



**Wigan Council**

**Planning Advice Note on  
Applications for Tall Buildings**

**July 2008**

# **1. Prelude**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Wigan Borough is not a place renowned for its tall buildings. The main towns of the borough are generally low rise, punctured by church spires and mill buildings associated with the borough's industrial heritage.

As with other parts of the UK, the 1960s and 1970s saw an increase in the development of taller buildings throughout the borough. Some of these have been criticised in the past because of their design quality, inadequate security measures and ambiguous public and private spaces.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest to develop tall buildings in Wigan Borough.

In the right place, tall buildings can make a positive contribution to the area in which they are located. Individually, or in groups they can be excellent works of architecture in their own right and can affect the image and identity of the area as a whole. In the right place they can serve as beacons of regeneration, and stimulate further investment. The design and construction of innovative tall buildings can also serve to extend the frontiers of building and environmental technology.

## **1.2 Purpose of Guidance Note**

Proposals for tall buildings are often submitted to the council with inadequate information, which can lead to significant delays in the determination of applications. The implications of such developments can be complex. As such, they need to be carefully assessed to ensure that all of the potential impacts can be fully understood and addressed.

The Planning Advice Note on Applications for Tall Buildings sets out what additional information the council expects to be submitted with such applications.

The Advice Note is not intended to be a replacement for the council's existing plans and policies but rather provides additional guidance on the specific issues relating to planning applications for tall buildings. The document is intended to be informal guidance and will be used as a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications and other matters throughout the borough.

### **1.3 Definition of Tall Buildings**

Given that tall buildings have different impacts in different areas, a definition which takes account of urban, suburban and rural locations is required.

For the purposes of this Advice Note, a tall building is defined as:

- A building over 18 metres in height; and/or
- A building of any height, which is substantially taller than the predominant height of the buildings in the surrounding area; and/or
- A building that would make a significant impact on the skyline.

## **2. Consultations**

### **2.1 Consultation with Council**

Applicants of tall building proposals are encouraged to enter into pre-application discussions with the council as soon in the design process as possible (Appendix 1).

Pre-application discussions will ensure formal applications can be dealt with in a more certain and speedy manner and the quality of decisions can be better assured. This should lead to both the early abandonment of fundamentally unacceptable schemes, and to the reworking or refinement of potentially good projects before detailed plans get finalised.

### **2.2 Consultation with External Bodies**

As part of pre-application discussions, the council may seek to involve the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), English Heritage or RENEW Northwest to assess tall building proposals (Appendix 2).

These are national and regional bodies with responsibility for promoting high standards in architecture and urban design and with the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. They can provide helpful and impartial advice in relation to a particular scheme. The appropriateness of consulting these bodies should be discussed as part of pre-application meetings. Applicants should be encouraged to liaise with these bodies in advance of application submission if this is considered to be appropriate.

The council may also seek input from these bodies once an application has been lodged, which may include a 'design review' of proposals.

### **2.3 Consultation with the Local Community**

Discussions with the local community can influence the scope and content of submissions, as they may raise queries and concerns that need to be addressed.

In accordance with the 'Statement of Community Involvement', prospective developers should seek to engage in pre-application discussions with people who may be affected by a proposal. Genuine engagement with the surrounding community early in the process can be beneficial for all those involved. Details of how this might be carried out are contained in council's 'Community Involvement in the Planning Application Process – A Step by Step Guide for Developers and Agents' and also in the 'Statement of Community Involvement'.

## **3. Submitting an Application**

### **3.1 Full and Outline Application**

Outline planning applications for tall building proposals are appropriate only in exceptional cases where the applicant is seeking to establish the principle of a tall building as an important element within a robust and credible masterplan.

In all other cases, the council will require tall building applications to be submitted for full planning permission.

### **3.2 Design and Access Statement**

In accordance with national planning guidance, all tall building proposals submitted to the council must include a Design and Access Statement as part of the application.

Wigan Council has produced a guide on how to prepare a Design and Access Statement, which should be considered prior to submission. Guidance has also been produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 'Circular 01/06' and by CABE in 'Design and Access Statements: How to write, read and use them'.

In addition to the requirements listed in the abovementioned documents, applications for tall buildings will be required to submit supplementary information. Wigan Council has used the evaluation criteria outlined in the CABE / English Heritage publication 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' as a basis for establishing the scope of the additional issues which may need to be addressed.

The following paragraphs explain the information that will be required, although it should be noted that not all criteria will be relevant to every site and Statements should be tailored to focus on the pertinent issues to ensure that it is concise and relevant.

#### **(a) The Relationship to Context**

Planning Policy Statement 1 makes it clear that designs which are inappropriate in their context are not acceptable. It is important therefore, that applicants demonstrate their proposals have emerged from a full assessment of a site's circumstances and characteristics. As well as this, tall buildings should have a positive relationship with relevant topographical features and other tall buildings.

- Statements should include a written and illustrated assessment of the existing characteristics of the area and its surrounds in terms of:
  - Natural topography
  - Scale and height of structures
  - Urban grain
  - Streetscape and built form
  - Open spaces
  - Rivers and waterways

- Important views, prospects and panoramas
- Effect on the skyline
- The following visual material may be required to illustrate the impact of tall buildings on the existing environment:
  - Cross sections: provide an accurate illustration of the size and massing of the proposed development in relation to their immediate context.
  - Photomontages: provide an accurate superimposition of an image of the proposed development onto a photograph of a view.
  - Computer modelling: provide a three dimensional view of proposals.
  - Models: provide a three dimensional view of proposals which are often easily understandable by the local community.
  - View analysis: a combination of near, middle and distant views of the proposed development may be required. Detailed guidelines for undertaking this work are contained in “Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment” by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

**(b) The Architectural Quality and Built Form**

Tall buildings should aim to set exemplary standards in design because of their high profile and local impact.

