

Matter 13: Tall Buildings

Eastfield Estate

Participant Statement on behalf of Clarion Housing Group

May 2022

Matter 13: Tall Buildings

Matter 13: Is the Plan's approach to tall buildings grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics, in general conformity with the London Plan, and are the Plan's policies relating to tall buildings effective?

Issue (i): Is the Plan in general conformity with Policy D9 of the London Plan insofar as the approach to Tall Buildings is concerned?

Questions:

1. **Does the development plan define what is considered a tall building for specific localities; and is the plan clear and consistent in its terminology relating to 'tall', 'taller' and 'mid-rise' buildings?**
 - a. Modified policy D12.6 defines "tall" buildings in the borough as those with a minimum height of 21m from the ground level to the top of the uppermost storey. London Plan (LP) policy does not require differentiation between tall and taller buildings therefore for clarity, and consistency in terminology, references to 'taller' should be replaced by 'tall' in the draft Local Plan.
2. **Is it clear where in the Borough that tall buildings may be appropriate, and has the process for defining such areas included engagement with neighbouring boroughs that may be affected?**
 - a. LP Policy D9 (B) explains how Boroughs, through local plans, should identify suitable locations for tall buildings with appropriate heights also identified. It also states that any such locations should be identified on maps in Development Plans.
 - b. Supporting LP paragraph 3.9.1 states that *"...tall buildings can form part of a plan-led approach to facilitating regeneration opportunities and managing future growth, contributing to new homes and economic growth, particularly in order to make optimal use of the capacity of sites which are well-connected by public transport and have good access to services and amenities."*
 - c. In acknowledging the above, draft policy D12.6 confirms that *"in the right locations, tall buildings can make important contributions towards delivering new homes, economic growth and sense of place"*. Part 1 then goes on to identify these *"right"* locations and provides a list of appropriate locations to include sites within the Estates Local Plan (ELP) Development Plan Document (DPD)

2018¹, including at the Eastfields Estate site. Consistent with LP paragraph 3.9.1, this is a sustainable location which through the draft Local Plan, and adopted Estates Local Plan has been identified for planned growth at a sustainable location, in proximity to a rail station, with capacity for optimisation. The estate is also identified on the 'Map of appropriate locations for all buildings' included after the policy wording in the modified draft Local Plan.

- d. The ELP contains site specific policies to be applied to the masterplanning of the large estate sites in order to deliver a high-quality design-led masterplanning approach informed by townscape and visual impact analysis, stakeholder engagement and design scrutiny via design review panel. It also includes estate specific spatial diagrams to accompany the site-specific policies therefore it is not necessary for the draft Local Plan to duplicate these or to provide further detail.
- e. With regards to engagement with neighbouring boroughs, in preparing the ELP, LBM consulted with the adjoining boroughs: London Borough of Wandsworth, London Borough of Sutton, Royal Borough of Richmond, Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames and London Borough of Croydon. This is confirmed in the Statement of Consultation Submission (March 2017)² which was submitted for Examination prior to the adoption of the ELP.
- f. Draft Modified Policy D12.6 therefore clearly identifies where tall buildings may be an appropriate form of development, and the Council has appropriately engaged with neighbouring boroughs.

¹ Submission Document reference 0D25

²

https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files?file=sd8_statement_of_consultation_estates_local_plan.pdf
[Accessed: 16th May 2022) – page 154

Issue (ii): Is the Plan's approach to tall buildings based on local context and grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics?

Questions:

- 1. Are locations and appropriate building heights for tall buildings clearly identified on maps; and are proposed MMs which would bring about the inclusion of strategic heights diagrams justified and underpinned by relevant evidence, such as the Borough's ongoing Character Study, the findings of any relevant conservation area appraisals, or the implications of the heritage assets identified as being "at risk" (e.g Upper Morden Conservation Area)?**
 - a. Yes. Eastfields is clearly identified in the 'Map of appropriate locations for tall buildings policy illustrating D12.6 part 1 (a-f)' which has been included in the modified draft Local Plan
 - b. A Strategic Height Diagram has not been included for Eastfields. This is justified because the ELP DPD, which will remain part of the Development Plan, includes site specific policies for Eastfields including in relation to Townscape (ELP Policy EP E1) and Building Heights (ELP Policy EP E8). The ELP also includes vision diagrams to accompany the site specific policies.
 - c. The ELP DPD was justified and underpinned by site specific evidence including, inter alia, a detailed Case for Regeneration, Socio-economic analysis, Housing Needs Study, Urban Design Review and Visual Impact Study; and an appropriate engagement exercise was carried out by the Council during the plan-making process.
- 2. Is there any specific evidence to justify tall buildings sites allocated in the Plan, and are policies clear as to the scale of building likely to be acceptable on such sites?**
 - a. Yes, specific evidence is available to justify tall buildings within Eastfields.
 - b. Urban design and townscape analysis was carried out to inform the ELP including the Eastfields Urban Design Review 2015. This identified that the physical separation of the site from its surroundings presented an opportunity, through regeneration, to *"create a distinctive new character for Eastfields with greater variation in architectural treatment, building heights, dwelling types and sizes"*.

