

Committee(s)	Dated:
Local Plans Sub (Planning and Transportation) Committee	20/06/2023
Subject: City Plan 2040 – Tall Buildings & Heritage	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1,2,4,7,9,11,12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Gwyn Richards, Planning & Development Director, Environment Department	For discussion
Report author: Rob McNicol, Environment Department	

Summary

As part of the previous formal (regulation 19) consultation stage on the draft City Plan, respondents raised issues regarding tall buildings and their impacts. An extensive exercise has been undertaken to establish and analyse character areas across the Square Mile, identifying those that could be appropriate for tall buildings and establishing appropriate heights for tall buildings in these areas.

This paper sets out proposed amendments to City Plan policy on tall buildings, including where they may be appropriate and inappropriate; permissible heights within areas appropriate for tall buildings; and approaches to ensure development would conserve the special historic and architectural interest of Bevis Marks Synagogue.

Due to the commercial sensitivity of identifying specific sites as appropriate or inappropriate for tall buildings, this report does not include specific maps or images of proposed tall building areas and heights. These will be presented to the Sub-Committee under non-public item 9.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Advise on the proposed direction for City Plan policies related to tall buildings in the City.

Main Report

Background

Consultation responses to the regulation 19 pre-submission Local Plan consultation

1. The Proposed Submission of the draft Local Plan, called the 'City Plan 2036', was published for Regulation 19 consultation in March 2021. In response to the draft Local Plan consultation, a total of 1,327 formal representations were received from 171 respondents which covered a wide range of topics, though a main theme related to the impact of growth and intensification on heritage assets and the City's character. The following key points raised in relation to the draft Strategic Policy S12 (Tall Buildings).
 - Tall Buildings – the City Plan should identify which areas of the City that are appropriate for tall buildings and, within these areas, indicate appropriate building heights to provide necessary guidance on tall building development and accord with the London Plan.
 - The Tower of London World Heritage Site (WHS) – the City Plan should consider potential negative impacts on The Tower of London WHS from the development of tall buildings and provide clear guidance to manage down building heights in proximity to the Tower and its setting.
2. The Mayor of London considered that the policy approach in the City Plan, which defines inappropriate areas for tall buildings, leaves uncertainty regarding the status of other parts of the City. The London Plan Policy D9 states that tall buildings should only be developed in locations identified as suitable in development plans and requires boroughs to identify any such locations along with appropriate tall building heights. As a result, the Mayor considered that the draft City Plan 2036 was not in general conformity with Policy D9 of the adopted London Plan 2021. To address the conformity issue, changes were requested to two key areas:
 - Tall Buildings – the City Plan should identify which areas of the City that are appropriate for tall buildings and, within these areas, indicate appropriate building heights to provide necessary guidance on tall building development and accord with the London Plan.
 - The Tower of London World Heritage Site (WHS) – the City Plan should consider potential negative impacts on The Tower of London WHS from the development of tall buildings and provide clear guidance to manage down building heights in proximity to the Tower and its setting.
3. Observations were made by Historic England stating that the City Plan does not adequately reflect national or strategic policy and the tall buildings proposals were likely to continue to come forward in locations and at heights that would cause serious harm to the significance of key heritage assets. The Plan should offer mechanisms to adequately protect the City's historic environment.
4. The London Sephardi Trust and the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi Community expressed concerns that the policy gives greater weight to the need for additional tall buildings over other important planning objectives, notably conserving and enhancing heritage assets and their settings. Bevis Marks Synagogue as a Grade I Listed Building warrants similar protection as that provided for St Paul's, the Tower of London and the Monument (around 80 similar representations were received on this point).

