

# Brixton Tall Buildings Study

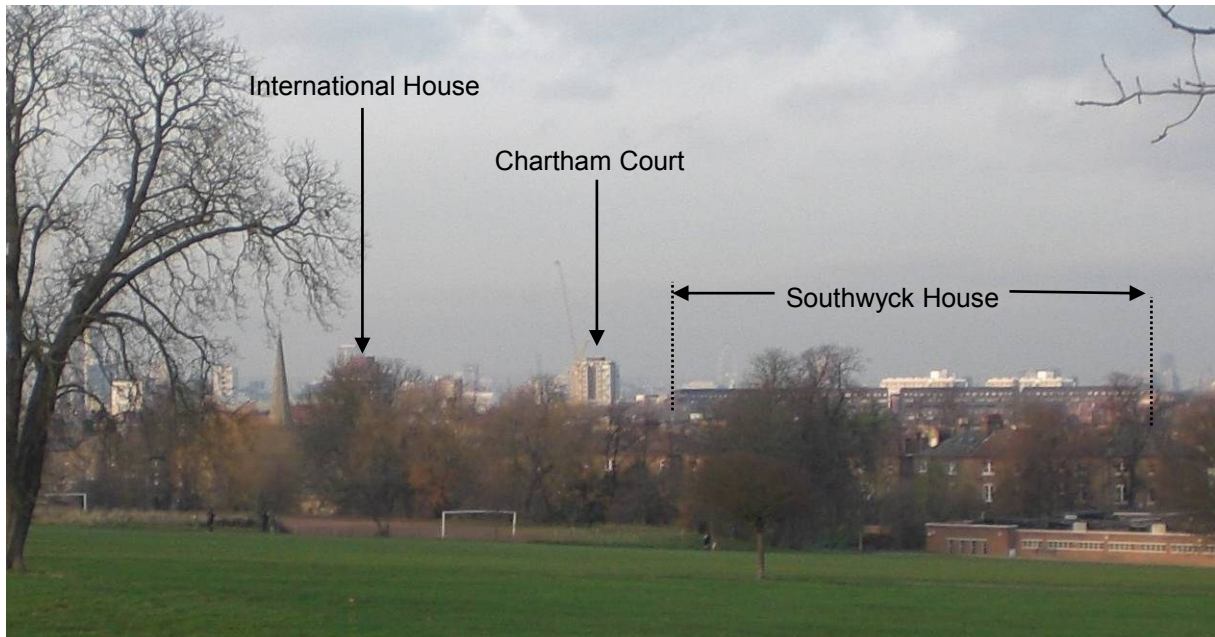


**FINAL 2014**

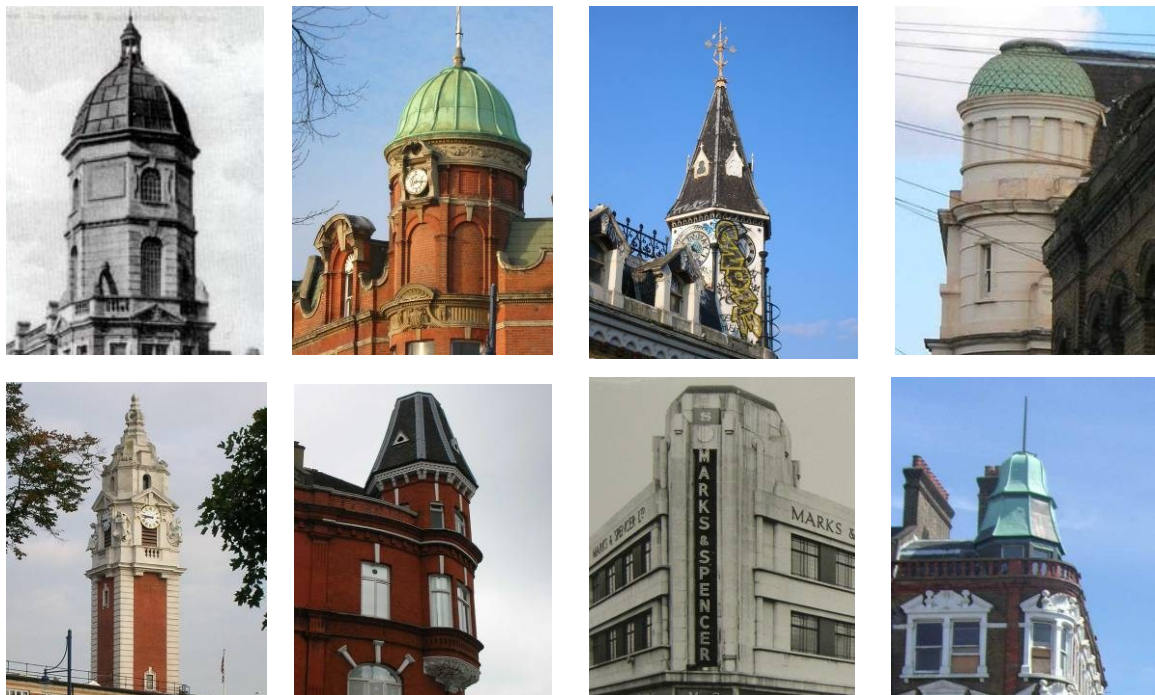
  
**Lambeth**

## Cover Images

1. St Matthew's Church and Town Hall towers from Effra Road
2. International House, Canterbury Crescent
3. Town Hall tower from Brockwell Park
4. Victoria Tower, Houses of Parliament from Brockwell Park



Existing tall / large buildings in Brixton as seen from the City Panorama View from Brockwell Park (policy 41 of Unitary Development Plan (2007), Saved Policies)



Central Brixton's roovescape is ornamented by slender towers and corner turrets.

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This final version of the Brixton Tall Buildings Study comes as a result of representations made by English Heritage in relation to the to the draft Lambeth Local Plan (2013). In response to those submissions a meetings were held with English Heritage in June and July 2014 and at the Examination in Public for the draft Local Plan it was agreed that the Council would re-visit terminology, content, assessment and conclusions of the Council's tall building evidence taking greater account of the advice set out in the document 'Guidance on Tall Buildings by CABE / EH, 2007' especially in relation to the terms 'appropriate for', 'sensitive to' and 'inappropriate for' tall building and with the view to making the documents a useful resource to anyone considering tall building development in Lambeth.

