

## John Worthington

The initial question I would suggest we have to answer this evening is not “what is a tall building?” but “why build tall?”. One can approach the question from three viewpoints..

**First of all the commercial imperative.** Ian Gilder eloquently expressed the developer's approach, to maximize the return on a small site – by using the existing infrastructure, and access to light from the space surrounding a site, 100% of the site can be built on and if you can build 12 times what you are allowed, you get 12x more return.. Greed becomes a critical driver. Small sites with one building from a developer's point of view can make a killing.

**Secondly the community desire to increase density**, so providing greater accessibility, amenity and urban vitality. Increasing density over a large site may not require a tall building, in the sense of a tower. if I took an area of 2 or 3 storeys (as Richard was talking about) and built perimeter blocks around courtyards at 6 to 8 storeys – ie the Continental European city typology, I could dramatically increase the density of my city. This is an important reason why you want to densify but not necessarily build tall. The 6 storey height still allows a sense of contact with the ground whilst yielding a significant increase in density, A move to 6 -8 storeys is a significant increase in height from a city which was 2-3 storeys, but would require us to reframe the question of should we build tall, which has I believe been perceived as an issue of “tall towers”.

**Density is to improve amenity** – that is what the modern movement was about. Le Corbusier's vision of tall slabs and towers in a green parkland setting providing light, air and green amenity. This was very much the 1920s view of building tall. It was a different view of the city which shattered the traditional compact city with streets, front doors and a sense of community.

**Finally to provide identity.** This is an issue we want to talk about. The tower as an icon and marker to define a locality and help us navigate an urban neighbourhood. Then there is the the individual desire of certain users for views, security and anonymity. For some a high value is attached to high-rise living where one can lock the door, hide away, have a view and gain prestige. Whether we want that and whether it makes good cities, is for the community to decide.

In the breakout groups you have been asked to address four questions:.

### What do we think a tall building is?

I have suggested you should be prepared to reframe this question as "why tall buildings?".

### What makes a tall building successful or unsuccessful?

It depends what your values are and what you want it to do. From whose perspective is it successful? Success is only the particular value you attach to it.

What is successful for the community might not be the same as what is successful for the trader developer (the one who wants a quick buck) or the long-term developer.

### Where in the Cambridge Area could you successfully put tall buildings?

Think about that one – the presentations talked a lot about skyline and the composition of the silhouette of the city with a combination of tall individual elements and high rise clusters. It is an important issue but once opened up for debate, as Richard MacCormac rightly reflected, it is a little like letting the genie out of the bottle. My experience of defining precise locations for tall buildings, and prescribing a tall building here but not there, is that you get into all sorts of problems; suddenly somebody's land value has shot up and everybody is negotiating to be that special place. What I have termed *developer's creep*. Watch out – if you start putting rules in place, then people work around it: I have 6 storeys but perhaps I could add a few more. This happens and so the creep goes on.

The other approach from prescribing everything we would like, is to clearly define the minimum rules which will have the maximum impact on quality. Which brings us to the last question:

### **What are the key issues the City Council has to get right in developing a robust planning policy?**

Peter Carolin described a virtual model of the city. A wonderful idea that can be used to test options and assess impact. Events like this are important in raising awareness, changing perceptions, and building a common understanding. Perhaps the best controls you can have is a common understanding of the issues, the different expectations and the trade offs,

Perhaps one of the prime roles of planning is to open up people's minds, and change perceptions till finally you get a paradigm shift where there is a common recognition of "Ah I used to have a city like that, but I have the opportunity to get this kind of City".

### **Will planning in the future be more about a process of managing and moderating change through positive dialogue, as opposed to control through tightly prescribed rules?**