

BUILDING HEIGHT IN THE ROYAL BOROUGH

– A SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA



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STATUTORY DOCUMENT

This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been subject to public consultation, which was conducted in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement. The revised document has been agreed by Key Decision on **15 September 2010** and is now the Council's adopted SPD for considering tall building proposals within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Should you require any further information on the contents of the SPD or have any questions relating to a planning submission or pre-application discussions involving tall buildings, please contact the Planning Line on **020 7361 3012** or email planning@rbkc.gov.uk

For further information on the Local Development Framework (LDF) process or consultation arrangements, please call the LDF hotline on **020 7361 3879** or email the above address.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“Skylines are urban signatures... Cities of all descriptions and periods raise aloft distinctive landmarks, to celebrate faith and power and special achievement”.¹

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

1.1 This document sets out supplementary planning policy for building heights in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and particularly in relation to tall buildings. It does not create policy. It provides an analysis of the physical context of the Royal Borough and guidance, elaborating upon the policies used to determine planning applications for new large scale buildings in Kensington and Chelsea, particularly tall buildings, as set out in the Council’s statutory development plan.²

1.2 The guidance identifies at the strategic level those parts of the Royal Borough that are unable or less able to absorb the impacts of tall buildings, and describes the positive tests that new proposals for tall buildings should satisfy. It provides a checklist of design issues that applicants of tall buildings must address in their planning submissions, and advises discussions with the Council at an early stage. Outline planning applications for tall buildings in the Royal Borough are not accepted.

1.3 The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) forms part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) and will be used in the determination of planning applications. The SPD is supplementary to Strategic Objectives **CO5** and **CL2** of the Core Strategy and to policies **Strat10**, **CD1-2**, **CD8-11**, **CD13-15**, **CD17**, **CD27-28**, **CD57** and **CD61-63** of the adopted UDP.³



DEFINITION OF TALL BUILDINGS

1.4 The London Plan defines tall buildings as “buildings that are significantly taller than their surroundings and/or have a significant impact on the skyline”.⁴ Tall buildings are taller than the overall building height in an area. Thus, a 6-storey building might be a tall building in a predominantly 2-storey suburban area, but of a common height in a metropolitan city centre. Tall buildings must therefore be considered in relation to their local context and measured on a proportional basis. For the purposes of applying this guidance tall buildings are 1½ times or more the height of their context. In a typical part of the Borough, such as a Victorian terraced street, this would be 23m or above, though this will depend on the context.⁵

Methodology and structure of the document

1.5 English Heritage and Commission for the Built Environment (“CABE”)’s joint guidance on tall buildings encourages local planning authorities to include specific policies for tall buildings in development plans clearly identifying, in map-based form, areas which are appropriate, sensitive or inappropriate for tall buildings. This ensures that “tall buildings are properly planned as part of an exercise in place-making informed by clear long-term vision, rather than in an

ad hoc, reactive, piecemeal manner”.⁶ The London Plan also suggests that boroughs may wish to identify defined areas of specific character that could be sensitive to tall buildings within their development plans.⁷

1.6 The London Plan indicates that boroughs should explain what aspects of local character tall buildings could affect and “not impose unsubstantiated borough-wide height restrictions”.⁸ Furthermore, English Heritage and CABE’s joint guidance recommends that local authorities should carry out a detailed urban design study when assigning appropriate and inappropriate areas for tall buildings. The urban design study should identify those elements that create local character, such as streetscape, scale, height, urban grain, natural topography as well as landmark buildings and significant views.⁹

1.7 In line with the London Plan and English Heritage and CABE’s joint guidance this analysis identifies sensitive or inappropriate areas for tall buildings based on a detailed urban design and character study. This has been done through a sieve analysis designed to protect sensitive buildings, areas and views. It is a methodology widely used in a number of similar studies across London and the UK.¹⁰



1.8 This document presents the following:

- built character of the Royal Borough
- building height and typologies in the Royal Borough
- sieve tests
- Proactive tests and tall building arguments
- conclusion

1.9 Other pertinent information, including the national, regional and local policy context, design evaluation criteria and detailed submissions for tall building proposals, are contained in the appendices. They are material to planning consent decisions.

However, the analysis does not indicate where tall buildings are appropriate. This would require a comprehensive review, which because of the finely grained nature of the Borough's urban form, would be a disproportionate use of council resources to produce. In addition, a proactive assessment of how tall buildings could enhance the Borough image is set out. Based on the analysis, this document provides guidance on how proposals for tall buildings will be determined in accordance with current planning policy. It is not enough that tall building proposals are outside inappropriate or sensitive areas. All tall building proposals must also satisfy the proactive assessment.

