

## PART A

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date of meeting:** 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015  
**Report of:** Head of Regeneration and Development  
**Title:** Local Plan Part 2 – additional policy on tall buildings

### 1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 There has been a significant increase in pre-application discussions for tall buildings. Whilst such schemes could help deliver future housing and provide employment opportunities they could fundamentally change the skyline and character of the Borough. Existing planning policy requires strengthening to prevent inappropriate tall building development given the Government's desire to increase housing supply. This report considers the work being undertaken to support a Tall Buildings policy for inclusion in Local Plan 2 of which an early draft is contained in the attached appendix. A more developed policy will be subject to public consultation and a sustainability appraisal and revised if necessary before inclusion in the publication version of Local Plan Part 2 in 2016.
- 1.2 Due to the time to take a planning policy through external examination and adoption, coupled with impending applications being made, a Tall Buildings Supplementary Planning Document is also being prepared for consultation – to guide tall building development and to assist decision makers ahead of formal adoption of Local Plan Part 2.

### 2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That members endorse the broad approach to tall buildings and support further work being undertaken to prepare a policy for inclusion in Local Plan Part 2.
- 2.2 That members support the preparation of a tall buildings supplementary planning document to guide such development and to assist decision makers in advance of the adoption of LP2.
- 2.3 That the Head of Regeneration and Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development has delegated authority to agree the wording of a draft Tall Buildings Policy and supplementary planning document for consultation, to undertake that consultation and report back to Cabinet following the conclusion of the consultation.

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**Report approved by:** Jane Custance, Head of Regeneration and Development.

**3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 An increase in the delivery of housing is the key planning priority for the government. Housing demand is acknowledged to be high in this area. Proposals for tall residential schemes are consequently beginning to come forward in greater numbers. These schemes are typically 15 -25 storeys. By way of context, Watford's YMCA is the equivalent of 11-12 storeys.
- 3.2 Whilst the Borough of Watford is highly urbanised, the density of development in most of the Borough is relatively low. Watford contains a number of distinctive urban character areas, including conservation areas, which contribute to local identity and consequently need to be protected in terms of siting tall buildings, their detailed design and integration with existing communities.
- 3.3 Being mindful of the failures of some previous tall buildings and that Watford is not considered a suitable location for very tall buildings, officers are concerned that the existing and emerging policies in LP2 may not be sufficient to ensure that taller buildings are only located in the most appropriate locations, are of exceptional build quality, and create places where people want to live, work and visit. Officers have been working with Design South East to draft a tall buildings policy which could be included in Local Plan 2. By having a policy framework, this would also avoid some inappropriate applications or pre-application approaches for very tall buildings.
- 3.4 Although Core Strategy Policy UD1 does afford some protection with regard to quality and impact on adjoining areas there is currently no specific policy to assess tall building applications. With the government emphasis on delivering housing there is a risk that if schemes containing tall buildings were refused under UD1 the decision could be challenged on appeal, and costs could be incurred.
- 3.5 Following on from the officer and member workshops with Design South East held in August 2015, an emerging policy was discussed by the Planning Policy Advisory Group in September 2015. The emerging policy is contained in Appendix A.
- 3.6 Whilst this is still work in progress, the final policy will need to define what we mean by tall buildings and where they might be considered appropriate. A number of other authorities have been tackling this issue and have come up with the following range of approaches:

## Other local authorities local plan definition of tall buildings

	<b>Mid-rise</b>		<b>Tall</b>	<b>Very Tall</b>
<b>Hackney (2014)</b>	18-29 metres(6-9 storeys)		30-45 metres(10-15 storeys)	46 metres + (16 storeys)
<b>Adur-Worthing</b>	Cabe standards/EH guidance			
<b>Wandsworth/ Nine Elms</b>	No breakdown of category locational metre restriction. Up to 150m Vauxhall tower 180m			
<b>Portsmouth 2012</b>			6 stores or 20m +	
<b>Reading 2008</b>			Over 10 commercial storeys or equivalent.	Landmark towers up to 25 towers.
<b>Birmingham 2003</b>			15 storeys 8 storeys	
<b>Brent</b>			25+ m high (82 feet or 9 storeys)	
<b>Barnet (2006)</b>			30m +height	
<b>Ealing (2004)</b>			20m+	
<b>Merton (2010)</b>	Suburban low rise – 0-3	Mid rise 4-6	High rise 7-10 Prominent High rise – 11+	Large one off landmarks

3.7 Officers consider that an approach similar to that used by Merton would be appropriate in Watford, and that it would be appropriate to refer to building heights in metres as well as number of storeys. This approach was supported by members of the Planning Policy Advisory Group who agreed that:

- it was important for the Council to take a proactive approach on this issue. This should identify a limited number of landmark sites
- any policy should include guidelines defining tall buildings – members supported a similar approach to that taken in Merton
- high quality design was crucial for all parts of the development, including any social or affordable housing
- developments should give proper consideration to public amenities and play areas to encourage a sense of community
- underground car parking was desirable
- any new developments should undertake appropriate archaeological surveys.

3.8 The proposed policy would identify which areas might be suitable for tall buildings, the range of heights that could be appropriate and other relevant factors such as views to be protected.

3.9 Other matters being considered include setting out how many tall buildings might be appropriate in area specific locations, the number and nature of taller building clusters;

how different uses can be integrated both vertically and horizontally within the building to support new and existing communities and whether public art should be an integral part of the scheme.

- 3.10 Work is currently being progressed on the evidence to support the policy in terms of identifying the most appropriate locations for tall buildings, the scale that could be achieved in those locations and the views and vistas that could be protected or enhanced by a landmark building. A further workshop with Design South East has been arranged for 4 November which will further inform the policy and potential locations.
- 3.11 Given that Local Plan 2 will not be adopted until 2017 and that applications for tall buildings will soon be made, it is proposed that work on a Tall Buildings Supplementary Planning Document is progressed which would set out detailed design advice for tall buildings, which could support the adopted Core Strategy policies, and be used ahead of the adoption of LP2. This would be subject to consultation alongside the draft policy.

#### 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the costs associated with consultation will be covered by the Local Plan budget.

##### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained in the body of the report.

##### 4.3 **Equalities**

- 4.3.1 Policy UD1 of the adopted Core Strategy already requires design of new developments to be inclusive. An equalities impact assessment of the Local Plan Part 2 will be undertaken before the policies progress to publication stage.

##### 4.4 **Potential Risks**

Note that the table below sets out the risks associated with **not** including a policy on tall buildings in Local Plan Part 2. It is considered that the preparation of a policy and a supplementary planning document will mitigate the risks and provide clarity to future investors.

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
<i>Without a policy, multiple tall buildings applications could be received on an ad hoc basis across the borough rather than in planned locations.</i>	3	3	9
<i>Risk of appeal costs</i>	3	3	9
<i>Lack of policy could undermine role of SPAs</i>	3	3	9
<i>Tall buildings in wrong locations would increase service demands ( e.g. school places)</i>	2	2	4

*Those risks scoring 9 or above are considered significant and will need specific attention in project management. They will also be added to the service's Risk Register.*

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 No specific staffing implications.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 No accommodation implications

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 Community Safety is covered by Policy UD1 of the adopted Core Strategy, which will apply alongside any tall buildings policy.

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 All Local Plan policies are subject to sustainability appraisal which will also be consulted upon before the plan is submitted for examination.

Appendices

Appendix A – draft tall buildings policy.

Background Papers

None

File Reference

None