan and development management processes. The advice is for developers, designers, local authorities, neighbourhood forums, civic societies, local communities and other interested parties. It reflects Historic England's experience of the processes of planning for tall buildings and with assessing the impacts that an increased number of completed tall buildings are having on the historic environment, individually and cumulatively, and on local communities.

Introduction

The purpose of this Historic England Advice Note is to support everyone involved with the planning, designing and assessing the impact of tall buildings in implementing historic environment legislation, the relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the related guidance given in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It should also inform decision-makers, design review panels and local communities in assessing their impact. In addition to these documents, this advice should be read in conjunction with the relevant Good Practice Advice in Planning and Historic England Advice Notes. Alternative approaches may be equally acceptable, provided they are demonstrably compliant with legislation, and conform generally with national and regional policy objectives.

Historic England is the government's expert adviser on the historic environment. We recognise the importance of managing change in the built environment to continually improve its quality. The planning process in England requires Historic England to be consulted on the development of local and neighbourhood plans and in relation to certain proposals that affect the historic environment. Our advice focuses on how to conserve the significance of heritage assets and pursue sustainable place-making to ensure that the character of our historic towns, cities and places is sustained and enhanced for future generations.

Historic England strongly encourages early and continued engagement between developers, planners, specialists in conservation and urban design, and local communities and civic groups in the preparation of plans and relevant development proposals. This is especially important for tall building proposals given their greater potential impacts. Such engagement reduces risks to developers and communities, and increases the likelihood of achieving successful sustainable development.

¹ For further details on when to consult or notify Historic England about a planning application see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/proposals-for-development-management/>.

Commented [MB1]:

1 Tall Buildings and their impacts

1.1 Towns and cities evolve, as do their skylines. Individually, or in groups, tall buildings can dramatically affect the image, character and identity of towns and cities as a whole, and once they are built will do so for a long time. Some of the most important buildings in our historic towns and cities are, or were when they were built, the tallest. Be they church towers, town halls or industrial structures, such as chimneys, these buildings often remain prominent local landmarks, informing the sense of place. Although more modern tall buildings are not universally admired, some of the finest post-war examples are now listed in recognition of their special quality of design or use of new technology. In the right place well-designed tall buildings can make a positive contribution to **our streetscape, townscape, skyline and to** urban life.

1.2 However, a tall building, by virtue of its height, bulk and widespread visibility, can seriously harm the qualities that people value about a place if it is not in the right place and not well designed. There will be some locations where the existing qualities of a place are so distinctive or sensitive that new tall buildings **would** cause harm regardless of the perceived quality of their **design**.

1.3 One of the principal failings in the location and design of certain tall buildings has been a lack of understanding of the nature of the area around them, and the impact they would have on heritage assets and historic character of places: the very things that make places distinctive and that people cherish. There have been many examples of tall buildings that have had a lasting adverse impact due to their unsuitable locations, poor design, construction and management. Modern construction techniques enable taller buildings than ever before, with greater impacts on surrounding areas, and so it is especially important that impacts are fully considered.

1.4 What might be considered a tall building will vary according to the prevailing character of the local area. A ten-storey building in a mainly two-storey neighbourhood will be thought of as a tall building by those affected, whereas in the centre of a large city where the general building heights are taller, it may not. Similarly a building in a hill-top location, or on the crest of a ridge of higher ground, may gain prominence and an appearance of height. Height may also be experienced differently depending on the location of the viewer **and on the prevailing height of surrounding buildings**. Definitions of tall buildings that are based on evidence **from an assessment of the local context and character of the area will** help when developing planning policy and are more likely to encourage appropriate developments.

Examples of this context-led approach to defining a tall building can be seen in Cambridge and Oxford. In Cambridge, the City Council defines a tall building as any building 'that breaks the existing skyline and/or is significantly taller than the surrounding built form'. In practice this means buildings above 6 storeys in the historic core are subject to tall buildings policies, as buildings in this part of the City tend to range in height from 3-5 storeys. In the suburbs, which are characterised by lower buildings, a lower threshold is applied, with buildings over 4 storeys subject to the tall buildings and skyline policy.

