

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Derby Tall Buildings Study provides guidance related to the intensification of land uses in the city centre, including identification of optimal locations and scale of potential tall buildings. It provides advice in relation to the definition of tall buildings and sets out urban design considerations associated with their development.

The guidance is the result of detailed analysis of Derby city centre through site visits, mapping, 3d modelling, a detailed heritage assessment and extensive engagement with Derby City Council and other key stakeholders undertaken by an independent urban design consultant. The methodology of the study is underpinned by a robust theoretical framework for tall buildings developed over many years of conducting similar studies in the UK and Ireland.

Alongside guidance for the optimal location of new tall buildings, the study also identifies a number of opportunities for intensification in the city centre through small increases in context height and through the development of 'larger' buildings. Carefully designed larger buildings can significantly increase density, but are lower in height than tall buildings and therefore may be more easily integrated into the city's townscape and heritage. This approach reflects the vital contribution of Derby's built heritage, history and culture to the city's identity and sense of place. This study acknowledges the role that heritage and townscape should play as positive forces for regeneration. It also demonstrates the potential

for substantial intensification and regeneration within Derby city centre through contextual-scale development.

It is beyond the scope of this study to undertake viability or more broad economic impact testing for potential development areas. Viability of development is a complex topic that depends on site-specific knowledge and design approach and may also change due to wider economic circumstances. As is the case with all development, the economic benefits of specific proposals will be weighed in the balance as part of the determination process.

CONTEXT

In 2008, the Council in conjunction with Derby Cityscape commissioned consultants to develop a 'Tall Buildings Strategy' to inform the implementation of the Derby Cityscape City Centre Masterplan. The strategy assessed the baseline townscape context and provided an indication of locations within the city centre that may be appropriate for tall buildings. These areas were largely constrained to the Castleward and Riverside areas of the city centre.

Whilst the Tall Buildings Strategy produced in 2008 provided useful evidence to inform decision making, it was never formally adopted by the Council, although some of the broad principles have been incorporated into the Council's Local Plan Part 1.

Since the 2008 work was produced, the need to make more efficient use of land has continued to increase due to housing needs and a depleting supply of suitable greenfield sites. This has resulted in the submission of proposals that seek to significantly intensify development densities in and on the edge of the city centre, including several proposals for tall buildings.

The delivery of higher density development in the city centre will undoubtedly boost its vitality and viability through the creation of a critical mass of people and help to provide the city centre with a more diverse role and function. However, in some cases, such proposals due to their design and location have been at risk of negatively impacting valued heritage assets and designations.

In the absence of specific policy direction, the tension between growth aspirations and heritage considerations has resulted in increasingly polarised views, protracted debate and greater uncertainty. This has resulted in the need to find a middle ground where the conservation and celebration of heritage assets can be achieved in tandem with new development.

The Council is in the process of reviewing its Local Plan which provides an opportunity for the tall buildings issue to be explored in the context of the need to make more efficient use of land, regenerate large parts of the city centre, whilst recognising the existing and potential contribution that heritage assets make to the city centre. There is an opportunity to include a specific policy in the Local Plan in order to direct investment in tall buildings into appropriate locations and set out the Council's expectations in terms of design and planning application requirements – thus providing greater certainty to the development industry. The need for such a policy has been acknowledged by the Council for a number of years and the principle has been supported by key stakeholders.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the decline of city centres and local authorities are having to consider strategies for short term recovery as well their longer-term role and function. The Council will be producing a new City Centre Masterplan that provides a clear vision for what it should look like, how it should function and importantly how challenges will be addressed. This

study will be a key piece of evidence to inform the development of the new Masterplan.

EVIDENCE TO INFORM FUTURE POLICY DIRECTION

There is a requirement for planning policies to be based on robust evidence; otherwise they will not be found 'sound' when examined by a Planning Inspector. It is therefore necessary for the Council to have a thorough understanding of the key issues and areas of debate associated with the planning and development of tall buildings. This Tall Buildings Study provides detailed analysis of a number of the key issues and will be a fundamental part of the evidence base underpinning a future policy.

In addition to being used as part of the evidence base to support a tall buildings policy in the Council's new Local Plan, it is also a helpful tool for developers interested in proposing tall or intense development in Derby. It will steer developers towards sites and designs that are most likely to be considered acceptable by the Council, based on consistency with current /emerging planning policy and best practice, as well providing evidence to inform their understanding of the character of different areas which will need to be taken into account when developing proposals. This has the benefit of increasing investor confidence and can help to make the application process more efficient.