5. Historic Royal Palaces advocated that areas identified as inappropriate for tall buildings should take account of London View Management Framework (LVMF) views 10A.1 from Tower Bridge and 25A.2 and 3 from the South Bank.
6. The Surveyor to the Fabric of St Paul's noted that the digital model for tall buildings was not included in the evidence base for the City Plan, arguing that it should be added so that decision-making is transparent with reference to an agreed model on which harms and benefits can be judged.
7. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets advocated amending the definition of tall buildings to ensure that all buildings that are tall relative to their context are assessed as such, and suggested that the City Plan should acknowledge that buildings below 75m could also have significant impacts on protected views.
8. A few respondents requested that the area around the Barbican and Golden Lane and the Smithfield and Barbican Key Area of Change be identified as inappropriate for new tall buildings.

Tall buildings analysis

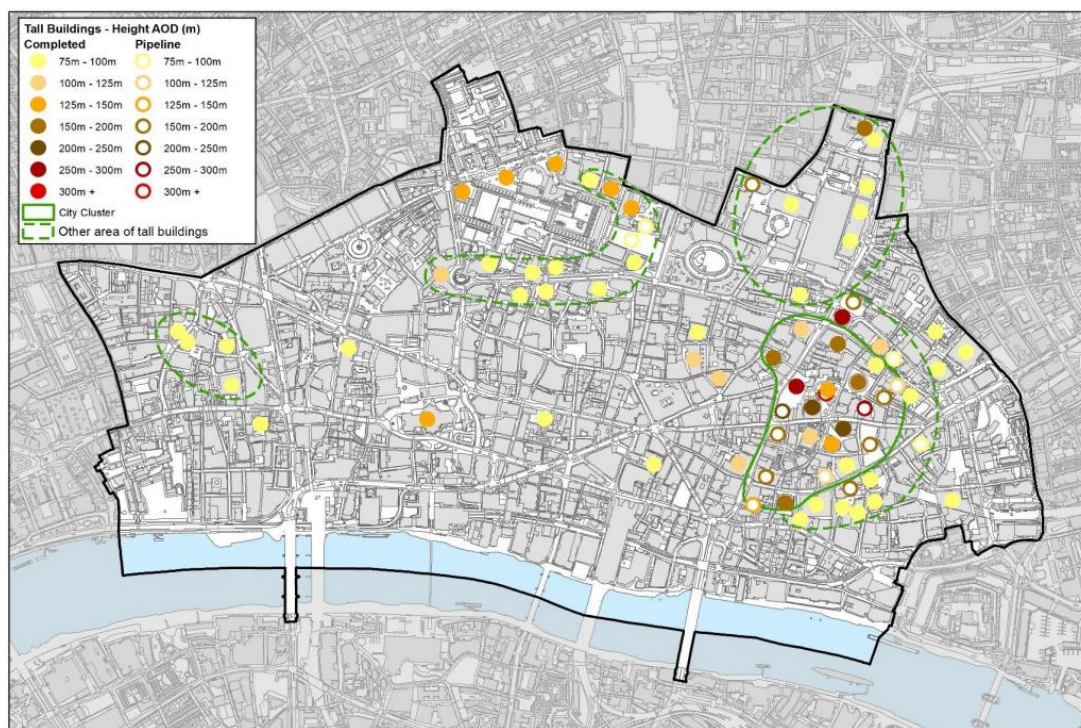
9. To address the issues raised by stakeholders in relation to tall buildings, and to ensure that the City Plan is in general conformity with the London Plan 2021, officers have undertaken extensive research and evidence work related to tall buildings. The objectives of this exercise have been:
 - To identify appropriate locations, in principle, for tall buildings within the City of London;
 - To determine suitable building heights within these tall building areas;
 - To evaluate potential development impacts of new tall buildings using 3D modelling and visualisations.