August 2014

## **1. Study Background**

1.1 The first draft of this document was produced to inform the production London Borough of Lambeth's Brixton Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and as evidence to inform the emerging draft Lambeth Local Plan. It was subsequently revisited in response to advice from English Heritage during the Examination in Public for the draft Local Plan in July 2014. The document objective is the identification of constraints affecting the siting of tall buildings, the identification of suitable sites and the guidance on heights within the area of central Brixton covered by the Council's Brixton SPD boundary. See map opposite.

### Policy Context

1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes that Local Planning Authorities should set out their strategic priorities, which should also include policies to deliver conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscaping (paragraph 156) and identify land where development would be inappropriate due to environmental or historical significance. This follows on from the requirement that local plans should set out opportunities for development and clear policies on what will, or will not, be permitted and where (paragraph 154).

1.3 The London Plan, Policy 7.7a, identifies that tall and large buildings should be part of a strategic approach to changing or developing an area. In relation to tall buildings, the Lambeth Core Strategy refers to the London Plan identification of Central Activities Zone and Opportunity Areas as suitable locations for tall buildings.

1.4 Policy 40 of the Council's Unitary Development Plan, 2007 (Saved Policies, 2010) identified Brixton as an appropriate location for tall buildings. It also states that tall buildings should meet both visual design criteria and urban design conditions. The criteria on the opposite page is provided in extract from the UDP.

### Tall Buildings

1.5 The Lambeth Core Strategy (2011) identifies tall buildings as those over 25 metres (adjacent to the River Thames and over 30 metres elsewhere within the borough. These are the thresholds over which planning applications are referred to the Mayor and over which he has a power of direction of approval or refusal (paragraph 4.46).

### Best Practice

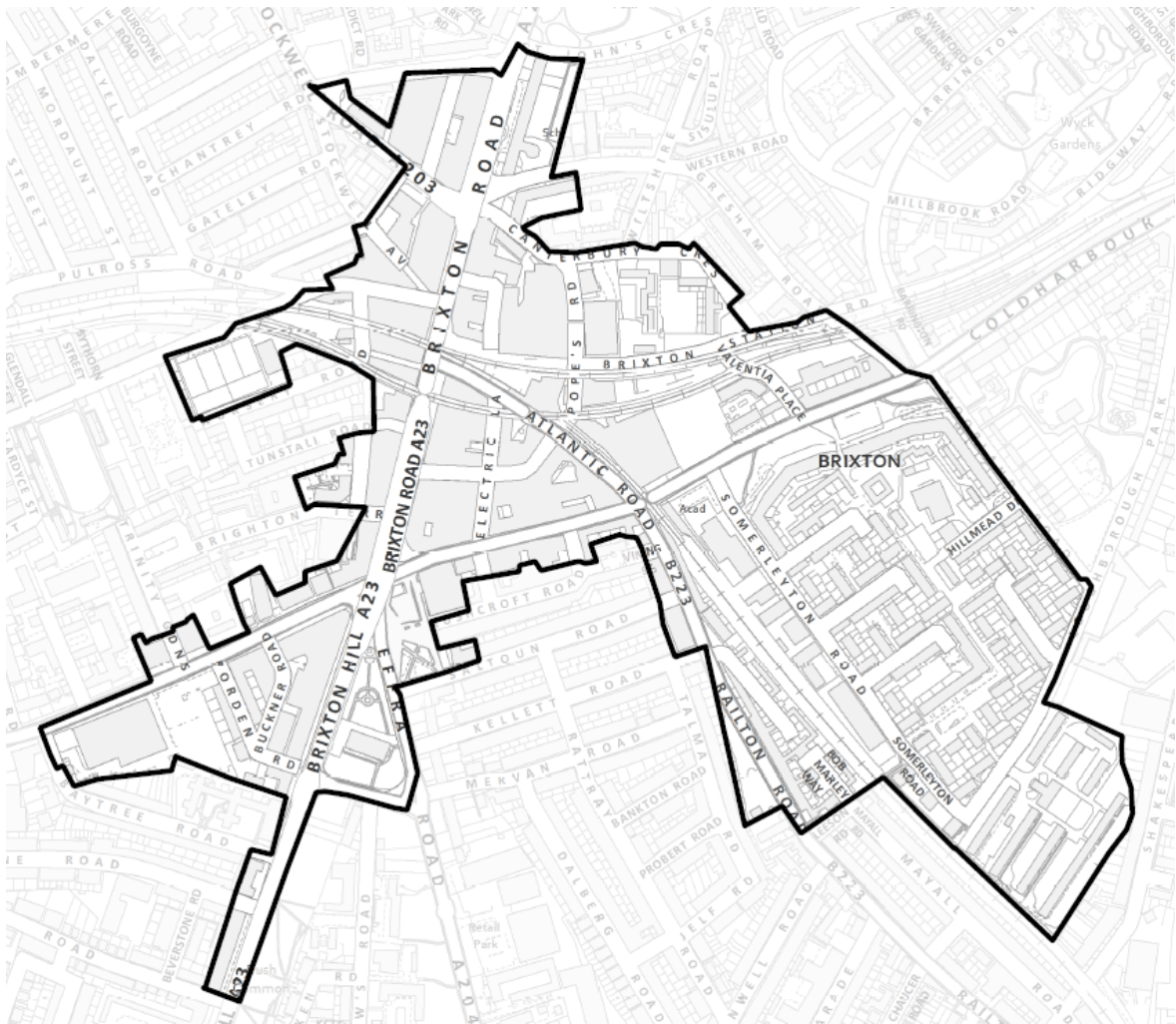
1.6 The Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) / English Heritage (EH) Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007) states that within the strategy for designing tall buildings, LPAs should identify appropriate locations for tall buildings in their development plan documents. These should be drawn up through effective engagement with local communities and with proper regard to national and regional planning policies and matters such as the local environment. The terms 'appropriate for', 'sensitive to' and 'inappropriate for' tall building development are used in this study in order to align with that guidance.

### Study Area / Brixton SPD Area

1.7 The study area / Brixton SPD area boundary reflects the Brixton Town Centre boundary as defined in the Lambeth Core Strategy (2010) and also extends South East to include the Moorlands estate, the Guinness Trust / Loughborough Estate – areas which are highlighted as regeneration areas under Policy PN3 of the Core Strategy. Identified as a major centre in the London Plan, Brixton is one of the two largest commercial town centres in Lambeth (the other being Streatham).

