

April 2017

**Newcastle Tall Buildings SPD Scoping Report**





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# 1 Introduction

This scoping report acts as an opening consultation paper to discuss the relevant issues, themes and potential format of a Tall Building Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Newcastle upon Tyne.

It will form the initial stage of the process towards developing a Tall Building Guidance SPD.

# 2 Background to Tall Buildings

A tall building is defined as *“any building or structure that breaks the skyline and/or which is significantly taller than its surrounding built fabric”*.

Tall buildings are not a new building form and have historically been around for hundreds of years as physical expressions of growth, power, wealth and religion.

Two major breakthroughs in the building construction industry have influenced tall buildings. The Great Fire in Chicago (1871) and the Great Exhibition (1851) with the introduction of the elevator.

The new model of ‘tall building’ is very different to past failures. In the right location and meeting all the key principles advocated at a national level by Design Council CABE and Historic England tall buildings can positively benefit a place if exceptionally well designed.

Today they bear little resemblance to the much derided tower blocks of the 1960s and 70s. They are changing the skylines of cities such as Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham acting as markers and signposts of regeneration.

As a regional capital and Core City Newcastle will continue to attract major investment. The desire to build tall will continue primarily as a way of maximising the use of a site and its value which in turn has put pressure on the local authority to assess proposals appropriateness in the city.



[San Gimignano - the 'Medieval Manhattan' of Tuscany]



[Great Fire of Chicago]

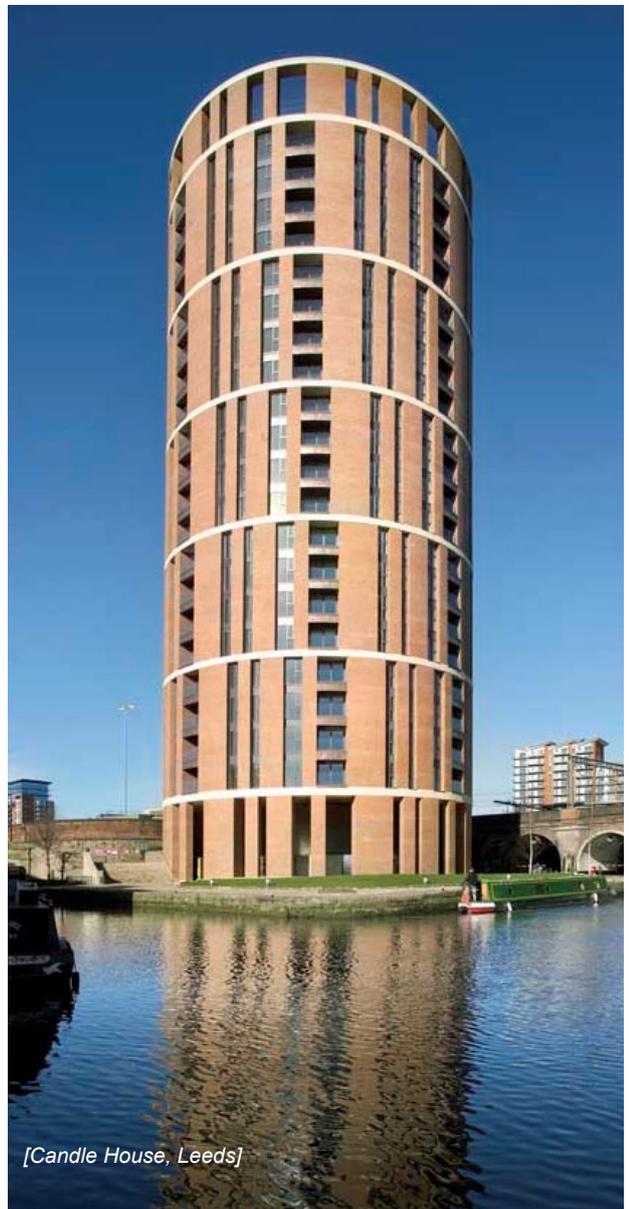
CHICAGO IN FLAMIES.



[St. Nicholas Cathedral]



[1851 Great Exhibition]



[Candle House, Leeds]



[Turning Torso, Malmö]



[Beetham Tower, Manchester]

## Tall buildings in Newcastle

Newcastle enjoys a rich historic environment containing 12 conservations areas, 1 World heritage site and 830 listed buildings.

