London Tall Buildings Survey 2015

By New London Architecture and GL Hearn

Analysis by GL Hearn

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Executive summary

GL Hearn with the New London Architecture undertook in-depth research on the planning activity in connection with major schemes which included buildings over 20 storeys for 12 months (between 01 February 2014 and 28 February 2015). This analysis provides comparative updates of last year's Tall Buildings survey which found that 236 tall buildings were planned for the capital.

The analysis has considered towers that are proposed (pre and post formal submission), approved (with planning permission) and under construction (but not yet completed).

Key observations:

- 263 in the pipeline across London (+11%)
- 70 under construction (+56%)
- 117 approved schemes (+4%)
- 76 proposed schemes (+6%)
- Six completed schemes six years after planning permission
- Planning decision issued approximately eight months after validation of the scheme

1. Numbers, height and status

The research has shown that there are a total of 263 towers in the pipeline across London. As detailed in **Figure 1** below, close to half of the pipeline towers already have planning permission (117 / 44%) but have not yet been commenced and some 70 (or 27%) of towers are currently under construction. There are 76 (29%) towers in the pipeline without planning permission (72 decisions are still pending and 4 have been refused).

Compared to last year's data, this shows a significant increase in the number of towers under construction, up 56% from the 45 projects contained in the 2014 survey. There is only a small increase of 6% in the number of proposed towers (up from 72 to 76), and a 4% increase in the number of towers with planning approval but not yet on site (up from 113 to 117).

Over the last 12 months, 72 towers have been submitted to planning approval.

Figure 2 shows that 27 (37%) have been granted with planning permission, 4 (6%) have been refused, and 41 (57%) remain undecided.

Six schemes have now being completed since last year:

- 20 Fenchurch Street (City of London) – was under construction last year and was approved 07.10.2009 (approx. 5 years)
- 240 Blackfriars Road (Southwark) – was not under construction last year and was approved 18.02.2011 (approx. 3 years)
- One Commercial Street (Tower Hamlets) – was under construction and was approved 29.08.2006 (approx. 8 years)
- The Leadenhall Building (City of London) - was under construction and was approved 29.04.2005 (approx. 9 years)
- The Tower, One St George Wharf (Lambeth) - was under construction and was approved 14.07.2005 (approx. 8 years for completion in 2013)
- Unite Stratford (Newham) – was under construction and was approved 15.12.2011 (approx. 3 years)

On average these towers reached completion six years after planning permission was granted.