This study does not intend to provide a blueprint for what is acceptable in the city in terms of height. It rather establishes a framework of the issues that will need to be considered when deciding if a tall building in a certain location will be acceptable.

Whilst the study will be used to inform the Council's Local Plan and the development of a new City Centre Masterplan, it will also be a material consideration in the decision making process. The study provides useful guidance, but each proposal for a tall building will be considered on its own merits and will be required to test impacts on sensitivities and place, demonstrate that harmful impacts on sensitivities have been avoided or minimised and establish a sound justification in respect of regeneration, place making and legibility. It is only at planning application stage that the acceptability of a tall building proposal can be decided on balance with all other considerations taken into account.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study analyses Derby city centre and makes recommendations for the optimal locations and scale of tall buildings from an urban design perspective. This approach takes into account the potential contribution of tall buildings to the following aspects:

- The need for sustainable development and regeneration;
- Derby's attractiveness, character and image;
- The city's unique heritage and townscape;
- Important views and vistas;
- Enjoyment of the city and resident amenity;
- The ability to navigate the city (i.e. legibility);

The study takes a strategic, high-level approach and so is naturally limited in its scope. Its primary focus is to provide urban design guidance on tall buildings in respect of their potential to physically regenerate the city, contribute to place making and respond to development opportunities within the city centre, while also considering their impact on townscape character, heritage assets and views.

As already noted, it is beyond the scope of this study to undertake viability or more broad economic impact testing for potential development areas. Generally speaking the viability of tall buildings becomes more marginal with greater height due to their increased build cost. For this reason they are usually only pursued by developers if the market is strong.

This may mean that while a site has been identified as an opportunity for a tall building for place making, legibility or regeneration reasons, it may be possible that a tall building on this site is presently not viable. The study therefore does not prescribe minimum heights to enable flexibility to developers to develop a scheme with a height that can be delivered.



SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

DEFINITION OF TALL BUILDINGS

For the purposes of this study, a ‘tall building’ is a very specific and relative term. A ten-storey building might be a (very) tall building in a predominantly two-storey suburban area, yet would be considered only as a local high point in an urban five to six storey context. Thus, tall buildings must be considered in relation to their local context height.

The context height of an area is the height that an observer would read as the typical or defining height of a particular area. In places that are consistent in height, the context height may be the most commonly occurring building height. In more varied places, the context height may be a middle point that buildings fluctuate around. The context heights in Derby city centre range from 2-3 storeys around the railway station up to 5 storeys in more central areas.

Tall buildings are the exceptions to the context height. They are significantly taller than the context height in an area, break the skyline and are visually prominent. The height relationship of a tall building with its context can be expressed as a factor of the prevailing contextual height. This study calls this the context height ratio (CHR). The CHR expresses the degree of ‘tallness’ of a building in relation to its context.

Buildings that are less than twice (2x) the context height are not considered to be tall buildings, but merely “Large Buildings”. Large buildings may still have a considerable impact on their local context but should be considered in respect of the Council’s general design policies.

A building that is twice the context height or above is considered to be a ‘tall building’.

TALL BUILDINGS OBJECTIVES

Given that tall buildings are larger than conventional development and will have an impact over a much larger area, they require additional levels of scrutiny to ensure they fit in and make a positive contribution to Derby.

This study sets out ten objectives, which should guide the role of tall buildings in Derby. These were endorsed by stakeholders through the consultation process.

In many cases, the objectives are simply an articulation of best practice and / or are underpinned by existing planning policies. A tall building would generally be expected to contribute to the achievement of these objectives. The closer a proposal aligns with these objectives, the more appropriate it is likely to be.

The objectives are listed in no particular order and all have equal importance. Tall buildings should:

- Be of high quality architectural design and appearance;
- Support intensification and a mix of uses;
- Be part of a plan-led, place making approach;
- Have a clear purpose as a landmark or to increase densities;
- Protect and enhance heritage assets and their setting and protected landscape characteristics;
- Preserve and enhance special and valued townscapes;
- Protect and enhance townscape views and the skyline;
- Result in high quality places where people want to live and spend their time;
- Integrate effectively with the surrounding area; and
- Be sustainable and innovative developments.

SENSITIVITIES

Due to their greater height and wider visibility, tall buildings bring significant change to the urban fabric. While this change may be welcome, and deliver regeneration benefits and improvements, in some cases tall buildings can also have a negative impact on existing features of the urban environment. It is important for the nature of such impacts to be fully understood and evaluated in order to inform both decision making and plan making.

