



Historic England

LONDON OFFICE

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Direct Dial: 020 7973 3763

Our ref: PA00734687

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Dear Mr Morgan

## **Pre-application Advice**

### **NEW CITY COURT, ST. THOMAS STREET, SE1**

Thank you for arranging the useful site visit and subsequent presentation to our London Advisory Committee on 26 June regarding pre-application proposals for New City Court. The Committee formally considered the proposals at their meeting on 28 June, and their views have informed Historic England's advice as follows.

#### **Summary**

Should these proposals be submitted in their current form, Historic England would strongly object to the scheme due to the serious harm that would result to the historic environment. We consider that the level of harm would be bordering on substantial, particularly with regards to the impact on the character of the Borough High Street Conservation Area, and on the setting of Guy's Hospital and Southwark Cathedral.

We strongly recommend that alternative forms of development that are more sensitive to the historic environment are pursued.

#### **Advice**

##### *The Site and its Significance*

New City Court is located on a site bounded by St Thomas Street and King's Head Yard. Buildings fronting Borough High Street are located immediately to the west of the site and Guy's Hospital immediately to the east.

The site was redeveloped in the early 1980s, and incorporates a number of four storey buildings fronting St Thomas Street: nos. 4-8 and 12-16 (Grade II listed), no. 20 (built as part of the 1980s scheme) and nos. 24-26 (Keats House, the façade of which was retained as part of the 1980s scheme), as well as a six storey office block which abuts King's Head Yard to the south.



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The site is located within the Borough High Street Conservation Area, which has a very high degree of historic significance as the main arterial route out of the City of London of Roman origin. The well-preserved fine urban grain of Borough High Street demonstrates its organic development with historic frontage buildings of a high architectural quality along both sides of the street. Behind a number of these frontages are narrow and enclosed alleyways and yards associated with the coaching inns that lined the high street from the medieval period until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This narrow plot formation gives Borough High Street a distinctive urban grain. As set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal (Southwark Council, June 2006), this street form and layout is the most powerful influence on the physical evolution of the Conservation Area and contributes fundamentally to its character (p15).

The only coaching inn that survives is the Grade I listed George Inn, located several plots south of the development site. However, as set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal, “glimpses into the numerous alleys and yards that open off Borough High Street are part of its visual interest and a reminder of Borough’s historic legacy” (p27). This includes King’s Head Yard, which borders the development site to the south. It contains a rich ensemble of Victorian architecture including a decorative archway which gives way to a narrow alleyway with a pedimented Victorian north frontage (which was purposefully retained as part of the 1980s redevelopment of New City Court) and the Grade II listed King’s Head Public House opposite.

New City Court is located in a transitional part of the conservation area, between the organic grain of the High Street, and the more formal and institutional buildings associated with the hospital and medical school to the east.

The Grade II listed early 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace at Nos. 4-8 and 12-16 St Thomas Street reflects this more formal character. The buildings were extensively altered during the 1980s, although the party walls and, to an extent, the plan form at ground and first floors survive, as does a notable cantilevered staircase within no.14. The façade of the neighbouring Keats House makes a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the Borough High Street Conservation Area and combined with the listed terrace forms a pleasing streetscape.

The Grade II\* Guy’s Hospital building to the east of the site is a fine example of a Georgian hospital complex, founded in 1725, and a particularly rare and important survival of an institution reflective of the emergence of institutional health provision in 18th century London. The Hospital has long been a centre for education, converted to a teaching institution with the neighbouring St Thomas’ Hospital in 1768 and in use today by King’s College London as a science and medical campus. Architecturally it has a formal arrangement of Classically proportioned ranges around the large forecourt and inner quadrangles, with a central entrance block by Thomas Dance



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(1728), east wing originally by James Steere (1738-41 but completely rebuilt in the 1960s following WWII damage) and the chapel and west wing by Richard Jupp (1774-7).

Given the scale of the proposed development, there are a number of other designated heritage assets potentially affected by the proposals located in the immediate and wider vicinity, including Southwark Cathedral, the Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral.

