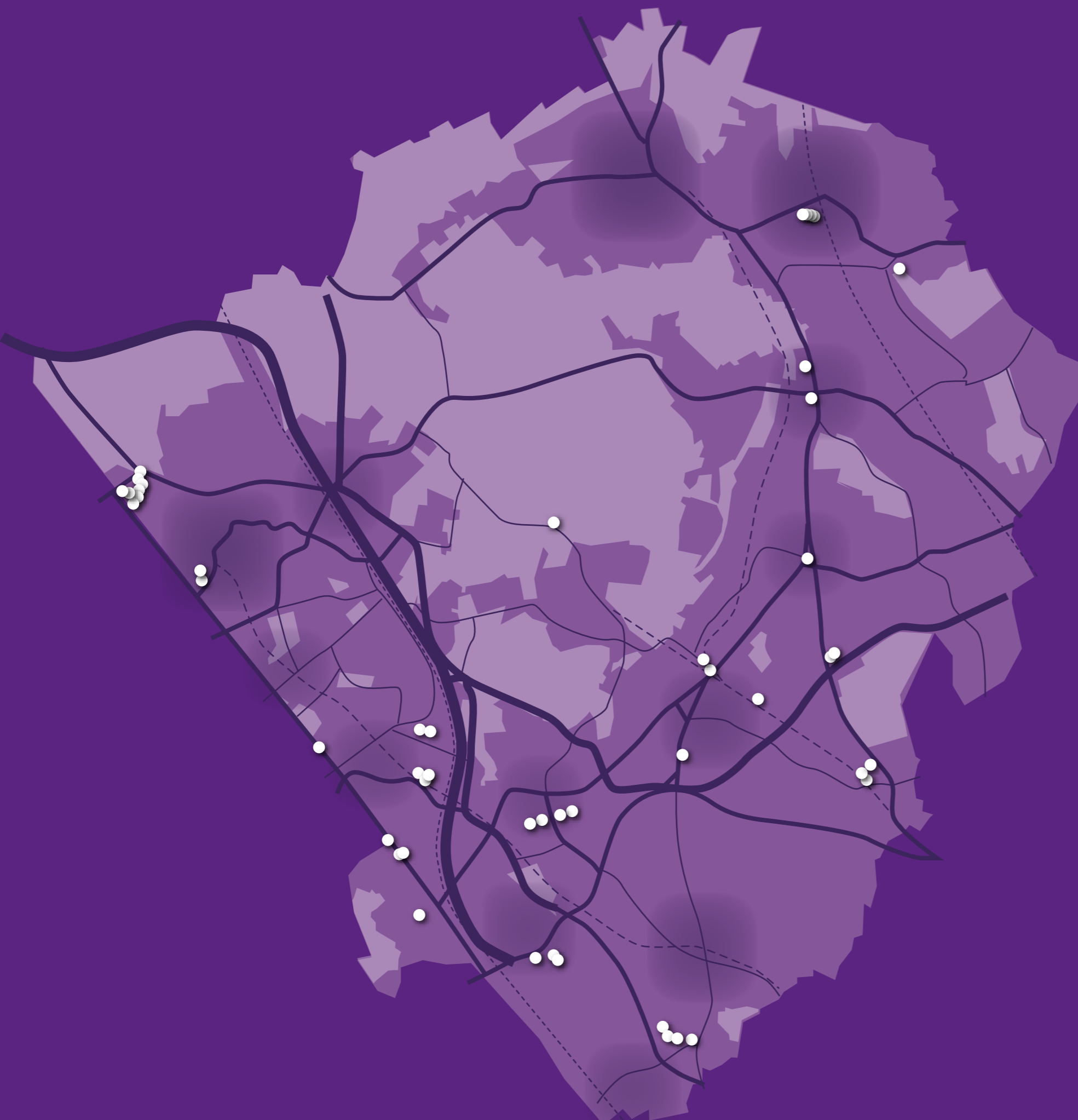


Tall Buildings Study of London Borough of Barnet

Final Report | November 2010





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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by Urban Practitioners on behalf of the London Borough of Barnet as a companion piece to the Barnet Characterisation study published in 2010, setting out the overall urban character of the borough. Its role is to provide supplementary information about the nature of tall buildings in the borough and their impact on their surroundings. It also then provides advice on the issues which should be evaluated during the consideration of any future proposals for tall buildings.

The Borough of Barnet is one which can expect to see considerable growth and change over the coming years and, in particular, significant population growth. It is anticipated that there will be pressure for tall buildings to play a part in delivering this new development and so it is important to understand the impact of existing tall buildings in the borough and to appreciate any lessons which can help to guide decisions for the future.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A TALL BUILDING?

The concept of a tall building is relative to context – a ten storey building which would be considered modest in a large city centre has a substantial presence in a largely suburban area like Barnet where the predominant character is two or at most three storeys.

Following a review of the various building typologies through the characterisation study the following ranges have been adopted for this analysis of tall buildings in the borough:

Low rise buildings: 1-3 storeys

This category essentially covers buildings which are domestic in scale, and hence accounts for the large part of the borough. This scale of development generally has little significant impact on the skyline and would not normally be singled out for its height.



Medium rise buildings: 4-7 storeys

There are numerous buildings, particularly in the town centres and along key routes, which fall into this category. These sometimes provide several storeys of residential accommodation above business uses but can also include medium rise blocks of flats or mansion blocks. The proportions of these blocks can vary, appearing broader in some cases and more slender in others. Whilst they can have an important role as local landmarks, particularly where they have been placed on junctions or other significant locations, they generally do not act as significant landmark blocks in wider scale views.



Tall buildings: 8 storeys and above

Buildings above eight storeys tend to take on the attributes of a tall building in a context such as Barnet. They are increasingly likely to be more slender in proportion and may play a more significant role as landmarks due to their greater prominence. Some examples, such as 1255 High Road (see later section) are slab buildings which are narrow in profile. Later buildings such as the Arts Depot (shown below) have increasingly broader profiles creating a bulkier appearance and having a significant impact.



EXISTING TALL BUILDINGS IN BARNET

MAPPING TALL BUILDINGS IN BARNET

Figure 1 shows the location of the buildings in the borough which are above the eight storey threshold and which should therefore be regarded as tall buildings. They range significantly in height, with the tallest being the 19 storey tower at the Metropolitan Police training centre in Colindale. Most are from the post-war period, with the large majority of the residential towers being 1960s. A notable tall older building is the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in Mill Hill (designed by the architect of the original Wembley Stadium, Maxwell Ayrton) which was completed in 1939 and has an imposing copper roof.

It should be noted that whilst the number of storeys is taken as a broad indication of height there is sometimes a difference between commercial and residential storey heights, with residential floor-to-floor dimensions typically being smaller than for commercial buildings.

21 buildings or clusters of buildings have been identified in the borough. These fall into a number of distinct groupings:

Historic corridors – The two key historic routes in the Borough are the Edgware Road corridor following the route of the Roman Watling Street along the valley bottom and the A1000 Corridor – the old route of the Great North Road linking the old town centres along the ridge line. Both of these routes have been the focus for continual renewal and intensification over time and include a spread of tall buildings.

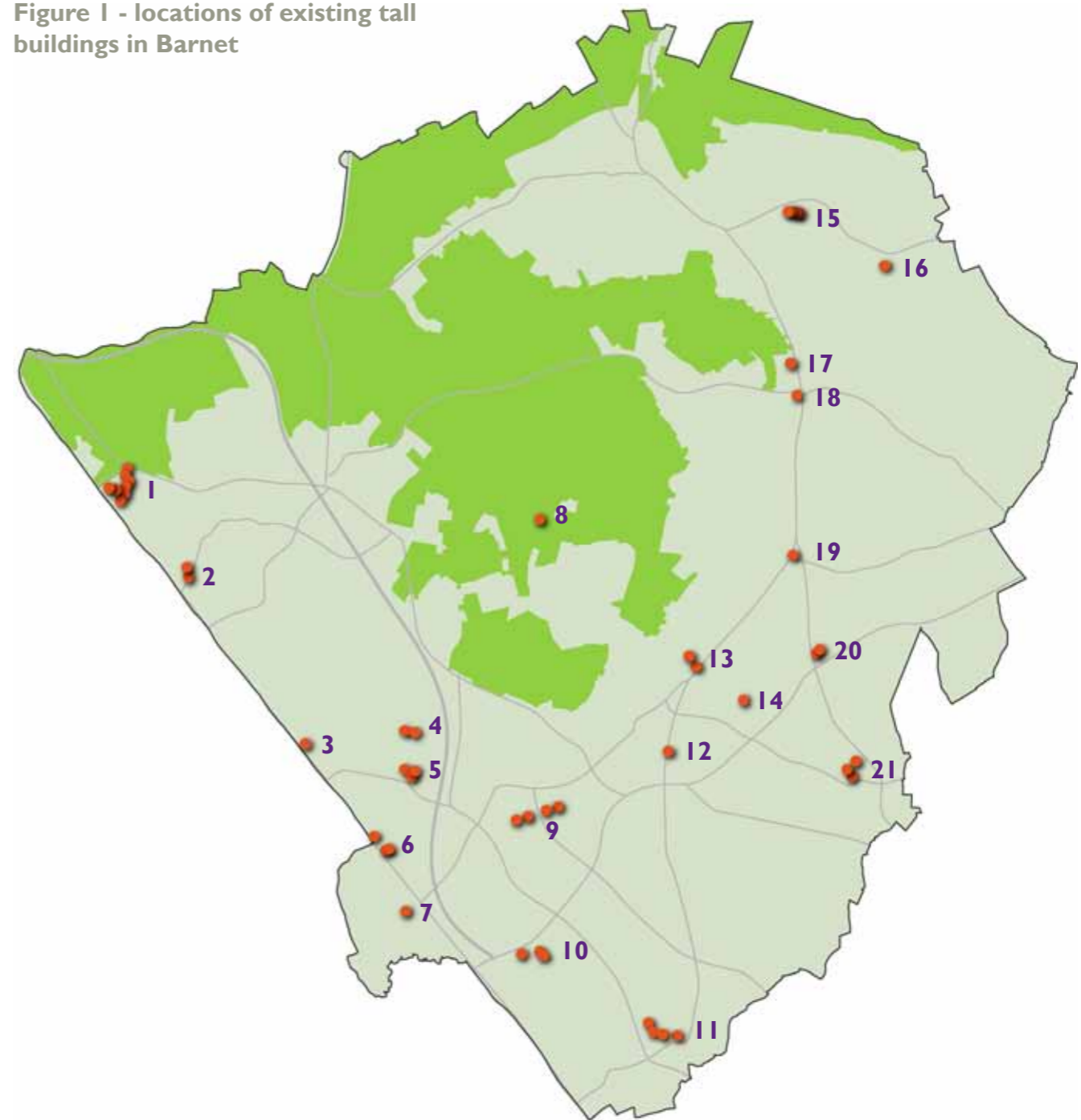
Town centre clusters – The centres at Finchley Church End, New Barnet and Edgware all feature clusters of taller buildings, reinforcing

their visibility and importance as both services centres and also transport nodes.

Residential clusters – There are a number of residential estates which feature tall buildings, typically dating from the 1960s, including Stonegrove and Spur Road, New Brent Street, Claremont Road and Granville Road. Like many other London suburbs these towers are generally not well regarded and in many cases are the subject of comprehensive renewal programmes. The results of the renewal programme in the Colindale area are now starting to be seen in the form of the new Beaufort Park scheme which itself features taller buildings within the design. Beyond the identifiable clusters there are also a couple of incidental residential buildings on Cat Hill, and the eastern end of Friern Barnet Road.

Non-residential buildings – away from the key corridors and centres there are a number of other non-residential tall buildings. These include the group of three towers at the police training centre in Hendon and the NIMR establishment on the Ridgeway in Mill Hill which have both been mentioned previously, along with the offices of Pentland Brands PLC on Squires Lane in Finchley.

Figure 1 - locations of existing tall buildings in Barnet



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1 - Stonegrove and Spur Road



2 - Edgware Town Centre



3 - Merit House, Edgware Road



4 - Beaufort Park



5 - Metropolitan Police Centre, Hendon



6 - BT Exchange and Hyde House, Edgware Road



7 - West Hendon



8 - National Institute for Medical Research



9 - Brent Street, Hendon



10 - Brent Cross



11 - Granville Road



12 - Mayflower Lodge, Regent's Park Road



13 - Finchley Central



14 - Pentland Lakeside, Squires Lane



15 - New Barnet



16 - Desmond House, East Barnet



17 - Northway House, Barnet High Road



18 - 1255 High Road



19 - North Finchley



20 - Barrett Homes (former TA centre)



21 - East Finchley

TALL BUILDINGS AND TOPOGRAPHY

One of the key groups of tall buildings identified in the borough is that which follows the historic routes. The Barnet Characterisation Study identified that the historic settlement pattern of the borough focussed on a linear group of settlements along both the Great North Road (the old A1) and along the A5, Edgware Road (the historic Roman road of Watling Street). These historic roads and centres have continued to be important in the growth of the Borough and so have continued to be corridors in which there is pressure for development and hence intensification of activity and development – leading to an inevitable rise in overall building scale.

The Edgware Road corridor lies in the valley floor – taller buildings in this area are therefore less likely to have a significant impact on key views from elevated vantage points, although they may have an impact on views to distant hills.

By contrast the Great North Road corridor is along a well defined ridge – this means that tall buildings within this area are likely to be highly visible and some examples have a significant impact on the skyline of the borough. This can have a positive effect if the building is both elegant and also provides a meaningful landmark to a place of significance. However, it is most often regarded as having a negative impact on the character of the area.