Applicants will need to:

- Describe in detail the rationale for the form and design of the proposal. This should be accompanied by detailed elevations and three dimensional drawings in colour to illustrate the design quality proposed. Precedents and references to other similar projects would be useful.
- Describe the massing of the proposal and how it is to be integrated into surrounding development. Illustrations should be provided to show how the massing creates an appropriate form (see point (a) above).
- Describe and illustrate how the form of the roof top enhances the skyline.
- Describe and illustrate how the building addresses and interacts with the street at ground floor level.
- Describe and illustrate the palette of materials, and its association and contribution to the local character.
- Describe and illustrate the relationship of the proposal to other structures proposed or existing.

- Describe and illustrate how the proposal contributes to the streetscape. Key issues for consideration include the need for:
  - Active frontages and natural surveillance.
  - Legible entrances.
  - An understanding of the relationship of the proposal to the existing streetscape.
  - A definition of the public realm.

### **(c) The Contribution to the Surrounding Area**

The inclusion of a mix of uses can help to give greater vitality to the public realm and create activity throughout the day increasing a perception of greater safety.

Applicants should detail the contribution to public space and facilities, both internally and externally, that the development will make in the area. The development should interact with, and contribute positively to its surroundings at street level; it should contribute to safety, diversity, vitality, social engagement and a 'sense of place'.

- Describe how the proposal supports and complements the surrounding land use pattern and local and future community needs.
- Describe how the proposal assists in delivering relevant housing and/or employment opportunities.
- Describe and illustrate how the proposal has been designed to create high quality public spaces and streets within the site and nearby. Particular consideration should be given to:
  - High design quality.
  - Climatic comfort.
  - Need for light sun and shade.
  - Adjacent uses.
  - Quality of materials.
- Applicants should describe and illustrate how the building contributes to the permeability of a site and the wider area; opportunities to offer improved accessibility, and, where appropriate, the opening up, or effective closure, of views to improve the legibility of the city and the wider townscape.

### **(d) The Sustainable Design and Construction of the Proposal**

For all forms of development, good design means sustainable design.

Proposals should seek to exceed the latest regulations and planning policies for minimising energy use and reducing carbon emissions over the lifetime of the development. The long-term resource and energy efficiency of tall buildings will be enhanced if their design can be adapted over time.

- Applicants should explain how the proposal will apply the best sustainable practices. Particular attention should be given to:

- Energy management, including on-site and the proposed building(s).
- Resource conservation, including the use of recycled aggregates.
- Waste management, including recycling both during and after construction and throughout the life of the building.
- Energy efficiency best practice.
- Flexibility of the design to easily accommodate new users over time.

### **(e) The Effect on the Local Environment**

Tall buildings can adversely affect the environmental quality of surrounding areas through the diversion of wind to ground level and through the overshadowing of adjacent buildings, streets and open spaces. The impact of these elements can be mitigated through good design and sensitive siting.

Applicants will need to:

- Describe, and where possible illustrate, how the design has considered the local climate.
- Explain, and where appropriate, illustrate how the proposals address the climatic effects of the proposal on its surroundings. Issues to be considered include:
  - Overshadowing.
  - The diversion of winds to ground level.
  - Glare reduction.
  - Night time appearance.
  - The environment and amenity of those in the vicinity of the building.
  - Potential impact on radio, communications and television equipment.

### **3.3 Additional Requirements**

In addition to the submission of a Design and Access Statement, applicants for tall buildings may be required to submit further details assessing the proposal and the immediate and wider areas affected. The additional requirements which may be requested are contained in the council's Validation Checklists for Planning Applications.

## **Definitions**

Height:

The vertical distance measured in metres between the natural surface level of the ground on which the building is sited or, where the natural surface has been excavated, the land of the adjoining public domain, and the topmost part of the structure above that point.

Substantially Taller:

In order to establish whether a building is substantially taller, applicants will be required to provide an assessment of the mean height of surrounding existing development. This assessment will extend to 100 metres in all directions from the proposed footprint. The council will then determine if the building is significantly taller. For the avoidance of doubt, it is the height of the building in the context of building heights throughout the 100 metre zone that will determine whether a building is significantly taller and not its relationship to buildings that immediately adjoin the proposed development.

## **Statement of Consultation and Representations**

The Planning Advice Note on Applications for Tall Buildings has been subject to a period of consultation prior to its adoption.

Throughout January and February 2008 the Draft Advice Note underwent a period of internal consultation within the council. A number of comments were received which were incorporated into the document.

The revised draft was presented to the joint Wigan / St. Helens Development Control / Building Control Service Users Forum on 11 March 2008. This also commenced a period of public consultation until 4 April 2008, where the Advice Note was advertised on the Wigan Council website. Letters were also sent to a number of target groups, inviting them to submit their comments on the revised draft. Two (2) comments were received.

The document was approved by Wigan Council's Planning Committee on 15 July 2008.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Wigan Council Contact Details**

[www.wigan.gov.uk](http://www.wigan.gov.uk)

Telephone:

Development Control Advice

West Team: Principal Planning Officer – 01942 488045

Principal Planning Officer – 01942 488046

Principal Planning Officer – 01942 404275

East Team: Principal Planning Officer – 01942 404263

Principal Planning Officer – 01942 404260

Urban Design and Conservation Advice – 01942 404254

Policy and Strategic Advice – 01942 404235

Email:

[planning@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:planning@wigan.gov.uk)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Useful Contact Details of External Bodies**

- **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)**

[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

- **English Heritage**

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

- **Renew North West**

[www.renew.co.uk](http://www.renew.co.uk)