### Existing building heights in the study area

1.8 The average building height in the locality is 11.542 m, this is typical of the 3-storey building stock which is the norm for the area. However, larger and tall buildings do exist including—Blue Star House, Stockwell Road, Recreation Centre, Brixton Station Road, Hambrook House, Brixton Hill; and International House, Canterbury Crescent.



**UDP Design Criteria for tall Buildings (from Policy 40– Tall Buildings)**

Visual Design Criteria:

If the location criteria are met, then the tall building will need to meet the following visual design criteria:

In view of the inevitable prominence of a tall building it should be of the highest architectural and constructional quality.

It should enhance the skyline through profile and use of materials.

Bulky, solid structures or buildings with unsightly roof plant will not be permitted.

Be constructed to the standard of quality, design, and vision of the original architect.

Urban Design:

Tall buildings should create pedestrian friendly spaces, a suitable high quality public realm, improving the sense of place and identity, and address streets (and potentially the river) with active ground floor uses. The Council will also have regard to the following considerations:

The development should interact with, and contribute to its surroundings at street level.

Development should provide a proper setting and treatment, including the provision of mixed uses, active frontage uses where appropriate, considerable improvements to the public realm, and landscaped open space

The building should achieve a harmonious relationship when viewed in context with surrounding buildings at street level and as part of the public realm.

The development should have access, servicing, and entrances that do not detract from their surroundings;

The amenities and development possibilities of surrounding sites and buildings should not be impaired. Where this cannot be demonstrated, the proposal should be part of, or accompanied by, a wider master-plan or development framework.

## **2. Heritage Assets**

2.1 The Brixton study area is rich in designated and undesignated heritage assets.

### Statutory Listed Buildings (designated heritage Asset)

2.2 The Council has a statutory obligation to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the special interest of listed buildings; including their settings. There are 30 statutory listed buildings within or immediately adjoining the SPD area. These tend to be relatively low 19th century buildings—varying greatly in status and character—from the modest two storey former St John’s School on Canterbury Grove to Brixton Town Hall.

### Locally Listed Buildings (undesignated heritage assets)

2.3 The Council maintains a list of buildings of local architectural or historic interest—the ‘local list’. Local planning policy seeks the sympathetic retention of locally listed buildings. There are 58 locally listed buildings within or immediately adjoining the SPD area.

2.4 Sites immediately adjoining statutory and locally listed buildings are considered inappropriate for tall building development as the scale of the new would overwhelm. The wider settings of statutory and locally listed buildings are sensitive to tall building development.

### Conservation Areas (designated heritage assets)

2.45 Areas of special architectural or historic interest are designated by the Council under national legislation. When considering proposals affecting conservation areas the law requires the Council to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.

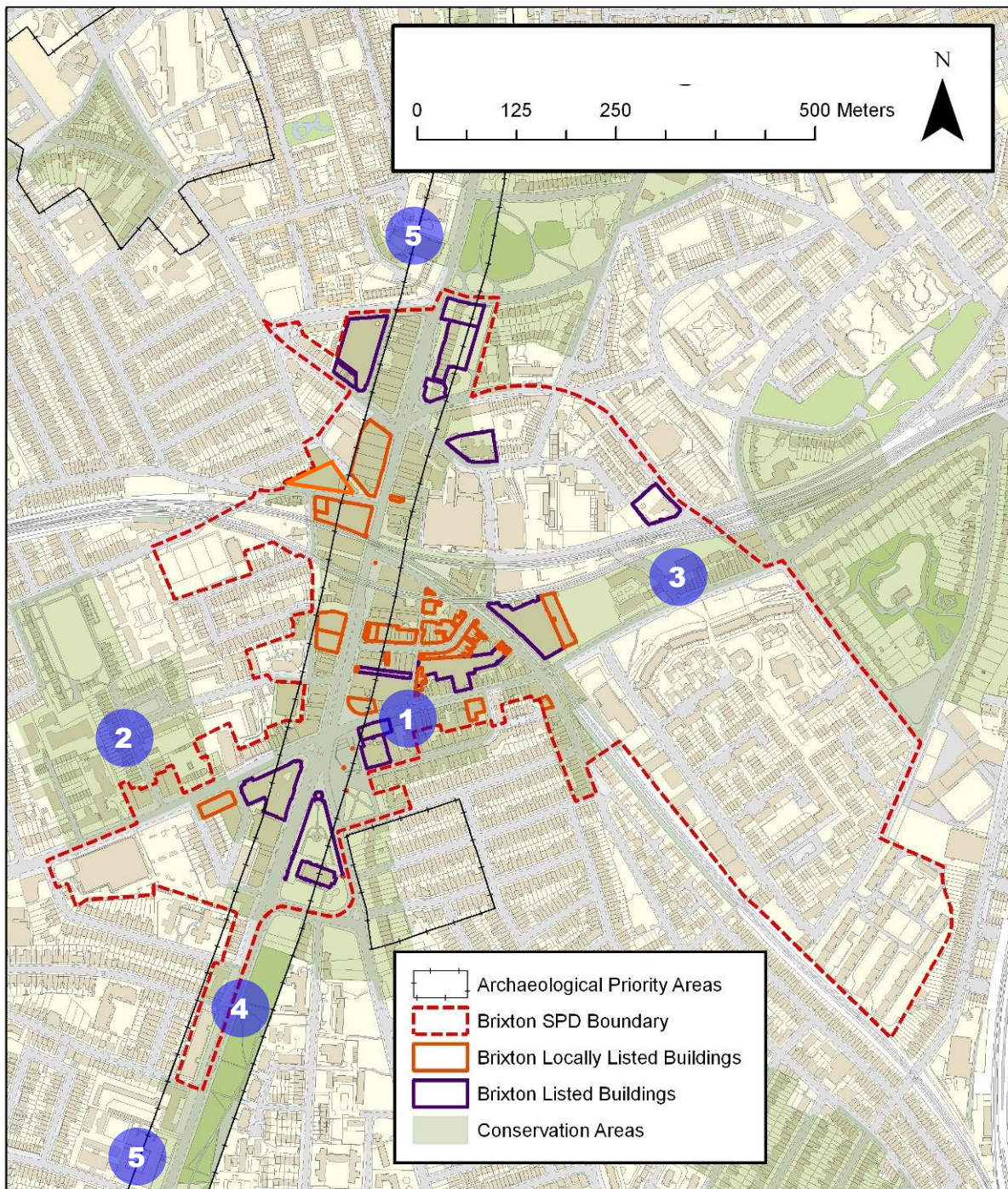
2.6 Brixton Conservation Area (CA26) forms the heart of the SPD area. It is characterised by 19th and early 20th Century commercial development. Building heights range from 3—5 storeys. The palette of materials is typical of the period with brick being dominant with some use of faience. A number of landmark buildings are characterised by towers and spires which gives a varied and rich roofscape. Other than historic towers there are no other tall buildings with the conservation area. However, some adjoin the boundary and are established elements in the setting. This conservation area and its setting are sensitive to tall building development.

