



Background paper:
Visual impact assessment
Aylesbury Area Action Plan
May 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The height and form of buildings have an impact on the visual quality, daylight and on the character of a place.
- 1.2 The building heights strategy and the explanation for the strategy are set out in section 4.4 of the publication draft AAP and are therefore not repeated here. Rather, this paper looks at the existing heights on the estate and the surrounding area, illustrates the proposed heights, then concludes with a visual assessment of the impact of the proposed building heights on strategic and sensitive local views.
- 1.3 Appendix 6 of the AAP contains design guidance including for building heights and roofscape and tall buildings (A6.6.33-A6.6.38 of publication draft AAP, Appendix 6).

Structure of this report

- 1.4 This document is structured in five parts:
 - The introduction sets out the purpose and structure of this report
 - This is followed by the planning policy context
 - Context explains the policy and existing physical context in terms of building height.
 - Visual Impact assessment describes the effect of the proposed strategy on important local views.
 - Conclusion

2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National

- 2.1 PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development underlines the importance of good design in securing high-quality, inclusive, safe and sustainable developments that show respect for their surroundings and context.
- 2.2 CABE/English Heritage Guidance on Tall Buildings whilst not a statutory national policy is regarded as best practice nationally with regard to tall building assessments. It sets out criteria for evaluating tall building proposals and is considered a useful reference in this assessment. Importantly the guidance states in para 4.4 “ To be acceptable, any new tall building should be in an appropriate location, should be of first class design quality in its own right and should enhance the qualities of its immediate location and wider setting. It should produce more benefits than costs to the lives of those affected by it. Para 4.3 of this guidance stresses the need for tall buildings to integrate with their immediate surroundings in a satisfactory way at the lower levels.

Regional

- 2.3 The London Plan (with consolidated alterations, GLA 2008) provides the regional policy framework for tall buildings.
- 2.4 Policy 4B.9: Tall Buildings, Location – The Mayor will promote the development of tall buildings where:
- They create attractive landmarks enhancing London’s character
 - Help to provide a coherent location for economic clusters of related activities
 - And/or act as a catalyst for regeneration
 - And where they are also acceptable in terms of design and impact on their surroundings
- 2.5 It further states that the Mayor will work with boroughs to help identify suitable locations for tall buildings that should be included in DPDs. These may include part of the Central Activities Zone and some Opportunity Areas.
- 2.6 Policy 4B.10: Large-scale buildings – Design and Impact clearly underlines the importance of good design for tall buildings – This policy requires “All large scale buildings including tall buildings should be of the highest quality design”. The policy then sets out a number of particular criteria that developments should achieve to be of the highest quality design including meeting the requirements of the London View Management Framework (GLA, 2007).
- 2.7 The London View Management Framework (GLA, 2007) has been considered in section 3 below.

Local

- 2.8 Southwark Plan Policy 3.20 Tall Buildings states that :planning permission will be granted for buildings that are significantly taller than their surroundings or have a significant impact on the skyline, on sites which have excellent accessibility to public transport facilities and are located in Central Activities Zone (particularly in opportunity areas) outside landmark viewing corridors. Proposals for tall buildings should ensure that there are excellent link between the building(s) and public transport services.
- 2.9 The Core Strategy Preferred Options, policy 12, sets out that tall buildings will be encouraged in the right locations in the opportunity and core action areas where they make a positive contribution to regeneration and have exceptional design quality.
- 2.10 Policy 3.21 Strategic Views states that the council “will seek to protect and enhance strategic views of St. Paul’s Cathedral illustrated on the Proposals Map. The masterplan area is not within these strategic views.
- 2.11 Policy 3.22 Important local views seeks to protect and enhance idenetified views, panoramas, prospects and their settings that contribute t the image and built environment of the borough and wider London. The reasons to this policy also state that local views will be identified in development plan documents.

