

Setting the Scene

Why has this guide been produced?

The city centre of Leeds has seen a huge amount of private sector investment in new development over the last decade. The economic growth and success of the city has resulted in a greater number of proposals for tall buildings in different parts of the city. The aim of this document is to provide clear design guidance on the location, form and appearance of tall buildings so that they can be successfully integrated into the environment and contribute to the changing skyline of the city. As a component of the Local Development Framework this document provides supplementary support to Development Plan Documents and identifies areas where there may be opportunities for tall buildings. It also develops from the work contained in the City Centre Urban Design Strategy and supports the Renaissance Leeds study on the theme of a central Leeds skyline.

Who is the guide for?

It is expected that this guide will be of value to a variety of groups:-

Developers – to assist developers to take on board sustainable approaches to the planning and design of tall buildings whilst at the same time providing more certainty about the appropriateness and location of tall buildings.

Design teams – to provide a high standard of design of tall buildings and their connection with the ground so that they can be successfully integrated within the local and city context.

Local amenity societies – to provide a methodology to preserve the character and appearance of Conservation Areas and protect important buildings, views and settings.

Planners – to establish clear principles and advice criteria against which proposals for tall buildings will be considered and assessed in an objective and consistent manner.

How to use the guide

It is anticipated that the guide will be used to provide:-

- Key principles required for good practice in the location and design of tall buildings.
- An appreciation of the context and local distinctiveness of Leeds.
- Examples of good and bad practice.
- Reference to national and local policy frameworks.
- A background of the emerging physical framework for tall buildings and the skyline of Leeds which applicants and their agents can contribute to.
- Clear checklist and submission requirements for planning applications.

Status of the guide

The guide holds the status of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), this means that it both supports and reinforces the “saved” planning policies as set out in the Leeds Unitary Development Plan (Review 2006) and it is also in accordance with policy SC8 – Design, Conservation and Landscape of the emerging draft Leeds Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy ‘Preferred Approach’.

The emerging Core Strategy sets out the vision for the future of Leeds over the next two decades and provides broad policies to shape development and support its strategic vision.

The SPD is a material consideration and will be used to help decide planning applications and defend decisions made at appeals.

Foreword



Tall buildings, being prominent and highly visible, can affect everyone. Apart from being places to live or work in, their presence can create a sense of place and give an impression, whether good or bad. Tall buildings break into the scale, rhythm and grain of the urban form of our towns and cities, with town halls, churches and cathedrals being notable earlier structures that have been joined by other tall buildings built for commerce and housing during the last 50 years. The former expressed the spiritual powers of their owners and acted as a focus for the community and civic life

with the church spire and town hall clock being focal points with functions well understood by the public. Unfortunately the latter has peppered tall buildings on the urban skyline, many creating visual harm that reflects the worst of the 60's and later. Rejected by the general public, many have blighted their environments. Consequently it is important that the lessons of history are understood to enable the new generation of tall buildings to be liked by all.

Tall buildings of architectural quality and located in the right places can enhance and contribute to the attractiveness of our towns and cities. They can have a positive role by acting as catalysts for regeneration and good development whilst at the same time celebrating growth and economic prosperity. As the space available for development in Leeds City Centre becomes scarcer and more expensive, the pressure to conceive high density schemes and taller buildings in the city centre and its immediate vicinity, has become increasingly important with tall buildings featuring in many development applications. It is therefore essential that we have a sensible but sensitive policy for short and long term development of tall buildings to promote solutions for the public good and the urban environment.

Claims that tall buildings are an essential part of the urban renaissance are unfounded but in recent years there has been a resurgence and a desire to build them. Proposals for tall buildings deserve the closest of scrutiny and policies to deal with them.

This tall building guide is also about the challenge of successfully introducing and controlling new development into an existing urban form and grain which in some parts is in need of further urban 'surgery, massage and sculpture' to express and reinforce its distinctiveness - particularly its skyline.

