

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2792

London-wide context mapping and tall building sensitivity screening assessment

Programme: London Plan (as part of the Making Best Use of Land Delivery Plan)

Executive summary:

This decision seeks approval of expenditure to cover the costs of procuring specialist consultant support to advise upon, and produce evidence to support, London Plan policies. This includes optimisation /building heights policies, with consultant support in particular on two studies (but also potentially additional support to the team on associated work):

- refinement of a London-wide context mapping that categorises London across different ‘character types’: this study aims to support work informing the scale of development that might be appropriate in different areas of London
- sensitivity screening assessment for tall buildings in London: this project aims to identify criteria and/or potential locations that may be appropriate for taller buildings.

Options related to these studies were referenced in the ‘Towards a New London Plan’ consultation document and this work is needed to further inform the development of the new London Plan in relation to optimising housing delivery, particularly in the context of the target set by national government for London to deliver 88,000 homes per year

Although this indirectly supports the Making Best Use of Land mandate this is a very specific piece of work for the evidence base for the London Plan and it is time critical that we go out to procurement rapidly. While the arrangements via the Delivery plan are still being fully resolved we are following an appropriate route for a technical piece of work that is part of an evidence base programme and as such less directly linked to the Delivery Plan.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration approves spending up to £70,000, from the 2025-26 London Plan Programme budget, to commission specialist consultants to support on the final stages of the studies outlined above.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor’s plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Lucinda Turner

Position: Assistant Director for Planning and Regeneration

Signature:



Date: 3 November 2025

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

2. Approval is sought to spend up to £70,000 to procure and appoint specialist consultancy services to advise on the draft London Plan design policies and complete a number of studies to inform this. The first study is an analysis and refinement of a London-wide context mapping that categorises London across different ‘character types’: this study aims to support work informing the scale of development that might be appropriate in different areas of London. The second study is a sensitivity screening assessment for tall buildings in London: this project aims to identify criteria and/or potential locations that may be appropriate for taller buildings. Both studies will involve using the Geographic Information System (GIS); and developing a series of maps/data layers. These studies aim to inform and support the design policies in the next London Plan, which is due to be published in draft in spring/summer 2026.

2.1. The successful consultants will need to have technical experience and expertise in the production of character studies, tall building studies and GIS mapping projects.

London-wide context map

2.2. The London Plan Team, working with boroughs, is currently developing an updated Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) to inform the next London Plan. This work includes developing a new context map of London which will help to inform a better understanding of which areas of London have a greater capacity for delivery and change. To date, the GLA has worked with Historic England to produce an updated London-wide characterisation map, which categorises and groups the capital into a number of ‘character types’. Further refinements are required to this map to make it a robust evidence base for the SHLAA and for informing London Plan policy on optimising development sites.

Sensitivity screening assessment for very tall buildings in London

2.3. In the last year, the GLA has undertaken a building-heights sensitivity screening assessment for London. This has involved identifying opportunities for, and constraints on, the development of very tall buildings (defined as having 30-plus storeys) in London.

2.4. This assessment is being carried out to understand where such buildings may be an appropriate form of development. The ‘Towards a New London Plan’ consultation document mooted a more strategic consideration of where London’s tallest buildings are located. This assessment and resultant mapping will explore and evidence this potential approach and inform whether this option is pursued into the next London Plan.

2.5. While some work has been carried out on this assessment, specialist consultant support is sought to complete the study.

3. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 3.1. This work involves providing expertise and advice to support the finalising of the optimisation/ building heights policies in the next London Plan and also specifically to lead on two spatial analysis studies. Each study should comprise several stages/outputs; they should be carried out in parallel and may feed into each other at points. The outputs are as follows:

	Outputs
Expert consultant support Provide advice and recommendations on draft optimisation/ building heights policies	i. Attend meetings with GLA officers; and provide advice and input on urban design and planning issues related to the draft optimisation/building heights policy.
	ii. Produce relevant documentation, evidence and recommendations to inform the development of the draft optimisation/building heights policies.

Study name	Outputs
Study one Refinement of a London-wide context (characterisation) mapping	1a. Produce a categorisation/ hierarchy of London's character types based on a typological approach to characterisation, in which character types sharing similar physical characteristics are grouped together. This revised hierarchy aims to provide an understanding of character at different spatial scales.
	1b. Carry out a first round of targeted engagement with a small group of London boroughs, Historic England, to discuss the proposed approach to mapping. This should include a workshop with key stakeholders to discuss refinements to the mapping.
	1c. Amend the existing characterisation mapping in GIS, by reclassifying the existing character types so they match the hierarchy in output 1a.
	1d. Carry out a second round of targeted engagement with a small group of London boroughs, Historic England, to discuss the mapping.
	1e. Produce a finalised and refined character map of London.

