

Insights

TALL BUILDING TRENDS IN LONDON

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SUMMARY

Tall buildings have hugely contributed to London's sense of place and rightful place as a world-leading financial centre. They have made a defined impact on the London skyline particularly in the period between 2000-2019 when the number of new tall buildings built increased significantly, largely due to a change in planning policy.

For the last 10 years the NLA (New London Architecture) has been surveying trends in tall building development (which it defines as those of 20 storeys or above) across London. In this Insight we examine the NLA's recently published annual survey 2025 and what it means for tall building development in the capital.

Tall building development in London presents some unique planning considerations, ranging from visual and environmental impacts, to impacts on protected views and other heritage concerns. Planning policy, both in the London Plan and at borough level, seeks to balance these impacts with development pressures on constrained land availability and potential for growth. Against this constantly evolving backdrop, navigating the consenting process for tall buildings in London presents some distinct challenges and opportunities.

NLA'S TALL BUILDING SURVEY 2025

The NLA's annual tall building survey 2025 shows some interesting planning trends for tall building development in London.

Based on 2024 GLA data, the survey shows that, despite economic headwinds and shifting trends, development confidence in London appears to remain strong with a 23% increase in the number of tall building planning applications in 2024 compared to the previous year (rising from 47 applications in 2023 to 58 in 2024). However, it is notable that far fewer applications have been granted planning permission, with a decrease from 21 in 2023 to just 6 in 2024 with one refused.

Notwithstanding this, there remains a healthy supply of tall building applications awaiting determination.

The majority of these applications (76%) are for mixed use schemes, with single use residential or office schemes making up a much smaller proportion, and applications concentrated most heavily in east London and, as you might expect, in central London boroughs.

RESIDENTIAL TALL BUILDINGS

The survey shows a nuanced picture, with high-rise residential building proposals experiencing notable challenges compared to other sectors.

This can be attributed to a number of factors: a change in London Plan policy introduced in 2021 which made it easier for boroughs to refuse tall building applications, viability challenges attributed to, in part, the GLA's 2023 second staircase requirement, the new building safety regime resulting in greater application scrutiny, affordable housing policy, along with more general economic challenges.

The planning landscape may improve for residential proposals following the recent amendments to the NPPF which provides greater support for housing and introduced new housing targets. It will be interesting to see whether these changes translate in the results of the NLA's survey next year.

OFFICE TALL BUILDINGS

The NLA's survey shows high-rise office or office-led proposals to be in more robust health. Despite evolving office space trends, demand for Grade A office properties in the City of London continues to underpin new tall building development proposals in this location. A defining example being the planning permission granted in December 2024 for the office-led 73-floor landmark tower at 1 Undershaft in the East City Cluster that will rival the Shard in height when built.

BCLP'S TALL BUILDING EXPERIENCE

BCLP's Planning & Zoning team, ranked the number one Planning team in the UK's leading legal directories for over 25 years, is well placed to help promoters navigate the constantly evolving legal, policy and economic landscape and advise on the unique aspects of tall building development in London, being able to draw on extensive experience from its work on tall buildings in the capital, including the Shard. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Christian Drage, Giles Pink, James Parker or James Good in our Planning & Zoning team should you seek advice.

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