This document aims to assist developers, architects and the Leeds City Council City Development with comprehensive guidance for the location and design of tall buildings with respect to appearance, sustainability, micro-climate and quality of public realm around tall buildings. Its outcome is a result of collaboration between officers of the council, the Leeds Renaissance Study team, and with Civic Trust members, Councillors, property developers and their consultants who all attended a major workshop event held to develop the document. It also takes on previous guidance from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage in their joint consultation paper 'Guidance on Tall Buildings'.

< **FIG.1** This delightful wood cut from **Thomas Gent's History of Ripon** shows Leeds from the south, its major features being the towers of St John's Church, Holy Trinity, and the Parish Church. On the extreme left, the manor house still stands within its moated enclosure on the site now occupied by The Scarbrough public house in Bishopgate Street

< **FIG.2** This detail from **Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's South East Prospect of Leeds of 1745** shows the town from Cavalier Hill with Leeds Bridge to the left, and the parish church and Holy Trinity towards the right. Note the orchards on Kirk Ing, between the Parish Church and the river and the haystacks and tenter-frames in the foreground

Strategic

Key Strategic Principles

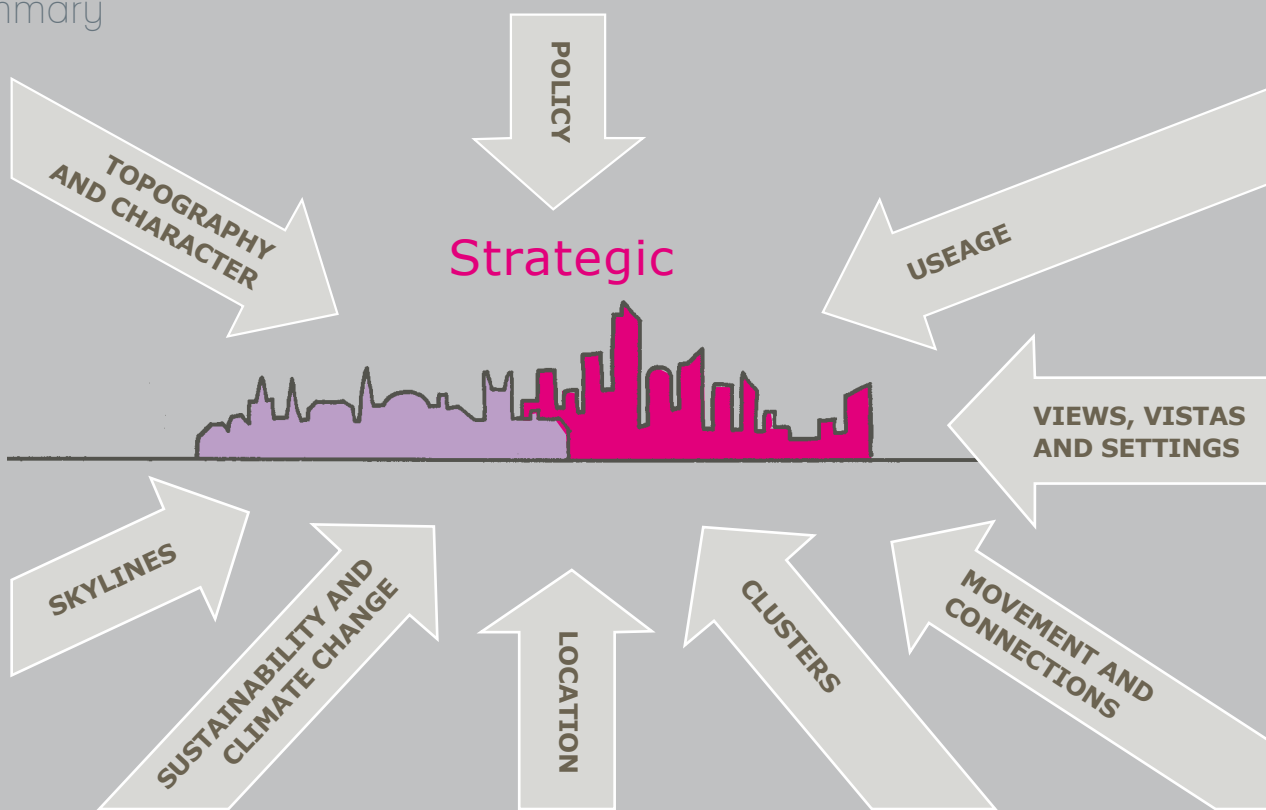
- Locate tall buildings in the **right place**, to integrate them into and make them compatible with their surroundings.
- Enhance **skylines, views and settings**.
- Protect and preserve areas of **special character** and interest, principal views across the city and historic **skyline**.
- Ensure that new tall buildings have a good relationship with the **street, movement patterns and transport** facilities, creating high quality public space at the same time.
- Ensure that tall buildings assist in the **legibility** of the city and contribute strongly to a **sense of place**.
- Make tall buildings **environmentally sustainable** and operational.
- Promote the **highest design quality** for tall buildings and their composition resulting in a distinctive, recognisable, "this could only be Leeds" skyline.