2.7 Trinity Gardens Conservation Area (CA18) sits immediately to the west of the town centre and is only partly within the SPD area. It is largely characterised by 19th Century residential development of 2—4 storeys. There is only one large building the former Sandle Street School which is a 5—6 storey London Board School located some distance from the study area. This conservation area and its immediate setting are inappropriate for tall building development because of its low-scale residential character.

2.8 Rush Common & Brixton Hill Conservation Area (CA49) lies immediately to the south of central Brixton. It has a mixed character of 19th and 20th Century residential development types and the Rush Common Open Space. 20th Century residential development at the north end of the conservation area (nearest the SPD area) does not exceed 6 storeys. This conservation area setting is sensitive to tall building development.

2.9 Loughborough Park Conservation Area (CA27) sits to the east of central Brixton. It is largely characterised by early—mid 19th Century residential development although there is a commercial frontage on the north side of Coldharbour Lane. The building heights of traditional buildings do not generally exceed 3 storeys. Modern blocks fronting Coldharbour Lane are in the region of 6 storeys—these are an exception to the prevailing character. This conservation area and its immediate setting is therefore inappropriate for tall building development and its wider setting is sensitive.

# Heritage Assets Map



## Brixton Conservation Areas:

- 1) Brixton Conservation Area (CA26)
- 2) Trinity Gardens Conservation Area (CA18)
- 3) Loughborough Park Conservation Area (CA27)
- 4) Rush Common & Brixton Hill Conservation Area (CA49)
- 5) Archaeological Priority Area—Bristol Causeway

### **3. Brixton Conservation Area Statement (2012)**

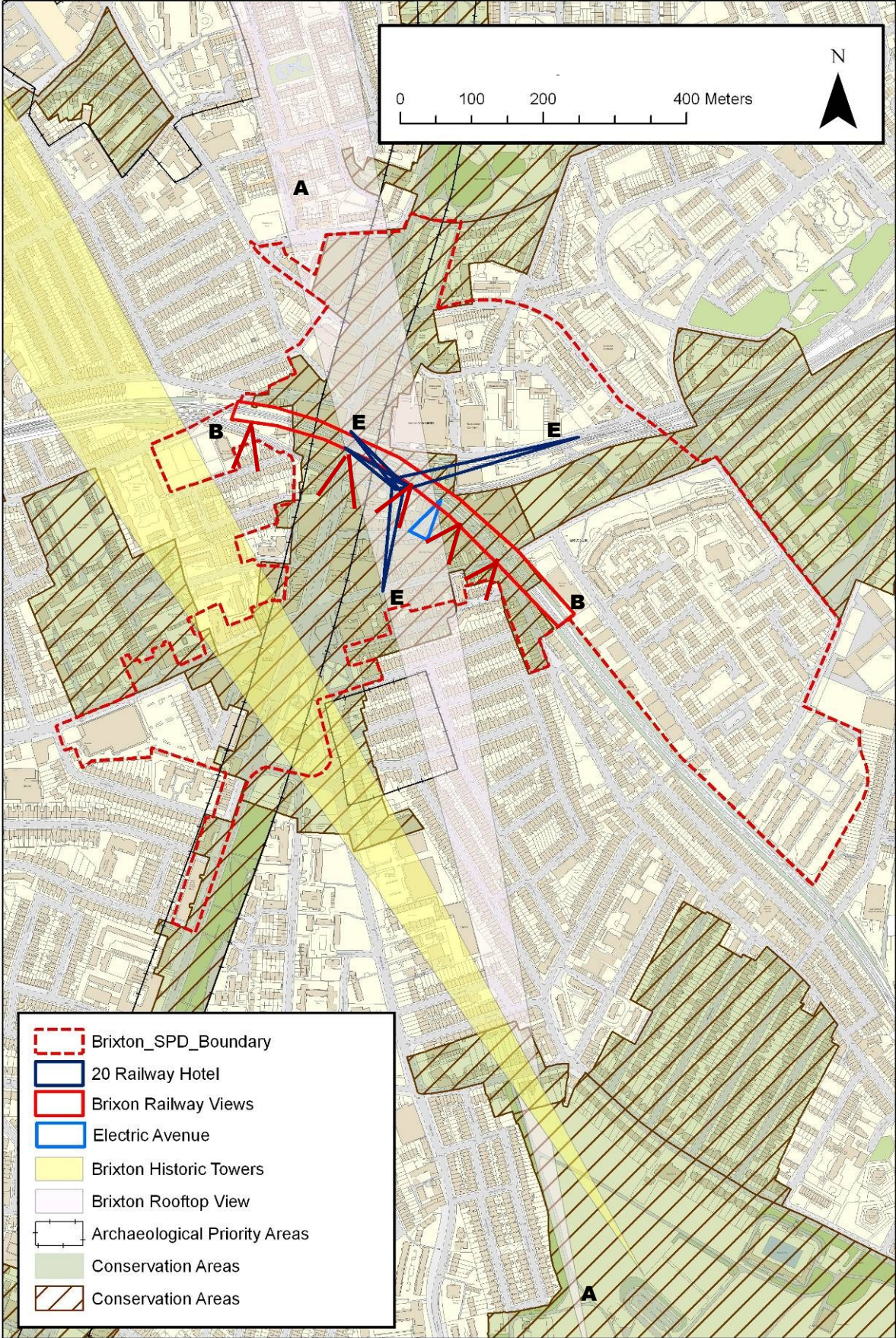
- 3.1 The Brixton Conservation Area Statement (2012) identifies views of note:
- 3.2 A Distant views of roofscape from Brockwell Park where the numerous towers and turrets can be appreciated.
- 3.3 B Views of roofscape and streetscape from trains travelling along the elevated railway viaducts and from the platforms of Brixton Station. These are not all shown on the map opposite for reasons of clarity although the length of track from which views are made is outlined in red. Of particular note is the views down Electric Avenue and towards Brixton Road. The views from the railway platform (B) radiate out to the North and South of the platform.
- 3.4 C Views of Lambeth Town Hall including its landmark tower: generally these views can be obtained from many vantage points both from within and outside the conservation area and appreciation of these should not be impaired. Specific views - along Brixton Road & Brixton Hill, west along Coldharbour Lane and East along Acre Lane are of particular importance and should be safeguarded from interruption. These are not shown on the map opposite because of their sheer number but include views west from trains on the railway viaduct as it crosses Coldharbour Lane (one of the railway views).
- 3.5 D Views of St Matthew's Church, especially the tower and lantern: generally these views can be obtained from many vantage points both from within and outside the conservation area and appreciation of these should not be impaired. Specific views north long Effra Road, south along Brixton Road, up Kellett Road and north up Brixton Hill are of particular importance and should be safeguarded from harm.
- 3.6 E Views of the Railway Hotel, 20 Atlantic Road: this impressive late Victorian Public House is a local landmark and views of its clock tower with 6 faces and gilt weather vane rising above is visible in views east and west along Atlantic Road and north wards along Electric Lane. The views as demonstrated on the map, at right, cover a central part of Brixton. The Railway Hotel can be seen from several locations, as the clock tower and weather vane are both identifiable features. This landmark fades in and out of view moving up Atlantic Road and Brixton Road.