This study has identified a range of features in Derby that are sensitive to tall buildings, due to their importance for the city's image and identity. This includes the city's heritage, whose setting (i.e. the context in which a heritage asset is experienced) may be impacted by a tall building. The Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) extends into Derby city centre and much of the historic Derby city centre is designated as a Conservation Area. Some assets are of higher sensitivity than others, which has been assessed in a detailed analysis of the city's heritage conducted as part of this study.

Similar to other cities, Derby city centre contains special elements of the urban fabric that contribute to the city's identity, image and skyline. These elements are important to protect and enhance due to their contribution to the city centre's vitality and their potential role in heritage-led regeneration. As part of the understanding of sensitivities, this study analysed the views identified by the Derby Skyline Study

(2019) and identified narrow sensitive view cones to key landmarks within views. These are the aspects of the views that are fundamental to their significance and so are most sensitive to tall buildings.

Throughout the centuries Derby Cathedral has enjoyed a ubiquitous and uncontested role on Derby's skyline and is an important feature of the city's image and cultural identity. Views to the Cathedral and a number of other city landmarks identified in the Derby Skyline Study are identified as being "sensitive", meaning there is a risk that a tall building could negatively impact on them.

The purpose of identifying these sensitivities is firstly to steer future tall building development to areas of lower sensitivity, and secondly to flag up what sensitivities need to be tested at planning application stage to ensure the optimal siting and design of tall buildings. These sensitivities are just one element considered in forming the recommendations in the study.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDANCE:

The study provides recommendations for both the optimal location of tall buildings in Derby city centre and opportunities to increase general building heights.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TALL BUILDINGS:

The study identifies a number of opportunities for tall buildings in Derby, including four tall building clusters and thirteen potential tall building locations in and around the edge of the city centre, shown in Figure 1.

To reiterate, these are opportunities for development in excess of twice (2X) the general context height, meaning that new buildings would be significantly taller than their surroundings.

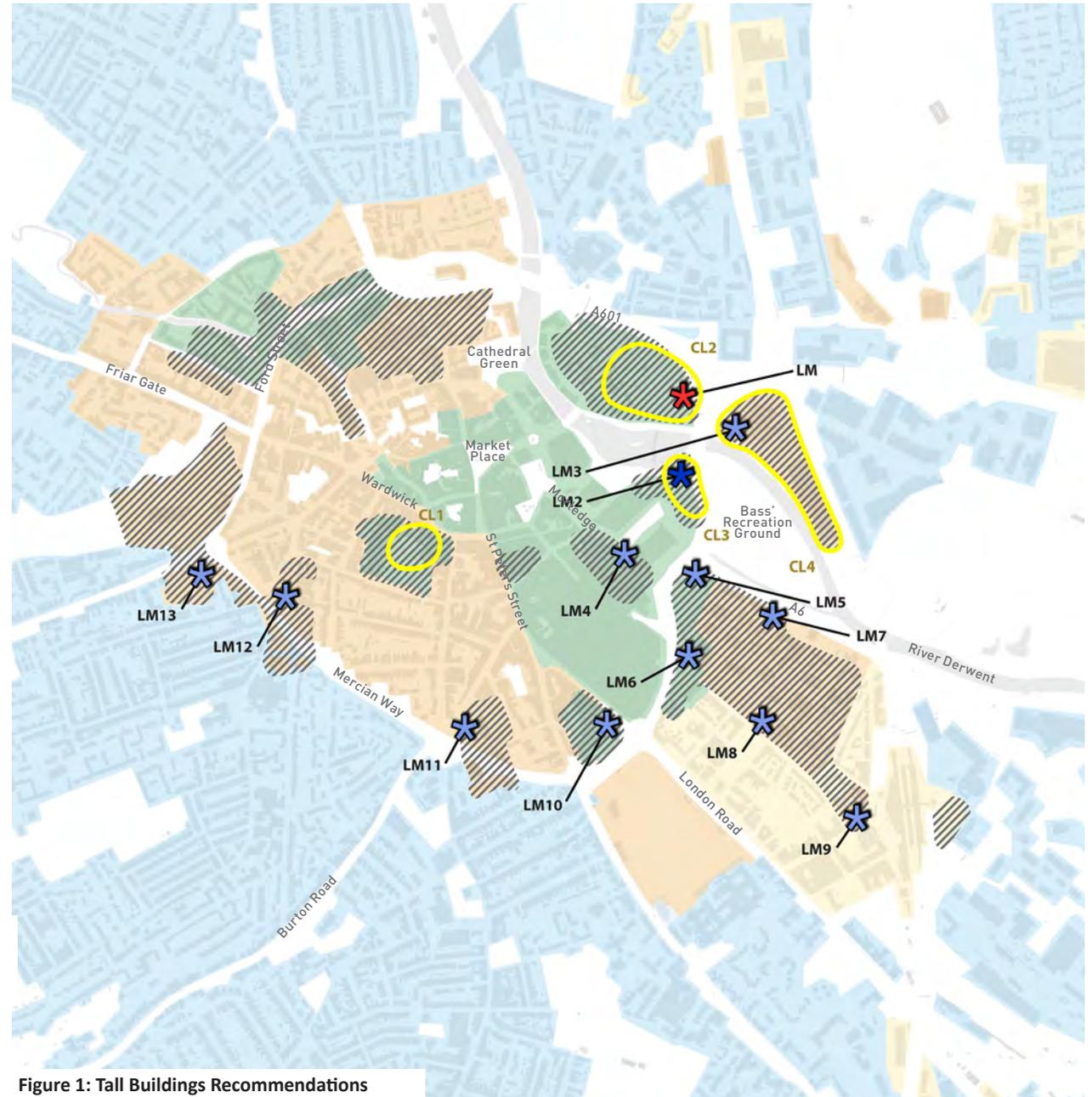
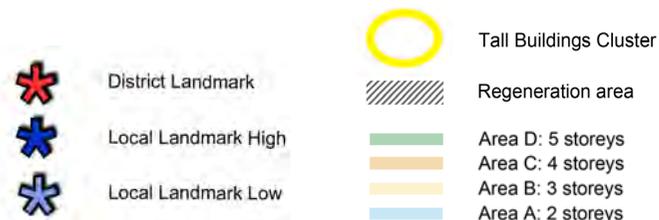