Similarly, in Oxford, a city famed since the 19th century for its skyline of dreaming spires, and where much of the historic character is medieval, the Council traditionally defined anything above the parapet height (18.2m) of the Grade II listed Carfax tower as tall. Locally-specific technical advice has been developed to support densification while protecting what is important. It notes that 'an understanding of context is critical' as in some locations 'even an increase in height of a single storey may constitute a high building.'

2 National Planning Policy

2.1 The government's objectives for new development are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Framework seeks to promote sustainable development, in part through the creation of high-quality buildings and places, with developments that add to the overall quality of an area, are visually attractive and 'sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting'. New development should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness **as well as to the townscape and skyline, whilst** 'poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area' should be refused.

2.2 The NPPF has strong policies to protect and enhance the historic environment including the 'great weight' that should be attached to the conservation of designated heritage assets. It recognises that the setting of a heritage asset can contribute to its significance.

2.3 The NPPF also introduces policies to promote the effective and efficient use of land which should be achieved 'while safeguarding and improving the environment', and by taking into account 'the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting...and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places'.

2.4 The NPPF is clear that new development should be plan-led, and that all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. Local authorities need to develop their overall strategy for development, taking into account reasonable alternatives, and basing their approach on proportionate evidence. Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the **location, pattern, scale and quality of development and what it is expected to deliver**, while making provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment.

² Paragraph 127 ³ Paragraph 130 ⁴ Paragraph 20.

2.5 The supporting [Planning Practice Guidance](#) and the accompanying [National Design Guide \(NDG\)](#) also promote the creation of high-quality buildings and places. The NDG sets out ten characteristics of good design; and first amongst them is an understanding and response to context:

'Well-designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary. It enhances positive qualities and improves negative ones. Some features are physical, including:

- the existing built development, including layout, form, scale, appearance, details, and materials;
- local heritage... and local character...' (paragraph 40).

2.6 Paragraphs 69 and 70 deal specifically with tall buildings:

'Well-designed tall buildings play a positive urban design role in the built form. They act as landmarks, emphasising important places and making a positive contribution to views and the skyline' (paragraph 69).

And

'Proposals for tall buildings (and other buildings with a significantly larger scale or bulk than their surroundings) require special consideration. This includes their location and siting; relationship to context; impact on local character, views and sight lines; composition - how they meet the ground and the sky; and environmental impacts, such as sunlight, daylight, overshadowing and wind. These need to be resolved satisfactorily in relation to the context and local character' (paragraph 70).

2.7 The NDG will be supplemented by a National Model Design Code. The Code will set a baseline standard of quality and practice across England which local planning authorities will be expected to take into account when developing their own local design codes and guides and when determining planning applications, such as those for tall buildings.

2.8 Thus, the importance of plan-makers developing clear policies that protect and enhance the historic environment, including the settings of designated assets, while promoting high-quality design, responding to local context, is a key planning objective running through from primary legislation to government guidance. The NPPF makes it clear that councils should put in place strategic policies that set out an overall strategy for the **location**, pattern, scale and quality of development, whilst making provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. **[NB: this paragraph repeats what is in paragraph 2.4]**

3 Tall Buildings and the Development Plan

3.1 In a successful plan-led system, the location and design of tall buildings will reflect the local vision for an area, and a positive, managed approach to development, rather than a reaction to speculative development applications. It is therefore important that the appropriate scale and form of development is assessed as part of the formulation of policies **for the height and location of tall buildings** in the development plan.

Benefits of taking a plan-led approach

3.2 Including tall buildings policies in plans promotes transparency and confidence in the sustainable management of development for proposals that could be ~~become~~ contentious with local communities and other stakeholders. Developing clear and well-evidenced policies supports planning authorities to:

- a) Identify the role and contribution of tall buildings, where appropriate, as part of an overall place-making strategy
- b) Ensure early public engagement on the principles of development in relation to place, context and design and consideration of the impact on, and contribution to, the aspirations of local communities **[through site allocations in local plans or through site-based planning briefs]**