#### Conclusion

- 3.7 The majority of noteworthy views within the Brixton Conservation Areas are of roofscapes and building silhouettes. The roofscape is rich with vertical element (turrets, towers and domes etc.). This makes the conservation area generally inappropriate / sensitive and its setting sensitive to tall building development.



**Brixton Conservation Area Statement (2012) Views**



## **4. Designated Views**

### Strategic Views

4.1 None of the Mayor of London's Strategic Views cover the Brixton study area.

### Local Views

4.2 The Lambeth UDP (Saved Policies 2010) identifies a number of views of local significance. The emerging Draft Local Plan further expands upon this; identifying views of local interest from Policy 41 and expanding the number. Relevant locally important views are those northwards from Brockwell Park as they pass through the study area. They are:

#### Brockwell Park City panorama (1a)

4.3 This wide view falls across all but the south west corner of the study area. The objective of the view is to protect roofscape views across Lambeth towards the landmark buildings of the city beyond (St Paul's Cathedral, The Shard etc). Southwyck House (AKA Brixton Barrier Block) is considered to be a negative element because its bulky slab form acts as a visual barrier.

4.4 This view is sensitive to tall building development. Whilst tall buildings are not excluded within the view given the proximity of the study area to the viewing locations slender and graceful forms are considered to be the most appropriate forms for tall development given that they will have the least impact on the wider view.

#### Brockwell Park to Houses of Parliament Linear View (1b)

4.5 This is a tight view corridor from Brockwell Park to the Victoria Tower. It cuts north across the centre of the study area (over the roof of the Brixton Academy building). Given the narrow nature of this view no tall development is considered appropriate in the view corridor as it would adversely affect the viewers appreciation of the silhouette of the Victoria Tower. In the foreground of the study area existing buildings heights need to be respected in order to protect this view. Land falling within this view cone is considered inappropriate for tall building development.

#### Brockwell Park to Brixton's Historic Towers

4.6 The towers of Lambeth Town Hall and St Matthew's Church are the focal points within this view. The grade II\* listed St Matthew's Church, Brixton Hill, was built in 1822. It is in the Greek Revival style and tower is 36m high. The Lambeth Town Hall is in the Edwardian Baroque style with a distinctive 40m tower. Both towers are slender and graceful local landmarks. Tall building development is inappropriate in this view corridor (foreground and immediate backdrop) as it is likely to prevent an the appreciation of these landmark towers.

### Conclusion

4.7 Assessment shows that local view corridors place some constraint on buildings heights within parts of the study area.

**Map showing relevant UDP Views (Policy 41)**



## 5. Other Local Views

5.1 Notwithstanding the other views identified in sections 3 and 4 an assessment was taken around the study area in order to identify other views of note. These are identified on the map opposite and explained below:

### Acre Lane

5.2 The view East along Acre Lane (from the junction with Concannon Road) provides view of the Town Hall tower. At first the tower is glimpsed between trees and then appears as the main focal point on the horizon.

### Brixton Hill

5.3 Brixton Hill provides a series of kinetic views north of both St Matthew's Church tower and the Town Hall tower. Both towers drop in and out of view depending on the seasonality of surrounding foliage. At times this view is enhanced by tall buildings (such as the Shard) against the backdrop of generally low local buildings.

### Brixton Railway Station

5.4 The elevated platforms of the railway station provides a vantage point from which to see along Atlantic Road and onto Brixton Road. Roofscape views are important. Along the elevated platform is an opportunity to look down on Electric Avenue, watch the market and street scene below. Additionally vantage points from moving trains demonstrate the various scenes of Brixton.

### Our Lady of the Rosary Church Tower

5.5 The view from trains crossing the Brixton Road railway bridge affords a view North up Brixton Road to the tower of Our Lady of the Rosary Church (opposite Max Roach Park). The street scene also highlights various town features which can be seen in and out of the conservation area.

