

London Borough of Hounslow
Hounslow Local Plan 2020-2041
Design and Heritage Background Paper
June 2025

Introduction

Hounslow Council are preparing a new Local Plan which ensures that the Authority can meet housing and other needs over the course of the plan period. This document has been prepared to demonstrate that the LPA has duly considered, throughout the site selection and policy drafting processes, the potential effects of the new Local Plan on heritage assets and their settings. Heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and make a significant contribution to the character and identity of our Borough.

The draft Local Plan was subject to a Regulation 19 consultation between 6th September and 28th October 2024. There were 102 unique respondents generating 110 representations and 773 specific comments on the plan. Several respondents made detailed comments on design and heritage issues, including Historic England.

Historic England is a statutory consultee and in their Regulation 19 response objected to the plan on soundness grounds. The primary grounds for objection were the tall buildings policy and evidence base and the approach to heritage impact assessment in the evidence underpinning the plan.

The purpose of this explanatory note is to address these concerns by clarifying the approach taken to the tall buildings policy, the site allocations and the associated evidence base documents underpinning these. This paper seeks to provide further explanation as to how the documents relating to design and heritage are aligned in their approach and compliant with overarching London Plan policy.

Modifications have been proposed to aid this process of clarification and are part of the proposed modifications document. As set out in the Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations (paragraph 1.6), local planning authorities (LPAs) sometimes submit to the examination a list of proposed modifications to the published plan that have not been the subject of consultation. The Inspector will not treat those proposed modifications as part of the plan to be examined. However, the Inspector may consider it appropriate for some or all of the LPA's proposed changes to be discussed at the hearing sessions, and in appropriate circumstances they may form the basis for Main Modifications.

In the context of paragraph 1.6 of the Guide, the London Borough of Hounslow will submit to the examination a list of proposed changes to the published plan. While the Council does not believe Main Modifications to be required at this stage to make the plan sound, these changes are being proposed in the spirit of ongoing collaboration with stakeholders and to inform discussions at the hearing sessions. Should the Inspectors consider it appropriate, the Council would welcome the opportunity for these to be discussed at the hearing sessions, and (in appropriate circumstances) for these to form the basis of Main Modifications, should the Inspectors consider Main Modifications necessary.

This explanatory note refers to parts of the plan in which the London Borough of Hounslow will propose changes, in line with the approach set out in paragraph 1.6 of the Procedure Guide.

This background paper is structured as follows:

- Section 1: Policy Context

Outlines the regional policies that are relevant to defining a tall building in the borough's context, and to identifying the appropriate locations for tall buildings, appropriate heights and determining site capacity.

- Section 2: Summary of the Local Plan Heritage Strategy and Rationale

A summary of the Local Plan's strategy in relation to heritage and the rationale for the approach taken.

- Section 3: Key Concerns Raised by Historic England

A summary of the key concerns raised by Historic England in their Regulation 19 representation.

- Section 4: Tall Buildings Evidence Base

Discusses the GWC Masterplan's approach to tall buildings, and the Tall Building Study, and explains how their methodologies align and are appropriate to inform the Tall Buildings Policy (CC3) in the Local Plan.

- Section 5: Approach to Heritage Impact Assessments in the Local Plan

This section discusses the approach taken to heritage impact assessments ("HIAs") to date including in Appendix B of the GWC Masterplan, and the obligation that will be placed on developers to provide a HIA for relevant sites at the planning application stage. This section explains why this is a proportionate and justified approach.

- Section 6: Addressing Historic England's Concerns

This section explains the measures we have taken to address Historic England's concerns.

- Section 7: Conclusions

Section 1: Policy Context

London Plan Policy D9 Tall Buildings is the main development plan policy that relates to tall buildings. It states that tall buildings should be part of a plan-led approach and that local authorities should identify, in Development Plans, definitions for what is considered a tall building for specific localities, the locations where tall buildings may be an appropriate form of development and the appropriate building heights within those locations.

Section A of Policy D9 states: 'Based on local context, Development Plans should define what is considered a tall building for specific localities, the height of which will vary between and within different parts of London but should not be less than 6 storeys or 18 metres measured from ground to the floor level of the uppermost storey'.

London Plan Guidance - Characterisation and Growth Strategy (June 2023) provides further guidance on how London Boroughs should determine the capacity for growth in response to character. The LPG sets out a methodology for carrying out characterisation of the Borough so that the level of change that may be appropriate for each part of the Borough can be identified, based on categorizing areas into one of the three scales of change: Conserve, Enhance and or Transform.

The guidance also states that a tall building definition should be established and that this should 'identify the height at which a building becomes substantially taller than its surroundings, and causes a significant change to the skyline' (para. 2.4.1).

The guidance also indicates that 'this can be in the form of one borough-wide definition; but, where considerable variations in context heights exist, different definitions can be used for different regions to reflect changes in building height across the borough' (para. 2.4.3). This is the approach the Council has taken, driven by the particular sensitivities of different areas of the borough.

The definition should be stated as the total height of a building in metres from ground level to the top of the building including any rooftop equipment (para. 2.4.4). The definition should not be less than 6 storeys, or 21 metres as measured from ground to the top of the building. (A footnote to para. 2.4.4 explains that the figure of 21m assumes a floor-to-ceiling height of 3m for the uppermost storey, and so is equivalent to the London Plan definition of 18m from ground level to floor level of the uppermost storey).

The guidance then advocates a sieving process to identify the locations where tall buildings may be appropriate, drawing on character assessment and evaluation. Mapping sensitivities allows some areas to be discounted as 'inappropriate' from the outset. Less sensitive areas can then be sieved to discount those areas where tall buildings are not envisioned. The reasons for discounting the areas should be recorded in a publicly available document (para. 4.4.2).