It also includes a number of distinct and sensitive character areas including:

- The Tyne Gorge and its impressive riverscape
- Grainger Town - exhibiting exceptional streets of Victorian and Georgian architecture sweeping along the dramatic topography of the city
- Remains of the Roman era (most notably Hadrian's Wall), the medieval Castle Keep and town walls and parish churches

Newcastle is a historic city continuing to grow into a dynamic and diverse place of European standing. It is a compact city full of character and local distinctiveness made up by a series of layers including its historic assets, topography, its relationship with the river and some of the most interesting examples of townscape in the country.

In the right location a well-designed tall building can make a positive contribution to Newcastle upon Tyne. Individually, or in groups, they can affect the image and identity of the city as a whole. They can serve as beacons of growth and regeneration, and stimulate further investment in a city.

Over 30 tall buildings are located throughout the city. These include a number of successful examples of tall buildings both old and new. The Civic Centre, a grade.II\* listed building, in a highly prominent location is a key landmark building in the city. More recently The View, winner of the Lord Mayor Design Awards 2015, highlights how a tall building when done well can make a major contribution to the city.

It is important to appreciate tall buildings are a city-wide topic and not just applicable to the urban core. Unsuccessful tower blocks built between the 1950s and 1980s which responded to the city's desire to maintain growth are a stark reminder of past failures on the edges of the city centre.

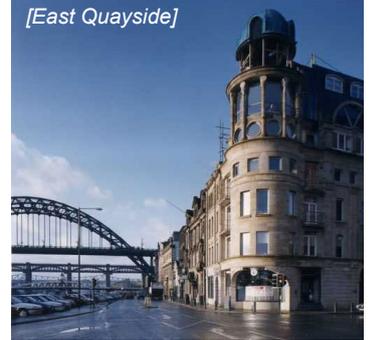
Ultimately buildings of all heights can fail in many different ways, but when tall buildings fail, the results are much more obvious.

Newcastle City Council must now be proactive in dealing with applications for tall buildings by developing a specific clear policy which sets out when tall buildings may be appropriate and what needs to be submitted by applicants.

[Grainger Town]



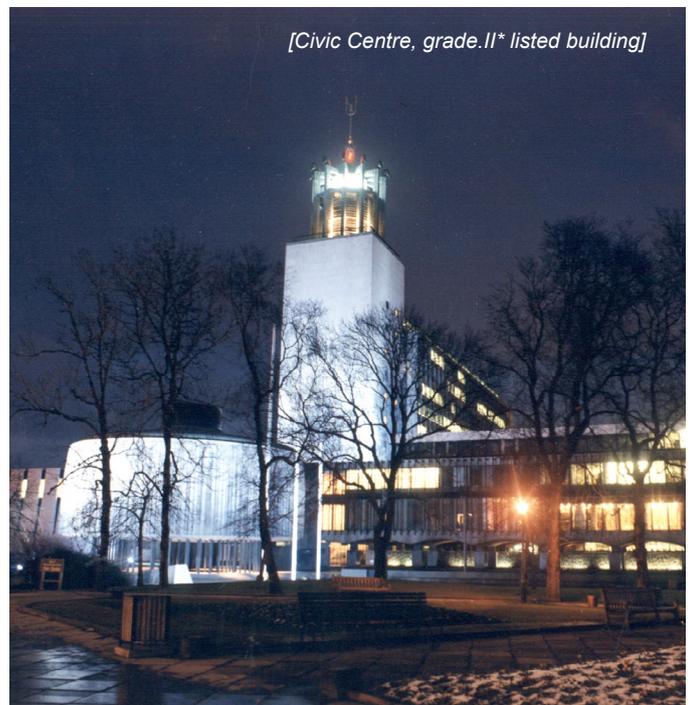
[East Quayside]



[The View]