- c) Protect designated heritage assets and their settings, where this contributes to their significance, as well as the overall historic character that makes a place distinctive and special
- d) Identify areas that might be, and definitely are not, appropriate for tall buildings in advance of specific proposals, reducing unnecessary, speculative applications in the wrong places [should areas sensitive to tall buildings also be identified?]
- e) Demonstrate that in selecting areas that might be appropriate for tall buildings due consideration has been given to alternative sites or forms of development to meet identified local needs, and to the impacts on land outside the local authority's area
- f) Express the clear expression of spatial scale and design quality requirements for new tall buildings to ensure they make a positive contribution to local streetscape, townscape and to the skyline
- g) Highlight opportunities for the removal of past inappropriately scaled developments and their replacement by development of an improved quality and more appropriate scale.

Evidence base

3.3 As part of plan-making, the assembly of the evidence base provides the opportunity for a more thorough upfront heritage assessment and urban design analysis, which will be tested through the options appraisal, environmental impact assessment, and consultation. This will create a stronger and more realistic policy base, which is beneficial to applicants and local authorities alike in guiding site selection and design, and ensure that the local community can influence the outcome. The amount of evidence necessary to support appropriate locations for tall buildings will be proportionate to the nature of the area. Types of evidence needed to support plan-making could include:

- Statements of Heritage Significance
- Conservation Area Appraisals
- Characterisation Studies
- Inter-visibility Studies
- Urban design and townscape analysis
- Master-plans
- Three dimensional (3D) modelling
- Views studies, including views and vistas including those identified in development plans and in conservation area appraisals

A Statement of Heritage Significance, reviewing which assets could be affected by tall building development, and then describing what is special about those assets to a level of detail sufficient to assess likely impacts, will underpin any sifting exercise that seeks to identify the potential locations for prominent or tall buildings. Historic

England's Advice Note 12: [Statements of Heritage Significance](#) provides a framework to support this analysis. Additional analysis may be required if there are particularly sensitive heritage assets that might be affected by potential policies and allocations, such as World Heritage Sites where Heritage Impact Assessments complying with the International Council on Monuments and Sites' [Heritage Impact Assessment](#) methodology are likely to be necessary.

3.4 Techniques such as characterisation and building height studies, inter-visibility studies and conservation area appraisals, also help identify areas of increased sensitivity to tall buildings, and can provide evidence to inform guidance or design coding on building heights across a plan area. This can include defining areas where different scales will be expected, as well as supporting local height definitions for tall buildings. Such definitions may vary within the plan area, based on the local character. Studies informing the potential of areas for tall buildings should consider the impacts of any existing tall buildings. This may include the locations of prominent historic buildings, the role they play (either positive or negative) in the surrounding townscape, or the contribution they make to local character, vistas or views. **Likewise, this may include the identification of tall buildings that have had a strongly negative impact in order to identify sites where any redevelopment will be seen as an opportunity to repair past damage to heritage assets.**

To support the management of the York Centre Historic Core Conservation Area the City of York Council commissioned a conservation area appraisal to support decision making. The appraisal of York's special local character includes assessments that demonstrate that settings and views, including important views several miles from the city centre, can be sensitive to tall buildings, requiring a broader analysis than might be expected. This illustrates the importance of having evidence and clear published guidance to help guide development proposals. For more details on conservation area appraisals see Historic England's Advice Note 1: [Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management](#).

3.5 Factors to consider when assessing the suitability of land for tall building development include the impact on the overall character of an area of acknowledged high townscape or landscape value (such as a conservation area or within protected views) or more specific impacts to heritage assets and their settings. It will provide certainty in decision making and clarity for would-be developers if areas recognised as having particular heritage sensitivities are clearly identified as inappropriate for tall buildings within the development plan. This would be considered part of a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment (NPPF paragraph 185). When identifying areas appropriate or inappropriate for tall buildings, the findings will need to be carefully reasoned and supported by the evidence base.