### Coldharbour Lane

5.6 Coldharbour Lane provides a view west of the Town Hall tower.

### Effra Road

5.7 One of better views of St Matthew's Church tower appears from the South on Effra Road.

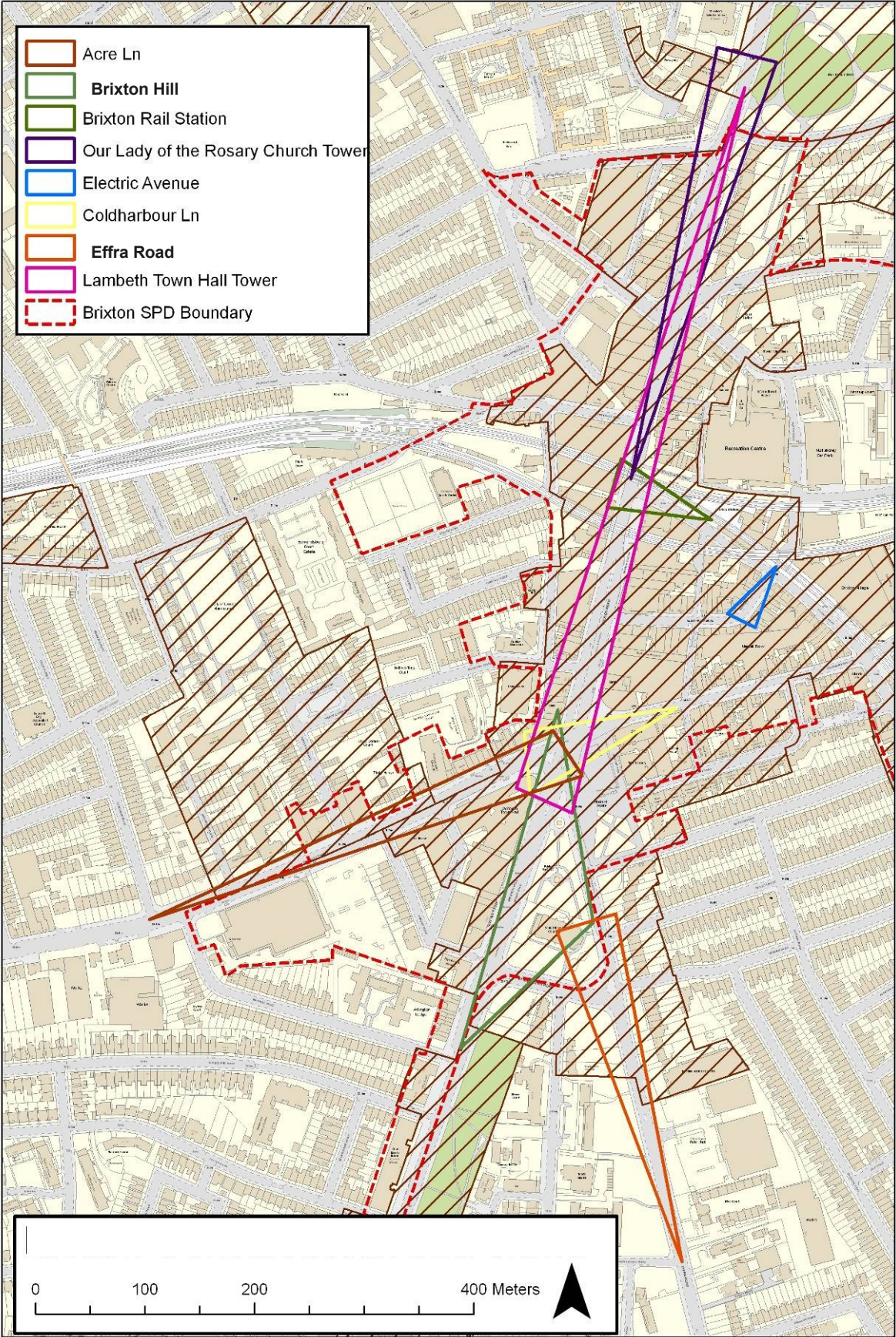
### Conclusion

5.8 Not all the local views would be affected by tall building development. However, many are of landmark towers the setting or silhouette of which could be compromised by tall building development. Some local views therefore are likely to be sensitive to large and tall building.



The view north from trains passing over Brixton Road.

**Other Local Views**



## 6. Assessment / Conclusions

6.1 By over-layering the various constraints within the study area it becomes apparent that their distribution is concentrated. For example heritage assets and buildings with landmark towers tend to be within the main core of the Brixton Conservation Area, so do most of the townscape views of note.

6.2 Using this detailed understanding of the constraints, assisted with 3D modelling to test assumptions, the locations considered least inappropriate for clustering of tall buildings within the study area boundary are limited to two areas which are identified (BC and SH), along with the constraints, on the map opposite. Both sites are outside of conservation areas but adjoin their boundaries—making them sensitive. It also should be noted that tall buildings on these sites would not be inappropriately places within the locally important Brockwell Park City Panorama (see 4.3).

### Brixton Central and Canterbury Estate (BC)

6.3 This is the area bounded by Brixton Station Road, Popes Road and Canterbury Crescent (including the temporary ice rink site, the parking area for market traders and the adjoining Canterbury Estate). On this site International House is 12 storeys + plant and the Canterbury Estate already has one tall building - Chartham Court (16 storeys + plant). The following design parameters need to be considered:

6.4 This area is sensitive to tall building—it should be avoided at the corner of Popes Road and Canterbury Crescent to protect the setting of the former St John's School (a listed building), prevent an unacceptably close relationship with international House (both visually and in terms of amenity) and to protect the setting of the Brixton Conservation Area.

### Southwyck House (SH) and Moorlands Estate (northern part only)

6.5 The existing Southwyck House (9 storeys high) and the low rise housing to its immediate south. Within the Southwyck Site, the recommended development is to the North Western corner due to its proximity the town centre. The north eastern corner is considered sensitive due to the proximity of the Loughborough Park Conservation Area and statutory listed buildings within it. The southern part of the estate is fine grain, low-rise residential building stock, further from the town centre which would be inappropriate for tall building development.

6.6 Tall building development on these sites to a height of 10 storeys is likely to have a neutral impact on the Brixton's heritage assets (and their settings). Development above 10 storeys will be visible from within the conservation areas—making them sensitive to tall building development— care will need to be taken to ensure no harm through careful siting and high quality design.