Study name	Outputs
Study two Sensitivity screening assessment for very tall buildings in London	2a. Provide technical advice on improvements that could be made to the methodologies for the mapping and the sensitivity screening assessment for very tall buildings (30-plus storeys) in London.
	2b. Carry out a first round of targeted engagement with a small group of London boroughs, Historic England, and townscape and views consultants to discuss the proposed approach to a sensitivity screening assessment for very tall buildings in London.
	2c. Produce an updated sensitivity screening assessment for London in GIS including the identification of locations that may be appropriate for buildings of at least 30 storeys.
	2d. Carry out a second round of targeted engagement with a small group of London boroughs, Historic England, and townscape and views consultants to discuss the drafted mapping.
	2e. Produce a finalised sensitivity screening assessment for London; and the identification of criteria potential locations that may be appropriate for taller buildings.

	2f. Summarise outputs 2a to 2e into a final report, evidencing the process and mapping that has been reached.
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4. Equality comments

- 4.1. The public sector equality duty, under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Equality Act), requires the identification and evaluation of the likely potential impacts, both positive and negative, of decisions on those with protected characteristics. The Mayor is to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; and advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. In particular, this may involve removing or minimising any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic; and taking steps to meet the needs of such people. In certain circumstances, compliance with the Equality Act may involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without one.
- 4.2. This project is considered unlikely to have a significant impact on any persons with protected characteristics. This is because it is a technical mapping exercise that is not directly connected to any policy direction at this point. If one or either of the mapping studies were to be used for particular policies, these would be considered as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment of the next London Plan that will consider the impacts of the policies within it.

5. Other considerations

Key risks and issues

- 5.1. Carrying out a characterisation study and sensitivity screening assessment for very tall buildings in London could create risks around the data's reliability and accuracy. As a result, if these maps are to be made public, they will need to be accompanied by advice for LPAs and it would be made clear that the maps are a starting point and may be refined.

Links to other Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 5.2. This project primarily supports the Mayor's programmes of building more homes, and making best use of land. They provide an assessment of London's physical character and sensitivity to tall buildings and their aim would be to provide greater clarity on what might be considered feasible and appropriate in different parts of London. This project could also contribute to the boosting London's growth sector programme if the maps were used by urban design and 2D/3D modelling companies in refining the data/mapping.

6. Financial comments

- 6.1. Approval is sought to spend up to £70,000 to procure and appoint specialist consultancy services to advise on the draft London Plan design policies and complete the mapping studies outlined in studies one and two of this report. (See section two: objectives and expected outcomes.) The decision also requests approval to commence procurement for this project via the Architecture & Urbanism Framework Lot 9; and award of the subsequent contracts via a direct award. The procurement brief advises that a sub-contractor should be procured as part of the project. The sub-contractor's role will be to advise and support on the project, with the aim of sharing expertise within this technical field. The sub-contractor is required to have technical experience and expertise in producing character studies, tall building studies and GIS mapping projects.
- 6.2. The total funding for this project (up to £70,000) will be met from the London Plan 2025-26 and 2026-27 budget. Future years' budgets will remain subject to the annual budget-setting process. Any

contracts that cover future years will require break clauses. Any changes in the anticipated profile of spend across the years will be reflected as updates during the budget-setting process.

6.3. All appropriate budget adjustments will be made.

7. Legal comments

7.1. The sections above indicate that the decision requested of the Mayor fall within his statutory power under section 30 of the Greater London Authority 1999 (as amended) (the GLA Act), acting on behalf of the GLA, to do anything he considers will promote the improvement of the environment in Greater London; and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought officers have complied with the GLA's related statutory duties to:

- pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
- consider how the proposals will affect:
 - the health of persons in Greater London
 - the health inequalities between persons living in Greater London
 - the achievement of sustainable development in the UK
 - climate change, and the consequences of climate change
- consult with appropriate bodies.

7.2. Section 334 of the GLA Act requires the Mayor to prepare and publish a Spatial Development Strategy (known as the London Plan). Section 339 of the GLA Act requires the Mayor to keep the London Plan under review – especially matters that may be expected to affect the development of Greater London or the planning of its development.

7.3. The GLA also has a subsidiary power, pursuant to Section 34 of the GLA Act. This gives the Mayor the authority to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any of the GLA's statutory functions. In this case, the decision to procure a specialist consultant technical services to undertake this work may reasonably be regarded as facilitating, or being conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the Mayor's power detailed above.

Procurement

7.4. Officers must ensure that appropriate documentation is put in place and executed by the consultant and the GLA formalising the services before commencement of such services.

8. Planned delivery approach and next steps

8.1. The project will be delivered according to the following timetable:

Activity	Timeline
Delivery start date	November 2025
Main milestones: • study one – outputs 1a and 1b • study two – outputs 2a and 2b	November 2025
Main milestones: • study one – outputs 1c and 1d • study two – outputs 2c and 2d	November – December 2026

Main milestone: • study two: output 2e	December 2025
Main milestones: • study one: output 1e • study two: output 2f	January – March 2026
Delivery end date	March 2026
Project closure	March 2026

Appendices and supporting papers:

None

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will be published either within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? YES

If YES, for what reason: This project will be linked to the next London Plan and the policies within it. Therefore, any details on the decision should only be made public once the next London Plan public consultation has ended. This is to avoid prejudicing statutory consultation on the new London Plan.

Until what date: July 2026.

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under the FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to
confirm the
following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Alan Smithies has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

Mayoral Delivery Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 3 November 2025.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL SERVICES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Date: 3 November 2025

Signature:

