



Quod

R22 Local Plan

Matter 8: Design, Tall Buildings and Heritage

Hounslow Local Plan

St James Group Ltd

DECEMBER 2025

Matter 8: Design, Tall Buildings and Heritage

- 1.1 On behalf of St James Group Ltd ('St James'), Quod submits this hearing statement in respect of Matter 8: Design, Tall Buildings and Heritage. This hearing statement responds to Matters Issues and Questions (MIQs) (IN03) issued by the Inspector on 24th November 2025.
- 1.2 St James has entered a partnership with Sainsbury's to bring forward the redevelopment of the Sainsbury's Chiswick store and car park and are in pre-application discussions with the Council.
- 1.3 The Sainsbury's site represents the largest development site within Chiswick, the borough's second largest town centre, and is designated as emerging Site Allocation 107 to deliver a minimum of 300 homes and 5,300sqm of replacement retail floorspace. St James considers that the site has a greater housing capacity and has made submissions that the replacement floorspace is incorrectly reported.
- 1.4 Our client submitted representations at Regulation 18 ('R18') and 19 ('R19') stage and continues to be engaged at Regulation 22 stage (the 'Plan').
- 1.5 This hearing statement should be read in conjunction with the hearing statements submitted for Matters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 the key points of which are summarised below:
- 1.6 The Plan is being prepared at an unprecedented time for London. The Government's¹ clear intention is to make rapid progress toward universal Local Plan coverage because they remain essential to facilitating the effective delivery of housing, jobs and infrastructure. However, to achieve this, the Government expects Inspectors to exercise a degree of flexibility to avoid seeing the adoption of poor-quality plans. We agree that flexibility is required here for the following reasons:
 - 1.6.1 This Plan is being heard against the previous Framework from 2023. It does not consider the Standard Method which proposes to increase housing from London Plan levels of 1,782dpa, to 2,052dpa to address affordability issues. Instead, the Council is proposing to reduce housing delivery over the plan period to an average 1,092dpa from 2030-2041. The Mayor has raised concern with this approach in the Statement of Common Ground between the Council and the Mayor of London (EX5E), and we do not consider that this approach is positive.
 - 1.6.2 The Mayor of London and Government² are proposing emergency measures now to address *'the housing emergency, a national priority'*. The Government acknowledges *'That need is particularly acute in London. Housebuilding in the capital has faced significant challenges over recent years – including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, high interest rates, spiralling construction costs, regulatory blockers and wider economic conditions. As a result, more than a third of London boroughs recorded'*

¹ The Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP letter to the Planning Inspectorate, 9th October 2025

² London Plan Guidance Support for Housebuilding and Emergency Housing Package, November 2025

zero housebuilding starts in the first quarter of this year. The Government and the Mayor of London are determined to do what it takes to tackle London's housing crisis'. This emergency is not recognised in the Plan, and the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (EBV1) (2024) is dated in this respect and does not demonstrate viability of the cumulative policies of the Plan, the threshold and promotes individual viability assessments at application stage to overcome this.

- 1.6.3 The borough has seen a sharp decline in its Housing Delivery Test results, dropping close to the 75% threshold. Only 668 homes were started in the borough in 2024/25, and 112 recorded to date (25/26). Once adopted the new London Plan housing figures will apply to the borough '*London has a stretching but realistic housebuilding target of 87,992 homes per year*'. These will supersede the Plan and the remaining policies of the Plan will need to adapt to these new housing levels otherwise they will be out of date.
- 1.6.4 The Council is promoting the release of greenfield land to meet future development requirements. It proposes to de-designate Green Belt (38ha) and use existing open space for housing, industry and traveller accommodation. We do not consider that the Council has sufficiently optimised its accessible, brownfield town centre sites as part of this strategic decision. For example, throughout the preparation of the Plan, the indicative capacity of Site Allocation 107 (S1Aa) has been reduced by 20% from 390 to 300 homes with no justification provided within the Site Allocations and Capacity Assessment (EBSC2).

