

## SPITALFIELDS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINATION

### RESPONSE BY SPITALFIELDS NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM TO EXAMINER'S QUESTIONS

6<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021



1. **Responses were required to three matters raised in representations by Mr Zeloof:**
  - **A 45% rent discount on affordable workspace would result in the majority of schemes being unviable.**
  - **The requirement for at least 10% of new employment floorspace to be affordable workspace, as expected in the Tower Hamlets Local Plan, would not be viable in many cases in the Spitalfields area; and**
  - **The COVID-19 epidemic could have a long term, negative impact on the commercial workspace market.**

Mr Zeloof states that the Tower Hamlets Local Plan requirement for at least 10% of new employment floorspace to be affordable workspace is not viable 'in many cases' in the Spitalfields area. The Local Plan was declared sound and has been adopted. Whilst not all development has to be viable for a plan policy to be sound, it must demonstrate this to be the case for the bulk of development which evidently it has done. The DS2 report summarises that 10% affordable workspace is unviable for the majority of typologies in Spitalfields. If this is the case, then the market will determine that such development will not happen in Spitalfields because it will not be able to comply with Local Plan policy, which it is required to do.

Moreover, if Mr Zeloof considers that 10% is not viable then it is unclear why he would be proposing an alternative figure of 25%. The policy enables proposals to be subject to viability so the flexibility for a potentially different percentage requirement for affordable workspace is built in. If, as Mr Zeloof asserts, this is not viable, then an applicant would be able to present an open book appraisal to demonstrate this.

It is observed that the DS2 report suggests that low value offices are viable, therefore the exercise becomes a judgement based almost exclusively on what land value is assumed. The report presents land values ranging from £14,308,000 to £137,500,000 which highlights that there can be substantially different opinions on the value of the same site.

**A key theme which emerged during our consultations with the public and our analysis of the local area is that the commercial character of Spitalfields is typified by smaller scale, diverse, independent businesses and workspaces.** The reason that Policy SPITAL7 only addresses major development is to avoid Spitalfields becoming a location for large scale commercial development which is targeted at attracting large, international and singular occupiers. The reason for this is that it would price the small, local businesses which characterise this area further out of the market because it would reduce the amount of small scale premises that are required by these businesses.

It is impossible to know with certainty what the commercial workspace market could look like in the long term. In many respects, the volatility of the commercial floorspace market highlights the caution that should be exercised in making definitive policy judgements about viability at the present time. However, that is not a reason not to plan for what an area is likely to need in the future. Spitalfields is a location for small scale workspaces, many of which are run and staffed by local people. Whilst there is uncertainty over whether large format office spaces may be fully occupied by large employers in a post-Covid world, the need for smaller commercial workspaces that allow small, local businesses (in every sense of the word) to flourish will still reasonably remain. If ultimately, under a worst case scenario, the commercial market determines that all such provision is totally unviable, then Policy SPITAL7 will be irrelevant. In other cases, the requirement in the policy to ensure that proposals can be subject to viability provides flexibility to account for uncertainty.

## **2. Matters raised by London Borough of Tower Hamlets relating to SPITAL4, SPITAL5, SPITAL7 and Table 4.1**

In respect of SPITAL4, the Forum accepts the requirement for the change. However, the wording should align with that in Policy G5 of the newly adopted London Plan. The following amendments should therefore be made:

Policy SPITAL4: B. All major residential development proposals must seek to achieve an Urban Greening Factor (UGF) score of at least 0.4 and all major ~~Class B1~~ commercial schemes (excluding B2 and B8 uses) a UGF score of at least 0.3.

Paragraph 5.9: In the absence of a target in a lower tier plan, ~~draft~~ London Plan Policy G5 (Urban greening) proposes a UGF score of 0.4 for predominantly residential development and 0.3 for predominantly ~~B1~~ commercial development (~~offices and light industrial~~excluding B2 and B8 uses).

In this regard, it should also be noted that there will be a need to update all references to the London Plan in light of its adoption.

In respect of SPITAL5, the Forum agrees with the proposed change.

In respect of the supporting text to SPITAL7 in paragraph 6.12, the Forum agrees with the proposed change.

In respect of the suggestion that changes are made to Table 4.1(6), the Forum would support a change to address this in the manner suggested.

## **3. Text proposed by Thames Water**

The Neighbourhood Plan has not addressed matters relating to water because it was not an issue raised by the local community. In light of this, it is not considered that there is a rationale

for including the suggested wording by Thames Water. The Forum does not consider that any such wording should be added.