### Design Advice

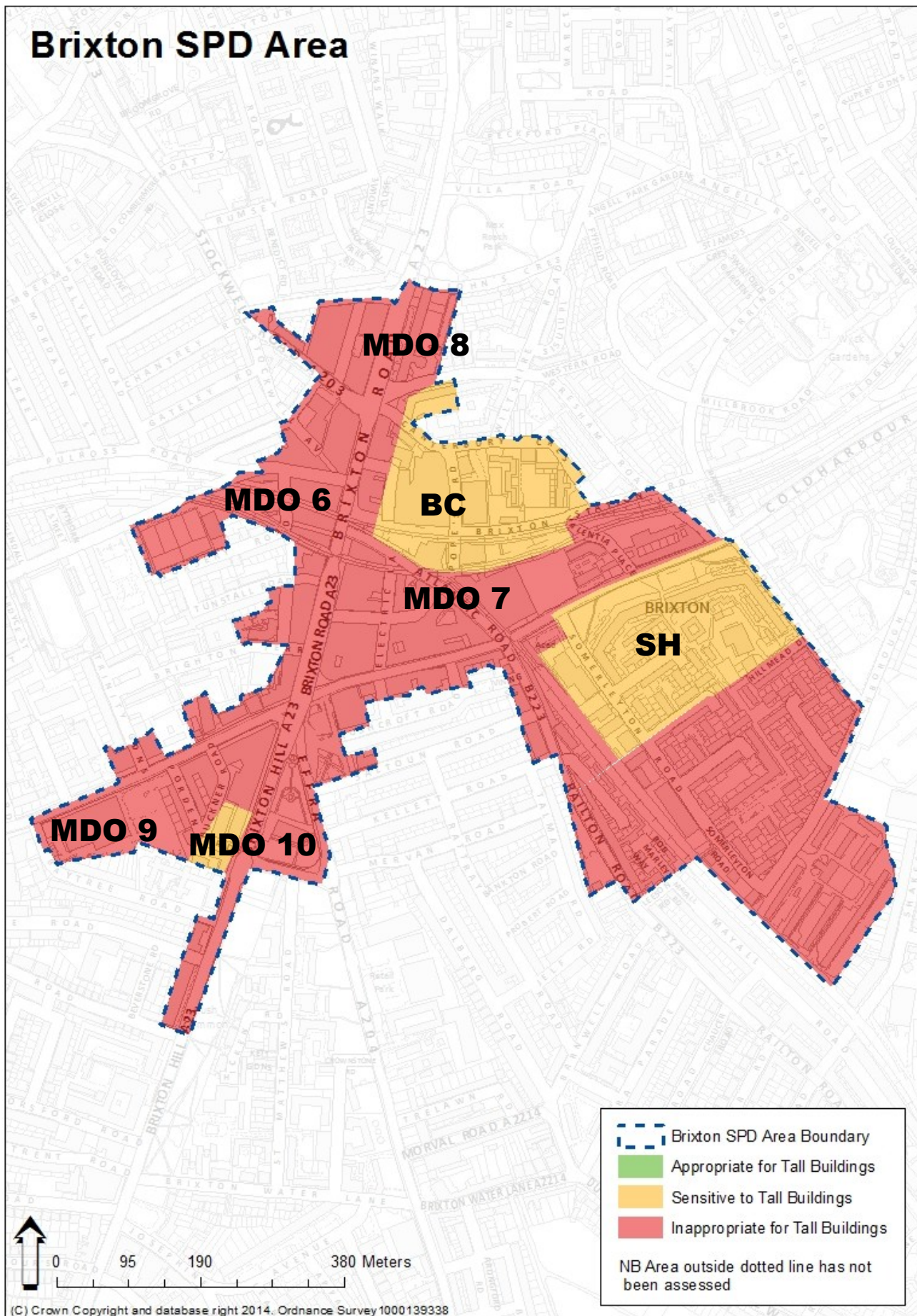
6.7 Applicants proposing tall buildings in excess of 10 storeys should be asked to prepare accurate heritage and townscape impact assessments to allow informed decisions to be made. Ideally in order to mitigate such harm new tall buildings should:

1. Be slender, of elegant proportions with a good silhouette; and
2. Use detailing and materials that harmonise visually with the locally distinct palette of materials (brick and stone).

By following these design parameters the new structures will enhance Brixton's already rich roofscape of historic towers. Large, bulky, squat or alien looking structures are unlikely to be considered acceptable.

6.8 Should proposals for a cluster of tall buildings come forward it is essential that issues of overshadowing, microclimate and outlook / privacy (for existing and new residents) are considered in detail and inform the design from the outset. Clustering which results in solid development of tall buildings is likely to be particularly harmful.

**Tall Building Sensitivity Map for Brixton**



6.9 Good design can mitigate against some potential harm—this can only be considered in full planning applications. Outline proposals for tall buildings are not considered acceptable.

#### Major Development Opportunities

6.10 The Lambeth UDP (Saved policies 2010) identifies a number of Major Development Opportunity sites in Brixton. Each within the study area is discussed in turn below in relation to their suitability for tall buildings:

#### MDO6—Bon Marche yard, Nursery Road / Ferndale Road

6.11 This site adjoins the Brixton Conservation Area and important locally listed buildings. It is a small site in a constrained location between two elevated railways viaducts and with a very short frontage to Nursery Road. The constrained nature of the site makes this site inappropriate for tall buildings.

#### MDO7—London Underground Shaft site Electric Lane

6.12 This small constrained site within the conservation area is inappropriate for development exceeding 4 storeys given the nature of the site and its heritage context with adjoining locally listed buildings.

#### MDO8—Car Park to 337 / 365 Brixton Road

6.13 This site is within the conservation area. The adjoining properties are Grade II listed buildings. This back-land site is not appropriate for tall building development.

#### MDO9—Tesco Supermarket, 13 Acre Lane

6.14 This site adjoins the boundary with the Trinity Gardens Conservation Area (across the road) and is immediately west of the Brixton Conservation Area. This area is not characterised by tall buildings. The site is inappropriate for tall building development.

#### MDO 10 -Hambrook House, 17 Porden Road / 2 - 7 Town Hall Parade

6.15 This is a prominent site fronting Brixton Hill in the locality of both the Town Hall and St Matthew's Church towers. This makes the site sensitive to tall building development.