1.7 Therefore, crucial to the success of this Plan, is that it is prepared positively in a way that is aspirational but deliverable, contains clearly written and unambiguous policies, and avoids unnecessary duplication of policies (that appear in the Framework and London Plan)³. We consider that this can be achieved by the following:-

- 1.7.1 Recognition that there is a housing emergency.
- 1.7.2 Applying flexibility within policies to secure deliverability as the priority of the Plan. Policies which constrain delivery and viability should be revisited or revised.
- 1.7.3 Awarding equal weight to the affordable housing threshold approach and the viability tested route and the level of affordable housing arising from either approach.
- 1.7.4 Recognition that the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (EBV1) upon which policies of the Plan are based (1) does not demonstrate deliverability of the affordable threshold proposed for the majority of sites; (2) excludes abnormal costs which are incurred with the majority of brownfield site development; (3) advocates use of the viability tested route because of viability concerns; and (4) weight should be applied to viability assessments.
- 1.7.5 Incorporate the wording accepted by the local plan inspectors for Tower Hamlets Local Plan Policy D.SG5 wording to ensure site allocation deliverability "*For site allocations,*

³ Framework, paragraph 16

the policies set out in this plan may be applied flexibly to ensure that the sites are viable and deliverable”.

1.7.6 At 276 pages, it is not clear that this Plan has not duplicated policies throughout. Policy CC2 ‘Urban Design and Architecture’ for example is four pages long, comprising 34 limbs and 11 sub-limbs and refers to four other plans and SPDs. Policy CC3 ‘Tall Buildings’ is three pages long, and has 15 limbs, and 17 sub-limbs. Policy CC4 heritage is four pages, with 31 limbs and 6 sub-limbs. Any major development assessed against these 3 policies alone will need to consider 80 limbs and 34 sub-limbs, 114 policy requirements in total, in addition to the design policies in the London Plan and Framework. This does not suggest compliance with the Framework.

Executive Summary for Matter 8

- 1.8 Policy CC1 should recognise that Site Allocations may require transformative, higher-density development where appropriate to achieve regeneration objectives.
- 1.9 Policies CC1 and CC2 are overly prescriptive, with extensive design criteria that undermine the flexible, design-led approach required by London Plan Policy D3.
- 1.10 Policy CC3 is unduly rigid regarding tall building definitions, heights, and locations; wording should allow site-specific flexibility to propose “appropriate” heights and for tall buildings to come forward outside identified zones where robustly assessed against London Plan Policy D9(C).
- 1.11 Policy CC4 is excessively long and prescriptive and lacks clarity on which “local views” and heritage assets should be prioritised and how they should be assessed.

Issue: Whether the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective, consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan in relation to design, tall buildings and heritage?

Q1: Policies CC1 and CC2 relate to context and character, and urban design and architecture respectively; are they positively prepared, justified, effective, consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan 2021? Responses should address:

a) Whether the intended approach in Policy CC1 that all new development ‘conserves’ and takes opportunities to ‘enhance’ is justified and consistent with national policy, or should the approach be more closely linked to London Plan Policies D1 to D6, and different for development proposals that may affect the historic environment?

- 1.12 The National Planning Policy Framework (‘the Framework’) requires local plans to set out strategic policies for the “conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment”⁴. However, reference ‘conservation’ applies principally in a heritage policy

⁴ NPPF Paragraph 20(d)

context, as per the Framework definition⁵ and is endorsed by London Plan 2021 ('LP2021') Policy HC1 '*Heritage conservation and growth*'.

