

Matter 3 Spatial Strategy

Tall Building Zones

Q3.2 Are the Tall Building Zones listed in policy D4 Table I and designated on the policies map, and the “height range maximum” for each, justified and will they be effective in helping to meet the identified needs for housing and other development in an appropriate way that is consistent with national policy and the London Plan?

We consider that the maximum 20-storey height limit on the Limmo site allocation (N4.SA4) is unsound for the following reasons:

- **It is not justified** – It is not based on appropriate or robust evidence. The Council has not demonstrated that this is the most appropriate strategy taking into account reasonable alternatives and the available evidence and overall planning considerations. The height limits entirely disregard the existing and emerging townscape and tall buildings context.
- **It is not positively prepared** – The 20-storey cap on development heights on the Limmo site would demonstrably fail to fully optimise the development potential of this substantial 5-hectare vacant brownfield site in view of the site specific opportunities and existing townscape context. This is demonstrated by our evidence detailed below.
- **It is not effective or deliverable** – the 20-storey cap on development heights would significantly constrain development viability and restrict the quantum of overall and affordable housing that is achievable on the site. This is a key consideration given the site specific development constraints which potentially limit the buildable area and also noting the infrastructure delivery requirements.

We question whether the proposed approach is therefore consistent with the overarching strategic and national policy imperative to make best use of suitable, available vacant brownfield sites, in particular, the requirement to make effective use of land, as set out in Chapter II of the NPPF.

In our view the proposed maximum height cap would unnecessarily constrain the potential for us to fully optimise the site’s development capacity via a design-led / masterplan-led process, in line with the London Plan.

The Council’s evidence base

The Council’s Characterisation and Tall Buildings studies have been undertaken in a spatial vacuum with the scope of the studies restricted to the borough of Newham only. This is an inappropriate and flawed approach to a site such as Limmo which is located on the far western edge of the borough. Land to the west and south of the Limmo site boundary falls within Tower Hamlets and this has been almost entirely ignored in the two studies.

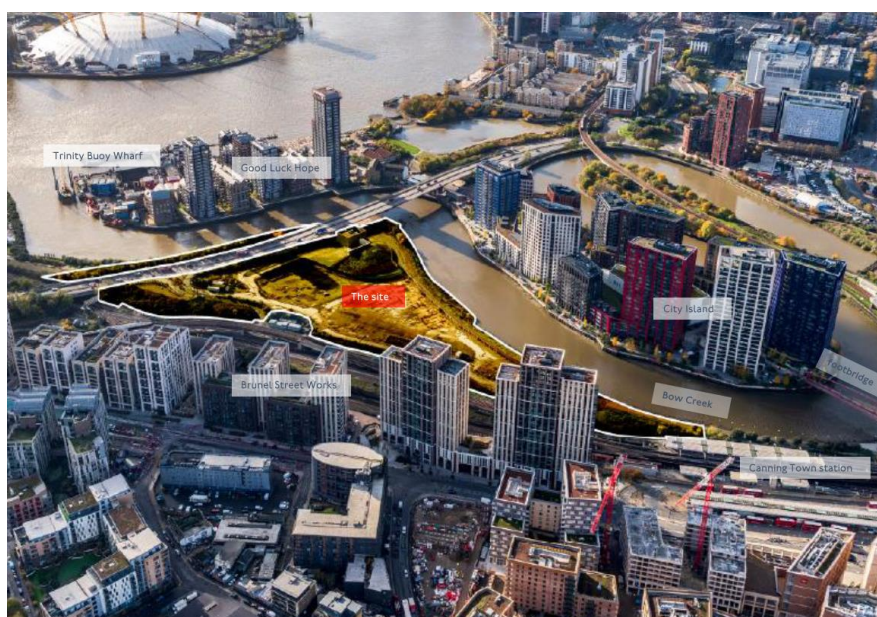
The existing context on all sides of the Limmo site is defined by tall buildings and high density residential-led development, as shown in Figure I below. The constructed building heights on the adjacent sites are as follows:

- Brunel Street Works (Newham) – up to 26-storeys
- Manor Road Quarter (Newham) – up to 30-storeys
- London City Island (Tower Hamlets) – up to 27-storeys
- Good Luck Hope (Tower Hamlets) – up to 30-storeys

In addition, Crown Wharf (Newham) to the north provides buildings up to 30-storeys (planning permission 23/00655/FUL).