#### 4. **Proposals by Historic England to strengthen the Plan**

The Forum acknowledges the representations made by Historic England and welcomes proposals to strengthen the Plan where necessary and appropriate. A number of matters have been raised that the Examination has invited the Forum to respond to. We address each in turn:

- **Clarification of the assessment process for inclusion in the list of undesignated heritage assets in Appendix B**

A comprehensive survey was carried out by Dan Cruickshank and Alec Forshaw in April/May 2020, commissioned by the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum.

Every street and every building or structure visible from the public realm or other publicly accessible spaces was visually inspected. This included extant buildings, road surfaces and street furniture. Extensive notes and photographic evidence was taken.

Inspection of the interiors of buildings was not undertaken.

The extant fabric was assessed according to its contribution towards the historic environment. Buildings, structures and objects were assessed according to a number of criteria:

- age and condition
- architectural design
- historic fabric
- quality of materials and workmanship
- use and function
- historical associations
- social history
- townscape importance

Reference was made to *The Buildings of England: London Volume 5: East, The Survey of London and Spitalfields* (Dan Cruickshank 2020).

The forty assets regarded by these experts as the most important of the historic assets according to these criteria were selected for inclusion within Appendix B, defined as Non-Designated Heritage Assets. The remainder were included in Appendix D as a List of Assets of Historic Interest.

Buildings already statutorily listed or locally listed by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets were not included.

The survey of all the assets listed in Appendix B and Appendix D was carried out by Dan Cruickshank and Alec Forshaw, two acknowledged experts in the field. Their qualifications are set out below.

Professor Dan Cruickshank BA (Hons), Hon FRIBA is a founding Trustee (in 1977) of the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust and resident of Spitalfields since 1978. Author of: *London: the Art of Georgian Building* (1975); *Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland* (1985); *Life in the Georgian City* (1990); *Britain's Best Buildings* (2002 - to accompany a BBC2 series); *People, Places and Treasure Under Fire* (2003 - to accompany a BBC2 series); *Around the World in 80 Treasures* (2005 - to accompany a BBC2 series); *Adventures in Architecture* (2008 - to accompany a BBC2 series); *The Secret History of Georgian London* (2009); *Bridges: heroic designs that changed the world* (2010); *The Country House Revealed* (2011 - to accompany a BBC2 series); *Architecture: a history in a 100 Buildings* (2015); *Spitalfields; a history of a nation in a handful of streets* (2016); *Skyscraper* (2018); *Cruickshank's London* (2019); *Soho: a street guide to Soho's history, architecture, and people* (2020); *Built in Chelsea* (2021); *Robert Adam and Fitzroy Square* (2021); editor of the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of *Sir Banister Fletcher's History of Architecture* (1996); served on the executive committee of the Georgian Group and on the architectural panel of the National Trust; Visiting Professor in the Department of Architecture, University of Sheffield; an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects; holder of a BA in the history of design, art and architecture.

Alec Forshaw MA, Dip. TP, MRTPI, IHBC is an historic buildings consultant. He worked as a local authority town planner and conservation officer for the London Borough of Islington, and before that the London Borough of Harrow, for over three decades (1973-2007). He was involved in the formal review of the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest for the London Borough of Islington, and the formulation and adoption of a Local List for that borough. He is the author of several books about architectural history and on London in particular.

Whilst the Forum acknowledges that this level of detail may not be appropriate to include in the Plan, the intention is to provide the necessary information for the Examiner to decide how best to present this information which may help to make the plan interesting and accessible to the public.