- 1.13 The reference to "conserve" within 'our approach', B and G(III) should be removed from Policy CC1, as this concept should apply only in the context of a heritage asset. Its use could further stymie development.
- 1.14 Furthermore, the requirement to 'conserve and enhance' must be read alongside the Framework, which states that planning policies should enable development that is "*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)*".⁶
- 1.15 Policy CC1 should explicitly acknowledge under limb D, that Site Allocations will be expected to deliver transformative and regenerative development that will include higher densities and physical change where appropriate.
- 1.16 This distinction is essential to ensure that the Borough's key development sites, which are responsible for delivering the majority of the Local Plan's development capacity and growth, are able to come forward effectively and without undue constraint.
- 1.17 Overall CC1 could be rationalised to reduce duplication.
 - b) Whether the individual and cumulative policy requirements of development proposals in Policies CC1 and CC2 reflect the design-led approach in London Plan Policy D3 and are they sufficiently clear to be justified and effective, insofar as being evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals?
- 1.18 The fundamental principle of the design-led approach endorsed by Policy D3 of the LP2021 is that development should make the best possible use of land through appropriate built form and land uses, which should result in the optimisation of site capacities.
- 1.19 While Policy SC4(c) of the Local Plan references the design-led approach in the context of development density, Policy CC2 does not recognise this principle.
- 1.20 Instead, Policy CC2 presents a checklist of twenty-four urban design and architectural principles (criteria K–HH) that development proposals are expected to respond to.
- 1.21 The cumulative effect of these numerous and prescriptive design criteria will prevent development proposals from following a genuine design-led process, which by definition, requires design flexibility to respond to site-specific context, form, and opportunity. An overly rigid checklist constrains this process and risks undermining the optimisation of land contrary to the requirements of LP2021 Policy D3 and Paragraph 124 of the Framework.

⁵ Conservation (for heritage policy): The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

⁶ NPPF Paragraph 135(c)

1.22 Furthermore, the length of Policy CC2, which extends across four pages and contains 42 individual limbs that Applicants need to consider and respond to, presents a clear conflict with the Framework, which expects Local Plans to “*contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals*”.

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Q2: Policy CC3 relates to tall buildings; is it positively prepared, effective, justified and consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan 2021? Responses should address.

1.23 Our representations in respect of tall buildings are summarised below.

- 1.23.1 CC3(J) should exclude rooftop plant from the definition of tall buildings as this is inconsistent with London Plan D9.
- 1.23.2 CC3(K) is inconsistent with London Plan D9, and R (London Borough of Hillingdon) v Mayor of London [2021] EWHC 3387 (Admin) High Court Decision which permits tall buildings subject to an assessment of effects.
- 1.23.3 CC3(L) is inflexible and should permit heights taller than the appropriate thresholds where this can be suitably evidenced using the tests in London Plan D9 and CC3N (I to XV).
- 1.23.4 We support modification HLP_C6_12 to remove ‘maximum’ and replace with ‘appropriate’.
- 1.23.5 We support the identification of tall buildings at Sainsburys (Site allocation 107) within Table CC3.2, but are concerned that the prescriptive heights of up to 30m- 45m/ 9-14 storeys (37m AOD and 52m AOD) have been informed by an assessment based on “invisibility” in part within the borough wide tall building assessment (EBCC3) which fails to reflect the site’s potential capacity as a brownfield, accessible town centre location. The prescribed building heights and associated storey equivalents are not reflective of floor to ceiling heights for the replacement retail superstore at ground level.
- 1.23.6 Modification HLP_C6_15 indicates a variation to Figure 3.8 but it is unclear what the changes are as this has yet to be issued. We support the identification of CH1 on the whole as a tall building location, and support the removal of the overly prescriptive and inflexible identification of two ‘dots’ as tall building locations.

b) Is the approach of identifying two definitions of tall buildings (higher scale areas - above 30m from ground level to the top of the building, excluding rooftop plant, and lower scale areas - above 21m from ground level to the top of the building, excluding rooftop plant) as given in Policy CC3, justified?

1.24 Policy CC3(J) provides two definitions for tall buildings, which is based on their location and whether they are in a lower or higher scale area. Figure CC 3.1 includes Site Allocation 107

⁷ NPPF Paragraph 16(d)

within a lower scale area which is defined as “*any building of 21m and above from ground level to the top of the building (including any rooftop plant)*”.

