



Figure 02
Definition of tall buildings as Landmark Structures

3 BUILDING HEIGHT AND TYPOLOGIES

INTRODUCTION

3.1 When considering high or tall buildings the Royal Borough distinguishes three categories, referring to how far a building rises above its context and the likely extent of visual impact this has. This is measured on a proportional basis. *[See Figure 2, Page 16]*

- Local landmarks
- District landmarks
- Metropolitan landmarks

3.2 The three categories are landmarks by virtue of the additional height, forming distinct features in the townscape. That said, landmarks may be distinguished by factors other than height, such as a distinctive form, choice of facing materials or colour, or use: notable examples are the Michelin building in Fulham Road at its junction with Draycott Avenue,²¹ Chelsea Town Hall,²² and the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington High Street,²³ which do not rise above the predominant building height. Nevertheless, height is an obvious landmark device. Only the last two landmark categories of district and metropolitan are regarded as significantly taller than their context and might be referred to as ‘tall buildings’.



Local landmarks

3.3 Local landmarks are defined in the Royal Borough as buildings that may be taller than the surroundings, but no taller than 1½ times the typical building height of the context. Although a local landmark stands out, its height-ratio remains integrated into the local context. Its scale, massing and height still relate to that of adjoining buildings and can be read as part of the context. For example, where the surrounding buildings are 15m (50ft), which is typical of the Borough, a local landmark could be up to 22½m (75ft) in height. Local landmarks may be regarded as ‘high’ buildings or in effect buildings that are ‘higher’ than their context, but not so much as to be incompatible with the local scale.

3.4 Local landmarks often give emphasis to prestigious locations or important uses relevant to those living or working in the area. They are used to express important cross-roads, or terminate local views. Often they highlight activities or services that have localised meaning or significance, aiding local navigation, such as the parish church, meeting hall, local library or town hall. It is not uncommon for corner properties in our Victorian shopping streets to feature an additional storey; or for our public buildings to be of a larger scale and occasionally mid-terrace, providing local

emphasis. Notable examples are Cadogan Hall in Sloane Terrace,²⁴ St. Columba’s Church in Pont Street,²⁵ and Empire House in Brompton Road.

3.5 In each instance the local landmarks may breach the general roofline, but the impact on the skyline is likely to be negligible.²⁶ Their visual emphasis or ‘legibility’ within the local townscape benefits from and contributes to the Borough’s distinctly traditional urban form. Local landmarks perform local functions, and to do so they should remain compatible with and sensitive to the context. However, their very emphasis is derived from their occasional presence within the local townscape. Careful control is therefore needed to prevent the proliferation of new local landmarks that would otherwise undermine their very purpose and gradually erode the Borough’s consistent building heights. *New local landmarks could be permitted in the Borough where they express important features and aspects of the form and use of buildings, or terminate local views.*²⁷

District landmarks

3.6 District landmarks are defined as buildings between 1½ times and 4 times the context height. In contrast to local landmarks, they have a dominant effect on

their immediate and wider surroundings. This type of tall building significantly impacts upon the skyline and can act as a strategic landmark, providing important orientation points. Depending on its height and massing, a district landmark may harm its surroundings by overshadowing, overlooking and disrupting the prevailing local building character. Slender tall buildings are easier to absorb within the urban fabric.

3.7 District landmarks work best when they ‘embody’ a particular public use. According to Spiro Kostof “Urban symbols are presumably carriers of some collective meaning of those who live and work there... Who should have the privilege to represent us on the horizon? These are the fundamental questions.”²⁸ By Design cites buildings with functions of civic importance as one example where a building could stand out from its background, contributing positively to views and vistas as a landmark building.²⁹ Tall buildings are a very dominant building form and have a significant impact on the skyline. Notable examples are the Natural History Museum, Brompton Oratory and, more prosaically, the Earl’s Court Exhibition Centre. They may also create an opportunity for magnificent views from top floors, as highlighted in the London Plan.³⁰

3.8 *District landmarks should enhance legibility in the Borough by emphasising civic, cultural or institutional activities of London-wide significance.* London-wide public uses are those of significant public interest, such as a convention centre, major cultural or institutional building, or, in other boroughs, a mainline railway terminus. Opportunities for new public buildings of significant public interest are likely to be very occasional. Where they do arise legibility within the Borough will be an important factor that could justify a new building of district height. If they are to be fully effective and have meaning, however, the new building should accommodate the London-wide function rather than be linked to a wider development that provides the function. Furthermore, an equally distinctive landmark building could just as easily be achieved by focussing on architectural matters other than height, such as form, materials and colour. Privacy, amenity and security remain important considerations.

District landmarks will require a detailed impact assessment study and masterplan to ensure a wholly positive visual contribution and to avoid harming the amenity of their surroundings.



Metropolitan landmarks

3.9 Metropolitan landmarks are defined as buildings whose height is more than 4 times the typical building height. They are regarded as very tall buildings in the context of the Royal Borough. Buildings of this height, such as Trellick Tower and the Forum Hotel, can be seen from outside the borough and act as significant landmarks on a city-wide scale. They would usually denote the economic centre of a major conurbation, often providing headquarter buildings of major institutes and corporations - for example, Tower 42 and the Gherkin in the City of London and Canary Wharf in the Docklands - and are not associated with predominately residential quarters. Metropolitan landmarks have a stronger impact than district landmarks and are likely to harm their surroundings by overshadowing and overlooking. They are excessively taller than their surroundings and, regardless of their profile, too disruptive to the Borough's traditional urban form and townscape.

*Metropolitan landmarks are inappropriate to the predominantly residential character of the Borough, away from the economic centre of the Capital.*³¹



TALL BUILDING PREMISE

3.10 The premise is that Kensington and Chelsea is generally not a tall buildings Borough and as such there are unlikely to be opportunities for new tall buildings. However, *where a tall building may be countenanced it should be of district scale*. This is considered in proportion to the surrounding context and is between 1½ and 4 times the prevailing building scale. Based on a typical building height and street pattern in the Borough this generally equates to 60m (197ft) maximum for a new tall building. Careful assessment of the tall building's location, detailed design and impacts is nonetheless required (see sections 5 and 6). Above this proportional height, *metropolitan scaled proposals will be resisted*.

3.11 When applying this guidance, building heights will be assessed with reference to structures that are designed for occupation or that can be adapted for occupation, including roof top plant room and lift over-runs. This excludes aerials, finials, screens, spires or devices designed specifically to finish the building and provide its roof profile, and which for the most part are marginal additions to its overall scale.³²