Urban design framework

3.6 Tall buildings policies may form part of a wider urban design framework. A successful urban design framework will identify the various roles and characters of different areas, including their heritage interest, and thereby enable the conservation of heritage. An urban design framework can:

- a) Identify those elements that create local character and other important features and constraints, including:

- Natural topography
 - Urban grain
 - Significant views of skylines
 - Scale and height
 - Streetscape and character assessment (including the history of the place which draws out the characteristics that are particularly significant to its identity)
 - Materials
 - Landmark and historic buildings and areas and their settings, including backdrops, and important local views
- b) Identify opportunities where prominent or tall buildings might be appropriate, for example by enhancing overall townscape legibility by drawing attention to important urban or transport nodes.
- c) Identify sites where the removal of past mistakes might also achieve an enhancement.

Urban design frameworks will benefit from early community engagement and will ensure that the local community are fully engaged in their preparation and have a sense of ownership of the agreed outcome.

3.7 In areas where significant regeneration is planned, a master-planning process can provide a more detailed urban design framework based on an assessment of options, reconciling various interests and providing clarity. While larger regeneration schemes are likely to have a major impact on their surrounding context, this still needs to be sympathetic to local character and history. Understanding the heritage significance of the area and its surroundings are an important step to take before establishing the overall aspirations of the area, as imposing precise targets on an area before considering its sensitivities can lead to unrealistic expectations.

3.8 Modelling various heights and forms of development to assess their impact on heritage assets and the historic character of places that might be affected (including those beyond the plan boundary) at the plan-making stage can help identify the most appropriate approach to use land most efficiently. In many urban locations the use of 3D digital models can support this process by providing easily understandable images that illustrate likely impacts. Developed by planning authorities, universities, as proprietary software, or architects considering the context for their designs, 3D models are increasingly available for towns and cities across England. Such models are particularly efficient if the user can turn on different layers of data, such as heritage designations or views, and allow scenarios to be built and tested. 3D models can also facilitate the appreciation of dynamic experiences (using walk-through video montages), and allow for the consideration of other environmental effects such as wind, daylight/sunlight or pollution.

Views

3.9 Given the potential visual impacts of tall buildings, tall buildings policies are likely to interact with any policies intended to protect views **and vistas** of particular importance. It is advisable to prepare evidence to support such policies together and to associate them

closely within the plan. Evidence describing the value of important views will be a **major** consideration when considering the suitability of sites for tall buildings, as well as identifying the desirable scale or form that might be adopted to ensure potential development enhances the ability to appreciate views. Historic England's Good Practice in Planning Note 3: [The Setting of Heritage Assets](#) includes more advice on managing views.

Case study: Due to its distinctive topography London benefits from expansive cityscape views **and vistas**. Planning policies have evolved to ensure that the public can appreciate these much-loved prospects, including the London Views Management Framework (LVMF). This includes a variety of tools to protect the ability to appreciate key historic landmarks such as the Westminster World Heritage Site, St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London. Historic England's [London's Image and Identity](#) report studied the effectiveness of these policies and why they are deeply important to London's identity. While generally successful in protecting the views of landmark buildings and encouraging development, these policies highlight the need for clear evidence and for rigorous application as part of a joined-up strategic approach to tall buildings.

Development Plan Policies

3.10 To justify policy that proposes tall buildings it will need to be demonstrated that potential impacts on the historic environment have been considered, based on proportionate evidence, and that reasonable alternatives have been taken into consideration to avoid or minimise harm (NPPF paragraph 35). This approach will enable the creation of clear strategic policies, site allocations and development management policies, supported by supplementary planning advice, **such as planning briefs**, where appropriate.

3.11 Clearly identifying areas and sites where tall buildings would be considered appropriate in principle is likely to be the most effective way of ensuring development is genuinely planned. This applies particularly to areas within towns and cities where tall buildings are promoted by the planning authority or in places where there is a reasonable expectation that tall building proposals will come forward during the life of the plan. This approach also actively supports the requirement for a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment (NPPF paragraph 185).

3.12 In the absence of allocations or areas identified as appropriate for tall buildings development plans, and in places where tall building development is likely, there will need to be criteria to assess speculative proposals, including the sustainable management of the historic environment. As with site-specific policies, criteria-based policies require proportionate evidence to justify the approach taken (NPPF paragraph 31).

3.13 These site-specific or criteria-based policies both need to be drawn up through effective engagement with local communities, statutory consultees such as Historic England, and with proper regard to national planning policies and heritage protection legislation.