Summary

What is it about?

The purpose of this Tall Building Guide for Leeds is to establish clear principles and advice to steer them to appropriate locations and ensure they are well designed. It will also be used to assess emerging proposals. It embraces key urban design issues for the city centre by addressing the importance of Form (buildings and morphology), Movement (transport, vehicles and pedestrians), Space (space/landscape around and in front of buildings) and Uses (activity and regeneration). It builds on Leeds' inheritance of existing tall buildings and Council Policies and initiatives affecting the city centre. As a component of the Local Development Framework this document provides supplementary support to the Development Plan documents.

It is expected that the guide will be used in a variety of ways ranging from strategic to detailed guidance. Where relevant the appropriate UDP Policy is highlighted to reinforce the particular point.



Existing Situation

This section explains how topography, urban morphology and urban form influence the existing context and shape of the city. Distant panoramic and local views of the city and its existing collection of tall buildings give a flavour of the built form and hint at the challenge ahead of developing tall buildings in Leeds. Reference is made to existing Policies (both national and local), and the aspirational documents - The Vision for Leeds 2004-2020 and Renaissance Leeds, the former strives to make Leeds an international competitive city, and the latter is about moving forward a diverse, dynamic and evolving city with a recognisable skyline, whilst preserving its character areas and strong sense of place.