- 1.25 This approach is inconsistent with the LP2021 Policy D9(A) which defines a tall building as one that is “*not be less than 6 storeys or 18 metres measured from ground to the floor level of the uppermost storey*”. LP2021 makes no reference to the inclusion or exclusion of rooftop plant. Policy CC3(J) is therefore inconsistent as it measures from ground to the top of the building and is inclusive of rooftop plant.
- 1.26 Floor to floor levels that inform storey height are generally applied at 3m for residential buildings. In the context of Policy CC3(J), a 21m building from ground to the top of building would represent seven storeys, which is broadly consistent with LP2021 Policy D9(A), however the inclusion of rooftop plant has the potential to suppress building heights below the tall building definition.
- 1.27 The Site Allocation does also not account for the floor to ceiling heights required to accommodate the replacement superstore, which are notably taller than conventional residential levels.
- 1.28 Policy CC3(J) should be updated to align with the LP2021.

c) Is the identification of the locations in Figure CC3.1 that are considered suitable for higher scale tall buildings and lower scale tall buildings appropriate, informed and justified by robust evidence, and are the locations sufficiently precise?

- 1.29 The Council are correctly agreeing to change “maximum” building heights (CC3.2) to “appropriate” in line with the Mayor of London representations and London Plan 2021 D9 (Part B(2)).
- 1.30 Figure CC3.8 of Policy CC3 indicates the specific location of two tall buildings within ‘CH1’. One of Local Scale CH1c (up to 9 storeys or 37m AOD); and one of ‘District Scale’ CH1b up to 14 storeys (52.0m AOD). This is overly prescriptive, and based on the borough wide tall building study (EBCC3) unjustified as being too conservative.
- 1.31 The identification of two singular tall building blocks does not align with LP2021 Policy D9, which expects appropriate locations for tall buildings and their associated heights to be identified via the Development Plan and tested at application stage, not informed by prescriptive individual buildings heights based upon the Council’s own scheme informed by a flawed design code (SPD1).
- 1.32 This is noted by the Mayor of London who stated that whilst the series of maps illustrating areas that may be suitable for tall buildings is consistent with LP2021 Policy D9(B), they are too site-specific and for practical reasons broader locations should be identified.

d) Whether Policy CC3 Park K is sufficiently clear to be effective in guiding development proposals to the respective locations identified in Figure CC3.1?

- 1.33 Policy CC3(K) states tall building development proposals should only be located in areas identified as having potential for tall buildings as indicated by Figure CC3.1.

1.34 Policy CC3(K) conflicts with the High Court judgement⁸ on the application of the LP2021 D9 within which it was made Part A or Part B are not pre-conditions (“gateways”) to the operation of Part C.

1.35 In other words, the Mayor (or deciding authority) may proceed to assess a tall building scheme under Part C, even where the site is not in an identified ‘suitable location’ under Part B(3) within the Local Plan. This interpretation of policy is currently absent from Policy CC3(K).

1.36 This approach is of course logical, Policy D9(C) requires visual, functional, environmental and cumulative tests to be addressed (20 criteria in total) which if passed, would determine that a tall building is an appropriate typology even when outside of the designated tall building location. This also aligns with the design-led approach informed by a robust townscape, heritage and visual analysis rather than from fixed thresholds. This allows for a qualitative assessment of proposed tall buildings, and the testing and demonstration of acceptable effects to help deliver and optimise development.

1.37 To ensure soundness, Policy CC3(K) should be amended to allow tall buildings to come forward in locations not identified as tall building zones, where proposals are robustly assessed in accordance with LP2021 Policy D9.

1.38 We propose that the similar wording is incorporated within the supporting text of Policy CC3.

e) Are the maximum permissible heights set out in Table CC3.2 and referred to in Policy CC3 for sites, areas and existing tall building clusters, justified by evidence and in general conformity with London Plan Policies D3 and D9 - particularly in terms of the design-led approach and consideration of impacts arising from development proposals?

1.39 Policy CC3(L) states that tall building developments should “*not exceed the maximum building heights for that site or area, as set out in Table CC 3.2*”. Table CC3.2 indicates the ‘*Maximum permissible heights for each location*’.

1.40 The use of prescribed maximum heights is inconsistent with LP2021 Policy D9, and risks preventing schemes coming forward that would otherwise follow the design-led approach under Policy D3 and can demonstrate, in architectural, townscape and visual terms, that greater heights are appropriate. Fixing maximums in this manner places an unnecessary constraint on optimising housing delivery and growth.