3.14 In areas with a regional level plan, local planning authorities **are required** to take into account strategic level policies relating to tall buildings and the management of strategic views, for example in the London Plan (2020 (tbc) and its future alterations) and its associated supplementary planning guidance including the [London View Management Framework](#), and [London's World Heritage Sites Guidance on Setting](#).

3.15 The existence of a tall building in a particular location will not of itself justify its replacement with a new tall building on the same site or in the same area, as it may improve the area to replace it with a lower, **more sensitively designed** building. Nor will an existing tall building (or buildings) itself justify further tall buildings so as to form a cluster. Clusters can result in individually well-designed tall buildings becoming hidden behind less special ones, and can have greater cumulative visual impacts and possible unexpected impacts on microclimatic conditions. Conversely, when each building in a cluster is designed to stand out visually, the result can be buildings that relate poorly to one another.

3.16 While tall buildings are one model for increasing densities to support the efficient use of land, higher-density development can be delivered by alternative built forms that may respond better to existing local character. Historic England's research on [Increasing Residential Density in Historic Environments](#) explores the factors that can contribute to successfully delivering developments which increase residential density in historic environments **or in any established community**.

3.17 The NPPF highlights the need for public bodies to consider the duty to cooperate in planning matters (NPPF paragraphs 24-27). Some tall buildings will raise planning issues beyond the boundaries of an individual authority that will require consultation and co-ordination with its neighbours. Opportunities should be sought to work together to produce joint planning policies and strategies where appropriate.

Supplementary Planning Documents

3.18 Given the wide range of issues that tall building development can raise, supplementary planning documents can be important tools to help planning authorities ~~to~~ deliver good design. By providing greater clarity about how the planning authority will interpret policies, more considered proposals are likely to come forward. SPDs, presented graphically, can be particularly useful in communicating local heritage evidence and urban design analysis that has informed the policy development. **Since SPDs are not subject to public examination, early engagement with both developers and the local community will be essential to ensure strong ownership of the resulting guidance.**

4. Making a Planning Application [missing: early community engagement – this is not just a private process reserved for “specialists”]

4.1 The following advice seeks to support designers as they consider a range of issues to help achieve exemplary design for new tall buildings. While good design on its own does not justify a tall building in the wrong location, tall buildings need to set the highest standards in design because of their wide impact and likely longevity. Good design will take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area (NPPF paragraphs 127 and 130).

4.2 Before making a planning application, it is good practice **for developers to engage as early as possible with both the local planning authority, the local community** ~~discuss proposals with the local planning authority~~ and other relevant parties, such as Historic England (NPPF 2019 paragraphs 39-46). These consultations will help to:

- a) Identify the zone of visual influence of a proposal, which can then help to understand the character of the areas that may be affected and determine which heritage assets are likely to be affected (this includes considering recognised views and the settings of heritage assets). This will inform the Statement of Heritage Significance and townscape/landscape assessments, and where necessary the environmental impact assessments, which will accompany the planning application.

b) Guide and improve design. Design Review is one established tool for the assessment of impact at the pre-planning and planning application stages, and can inform the Design and Access Statement. Historic England encourages local authorities and the providers of design review panels to ensure that a broad range of specialists are included on panels, including heritage specialists and urban design where it seems likely a proposal will affect heritage assets. The greater the impact, the more detailed and comprehensive the Design and Access Statement needed. The same is true in relation to the Statement of Heritage Significance. [engage civic societies in design review]

c) Understand what illustrative material is likely to be needed in terms of the quality, accuracy, clarity and detail, so that the impact of a tall building can be properly and objectively assessed.

d) Identify additional material that may be required. For example, for applications that may affect a World Heritage Site, a Heritage Impact Assessment will be required, which provides sufficient information to enable assessment of the potential impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, and can be used to inform the scale and design of the building (NPPG 035 Reference ID: 18a-035-20190723).

4.3 Submitting a detailed planning application will require the applicant to provide sufficient information to enable the planning authority to assess the impact and planning merits when taking a decision. Outline applications are only likely to be justified in exceptional cases where the impact on the character and distinctiveness of local areas and on heritage assets can be assessed without knowing the detailed form and finishes of the building. This is likely to be rare. If an outline application is sought in these circumstances it is important to ensure that the parameters for development are derived from a thorough urban design analysis and heritage assessment that clearly demonstrates impact.