Establishing a tall building definition for the Square Mile

10. London Plan policy D9 (Tall Buildings) advises that boroughs should define what a tall building is for specific localities, and that this should not be less than 6 storeys or 18m high. The City Corporation's GIS portal contains data on building heights from the Ordnance Survey. This data indicates that only small pockets of the City have building heights at or around 6 storeys or 18m high. These areas include relatively small parts of Smithfield, Fleet Street and the Temples or along the lanes and alleys off Bank junction, which mostly comprise conservation areas.
11. It is apparent from the building height mapping that much of the City is between 50-75m above Ordnance Datum (AOD), or between 15-21 storeys. The City has a varied character with a striking spatial contrast. Given its small geographical area, it is not considered appropriate to prescribe a granular approach to a

definition of tall buildings on an area-by-area basis, but instead to have a single definition for tall buildings across the area.

12. The City Corporation also publishes annual monitoring reports on tall buildings in the City of London and these define tall buildings as those that are greater than 75m AOD. For the purposes of addressing the London Plan requirements, it was considered that a 75m definition would be appropriate. It ensures consistency with the longer-term monitoring and – given prevailing heights across much of the City – is a level where buildings may have significant visual implications and could result in a significant change to the skyline.

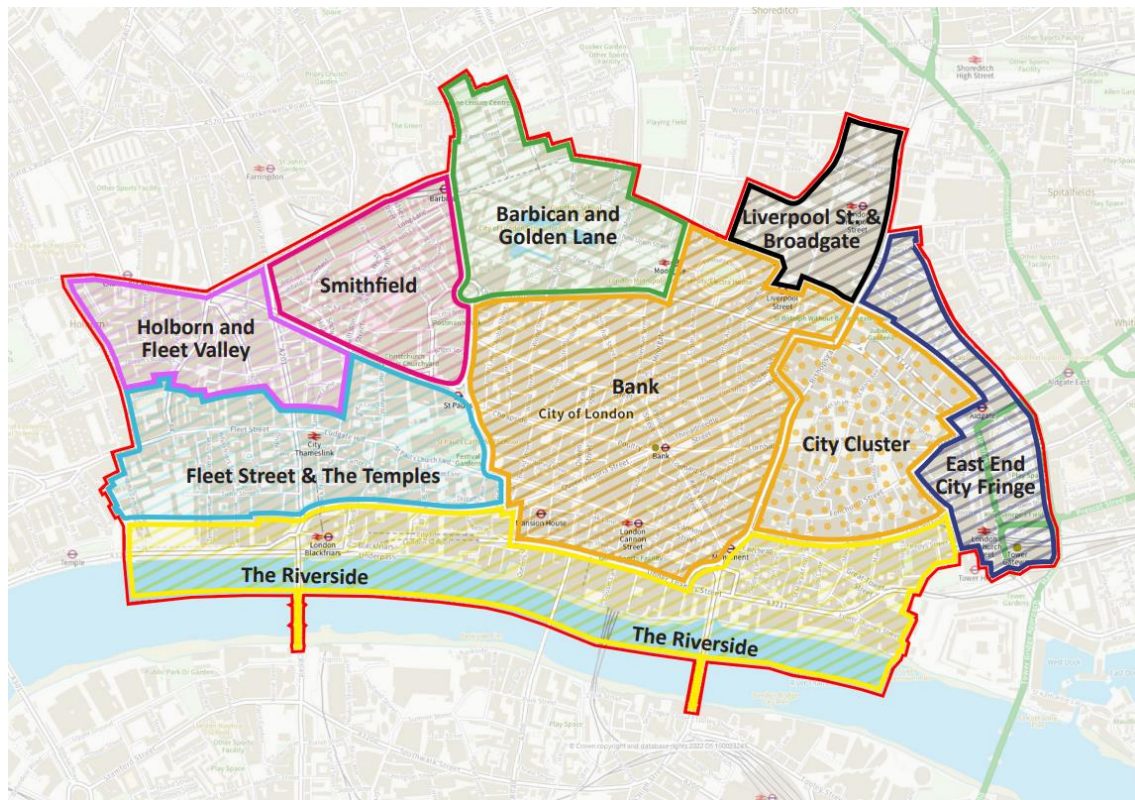


Character areas sieving exercise

13. London Plan policy D9 (Tall Buildings) requires boroughs to determine if there are locations where tall buildings may be an appropriate form of development and to identify these areas on maps. Supporting text advises that a 'sieving exercise' should be undertaken to identify these locations, by assessing potential visual and cumulative impacts; and that maximum heights for tall buildings in these locations should be determined.