Figure 2 on this page shows the location of the tall buildings in Barnet in relation to the topography with land heights given above ordnance datum (AOD) following the Ordnance Survey convention. This clearly indicates those buildings which are located on high ground.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Topography and site lines should be a major factor in evaluating the suitability of any potential tall building projects in the borough. Whilst proposals for tall buildings in low-lying areas may or may not be acceptable, there is likely to be an even higher threshold of acceptability for any which stand on high ground and may be seen in silhouette. For these very prominent buildings it will be especially important to ensure that the design quality is excellent and that the location is significant enough to warrant a major landmark.
- Taller buildings in low lying areas are likely to be more acceptable, with key considerations more likely to relate to the detailed context such as the relationship with conservation areas or other constraints.

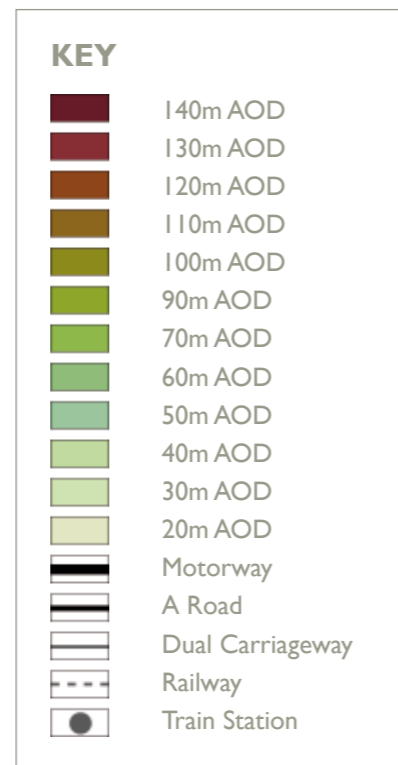
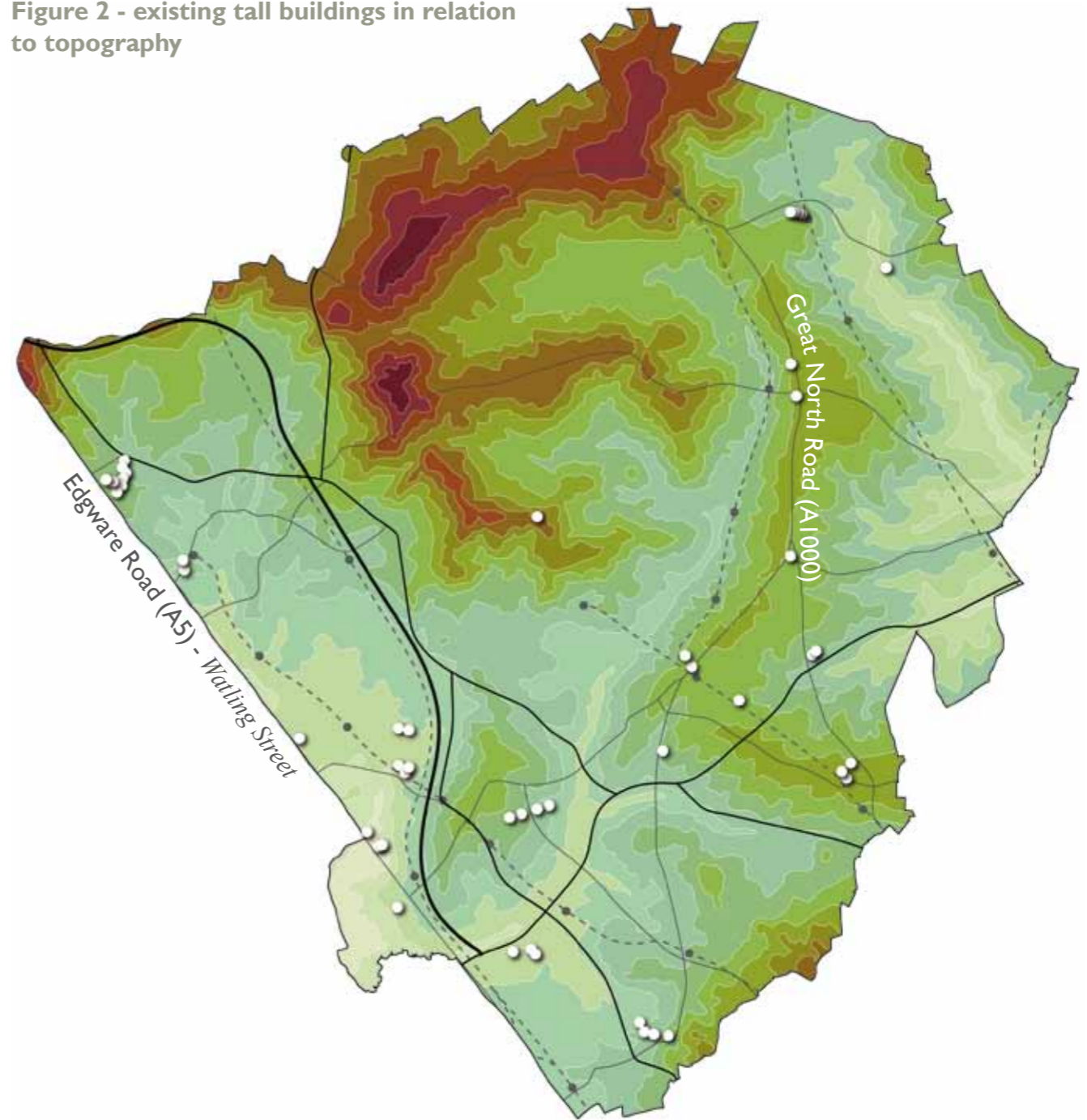


Figure 2 - existing tall buildings in relation to topography



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1255 High Road and Northway House are both on the line of the old Great North Road which follows the ridge. This makes them very prominent, as shown in this view from Belmont Avenue, Cockfosters



The group of towers on Granville Road viewed across Hendon Park. Their position on the side of the hill rather than the ridge makes them less prominent from this vantage point



Two views of the cluster of buildings in Beaufort Park taken from a short distance apart on Greyhound Hill. These demonstrate the importance of the viewing position on perceptions of impact.



