

**Pat Naldi**

### ***Creating London's image***

The painting *Greenwich Hospital from the north bank of the Thames* by the Italian painter Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto) is one of the most iconic paintings depicting a view – that is, a particular image – of London. Dated circa 1750-2, it is believed that the painting was commissioned by the British Consul Joseph Smith to mark the completion of the Greenwich Hospital building. The painting was to hang in his consular residence located on the Grand Canal in Venice, where it would have been on view to the many English Grand Tourists he entertained there.

Whereas historically the image of the skyline made visible church and state power, authority, governance, and influence over its citizen population, contemporaneously and for the foreseeable future, it is the desire, demand, cause, and effect of a privatised, capitalist, speculative economy (and the elite who drive it and benefit from it) that actively shapes the image of the skyline. As Harvey claims, ‘capitalism and urbanization’ are connected, with ‘the logistical curves of growth of capitalist output over time [...] broadly paralleled by the logistical curves of urbanization of the world’s population’ (Harvey, 2012: 4). The image of the skyline predicates how we citizens view, understand, negotiate, and relate to the city conceptually, spatially and societally.

Fast forward 266 years to the present day, and the exact same view that Canaletto painted, barring a few minor historical details, can still be observed from the vantage point of Island Gardens situated on the north bank of the Thames on the Isle of Dogs, east London. This particular view forms part of the *London View Management Framework* (LVMF) which was originally published in 2007 as a component of the Mayor of London’s *London Plan*, a Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London that itself was initially published by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2004. The *London Plan* sets out an integrated economic, environmental, transport and social framework for the development of the capital. First published under the leadership of the then London Mayor Ken Livingstone, the plan, set to be in effect until the year 2031, has subsequently been revised periodically, with the most recent version, published by the then Mayor Boris Johnson in 2016.

The LVMF, which includes the view of the Greenwich Hospital under the rubric *24A.1: Island Gardens, Isle of Dogs to Royal Naval College*, forms a key part of the strategy to preserve London's character and built heritage. The document outlines the policy framework for managing the impact of proposed urban development within the scopal frame of fixed key views across London from the perspective of ‘parks and other well-used public [and private for public use] spaces that take in

important buildings or urban landscapes that help define London' (Johnson, 2012). It is, Boris Johnson asserts:

important that we find a way of ensuring that new development fits with our built heritage so that London continues to be a desirable place to live, work and do business (Johnson, 2012).

The policy has to be incorporated into development planning applications in London. In turn the plans have to be approved by the local borough council or City of London Corporation, and finally submitted to the GLA for final approval. How the policy is interpreted by the architects and planners, and how it is interpreted and applied by the GLA is the crucial question.

The LVMF delineates, in textual and photographic descriptive format, 27 designated and protected views of, and from, specific viewing locations in London. Some of the views encompass more than one viewing location, whilst others for instance, have two or three shifting viewpoints along a bridge; these are called kinetic views. Hence, in actual fact, there are 61 separate designated and protected views within the framework of 27.

The views are categorised under the aegis of:

- *London Panoramas*: [providing] views of central London and its suburbs from elevated public open spaces [...] All London Panoramas include either the Palace of Westminster or St Paul's Cathedral as their focus. These buildings are cultural landmarks that help promote London at a strategic level while also providing orientation and legibility within the panorama. Therefore, each panorama incorporates one or more Protected Vistas to ensure that the ability to recognise and appreciate the Strategically Important Landmark within the wider panorama is preserved or enhanced.
- *Linear Views*: views of landmarks framed by objects in the landscape. They are defined by virtue of a gap between existing elements of the built or natural environment. They should be managed so that the ability to recognise and appreciate the landmark building in combination with the surrounding environment is preserved or enhanced
- *River Prospects*: broad prospects along the River Thames. Views of the River Thames and its associated landmarks often provide key images of London and reinforce the city's identity. The views of London and its skyline across riverscapes and from bridge to bridge are representative of the capital and include many iconic buildings. Several of these views are experienced as the viewer moves through the Viewing Place. The character and composition of built form above the river is often coherent and of very high quality. In many cases, it encompasses conservation areas, listed buildings and World Heritage Sites, enhanced by mature trees lining well-designed publicly accessible walkways
- *Townscape Views*: These are views of the urban townscape. They focus on architecturally and/or culturally significant set pieces. They are views of an architectural or landscape

composition of historical significance (Mayor of London, 2012b: 30-33).

The overriding focal point of the LVMF is the protection of views of St. Paul's Cathedral. The 1938 St Paul's Heights policy implemented a near and medium distance building height restriction affecting views of St Pauls. The 1991 Regional Planning Guidance for London (RPG3a) set up after the abolition of the GLC, implemented a distant view[s] of St Paul's alongside 34 strategic views of London through a visual system of 'views' and 'viewing corridors', 10 of which were to be protected. The LVMF of 2007 (under Ken Livingstone) replaced the previous RPG3a guidance (control was transferred from the Government Office to the GLA after the first Mayoral election in the year 2000). As a supporter of tall buildings and their lucrative emblem, plus added pressure from the insurance company Legal and General, a major player of land ownership in the City, Livingstone's LVMF guidelines reduced the number of strategic views from 34 to 26 protected and designated views, and narrowed considerably the viewing corridors, thus enabling the release of sites for future development. The revised 2012 edition of the LVMF (under Johnson) increased the number of protected and designated views to 27.