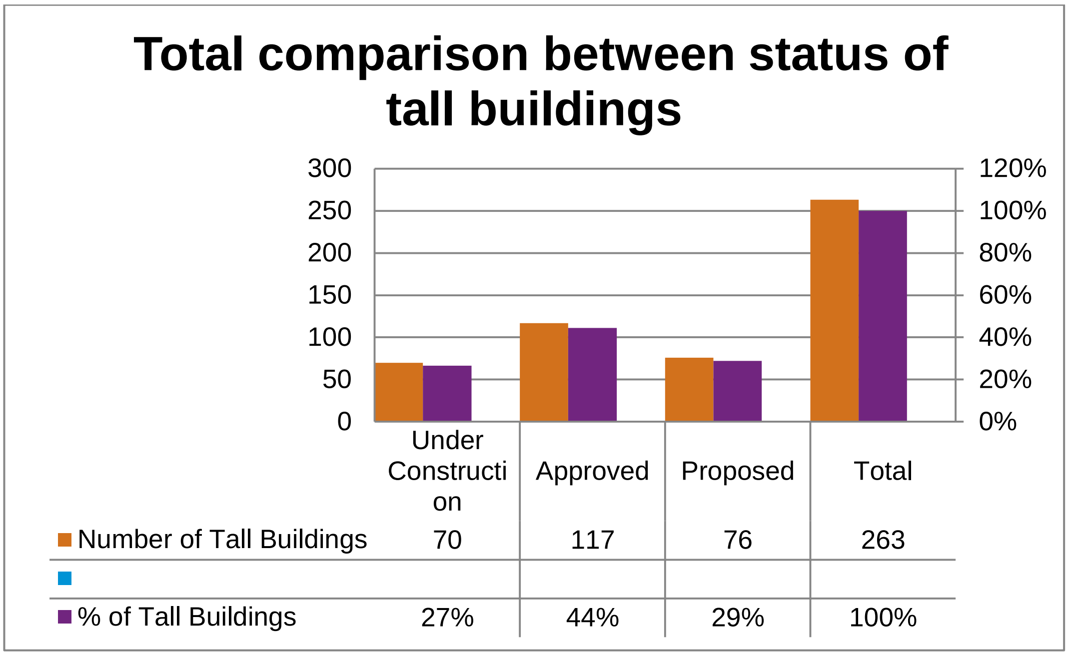


Figure 1

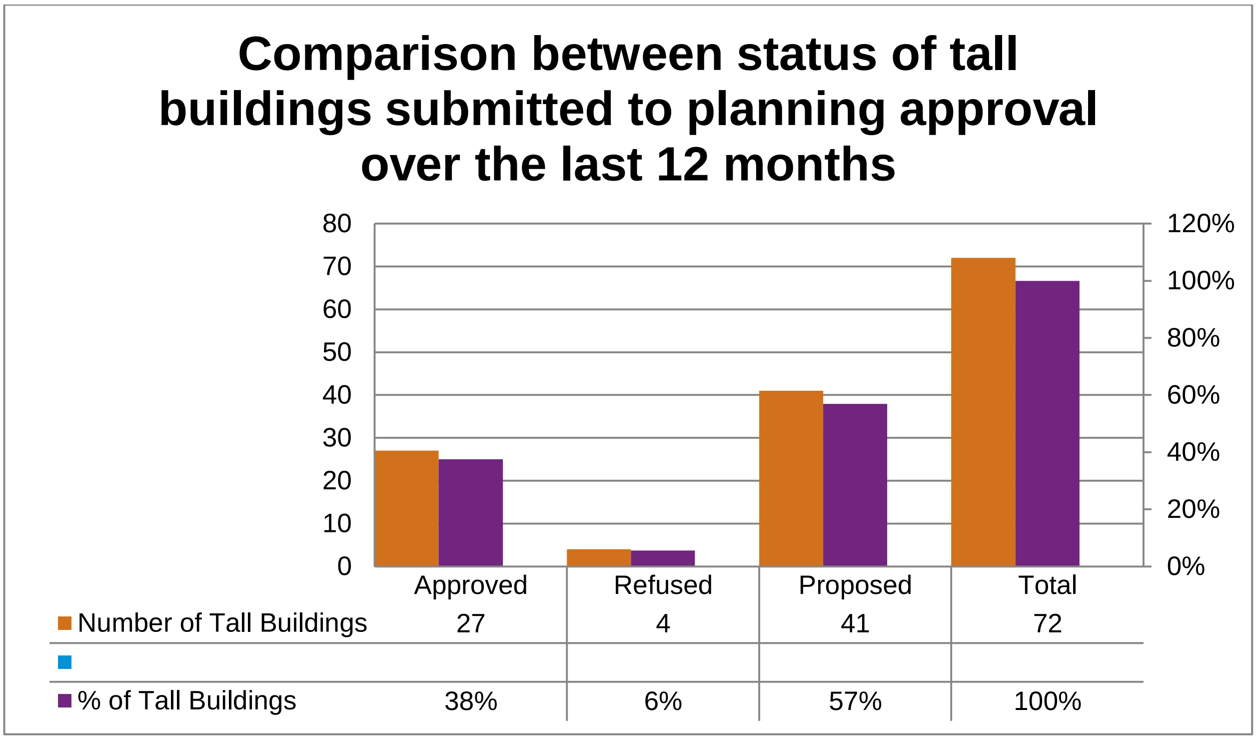


Figure 2

The analysis assessed proposals above 20 storeys – the Pinnacle in the City of London currently being redesigned, the tallest proposed tower is the 270m high building (56 storeys) replacing St Helen's Tower (City Pride). The towers with the highest numbers of storeys are, Columbus Tower (Hertsmere House), Quay House and South Quay Plaza, all of which would extend to 68-75 storeys.

Figure 3 shows all of the proposed by towers by number of storey - actual storey heights, and overall heights, will vary between developments as a result of design and use;

- 20-29 storeys = 153 proposed towers (58%)
- 30-39 storeys = 55 proposed towers (21%)
- 40-49 storeys = 30 proposed towers (11%)
- 50-59 storeys = 19 proposed towers (7%)
- 60+ storeys = 6 proposed towers (2%)

