

Southwark Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee

Following two presentations by the developers in late 2018, the Fabric Advisory Committee of Southwark Cathedral have serious concerns about the effect the development would have on the setting of the Grade I listed Cathedral, its churchyard and the surrounding Conservation Area. The current proposal is inappropriate in respect to height and massing and will cause substantial harm to the historic environment with a number of different, cumulative negative impacts.

Our principal concerns are:

(1) The proposed building would effectively destroy what should be a protected view of the Cathedral, blocking the axial view across London Bridge (a view central to the whole conservation area); (2) views of the Cathedral tower which has, for centuries stood at this historic river crossing point and at the start of the pilgrimage route to Canterbury will be compromised; (3) it would contaminate the 'spirit of place' of the Cathedral as a historic point of setting-off for pilgrimage; (4) the quality of ambient light through the cathedral's large windows containing stained glass would deteriorate; (5) the climate in the churchyard would be negatively affected; (6) the mass and over-shadowing caused by the proposed building would erode any perceived new public benefit by undermining the public's experience of the unique and special quality and character of the Borough Market Conservation Area within which the Cathedral is the historic heart.

Impact upon setting and key views of the Cathedral, churchyard and Borough Market Conservation Area:

We are concerned about the daytime intrusion on views of and from the Cathedral and its churchyard. Also, given the extensive glazing proposed, additional light pollution would have an adverse night-time effect on Cathedral views. The height and mass of the proposed tower destroys the principal views of the unbroken silhouette of the Cathedral roofline, its tower and pinnacles in views from the west and the north. This has been uncompromised for over 1000 years. The kinetic view sequence along the Thames Riverside Walkway is affected by the presence of the new tower set within the Conservation Area.

Views of the Cathedral are a significant contribution to the character of the Borough High Street Conservation Area. The Conservation Area appraisal states: 'Southwark Cathedral, notably its central square tower.....is a major landmark within the Northern Conservation Area'. It also says 'views of it are relatively limited.....making those glimpses that there are all the more significant.'

One important and historically significant view is from the northern end of London Bridge. The Roman Roads into London, Watling Street and Stane Street, converged a little south of the site to cross the first permanent bridge into London, built in 43AD. The Conservation Area Appraisal acknowledges that 'the key approach into the Conservation Area is over London Bridge, passing the gateway formed by Glaziers' Hall and No.1 London Bridge'.

The tower of the Priory and then Cathedral has stood to the west of London Bridge allowing an extended view south along which the pilgrims to Canterbury massed and travelled. The proposed building will block this long view and visually act as a closure to this historic and spiritual gateway. It will also break the established precedent that tall development should respect this view from London Bridge, remaining to the East of this view. Thus, the proposed tower will undermine the legibility of a route which has characterised the relationship of Southwark with the City of London for over 2,000 years.

In this context, the towering presence of the proposed building beside and behind the Cathedral tower, in street views from the west and north will cause significant harm to a rare heritage asset.

Impact of overshadowing:

The proposed building will overshadow the Cathedral's churchyard, causing a loss of amenity in one of the few green spaces within the Conservation Area. And significantly, the building will overshadow the cathedral with two significant impacts:

- loss of sunlight through the south-facing windows which will have a devastating impact on the quality and character of the interior of the Nave, transept, choir and retrochoir; and
- change in microclimate caused by blocked sunshine onto the external walls of the cathedral.

Impact of wind pressures and vortices:

Whilst computer modelling of the projected impact of detrimental wind conditions created by the new tall building has been carried out, these studies relate to human comfort at ground level. Of principal concern is the impact upon the condition of the historic building fabric, and in particular, the fine pinnacles to the choir and the tower. There is considered to be a real risk of accelerated deterioration of the historic materials and structure (which is currently undergoing structural monitoring), which will be caused by the newly created wind conditions around the Cathedral.