The Grade I listed Cathedral Church of St. Saviour and St. Mary Overie (Southwark Cathedral) lies to the west of the site beyond Borough Market. It is arguably one of London's most important medieval structures, and has been an Anglican cathedral since 1905. With 13th century origins as the Augustinian Priory of St. Mary Overie, the building has been subject to various alterations and additions over time. The lower stage of the tower dates to the 14th century and two upper stages to the 14th-15th centuries, with early 19th century pinnacles added by Gwilt, and is a prominent landmark on London's skyline.

Across the river from the site lies the Tower of London. Its international significance is well known, confirmed by its World Heritage Site status. The Outstanding Universal Value is rooted in the rare survival of an 11th century fortress symbolising the military might of William the Conqueror and the seat of Royal power through the middle ages. The Tower complex also includes a number of individual palace buildings of very high significance that are considered by UNESCO as being attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site.

Amongst these, the Scheduled and Grade I listed Queen's House is a rare and unique collection of late medieval timber-framed buildings with distinctive gabled roofs, all of which form an important and distinctive historic corner to the Inner Ward.

The site is located within Protected Vistas orientated towards St Paul's Cathedral from Parliament Hill (LVMF 2A.1) and Kenwood (LVMF 3A.1).

### *Proposals and their Impact*

This scheme as proposed by your client Great Portland Estate involves the demolition of the 1980s office building and the erection of a 37 storey tower (137m/143m AOD). The proposed use is predominantly office space, although retail uses at ground floor level and a publically accessible garden at 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> floors are also included. The scheme includes the conversion and restoration of the Grade II listed terrace (nos.4-8 and 12-16 St Thomas St) with new shopfronts added to the rear facades, and the deconstruction and rebuilding of Keats House as a standalone building.



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A large amount of public realm would be created around the tower and within the backland area which would incorporate a new public route from St Thomas St to Borough High St, incorporating a new point of access to the London Bridge Underground Station.

In design terms the footprint of the proposed tall building is orientated east-west. The elevations are predominantly glazed with an exoskeleton steel frame to the east and west. To the north elevation the width increases with the height through a curvature that tapers towards the ground to increase the amount of public space.

Due to its scale, the tower would have a major townscape impact, visually impacting on a wide range of designated heritage assets including the Guy's Hospital, Southwark Cathedral, the terrace along St Thomas Street, and the frontage buildings along the Borough High Street Conservation Area.

In more distant views, the tower would appear above the roofline of the Queen's House within the Tower of London, and would appear behind the western towers of St Paul's Cathedral from the viewing gazebo at Kenwood.

### *Policy Context*

Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 impose a statutory duty upon local planning authorities to consider the impact of proposals upon listed buildings and their settings.

Section 72 of the same Act sets out the statutory duty on local planning authorities to pay special regard to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Government guidance on how to carry out those duties is found in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). At the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' where conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is one of the 12 core principles.

NPPF policy advises that for new development to be sustainable it needs to encompass an economic, social and environmental role, with the latter including the protection and enhancement of the historic environment (paragraph 7). Paragraph 8 notes that these roles are mutually dependent and should not be considered in isolation; and that to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.



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Section 12 of the NPPF sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced, and makes it clear at paragraph 132 that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset (which includes its setting), local planning authorities should give 'great weight' to preserving the asset's significance. Any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or complete loss of a Grade II listed building should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including grade I and II\* listed buildings and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

Where harm is caused to a heritage asset, the NPPF requires decision makers to determine whether the harm is substantial, or less than substantial. If the harm is deemed to be less than substantial, paragraph 134 of the NPPF requires that harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

If the harm is substantial, or results in a total loss of significance, paragraph 133 states that local authorities should refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss, or all four of the following criteria apply:

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- Conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

Paragraph 026 of the NPPG states that the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of a World Heritage Site indicates the importance of World Heritage Sites as designated heritage assets of the highest significance to be taken into account by the relevant authorities in plan-making, determining planning and related consents and by the Secretary of State in determining such cases on appeal or following call in. Effective management of World Heritage Sites involves the identification and promotion of positive change that will conserve and enhance their Outstanding Universal Value (a concept that includes authenticity, integrity and protection and management arrangements in addition to significance) and with the modification or mitigation of changes which have a negative impact on those values.