For the remaining areas, the guidance specifies that a suitability scoping exercise informed by an evaluation of character including potential for change should be

carried out to identify a finalised set of locations, with 3D modelling used to carry out visual impact assessments to test potential impacts and harm to sensitivities. The guidance states that boroughs should pay close attention to an area's location in respect to conservation areas, strategic views and World Heritage Sites, considering impacts to the backdrop of any strategic views (paras 4.4.10-4.4.11).

Whilst Policy D9 is the main London Plan policy in relation to tall buildings it should be considered in conjunction with **Policy D3 Optimising site capacity**, which requires that all development must make the best use of land by following a design-led approach that optimises the capacity of sites. The design-led approach requires consideration of design options to determine the most appropriate form of development that responds to a site's context and capacity for growth and to the existing character of a place.

These are the London Plan policies which have driven the Council's approach to tall buildings in the new Local Plan.

As will be explained further below, the Tall Building Study, which forms part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan, draws on existing documents, including the design codes set out in the Council's Character, Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document ("SPD") and masterplans previously prepared for Brentford, Feltham and Hounslow town centres. These masterplans are not statutory documents and do not form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. The proposals in these masterplans were used as a starting point for testing the appropriate locations and heights of tall buildings in the Tall Building Study.

Section 2: Summary of the Local Plan Heritage Strategy and Rationale

The Council adopted the Local Plan 2015-2030 Volumes 1 & 2 on 15 September 2015. As advised by the Local Plan Inspector at that time, the Council went on to undertake a partial review of the Local Plan focussing on two key growth areas: the Great West Corridor Opportunity Area and the West of Borough Opportunity Area (also known as the Heathrow Opportunity Area). Following extensive consultation, the Council submitted three development plan documents (“DPDs”) for examination in December 2020: two DPDs for the two Opportunity Areas respectively, and an update to the Vol.2 Site Allocations DPD. Examination hearing sessions took place in November/December 2021. Following the hearing sessions, a number of procedural issues were identified which led the Council to withdraw these DPDs and pause work on a Focused Issues Review of the Local Plan Vol.1.

Historic England sought a full heritage impact assessment for each site allocation during the partial review of the Local Plan. The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew also sought a number of changes. Many minor wording changes were proposed. However, the Council’s position (backed by legal advice at the time) was that evidence equivalent to that sought by Historic England in the form of discrete heritage impact assessments could be provided for allocations in the Great West Corridor across three documents: (i) the Great West Corridor Masterplan and Capacity Study (“the GWC Masterplan”); (ii) Appendix B of the GWC Masterplan entitled “Overview Assessment Of Heritage Assets and Tall Building Sensitivity: the Great West Corridor Views Appendix”; and (iii) the heritage designations section of each site allocation entry. These effectively set out work based on the same methodology as the latterly published relevant Historic England and UNESCO guidance. Council resources at the time would not allow for discrete heritage impact assessments to be commissioned in addition to these documents, and the Council was satisfied that this approach would meet the objectives of the relevant guidance. This was a matter that was not fully agreed on in previous draft Statements of Common Ground with Historic England and others.

The Council undertook a Regulation 18 consultation between 1st November and 17th December 2023 focusing on a proposal to consolidate the emerging DPDs into a single Local Plan document, and to update emerging policies. Following this, the Council prepared updates to key evidence base documents and developed the proposed submission version of the Hounslow Local Plan 2020-2041, undertaking a Regulation 19 consultation on the draft Local Plan between 6th September and 28th October 2024.

The Regulation 19 Local Plan included updated heritage and design policies (Policies CC1-CC5) for the whole Borough, underpinned by an evidence base that includes, principally: (i) the retained GWC Masterplan documentation, which underpins the tall building locations and appropriate heights within the GWC; and (ii) to comply with the adopted London Plan, a new Tall Building Study which is the evidence base for the tall building definition covering the whole borough, and also the evidence base for the tall building locations and appropriate heights in the rest of the Borough (i.e. outside the GWC).

This two-pronged approach allows a more in-depth consideration of potential development in the GWC, recognising its context as an Opportunity Area directly opposite a World Heritage Site (“WHS”). Despite the GWC Masterplan and the Tall Building Study being two separate documents, both approach and consider heritage assets in broadly the same way, and both are in alignment with the approach to tall buildings required by the London Plan. The Council’s evidence base also consists of other documents pertaining to context and character, which are detailed below.

Section 3: Key Concerns Raised by Historic England

Historic England (HE) submitted a representation to the Regulation 19 consultation on the proposed submission version of the Local Plan on 6th November 2024, with a separate representation relating to the accompanying Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). In its representation on the Local Plan, HE stated that it did not consider the plan to be sound. The main reasons it gave for this view were that:

- It considered the production of HIAs to be necessary additional evidence to make the Local Plan sound;
- It considered the tall building policy in the Local Plan to be ambiguous and based on out-of-date and insufficient evidence.

To expand on the first of these reasons, HE initially considered that full HIAs are required for all site allocations with heritage sensitivities. It considered this to be required by (i) its own Advice Note 3 ('The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans'); and (ii) UNESCO's 'Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context' (2022), where development has the potential to affect the Outstanding Universal Value ("OUV") of the WHS at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. In further meetings and correspondence between the Council and HE, HE modified its position slightly and suggested a more proportionate approach of strengthening the development principles for the allocations where impacts on heritage significance are unlikely, and for other allocations where impacts on heritage significance are more likely, undertaking strategic HIAs of varying levels of detail.