- c. The subsequent adoption of the ELP sets out site specific policies, including vision diagrams, providing support for potential tall buildings and guiding the approach to scale, including policies EP E1 (Townscape) and EP E8 (Building heights).
- d. Outline planning permission has also been granted in 2019 (ref: 17/P1717), with amendments in 2022 (ref: 21/P4078) for buildings up to 35.85m above ground level as part of comprehensive regeneration approach for the Eastfields Estate whereby heights appropriately step up from lower scale development to the west and aid legibility. The high quality masterplanning design-led approach supports the optimisation of this large site. Extensive engagement and detailed contextual analysis was carried out in preparing the masterplan, with townscape and visual impact assessment supporting this process. The townscape and visual impact assessment submitted with the outline application concluded that: *“Overall, the massing strategy is well thought out and aims to create a coherent masterplan, which will give the new estate some presence within its wider context and make it more legible as a place.”* Subsequent to this reserved matters approval was granted in April 2022 for the first phases of development which will deliver tall buildings within the approved maximum parameters.
- e. In assessing the scale and height of the masterplan proposals the Council officer’s report to planning committee confirmed: *“The proposed height strategy across the whole estate is acceptable be in accordance with the provisions of the Estates Local Plan 2018. As the site is part of a key regeneration area, the principle of tall buildings is supported in certain areas within the estate and confirmed by Policy EP E8 of the Estates Local Plan 2018” (para.13.23).*
- f. The Merton Borough Character Study continues to recognise the suitability of the estate to be ‘re-imagined’ where there is opportunity for *“More fundamental intervention through the redevelopment of larger sites or centres to be bolder about the level of change, using the prevailing character from surrounding areas to influence re-design”*. The Study confirms that tall buildings are suited to areas identified to be re-imagined (page 132) and based on its framework for character-led tall buildings, it does not identify any sensitivities to tall building development at Eastfields (page 136 & 137). Instead, based on the considerations identified for determining the suitability of parts of the borough for tall buildings, the evidence base reinforces the suitability of the estate for tall buildings noting its proximity to a station, proximity to a local park, and the regeneration opportunity (page 138 & 139).
- g. Tall buildings at Eastfields are also supported when considered against LP Policy H1 to appropriately optimising the potential of the site, particularly given the proximity of Eastfields to Mitcham Eastfields station and the high quality design-led approach that underpinned the

preparation of the approved masterplan. The building heights strategy, incorporating tall buildings, helps to optimise housing potential, and this in turn will help to support the linked regeneration programme for the three housing estate regeneration schemes (Eastfields, High Path and Ravensbury) which are supported by the ELP. The linked regeneration programme of the three estates will deliver over 2,500 new homes (uplift of at least 1,375) over the plan period³. As such, Eastfields and the other two Estates are very important contributors to the Councils housing supply trajectory, and in ensuring that the draft Local Plan is positively prepared and effective in addressing housing need and boosting housing delivery in accordance with the NPPF.

- h. The ELP contains site specific policies to be applied to the masterplanning of the large estate sites in order to deliver a high-quality design-led masterplanning approach informed by townscape and visual impact analysis, stakeholder engagement and design scrutiny via design review panel. It also includes estate specific spatial diagrams to accompany the site-specific policies therefore it is not necessary for the draft Local Plan to duplicate these or to specify building heights.
- i. It is therefore considered that there is site-specific evidence to justify that Eastfields is appropriate for tall buildings. It is not necessary to provide further detail within the draft Local Plan having regard to the site specific ELP policies which will appropriately guide the scale of development.

Issue (iii): Are the Plan's policies relating to tall buildings effective?

Questions:

- 2. **There is no inclusion of any criteria in the policy to relate tall buildings to public transport accessibility; in this regard, should the policy relate to PTAL levels, and if so, how? Should the policy be extended to other areas with good public transport access?**
 - a. We agree that the draft policy should be extended to areas with good public transport access. We do not agree that the larger sites within the Estates Local Plan or other sites which are capable of being masterplanned, such as High Path and Eastfields, require any reference to specific PTAL rating. As outlined above, the case for regeneration, and suitability for tall buildings, on the estate

³ This excludes homes already delivered in the first phase of High Path (134 homes completed in 2022) and first phase of Ravensbury (21 homes completed in 2021).

has already been appropriately evidenced and examined, via the adoption of the ELP and via the consideration of the approved masterplan.

- b. LP Policy H1 seeks the optimisation of housing delivery on sites *“which are located 800m distance of a station or town centre boundary”*. This recognises the suitability of these sites for higher density development having regard to good access to public transport and amenities. It would therefore be appropriate for the draft policy D12.6 to embed similar wording instead.
- c. When considering suitability for tall buildings development, the Merton Borough Character Study also gives weight to considering the proximity to town or local centres, Opportunity or Intensification Areas, and proximity to a train stations. With regards to the latter it says *“In addition to taking advantage of the accessibility this affords, the immediate setting of stations tends to be urban in character and therefore more suitable for accommodating tall buildings. Often train stations can provide areas of focused regeneration, where tall buildings can help contribute positively to defining a new, higher density character”*. This lends support to repeating the criteria in London Plan Policy H1 rather than focusing on PTAL ratings in isolation.

6. Is the Plan consistent with the Estates Local Plan insofar as that adopted DPD’s policies relating to tall buildings are concerned? Are there any MMs suggested to achieve consistency in these regards?

- a. Yes, the Plan is consistent with the ELP in relation to tall buildings. Part 1. e) of draft policy D12.6 identifies sites within the ELP (namely Eastfields and High Path) as locations where tall buildings may be acceptable. Part 2. a) to g) then lists a range of overarching development management considerations to inform the assessment of whether tall buildings would be acceptable including that they are *“appropriately sized and located and demonstrate they do not undermine local character and heritage assets and their settings through townscape analysis”*. This is consistent with ELP Policy EP E8 which says that *“Building heights must be based on a comprehensive townscape appraisal and visual assessment which builds on the analysis included in this document. Any strategy for building heights must make a positive contribution to the existing townscape, character and local distinctiveness of the area”*.