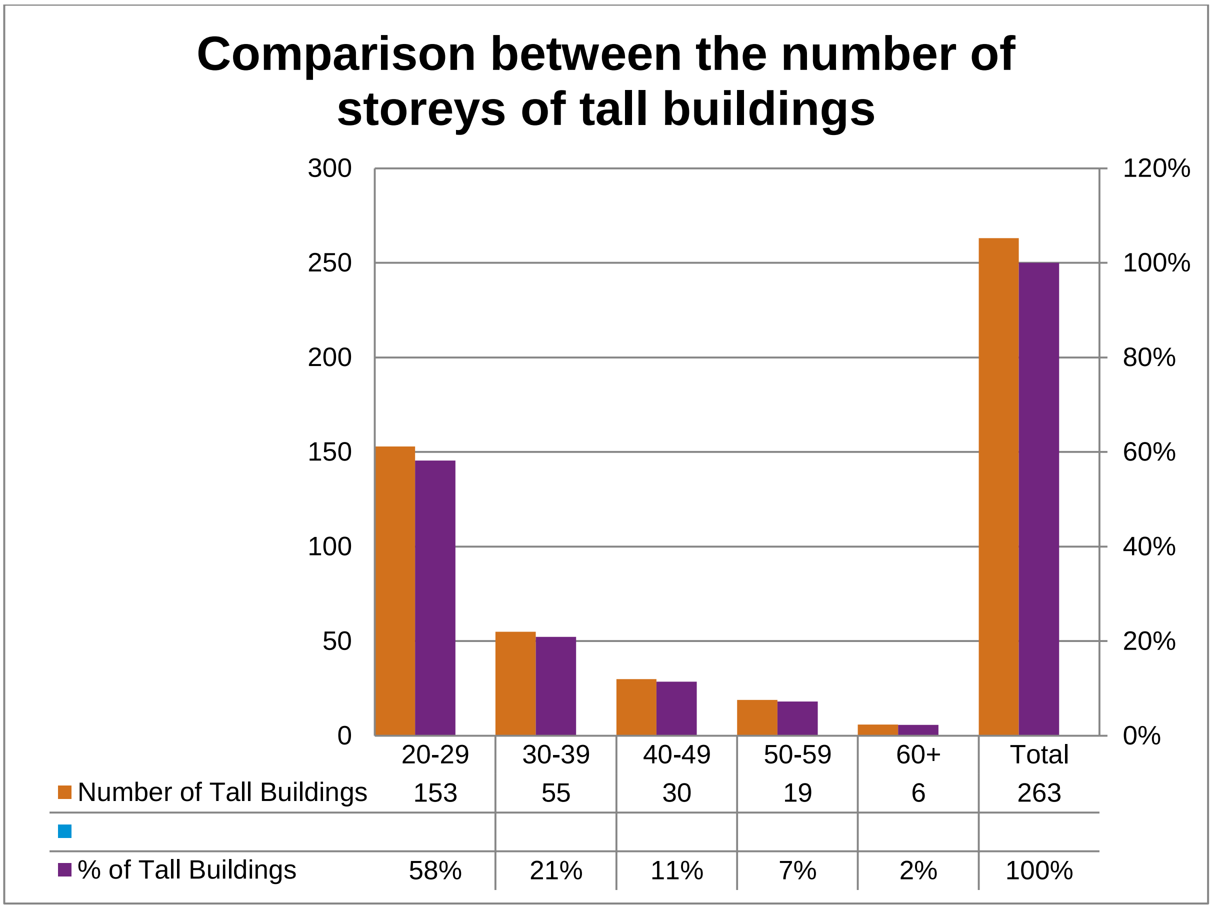


Figure 3

Approximately 58% of the pipeline towers are between 20 and 29 storeys with just 9% extending above 50 storeys. **Figure 4** does not show any significant “step changes” between certain floor heights which may have been expected to result from thresholds in terms of construction economics – the figures suggest that towers are feasible at any height up to the current maximum of 75 storeys.

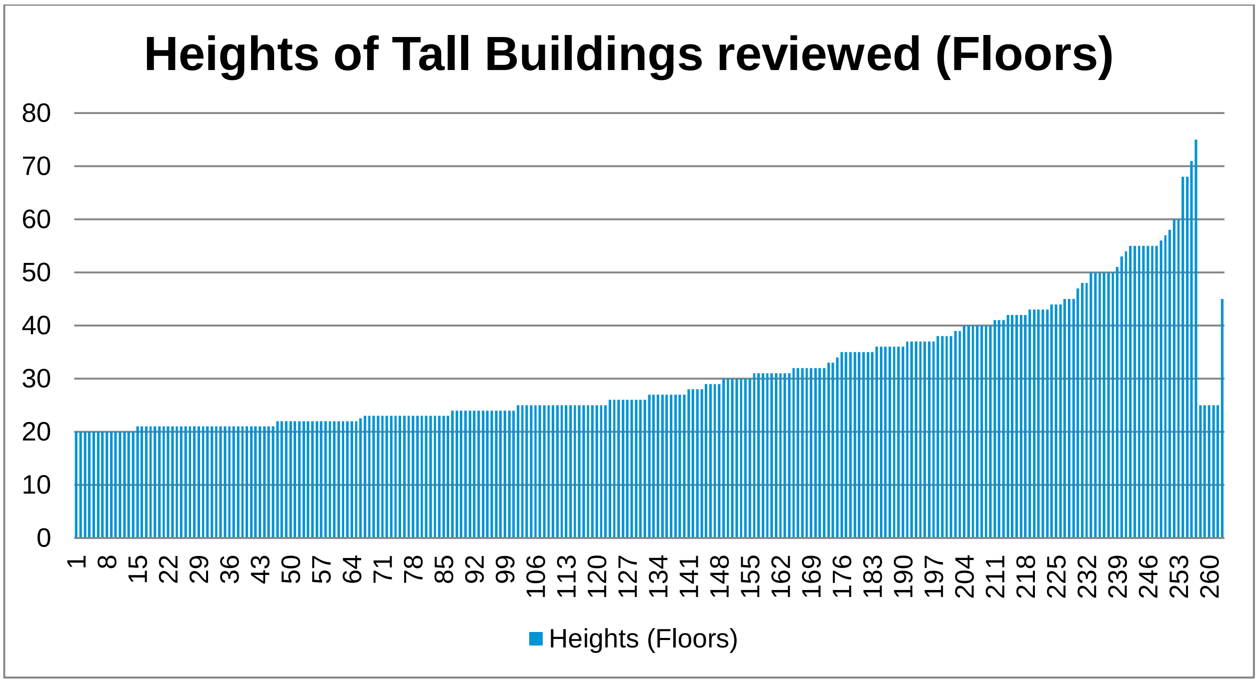


Figure 4

2. Location

Figure 5 and 6 show the geographic distribution of towers by borough. Whilst there are tall building proposals across London, certain boroughs are set to accommodate far higher numbers of towers than others. This may be expected to some extent given the varying planning opportunities and constraints across London allied to local economic and market factors. Tower Hamlets remains the most active borough with 67 applications.