Figure 1: Tall Buildings Recommendations

INCREASING CONTEXT HEIGHTS

The study identifies the existing context heights and makes recommendations for increasing the context height in the city centre to allow for more intense development without adversely impacting the character of surrounding areas – see Figure 2. For example:

- The general building heights in Castleward could increase from 3 storeys to 4 storeys;
- Comprehensive development of the Northern Riverside could establish a new general height of 5 storeys;
- Generally, the sites along the ring road could increase their general height from 4 to 5 storeys or from 2 to 4 storeys.

It is possible for individual buildings in each area to be higher or lower than the context height, as long as the area as a whole can still be read as having a defining general height. This allows for flexibility.

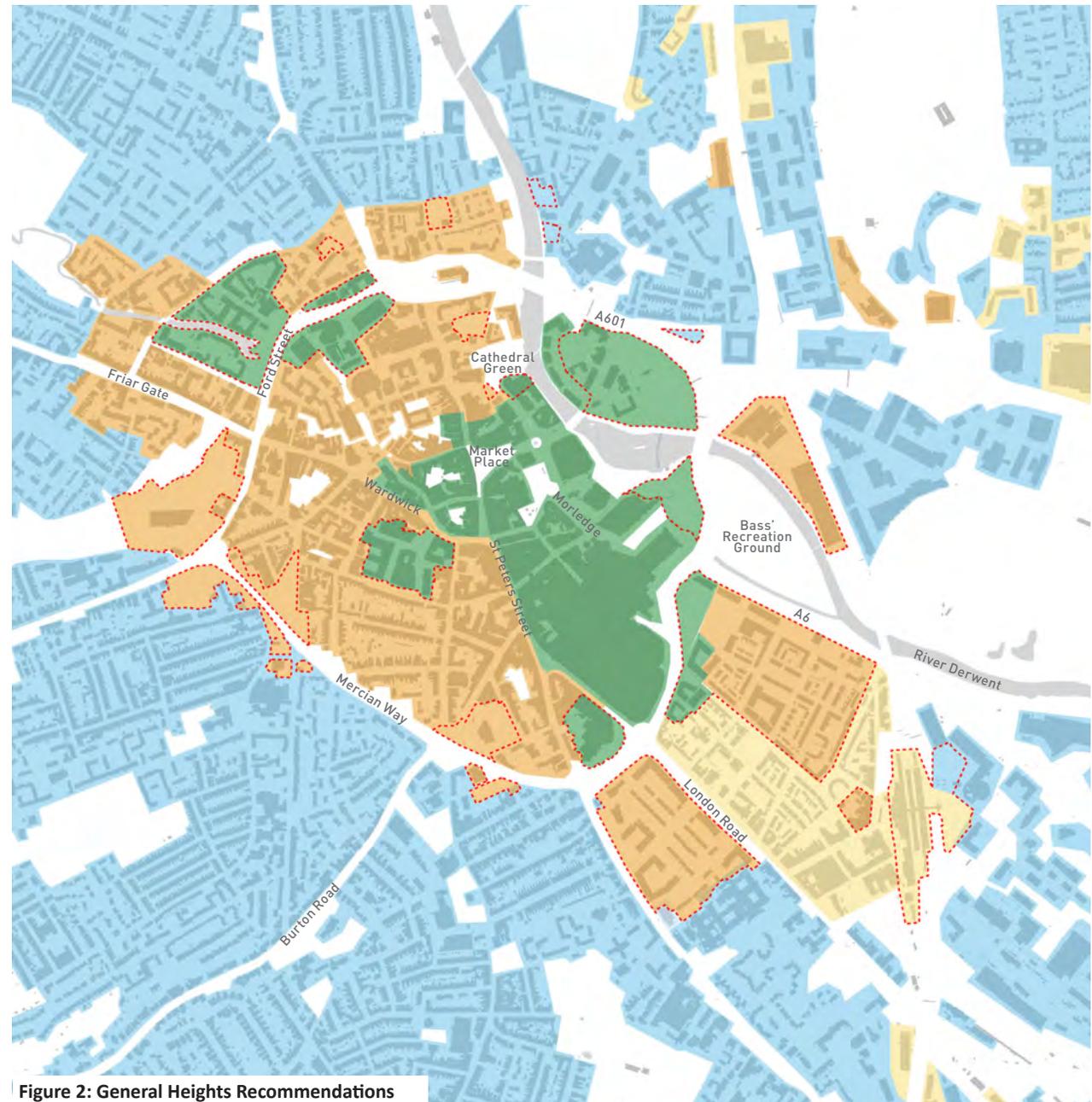
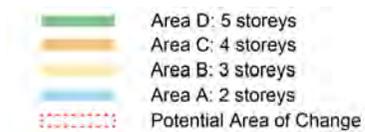


Figure 2: General Heights Recommendations

INTENSIFICATION

The study does not identify opportunities for tall buildings within the city's historic core or the 'northern fringe' character areas because they are the most sensitive parts of the city in regard to heritage assets and views. While this may be viewed by some as overly restrictive, the study concludes that in these areas there is an increased risk that tall buildings would cause substantial damage to the setting and significance of key heritage assets as well as the city image. Notwithstanding this, these areas continue to provide substantial opportunities for intensification through careful and context sensitive design of buildings which in some cases could be up to twice the context height. This could still result in development that provides a step change in the intensity of uses in these areas.

TALL BUILDINGS WITH PURPOSE