14. To meet these requirements, a comprehensive 'sieving exercise' has been undertaken for the Square Mile. This involved carrying out a detailed character and heritage significance assessment for the Square Mile as a whole, and then at a more granular level further sensitivity analysis for identified distinct Character Areas of the City. The study confirmed the City's long-term approach that, given its historic nature, and the area's prominence in local and wider views, all parts of the Square Mile are sensitive to tall building development. However, through the sieving exercise it has been possible to assess varying levels of sensitivity

across the City and identify those areas which have the greatest sensitivity to the potential impact of tall buildings.



15. For the purpose of this analysis, the City was divided into nine character areas that have characteristics which make them distinct from each other.

The following criteria were applied to assess each area's sensitivity to tall building development:

- **Character and appearance** – an assessment of the look and feel of the character areas; including its core characteristics such as building height; morphology, topography and urban structure; built form and mix of land uses; landmarks; local views. Based on the above character analysis, a conclusion was drawn on the level of sensitivity of the area's existing urban form, in principle, to tall buildings.
- **Strategic Townscape, Heritage & Views** – a general assessment in relation to the potential implications of tall buildings on the wider City and pan-London skyline. Each area was assessed in relation to the setting of St Paul's Cathedral (LVMF views, St Paul's Heights and associated views); the City Landmarks and Skyline Features; Monument Views; the settings of the Monument and the Tower of London World Heritage Site; and the locally designated views of other neighbouring boroughs. A conclusion was drawn regarding the area's sensitivity to tall buildings, in principle, on this basis.

- **Heritage Significance** – a broad assessment of the heritage significance of the Character Areas and their constituent heritage assets was made, including how they contribute to the City’s overarching heritage significance. A conclusion was drawn regarding the area’s sensitivity to tall buildings, in principle, on this basis.
16. An overall conclusion was formed regarding the sensitivity of each of the areas to tall buildings. If found to be very sensitive, it was sieved out of the exercise; if found to be sensitive, it was taken forward, or ‘sieved in’, for more detailed sensitivity assessment.
 17. Of the nine character areas, seven areas were identified as being ‘very sensitive’ to tall buildings, and were therefore ‘sieved out’. Two areas – specifically the City Cluster and Holborn and Fleet Valley areas – were found to be ‘sensitive’. These two areas were subjected to detailed 3D modelling sensitivity analysis to refine the extent of their perimeter boundaries and determine acceptable building heights within these areas.
 18. The characterisation work has been undertaken in-house, with expert input from planning policy and design officers. To add robustness, the sections establishing a baseline characterisation and heritage significance of the City, and the constituent Character Areas, has been expert peer-reviewed by Dr Nigel Barker Mills, a former Director of Historic England’s London Office and heritage conservation expert.

Detailed assessment of the tall building areas

19. To assess the potential impact of future development on strategic view and heritage constraints, detailed 3D modelling was carried out for the two identified tall building areas. This work has been undertaken with leading experts in the field, VU City and Miller Hare, working closely with officers.
20. This process involved geometric three-dimensional mapping of the relevant criteria, reflecting those strategic constraints. It is worth noting that this comprehensive process didn’t seek to address more localised character and heritage constraints, or other material considerations when assessing tall buildings. Those constraints would be appropriately dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The relevant criteria comprised:
 1. Those strategic pan-London views of the London View Management Framework (LVMF), including further modelling of hard constraints which are integral to their management;
 2. St Paul’s Heights Viewing Points contained in the Protected Views SPD (2012);
 3. Monument Views contained in the Protected Views SPD (2012);
 4. Tower of London World Heritage Site (WHS) approaches and representative views, as identified in the Tower of London Local Setting Study;
 5. Relevant neighbouring borough’s strategic local views;
 6. Achieving an overall coherent cluster form on the skyline.

