

2. Existing Tall Building Usage

Many of the existing tall buildings along the north/south ridge date from the late sixties/early seventies and are very much of their time as shown with:

West Riding House
Albion Street
(top right, bottom right)

Merrion House
Merrion Centre
(middle centre)

Ventura House
Clay Pit Lane
(middle right)

Tower House
Merrion Way
(bottom centre)

There are a variety of uses for tall buildings, the main ones of which are considered separately.

Offices

Existing tall office towers have mainly developed along the north/south ridge line topography as a result of city centre policy of the late 60's, 70's and 80's with City House, West Riding House, Merrion House, Tower House and Ventura (previously Hepworths) being notable examples. Their locations have proved successful to some extent due to their proximity with other city centre usages and transport facilities. Recladding,

refurbishment and change of use has led to the retention of all but one of those 60's to 80's towers.

In general they are not regarded as significant pieces of architecture, although Ventura could be regarded as an interesting essay in design for its time. Not many have contributed to the street scene with, for example, West Riding House's failure in closing the important vista down Albion Place. They have, however, assisted in creating a visual definition to the city centre when seen from a distance as a north to south spine.



Aerial photograph of north/south ridge of tall buildings (from CCUDS analysis)



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< The apartments of the City Island development at Goffs Island step up as they curve round to create an interesting sculptural form



New Apartments

Certain inefficient patterns of development are not sustainable in the city centre. The need to optimise the use of land and reduce overall land take together with efficient and sustainable patterns of development has resulted in the growth of apartment blocks mainly on either side of the River Aire, with large developments at Aireside, Goffs Island, Sweet Street and The Calls being notable examples. These have resulted in localised built form of varied scales and heights, e.g. 6 to 8 storeys in Sweet Street and 14 to 16 storeys in Aireside.

< The apartment development along Whitehall Road front the river and railway station and delineate the edge of the city centre

<< This student block on Burley Road provides a focal point on the journey westward



Student Housing

Recent growth of student accommodation has prompted many applications for large blocks of accommodation which have generally been 8 to 12 storeys in height and proposed mainly for the Burley Road area to the west of the city centre.

Student accommodation proposed for the Clay Pit Lane, former Little Londoner and BBC sites has resulted in the construction of three tall buildings in the highest part of the city. Notwithstanding any individual design quality these may have additional merit since they have been proposed in a zone where tall buildings will be acceptable and because they can complement other adjacent existing tall towers to form part of a cluster formation.

< Whilst opposite is OPAL, a new urban block of student accommodation

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Examples of social housing towers (formerly Council flat blocks) are peppered around the former Leeds County Borough area beyond the city centre



Social Housing Towers

In December 2003 there were 131 post-war tower blocks throughout the Leeds district. Many 'pepperpot' the outer areas of the city and some encroach into the city centre with others clearly affecting the skyline. Blocks tend to be 15, 18 and 20 storeys high with two at 25 storeys. They have been constructed using various system building techniques. The resultant spaces around and between tall residential towers have in many cases produced low quality environments leading to progressive neglect.

The flats at Marlborough Towers Burley Road provide an end stop to the view down the Headrow and Westgate



These blocks which are part of Leeds Metropolitan University on Portland Way have now been reclad and updated



Other uses

Educational and hotel buildings are the other main uses for tall buildings in Leeds City Centre. Leeds Metropolitan University and Leeds College of Technology have accommodation in the form of tall towers which form part of the north/south spine of tall buildings. Similarly placed along the spine and adjacent to City Square, Park Plaza was an office building but has been converted into a hotel circa 2003.

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The concrete tower block on Albion Street that was formerly Dudley House offices has been reclad and refurbished to form K2 with its apartments to bring this outdated building back into beneficial use

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Park Plaza Hotel is a reclad and refurbished office block on the corner of City Square and Boar Lane which sits on a podium of restaurants and bars. It illustrates that tall buildings can be adapted to have uses other than residential or office, and can be rejuvenated

< Recent tall buildings and blocks that form a 'string' alongside the River Aire



Residential buildings have had a major impact on the city centre and its neighbourhoods and it is important not only to accept their key role but to acknowledge that they can make a valid contribution to a higher quality of life and environment.

Future

Tall buildings can:-

- Offer viable solutions to city centre living
- Respond to the crisis of affordable housing
- Facilitate those who keep services running
- Alleviate strain on public transport
- Reinforce existing business areas
- Cater for significant population growth in a sustainable manner providing lessons have been learnt from the mistakes of the past
- Meet the needs of young professionals who wish to enjoy the metropolitan lifestyle
- Contribute towards the urban renaissance
- Could facilitate renewable energy eg. wind turbines

< Recently completely student accommodation OPAL on Burley Road is a 9/10 storey urban block with a 14/15 storey tower - a mixture of block and tower form

Recent Trends

- Waterfront

Waterfront locations have in recent years offered opportunities, with development having occurred along Brewery Wharf with more being planned and progressed for the Aireside Site. Sites to the east of the city have the potential to offer new urban form and landmarks as did the former Hunslet Mill to this area.

Water can benefit from reflections of tall buildings by day and by night e.g. The Clarence Dock Basin, River Aire.

- West of the City / Burley Road

There has been recent activity of establishing tall buildings containing student residences along Burley Road. This has probably been due to developers taking advantage of cheaper sites to the west of the City Centre and their proximity to the University. Recent applications have been of up to a 12-15 storey scale which will result in tall blocks positioned close to each other rather than individual tall buildings.