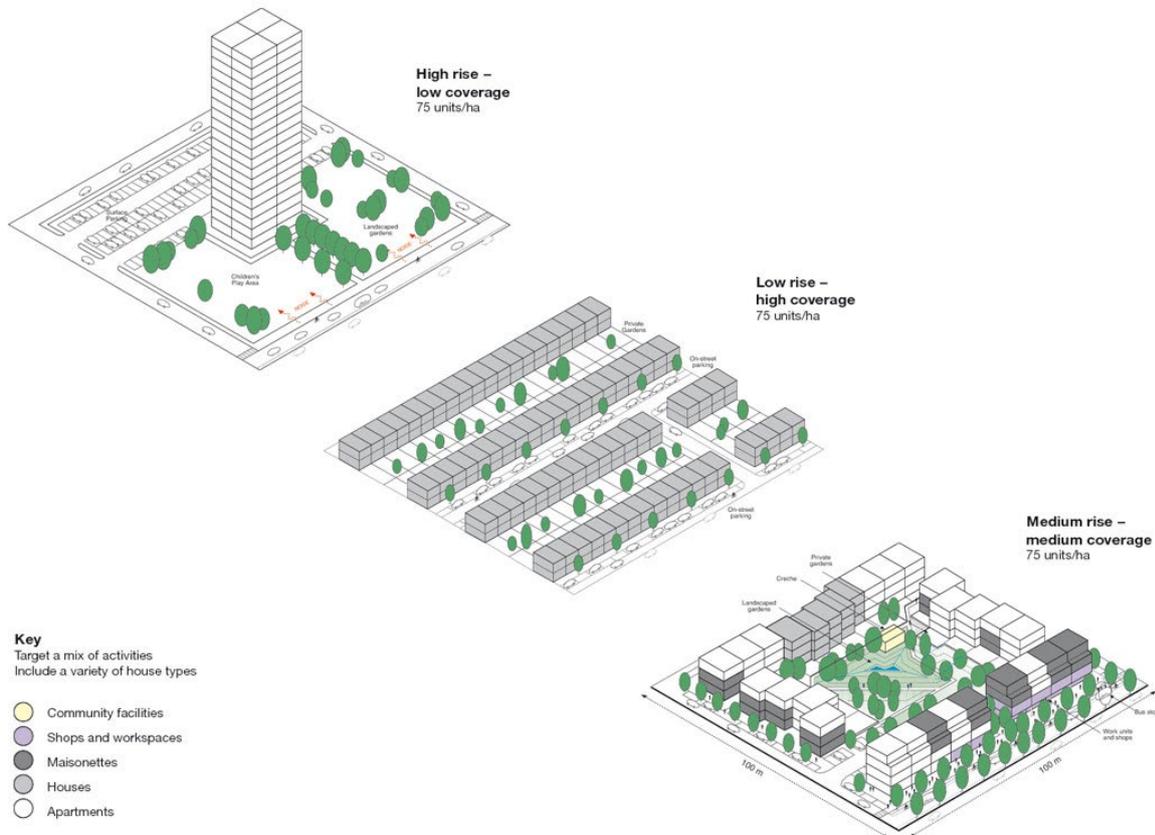


[Civic Centre, grade.II\* listed building]



# Tall Building Design

Tall buildings can be approached in a number of ways such as in clusters or as a point block. There may be good reasons to seek an increased development density however tall buildings represent one of a number of possible models for high-density development.



[Diagram highlighting high-density development can be accommodated in a number of forms]

It is important that the appropriate scale and form of development is assessed as part of the planning policy process. Proposals for tall buildings should reflect a positive approach to development rather than reacting to speculative development applications.

Summarised below are some of advantages and disadvantages for clusters and point blocks.



## Point Blocks

- Landmark function
- No significant impact on density
- Difficult to control environmental impact
- Will often rely on existing infrastructure

## Clusters

- Generate own environment
- Significant increase of density
- Potential enhancement of infrastructure
- Comprehensive control of environmental impact

## **Masterplan**

In planning for clusters or point blocks it will be essential to prepare a masterplan. This approach should be supported by a sound evidence base covering critical urban design and historic environment issues ensuring appropriate and comprehensive development is deliverable and not prejudicing the future development of surrounding sites.

## **Emerging higher density in the city**

Recent planning consents in the west of the city centre around Science Central and Strawberry Place have shown an increase in height supported by major transport infrastructure and forming an important gateway can be supportable.

Forth Yard on the edge of the city away from the historic core and along a major gateway into the city could also have potential for accommodating tall buildings.

## **Tall Building [Cluster]**

Appropriate locations for groups of tall buildings should be limited in Newcastle.

To the east of the city student accommodation at the Manors area will have an impact on the changing skyline of Newcastle.