21. The 3D model and relevant criteria were used to test the potential heights of tall buildings within each area. Two options were tested for each area, an Option A and Option B, taking into account the criteria and assessing the potential impact of the massing and overall form. For the City Cluster area, particular attention has been given to the proximity of potential tall buildings to the Tower of London WHS, and this has informed the preferred option for the tall building area. This exercise has involved comprehensive and exhaustive work, applying expert judgement and analysis of tall building impacts on many views.

Refresh Strategic Policy S12 (Tall Buildings)

22. As a result of the tall buildings analysis work, there is a requirement to revise the City Plan draft policy on tall buildings.

23. The updated policy will designate areas within the City where tall building development (over 75m AOD) is considered appropriate, based on the evidence base analysis. These areas will be clearly marked on the policies map. This is a shift in policy, with the current draft policy only identifying areas where tall buildings would be inappropriate. The new policy will provide further clarification that new tall buildings will only be appropriate in suitable locations within the designated tall building areas and will be subject to detail site assessments to ensure that they are in compliance with the tall buildings and other relevant local plan policies.

24. Outside the designated areas, policy will be amended to specify that these areas have been identified as being 'very sensitive' to tall buildings and that new tall buildings would be inappropriate in these areas.

25. The revised policy will indicate building heights on contour maps, and any tall building proposal will have to consider the maximum permissible building heights (in metres AOD) specified on the 2D contour map. A 3D digital model of the tall building areas and potential heights within them will also be made available to guide development proposals for tall buildings.

26. The policy will be clear that, while the heights identified are potentially appropriate, buildings should not be designed purely to maximise height up to this limit; instead, tall buildings should be carefully designed with building forms that contribute positively to the skyline, the local character and have architectural integrity.

27. In addition, proposals for tall building development will be subject to detailed scrutiny, and will be required to take into account all relevant policies in the City Plan and the London Plan. Impacts on conservation areas, heritage assets, and their settings will be addressed through a more detailed assessment conducted at a local level on a case-by-case basis. Other potential impacts of proposed tall buildings would also be assessed, in line with relevant policy.

Impacts on Bevis Marks Synagogue and its Immediate Setting

28. Bevis Marks synagogue is the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the United Kingdom, opened in 1701, and it is understood to be the only synagogue in Europe that has held regular services continuously for over 300 years. It is a Grade I listed building, of outstanding architectural and historic interest, and is notably very little altered. Representatives of the synagogue community have raised concerns that further development in the surrounding area could worsen the internal light levels experienced by the building and affect the historic setting of the building.
29. The synagogue sits within a gated courtyard, immediately surrounded by buildings on all sides, most of which date from the 20th Century. There are a number of taller buildings that are visible from within the courtyard space and a number of additional consented buildings will be visible once completed.
30. Officers consider that there are a range of steps that could be taken to ensure that new development in the area has an acceptable impact on the setting and therefore the significance of Bevis Marks synagogue. These include:
 - Identifying an 'Immediate Setting' area for the synagogue, which recognises the relationship between the synagogue building, its courtyard and those buildings immediately surrounding it, and which will require the height of any development to respect and respond to the immediate setting of the Synagogue, avoid having an overbearing impact and conserve the special interest of the synagogue.
 - Including in City Plan policy a requirement that development within the City Cluster would not have an unacceptable impact (in line with BRE guidance) on daylight levels in historic places of worship including the Synagogue, including cumulatively, and that developments should seek to improve daylight levels where possible.
 - Members are advised that, as a separate issue, an assessment is being carried out for establishing a conservation area covering the wider Creechurch area, recognising the significance of the many heritage assets in the area, including Bevis Marks synagogue. This process sits alongside the Local Plan, as a result of the City Corporation's duties set out in section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires local planning authorities to determine whether any areas should be designated as conservation areas, and will be a matter for consideration by the Planning and Transportation Committee in July 2023.
31. Officers believe that taking these steps would help to ensure that development in the area would not have a detrimental impact on the significance of Bevis Marks synagogue, while not unduly constraining appropriate development in a part of the City where tall buildings are considered suitable, in principle.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. The proposed refresh of draft Local Plan policy will be in conformity with strategic policy and complementary to Destination City.