4.4 Applicants may find the good-practice checklist below useful when preparing an application. Where there is an impact on the historic environment, the level of detail should be proportionate to the importance of the affected heritage asset(s) and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Further information is provided in the paragraphs which follow.

Checklist When Preparing an Application

- a) Design and Access Statement
 - b) Statement of Heritage Significance
 - c) Assessment of context (local and town or city-wide)
 - d) Assessment of cumulative impacts
 - e) Environmental Impact Assessment (when required by the local planning authority)
 - f) World Heritage Site Heritage Impact Assessment (where proposals might affect the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Site)
 - g) Satisfaction of the following design criteria:
 - Architectural quality
 - Sustainable design and construction
 - Credibility of the design
 - Contribution to public space and facilities
-
- – Consideration of the impact on the local environment (and particularly at ground level)
 - – Provision of a well-designed inclusive environment

h) A 3D digital model that can be shared with stakeholders

4.5 A Design and Access Statement should accompany all tall buildings proposals. The principles established within the Design and Access Statement will need to satisfactorily demonstrate high quality in urban design and architecture, as well as respond to and take full account of the **local and any regional policies and** impacts on heritage assets. Further details on Statements of Heritage Significance as part of a Design and Access Statement can be found in Historic England's Advice Note 12: [Statements of Heritage Significance](#).

4.6 A high-quality scheme will have a positive relationship with:

- a) Topography
- b) Unique character of the place
- c) Heritage assets and their settings
- d) Height and scale of development (immediate, intermediate and town or city-wide)
- e) Urban grain and streetscape
- f) The impact on the skyline and on the role of existing prominent buildings of importance or merit
- g) **The nature and character of local neighbourhood and the impact on the local community**

And, where relevant:

- g) Open spaces
- h) Rivers and waterways
- i) Important views including prospects and panoramas

4.7 Careful assessment of any cumulative impacts in relation to other existing tall buildings and concurrent proposals will also be needed to fully understand the merits of the proposal. Where a proposal is promoted as part of a cluster, a successful design will have a positive relationship within the cluster, and the altered impact of a cluster itself also needs to be considered.

4.8 3D models and Accurate Visual Representations using photography are recommended to fully assess a proposal's impact on the surrounding area. It is essential to understand the nature of images that are developed. Images produced solely using computer models, or for marketing purposes, may not provide the level of detail or accuracy required to understand what the development would look like once constructed. **Similarly the use of 24mm wide-angle lens cameras distorts the images presented to public and to decision makers. The Landscape Institute's latest guidance on "Visual Representation of Development Proposals" (September 2019) advises that a 50mm lens, which is closest to what the human eye sees, should be the default choice, unless there are exceptional conditions where wider-angle lenses are required to fully capture the scene at close quarters (e.g. tall tower blocks).**

4.9 Planning applications for tall buildings often require an Environmental Impact Assessment, which would be expected to address matters in respect of both the proposed building and its cumulative impact, including:

- a) Accurate and realistic representations of the proposal, **produced in accordance with the Landscape Institute guidance**
 - b) Consideration of the character of surrounding areas and the settings of heritage assets, **including locally-listed buildings**
 - c) Consideration of impact on significant views
 - d) Consideration of impact on townscape and public realm
- e) Other relevant environmental issues, particularly sustainability, **sunlight and daylight, wind** and environmental performance.