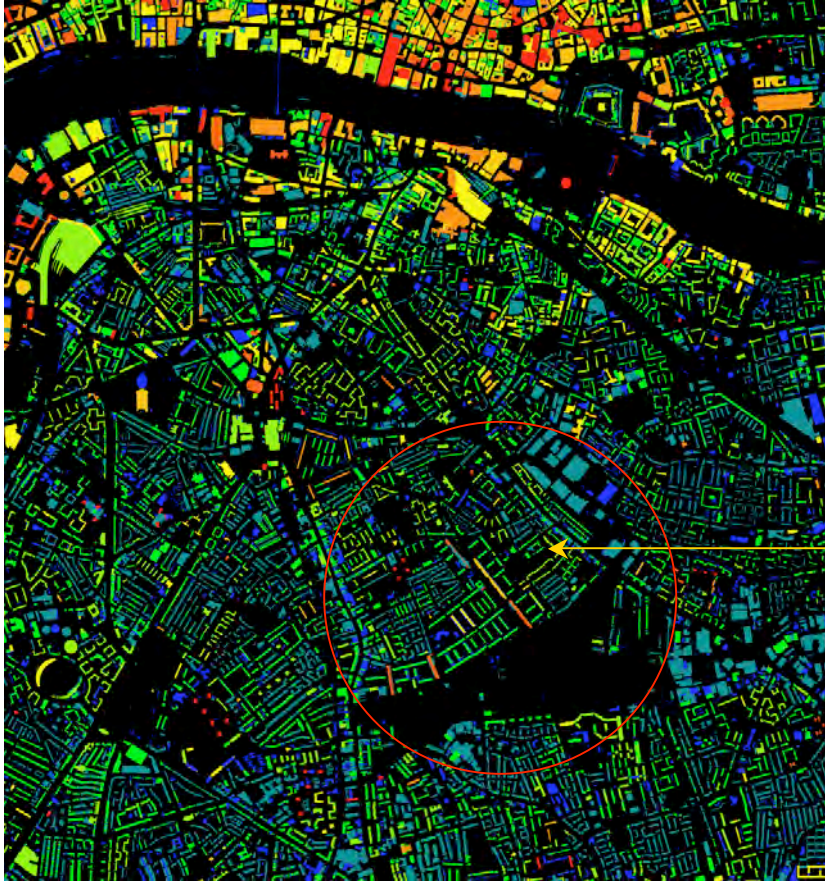
3. CONTEXT

- 3.1 This section should be read in conjunction with sections 4 and 5 of the Baseline Report.

Physical Context

- 3.2 Beyond the Aylesbury AAP area there are a number of clusters of tall buildings with the tallest located within the City of London across the River Thames and around Waterloo and London Bridge. Closest to the Aylesbury Estate is the cluster of taller buildings at Elephant and Castle. The immediate surroundings of the Aylesbury Estate are characterised by low to medium rise buildings ranging from 2 to 4 storeys. These are punctuated by tower blocks of up to 20 storeys in some locations. The Aylesbury Estate itself shows taller buildings and a variation in building heights (see fig 1). The AAP area, whilst not suitable for a cluster of tall buildings or buildings of a metropolitan scale, is suitable for some taller buildings which would be in keeping with the character of this part of London.

Fig 1: Heat Map showing building heights in the wider area (brighter colours show taller buildings)



The prevalence of taller buildings on the Aylesbury Estate and variation within the Aylesbury Estate.

3.3 The existing typical heights within the AAP area are 4 to 5 storeys – this is known as the benchmark height. This benchmark height does vary, however, with slightly taller buildings located within the Aylesbury Estate itself (e.g. Missenden, which is 5 to 8 storeys) and lower buildings within more sensitive parts of the action plan area, such as conservation areas. A 3-D view showing existing heights is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: 3D Model showing existing building heights on the Aylesbury Estate



3.4 There are also some more significant exceptions to this rule – there are a number of taller buildings located in the AAP area, such as the massive slab blocks of Wendover, Taplow, Chiltern and Bradenham, which are 10, 12 and 14 storeys, as well as the more slender Portland Estate towers, also 14 storeys. Local landmarks include the façade and spire of St Peter’s Church, Chumleigh Gardens Almshouses, the taller blocks in the area (Wendover in particular, but also Taplow, Bradenham and Chiltern).

3.5 Aylesbury Estate itself suffers from many of the issues associated with poorly sited and designed tall buildings. This is often aggravated by the sheer scale and massing of some of the blocks, creating overbearing environments and overshadowing in the surrounding public spaces.