The Orchard Buoy Wharf scheme also now has resolution to grant in Tower Hamlets (up to 24-storeys).

Figure I - Existing tall buildings context surrounding the Limmo site:



In its evidence, the Council has failed to justify why there should be a significant step down in heights on the Limmo site compared to the existing and planned tall building context, especially given the particular characteristics, opportunities and constraints on this site.

The Council's Characterisation and Tall Buildings zone studies suggest that that maximum heights on Limmo have been set to '*avoid saturation*', noting that '*a significant number of tall buildings have already been established*'. Concerns regarding the potential '*saturation*' of tall buildings / '*saturation of the skyline*' are not substantiated or evidenced in either study in terms of townscape or environmental impacts or harm.

The term '*saturated*' is not defined and is considered to be ambiguous and inappropriate in this context. This is an arbitrary and subjective approach which is not supported or justified by any robust evidence and is unsound.

The proposed maximum height cap of 20-storeys has not been set based on specifically identified development or townscape constraints in terms of LVMF strategic views, local views, designated heritage assets or environmental constraints.

Newham's tall building study is not supported by massing studies or townscape or visual appraisals. In our view, this should be considered an essential requirement for a site of this size and importance in terms of housing delivery, connectivity and place making.

Montagu Evans Report (Feb 2023)

To support our Regulation 18 and 19 consultation responses, we commissioned Montagu Evans to undertake a baseline townscape and heritage appraisal of the Limmo site. The report demonstrates that additional height up to 30-storeys / 100 metres at Limmo Peninsula would not give rise to any adverse heritage, townscape or visual effects. This assumes an appropriate variation in heights and massing across the site.

In contrast with the Council's evidence base, the Montagu Evans report provides a detailed townscape appraisal that is bespoke to the site, based on an understanding of surrounding receptors, including heritage assets. The assessment relies on industry standard VuCity software to establish a zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) around the Limmo site. In line with best practice, this ZTV is then overlaid with heritage assets and designated strategic and local views to help identify potential visual receptors and viewpoints for testing in terms of the potential impact of tall buildings in this location.

Importantly, the ZTV is not restricted to Newham and covers and covers an appropriate range of immediate, mid-range and longer-distance views, as required by London Plan Policy D9. This includes heritage assets and visual receptors within Newham, Tower Hamlets, RB Greenwich. It includes an assessment of London View Management Framework (LVMF) strategic views and consideration of the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site and numerous conservation areas within the three boroughs. A total of 25 views are included in the report.

The Montagu Evans report shows that buildings up to 30-storeys in height would not actually be visible from a number of the locations in the local and wider area due to the surrounding development context.

The report also shows that, where tall buildings would be visible in certain views, they have the potential to contribute positively to the existing and emerging townscape character and skyline and enhance legibility, in line with London Plan Policy D9.

The report was finalised in February 2023 and is appended to this Statement.

The Montagu Evans report conclusions are as follows:

- *'In our view, the site is capable of accommodating buildings in excess of the prescriptive limits expressed in the draft Local Plan and is specifically a location that can accommodate tall buildings up to 30 storeys / 100m as part of a development containing a variety of building heights.'*
- *'Identified appropriate heights should be based on a site-specific appraisal. On that basis we strongly disagree that building heights should be limited to isolated heights of 50m and 60m across the entire site, as that does not provide helpful guidance as to the locations of tall buildings and will inhibit the comprehensive planning of tall buildings at Canning Town.'*

Deliverability considerations

We are concerned that the 20-storey cap on development heights would significantly restrict the quantum of overall and affordable housing that is achievable on the site (and other public benefits such as a local park), particularly given the site constraints and planning policy requirements which would need to be addressed.