1.41 The Mayor’s representations to the Hounslow Regulation 19 consultation stated that “maximum permissible” should be amended to “*appropriate building heights*”⁹.

1.42 We agree with this position and welcome the Council’s suggested modification (S11) under HLP_C6_12 to revert to *appropriate building heights*.

⁸ R (London Borough of Hillingdon) v Mayor of London [2021] EWHC 3387 (Admin) High Court Decision

⁹ GLA Regulation 19 Consultation to Hounslow Local Plan, dated 25th October 2024

1.43 The Mayor has since clarified that absolute maximums should only apply where clear constraints exist, such as aviation safeguarding or impacts on protected views¹⁰. In all other cases, boroughs should set *appropriate height ranges*.

1.44 Only the western part of Hounslow falls within the CAA Obstacle Limitation Surfaces for Heathrow Airport, as referenced in paragraph 7.1.2 of the Tall Buildings Study (EBCC3). The Plan should therefore specify which sites are affected by these constraints and ensure sufficient flexibility to respond to any future amendments to CAA safeguarding.

1.45 For sites identified as appropriate tall-building locations, it is important to note that the height parameters have not been viability-tested and are not informed by borough needs. They are derived from the borough-wide Tall Buildings Study (EBCC3). The study has inherent limitations as a result and cannot substitute for a site-specific townscape and heritage assessment at planning application stage.

1.46 Policy CC3 must therefore allow proposals to be assessed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with LP2021 Policy D9. This reflects the approach taken in other recently examined and adopted Local Plans, such as the Lewisham Local Plan (2025) and the Brent Local Plan (2022), both of which were found sound by the Secretary of State. These plans include wording that enables tall building heights to be considered beyond the height parameters identified by the borough wide assessment where this is supported by evidence demonstrating compliance with the design-led approach, townscape considerations, and wider planning objectives.

Lewisham Local Plan (Policy QD4, paragraph 5.35)

“Development proposals for building heights that depart from the parameters set by the Local Plan will be considered having regard to relevant material considerations. In such circumstances a wider public benefit must be demonstrated to justify the design of the development”.

Brent Local Plan (Policy BD2, paragraph 6.1.15)

“The heights identified for the Tall Buildings Zones, town centres and site allocations are based on a high level of analysis, rather than in many cases considering a detailed building design. They indicate the heights likely to be generally acceptable to the council. This does not mean that all buildings up to these heights are automatically acceptable. Proposals will still need to be assessed in the context of other policies to ensure that they are appropriate in that location. There might however also be circumstances where the quality of design of a development and its impact on character is such that taller buildings in these locations could be shown by applicants to be acceptable”.

1.47 In the case of Sainsbury's Chiswick (Site Allocation 107), EBCC3 confirms that the modelled building heights are directly informed by the site-specific Design Code in the Hounslow Characterisation and Growth Study (SPD1) *“7.9.29 Proposals for the Sainsbury's Site (Site CH1) have been modelled and incorporated into the VuCity model. The proposals follow the principles set within the Design Code for the site set out in the Hounslow Characterisation and*

¹⁰ GLA Regulation 19 Consultation to LB Harrow Local Plan

Growth Study". Whilst the principle for tall buildings was supported, concerns were previously raised at that stage because the design code scheme (shown at EBCC3 - Figure 7.314: Chiswick High Road Areas of Search - 3D aerial view with potential development (from VuCity)) was not suitably optimising the capacity of the site and excluded the replacement food store. The Design Code informs Policy CC3, CC3.1, CC3.2 and CC3.8 despite these concerns remaining unresolved.