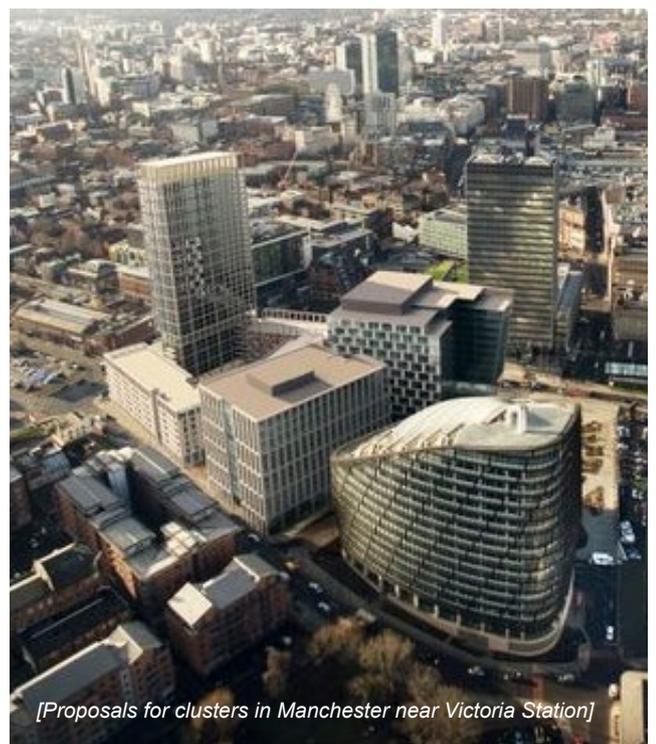
A cluster approach could be limited because of economic reasons (market demand) but also because of the physical limitations the city has for new developments of this kind, given the amount of constraints that would be placed on any proposal.

For instance; they would need to be close to (and contribute to) good public transport links; the location must have the capacity to cope with any extra traffic movements; the proposed buildings must sit comfortably with the city's topography and existing built form, without any damaging impact on strategic views or the historic fabric of the city.

Locating a tall building cluster to reinforce gateways can help create a strong physical image and focal point for the city that would enhance strategic views of the city on approach from the south west. It would potentially be less harmful impact on the historic core; tall structures situated here could have a positive impact on the topography and skyline of the city as well as being located adjacent to good public transport links and highway networks.



[Wembley Park Masterplan, Brent]



[Proposals for clusters in Manchester near Victoria Station]



[London - cluster of skyscrapers]

### **Tall Building [Point Blocks]**

Point blocks (tall buildings used as single or 'stand alone' structures) should be more innovative or sculptural in their form and detailing, creating a building that is more distinctive and elegant as a singular element.

This is opposed to a tall building that forms part of a cluster which should be designed as part of a 'family' of structures that relate to one another in some way.

Usually a point block creates a focal point or beacon that acts as a form of marker.

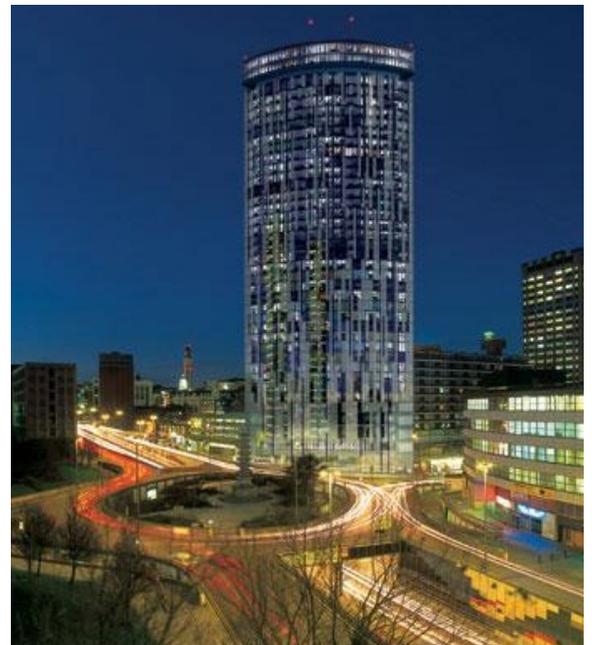
For instance; as a point of orientation; to terminate a long vista; highlight a geographical feature; or punctuate the end (or beginning) of a linear development. Considering these issues, Newcastle could present opportunities for point block proposals that would reinforce or enhance the legibility and image of the city.

A Tall Building Guidance SPD will provide a way of assessing proposals for tall buildings city-wide including historically sensitive areas and the Tyne Gorge.

Unless an exceptional case can be made there will however, be a presumption against tall buildings that; rise from the River Tyne bankside level significantly higher than present landmark structures on the Quayside; tall buildings significantly higher than present landmark structures on top of the River Tyne escarpment; tall buildings significantly higher than general building heights within the historic core.



[Liverpool - West Tower]



[Birmingham - Holloway Circus Tower]



[Tyne Gorge - an important character area in the city]

### 3 Policy Context

#### *Tall Building Guidance SPD 2006*

On 21st December 2006 Planning & Transport Strategy Committee adopted the Tall Buildings Guidance Supplementary Planning Document [SPD]. The document sets out assessment criteria for evaluating tall building applications in the city.

11 years on tall buildings remain a highly emotive subject. When done well a tall building in the right location, doing all the right things can make a positive contribution to the city.