3.6 The building heights strategy for the masterplan area proposed 2-4 storeys buildings across much of the area with 7-10 storeys along Thurlow Street and Albany Road. There will be some taller buildings to mark important locations with the tallest 15-20 storeys at the junction of Thurlow Street and Albany Road as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: 3D Model showing proposed building heights on the Aylesbury Estate

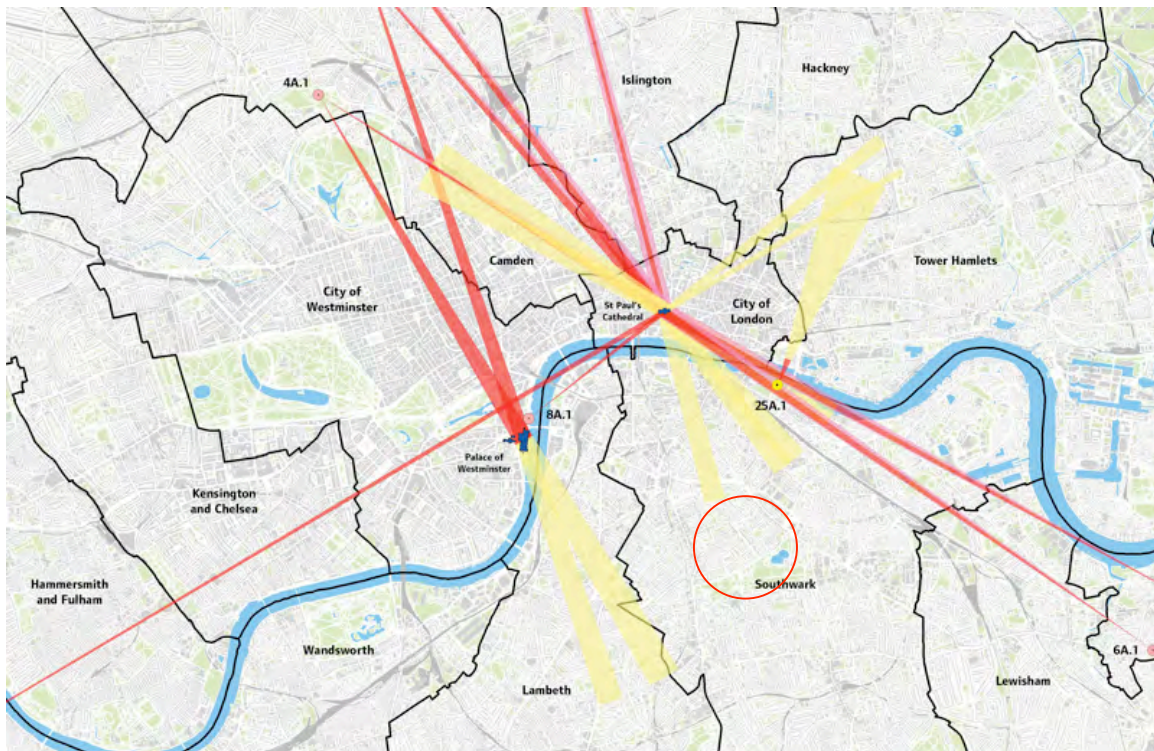


4. VISUAL IMPACT

Strategic Views

- 4.1 The London View Management Framework (GLA, July 2007) designates views of strategic importance.
- 4.2 Building heights in the London Plan are governed in part by restrictions associated with strategic metropolitan scale views, mainly associated with view of St Paul's, Westminster and the Tower of London. The AAP area does not lie within any of these strategic view corridors (figure 4).

Figure 4: Protected Vistas, London View Management Framework (2007)



Local Views

- 4.3 As a result of the building height strategy, a series of important local views has been established to understand the impact of the redevelopment. The following methodology has been followed in establishing and assessing these views. This is consistent with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (IEMA, 2nd edition, 2002):
 1. Establishing the views – the sensitivity of the viewing location has determined the selection of the view points. Sensitive locations are considered to be areas of open space, conservation areas, key routes through the area and places

near listed buildings.