In the forward to the 2012 revised guidance of the LVMF, Johnson states:

For centuries, London has been home to some of the world's greatest buildings and urban spaces. We are privileged to enjoy this architectural history as we go about our daily lives. When we cross one of London's bridges, walk along the South Bank, or visit one of the viewpoints above the city, such as Parliament Hill, Primrose Hill or Greenwich, we are reminded of London's history and beauty, and why we love living here (Johnson, 2012b: v).

By the same token the *London Plan* (2004) highlights the political and economic heritage of the city by valuing certain views above others; those that portray and uphold its heritage:

Two thousand years of building have left layers of history, illuminating London's social, political and economic heritage. Today London has a great wealth of fine historic buildings, spaces and archaeology, including four World Heritage Sites and many buildings and sites of national importance that add to the capital's identity, attractiveness and cultural richness. The historic environment also helps to attract tourists, and provides valuable leisure opportunities and commercial and residential space, and is an important part of London's economy (Mayor of London, 2004: 184).

Therefore, the particular views within the LVMF are chosen, according to the guidance:

because they make a significant contribution to people's ability to understand and appreciate London as a whole [and] because they allow a viewer to see significant historic and cultural landmarks in their landscape or townscape setting and to understand the relationship between them (Mayor of London, 2012b:29).

Many of the LVMF designated and protected views feature the identical or approximate view of pictorial imagery of London made familiar through historical paintings, prints and drawings. However, it is Canaletto and his views *of*, *where from*, and *how* London is depicted, that, in particular, still endures today. For not only do other LVMF views correlate with his painting depictions of London, for instance *The Thames and the city of Westminster from Lambeth* (1746-47) and the LVMF view 19A.2: *Lambeth Bridge*, other overt exemplars of his pictorial influence in contemporary London include the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant held on the 3 June 2012, whereby the spectacle performed on the Thames was reminiscent of his painting *The Thames on Lord Mayor's Day, looking towards the City and St Paul's Cathedral* (1752). Canaletto was the most famous exponent of the pictorial *vedute* (Italian for view) that originated in Flanders as early as the sixteenth century. The *vedute* was a landscape genre of detailed painted cityscapes, a particular approach towards the traditional viewing of cities. It is also important to note that not only was Canaletto's father a theatrical scene painter, but Canaletto himself painted stage decorations, as did other painters of city views in his time. This influenced their attitude and approach towards their depictions of cities (Safarik, 1961).

Frédéric Pousin believes that the very 'idea of urban landscape', and here we can include the views of the LVMF, 'is based on an aesthetic attitude as well as on an aloofness toward the city', and it is one which is due to 'aesthetic models borrowed, in the past from painting, and, today, from other artistic media' (Pousin, 2003: 161). Landscape however, Rosalyn Deutsche argues, 'is an object framed for, and therefore inseparable from, a viewer' (Deutsche, 1996: 213). It is this interrelationship of the object (in this case the framed views of the city of the LVMF) and the viewer, in the city, that is the cause for tension within the very concept of the London designated and protected views; for visually, spatially, and conceptually the LVMF posits London as a series of framed views (images) to be 'experienced' from static 'view points'.

The historical depictions of London just outlined, and the governmental designated and protected views of the LVMF (one could also make a case for the designs by architects and planners) constitute what Christine Boyer describes as the pictorial image of the city as a work of art, a scenographic stage whereby:

The function of the image, which we seek to historicize, is to record the material form and look of the city, and to present it to the beholder through staged or posed views (Boyer, 1994: 69).

Renzo Dubbini argues that in the early seventeenth century new observation points also began to appear in depicted views of London. These views, he notes, were from the vantage points of sites of 'recent expansion looking toward the historical center' (Dubbini, 2002: 52), thus highlighting:

the greater importance that specific sites had acquired in both the observation of the city and the construction of an urban image, an image that had been primarily mental, but that took on increased objectivity when it could be compared with the actual topography (Dubbini, 2002: 52).

The transformation of the view of the city and the construction of its image from an imagined to an actual viewpoint at this time (Dubbini, 2002) was further enhanced by the patronage of artists. No longer did artists depict images of the monuments in London (in this instance) but also of and from private houses belonging to patrons wealthy enough to commission them. This enabled artists to produce, as Dubbini notes, 'a general, public vision of the city, but also views from vantage points that in many cases coincided with famous aristocratic residences' (Dubbini, 2002: 53), thus 'furthering a multiplication of viewpoints that helped to construct a visual perception of the growing city' (Dubbini, 2002: 52).