Newcastle City Council have received numerous applications for tall buildings over the years and this will be likely to continue and it is essential that we have an up-to-date planning policy to guide development.

Both Design Council CABE and Historic England have recognised the importance of managing change in the built environment to continually improve its quality. Since 2002 they have delivered a series of guidance documents and advice notes for local authorities on how best to deal with tall buildings.

Recent guidance specifically relating to local plans urges local planning authorities to identify appropriate locations for tall buildings in their development plan documents. These site specific policies need to be drawn up through effective engagement with local communities and with full regard to national planning policies.

#### *National Planning Policy Framework*

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment as well as in people's quality of life (para 6). Furthermore the core planning principles (para 17) state that planning should always seek to secure high quality design and ways to enhance and improve places in which people live their lives and conserve heritage assets for this and future generations.

The NPPF makes it clear that new development should be plan-led (para 154). The NPPF also makes it clear that the Government attaches 'great weight', both to the conservation of designated heritage assets including their settings, and the importance of securing high quality design. Both issues are core planning principles in the NPPF (para 17) with design policies being covered in paras 56 to 68 and conserving and enhancing the historic environment in paras 126 to 141. In addition, the NPPF makes clear that the significance of heritage assets derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting (para 132). Other policies in the NPPF may be relevant.

An up-to-date local plan based on a sound evidence base (paras 169-170) should contain enough detail to allow the significance of heritage assets to be assessed and to secure high quality design. This will help local planning authorities identify in local plans areas where tall buildings would not be appropriate because of the adverse impact (para 157).

### Planning Practice Guidance

Leading on from the NPPF, the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was published in March 2014. The online guidance provides more clarity on the interpretation of the NPPF and makes planning guidance more accessible.

Specific guidance on the importance of good design and its principles have been reflected within the Core Strategy and are covered by CS15.

### Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030

The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (approved 2014) is a strategic planning framework that will guide development in Newcastle and Gateshead to 2030. It is the first part of both councils Local Plan, containing an overall vision and spatial strategy to deliver economic prosperity and create lifetime neighbourhoods. The Plan covers the whole of the area within the administrative boundaries of Gateshead and Newcastle and includes strategic policies and specific policies for the Urban Core, Sub-Areas and sites.

Place-making policy (CS15) has been developed to ensure high quality design is delivered throughout the city however this does not include the identification of appropriate locations for tall buildings.

### Policy Reference

Proposals for tall buildings within Newcastle upon Tyne must demonstrate that they can address all of the following:	NPPF	CSUCP
1. Are of exceptional design quality,	Para 56,57, 62, 63-65,126	CS15, UC12
2. Are appropriately located,	Para 64	CS15 ,UC7,11-13
3. Contribute positively to sustainability,	Para 65, 95	CS15, CS16, UC12
4. Contribute positively to place making,	Para 58	CS15, UC12, UC13
5. Should not cause substantial harm to the setting of designated heritage assets	Para 128	CS15, UC11-14
6. Will bring significant regeneration and public benefit	Para 21,58,133	CS15, UC14, 16,17 DEL1

[Table.1 Policy referencing for emerging tall building criteria]

## 4 National Guidance

Both Design Council CABE and Historic England advise local planning authorities develop guidance and potentially identify appropriate locations for tall buildings in their development plan documents. These site specific policies need to be drawn up through effective engagement with local communities and with proper regard to national planning policies.

The advantages of including tall building policies in local plans include:

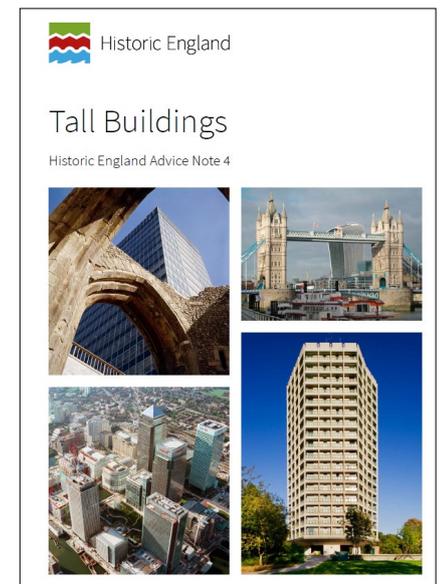
- identifying the role of tall buildings, where appropriate, as part of an overall vision for a place
- maintaining protection of the historic environment and the qualities which make a city or area special
- identifying areas appropriate for tall buildings in advance of specific proposals
- demonstrating that in selecting areas for tall buildings due consideration has been given to the effects on land outside the local authority's area and the setting of any designated heritage
- the clear expression of spatial scale and quality requirements for new tall buildings
- encouraging an appropriate mix of uses
- ensuring early public consultation on the principles of development in relation to place, context and design
- reducing unnecessary, speculative applications in the wrong places and thereby avoiding wasting resources
- highlighting opportunities for the removal of past mistakes and their replacement by development of an appropriate quality and scale
- setting out ambitious sustainability targets and the requirements for a waste and water strategy
- linking to the transport strategy for the area