2. Producing a 3D model – An accurate massing model of the current masterplan has been produced. The assessment is based on wirelines produced from the 3D model which are superimposed on existing photographs.
3. The visual assessment is based on the following
 - a. Quality of the existing view – High, medium or low
 - b. Sensitivity of the receptor – The receptors are the people who experience the view. In a view that is seen by a large number of people in a high quality visual environment, the sensitivity of receptors is considered high. The sensitivity of receptors in an open space or residential environment is considered higher than in a commercial environment.
 - c. Magnitude of change (the degree of change from the current environment to the new environment) – High, medium or low
 - d. Significance of impact – this depends on both the sensitivity of the receptor and magnitude of change. This can be harmful, beneficial or neutral
 - e. Mitigation – Development should try to reduce or avoid harmful impacts through the design of the scheme. In the absence of a detailed architectural design at this stage our assessment of this is based on the scale and massing of the development.
 - f. Conclusion of the overall assessment – This is based on the following:

Quality of existing view x sensitivity of receptors and the view x magnitude of change = Significance of Impact
 Significance of impact x quality of impact x mitigation factors = Residual Visual Impact

4. The residual visual impact is presented as
 - High, medium, low and then whether this is beneficial or harmful. Where the significance of impact is very small or non-existent, for example if the proposed development is not visible, the residual visual impact can be neutral.

4.4 The views used for the visual assessment are presented in Appendix 1 and the following section presents the assessment of these views.

View	Description/Issues	Impact
1. Across Burgess Park Lake looking west.	The lake is in the foreground of this view. The middleground is dominated by the southern end of Wendover. Also visible is the chimney of the CHP. In the background Chiltern House, the residential towers on the Wyndam Estate and the spire of St Georges Church are visible on the	The proposed development will present a consistent building line to the park. There is a variety of heights creating an interesting rhythm along the park. The massing of the development adds richness and variety to this view. It replaces an uneven building line with one that is coherent.

	<p>horizon. The area west of the lake is in the Cobourg Road Conservation Area. In this view, the buildings do not relate well with one another and the skyline is uneven and incoherent. It is a view across metropolitan open land, so the sensitivity of receptors is considered high.</p>	<p>The proposal has a high magnitude of impact on this view. However this will be compensated for by the fact that it creates a coherent skyline. The residual impact on this view will be highly beneficial.</p>
<p>4. Mina Road looking south west.</p>	<p>This foreground and middle ground comprises two storey Victorian terraces on either side of the road. The buildings provide a strong sense of enclosure to the street. The view culminates in oversize slab blocks running across the end of the street. This detracts from the otherwise high character of Mina Road. Because the environment is mainly residential, the sensitivity of receptors is considered moderate.</p>	<p>The proposal creates a continuation of the street and adds buildings of a similar scale to the Victorian terraces in the background. The view is much more open and leads the eye to the tall building at the junction of Albany Road and Chumleigh Garden green finger. A variety of building heights can be observed which will add to the visual quality of the view. The proposal will change the character of the view from one which is dominated by a large slab block to one comprising more contextual buildings. The proposed development will have a high beneficial impact on this view.</p>
<p>5. Portland Street north of junction with Hopwood Road looking south.</p>	<p>The human scale of Portland Street with a mixture of two and three storey terraced cottages and tenements in the foreground is in contrast to the oversized mass of the Chiltern House slab block in the middle and background which dominates the view. The sensitivity of receptors in the Liverpool Grove Conservation Area is considered moderate because the Chiltern House detracts from the character of the conservation area in this view.</p>	<p>The proposal will introduce buildings of a scale which relates more sympathetically to the scale of the conservation area and continues the building and the roof line of the Edwardian buildings in the middle ground. There is a gradual rise in building heights to the right of the view. The proposal would open up the view and provide a continuation of the street. By opening this view and introducing building height and massing which is more sympathetic to that of the Victorian buildings the proposal would have a high beneficial impact on this view.</p>
<p>6. Junction of Wooler Street and Portland Street looking east</p>	<p>The foreground has some clutter from road signage. A mixture of two and three storey terraced cottages and tenements continues from the foreground to the middle and background providing good street enclosure. A row of mature lopped trees can also be seen in the middle</p>	<p>The proposal would replace the Taplow block from the background of this view with a range of buildings whose height and massing or more suited to the context. It would also result in a continuation of the street. As a result the proposal would have a highly beneficial impact on this</p>