Hereafter depicted views of London were patronised *of, from* (and enabled by), privileged, privatised spatial and visual perspectives. It is this that is followed through in the present day designated and protected views of the LVMF, for not only are the 'views' designated by an elite few (and what is permitted to be built within their scopal frame), but the actual viewing locations – the vantage points you admire the views from – are on many occasions, mostly in fact, privately owned. That is, not owned by the state but by private moneyed elite (Royal, aristocratic, and private corporate companies) landlords. The 'viewing location', the LVMF policy guideline sets out:

[should be] open, publicly accessible and well used, a place in its own right allowing for pause and enjoyment of the view (Mayor of London, 2010: 1).

In other words, privately owned spaces for public use. This not only highlights the privileging of views from wealthy, and in most cases corporate owned land, but the attendant securitisation and control (physical, visual, and psychological) of these spaces.

Whilst some of the ownership of the LVMF viewing location points are well known or rightly assumed to be Crown Estate property, for instance the Royal Parks incorporating the London Panoramas of 5A.1: *Greenwich Park*, the Townscape View of 23A.1: *Bridge over the Serpentine*, or local authority owned such as the Townscape View of 24A.1: *Island Gardens*. Others are surprising or harder to discern, such as: Hampstead Heath, incorporating the London Panoramas assessment

points from *2A.1: Parliament Hill*, *2B.1*, and the assessment point *3A.1: Kenwood*. These latter viewing location points are under the control of the City of London Corporation. The Corporation became the custodians of the Heath in 1989 when the London Residuary Body, charged with disposing of the assets of the Greater London Council abolished in 1986, transferred its ownership, in the 'public's interest', from local authority owned to the auspices of the private Corporation. Through the Bridge House Estates, as its sole trustee, the City of London Corporation also owns a number of the bridges spanning the Thames such as Southwark Bridge, Tower Bridge, Millennium Bridge, London Bridge, and Blackfriars Bridge. LVMF viewing location assessment points on the bridges include the River Prospects from all of these bridges, such as *12A.1: Southwark Bridge*, *11A.1: London Bridge*, and *11B.2*. As a final example, the viewing location from the Townscape View assessment point *25A.1: The Queen's Walk at City Hall*, of which there are three kinetic views, is located (as well as City Hall, headquarters of the Greater London Authority) on the privately owned 13.5 acre More London Estate which was bought at the end of 2013 by the Kuwait State owned St Martins Property Corporation from Bahamas based company London Bridge Holdings.

The consequences and effects on citizens of private spaces for public use are multifaceted. However, in relation to 'public' access, not only to private estates, but to local authority controlled and hence 'public' spaces alike, it is prescient to consider what transpired during the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant held on the 3 June 2012. The flotilla of boats, which included the Queen and senior members of the Royal Family aboard the Spirit of Chartwell, travelled from Battersea Bridge to Tower Bridge (St Katherine's Dock), passing under 14 bridges. The bridges provided the prime vantage points from which to view the spectacle of the passing flotilla. Other than Southwark Bridge, the bridges were closed to traffic, five were open for passing pedestrians only, and the rest were reserved for invited spectators, and in some cases also selected guests from charities, riparian boroughs, and members of the media. Public access to these 'public' or private for public use spaces was denied to ordinary citizens.

The LVMF images purport a controlled view of London, one that is ideologically constructed to perpetuate and engender imaginative past state and current and future neoliberal desires. The political establishment's choice of, and value set upon, these sanctioned views above and instead of, other ways of encountering and viewing the city, posits the function of these scenic representations (of value), as encapsulating, upholding, and defining, a strategic political and capitalist 'image' that gives credence to, and postulates London as, a twenty-first century world city. This is an ideological 'construction' of London that Malcolm Warner argues, is refashioned by each age in 'its own image' (Warner, 1987: 25).

Historically London has not been envisioned or recognised as a city of tall buildings. Yet at the time of writing, the latest findings of the New London Architecture (NLA) Tall Buildings Survey 2018, on the planned growth of tall buildings in London over the next decade, cites 510 tall buildings of over 20 storeys high have been submitted to planning or application, have planning permission, or are under construction.