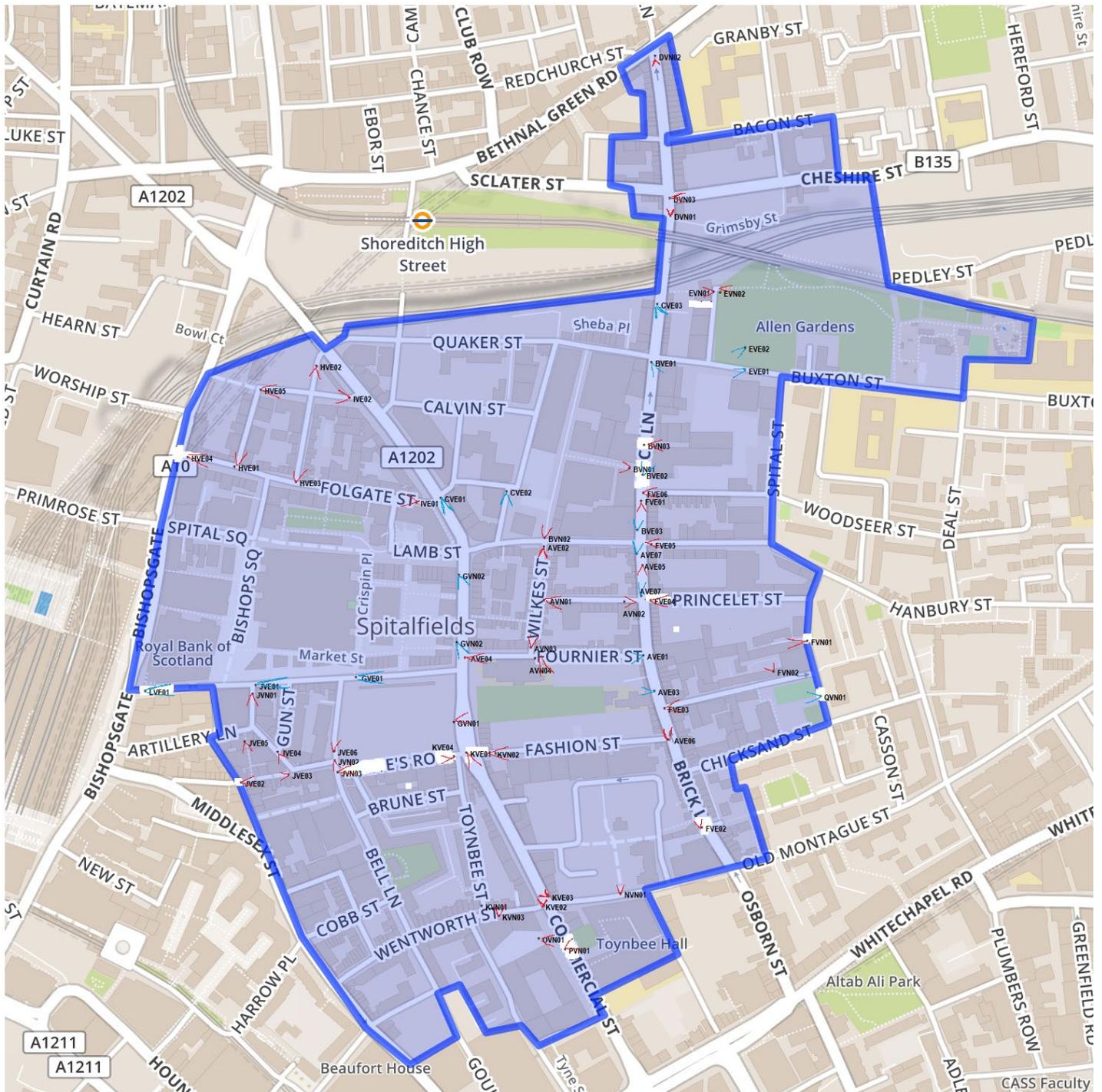
- **Whether a similar approach should be taken to help strengthen the policy on views**

As part of the survey carried out by Dan Cruickshank and Alec Forshaw in April/May 2020, the views were considered. As such, they represent the opinion of two highly qualified experts.

The methodology involved first identifying two categories of views – (1) those views already identified as important in the existing adopted Conservation Area Management Guidelines; and (2) additional views that were now also considered to be important. In addition to that,

the assessment also distinguished between views of a specific identified landmark e.g. the spire of Christ Church and the Old Truman Brewery chimney and general street or townscape views. As part of the assessment, a basic map was prepared but it was decided not to include this at Regulation 15 stage. This map is shown below. The Forum would welcome its inclusion and would be happy to prepare a formal version to the same standard as the other maps in the Regulation 16 version of the Plan.

### Original maps prepared to support views assessment



Views of a specific identified landmark are marked in blue and general street or townscape views are marked in red. Every view corresponds to a view listed in Appendix A of the

Regulation 16 version of the Neighbourhood Plan. These could be suitably numbered, with the corresponding numbering added to the text in Appendix A.

- **Whether heritage assets at risk, and the promotion of opportunities to address these risks, should be included**

The Forum recognises the importance of preserving heritage assets at risk (including those on Wentworth Street) and promoting opportunities to address these risks. Historic England alluded to the fact that the 'at risk' status of these assets is formally recognised in policy alongside the desirability of addressing the causes. The Forum would be happy for this to be included in Policy SPITAL1, along with a list of at-risk assets included in Appendix A for each of the respective Local Character Areas. These could also be marked on maps included in Appendix A.

We are happy to answer any further queries or provide you with additional clarification as required.

Yours sincerely,

**James Frankcom**

Chairman

Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum