

Report of the Head of Planning and City Regeneration

Planning Committee – 1 November 2016

TALL BUILDINGS STRATEGY REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION EXERCISE

Purpose:	To report back on the public consultation exercise undertaken on the draft revised Swansea Tall Buildings Strategy.
Policy Framework:	Swansea Unitary Development Plan (2008), Swansea Local Development Plan (Deposit Plan) (2016), Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework 2016. Swansea Tall Buildings Strategy 2015
Reason for Decision:	To update and amend the previous Tall Buildings Strategy supplementary planning guidance to align with the wider vision for Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework and provide opportunity for a broader consideration for tall buildings in parts of the Central Area.
Consultation:	Planning, Legal, Finance and Access to Services.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The revised Tall Buildings Strategy be forwarded to Planning Committee to be adopted as supplementary planning guidance and supersede the previous Tall Buildings Strategy (2008).
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Finance Officer:	Jeff Dong
Legal Officer:	Jonathan Wills
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2015 Cabinet approved a draft Swansea City Centre Strategic Framework Review (SCC SFR), which sets out a new role for the Central Area, and its potential for regeneration. An updated and revised Tall Buildings Strategy was also prepared in 2015 in order to provide opportunity for a broader consideration for tall buildings in parts of the Central Area to align with the aspirations of the Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (adopted 2016).
- 1.2 This revised Tall Buildings Strategy will supersede the previous 2008 Tall Buildings Strategy which was supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to the Swansea Unitary Development Plan (2008). It is intended that this revised Strategy will in due course be adopted as SPG to the Swansea Local Development Plan 2010-2025: Deposit Plan (June 2016).
- 1.3 This report outlines the public consultation process which was undertaken on this document earlier this year, and summarises the wide range of views and comments received from residents, visitors, stakeholders and other organisations. The report also responds to those views and comments, and recommends amendments which will help to clarify and refine the proposals contained in the 2015 draft.

2.0 Summary of Key Objectives and Principles Context

- 2.1 The Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (2016) aims to define a new role for Swansea's Central Area, and encourage a greater diversity of mixed uses with opportunities for living, working and learning in areas like the Kingsway and Alexandra Road, and within high quality mixed use developments on the City waterfront and St David's/ Quadrant.
- 2.2 Development schemes which incorporate tall buildings can provide the opportunity for landmark developments contributing significantly to the City's skyline, with the potential for exceptional sea views due to Swansea's seafront location. They can also capture the imagination and become associated with the City's image, consequently having a symbolic or iconic role. More significantly they can introduce intensive levels of activity which Swansea requires in order to become a more vibrant and viable destination. Whilst tall buildings can have a positive role in the City, they must relate to the context of the area, be well designed and sustainable and be close to supporting uses and infrastructure.
- 2.3 The overall aim of the Tall Building Strategy is to do the following:
 - Respond to matters outlined above with regard to regeneration aspirations for the City centre
 - Provide clear guidance to developers
 - Provide a basis for consistency in the consideration of proposals
 - Take account of the National Guidance and examples of good practice in the production of strategic guidance
- 2.4 The proposed Strategy sets out the background and policy, defines a tall building, appraises the context of the Central Area and defines the policy in terms of general principles, location, and design principles. The Tall Buildings Strategy is applicable to the whole of the City and County of Swansea. The main thrust of the Strategy however focuses on the Central Area where tall

buildings are considered more physically and economically viable. It also considers other areas including Swansea University and the SA1 Waterfront development area.

2.5 The key change proposed to the Tall Buildings Strategy is the extension to the area where tall buildings will be 'considered', to include:

- The remainder of the retail core, including the Kingsway
- Areas adjacent to the Railway Station including the Mariner Street/ Alexandra Road site.

As part of the revised Tall Buildings Strategy it is also proposed that the area where tall buildings will be 'welcomed' has also been extended to include only a limited additional area of the City waterfront.

3.0 Public Consultation Exercise

1. The Council has engaged the media with press releases, interviews and on-line.
2. The www.swansecitycentre.com website has provided up to date news on progress and provided access to the draft document.
3. Direct consultation with over 250 organisations by post and by email
4. Press notice December 30th
5. Site notices around the City Centre.
6. Public Exhibition- at the Grand Theatre 12th- 14th January 2016
7. Copies of the draft Consultation document were made available at all Swansea Libraries

3.1 Comment forms were made available at the exhibitions and on line which invited members of the public to give their views on the draft Tall Buildings Strategy proposals within a four week period. This was a robust and successful consultation exercise, with a good rate of response which generally supported the wider intentions of the Regeneration Framework.

3.2 Responses to the draft document were received through a variety of media and can generally be quantified as below:

- 8 organisations/ stakeholders responded
- 31 individual emails, response forms and letters were received from members of the public

4.0 Assessment of the Key Issues from the Public Consultation Exercise

4.1 A wide range of important issues were raised through the consultation exercise, and these are discussed briefly in the section below and set out in more detail in a schedule contained in Appendix 1. Table 1 at the end of this report also sets out the recommended changes to the Framework document which respond to the comments received.

- **Design Commission for Wales** made a number of points about format and references to guidance in the document. The final document has been refined to emphasise the need for early consultation with DCFW on any proposals for new tall buildings, and to include additional references in the document as recommended
- **Natural Resources Wales** queried the role of strategic gateways, and recommended some refinements to the document in terms of landscape design and the public realm, and the need to adopt an integrated approach.