The tallest building or structure within central London since 1310 until it was surpassed by the Post Office Tower (BT Tower) in 1962, was the pre and post Great Fire of 1666 St Paul's Cathedral located in the City, the historic and financial centre of London. A cathedral has stood on this site for over fourteen hundred years, dominating the London skyline and overseeing its urbanscape; it has been the site and sight of authoritative church and state power since the middle ages. The current incarnation of St. Paul's Cathedral designed by Sir Christopher Wren, and built between 1675 and 1710, stands at a height of 111.6 metres. Whilst no longer the tallest building in London, the cathedral's overarching symbolic status, and architectural and visual presence, dictates the location, height, and design of other buildings within its line of sight throughout the City, Central and Greater London. Through the preservation of the *view of*, the image of St Paul's Cathedral shapes the London skyline. This is achieved through the St Paul's Heights policy and the Greater London Authority's *London View Management Framework* (LVMF) policy guide. In 1930 the London Building Act, in existence for centuries (from 1667, a year after the Great Fire of London, buildings, aside from St. Paul's, were restricted to being four storeys high), raised the maximum height of building construction in London to 30.48 metres. This was the maximum length of the London Fire Brigade's ladders; fires were to be tackled from the outside of buildings. Fearing that views of St Paul's would be obstructed, in 1938 the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, together with the Corporation of London,<sup>1</sup> struck a gentleman's agreement with City developers that building height limitations would be applied to sightlines of the structure of St Paul's from certain viewing locations across the capital. Added to the height limitation, were façade restrictions to buildings immediately facing, and setback restrictions on the frontages of buildings in the streets leading up to St Paul's.<sup>2</sup> These restrictions only became legal statute in building guidance plans from the 1980s onwards; up to that time some building infringements did occur.

The *London View Management Framework* (LVMF) policy guide, which in 2007 replaced the previous Regional Planning Guidance for London (RPG3a) introduced in 1991, sets out 27 protected and designated views and viewing corridors throughout London, most of which have St Paul's Cathedral

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<sup>1</sup> The Corporation of London changed its name to City of London Corporation in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Façade and setback restrictions are concerned with limiting visual obstructions towards the cathedral. There are also depth restrictions in the immediate vicinity of St Paul's, thereby safeguarding underground structural damage.

as its focal point. Both the LVMF and the St Paul's Heights policy have not only enabled the image of St Paul's Cathedral and its attendant visual symbolism to be preserved, they have conversely impacted on the London skyline, shaping the urban layout, and thus how citizens view, negotiate, and relate to the City and the capital at large. (Harris and Ruggles, 2007: 18).

Nevertheless the 1956 repeal of the London Building Act lifted the constraints on the height of buildings (though not the St Paul's Heights) allowing for the surge in the construction of tall buildings in post World War II Britain. Tower blocks as high-rise housing in particular, were seen as quick and economic solutions for housing provision to achieve a high population density in what is claimed by the Royal Town Planning Institute was a 'perceived shortage of land' (House of Commons, 2002: 9), as replacement for homes destroyed by aerial bombardment, and aged dilapidated dwellings. High-rise housing was, as Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel (2012: 133) note:

a materialisation of a specific modernising vision for cities and city life, one that joined the progressive ethos of state-led welfarism with modernist architectural aesthetic (Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel, 2012: 133).

This modernist vision was part of an 'architectural imagination', they continue:

motivated by the potentials – economic, formal, social, spatial – of new materials such as steel, innovative construction technologies such as rapid system-building, new sciences about health and environment, and innovative mechanisms such as passenger lifts and integrated garbage handling systems (Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel, 2012: 135).

With London having the highest concentration of residential tower blocks, in addition to their economic viability (in 1956 the Conservative government also initiated public subsidies related to building height, that is, the higher the building the greater the subsidy), local authorities were eager to impress local residents with developers' futuristic Modern Movement and Brutalist architectural designs, and hence their own progressive outlooks; this included the 'desirable' views afforded from great heights and predicted greater resident sociality. However, by the 1970s, beset by (in many cases) poor design, material, upkeep, and location, residential tower blocks became unpopular, socially problematic, and stigmatised as undesirable social housing. The Housing Act 1980 under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, which gave council tenants the Right to Buy their council properties from local authorities, completely altered and striated the socio-economic dynamics of entire communities; social housing residential tower blocks being amongst them. Whilst some of these residential tower blocks have been demolished, others have subsequently been transformed physically and in terms of desirability, commanding high purchase prices in the open housing market.



As a consequence of the 1956 repeal of the London Building Act alongside the post-World War II surge in the construction of tower blocks as high-rise housing, commercial tall buildings, also began to be constructed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Centre Point was one such building. Designed by Richard Seifert and completed in 1966, the building still stands at 101 New Oxford Street in central London. At 34 storeys high (117 metres) Centre Point was, at the time that it was built, the tallest building in London. Built by the property speculator Harry Hyams, on completion he refused to rent spaces on a floor-by-floor basis, instead insisting that a single tenant should take over the entire building. Centre Point famously lay unoccupied for many years. It was no coincidence that it was financially propitious to remain empty. The property economy was such at the time, that the loss of any rental income was offset by an escalating profitable increase in the value of the building. Subsequently Centre Point became not only an architectural landmark, but also came to be seen as a white elephant emblematic of the corporate greed of property development. So much so that on various occasions in the mid 1970s squatters and campaigners managed to occupy the building to protest against London's housing crisis and highlight that the empty building should be used to house the homeless. One of those protestors was Ken Livingstone who, thirty years later as the first Mayor of London was not only a great advocate for the construction of tall buildings, but a major player in the shaping of the contemporary London skyline. In July 2013 planning was approved for the current owners of Centre Point, Almacantar,<sup>3</sup> a London property investment and development company, to redevelop the Grade II listed building from office space, restaurant and bar, into high-end residential apartments, retail space and public realm at the base of the building. In October 2018, half of the 82 luxury flats have been taken off the market as they remain unsold.