- 1.48 The Council's assessment also appears to be premised on the notion of 'visibility' as set out at paragraph 7.9.30 and 7.9.33 of EBCC3.
- 1.49 *"7.9.30 This allows consideration of the visibility and potential impacts of new development on representative views in the town centre and wider area. Views have been outputted from the VuCity model. They are not verified views but provide an indication of the likely visibility of proposals from the selected locations"..... 7.9.33. In many of the views proposed buildings will not be visible however an outline of the buildings is indicated for reference. This helps to indicate how much taller a building would need to be for it to be visible.*
- 1.50 Visibility of a tall building development from a townscape perspective and in the setting of a heritage asset does not necessarily equate to harm. Where harm does occur to the setting of a heritage assets, the Framework¹¹ provide a clear process for decision makers to follow when considering the degree of harm against the benefits of the proposal.
- 1.51 The assessment of '*impacts on townscape and views*' undertaken at EBCC3 paragraph 7.9.35 Table 7.18 consistently refers to visibility, limiting visibility and concealment behind tree lines and buildings.
- 1.52 Site Allocation 107 has therefore undergone a different level of testing compared with other tall-building locations as identified under Policy CC3. The scheme has then been tested for 'visibility' which has informed a conservative set of height parameters. This supports the need for flexibility within CC3 to ensure that sites are being properly optimised.
 - h) Whether the definitions of metropolitan scale, district scale and local scale tall buildings relating to context height ratio as set out in paragraph 6.15 are justified? If so, is the influence of those definitions on the suitability of a development proposal for a tall building sufficiently clear in Policy CC3 to be effective, insofar as being evident how a decision maker should react?
- 1.53 Paragraph 6.15 relates to limb O of Policy CC3 Tall Buildings, seeks to apply the policy to buildings that do not meet the Local Plan definition of a tall building. This is not sound.
- 1.54 It is also unclear what purpose is served by classifying such buildings as 'Local Scale', 'District Scale', or 'Metropolitan Scale', particularly as these definitions appear to be lifted directly from the Tall Buildings Study without a clear relationship to the policy wording.

¹¹ NPPF Paragraphs 213-216

k) Should the Plan be clearer in terms of any zones of influence and key views intended to be preserved, particular in terms of the setting of the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew World Heritage Site and any buffers zones that are justified in the context of Policy CC4?

- 1.55 Part D of the policy refers explicitly to the Kew Gardens World Heritage Site Management Plan 2020-2025, which will be used to consider and assess development proposals that may impact its setting.
- 1.56 The Heritage Site Management Plan does not form part of the statutory development plan and shall remain a '*material consideration*' in the determination of a planning application that effects the setting of Kew Gardens. This is the correct approach.
- 1.57 Where development is visible in a manner that would cause harm to Kew Gardens then applications should be assessed under limb M and N of the policy, in a manner that is consistent with the Framework.

Q3: Is the approach in Policy CC4 relating to heritage; positively prepared, effective, justified and consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan 2021? Responses should address:

a) Whether the approach is consistent with national policy which seeks to conserve and enhance the historic environment; particularly the approaches to proposals affecting heritage assets, the significance of heritage assets, substantial or less than substantial harm, heritage at risk and sites of archaeological importance?

- 1.58 Policy CC4 in its current form is four pages long, and is inconsistent with Framework objectives to avoid duplication.
- 1.59 Policy CC4 twice (H and CC) refers to local views being identified within the Hounslow Characterisation and Growth Study (EBCC2), the Tall Buildings Study (EBCC3), and the Character, Sustainability and Design Code SPD (SPD1), however none of these documents provide a clear schedule of local views that Applicants are expected to consider. It is unclear whether 'local views' relate to the 'representative views' identified within EBCC3.
- 1.60 In seeking to define local views, the Council should establish a priority of key views and define what valued viewpoint they are seeking to enhance or preserve. Such views must be cognisant of the wider development objectives of the Plan, particularly when considered in the context of emerging Site Allocations and should be applied with flexibility in accordance with other heritage and townscape considerations.
- 1.61 CC4(O)'s reference to non-designated heritage assets should refer to a '*balanced judgement*' as required by Framework paragraph 216.
- 1.62 CC4(Q) '*image of the borough*' should be deleted as this is unclear.
- 1.63 CC4(U) Conservation Areas states that '*Any development within or affecting a Conservation Area must conserve and take opportunities to enhance the character of the area, and respect the grain, scale, form, proportions and materials of the surrounding area and existing architecture*'. Framework paragraph 213 states that '*Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within*

its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.' The text as drafted is onerous "must conserve" and fails to recognise Framework paragraph 213 and 215.