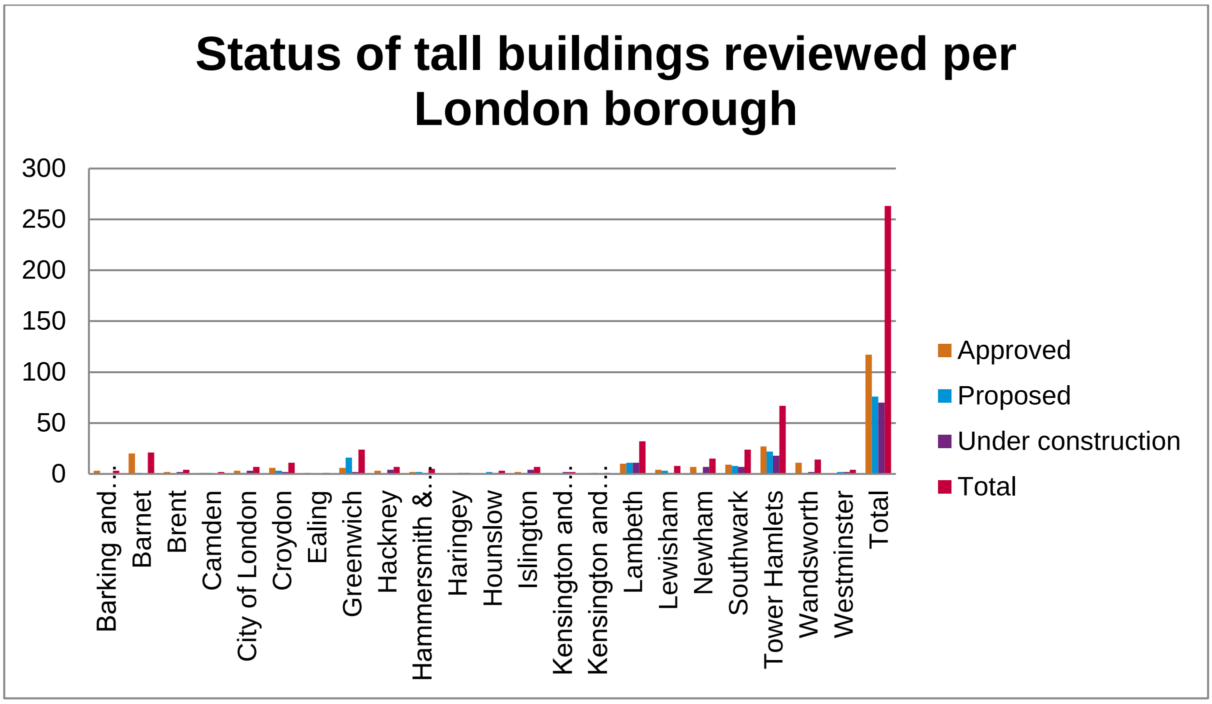


Figure 5

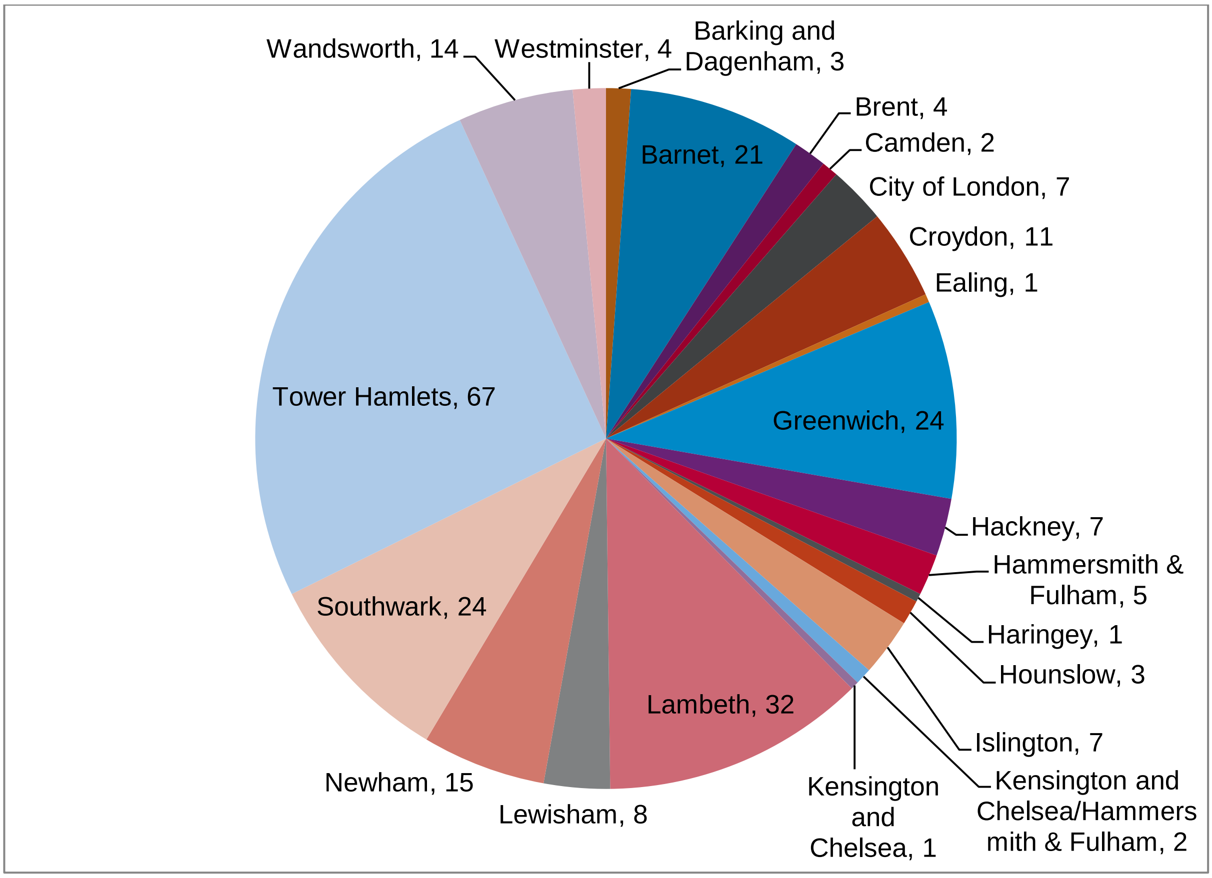


Figure 6

The most active boroughs remain the same as last year's high keeping up with the emerging importance of the Southbank as an appropriate location for tall buildings with a total of 101 (30%) of proposed tall buildings in Lambeth (32/12%), Greenwich (24/9%) and Southwark (24/9%).

The dominance of Tower Hamlets is reflected in the status tall building proposals **(Figure 5)** – the borough has the most approved towers (27 or 23%) and the most proposed towers (22 or 29%). Tower Hamlets also has the highest number development projects under construction with 18 proposals (26%).