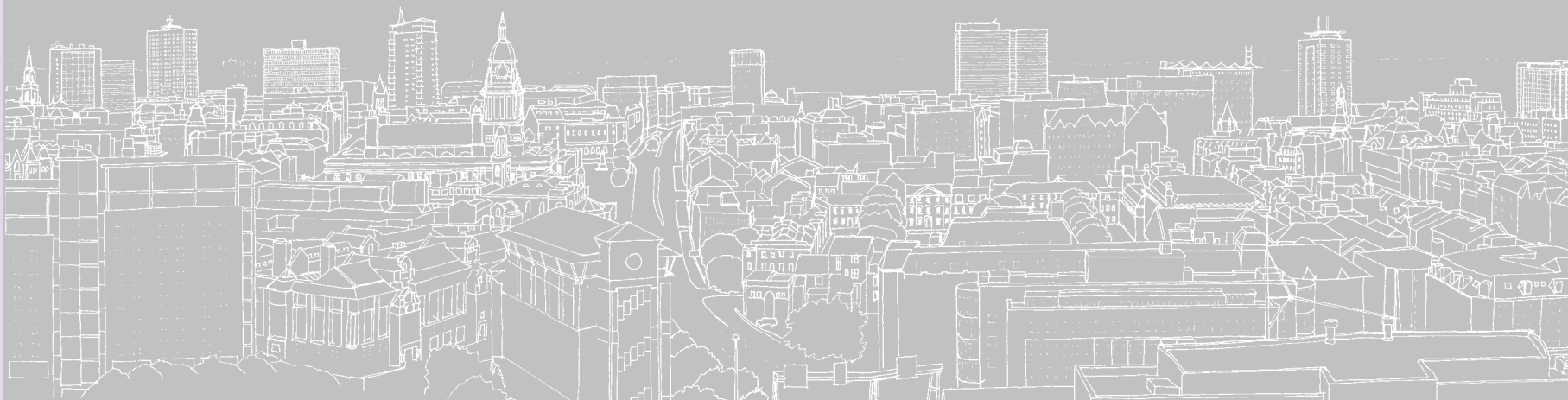
Strategic Issues

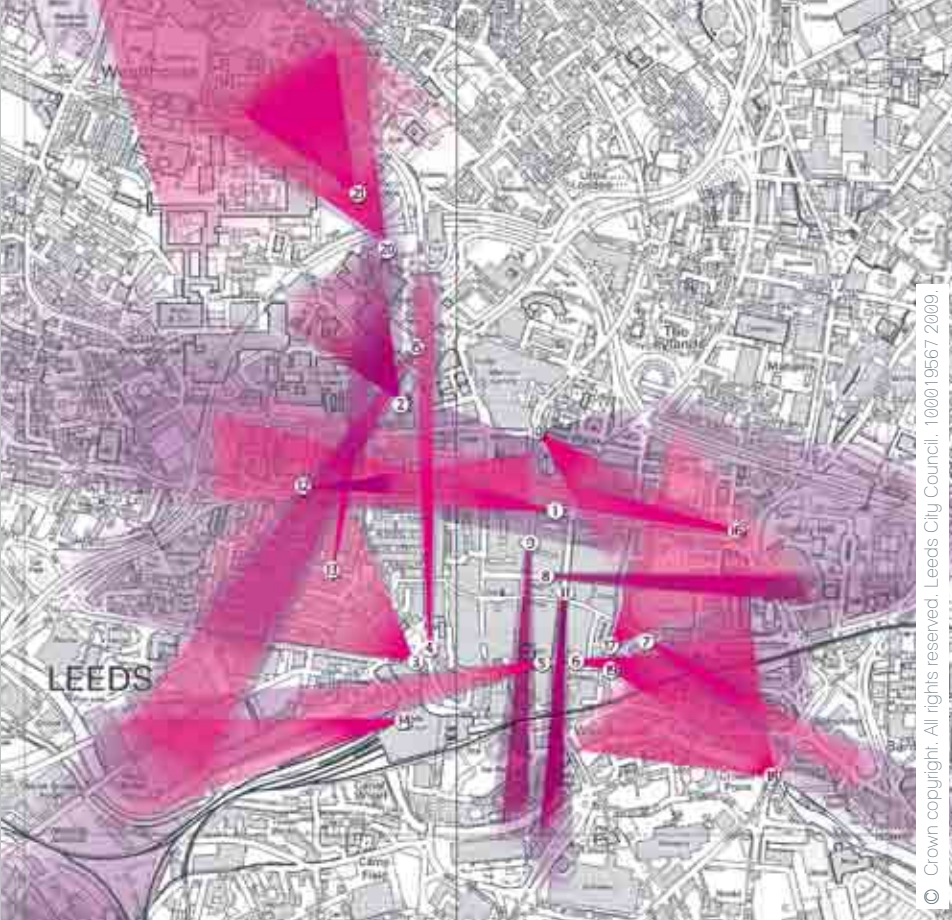
A variety of strategic issues reveal that the guide is not just about the form of tall buildings but is concerned with where they could go whilst protecting the best of the existing city fabric. A section - **Protecting Settings, Views and Vistas** - declares the intent to prohibit tall buildings where they are likely to cause visual damage.

The existing legacy of tall buildings provides the framework within which to recognise new opportunities and the potential to reshape the city into a more coherent urban form without harming the quality of the existing environment, particularly that of conservation areas.

The **Landmarks and Gateways** section shows how tall buildings can assist in making the city more legible, providing points for reference and orientation as well as forming important markers at entrances and exits to the city.