As for the second of the reasons cited above, HE's representation expressed concerns about the soundness of Policy CC3 and its evidence base. Its concerns related to the clarity of the policy, its conformity with the London Plan and NPPF, its justification, and the clarity and robustness of the Tall Building Study. In addition, the representation stated that the GWC Masterplan permits tall building heights that are harmful to the historic environment, and that the heights of several buildings approved on appeal have exceeded the heights in the GWC Masterplan, allowing harmful development. As a result, HE called into question the integrity and effectiveness of the GWC Masterplan. They also recommended an update to the HIA supporting the GWC Masterplan to take account of the UNESCO guidance named above. Further, HE's representation stated that there is inconsistency between the GWC Masterplan and Tall Building Study in terms of methodological approach.

HE's representation also sought clarifications to Policies CC1 (Context and Character), CC2 (Urban Design and Architecture), CC3 (Tall Buildings) and CC4 (Heritage), and made comments about the clarity of certain site allocations and the completeness and legibility of the Policy Map.

HE also raised concerns about the approach taken to assessing potential impacts on the historic environment and landscape within the IIA, suggested an additional IIA objective, and set out concerns about the approach taken in the site allocation methodology to understanding effects on the historic environment (specifically, that

the effects on non-designated heritage assets had not been adequately considered, and that a distance-based approach had been used at the expense of adequately understanding the significance of designated assets).

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames submitted two representations to the Regulation 19 consultation on the draft Hounslow Local Plan. The representation sent by email on 28th October 2024 related to the plan as a whole, with broadly supportive comments on each policy chapter. A further representation was submitted by email on 8th November 2024 focusing on Chapter 6 (Context and Character) and strategic, cross-boundary issues in relation to tall buildings and the impact on views and settings of key heritage assets, especially the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew WHS and its buffer zone, as well as Conservation Areas and river views, within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The latter representation raised various soundness concerns related to policies P1 (a-c), CC1, CC3 and CC4, and proposed various modifications to address these.

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (“RBGK”) submitted a Regulation 19 representation on 8th November 2024. RBGK raised various soundness objections relating to policies in Chapter 6 (Context and Character), as well as place policies P1(a-c) relating to the GWC area. RBGK presented various suggested modifications and expressed a desire to engage on agreeing an updated statement of common ground between itself, the Council and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

Section 4: Tall Buildings Evidence Base

The emerging Local Plan differs in approach from the adopted Local Plan (2015). The 2015 Local Plan is not explicit about locations where tall buildings could be suitable, and does not suggest appropriate heights, rather a basic set of principles. This policy approach was appropriate prior to the adoption of the latest London Plan, as the Inspector who examined the 2015 Local Plan confirmed in finding the 2015 Local Plan to be sound, subject to undertaking immediate partial reviews of the 2015 Local Plan so far as it related to the GWC (earmarked to be an Opportunity Area) and West of the Borough area (which was part of the wider multi-borough Heathrow Opportunity Area).

As part of this partial review process, the Council set out a Masterplan for tall buildings in the GWC (and to a lesser degree the West of the Borough), specifically identifying where tall buildings, necessary to meet housing and employment targets, could be appropriate. The Council was cognisant that the absence of a planned approach to tall buildings in the Borough was encouraging developers to submit plans and designs for their own site, without sufficient regard to the need to have a coherent, strategic vision for the development of tall buildings in the GWC. Furthermore, the presence of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew WHS in the hinterland of the Corridor, a heritage asset of the highest significance that is especially sensitive to any change in its setting, meant that it was vital that this area was masterplanned using modelling and a more intensive level of assessment than was feasible for tall buildings contemplated in the rest of the Borough. The GWC Masterplan stretched the Council's plan-making resources to their limit. It remained a living document to the point of submission, being amended to take account of any policy changes at a higher level, any relevant appeal decisions and any further sites coming forward for development.

Following the hearing sessions for the Local Plan Review DPDs, a number of procedural issues were identified which led the Council to withdraw these DPDs and pause work on a Focused Issues Review of the Local Plan Vol.1. The Council then decided to progress the Local Plan Review by combining the area-based DPDs and borough-wide Site Allocations DPD with an updated version of the adopted Local Plan 2015.

The tall building and heritage policies in the Local Plan have, therefore, been amended to comply with the latest adopted London Plan. The Tall Buildings Policy (CC3) in the Local Plan follows the London Plan approach to defining tall buildings in the context of the borough and identifying appropriate locations and building heights. The policy is underpinned by the GWC Masterplan and the Tall Building Study. The Hounslow Characterisation and Growth Study is also part of the evidence base for the plan, in particular the Character and Context policies and the site allocations.

The updated GWC Masterplan provides a vision and a spatial strategy for this Opportunity Area and identifies the development capacity of sites within the corridor. The area already includes a number of tall buildings and the vision for the area anticipates that distinct and well-designed tall buildings can support place-making and create a memorable kinetic experience and journey along the M4.

The GWC and its immediate hinterland accommodate a number of outstanding heritage assets that are sensitive to tall buildings. These include the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew WHS, several Registered Parks and Gardens (including Gunnersbury Park, Syon Park, Osterley Park and Chiswick House) and a great number of Conservation Areas and listed buildings.

The GWC Masterplan identifies locations where tall buildings may be appropriate and provides appropriate heights, identified in metres above ground and above ordnance datum (AOD) for each. An indicative number of storeys (residential) is also indicated.