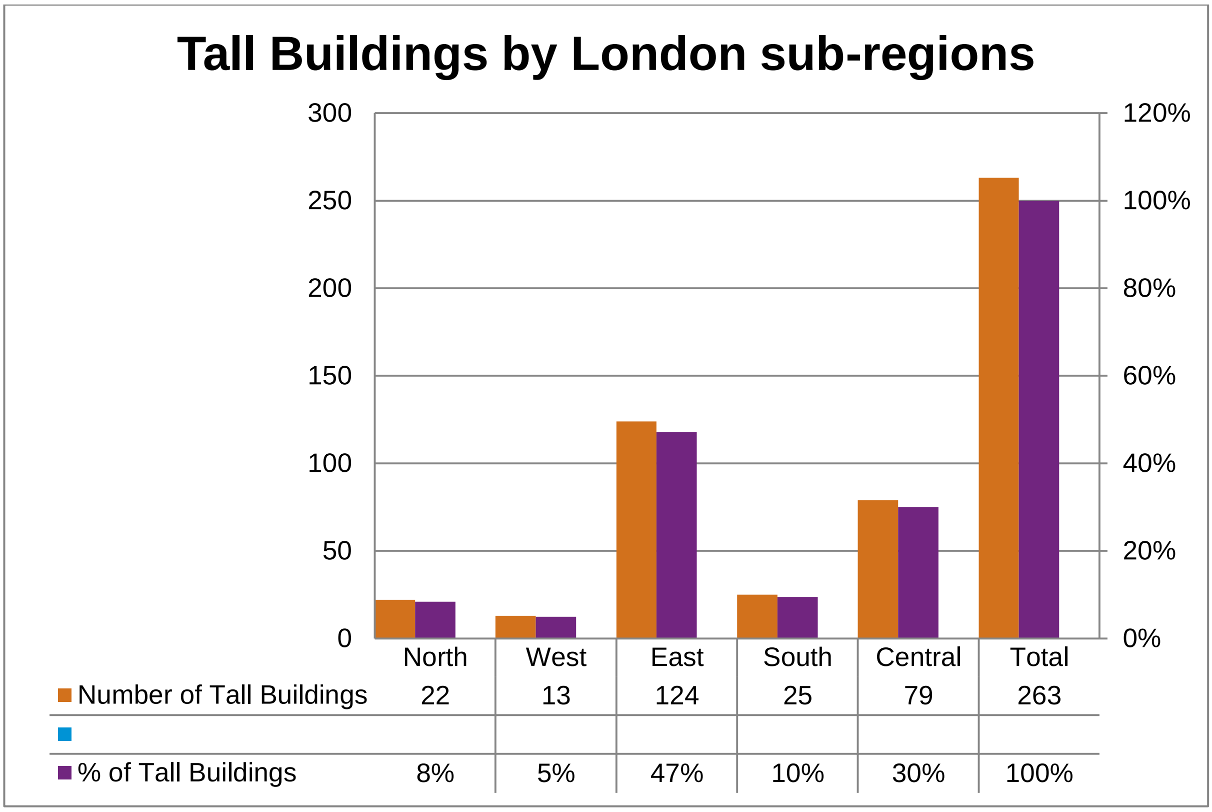


Figure 7

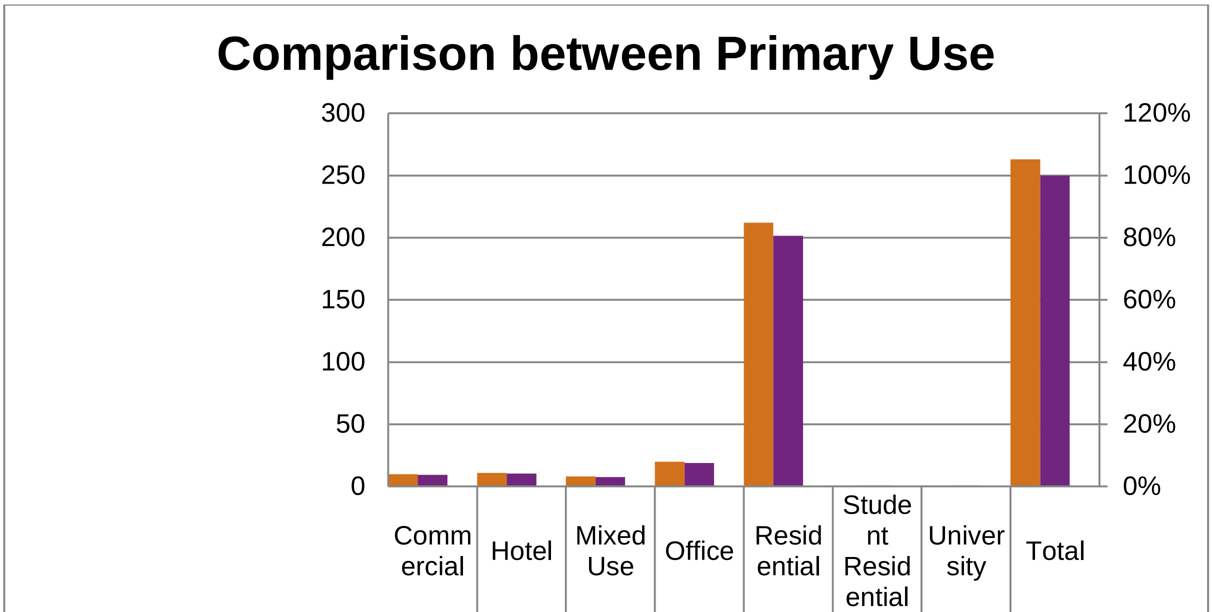
The amount of tower development in the East and Central sub-regions **(Figure 7)** remains very evident with these sub-regions accounting for 203 of proposals in the pipeline (77%).

Accordingly, the very small number of tall buildings proposed in the North and West sub-regions is striking given the geographic extent and nature of these sub-regions; just 22 (8%) and 13 (5%) respectively. By way of example, Ealing and Haringey have only one proposal in each borough. Nevertheless, it is likely that the number of proposals will increase in these sub-regions and that clusters of tall buildings will gradually appear as new Opportunity Areas are put forward.