- **University of Wales Trinity St David's** welcomed the identification of part of the SA1 Waterfront development as being within the welcome and consider zones, but highlighted the need to reference high buildings fronting Langdon Road within the plans, and the scope for a building on the southern tip of the SA1 development.
 - **Swansea Civic Society** Question the need for Tall Buildings or how they can have a positive role, and suggested that tall buildings impact on views of many people, and have a detrimental impact on street level. The Civic Society and NRW raised questions about relevance of Gateway locations. The rationale for the gateways is set out in 3.11 of the Strategy, essentially to provide a critical mass, and interface between significant areas of the City i.e. City Gateway, City waterfront and Tawe Gateway.
- 4.2** Some consultancy firms and representative agencies have offered comments of general support of the Tall Buildings Strategy support including Knight Frank, and Geraint John Planning. Some companies have also raised issues about the location and extent of the Consider Zone, and the Welcome Zone. Geraint John Planning has called for the extension of the Consider zone in SA1, and CDN Planning have called for parts of High Street area to be incorporated, including Bethesda Street, John Street and Jockey Street. They suggest that the extension of the consider zone into High Street is logical, provides an opportunity for landmark building, and is a logical cluster on the key approach to the City. This suggested amended has been fully considered and an appropriate refinement is made to the final document.
- 4.3 Comments raised by the general public.** Six members of the public indicated their support for a revised Tall Buildings Strategy, commenting on how if they were of good quality that they could enhance Swansea's image and generate wealth. Respondents also noted the importance of criteria set out in the policy to ensure that tall buildings are of the highest architectural quality. The key areas of concern highlighted from comments received from the general public included the following:
- 1. Loss of Views, impact on the skyline and character of the Bay-** A key area of concern expressed by members of the public related to the potential loss of views, and loss of the character of Swansea Bay in particular. Some respondents called for any new buildings to be located away from Swansea Bay and the marina, and drew attention to the need for further information to understand what the impacts are in certain locations and viewpoints. The guidance makes it clear that proposals for tall buildings must consider the importance of near, distant and far views. They need to be considered in relation to other landmarks, sight lines and strategic views. Tall buildings should also not detract from the setting of listed buildings.
 - 2. Economic Need and Demand-** A significant number of the respondents queried the demand and economic purpose of tall buildings, and that the extra space provided by tall buildings was not required. However this revised Tall Buildings guidance is responding to increased market interest in the development of tall buildings, and seeks to ensure that the policy provides a positive and consistent basis for determining the suitability of proposals and ensures that are of the highest quality. Respondents commented that more should be made of Swansea's underutilised buildings, and the scope for refurbishing existing buildings is highlighted within the design principles, and within the Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (2016).

3. Environmental effects -A number of respondents raised questions about the environmental effects of tall buildings, whether there was the potential for wind tunnelling or drift, and the loss of sunlight from the shadows of tall buildings. The Strategy sets out in page 25 how the effects of local microclimate, wind rain sunlight and overshadowing should be assessed when considering proposals for tall buildings.

4. Maintenance and effects of weathering- There were a small number of comments from respondents which highlighted concerns about the effect of weathering on buildings and maintenance needs. The Strategy does highlight how all buildings must exhibit the highest standards of design with good quality robust materials. Further wording is added to the final version of the Strategy to reinforce the point that materials used in the development of tall buildings should be capable withstanding weathering.

5. Social issues- Concerns were expressed by respondents about potential social issues arising from tall buildings in terms of overcrowding and increased crime. The Design Principles set out in the document highlight how proposals must consider aspects of safety and security, and encourage a clear definition of public and private space.

5.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening was been undertaken when the draft report was considered in 2015, and it concluded that a full EIA report is not required as there is generally a low equality impact and any accessibility issues would be addressed by separate (building) regulations. The Screening has been reviewed during the public consultation exercise and a full EIA is still not considered to be necessary.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report, however when / if schemes are developed FPR7 reports will be required.

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 None

Background Papers: Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (2016), Tall Buildings Strategy (2008)

Link to full report and Appendix attached below:

www.swansea.gov.uk/staffnet/developmentregen

Table 1 Schedule of recommended changes to the Swansea Tall Buildings Strategy

A fully revised version of the revised Tall Buildings Strategy document incorporating all the changes set out in the table below is on the Council's intranet site.

	Page of draft & page of final doc.	Recommended Key Changes to the final Swansea Tall Buildings Strategy
1.	Section 1.2 Aims	Expand aims- acknowledge that aims should be more wide ranging and reference increased residential density, provide commercial floorspace, intensify footfall, raise quality of public domain, encourage more diverse mixed uses.
2.	Section 1.4 Policy	Update relevant planning guidance
3.	Page 13	Amendment to context plan
4.	Section 3.8 page 15	Delete reference to photomontage
5.	Page 18	Civic Centre reference rather than County Hall
6.	Page 19	Strategic Gateways –clarifications added to 3.11
7.	Page 19-20	Ref Central Area rather than City centre
8.	Page 20	Insert suggested NRW wording with regard to relationship with public realm
9.	Page 20	Insert 'withstand the effects of weathering'
10.	Page 20	Insert final bullet point to highlight transport infrastructure
11.	Page 21	Amend plan to include additional areas in Upper High Street.
12.	Page 25	The wording 'through life costs and benefits' included in the previous Strategy is reinstated.
13.	Page 25	Add emphasis and reference to the importance of early consultation with DCFW and WG Practice Guide. Also reference is made to the process timeline in the WG Practice Guide.
14.	Page 25	Add reference to Access and Inclusion
15.	Appendix 1	Design and Access Statement- Add ref to need for Diagrams and visual info which should be included to ensure succinct and clear
16.	Appendix 2	Update policies and Guidance including reference to LDP Deposit Plan and Design Commission for wales guidance full references for Tall Buildings and Sustainability guidance.