In establishing the location and appropriate height of development, the GWC Masterplan applies the following methodology, which is based on guidance from HE's Good Practice Advice in Planning 3 ('The Setting of Heritage Assets') (see page 146 of the GWC Masterplan):

- 1) Establish an understanding of the wider context, including the existing character, urban form and structure, heritage assets and sensitivities, and the demand and opportunities for development.
- 2) Set out a vision and prepare a masterplan framework that establishes principles for the comprehensive development of the area. As part of this, consider where tall buildings could potentially have a role in contributing to the emerging character and townscape and help to deliver wider regeneration strategies, also considering pre-emptive strategies to minimise the potential impact on heritage assets.
- 3) Test the impact of tall buildings of different heights on heritage assets. Given the broad scope of the GWC Masterplan, a proportionately high-level assessment has been undertaken as follows:
 - a) Understand the significance of heritage assets and their sensitivity to tall buildings (see Appendix B: Overview Assessment of Heritage Assets and Tall Building Sensitivity Study);
 - b) Identify and take representative verified photographs from sensitive viewing locations where the impact of a tall building could potentially be harmful to the significance of heritage assets. The selected views provide a representative sample and are not exhaustive;
 - c) Undertake 3D modelling of existing heights, permitted tall buildings and potential tall buildings with different height scenarios;
 - d) Evaluate the impact of potential tall building heights on identified views of heritage assets and their settings. Initial assessment of visual impact and consideration of the individual and cumulative effects of tall building proposals is a starting point to understand the potential impact on the significance of a heritage asset and its setting (see Appendix C: View Testing);

e) Refine approach towards the location of tall buildings and calibrate their height in response to their impact on heritage assets.

4) Set out a clear framework for development of tall buildings that establishes locations where tall buildings could be acceptable and establish an indicative height that would be appropriate (see section 7.7.5 and 7.7.6);

5) Set out further design criteria, tests and requirements that tall building proposals will need to meet to be considered acceptable (see section 7.7.7).

This approach is appropriately detailed for the scope of the GWC Masterplan and provides a robust high-level assessment of the impact(s) of tall buildings on relevant heritage assets.

This methodology predates that of the London Plan 2021, but is in conformity with it.

To plan for tall buildings in the rest of the Borough, including the West of the Borough, a borough-wide Tall Building Study was commissioned from the same consultancy that prepared the GWC Masterplan. The Tall Building Study does not supersede the GWC Masterplan in relation to appropriate heights and locations. Rather, together, they form a two-pronged approach. Time constraints, limits on resources, pragmatism and (above all) the robustness and previous and ongoing adaptability of the GWC Masterplan work meant that the Council decided to retain it. This was also because of the specific status of the GWC as an Opportunity Area immediately adjacent to a WHS. To start again and seek to amalgamate this work into a new tall building study for the whole Borough would be time consuming, risk timely adoption and leave the Corridor, and other areas of the Borough, at continued significant risk of scattershot, speculative development by developers. The Tall Building Study was therefore commissioned to sit alongside the GWC Masterplan, covering all areas of the borough outside the GWC and treating the GWC as a distinct area requiring a bespoke approach due to its proximity to a WHS.

The Tall Building Study takes the same basic approach as the GWC Masterplan to identifying appropriate locations and appropriate building heights for tall buildings, identified in metres above ground and above ordnance datum (AOD) for each. An indicative number of storeys (residential) is also indicated. The Tall Building Study provides:

1. a spatial overview of the Borough, including an analysis of existing building heights and an exploration of the potential for tall buildings through a review of sensitivities and potential opportunities for growth;
2. a vision for tall buildings in the borough, set out as overarching objectives for tall buildings, which help to guide considerations on the locations of tall buildings;
3. a definition of a tall building for different parts of the Borough;
4. a methodology for identifying suitable locations for tall buildings, which considers sensitivities (including potential to impact on the significance of heritage assets), to establish areas of search for tall buildings;

5. an assessment of potential impacts of tall buildings on townscape, views and heritage assets for proposals within each area of search;
6. recommendations on appropriate locations for tall buildings and the potential height of these tall buildings.

The Tall Building Study does not state that all locations it recommends as appropriate for tall buildings should be site allocations, nor does it purport to be a full HIA. It is the developer of an individual proposal who is expected to provide the full HIA in due course. The Tall Buildings Study draws on existing evidence including the Hounslow Characterisation and Growth Study and existing area-based studies including the GWC Masterplan. It also builds on the non-statutory masterplans for Brentford, Feltham and Hounslow town centres to provide a baseline for assessing the impacts on tall building development.

This methodology is in conformity with the London Plan and broadly aligns with the methodology used for the GWC Masterplan.

It is true that the analysis of representative views in the GWC Masterplan is more intensive than it is in the Tall Building Study. The Council considered it proportionate to undertake a more intensive analysis of views in the GWC Masterplan given the proximity of the GWC to the WHS at Kew. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.

As noted above, London Plan Policy D9 requires Development Plans to define what is considered a tall building for specific localities, determine if there are locations where tall buildings may be an appropriate form of development and identify these on maps in the Development Plan.

The Tall Building Study is the evidence base which informs the definition of tall buildings across the borough. Drawing on a contextual analysis of building heights across the whole Borough (including the GWC), the Tall Building Study proposes a two-part definitions of tall buildings in the Borough. The Lower Scale Tall Building definition covers most parts of the borough, which is any building of 21m and above (including rooftop plant). The Higher Scale Tall Building definition is proposed in areas where the existing building context height is greater, and refers to any building of 30m and above (including rooftop plant).

The GWC Masterplan does not define tall buildings, however, some consultees expressed some confusion over the reference to mid-rise buildings in the GWC Masterplan. The GWC Masterplan identifies locations which are appropriate for the clustering of mid-rise buildings, which it states are broadly of a height of between 30m and 45m above ground.

The references to mid-rise buildings in the GWC Masterplan are contextually specific to this document. Mid-rise buildings in this document refers to 'smaller tall' buildings, and the approach to be taken in all clusters of tall buildings of stepping down in height towards the edges of the cluster and away from focal buildings (see page 154 of the GWC Masterplan). The provenance of the tall building definitions in draft Policy CC3 of the Local Plan is the Tall Building Study.

Section 5: Approach to Heritage Impact Assessments in the Local Plan

Context

The GWC is designated an Opportunity Area by the London Plan. This means the Council must adequately plan for the homes, jobs and infrastructure required in this area. The GWC Masterplan, its appendices, its Views Appendix and the heritage sections of the Site Allocations entries in that document, provide a framework for development in the GWC and are part of the evidence base for the draft Local Plan.

These documents provide a high-level strategic assessment of heritage assets in the GWC and its vicinity. Combined, they provide an overview of the significance of those assets, including the significance of their settings, to identify the sensitivity of each asset to tall buildings. This has informed the development of the GWC Masterplan, including the testing of proposed locations and heights for tall buildings in the GWC.

The main purpose of Appendix B to the GWC Masterplan is to be a reference document about relevant heritage assets and their main sensitivities to tall buildings. It is a resource to be read by developers, urban designers and architects as well as their heritage experts if they are considering proposing a tall building in the GWC. It is an overview document and does not replace the policy requirement for tall building proposals to be supported by detailed site-specific heritage and visual impact assessments as part of an application.

As explained above, because the rest of the Borough beyond the GWC is also under pressure from tall building proposals, the Tall Building Study was commissioned. This document, like the GWC Masterplan, which the Tall Building Study is intended to complement, demonstrates how the Council considers these aims can be achieved, whilst taking into account the existing features of area, including built and cultural heritage. The rest of the Borough is also subject to these targets for new homes and jobs and the Council must also plan for these. The Tall Building Study provides a framework for development and is part of the evidence base for the Hounslow Local Plan. Where relevant, it cross-references the GWC Masterplan and its appendices.

The Council has endeavoured to ensure that each site allocation is proposed having considered nearby heritage assets and having sought to remove or mitigate harm where the visibility of development in a setting could harm significance. The Council has done this either by removing the built form altogether from the setting, as in the case of Kew Gardens WHS, or by satisfying itself that harm could be avoided or mitigated by good design. None of this amounts to an acceptance of harm and Policy CC3 makes clear that a developer must carry out their own modelling and full HIAs when planning applications are made in due course in reliance on site allocations.

Both the GWC Masterplan and Tall Building Study were undertaken by Urban Initiatives Studio to provide an overview of relevant heritage assets that could potentially be affected by tall development within these areas.

The Council accepts that its approach of providing its tall buildings evidence base across these two main documents, supported by the site allocations entries in the Local Plan, may not be HE's preferred approach, but it is a product of the recent history of plan-making in the Borough, with the Council keen to ensure that valuable work already undertaken for the purposes of the GWC Masterplan that is still of considerable evidential value is not jettisoned unnecessarily. The Council considers that its approach is a means to the same ends sought by HE, namely devising and promoting site allocations that respect heritage assets.

Compliance with policy and guidance

Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets

Broad advice on how to assess the impact of proposals on the significance of heritage assets, including on setting, is set out in HE's Good Practice Advice in Planning 3 ('The Setting of Heritage Assets'). This is set out as a series of steps that apply proportionately to the complexity of the case (page 8):

- 1) Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected;
- 2) Assess the degree to which these settings makes a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) or allow significance to be appreciated;
- 3) Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance or on the ability to appreciate it;
- 4) Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm;
- 5) Make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.

The GWC Masterplan identifies the heritage baseline for the high-level assessment of tall building proposals at the masterplan stage. It covers the following points:

- 1) Identification of heritage assets, including their settings, that may be affected by tall buildings;
- 2) Description of assets and principal designations, including a brief description of the significance of assets and their settings;
- 3) Consideration and assessment of the potential impacts of tall buildings on the significance of heritage assets.
- 4) Exploration of ways to maximise enhancement or avoid or minimise harm (i.e. by testing heights and using building clusters and focal buildings)
- 5) Documentation of the analysis and decisions made in the GWC Masterplan and associated Appendix.

The assessment of the effects of tall building scenarios that were explored in the GWC Masterplan, and the appropriate height ranges identified for tall building sites, are recorded in the GWC Masterplan in section 7.7 and Appendix C: View Testing.

The Tall Building Study identifies the heritage baseline for the high-level assessment of tall building proposals for the rest of the Borough, covering the points below. The Tall Building Study does this in a proportionate way due to the geographic scale of the study and the fact that the more sensitive area (the GWC) is dealt with in detail in the GWC Masterplan. The Tall Building Study:

- 1) Identifies heritage assets and their settings in each area;
- 2) Includes a high-level assessment of the impacts of tall buildings on the significance of heritage assets (including their setting);
- 3) Makes recommendations to maximise enhancement or avoid or minimise harm;
- 4) Documents this analysis and decision-making.

The testing of tall buildings at masterplanning stage is naturally limited to the indicative massing and height of development, rather than detailed architectural proposals. Nevertheless, this level of detail allows the impact of development on the settings of heritage assets to be broadly assessed, and principles for appropriate heights to be established.

Any subsequent planning application for tall buildings on a site will need to include a detailed and development-specific heritage (and visual) impact assessment to ensure its impact is fully understood. Promoters of tall building developments are expected to make full reference to HE's Good Practice Advice in Planning 3, conduct a HIA of relevant assets and demonstrate how the proposal has responded to the significance of heritage assets and their setting at application stage. Modifications proposed to Policy CC3 in response to representations from HE seek to clarify this requirement (as discussed in Section 6).

The London Plan

Policy CC3 and its evidence base also demonstrate general compliance with Policy D9 of the London Plan. Part C of Policy D9 identifies impact criteria that will determine the appropriateness of a location for tall buildings. These include:

Visual impacts

- The views of buildings from long-range, mid-range and immediate views and how they contribute to the existing and emerging skyline (and do not adversely affect local or strategic views), the local townscape and the immediate context / street environment
- Whether as part of a group or stand alone they reinforce the spatial hierarchy of the local and wider context and aid legibility and wayfinding;
- The architectural quality and materials – which should be of an exemplary standard;
- The relationship with heritage assets and their settings;
- The relationship with the setting of a World Heritage Site - a tall building must preserve and not harm the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Site and the ability to appreciate it;

- The relationship with the River Thames where the open quality of the river and riverside public realm including views should be protected and enhanced and avoiding canyon effects;
- Avoiding adverse reflected glare and minimise light pollution.

Functional impacts

- Ensure that the internal and external design ensures safety of occupants;
- Ensure that servicing, maintenance and management can take place without inconvenience to surrounding area;
- Adequate space and appropriate ground floor uses to accommodate people accessing and egressing at peak times;
- Adequate capacity in the local transport network to access facilities and services;
- Avoid interference with aviation, navigation or telecommunications and any detrimental affects on solar energy generation in neighbouring buildings.
- Environmental impacts
- Not compromise comfort in respect of wind, daylight, sunlight and temperature conditions around the building
- Avoid adverse noise impacts from air movements, servicing machinery, or building uses.

Cumulative impacts

- Consider the cumulative visual, functional and environmental impacts

The work undertaken in the GWC Masterplan is consistent with these considerations, including those that relate specifically to heritage considerations.

The Tall Building Study also complies with Policy D9 of the London Plan for the same reason. The Tall Building Study also complements the GWC Masterplan successfully for the following reasons:

- The GWC Masterplan is explicitly referenced in the Tall Building Study, confirming that its authors were conscious of the need for the two documents to complement each other.
- With reference to the Kew Gardens WHS, the same views from the Management Plan for the WHS were considered in both the GWC Masterplan and Tall Building Study.
- The 'Objectives' section of the Tall Building Study makes clear that it has the same or similar objectives to the GWC Masterplan.
- The 'Definitions' section makes clear that the same heritage considerations as have been considered in the GWC Masterplan have been considered in the Tall Building Study.
- Both documents contain similar sections considering the impacts of tall buildings on townscapes and views.
- Both documents provide views modelling.
- The Tall Building Study carries out a scoping exercise based on constraints, including heritage constraints, as does the GWC Masterplan. The former is

more generalised, as it is looking Borough-wide, but the fundamental approach is the same.

- Section 6.3 of the Tall Building Study makes clear that the GWC is covered in the GWC Masterplan.
- The pipeline presented in the Tall Building Study for the GWC is the same in the GWC Masterplan.

Consideration of OUV and significance in the development of the appropriate heights

Some respondents have questioned how the tall building clusters in the GWC Masterplan were modelled and assessed in relation to the surrounding historic environment. In particular, the process by which the tall building clusters accounted for the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Kew Gardens WHS and its heritage significance has been queried.

In accordance with the approach taken generally in the GWC Masterplan when considering and testing site allocations, the locations and the tall building clusters in the GWC Masterplan were modelled to take account of the heritage assets in or near the Borough, including the OUV of Kew Gardens WHS, in a manner that was consistent with the strategic nature of the plan-making process, but also recognising that a WHS is the highest value heritage asset of all.

In this vein, the GWC Masterplan states (page 40):

The World Heritage Site Management Plan has identified a number of vistas that extend beyond the World Heritage Site Buffer Zone, which 'are an integral part of the Site's Outstanding Universal Value and will need additional planning protection.

It then goes on to consider, on page 142, policy in relation to World Heritage Sites and what the Council understands to be the Outstanding Universal Value of Kew Gardens WHS and how it should be protected. This is continued in depth in Appendix B to the GWC Masterplan, titled 'Overview Assessment Of Heritage Assets And Tall Building Sensitivity': see pages 212-216.

The GWC Masterplan Views Appendix then sets out, on page 41, the Outstanding Universal Value of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew as follows:

"The World Heritage Site Management Plan 2020-2025 sets out the contribution of setting to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the WHS. Kew Gardens is, with a few exceptions such as the vista to Syon House, an internally-oriented landscape. The setting of the WHS is fundamental to its OUV, and contributes to it in the following ways:

- *A largely unbroken skyline above the walls and planting, creating the sense of being separated from the surrounding urban area. This also allows visitors to fully appreciate the landscape design and its various historical phases.*
- *Areas of openness and "big sky" framing views across the landscape.*
- *Visual and physical connections to the River Thames and across it, as part of the designed relationship with Syon Park.*
- *Providing the backdrop to key views and vistas such as the Syon Vista, Broadwalk, Cedar Vista, Pagoda Vista and other internal views, such as views to architectural icons and follies.*

- *The well-defined boundaries directly enable the conservation of the internationally significant living connections housed within.*

[...]

The contribution of setting to the WHS is largely dependent on the form of development in the wider environs and their limited visual intrusions into the site. However, this contribution is under threat due to existing and proposed tall buildings. Commenting on the ongoing concern of UNESCO that development in the surrounding area is damaging to the OUV of the WHS, the WHS Management Plan 2020-2025 states:

“The primary cause of this concern is the development of buildings, particularly tall buildings, which are visible from within the WHS. This concern has been exacerbated by a number of recent planning applications, including from within the ‘Great West Corridor’ opportunity area, which would affect the setting of the WHS and key buildings within it and thus the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the WHS.”

Existing tall buildings, such as the Haverfield towers and the Kew Eye, can be seen in glimpsed views within the WHS. They add to the sense of external development overtopping the screening afforded by the tree planting within the Gardens degrading the strong sense of enclosure and separation that underpins the Garden’s character, significance and OUV. There is potential for new tall buildings to have a similar adverse impact, adding cumulatively to the harm that exists from existing intrusive tall building.

Great weight should be given to the preservation of the setting of the landscape and buildings in this most important heritage asset and harm to its significance should be wholly exceptional.

There is a risk of other tall buildings within the Great West Corridor to have a similar impact and significantly erode the sense of separation and ‘otherworldliness’ at the Gardens, and hence the OUV of the WHS.

The NPPF is clear that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, the more important the heritage asset, the greater the weight that its conservation should be afforded.”

The Views Appendix goes further and, where relevant (the relevance having been established in an office-based exercise), any potential impact on Outstanding Universal Value, or the attributes within, is discussed within each individual view page. As such, consideration of the OUV of Kew Gardens has been used to formulate the tall building appropriate heights and locations in its proposed Local Plan.

In addition to the above, the 2014 Management Plan for the Kew Gardens WHS identified the following “Attributes” of its OUV, which have been defined further in the current 2020-2025 Management Plan:

- i. a rich and diverse historic cultural landscape providing a palimpsest of landscape design;

- ii. an iconic architectural legacy;
- iii. globally important preserved and living plant collections;
- iv. a horticultural heritage of keynote species and collections;
- v. key contributions to developments in plant science and plant taxonomy

It is only attributes i and ii that engage the planning process, and these were the main considerations for the Council when considering the potential impacts of tall buildings in the GWC on the WHS.

In respect of Attribute 1, Kew Gardens is a “multi-phase historic designed landscape” (WHS Management Plan 2020-2025, section 3.2.1). Every phase of development “has been accompanied by seminal landscape design by internationally renowned landscape architects, illustrating significant periods in garden design from the 18th to the 20th centuries” (*ibid*). The 2020-2025 Management Plan denotes the key surviving physical features of the property’s historic cultural landscape, which include:

- iv Strongly enclosed sense of ‘otherworldliness’ within the high walls and tree shelterbelts,

As noted above, the GWC Masterplan Views Appendix acknowledges this ‘otherworldliness’ by recognising that the Kew Gardens WHS is “separated from the surrounding urban area” (page 41). The GWC Masterplan also recognises that there are already visual intrusions to this otherworldliness caused by the visual presence of tall buildings in the setting and buffer zone of the WHS. Policy CC3 seeks to prevent this otherworldliness being unacceptably interrupted by tall buildings appearing above the treeline in the WHS.

Intrinsically linked to Attribute 1 is Attribute 2: “an iconic architectural legacy”. The architectural elements within the designed landscapes are an established part of those landscapes and, like the natural elements of those landscapes, could be impacted by tall buildings that are inappropriately located or designed. Policy CC3 seeks to prevent unacceptable impacts on those architectural features also.

This does not mean that Policy CC3 precludes decision-makers from weighing the public benefits of a tall building proposal against any heritage harm that it would cause. However, Policy CC3 is clear that Kew Gardens is a WHS (the highest classification of heritage asset) and that significant adverse impacts on its setting, and views from within it, should be avoided.

On the specific issue of planting trees to protect Kew Gardens WHS from external visual intrusion, there has been a history of tree planting and screening to “hide” Brentford from the Kew Gardens WHS. This is discussed in the 2020-2025 WHS Management Plan (see pages 63/64 where a long-term screening strategy is discussed and pages 126 and 135, where the Victorian era screening scheme is discussed). Royal Botanic Gardens Kew maintains that tree planting and screening to protect the site from visual intrusion in Brentford is not acceptable and never would be. The Council agrees this is not desirable and, as such, has planned tall building appropriate locations and heights in the Local Plan such that they do not appear above the treeline (with one exception for a site with an extant consent

granted in 2002, before the inscription of the WHS in 2003). However, the Council does not agree that the mere existence of a view through trees of a well-designed building is necessarily harmful to the significance of the WHS, whether this tree screening be evergreen or deciduous. Each proposal will need to be assessed on its merits when a planning application is made.

The Tall Building Study states its understanding of Policies D9 and HC2 with regard to World Heritage Sites (page 12) and is clear in its consideration of Kew Gardens and its OUV in relation to Brentford.

Some respondents have suggested that the indicative heights of buildings within the tall building clusters, and their positions within the clusters, amount to the Council accepting that the clusters will cause harm to the significance of heritage assets. However, it is not possible to reach any conclusion about heritage harm at this stage as that can only be done properly when a planning application for a particular proposal is made, supported by a HIA. The proposed tall building clusters cannot themselves cause harm.

It bears repeating that a local plan is not a planning application. It is the planning application process that allows the potential harm of a proposed development to be properly assessed. This is reflected in the policy approach in the Local Plan, which – alongside identifying appropriate heights for the tall building areas in the GWC and the Tall Building Study – sets out a series of requirements for tall building proposals, including the need to take account of strategic and local views, local heritage assets, the effect on the skyline and historic skyline features, the significance of heritage assets and their immediate and wider settings, and several other matters. This sits alongside the requirements of Policy D9 of the London Plan, which also include various requirements for tall building applications. This approach recognises the distinction between plan-making and decision-making, with the latter allowing for a more detailed assessment of potential impacts, including heritage impacts.

Section 6: Addressing Historic England's Concerns

A number of modifications to address clarifications and corrections, as put forward by Historic England in their representation, have been proposed. These are detailed in this section.

Local Plan as a whole:

Modifications are proposed throughout to replace terms such as character, architectural appearance, architectural/ historical/special interest, value, and sole references to setting, with the term significance, or significance including contribution made by setting.

Modifications are made throughout to make a correction to replace the terms protect, preserve, respect and safeguard with the terms conserve and enhance in line with the NPPF and London Plan.

