

Tall Buildings in Cambridge
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Text of Talk – Richard MacCormac

Tall buildings are not good for Cambridge – I will come back to that.

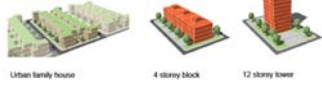


The first thing to understand is that building height is not necessarily the optimum way of maximising the number of dwellings or the area of commercial space on a site. The term used is DENSITY.

Low buildings can be surprisingly effective. When I say surprisingly, it is because the implications of density are often misunderstood by the public and by planning officers.



I'll start with examples that go back to the 1960s and 70s and to the research into these issues pioneered by Sir Leslie Martin with Lionel March in the school of architecture here. Basically the argument was that traditional terraces and squares were more effective than towers for residential density and cheaper too and they didn't destroy the scale of existing cityscape.



Urban family house

4 story block

12 story tower

Back to back terrace section



Back to back terrace perspective



We are working, at the moment, on a high density Urban Family House with Berkeley Homes. It is interesting that 40years later we should be using the same kind of analysis.

These terrace houses can achieve densities of 100 dwellings/hectare – the equivalent of tower blocks but without all the management problems.

Detached houses around a shared garden at 35dph



Town houses: semi detached and short terraces at 50dph



L-shaped houses at 50dph



Mass houses at 80dph



Flats at 100dph



It is also thought that to avoid suburban sprawl invading the green belt we need to build high.


We have just completed a study for the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) which shows that walkable communities can be created with all family houses with gardens at 2-3 storeys, perhaps some flats (accommodation without kids) at 4 – 5 storeys. These achieve gross densities of 50 dwellings per hectare.



The Gherkin

What about office buildings – the same basic principles apply – ground scrapers rather than skyscrapers. These are three proposals from offices in London – for the Home Office in Marsham Street, the redevelopment of the BBC, and Building One at Paternoster Square by St Pauls Cathedral. These were very dense proposals but the height was constrained to a London scale of around eight storeys and in each case the density is achieved linearly. To have achieved the 800,000 sqft of the BBC development in the form of the Gherkin would have required a building of 51 storeys. The same principles can and should apply at the smaller scale of Cambridge.

Not all of Cambridge is historic and it seems to me entirely appropriate that a greater urban scale should be generated outside the centre - for example around the station. There are important arguments, related to sustainability for consolidating the city rather than encourage out of town employment areas which require private car trips. The

	<p>viability of public transport, such as the guided bus, will be increased by dense commercial development as well as dense residential development, but it doesn't have to be high.</p>
<p>London 2012</p> 	<p>But why not tall buildings in Cambridge – can they not bring variety or excitement – that's been the argument in the city of London. I am not against variety of skyline, but I am against the idea that tall buildings can mark transport hubs, gateways, the central point of radiating street systems and cross roads, be cultural markers, be intrinsically iconic and so forth. Tall buildings are the genie in the bottle of the planning system, and the bottle is waiting to be opened by developers and planning lawyers who will find any of the above reasons to get their way. Once the genie is out, you cannot put it back in!</p>