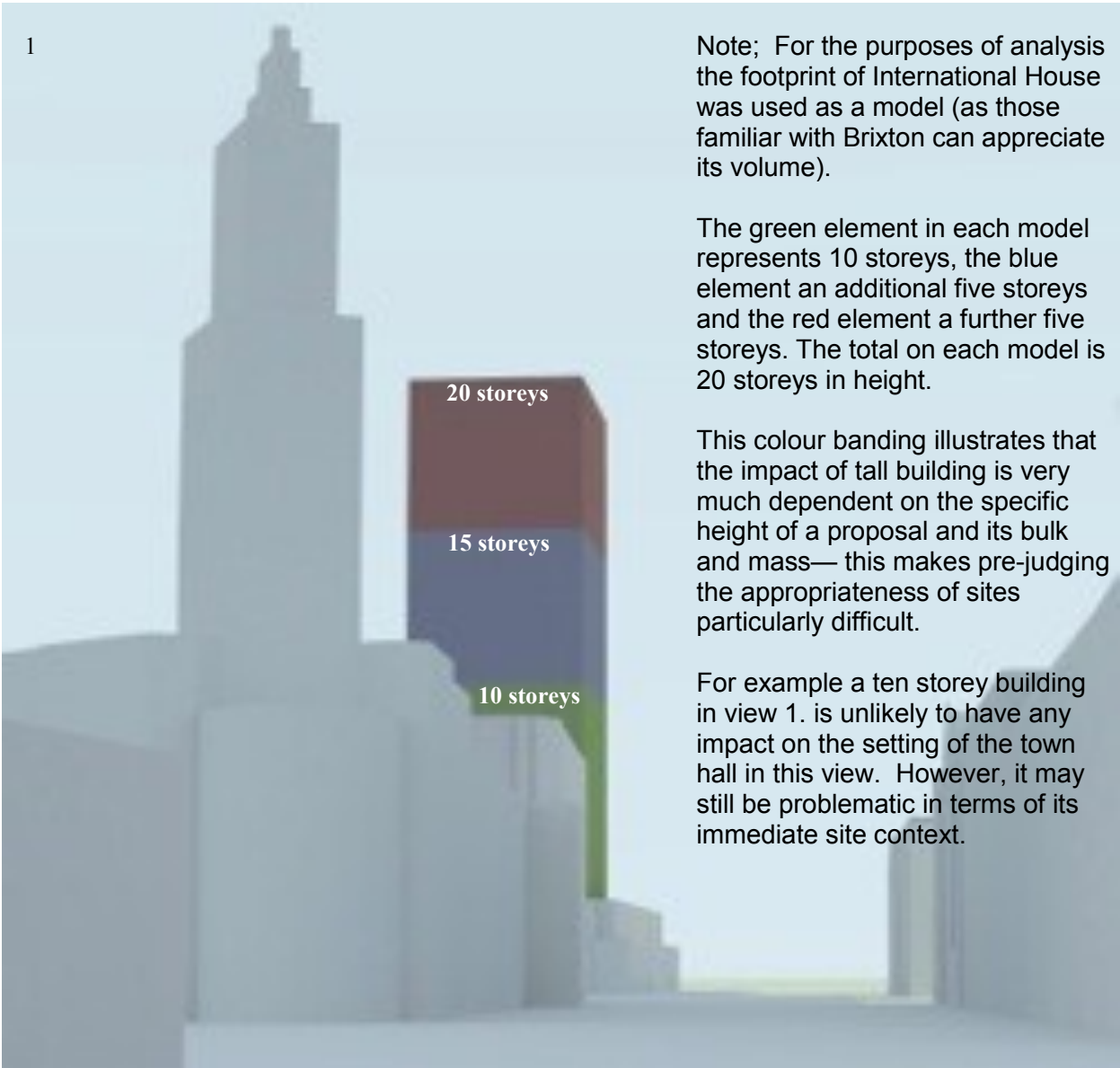
#### Images Opposite

6.16 Images opposite, illustrate the potential impacts of new tall buildings in the following locations:

- 1) Tall building on the Tesco Site, Acre Lane, showing the potential adverse impact upon the setting of the Town Hall when viewed from Coldharbour Lane.
- 2) Tall building on the temporary Ice Rink site as viewed from Electric Avenue.
- 3 & 4 Tall building on the Canterbury Arms site as viewed from Canterbury Crescent (image 3) and Brixton Station Road (image 4). Image 3 illustrates the unacceptable cumulative impact of having two large buildings so close together and the harm this causes to the Grade II listed former St John's School. Image 4 illustrates the overpowering impact on the sense of enclosure on the Pope's Road townscape.



1



Note; For the purposes of analysis the footprint of International House was used as a model (as those familiar with Brixton can appreciate its volume).

The green element in each model represents 10 storeys, the blue element an additional five storeys and the red element a further five storeys. The total on each model is 20 storeys in height.

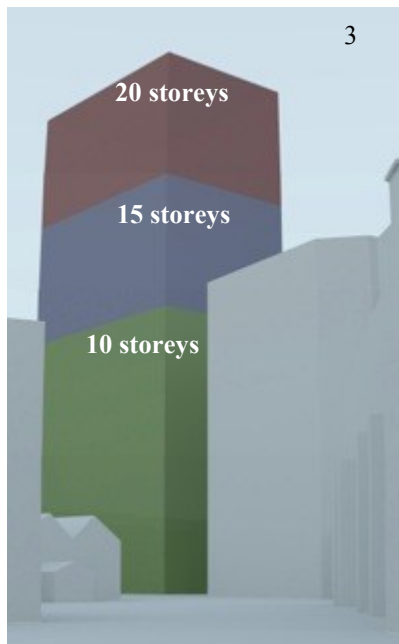
This colour banding illustrates that the impact of tall building is very much dependent on the specific height of a proposal and its bulk and mass— this makes pre-judging the appropriateness of sites particularly difficult.

For example a ten storey building in view 1. is unlikely to have any impact on the setting of the town hall in this view. However, it may still be problematic in terms of its immediate site context.

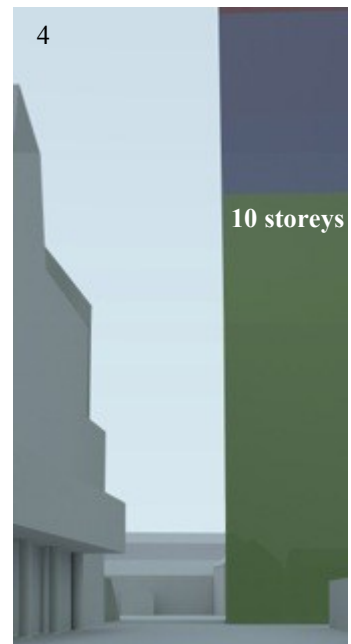
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**This document was prepared by Lambeth Council's**

**Conservation & Urban Design team**

**2014**