National guidance has outlined key considerations to take into account when assessing tall buildings. Identifying those elements that create local character and other important features and constraints, including:

- natural topography
- urban grain
- significant views of skylines
- scale and height
- streetscape and character assessment including the history of the place
- landmark buildings and areas and their settings, including backdrops, and important local views, prospects and panoramas;
  - identify opportunities where tall buildings might enhance the overall townscape
  - identify sites where the removal of past mistakes might also achieve such an enhancement.

These key considerations can be covered in a variety of ways such as criteria based guidance or a tall building strategy identifying areas appropriate for tall buildings.

Section.5 highlights how other 'Core Cities' have responded to dealing with tall buildings.



[Guidance relating to Tall Buildings]

## Tyne Gorge Study (2003)

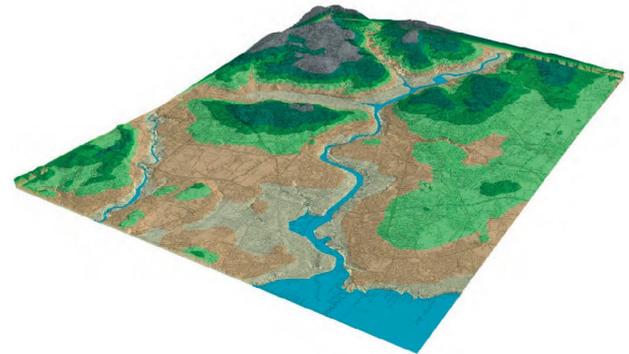
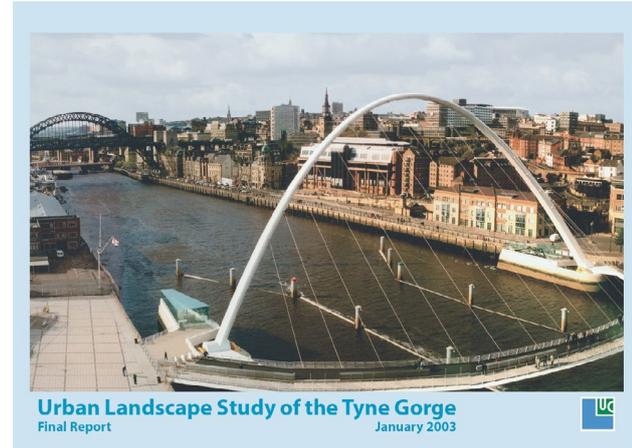
The study was commissioned in 2003 by English Heritage; the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE); Newcastle City Council; and Gateshead Council and produced by Land Use Consultants and published in 2003.

This explored the development of Newcastle and Gateshead in relation to the river, and its bridges, and to produce broad principles for both the siting, and design of, new development within the gorge.

The main objectives of the Study were to:

- Define the geographical extent of the study area
- Analyse the historical development of the gorge and its two settlements, Newcastle and Gateshead
- Undertake a visual analysis of the gorge
- Indicate the importance of different areas of the gorge
- Identify threats and opportunities within the gorge
- Indicate principles for the protection and development of the gorge in the future

Since the guidance in 2003 much new development has taken place with strategic views altered and new views created. Developing a Tall Building SPD will provide an opportunity to consider and update some of the key principles established from this study as part of a robust evidence base.



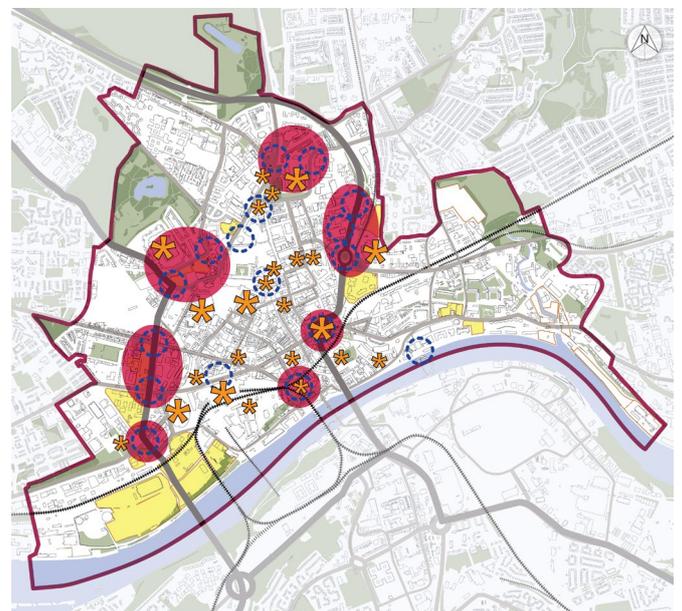
[Tyne Gorge Study]

## Journeys into the Urban Core (2012)

Newcastle has been developing evidence to support emerging design policy.