3. Type and use

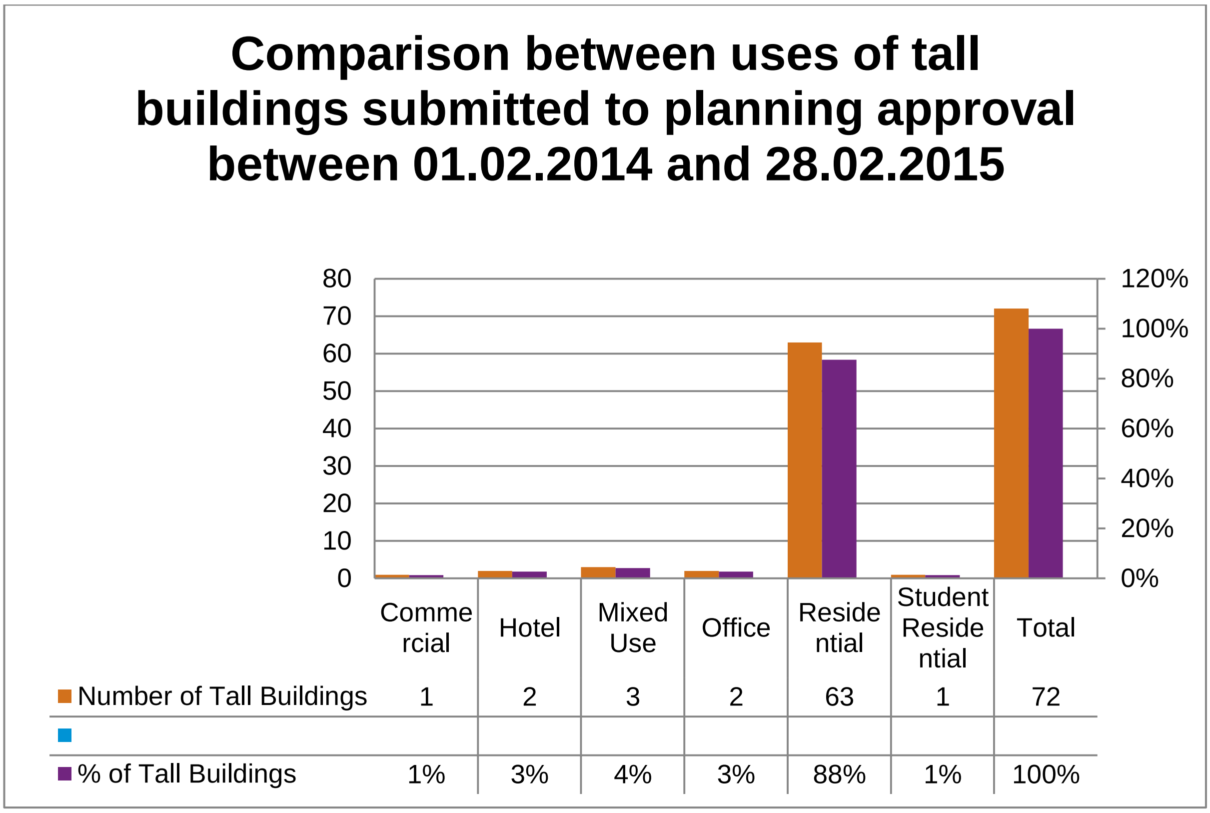
Figure 8 summarises the primary use of all the 263 tall buildings assessed. Unsurprisingly, in current market conditions, the vast majority of towers are proposed for residential development (212 or 81%). This is clearly a response to the strength in the residential market, allied to high levels of demand, housing targets and limited land supply. Of other primary uses, office towers are most prevalent (20 / 8%) and there are 11 (4%) proposals where the primary use is hotel.

Among the 72 towers which have been submitted for planning approval in the last 12 months this year, 63 (88%) are residential. **See Figure 9.**



	Commercial	Hotel	Mixed Use	Office	Residential	Student Residential	University	Total
Number of Talls Buildings	10	11	8	20	212	1	1	263
% of Tall Buildings	4%	4%	3%	8%	81%	0%	0%	100%