Design quality considerations

4.10 Well-designed tall buildings provide an inclusive environment, both internally and externally, taking opportunities to offer improved permeability, accessibility and, where appropriate, the opening up or effective closure of views to improve the legibility of the wider townscape. A successful application will have fully addressed a range of design criteria. Delivering architectural quality involves the consideration, amongst other things, of the building's:

- a) Scale
- b) Form and massing
- c) Proportion and silhouette
- d) Facing materials
- e) Detailed surface design
- f) Relationship to other structures
- g) Impact on streetscape and near views
- h) Impact on townscape and distant views
- i) Impact on the skyline
- j) Impact on the local community/neighbourhood**

4.11 Given their likely impact on a wide area, it is important that social and environmental effects are also assessed. Consideration needs to be given to a tall building's contribution to public space and facilities. This applies both internally and externally, including the provision of a mix of uses, especially on the ground floor of tall buildings to allow for active engagement with the street and public realm. Consideration of the impact on the local environment is also important, wind and other microclimatic effects, overshadowing, night-time appearance, light pollution, vehicle movements, the environment and amenity of those in the vicinity of the building, and the impact on the pedestrian experience.

4.12 The long-term maintenance and potential for future retrofit are important factors to consider in terms of the safety and appearance of the building, as well as its sustainability and viability. With older tall buildings in need of refurbishment, there will be a range of environmental and fire safety considerations, including the original fire **evacuation** strategy, which will need to be considered as part of the design process. Opportunities to enhance the

appearance of unsympathetic tall buildings, reducing negative impacts the building may have on the local area, should also be explored **using only those materials that would not introduce fire hazards.**

5 Assessing Proposals

5.1 Many of the issues associated with determining an application for a tall building proposal are the same as for other applications with heritage implications. Historic England's Good Practice Note 2 provides advice on [Managing Significance in Decision Taking](#). The advice on policy, process and material considerations set out in sections 2, 3 and 4 of this advice note is also of relevance to local planning authorities in their consideration of applications. Some aspects of tall buildings proposals raise particular issues, however, and these are discussed below.

5.2 The government gives considerable importance to the quality of design of all new development and the need to improve the character and quality of an area, supporting the creation of high-quality buildings and places. The need to conserve and enhance the historic environment, means the need to achieve high quality design is especially important. This may require a particular set of design responses for new tall buildings, and technical input from a range of specialists including urban designers and specialist heritage advisers in making assessments and recommendations.

5.3 Where proposals are likely to impact on heritage assets and affect the character and appearance of an area, it is particularly important for decision makers to visit the site in person whenever possible to get a direct understanding of the effects. Technology is becoming increasingly useful in assessing the impacts of proposals, for example virtual reality headsets can be helpful when on site to illustrate more complex development proposals and test the impacts.

5.4 Where relevant, the local planning authority will need to consider the impact on World Heritage Sites. The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value and the World Heritage Site Management Plan are material considerations in the planning process.

5.5 It is important that the planning authority is satisfied that the applicant has checked with the Civil Aviation Authority whether flight paths to airports and heliports are affected, and if this has then been evaluated and, where necessary, mitigated.

5.6 Where full planning permission for a tall building is sought, suitable planning conditions and obligations can be used for the detailed design, materials and finishes, and treatment of the public realm, as well as for achieving proportionate public and community benefits. This will help ensure that the required high standard of architectural quality is maintained throughout the process of procurement, detailed design, and construction.

5.7 When considering any proposal that has an adverse impact on a designated heritage asset through development within its setting, 'great weight should be given to the asset's conservation', with any harm requiring a 'clear and convincing justification' (NPPF paragraphs 193 and 194). Where proposals would affect a conservation area, either directly or indirectly, it will be necessary to demonstrate that decision have been taken with special attention paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the area's character or appearance.

5.8 In assessing this justification, and in weighing any public benefits offered by a tall building proposal, local planning authorities will need to pay particular regard to the policies in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the NPPF. These state that overarching economic, social and

environmental objectives need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways and in ways which contribute to protecting and enhancing the built, natural and historic environment. This assessment may involve the examination of alternative designs or schemes that might be more sustainable in that they deliver public benefits while avoiding harm to the built environment.

5.9 Due to the profound and long-term impacts that tall buildings can have on the significance of heritage assets, and the integrity of historic townscapes, it is especially important that the extent and nature of any claimed public benefits are fully and carefully scrutinised by decision makers.

⁵ Further guidance on World Heritage Sites is available within the Planning Practice Guidance (<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk>). Planning authorities in London will need to have regard to the London Plan policies for the management of World Heritage Sites and the Supplementary Planning Guidance: London World Heritage Sites Guidance on Settings (2012).