Richard Seifert also designed what was known at the time as the National Westminster Tower (NatWest, and since renamed Tower 42) at 25 Old Broad Street on Bishopsgate.

The NatWest Tower's very visible and imposing presence on the City skyline was meant to manifest the bank's stature. The 183 metres high, 47-storey building, its construction began in 1971 and completed in 1980 to house National Westminster Bank's international offices, was the first tall building (or otherwise known as a skyscraper) in the City of London, and the tallest in London until the completion of One Canada Square in Canary Wharf in the London Docklands, Tower Hamlets, in 1990. The development of the London Docklands into London's second financial centre (with its attendant tall buildings) came as a direct result of the deregulation of the financial markets in 1986 by Margaret Thatcher, the British Conservative Prime Minister at the time. Known as the Big Bang,

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<sup>3</sup> Almacantar bought Centre Point from administration for £120 million in 2011.

the outcome was an influx of foreign banks to the City of London. A New London Architecture study notes that this:

revolutionised office building [as these banks required] vast dealing floors which necessitated wide open offices and large glass windows to give natural light. Steel-frame buildings with raised floors, suspended ceilings and sophisticated building controls were the architectural order of the day (London's Centre for Built Environment, 2014: 45).

As a result, 'The City of London Corporation', the NLA report continues, 'relaxed development controls, which led to a six-fold increase in planning permissions' (London's Centre for Built Environment, 2014: 45). Limited ground space and the financial and planning incentives offered by the London Docklands Development Corporation (set up by the Conservative government in 1981), attracted foreign financial corporations to the Enterprise Zone of the London Docklands. This resulted in the tall buildings cluster in existence now in the privately owned but for public use Canary Wharf.<sup>4</sup> Thatcher's neoliberal policies directly enabled the construction of the first conglomeration of skyscrapers in London. Notwithstanding the economic downturn of the property market in London in the 1990s, which blighted the early years of the Docklands development, it was at this point that the London skyline had its greatest visual shift from St Paul's Cathedral to the neoliberal capitalist economy.

As a consequence of this shift, in actual competitive terms (the relocation of major players in the financial market), with the added governmental pressure to compete, in symbolic terms (the message it sent out to the world of finance), and its inability to secure the European Monetary Institute (subsequently the European Central Bank) that chose to locate its headquarters in Frankfurt in 1998, the City of London Corporation had to reinvent its image and identity by opening up to its surrounding boroughs and reaching out to the world (Maria Kaika, 2010).

Reaching out entailed implementing charitable organisations (which still continue) within the City and surroundings boroughs (whether this benefits the boroughs or is a strategy to extend its influence is questioned by Kaika) and an electoral reform that gave more power to the corporate businesses located in the City based on employee headcount, hence proving more attractive to corporate bodies. Its spatial restrictions safeguarding the view of St Paul's had, to this point, been used to its advantage to firstly perpetuate its symbolic historical and imperial importance of its locality through its centrality as 'host' of the cathedral, and secondly to better control the location and design of new developments. This however drew accusations both from the business sector and

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<sup>4</sup> The Canary Wharf area is currently owned by the private Canary Wharf Group plc.

from the government, of purporting a staid 'English' identity that contributed to its image of isolationism. Subsequently its spatial strategy and the City skyline became central features of a re-branding of the Corporation's image and identity highlighting the Corporation, Kaika notes, 'as an institution most conscious of the importance of the imaginary for the proper functioning of the economy' (Kaika, 2010: 459).

The election in the year 2000 of Ken Livingstone as Mayor of London also proved opportune for the Corporation. His election came at a time, with the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC), in which London, and the notion of Londoner, had lost its political and civic status, and they needed to be reconstructed (McNeill, 2002). With the prospect of London and the City's economic powerhouse status waning in the face of international competition and faced with the dual challenge of attracting international business, consolidating London's status as a competitive node (a 'world city') in a global economy, and securing the development of affordable housing, Livingstone saw the future construction of tall buildings in London as the solution. With his rhetoric of 'London must continue to reach for the skies' (Livingstone, 2001: 4), he stated:

I support high buildings, both as clusters (such as in the City, Canary Wharf and Croydon), and as stand-alone buildings (such as the Post Office Tower and Millbank Tower), where they are in close proximity to a major public transport interchanges and contribute to the quality of London's environment. I have no objection in principle to London having the tallest of buildings (Livingstone, 2000: 3).

In a further statement, Livingstone continues:

High buildings can have a significant impact both on their immediate surroundings and on skylines and views across London. High buildings are often flagship developments that play an important part in regeneration (Livingstone, 2001: 3).