'Journeys into the Urban Core' was one document produced with the aim of identifying landmarks, key views and vistas, arrival gateways and arrival approaches to the urban core.

Alongside the Tyne Gorge Study this document will help form part of the evidence and analysis for the urban core with wider analysis needed for the whole of the city.



[Journeys into the Urban Core]

## 5 Core Cities Examples

Newcastle is one of the 10 'Core Cities' which are economically the largest areas outside of London in England, Wales and Scotland.

Whilst all cities are different in context it is important to understand how other places have approached the subject of tall buildings.

A table has been developed to show how other 'Core Cities' are looking to develop policy in the future following the introduction of NPPF.

Core Cities	Post NPPF	Future Guidance
<b>Bristol</b> <i>Tall Buildings SPD (2005), Developing guidance</i> <i>'City Living: Successful Placemaking at Higher Density (2018)'</i>	X	✓
<b>Nottingham</b> <i>Nottingham Urban Design Guide (2009), BE8 City Skyline and Tall Buildings saved policy and partially covered in Aligned Core Strategies Part.1 (2014)</i>	✓	X
<b>Leeds</b> <i>Policy P10: DESIGN / Tall Building SPD (2010).</i> <i>Currently engaging with Councillors on 'update' of issues.</i>	X	✓
<b>Manchester</b> <i>Policy EN 2 Tall Buildings/Core Strategy (2012)</i> <i>Provides a criteria based policy for dealing with tall buildings</i>	✓	X
<b>Birmingham</b> <i>High Places: A planning policy framework for tall buildings (2003).</i> <i>Building Height in Big City Plan (2010) and currently reviewing policy.</i>	X	✓
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>Policy G11 Tall Buildings (2013) Core Strategy CS76, Tall Buildings in the City Centre</i>	✓	X
<b>Cardiff</b> <i>Tall Buildings SPD (2009)</i>	X	X
<b>Glasgow</b> <i>DES 11 Tall Buildings -Development Policies and Design Guidance (2016)</i>	X	X
<b>Liverpool</b> <i>World Heritage SPD (2009) Talling building Guidance provided around WHS and buffer zone.</i>	X	✓

[Table.2 Summary of how other Core Cities are approaching Tall Building policy following NPPF in 2012]

Nottingham



Bristol



Liverpool



Glasgow



Cardiff



Birmingham



Sheffield



Manchester



Leeds



## 6 Scope of Tall Building Guidance SPD

Preparation of a Tall Building Guidance SPD requires a number of steps as set out in Appendix.A for anticipated timescales. It is recognised in order to prepare an SPD, evidence gathering is required, followed by consultation and other Council procedural matters.

SPDs must also relate to a policy in a local plan, therefore, the priority is to ensure that the issue is addressed within a local plan document in the first instance. Whilst this has been done in the case of the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan, Policy CS15 requires further detail to support its implementation and provide detailed policy on the location of tall buildings.

### Policy CS15 Place-Making

Development will contribute to good place-making through the delivery of high quality and sustainable design, and the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. This will be achieved by:

1. Development being required to:
  - i. Respond positively to local distinctiveness and character,
  - ii. Create safe and inclusive environments,
  - iii. Ensure connectivity, accessibility and legibility,
  - iv. Respect and enhance significant views and the setting of heritage assets,
  - v. Respond to the unique character and importance of the River Tyne, its tributaries and its setting,
  - vi. Respond positively to opportunities to introduce public art, and
  - vii. Respond to local design and conservation guidance.
  
2. Taking a proactive approach to sustaining the historic environment in a manner appropriate to the significance of the relevant heritage asset and requiring development to support and safeguard the historic environment by:
  - i. Promoting the use, enjoyment and understanding of the historic environment,
  - ii. Positively responding to those heritage assets which are at risk, and not leaving heritage assets at risk, or vulnerable to risk, and
  - iii. Where appropriate positively adapting heritage assets to ensure the continued contribution to quality of place.

## 7 Approach - What evidence is required?

Reviewing evidence, policy considerations and case studies from other local planning authorities will assist in the preparation of a Tall Building Guidance.

More thorough upfront heritage assessment and urban design analysis which will be tested through the options appraisal, environmental impact assessment, consultation and the duty to cooperate where relevant will help create a stronger and more realistic policy base which is beneficial to the applicant and local authority alike. A heritage assessment and urban design framework could help to identify the potential locations for tall buildings and can be adopted as a supplementary planning document.

The previous 2006 guidance set a benchmark for helping to assess proposals. New up to date policy needs to be developed based on robust evidence. National guidance has highlighted key issues relating to tall buildings and the most recent guidance from Historic England capturing the essence of NPPF.

Existing background evidence work used for the CSUCP exists and alongside guidance such as the Tyne Gorge Study will help and the integration of the VNG model will mean a robust and thorough analysis can support the document.

## 8 Guidance Options

In terms of preparing guidance a number of options exist for assessing applications for tall buildings.

These include the following options for consultation:

- 1. Do nothing** – continue to deal with applications on an ad hoc basis utilising the guidance from Historic England and Design Council Cobe have produced.
- 2. Development Management Policy** – a high level policy covering in a clear and concise manner key criteria for any tall building to achieve to be considered appropriate.
- 3. Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** – prepare a new SPD in line with NPPF. The document would provide a city-wide criteria based guidance.

## 9 Preferred Option: Tall Building SPD

It is proposed a supplementary planning document (SPD) is prepared to provide guidance for tall buildings city-wide. This would be a criteria based SPD for new build, as well as existing tall buildings, in Newcastle based on a sound evidence base and analysis of the city in general conformity with all relevant guidance and policy.

It is envisaged the guidance will potentially cover 6 key headline areas as summarised below supported by more detailed information for assessment.

### ***i. Exceptional design quality***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Reflect the highest standards in architecture helping to raise standards of design*
- *Significantly enhance its immediate setting*
- *Sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area*
- *Visual Impact both day and night*

### ***ii. Appropriately located,***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Supported by major transport infrastructure*
- *Proposals for tall buildings within/or close to conservation areas to be carefully assessed*
- *Impact on flight paths/Civil Aviation Authority*
- *The existence of a tall building in a particular location will not of itself justify its replacement with a new tall building on the same site or in the same area*
- *Visual appearance taking into consideration Tyne Gorge Study, key views and topography*

### ***iii. Contribute positively to sustainability,***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Social, Economic and Environmental*
- *Likely to require an environmental impact assessment (EIA)*
- *Microclimate - The impact of environmental factors namely windflow patterns around buildings, daylight availability and overshadowing, air temperature and humidity, as well as the urban heat island phenomena, landscape and albedo of materials.*

### ***iv. Contribute positively to place making,***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Impact on quality of place*
- *Tyne Gorge Study*
- *Respond positively to local distinctiveness and character,*
- *Create safe and inclusive environments,*
- *Ensure connectivity, accessibility and legibility,*
- *Respect and enhance significant views and the setting*
- *Mix of uses (top, middle and bottom)*
- *Public realm*
- *Amenity*
- *Masterplans required for dealing with clusters of tall buildings.*

### ***v. Should not cause substantial harm to the setting of designated heritage assets,***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Should look to improve setting of designated heritage assets*
- *Be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area*
- *Heritage statement and urban design framework*

### ***vi. Will bring significant regeneration and public benefit***

Potential issues for criteria to cover:

- *Public and community benefits*
- *CIL and section 106 to secure such benefits*
- *Public access and viewing areas*

## 10 Next Steps

As part of the process for delivering the Supplementary Planning Document Tall Buildings Guidance for Newcastle upon Tyne you are invited to feedback your comments on this scoping document by 16th May 2017.

### Contact Officer

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## Appendix. A

### Proposed Timescales

- Scoping Report April
- Preparation of draft SPD and evidence April – August
- Draft SPD - Cabinet Sept
- Consult for 6 weeks Sept - Oct
- SEA – send to statutory consultees Sept - Oct
- Revise SPD considering comments Oct - Nov
- Revised SPD – Cabinet December
- Prepare adoption statement December
- Publish SPD and adoption statement on website December

## Appendix. B

### **Bibliography**

Tall Buildings 2002 CABE/English Heritage (2002)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (March 2015)

Guidance on Tall Buildings CABE/English Heritage (July 2007)

Tall Buildings Historic England Advice Note.4 (December 2015)

Planning for the Future Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030 (Adopted March 2015)

National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

