

# Subject: Tall Buildings – Implications for Draft London Plan Policy

Report to: Planning Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 27 June 2018

This report will be considered in public

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background information for a meeting with invited external experts to discuss the growth of applications for tall buildings and their implications for the draft London Plan policy.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report as background to putting questions to invited external experts on a range of issues relating to the growth of applications for tall buildings and their implications for draft London Plan policy.**
- 2.2 **That the Committee agrees to use information from this meeting as part of the Committee’s participation in the forthcoming London Plan Examination in Public.**

## 3. Background

- 3.1 The Mayor is required to regularly review the London Plan to ensure the plan reflects national policy, latest demographic projections and is based on the most current evidence base.
- 3.2 On 1 December 2017, the Mayor published his draft London Plan, a full review of the existing Plan, for consultation until 2 March 2018. The full review contains some 114 draft policies, one of which, Policy D8, relates to tall buildings in London.
- 3.3 The Committee has been monitoring the issue of the growth of tall buildings in London for some time:
- It held a meeting with a range of experts on 10 June 2014<sup>1</sup>;
  - It wrote to the Mayor outlining its concerns on the impact of tall buildings on London’s skyline on 9 March 2015<sup>2</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s36804/Tall%20Buildings%20and%20Londons%20Skyline.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla\\_migrate\\_files\\_destination/15-03-09-final-tall-buildings-letter.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/15-03-09-final-tall-buildings-letter.pdf)  
City Hall, The Queen’s Walk, London SE1 2AA

- Set out challenges for the new Mayor on a range of planning policy issues, including tall buildings, in a report published in January 2016<sup>3</sup>; and
- Further developed its recommendations on future tall buildings policy in the Committee's response to the draft London Plan consultation, in March 2018<sup>4</sup>.

3.4 The Committee has consistently recommended that Mayoral planning policy is strengthened to restrict the location of London's tall buildings and improve their design and scrutiny of potential alternative design configuration. Moreover, the Committee agrees that tall residential buildings are not an answer to London's real housing needs and as such should not be encouraged outside of a few designated and carefully managed areas of London.

## 4. Issues for Consideration

4.1 There have been a number of recent developments in the nature of tall buildings being planned and being built that give rise to concerns that planning policy remains insufficiently robust to ensure a greater control of this kind of development delivers benefits to Londoners. The current revision of the London Plan offers a rare and immediate opportunity to try to ensure policy is strengthened.

4.2 Recent data identifies new directions in the type and locations of tall buildings proposed in London. Some of the key trends indicated in these reports are:

- **The number of tall buildings in the 'pipeline' rose to 510** – a 12% increase from the previous year. A record 115 new tall schemes are now under construction.
- **There is a shift to towards suburban London** – Opportunity Areas and transport hubs are still the main locations for new tall buildings but there is a shift from inner to outer London. In 2011, 93% of schemes were in TfL travel zones 1 and two. By 2017, more than 70% were in zones 3, 4 and 5. Bromley and Waltham Forest have tall buildings in the pipeline for the first time.
- **While the average height of these buildings has declined slightly, to 29 storeys, 11% of buildings under construction are between 50 and 75 storeys.**
- **Tall buildings are increasingly for residential use** – Figures suggest that some 90% of tall buildings are residential, whereas only 5% are commercial. Other data suggests there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Build to Rent tall buildings. Nearly 30% of all towers were this type, up from virtually zero in 2013.
- **It is estimated that approximately 106,000 new homes may be built in tall buildings** – This represents some 1.5 years housing supply across London, however in some boroughs tall buildings represent several years of their housing targets: Tower Hamlets (5.8 years), Greenwich (5 years), Hammersmith and Fulham (4.7 years) and Southwark (4.3 years).

4.3 There is an argument that these trends have been a result of strategic planning policy. Tall buildings policy has evolved through different versions of the London Plan. For example, the 2008 London Plan promoted tall buildings where they "create attractive landmarks and provide a coherent location for economic clusters." The 2016 Plan indicated that "tall buildings should

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/up\\_or\\_out\\_report.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/up_or_out_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london\\_assembly\\_response\\_to\\_london\\_plan.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_assembly_response_to_london_plan.pdf)

generally be limited to the Central Activities Zone, opportunity areas, town centres or locations with good public transport access.” The 2017 Draft London Plan is explicit that “tall buildings have a role in London accommodating expected growth. But... must be part of a plan led approach based on appropriate locations – and their potential contribution to new homes, economic growth and regeneration.”

### **Issues for discussion**

- 4.4 Given the trends set out in paragraph 4.2 above, Members may wish to discuss whether London Plan tall building policy needs to be further reviewed in the light of the increasing residential nature of these developments, the significant contribution to new housing supply in some boroughs and their spread to suburban London where perhaps existing local urban character may not be as suitable for tall buildings than inner London.
- 4.5 This meeting might focus on the following questions:
- How has tall building policy evolved since the 2004 London Plan?
  - What are the implications for the trends in London's tall buildings in terms of representing an increasingly residential nature, and the outward spread to the suburbs?
  - Who are these residential units for in terms of tenure and size mix?
  - How are London local authorities assessing applications and applying policy?
  - Is the tall building policy in the draft London Plan sufficient to ensure London's identified housing needs are being met by this kind of proposal?
  - Does the Mayor need to adopt a specifically 'residential' tall buildings policy?
- 4.6 The discussion will add to the evidence base on tall building policy to enable the Committee to argue for policy change at the forthcoming London Plan Examination in Public if Members agree there is justification for the Mayor adopting a specifically 'residential' tall buildings policy.

### **Invited guests**

- 4.7 A number of external guests have been invited to attend this meeting. The confirmed guests are:
- David Hughes, Planning Policy Manager, London Borough of Harrow;
  - Barbara Weiss, Director, Barbara Weiss Architects;
  - Paul Wellman, Senior Analyst, Estates Gazette

## **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

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**List of appendices to this report:**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

List of Background Papers: None

Contact Officer: Paul Watling, Scrutiny Manager

Telephone: 020 7983 4393

Email: [scrutiny@london.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@london.gov.uk)