For Livingstone tall buildings had a dual role to play, on the one hand they were pragmatic, enabling more office space (thus lowering the rental premium) and affordable housing through conditional support of planning approvals with the private sector (as mentioned earlier he had been active in the Centre Point protests to provide housing for the homeless), and on the other they were symbolic, casting an image of London as a 'world city' within global capitalism, and as an inclusive multi-racial society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> World cities are termed such to denote global financial centres. For Livingstone however a 'world city' was not only limited to its economy it also meant an inclusive multi-racial society, a city that welcomes the world. For further reading on world cities, in particular London, see: Massey, D. (2007) *World city*. Reprint, Cambridge UK, Malden, US: Polity Press, 2014.

In 2001 the Mayor's Office through the GLA published the *Interim Strategic Planning Guidance on Tall Buildings, Strategic Views, and the Skyline in London*. The guidance establishes a direct analogy between the symbolic visual impact of St Paul's Cathedral and of tall buildings on the skyline, and the psyche of the local population and visitors alike. It states:

London would be unthinkable without it [St Paul's]. Yet in the purely functional sense there is no actual *need* for it. The activities for which it was built could be carried out just as efficiently in a far more modest building. The point is that there is a demand for it as spiritual inspiration, an architectural icon and a tourist destination. It is felt that the activities for which it was built are enhanced spiritually by an outstanding architectural expression that considerations of mere efficiency and cost could never deliver. For various reasons, some of those whose business it is to provide office floorspace find it advantageous to attract tenants by providing that floorspace in tall buildings of outstanding quality in certain locations (Greater London Authority, 2001a: 9).

Consequently, some of the Mayor's criteria for approval of planning applications for tall buildings were based on whether the developments were deemed to be: 'Creating new architectural icons for the new century', and 'Generating confidence in London's future, both economically and aesthetically' (Greater London Authority, 2001a: 14).

The *Interim Strategic Planning Guidance on Tall Buildings, Strategic Views, and the Skyline in London* was a precursor to *The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London* published by the Mayor of London under the auspices of the Greater London Authority in 2004. The plan set out an 'integrated social, economic and environmental framework for the future development of London, looking forward 15–20 years' (Mayor of London, 2004: vii), that was (and still is) at the forefront of the GLA's spatial urban regeneration strategy. In the plan, Livingstone notes the local and global socio-economic changes over the previous 20 years, acknowledging the 'dominance of the finance and business sectors' (Mayor of London, 2004: 1), and an:

increased inter-relationship between major economies, where internationalisation of investment and trade accompanies developments in telecommunications and rapid transport effectively shrinks distances between people, markets, and business decision takers (Mayor of London, 2004: 1).

Thereby the 'vision' of Livingstone's *London Plan* is to develop London as a 'capital city' in which:

The future of London has enormous importance for the UK as a whole. This partly reflects its capacity to attract economic activities, including the higher levels of global business, which it is simply not possible to attract elsewhere in the UK (Mayor of London, 2004: 17).

As a 'world city', in which:

London is a world city and acts as one of a very small number of command and control centres in the increasingly interactive network of transactions across the world economy. World cities have very distinctive strategic needs. Although separated by thousands of miles, they are intimately linked as a virtual global entity by the transactions of markets and communications systems (Mayor of London, 2004: 15).

Whereby the strategy, the plan continues, is to:

facilitate the continuing attractiveness of London to world business with a phased supply of appropriate floor space for international business activities, and the specialist services that supply them, especially in the Central Activity Zone where many will need and wish to locate. Areas that would benefit from new international scale activities and which have the potential to be attractive to them include the rest of central London, parts of the City fringe and the Thames Gateway (Mayor of London, 2004: 15).

Prior to the publication of both *The London Plan* and the *Interim Strategic Planning Guidance on Tall Buildings, Strategic Views, and the Skyline in London*, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Greater London Authority Spatial Development Strategy Investigative Committee for 16 May 2001, shed light on the strategising behind the development of tall buildings. Summary Action List 5.10 states:

The RIBA [Royal Institute of British Architects] advised that the argument for tall buildings did not necessarily relate to the need to accommodate more people but, rather to attract business and regeneration and improve the face of London to the world. The main issues surrounded how the City was perceived rather than a functional requirement of how more people could be accommodated. Members asked if tall building were perceived as virility symbol of the City. The RIBA advised that they formed part of the identity of the City. The way people viewed the contribution of tall buildings to areas, could also have a beneficial effect with people appreciating why more businesses were being attracted to London (Greater London Authority, 2001b: 3).

Consequently, following Livingstone's direct spatial planning policies, which included narrowing the viewing corridors of the St Paul's Heights policy of 1938, reducing the number of protected and designated views across London from 34 to 26, with the continued relaxation of spatial policies by the Corporation of London within the City, the floodgates were opened for the future proliferation of the construction of tall buildings.