The potential to reinforce an existing **cluster** of tall buildings and create a new cluster on the south side of the River Aire is revealed. The way in which the issues of **movement and connections** relate to tall buildings is important. Their relevance to the location and sustainability of tall buildings is described, particularly the influence of the central railway station on the acceptability of super-tall towers.





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<< Example of map indicating protected views
 < Image of Bridgewater Place, Aedas Architects

Design Detail

Key Design Principles

- Ensure tall buildings are **imaginative high quality designs** with a cohesive quality for all features so that the design works as a whole.
- Ensure tall buildings respond appropriately to the **distinctive local character** and ensure there is no visual harm to historic buildings and views.
- Minimise energy use and waste** (both during construction and throughout the life of the building) including using renewable energy production where appropriate.
- Use **sustainable materials**.
- Tops of tall buildings should **add appropriate interest to the skyline**.
- Create active ground level frontages** to the adjacent streets.
- Consider recladding** existing tall buildings to provide a sustainable high quality solution before proposing demolition and new build.

Sustainability and climate change are critical issues in designing for appropriate development. Ways of implementing sustainable principles and practices through design, such as multiple skins that create high transparency with energy conservation and renewable energy devices, are suggested.

Skyline enhancement is considered with emphasis on shaping the emerging skyline into a meaningful composition giving Leeds its own identity.

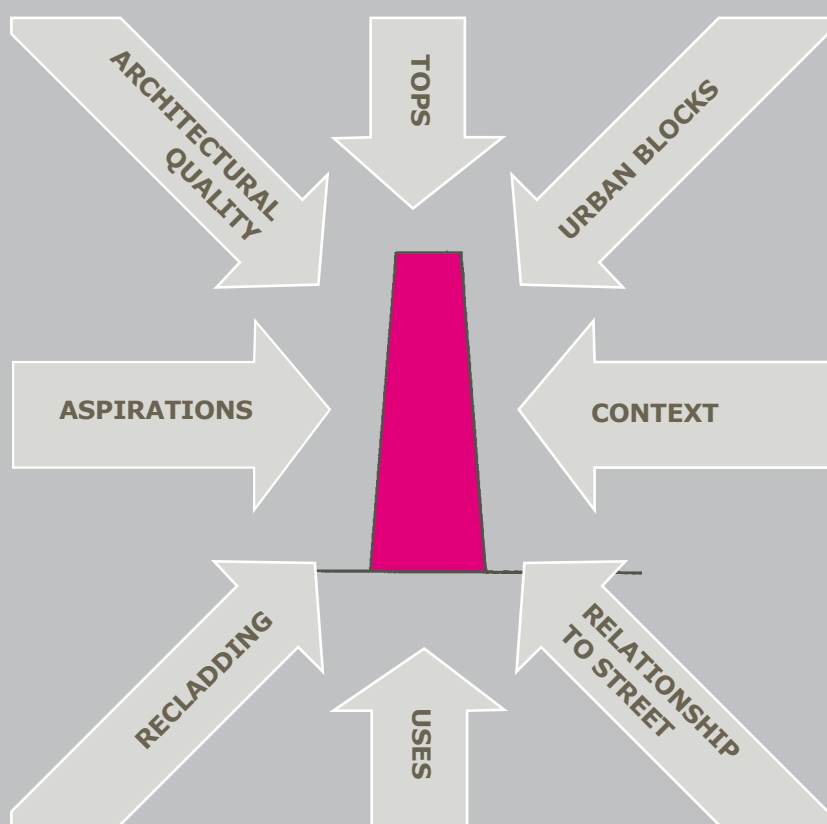
Design Detail

Design Detail focuses in on the various factors that make a tall building successful in design terms and compatible with its specific location. A key aim is to foster imaginative and high quality design. Architectural quality raises issues of height, scale, style, form and relationships with neighbouring buildings, as well as the influence of cladding, materials and patterns.