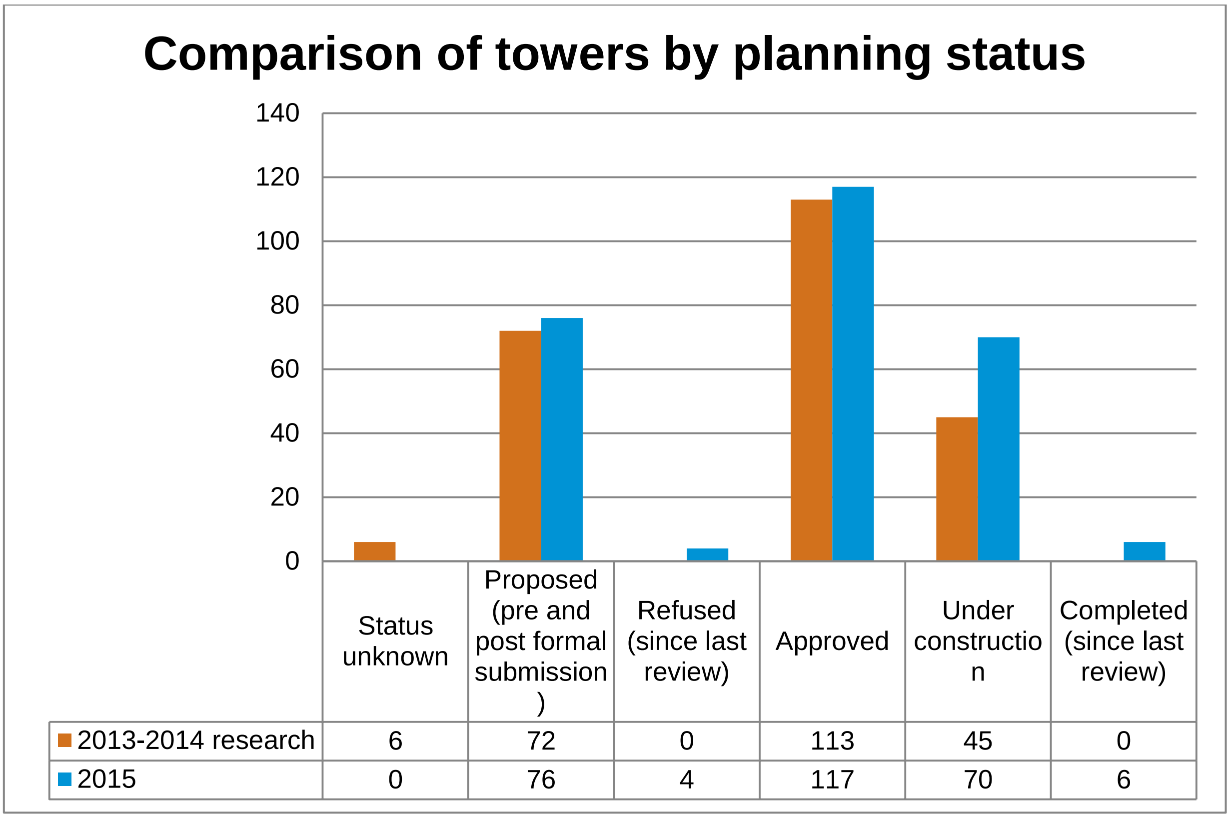
Figure 8

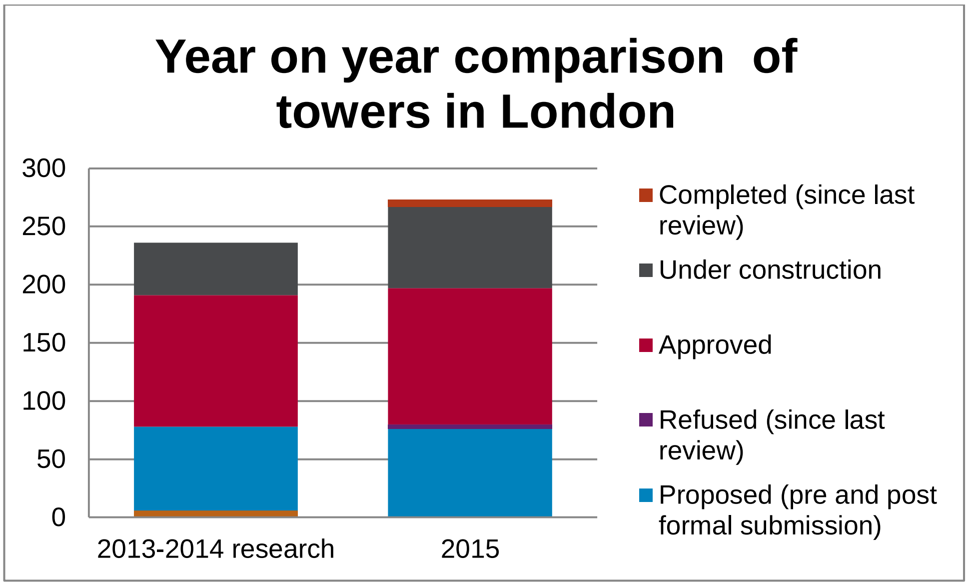


	Commercial	Hotel	Mixed Use	Office	Residential	Student Residential	Total
Number of Tall Buildings	1	2	3	2	63	1	72
% of Tall Buildings	1%	3%	4%	3%	88%	1%	100%

Figure 9

Summary





The research has identified 263 tall building proposals across London – it has focused on buildings above 20 storeys, but in many instances buildings below that threshold will still be considered to be "tall" in the local context. Of the total pipeline, approximately half (117/4% of the proposals have planning permission and 70 schemes are already under construction. There is no particular discernible trend in terms of height, but the majority of proposals remain between 20-29 storeys (153 / 58%). Tower Hamlets is by far away the most populous location for tall buildings in terms of towers that are proposed, approved and under construction but other boroughs have seen large comprehensive developments including several tall buildings such as New Covent Garden Market which includes a series of office towers.

Summary (continued)

It took approximately eight months for the recently approved planning applications to go through the planning system.

There are marked geographic patterns at the sub-regional scale as well. London Plan Opportunity Areas are located across the Capital, but the predominance of the Central, South and East sub-regions – in stark contrast to the North and West – is very marked in terms of tall building proposals, which is in line with the London Plan's recommendations to respond to current housing pressure. Greenwich Riverside/Deptford Creek, Greenwich Peninsula and the Isle of Dogs represent opportunities for new residential developments accommodating approximately 37,000 new homes.

The 62 towers (24%) currently under construction are on average 30-storeys high. Taking an average of 8 units per floor, approximately 14,800 new homes will be provided once these towers reach completion.

It is no surprise that the tall building proposals are predominantly residential as a result of planning, economic and market conditions representing a distinct phase of tower planning in London. Planning permissions have been granted to previously proposed schemes and works have started pursuing the London's growth and development. When taking all factors such as location, the average time of planning application from submission to approval and the small amount of towers which are reaching completion into consideration, the documented evidence suggests that all these buildings undergo the same rigorous planning processes as other major applications and even with planning approval will take around six years before first occupiers can move in.

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