TALL BUILDINGS AND ACCESSIBILITY

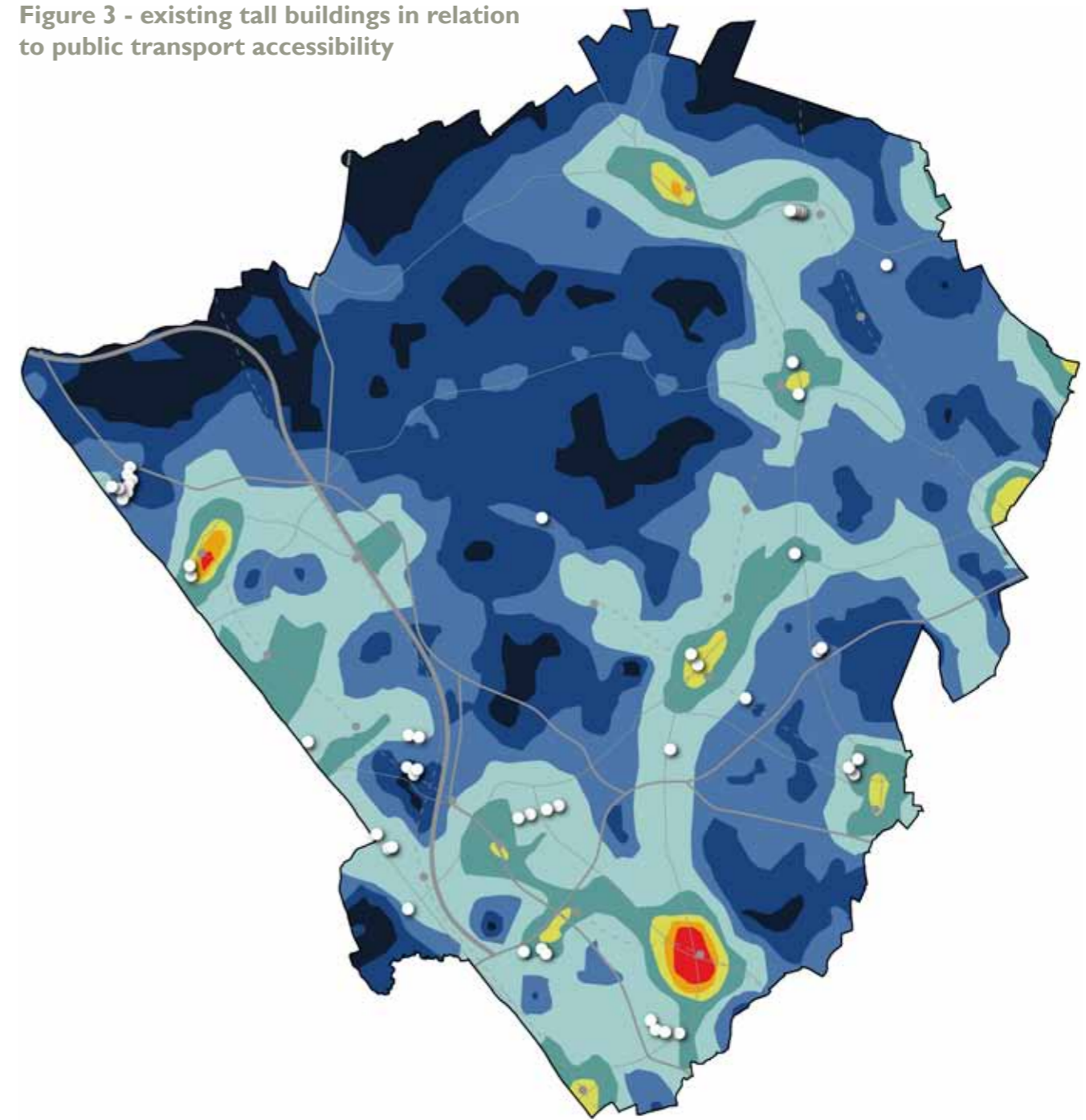
Tall buildings are capable of delivering a high population density which is best associated with good easy access to shops and services and good quality public transport links in order to provide sustainable forms of development. The analysis of the existing tall buildings shows that a significant number are in or close to town centres, whilst figure 3 shows the location of the existing tall buildings relative to the PTAL (public transport accessibility level).

When considering the PTAL level of a location the use of a building is largely immaterial. People living in a residential tower need good transport provision for commuting and access to shops and services whilst tall buildings used for business, academic or service use need to be accessible for staff and visitors.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Any proposals for tall buildings should be considered in the light of their likely PTAL level. There should be a general presumption against tall buildings or other very dense forms of development in areas where the PTAL level is low.
- The presence of existing tall buildings in a particular location is sometimes used to establish precedent for future tall buildings as part of a cluster. In an area where there is a low PTAL rating it should be considered whether or not this is appropriate.
- Where existing tall buildings are to be redeveloped the PTAL rating of the site should be reviewed. In the event that the PTAL rating is low it should be considered whether this is genuinely a location for a tall building. Alternatively, if tall buildings are regarded as essential and otherwise acceptable, a clear need should be identified to improve public transport.

Figure 3 - existing tall buildings in relation to public transport accessibility



Public Transport Accessibility Level is a description of how accessible any given location is by public transport. This is calculated as a combined measure of the distance to a public transport stop or station and the type and frequency of service available from that location. The value is given on a scale which ranges from 1a (indicating extremely poor accessibility) through to 6b (indicating excellent accessibility). Levels in Barnet reach as high as 6a, but also include unclassified areas, mainly in the Green Belt.

KEY	
■	6a
■	5
■	4
■	3
■	2
■	1b
■	1a
■	Unclassified

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Finchley Central



New Barnet

TALL BUILDINGS AND BUILT HERITAGE

The relationship between tall buildings and significant elements of our built heritage is a complex and subjective issue. Our towns and cities are littered with poor examples where tall buildings detract from the townscape and landscape, loom large in the backdrop of a conservation area or create a poor visual image which can detract from economic renewal. However, many tall buildings are elegant land marks which are beautifully designed and act as important social, economic and physical assets for communities. In some instances even relatively recent buildings are recognised as important examples of Twentieth Century architecture

The English Heritage and CABI guidance on tall buildings notes that the effect on the historic context should be considered to ‘... ensure that the proposal will preserve and/or enhance historic buildings, sites, landscapes and skylines’ and goes on to note that the impact on views to and from historic buildings should be considered over a wide area.

Whilst this process of assessment and evaluation does not exclude the possibility that tall buildings could be suitable in conservation areas or close to listed buildings there is a general presumption that it is not likely to be appropriate unless it can be proved otherwise. Given the very subjective nature of these debates this is unlikely to be a straightforward matter.

Figure 4 shows the locations of existing tall buildings in the context of the conservation areas in Barnet. This highlights that most tall buildings are located some distance away from the conservation areas. The key exception is the National Institute for Medical Research which is located within the Mill Hill conservation area.

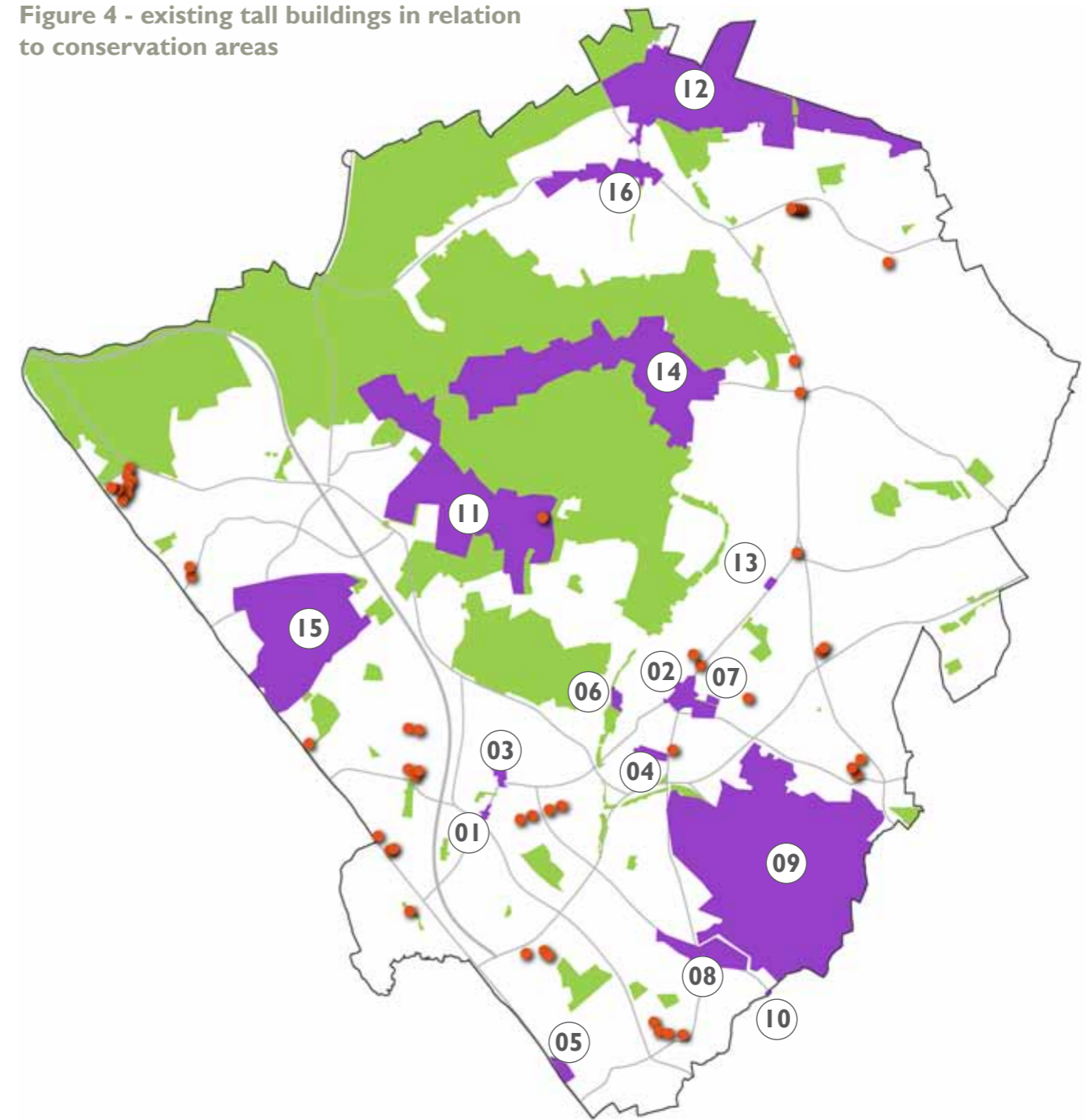
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- There should be a general presumption that tall buildings are not likely to be appropriate within or close to conservation areas or in close proximity to significant listed buildings.
- Careful consideration needs to be given to the potential negative impact of tall buildings falling within the back-drop of key views to listed buildings and within conservation areas. This is most likely to be an issue where views are long and open rather than within tight streets.

KEY

1. The Burroughs, Hendon
2. Church End, Finchley
3. Church End, Hendon
4. College Farm, Finchley
5. Cricklewood Railway Terraces
6. Finchley Garden Village
7. Glenhill Close, Finchley
8. Golders Green
9. Hampstead Garden Suburb
10. Hampstead Village (Heath Passage)
11. Mill Hill
12. Monken Hadley
13. Moss Hall Crescent
14. Totteridge
15. Watling Estate, Burnt Oak
16. Wood Street, Barnet

Figure 4 - existing tall buildings in relation to conservation areas



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An unfortunate juxtaposition of scales between a traditional terraced form and a tall building at North Finchley



Tall buildings can have a significant impact on the views of historic buildings where they form part of the back-drop, potentially spoiling views of the roofscape in particular (example - Mayflower Lodge)

TALL BUILDINGS AND OPEN SPACE

Barnet has significant areas of green open space and particularly benefits from having a large amount of Green Belt land which breaks up the urban area.

The Barnet Characterisation study provides an analysis of the various areas of open space in the borough and demonstrates the wealth of green space and conservation. Figure 5 maps the tall buildings against open spaces which provide some amenity to residents or users of those buildings. It therefore excludes conservation designations of any kind as these simply overlay areas of green space.

Perhaps more significant is the character and usability of the green areas which are shown. For example, some of the large areas of metropolitan open space shown on the eastern side of the borough are cemeteries and whilst they offer a visual amenity and a break in the urban fabric they are otherwise of limited use to local residents. Likewise, whilst the Green Belt is a significant benefit in many respects, not all of it is open for public access. It is therefore particularly important when evaluating access to open space to consider proximity to spaces such as local parks and allotments which can offer residents a genuine leisure amenity.

Tall buildings can also have a particular impact when they are located in or on the edge of open space. Many post war residential towers are located in areas of open space. However, this typically has two key disadvantages:

- Lack of interaction with the street caused by locating inactive uses on the ground floor level can make the buildings feel even more out of scale with its surroundings; and
- The open space around the base of towers is frequently designed in ways which make

it difficult to use for amenities such as play space, allotment space or seating areas, and so presents not only a missed opportunity for the ground floor flats, but often presents security issues as there is less of a barrier between the public and private space.

Where tall buildings are well integrated with their urban context and are located on the edge of an open space this can have a positive character, with the scale of the tower complemented by the scale of the space. However, this should not mean that open space locations are automatically considered to be suitable for tall buildings - other issues such as accessibility and topography remain important considerations.

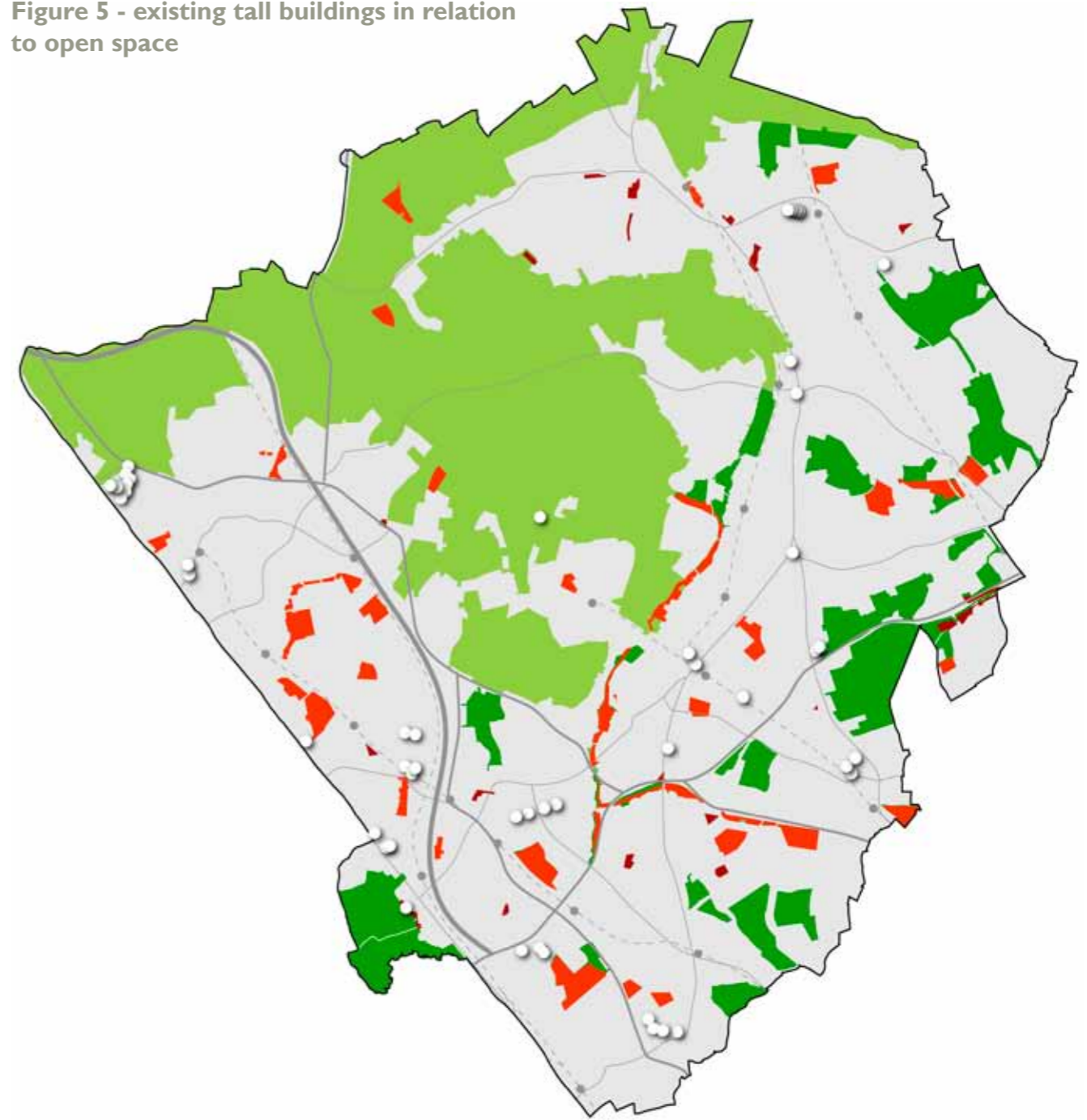
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- As with any dense form of development access to green space should be a factor for consideration when assessing the merits of any tall buildings proposal. This reflects the fact that many taller buildings offer their residents less private amenity space and therefore are likely to need and appreciate parks, public gardens and allotments.

KEY

- Green Belt
- Metropolitan Open Space
- Local Parks
- Small Local Parks

Figure 5 - existing tall buildings in relation to open space



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Attractive green space around the base of a tower can be an important visual amenity. However, although this space is well maintained it presents a security risk due to the ease of access to the ground floor (example - East Finchley)



Large open spaces can sometimes provide a good context for taller buildings (example - Regent's Park Road)

TALL BUILDINGS AND KEY VIEWS

The council has previously defined in the UDP a number of views which it regards as noteworthy and which it will seek to protect when considering the suitability of any development proposals.

These views are as follows:

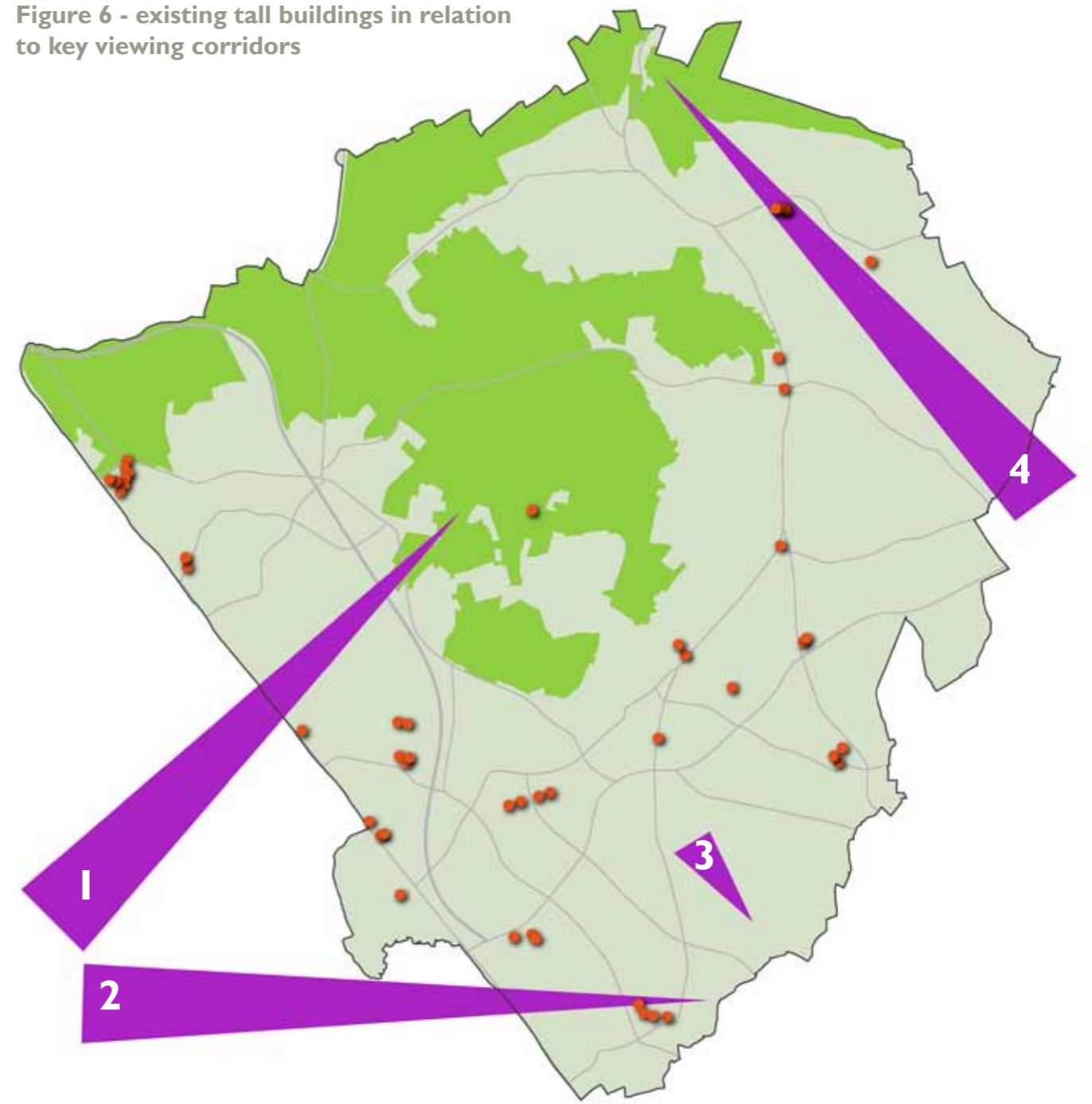
- 1. From Mill Field towards Harrow-on-the-Hill** - Mill Field offers an elevated vantage point with views to the east and south east. The domed roof of the University of London Observatory is prominent in the foreground whilst the arch of Wembley Stadium is the most striking of the major landmarks.
- 2. From Golders Hill Park towards Harrow-on-the-Hill** - Golders Hill park affords a view towards Harrow-on-the-Hill, although with trees in full leaf this is restricted. The trees also mask the significant number of taller buildings in the valley floor around Brent Cross and the southern part of Edgware Road.
- 3. From Hampstead Heath Extension towards Hampstead Garden Suburb** - Charming views north to the key landmark buildings of Hampstead Garden Suburb set within substantial tree planting.
- 4. From King George Fields, Hadley Green across Central London including Canary Wharf** - The views from King George Fields offer a long distance view at selected points towards the city and Canary Wharf. Other views from the field include closer subjects including the cluster of taller buildings at New Barnet. This view is also somewhat restricted when trees are in full leaf.

Existing tall buildings in the borough already have an impact on some of these key views. For example, the cluster of buildings at New Barnet has a significant foreground presence in the view from King George Fields, whilst numerous taller buildings in the western part of the borough have an impact on the views west towards Harrow-on-the-Hill. However, most of these views are from large open areas and so the precise impact varies significantly depending on the exact view point.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Given the impact of existing tall buildings on these views, it will be important to assess the potential impact of any proposed tall building. This should establish the key features of the view and how they may be affected. Impact will be considered significant if the proposed tall building is likely to mask or clash with the principle focus of the view; or if it is tall enough to break the horizon line and take very significant prominence.
- Tall buildings in key views may be appropriate where they are located at key centres or nodes and assist in land-marking. This could be regarded as making the overall view more legible, and provide a greater understanding of the city structure. Conversely, tall buildings located in hinterland areas are likely to be even less appropriate where they fall within a view corridor.

Figure 6 - existing tall buildings in relation to key viewing corridors



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1. From Mill Field towards Harrow-on-the-Hill



2. From Golders Hill Park towards Harrow-on-the-Hill



3. From Hampstead Heath Extension towards Hampstead Garden Suburb



4. From King George Playing Fields, Hadley Green across Central London including Canary Wharf

TALL BUILDINGS AND URBAN GRAIN

The Barnet Characterisation Study identifies that low rise perimeter blocks are the prevailing form of development in the borough. The arrangement of housing facing onto streets arranged in a loose grid provides a robust and flexible form which enables good pedestrian permeability and a clear sense of public and private space.

Figure 7 shows a figure ground plan of the southern part of the borough. This clearly shows the extensive coverage of perimeter block forms, contrasting with the areas (ringed) which feature tall buildings.

Tall buildings relate to the prevailing grain of perimeter blocks in a number of different ways:

Residential clusters

- There are a number of clusters of tall residential buildings where the towers are arranged in open space, breaking with the grain of the surrounding residential streets. This results in loss of continuity of the urban grain and generally creates a weaker pedestrian environment.

Towers in urban centres

- Some examples of taller buildings are in more central areas with a strongly urban character. In these instances they are typically better related to the urban form. This can be partly due to the fact that they are more sensitively located relative to the public realm and may have a podium/plinth block which sits below the tower and creates a more conventional scale of frontage to the street. It can also be due to the fact that tall buildings in urban centres are more likely to have alternative, active uses at ground floor level, thereby overcoming one of the key issues faced by

residential towers surrounded by public space.

Towers in campus environments

- Towers such as those found at the Metropolitan Police Centre or the Pentland Lakeside campus are effectively divorced from the surrounding grain by being placed within a private, campus setting. This ensures that they have little influence on the surrounding grain and their principal impact is the larger scale visual effect of a tall building.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Those existing towers which work best with the urban grain of the area tend to be those which have a direct relationship with the street to establish human scale.
- The design of a tall building to maintain an appropriate relationship to the street is likely to require active non-residential uses at ground floor.
- Tall buildings set within a campus environment have limited impact on the surrounding urban grain, but this would not be an appropriate typology for residential buildings.



Figure 7 - Figure-ground plan of the southern part of the borough highlighting two clusters of towers which break with the prevailing urban grain.



1255 High Road is an example of a very poor relationship with the street. Here the tower is raised on piloti with parking underneath, removing any chance of active frontage.



Active ground floor uses help to integrate a taller buildings with the public realm

TALL BUILDINGS IN MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Planning policy for Barnet includes several major development opportunities where the intention is to include tall buildings:

1. Stonegrove and Spur Road

The proposals for Stonegrove and Spur Road will renew an existing estate of tall buildings, most of which are around 10 storeys. The proposals for the replacement scheme which is under development show an area which will have a much improved public realm, with new buildings creating more defined street frontage and integrating new taller buildings into the built form. It is noted that the site lies within a relatively low PTAL area.

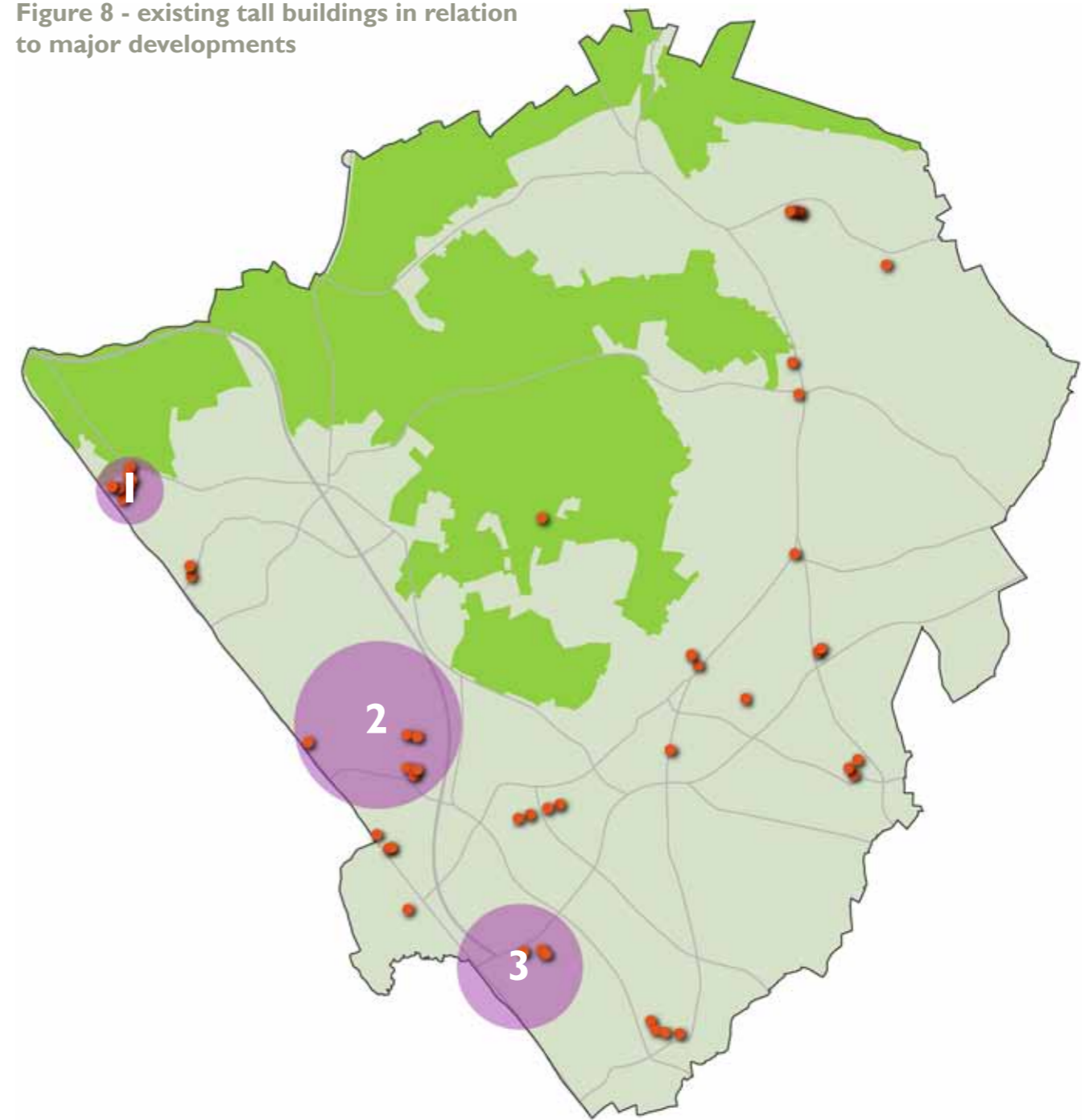
2. Colindale

The Colindale area is already the location of tall buildings due to the presence of the police training college and the new buildings at Beaufort Park. The regeneration proposals for Colindale establish a policy basis for a significant cluster of taller buildings, with particular focus on providing landmarks for key routes, spaces and nodes, including the tube station.

3. Brent Cross/Cricklewood

The proposals for the Brent Cross/Cricklewood area anticipate a significant rise in scale from the existing context, particularly in the area to the south of the north circular and east of the railway mainline. Existing plans show scope for a significant cluster of tall buildings up to 25 storeys tall in the area and particularly notes the inclusion of a tall building at the southern end of the MI which will have a role as a city-wide landmark. Taller buildings in the 10-20 storey range are also planned for the West Hendon redevelopment.

Figure 8 - existing tall buildings in relation to major developments



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Beaufort Park, where the recent examples of taller urban development demonstrate how a strong frontage and streetscape can be created at ground level. The scheme incorporates ground floor active uses, integrated parking, and provide natural surveillance over the open space.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has highlighted a number of key considerations relating to tall buildings in Barnet. These can be summarised as follows:

- There are a number of distinct tall building groupings in the borough including town centre clusters, residential clusters and those along key historic routes such as the A1000 and the Edgware Road. These clusters typically also tie in with other aspects of tall building location covered below, such as PTAL rating and urban grain. Tall buildings which lie within these existing tall building groupings are likely to be more appropriate than those which would fall outside them. However, it should be noted that this is not presented as a justification for creating or reinforcing clusters as opposed to single buildings. Rather, it applies because tall buildings located in these areas are significantly more likely to address the other issues identified here such as PTAL rating, landmarking, etc.
- A number of the existing tall buildings are located on elevated ground, particularly those along the A1000. This makes them extremely visible. Whilst this is often regarded as a negative feature, it can help with the general landmarking and legibility of the borough provided they are located in meaningful places. Where future tall buildings are considered, it may be justified for them to have a role as a strong landmark. However, to be valid in this role they would need to be located in a place which warranted marking. This could apply to a tall building in a town centre, transport node or major visitor destination, but is unlikely to apply to a stand-alone residential tower.
- Tall buildings in Barnet typically fall within areas which have reasonable transport access. However, some, including residential estates such as Stonegrove and Spur Road fall within a low PTAL rating. Given the intensive nature of land use which can be accommodated within tall buildings it becomes more important than ever that they are located in areas which have good public transport access so as to promote sustainable travel patterns.
- With the exception of the National Institute for Medical Research (itself an historic building), the tall buildings identified in the report lie outside the borough's conservation areas. However, consideration needs to be given to the potential impact of tall buildings on the historic environment, particularly in the event that they may form part of the backdrop of a key view or streetscene.
- Given the high intensity of use associated with tall buildings, proximity and access to green open space should be a key factor in assessing the suitability of any design.
- Tall buildings may have an impact on the four key views identified within the borough. Whilst there may be a general presumption that impact on these views is inappropriate some proposals for taller buildings may be acceptable and even helpful from a legibility point of view providing they don't have a significant visual impact which blocks or otherwise impedes the main subject of the view.
- Tall buildings are likely to be best considered as part of an integrated urban grain, rather than as elements within open space. They should incorporate active street frontages to provide a more human scale and better relationship to the street.

Although these observations and conclusions do not constitute a policy framework for tall buildings in Barnet it is considered that in identifying the key issues they form a basis for policy development and advice. It is also hoped that in the absence of an adopted policy they also identify the issues which may need to be considered and demonstrate how the design of tall buildings can best relate to the particular character of the borough, its places and form.

It should be noted that whilst this document considers the urban design and context issues which relate to tall buildings in Barnet there are also other significant planning and design-related issues which must be considered for any tall buildings proposals. These are likely to include consideration of the sustainability of the design including energy conservation and generation, overshadowing of existing buildings and the potential for any wind-tunnel effect at street level.



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