Paragraph 035 states that applicants proposing change that might affect the Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and, where applicable, authenticity of a World



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Heritage Site through development within the Site or affecting its setting or buffer zone (or equivalent) need to submit sufficient information with their applications to enable assessment of impact on OUV, recommending that this information is prepared in line with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) guidelines on Heritage Impact Assessments and Historic England's guidance on setting and views. Paragraph 035 reinforces the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's request to all State Parties to the World Heritage Convention that Heritage Impact Assessment in line with the ICOMOS Guidance should be undertaken where there is a potential impact on OUV.

The emerging New Southwark Local Plan, due for public examination in 2019, includes a tall buildings policy (P14) that emphasises the need to respond positively to local character and townscape and avoid harm to the setting of designated heritage assets and strategic views. Site allocations included within the document for the London Bridge area do not include New City Court.

Historic England's Tall Buildings guidance (Advice Note 4) recommends that the location and design of tall buildings should be part of a plan-led system that reflects the local vision for an area, which is supported by the NPPF.

The London View Management Framework Supplementary Planning Guidance (LVMF SPG, Mayor of London, March 2011) explains that the Protected Vista of St Paul's Cathedral from Kenwood Gazebo (View 3A) includes a Landmark Viewing Corridor to the peristyle, drum, dome and western towers of the cathedral. It states that "development above the threshold plane of this Landmark Viewing Corridor would compromise the viewer's ability to recognise the landmark, and should be refused." (p56, Para 120).

### *Historic England's Position*

Historic England recognises that the redevelopment of New City Court has the potential to offer some enhancement to the Borough High Street Conservation Area through the removal of unsympathetic 1980s infill development.

However, in our view, the proposals would have a major impact on the conservation area's character and appearance. The proposed tall building would be visible from almost all parts of Borough High Street, Southwark Street, and St Thomas Street located within the conservation area, and would result in a dramatic contrast in scale due to the close proximity of the development set behind the frontage of the fine grain and predominantly four storey buildings fronting Borough High Street.

The proposed demolition of the historic south façade of New City Court and the



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creation of open public realm would erode the historic street pattern of King's Head Yard and enclosed backland character which is illustrative of the historic pattern of yards that fundamentally underpins the overall significance of the Borough High Street Conservation Area. In our view, this impact would cause very serious harm to the significance of the conservation area.

Tall buildings are known to have impacts well beyond their immediate setting due to their height and scale. This proposal is no exception and would become a highly visible new addition to the townscape of London Bridge. While there are some existing and consented tall buildings around The Shard, which largely comply with Southwark Council's emerging strategy for tall building development, the New City Court site is somewhat isolated from this group, located further to the west closer to Borough High Street and outside the Council's site allocation for tall building development.

Historic England considers that the tall building would negatively impact on a number of designated heritage assets through development within their settings. The proposed tall building will rise significantly above the roofline of the west range of Guy's Hospital. Whilst development around London Bridge Station presents a major visual impact in views of the (1960s rebuilt) east range of Guy's Hospital, the south and west ranges (which are original) can largely be appreciated against a clear skyline in views within the forecourt and along St Thomas Street. This setting contributes towards the building's institutional and architectural significance as a neo-classical and orthogonally proportioned 18<sup>th</sup> century hospital complex. The significance of Guy's hospital would be seriously impacted by the proposed tower, causing a considerable degree of harm in our opinion.

Additionally, the proposed tower would impact on the interior of the Hospital chapel, which is located at the centre of the west range and benefits from a west facing elevation which provides natural light through its stained glass windows. Whilst a daylight/shadow analysis has not been provided, it is very likely that the tower would block natural light into the chapel, causing harm to its aesthetic value.

In views of Southwark Cathedral from the forecourt to the south and Montague Close, the proposed tall building would be clearly visible above the nave roof and behind the tower, both currently read against a clear sky. While other development is visible in a number of views of Southwark Cathedral, the view affected is a key location from which the architectural and landmark qualities of the building and its importance to this historic part of Southwark can be clearly appreciated. Therefore this setting contributes greatly to the overall significance of Southwark Cathedral. The proposed tower would seriously affect the architectural and landmark qualities of the cathedral in these important views which we consider would cause serious harm to its significance.