To this day (2018) the majority of the tall (iconic) buildings prominent in this skyline, that is, in the City and central London, are the legacy of Livingstone's spatial policies predicated by his desire to consolidate London's world city status. Though of course this has to be understood in the context of a globally competitive neoliberal economy; one that has instigated and overseen a global building

boom of highly visible iconic signature buildings by ‘starchitects’<sup>6</sup> in the aftermath and in search of the ‘Bilbao Effect’<sup>7</sup> by the commissioning state and corporate sector who ‘want’ to be ‘seen’ inhabiting these iconic buildings as a reflection (exuding a successful and progressive image) of the said company’s transnational financial and competitive status and aspirations; this is fictitious value creation based on the adage of ‘speculate to accumulate’.

In order for these new architectural buildings to be considered iconic, and thus situate their host cities (and clients) on the global map, they must have, what Leslie Sklair terms institutionally sanctioned symbolic/aesthetic significance. Whether state funded or private, this is driven by the corporate sector (Leslie Sklair, 2006).<sup>8</sup> Thus ‘starchitects’ are commissioned to design ‘public–private buildings that can act as logos for [the] city’ acting as ‘symbols of prosperity’ (Kaika & Thielen, 2006: 66).

The first of the current iconic building trend in London (in this particular instance the City) was 30 St Mary Axe completed in 2004. Designed by Norman Foster, the 40-floor building was approved by John Prescott the Deputy Prime Minister of the Labour government at the time. The planning approval (before Ken Livingstone became the first London Mayor) was entirely predicated on the premise of the ‘Bilbao Effect’. Other buildings that have since followed include the Willis Building, designed again by Norman Foster, completed in 2008, 26 floors; Heron Tower, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox, completed in 2011, 46 floors; the Shard, designed by Renzo Piano, completed in 2013, 72 floors; Leadenhall Building, designed by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, completed 2014, 48 floors; 20 Fenchurch Street], designed by Rafael Viñoly, 37 floors, completed in 2014. These buildings, all for commercial or mixed-use, provide the visual beacons of neoliberal capital power, overlooking the city spread out below and dominating the urban skyline in the manner of religious and state architecture centuries ago. Whilst some of Livingstone’s spatial policies were tightened by his Mayoral successor Boris Johnson, the proliferation of tall buildings has not only continued, it has become stratospheric.

These developments are targeted towards the accommodation of global capital corporations and luxurious residential use for international sale and or let investment. A manifestation of the neoliberal desire of exclusivity and aspiration is materialised not merely in visual form but is

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<sup>6</sup> Starchitects is the name given to describe star (ie. celebrity) architects who design signature ‘iconic’ buildings in cities across the world.

<sup>7</sup> This is attributed to the inauguration of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Another aspect of recent iconic buildings are the nicknames attributed to them as a means of familiarizing and marketing their ‘image’ in what Charles Jencks (2005: 13) calls a ‘one-liner’. Jencks, C. (2005) *The iconic building: the power of enigma*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd, p. 13. For musings on inventing names for London buildings see: Newman, H. (2013) *Common*. Isle of Wight: The Copy Press Ltd, pp. 47-48.

imbricated into the very fabric of the buildings and the streets we physically and psychically negotiate. As Harvey writes:

The results of this increasing polarization in the distribution of wealth and power are indelibly etched into the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly become cities of fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance. The neoliberal protection of private property rights and their values become a hegemonic form of politics, even for the lower middle class (Harvey, 2012: 15).

It is through this, Harvey continues, that:

ideals of urban identity, citizenship, and belonging, of a coherent urban politics, already threatened by the spreading malaise of the individualistic neoliberal ethic, become much harder to sustain (Harvey, 2012: 15).

Urbanism itself, as process and product, is the source and profit of capital production.

Hence the city, its urban fabric and socio-spatial structure manifest and correlate with its economy. Historically the skyline of church and civic towers in all their architectural forms were the visual manifestations of this economy and subsequent power, whilst in contemporary times they have been replaced by the corporate skyscraper (tall building). The construction and central location of church and civic towers and their visuality in the skyline, were a means of materialising this power and authority over its citizens, symbolically and in practice. That is, the symbolic 'showing' of power and authority itself 'instigated' power and authority.

Yet In the present day for all the success, prosperity, and power symbolically manifested through the materialisation of tall (iconic) buildings, that is, corporate and luxurious buildings as opposed to post war social housing tower blocks that have not undergone regeneration, paradoxically, they are also the instigators, aesthetic display and symptom of neo-liberal economic crisis. For instance consider the well-established idea of a 'crane index', whereby the number of cranes visible in the skyline is directly linked to, and is an indicator of, economic activity. A higher number of cranes signify more construction work and a healthier economy, thus instilling confidence in the speculative property and financial markets. The London Office Crane Survey published by Deloitte Real Estate provides information and forecasts future commercial construction. Alternatively the concept of the skyscraper index, initiated in 1999 by the property analyst Andrew Lawrence, charts a correlation between the construction of the world's tallest buildings and economic cycles in local and global financial markets. They are seen as predictors of economic collapse as they 'cap off what is a large building boom' (Lawrence, 2012: 44). The index cites examples such as the World Trade Center

(1973, US and world wide economic crisis), and more recently Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur (1998, Asian economic crisis), and the Burj Kalifa in Dubai (2010, global financial crisis).