The draft site allocation sets out a number of infrastructure requirements, including:

- a 2 hectare local park.
- a new river wall;
- a new riverside path (Leaway river walk extension); and
- a new pedestrian bridge to connect the site to Canning Town (Brunel Street Works bridge).

The Brunel Street Works Bridge is expected to cost approximately £13.5m.

In addition to this, there are other constraints on the site, including:

- underground high voltage UKPN cables and overhead power lines and pylons which create exclusion / no build zones on the eastern site boundary.
- gas and water mains to the south of the site which are subject to easement / exclusion zone restrictions)
- the complexity and cost associated with building over the Elizabeth Line tunnels and vent shafts
- an exclusion zone to the new river wall of approx. 11m

Planning policy expectations in terms of affordable housing also clearly necessitate a certain quantum of development floorspace on the site to ensure viability and deliverability.

Achieving all of these planning policy expectations on this particular challenging site would simply not be viable or deliverable within a 20-storey height cap, given the restricted developable site area and infrastructure requirements.

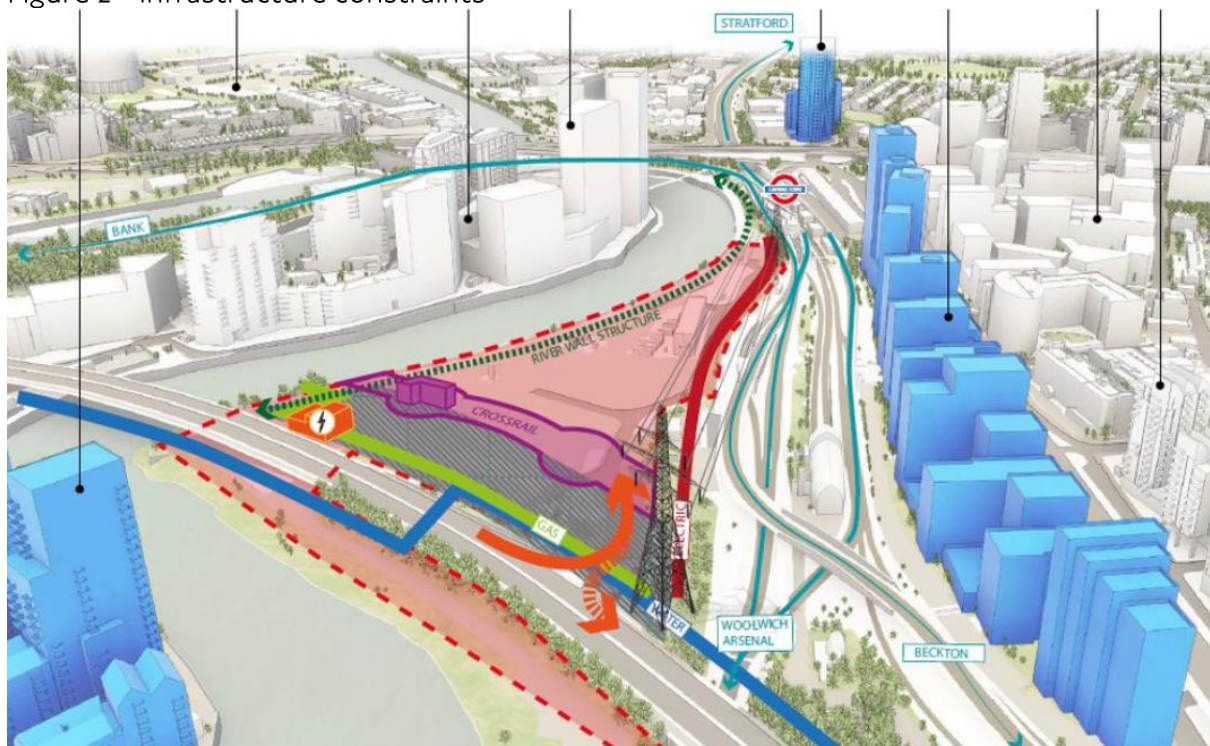
The requirement for a local park is relevant here. Our experience on other large sites (eg. Earls Court) is that delivering generously sized parks on constrained sites is likely to necessitate a degree of flexibility on height and the provision of taller elements.