The tops of tall buildings receive special attention because of their impact on the skyline, as does their relationship with the street, particularly the interface with the ground and the public realm which is very important. The merits of urban blocks and the uses within, are highlighted again to signify how important that connection with the ground is and their contribution to good frontage. The validity of re-cladding old buildings is also covered.

Design Process and Planning Submission Requirements

This section emphasises the design process based upon the importance of good site analysis, concept and detail. This engenders the right approach to an understanding of context and aids the production of the mandatory Design and Access Statements. This section also identifies the required standard of information and presentation needed for Planning Approval.



Design Detail

Relevant UDP Policies

SA1, SA9
 BD2, BD4, BD5, BD5A, BD14
 CC3, CC4, CC5, CC6, CC7, CC8, CC9,
 CC11, CC12, CC13
 N12, N13

Introduction

The 'Blue' development by Granary Wharf - a 16+ storey block which rises up dramatically next to the railway station, currently delineates the canal basin



In the foreground the Leeds International Swimming Pool site where there has been a proposal for a tall building adjacent to the Inner Ring Road as part of the 'string'

Tall urban blocks of Infirmary Street with the 21 storey tower of the Park Plaza Hotel terminating the view

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish clear principles and advice against which proposals for tall buildings will be considered and assessed. It will provide guidance regarding where tall buildings should and should not be built and provide the necessary degree of certainty for property developers. As well as providing supplementary support to Development Plan Documents as part of the Local Development Framework the document aims to demonstrate the importance of design and urban design in achieving distinctive quality buildings appropriate and compatible with their locations. By setting out strategic principles, visual damage, for example to the historic cores, can be avoided and high quality development will be able to enhance Leeds for the benefit of inhabitants, workers, visitors and businesses.



It seeks also to reinforce the existing but varied positive qualities of Leeds by securing the highest standard of design that itself will contribute to, rather than damage, local distinctiveness, whether it be by integration into the local context, or, on a wider city scale, by fitting into and enhancing the urban silhouette and skyline.



What is a tall building?

At the turn of the century tall was defined as 'out of reach of a fireman's ladder' but the safest present day definition is one which the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and English Heritage use in their guide:-

A tall building is one which is substantially taller than its neighbours and/or which significantly changes the skyline.



Windturbines erected on the ground and on top of existing structures will be considered as if they were tall buildings.



<< Bridgewater Place, view from Call Lane, is visible from many places within the city centre and beyond



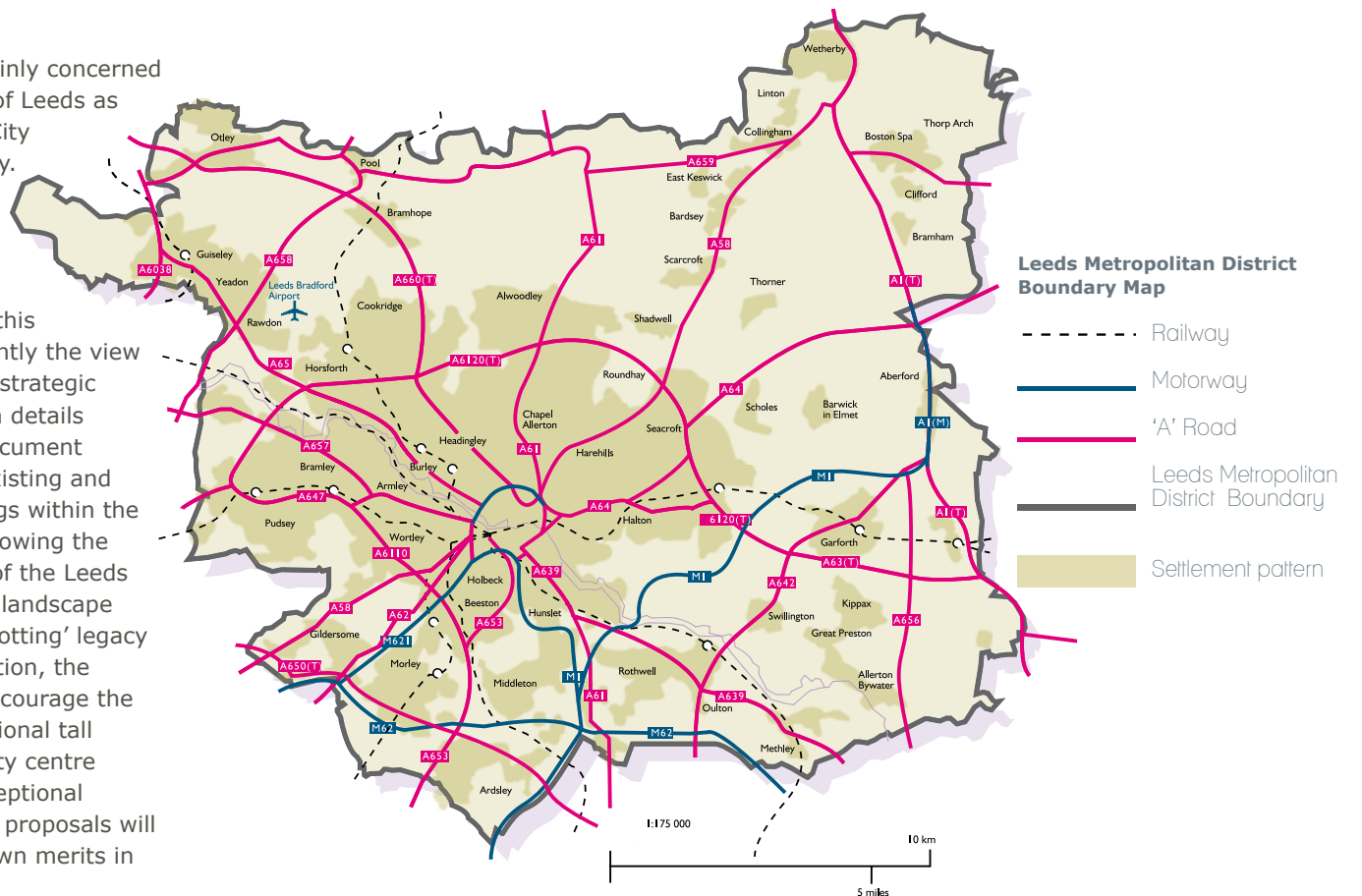
< Whilst 10-12 storeys would generally be regarded as tall, within the city centre there are areas where they have become the norm, as seen in these views along Park Row where they are regarded as part of tall urban blocks

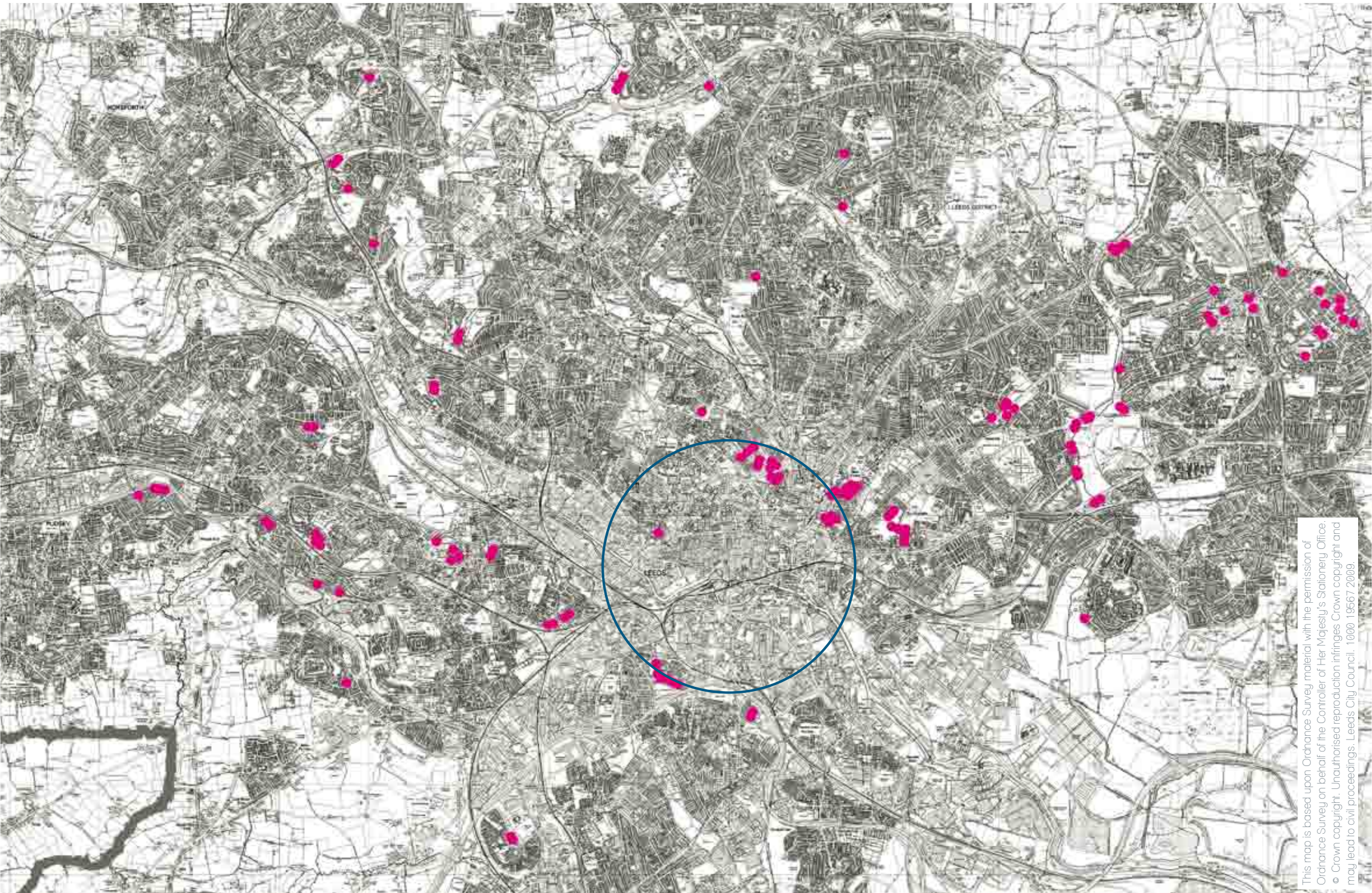
Office and residential storey heights are usually different. Proposed heights in metres (including plant rooms) will be more accurate and appropriate.

When one considers that some proposed large city centre blocks are in the region of 10 to 14 storeys compared to existing towers which are only a few storeys higher, it is clear that proposals for tall city centre blocks could unacceptably avoid the more intensive examination process which tall buildings have to undergo. It should however, still be possible to identify tall building applications because the built form in the city centre is of a consistent height e.g. the general 4 to 6 storey shopping quarter and the 6 to 8 storeys of the business quarter west of the city centre. Consequently, applications for tall buildings which are substantially taller than the surrounding buildings can easily be categorised. The City Council takes the view that any proposal which is more than 14 storeys (as a rule of thumb) could qualify as a tall building, notwithstanding its immediate 10-12 storey context, on the basis that there would be a change to the Leeds skyline.

Study Area

This document is mainly concerned with the city centre of Leeds as was defined by the City Centre UDP Boundary. The post war building programme has resulted in over 120 tower blocks constructed outside this boundary. Consequently the view has been taken that strategic principles and design details referred to in this document will be relevant to existing and proposed tall buildings within the district of Leeds. Following the visual deterioration of the Leeds urban and suburban landscape due to the 'pepper-potting' legacy of post war construction, the Council wishes to discourage the construction of additional tall blocks outside the city centre unless there are exceptional circumstances. Such proposals will be judged on their own merits in line with guidance.





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Existing Tall Housing Blocks in the Leeds District

- City Centre
- Tall block