Potential for tall buildings is only recommended where they would have a clear purpose. For example tall buildings can have a role as local landmarks, marking important gateways to the city or areas of local importance, such as at Liversage Square in Castleward. Local landmarks generally range in height between 8-12 storeys, depending on the relevant context height. These are considered "low" local landmarks. An opportunity for a high local landmark of 15 storeys is identified on the riverside to the rear of the bus station.

Four opportunities for tall building clusters have been identified in the city centre, three on the riverside and a smaller one at the Becketwell site. These provide opportunities for the development of more than one tall building. Generally they are areas for comprehensive change, where tall buildings could contribute to a distinct character.

In two of the clusters, on the riverside and on the Becketwell site, a district landmark of 17 storeys could be considered. They would act as an anchor for the regeneration of the area and be the focal building and centre of the cluster.

Chapter 9 of this study provides specific recommendations, for each tall building and cluster opportunity, on location, rationale, indicative maximum height, site specific design criteria and heritage sensitivities that will need to be considered. In addition, Chapter 10 provides general design criteria and guidelines for tall buildings.

CONCLUSION

The designation of tall building opportunities in Figure 1 is largely indicative, but has been informed by character assessments, 3d modelling and testing of potential locations against sensitivities. It may be that a case for a tall building could be made elsewhere, subject to the identification of a clear urban design rationale, detailed assessment of impacts and positive contribution towards tall buildings objectives.

The pro-active identification of a significant number of opportunities for tall buildings is a major step forward in planning for the future of the city centre. Even if only some of these sites are brought forward for tall buildings, it will result in a significant intensification of uses within the city centre, helping to boost its vitality and viability and contributing to its ongoing evolution.