Amendments to Policies in Chapter 2:

Clarification is provided in regard to what and where the Golden Mile is. Terminology is clarified in relation to the expectations at Boston Manor Park. Clarity is provided regarding exploring options for the optimal viable use of the lock-up in Cranford. Further clarification is provided in relation to conserving and enhancing the landmark status of St Catherine's Church Tower.

Amendments to policies in Chapter 6:

Clarification is provided in respect of the commitment to monitor and update the evidence base, including in relation to the historic environment.

Changes to Policy CC1:

Corrections are made to the map at CC1 to refer to Scheduled Monuments, as opposed to Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and to clarify that the map is showing just Registered Parks and Gardens, to colour the APA tiers in accordance with their importance and to add the Higher and Lower Tall Building Definition zones.

Changes to Policy CC3:

A number of modifications to this policy based on Historic England's response are being put forward to the inspector.

There are modifications to wording to reference harm, instead of significant adverse impacts, to align with the NPPF. The policy wording has also been clarified to replace terms such as character and appearance, architectural/historic/special interest, value and sole references to setting with the term 'significance'. Wording has also been clarified by removing references to 'built context', instead referring to 'context' to ensure all context is considered.

Amendments have been made to both the wording of the policy and the supporting text to clarify the definition of tall buildings. Corrections are made to make clear which map shows the definition areas and which shows the appropriate locations and heights.

Amendments to policy wording are also proposed to separate out the requirements for townscape, visual and heritage assessments.

Changes to Policy CC4:

Changes are proposed to the wording to respond to Historic England's request that reference to enabling development "where appropriate" is removed as it should only be as a last resort.

To enhance policy flow and conciseness, the elements of CC4 which speak about view assessments are moved to CC1, to recognise that views are not heritage assets in themselves and their management is more to do with context.

Policy wording has been further revised to include non-designated heritage assets.

Policy wording in relation to the significance of heritage assets, including the contribution made by setting, is clarified throughout.

Corrections are made to refer correctly to the Historic Environment Record, the name of the Archaeological Advisory Service and the Archaeological Desk Based Assessments.

Supporting text is revised to make clear that HIAs should be undertaken by qualified professionals and include consideration of cumulative impacts.

Amendments are made to align the terminology used in relation to World Heritage Sites and their Outstanding Universal Value with that used in the PPG. Additions are proposed to the supporting text to align with additions to the policy text.

Policy wording is corrected in relation to Historic Parks and Gardens and wording is added to require that non-designated parks are assessed for registration. A correction is also made to the wording of the title regarding Heritage at Risk to clarify that it includes all heritage assets.

Further clarification is made to the supporting text to detail what each of the APAs are and how they are tiered.

Revisions are made to the supporting text in response to Historic England's representation that it should be expanded to explain the other designated assets that cover particular aspects of the WHS and provide an overview of elements of setting that contribute to the OUV of the WHS both within and beyond the buffer zone. Further revisions made in response to Historic England's representation including explaining what the Arcadian Thames is and its relationship to Kew in line with London Plan Policy HC2.A. Further, a correction is made to include the primary source for the statement of OUV (CBA Royal Botanic Gardens Kew World Heritage Site Setting Study (2019)) and to include reference to the 'Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context' (UNESCO, 2022), the APA and other relevant Council strategies.

Site Allocations:

The term 'preserve' in allocation wording is removed and the terms 'conserve and enhance' are retained (or added) in line with the NPPF and London Plan.

Conclusion

The main concerns that Historic England have raised in their Regulation 19 representation are in regard to, first, the approach taken in the draft Local Plan to Heritage Impact Assessments and more specifically the consideration of OUV and significance in the development of appropriate heights for tall buildings in the Borough.

This background paper sets out how the evidence base underpinning the Local Plan, principally the GWC Masterplan and Tall Building Study, have considered impacts of tall buildings on the significance of heritage assets. Specifically, the paper explains how the OUV and significance of the World Heritage Site at Kew Gardens has been considered when identifying appropriate heights for tall buildings within its setting in the GWC Masterplan and its associated Appendix.

The Council consider this approach to be compliant with London Plan policy and in line with the broad principles set out in Historic England's Advice Note 3. The Council consider that this level of detail allows the impact of development on the setting of heritage assets to be broadly assessed in a proportionate manner at the plan-making stage, and principles to be established about the appropriate locations and heights of tall buildings.

Any subsequent planning application for tall buildings on a site will need to include a detailed and development-specific heritage (and visual) impact assessment to ensure its impact is fully understood. Promoters of tall building developments are expected to make full reference to Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning 3, conduct a Heritage Impact Assessment of relevant assets and demonstrate how the proposal has responded to the significance of heritage assets and their setting at application stage. Modifications proposed to Policy CC3 in response to representations from Historic England seek to clarify this requirement.

Historic England's second key concern relates to the soundness of Policy CC3 and its evidence base (the GWC Masterplan and the Tall Building Study). Regarding the methodological approach, the Council has undertaken a multi-pronged, yet consistent, approach to defining tall buildings, identifying locations appropriate for tall buildings and appropriate heights. The Tall Building Study covers the whole of the borough except for the GWC, which, due its proximity to the WHS and other sensitivities, warrants the retention of the more in-depth GWC Masterplan to identify appropriate locations and heights for tall buildings in the GWC. As demonstrated in this background paper, the methodologies used in the GWC Masterplan and Tall Building Study are based on the same broad principles and are consistent with the methodology promoted in the adopted London Plan. The analysis of representative views in the GWC Masterplan is more intensive than it is in the Tall Building Study,

but this was appropriate given the proximity of the GWC to the WHS at Kew Gardens.

As referenced throughout this document, the Council has proposed a number of wording changes to improve the clarity of the documents cited and make it clearer they are all in alignment with the London Plan.

For all these reasons, the Council considers that it has demonstrated that its approach to heritage matters in the draft Local Plan is sound and accords with national policy.