Financial implications

33. None.

Staff Resource implications

34. Preparation of the revised pre-submission Regulation 19 City Plan will be carried out in-house by the Development Plans Team, working alongside and supported by Development and Design colleagues in the Planning Service and by other services as appropriate.

Legal implications

35. There are no specific legal requirements, other than the ongoing requirement to ensure that all relevant statutory processes are complied with during production of the City Plan.

Equalities implications

36. Preparation of the City Plan has been informed by an Integrated Impact Assessment which incorporates an Equality Assessment. Any material changes to the Plan will be subject to further Equality Assessment. This will include assessment of the impacts of the relevant policies on people who share the protected characteristic of religion, in particular the Sephardic Jewish community who worship at the Bevis Marks Synagogue. The requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty – to eliminate unlawful discrimination, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not – have informed the proposed policy approaches set out in this paper.

Risk implications

37. The December 2021 report to the Grand Committee identified the risks associating with preparing a revised pre-submission Regulation 19 City Plan as compared to submitting the current version for examination. The Grand Committee agreed to revise the City Plan and officers will continue to monitor and report back on any changes to the risk assessment as the project progresses.

Climate implications

38. The City Plan is one of the key mechanisms for achieving those targets in the Climate Action Strategy which relate to the Square Mile rather than the City Corporation's own operations, in particular the net zero target for the Square Mile by 2040. It is intended that the revised City Plan will further strengthen alignment with the Climate Action Strategy.

Security implications

39. There are no direct security implications.

Conclusion

40. This paper sets out proposed policy changes to the City Plan 2040 in relation to tall buildings, as a result of issues raised by respondents during previous public consultation. The proposed changes result from an extensive project to undertake character assessments of all parts of the Square Mile; carry out a 'sieving exercise' to identify those areas that could be appropriate for tall buildings; undertake detailed analysis of these two areas – the City Cluster and Holborn and Fleet Valley – to establish appropriate heights for tall buildings in these areas.
41. As a result of this work, it is recommended that the City Plan policy on tall buildings be modified to identify those areas where tall buildings may be appropriate (and where they would be inappropriate); and to set out heights for the two tall buildings clusters in a contour map and published 3D shape file. Within the areas deemed appropriate for tall buildings, the policy will recognise that tall buildings may not be suitable on all sites and that further analysis would need to be undertaken to consider local and strategic impacts of any proposed tall buildings. Policy would also be amended to ensure proposed development within the City Cluster would not have an unacceptable impact (in line with BRE guidance) on daylight levels in historic places of worship including Bevis Marks Synagogue, as well as recognising the proposed Immediate Setting of the Synagogue, alongside work to establish a wider Creechurch Conservation Area.
42. Given the complex nature of the Square Mile, and in particular the strategic views that cross the area, this work is one of the most complicated tall building modelling exercises carried out to date in London. The use of a 3D shape file for guiding development proposals (alongside the policies and 2D mapping in the development plan) would be a highly innovative approach to implementing the City Plan, providing increased certainty and transparency to stakeholders.

Background Papers

- None

Appendices

- None

Report author

Rob McNicol

Assistant Director – Policy and Strategy

T: 07784 239316

E: rob.mcnicol@cityoflondon.gov.uk