As a result of these moments of economic crises and subsequent change, Kaika claims that architectures' need of creating significant and symbolic imaginary is essential in order to configure new significations (Kaika, 2010). Thus architecture produced during these moments, acts and performs, 'as a means of teaching society *what* to desire and *how* to desire it' (Kaika, 2010: 458); it is, in this respect, an attempt to 'salvage' and propagate itself. The current and future raft of tall building developments in London, are testament to this desire.

In London's recent history of tall buildings for instance, socio-economic based crises permeate: post war high rises (as utopian models) in response to, and as a means of, solving housing crisis in shortage of land; Canary Wharf cluster of tall buildings as a result of the 'Big Bang': the deregulation of financial markets by Thatcher's government in response to the City's lack of competitiveness in global banking. The subsequent effect of the Canary Wharf cluster in turn caused the City of London Corporation to change its spatial planning policy in order to allow for more tall buildings to be constructed and enable it to compete in attracting international corporations and capital back into the City. Ken Livingstone's support for tall buildings as a means through which to strengthen and secure London's image as a world city in a global economy in the face of competition. In addition, London borough councils, faced with continued funding cuts from central government, have and continue to be more favourable towards building planning applications that fund local resources. Subsequently this has resulted in state and private sector real estate partnerships, narrowing of St Paul's Cathedral protected viewing corridors, and the reduction of designated views, in order to allow for more planning applications to be approved.

In turn, current and recent constructions in London were directly affected by the 2007/8 global financial crisis. The start dates of developments were delayed, whilst others were halted midway through construction, for example 20 Fenchurch Street, Leadenhall Building, One Commercial Street, the Pinnacle, Heron Tower, and 240 Blackfriars. 30 St Mary Axe, one of the key landmark buildings in the City of London and of the capital's skyline, and the forerunner of the trend in the construction of tall iconic privatised corporate buildings within the City and the capital at large, was itself put up for sale on the open market in 2014, ten years after its completion. It was put into receivership by its co-owners, the privately held UK investment banking and private equity group Evans Randall, and the German real estate company IVG Immobilien, as they were unable to continue the repayments on the £500 million fifteen-year loan they undertook when they bought the building from its original owner the insurer Swiss Re in 2007 for £630 million (the highest purchase price for an office building



in the UK). The financial woes of the co-owners, players in the global financial crisis that began in 2007/2008, and who first defaulted on the loan repayment as far back as 2009, was said to be caused by the international currency exchange rate in which a strengthened Swiss franc against British pound sterling, inflated the original size of their multi-currency loan.

The building stands at the heart of London's financial centre, on the former site of the Baltic Exchange building damaged by an IRA bomb on 10 April 1992. A year later on 24 April 1993, the IRA detonated another bomb close by on Bishopsgate. Tower 42, known at the time as the NatWest Tower, and discussed earlier in this chapter, was also extensively damaged during this attack. At the time, the IRA were targeting London's financial centre; like the New York Twin Towers years later on 9/11, these were specifically chosen sites and sights for symbolic and physical attacks.

The skyline is intrinsic to London's 'image' as a city, more specifically, its status as a 'world city': how it is viewed, and what it represents on a local and global scale. This 'image' and its referent are crucial in attracting and securing current and future investment of global capital, especially in the light and as a consequence of, the global financial crisis of 2007/2008. As Harvey states:

what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold (Harvey, 2012: 4).

Though 'we', in the current state of affairs, is the 'we' of private corporate capital that has replaced the 'we' of church and state governance (though aided and abetted by the state). Thus, the building of 30 St Mary Axe itself, manifests and imbricates its inception, location, construction, ownership, purpose, function, and 'downfall'; it symbolises its economic status as a victim of its own making.

Whilst London is not unique in having designated and protected views, what is particular about London's 'views' is that they are premised on the purposeful creation and cultivation of an 'image' of the city the GLA wants to project for the here and now, and for the future. The desired image of London expressed through the *London Plan*, and the LVMF views, is, on the one hand, the aesthetics of a past heritage of Empire and power as the heart of the British Empire (with attendant, religious, military, and state power) inscribed into the very fabric of its buildings, for example Greenwich Hospital, Palace of Westminster, St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Mall and Buckingham Palace, and on the other, the aesthetics of a current and future neoliberal World City as expressed through its iconic tall corporate buildings, in order to attract and consolidate further capital. Both 'images' are the sites and sights of the London skyline that the GLA is attempting to coalesce into one within the LVMF policy guide.

As it currently stands, there exists a tension within the LVMF policy guide. It is the paradox between

the desire to designate and protect views of St Paul's Cathedral and other historical buildings – the heritage image of London of state power and empire – and the neoliberal, capitalist, economic, and political *need* to create and purport an urban skyline image of financial affluence and economic power – *a world city* – espoused through the construction of tall buildings throughout the capital and the City. How might this reconciliation be achieved, and how might the continued state and private sector privatisation strategies affect the future, only time will tell.