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The proposed tower would also be visible from within the Inner Ward of the Tower of London, above the roofline of the Queen's House, which as has been set out is an attribute of the World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value. Whilst various tall buildings including the recently approved Fielden House development are visible, the proposed development would create a significant cumulative effect that would further encroach on the Tower of London. In our view, this would cause harm to the setting of the Queen's House, and in so doing would harm the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site.

Should the current proposals to be submitted as a formal planning application, a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) prepared in line with Appendices 2 and 4 of the ICOMOS HIA guidelines would be required to assess their impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the Tower of London.

Within the protected vista orientated towards St Paul's Cathedral in the London Panorama from Kenwood Gazebo (LVMF 3A.1), the proposed tall building would sit immediately behind the western towers, impacting on their silhouette and reducing our ability to appreciate the landmark status of the cathedral. In our view, this would cause harm to the significance of St Paul's Cathedral, and would fail to comply with the view management guidance set out in the Mayor of London's LVMF SPG (p56).

As set out in Government policy, great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, and any harm to their significance requires clear and convincing justification (NPPF paragraph 132) and should be outweighed by the delivery of public benefits.

As set out in this letter, the tall building development is not supported in local or London-wide planning policy, and fails to comply with Historic England's guidance on tall buildings. Furthermore, no viability assessment has been prepared in support of a tall building development in this location. Therefore Historic England is unconvinced by the justification in support of tall building development on this site.

With regards to public benefits associated with the proposals, potential public benefits include the creation of a new public route from St Thomas Street to Borough High Street, new access to the London Bridge Underground entrance on the east side of Borough High Street and a double height public garden within the tower at 4th/5th floors. Ultimately, this is a decision for the local authority.

However, Historic England has a remit to comment on the heritage-related public benefits of the scheme. As explained to us, these include the restoration of the Grade II listed terrace, and perceived enhancement of the conservation area and setting of nearby listed buildings as well as Keat's House arising from the removal of the existing



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1980s infill building.

Whilst we have no objection in principle to the accommodating of shopfronts to the rear of the listed terrace given the current poor condition of the rear elevations, this intervention would disrupt the plan form and hierarchy or spaces which is fundamental to the overall significance of the London terrace house typology.

Regarding the proposed removal of the 1980s frontage along St Thomas Street which is intended to improve the setting of Keat's House, we now understand that it is proposed to deconstruct the decorative retained façade of Keat's House and rebuild it using approximately 60% of the salvaged material. In our view this does not constitute a heritage-related public benefit, and is technically demolition of a positive contributor to the character of the conservation area which would cause harm in accordance with paragraph 138 of the NPPF.

Furthermore, the removal of the retained Victorian façade along King's Head Yard and the creation of open public space with active shopfronts would significantly change the long-established intimate backland character of the area, and would, in our opinion, harm rather than enhance the setting of the listed King's Head Public House.

Again, Historic England has no objection to the principle of new public realm within the backland area, and recognises the benefits of improved public access to the London Underground Station. However, in our opinion, limited weight should be given to these elements of the scheme as heritage benefits.

### **Recommendation and Next Steps**

Historic England is unable to support these proposals. Although we recognise that there is potential for this scheme to deliver a positive change to the Borough High Street Conservation Area, we do not believe the scheme as currently presented achieves this due to the very serious, bordering on substantial harm that it causes to a range of highly graded, and in some cases internationally significant designated heritage assets. We are unconvinced by the justification provided and heritage-related public benefits offered to mitigate the harm. Should these proposals be submitted in their current form, Historic England will object to the application in the strongest possible terms.

We would therefore strongly welcome further pre-application discussions, ideally alongside the London Borough of Southwark, to secure a scheme that addresses our concerns and provides a sustainable solution for the historic environment. This should include a substantial reduction in height of the proposed tall building, and greater emphasis on the urban grain of Borough High Street.



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I hope this advice is helpful and please contact me if you require clarification on any of the points set out in this letter.

Please note that this advice relates to designated heritage asset matters only. Comments on unscheduled archaeology and non-designated heritage assets should be sought from Southwark Council's Design and Conservation Team, and Archaeologist.

Yours sincerely

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David Shiels, DP9

**'NEW CITY COURT', ST. THOMAS STREET, SE1**  
**Pre-application Advice**

**Information Provided**

Pre-application documents as received



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