Capping the development at 20-storeys on the Limmo site would not support us in helping to optimise the open space provision to address the draft Local Plan requirements and address the local deficiency in terms of access to open space.

The same quantum of floorspace would be required within a greater development footprint, thereby reducing provision of open space on the site. It is clear that the Council has not engaged in this level of design detail.

We cannot find any evidence that the Council has grappled with these site specific viability or delivery challenges when setting the proposed height cap, or other planning requirements (eg. open space). As shown below, these constraints limit the area of the site which can potentially be built upon.

Figure 2 – infrastructure constraints



The need to optimise development potential

The following key site specific factors and planning considerations are also relevant:

- Limmo is a large (5 ha) strategic site allocation with the potential for good public transport access levels (PTAL) once key infrastructure works are completed.
- It is located within the Royal Docks / Beckton Riverside Opportunity Area where the London Plan (2021) supports the provision of 30,000 new homes and 41,500 jobs and falls within Canning Town Centre. This is a location where the potential for housing provision should be fully optimised.
- The Newham Characterisation Study identifies the Limmo site as being a brownfield site which is not in an area which is sensitive to change and is in a location which has a high opportunity for growth.
- The site is not located within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings or structures within the site or within close proximity. The closest conservation area to the site is a considerable distance away to the west. The site does not have the potential to impact any local or strategic views.
- The site is of a substantial size (its dimensions are approximately 330 metres in length and ranges from between 50 and 180 metres in width).
- Limmo is effectively an island site, bounded by the surrounding waterways, major roads and rail infrastructure. There is sufficient space to locate tall buildings within the site in a sensitive and appropriate manner without causing any unacceptable adverse wind, daylight or sunlight impacts to surrounding residential homes.
- This is therefore precisely the type of location where housing capacity should be fully optimised in line with London Plan Policies H1, D3, GG2.
- As shown below these boundary features all provide a significant buffer to the closest residential properties. Underground cables and overhead power lines result in exclusion zone / no build zones running along the eastern site boundary. This would therefore ensure a significant buffer and set back to Brunel Street Works development to the east.
- The inclusion of taller buildings would assist in freeing up ground space to maximise the provision of public open space, which is a key requirement in the site allocation.
- Whilst the site is affected by London City Airport, the recommended height restriction to account for this constraint is approximately 30-storeys, so would greatly exceed the maximum height allowance in the draft Local Plan.



Conclusion

Overall, we consider that the 20-storey maximum height restriction on the Limmo site is not justified or supported by evidence and would unnecessarily constrain the potential to fully optimise the site potential via a design-led process. It would limit the potential for the site to contribute towards meeting housing need and maximise public open space provision and deliver new infrastructure, in line with the site allocation.

London Plan Policy D9 Part B requires local planning authorities in London to set 'appropriate' tall building heights within tall building zones. We consider that this provides flexibility for boroughs to set 'appropriate' height ranges (rather than maximum height caps), particularly in tall building zone location such as Limmo. We recommend the changes to the wording of draft Policy D4 which were set out in our Reg I9 representation.

Word count: 2,061 words

Appendix 1 – Montagu Evans townscape and tall buildings study Limmo Peninsula (2023)

Appendix 2 - Existing and permitted building heights map Limmo