



*Maritime* GREENWICH  
A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

## IMPORTANT VIEWS AND TALL BUILDINGS

NOVEMBER 2006



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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Maritime Greenwich was inscribed by UNESCO in 1997 and the Site is managed in accordance with a Management Plan approved by the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Steering Group and lodged with UNESCO. The World Heritage Site was inscribed according to three of the UNESCO criteria set out in the World Heritage Convention and this has led to the adoption of the “outstanding universal values “ for the Site. Developments proposed near the Site potentially threaten these values and this document is intended to address the issues raised.

1.2 Since 1997 there has been great progress in conserving and developing the Site and its facilities, which has also contributed to the wider regeneration of south and east London. Lying at the apex of the Thames Gateway, the context of the Site has changed and is still changing radically with substantial residential and commercial development of the former wharves and industrial sites along the south bank of the Thames.

1.3 Many cities are faced with the problems of reconciling the pressure for new development, on which their vitality depends, with its impact on the historic environment. Tall buildings which are often a feature of such development pressures can have an effect over a large area and can have a significant impact on their surroundings. This is particularly the case with World Heritage Sites where views and settings are an especially sensitive issue. The location of Maritime Greenwich, its topography and its built form make the Site vulnerable to the intrusion of tall buildings. In 2005 an international conference produced the Vienna Memorandum on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture-Managing the Historic Urban Landscape” which was subsequently adopted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The memorandum gives guidelines including for urban development as follows :

“Ethical standards and a demand for high-quality design and execution, sensitive to the cultural-historic context, are prerequisites for the planning process. Architecture of quality in historic areas should give proper consideration to the given scales, particularly with reference to building volumes and heights. It is important for new development to minimise direct impacts on important historic elements, such as significant structures or archaeological deposits.”

1.4 Tall buildings had already made an impact on the views from the Maritime Greenwich WHS prior to Inscription. Residential towers were built nearby in Lewisham and in Tower Hamlets during the 1960's and these intrude on some views . In the 1980's the creation of Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs saw the erection of the first commercial tower, No. 1 Canada Square, which became a dominant feature in the middle distance panorama from Greenwich Park. After discussion by an advisory group, this tower was deliberately located to the east of Wren's Grand Axis which defines the symmetry of the Site, so as not to dominate the view from Wolfe statue in the Park. The recent success of Canary Wharf has resulted in several more towers, forming a cluster around the original tower, recently encroaching on the extension of the Grand Axis itself. Planning permission was granted in 2005 for further substantial development in the former Millwall Dock, closer to Maritime

Greenwich. On the south bank, to the east and west of Maritime Greenwich there have been a number of proposals for further tall residential towers, none of them within any overall strategic planning context with regard to the view from the WHS. The blocks, individually and cumulatively, have a significant potential impact on the setting of the World Heritage Site.

1.5 The purpose of this document is to examine the particular characteristics of Maritime Greenwich and develop a framework which will assist the assessment of proposals that affect the setting of the Site. It will be used as a basis for comments on planning applications for which the World Heritage Site administration is a consultee. This framework in itself carries no statutory weight although there is support from the Local Authority UDP policies and the London Plan, in particular the London View Management Framework which forms part of the latter document.. It is hoped the emerging Local Development Frameworks will offer further support.

## **2. DEFINITION OF A TALL BUILDING**

2.1 English Heritage and CABE guidance defines a tall building as one that is significantly higher than its neighbours and/or one that significantly changes the skyline.

2.2 Other relevant guidance from EH/CABE states related issues of importance:

“The relationship to context, including natural topography, scale, height, urban grain, streetscape and built form, and the effect on the skyline. Tall buildings should have a positive relationship with relevant topographical features and other tall buildings; the virtue of clusters when perceived from all directions should be considered in this light.

The architectural quality of the building including its scale, form, massing, proportion and silhouette, facing materials and relationship to other structures. The design of the top of a tall building will be of particular importance when considering the effect on the skyline.

The contribution that the development will make to the external and internal public spaces and facilities in the area, including the provision of a mix of uses, especially on the ground floor of towers, and the inclusion of these areas as part of the public realm. The development should interact with and contribute positively to its surroundings at street level; it should contribute to diversity, vitality, social engagement and “sense of place”.

The effect on the local environment, including microclimate, overshadowing, night-time appearance, vehicle movements and the environment and amenity of those in the vicinity of the building.

The contribution made to the permeability of a site and the wider area; opportunities to offer improved linkages on foot, and, where appropriate, the opening up, or effective closure, of views to improve the legibility of the city and the wider townscape.”

### **3. LOCATION, HISTORIC CONTEXT AND HISTORIC VIEWS**

3.1 The landscape of Maritime Greenwich was significant long before the present buildings and long before any recorded history. Prehistoric remains in Greenwich Park illustrate the attraction of the area to early mankind and there can be little doubt that the ridge overlooking the “oxbow” of the River Thames formed a special place to stand and survey the landscape, as it still does today. The panorama from the Greenwich scarp is one of the finest views in London.

3.2 There is evidence of Roman and Saxon settlement in the area but it was with the establishment of the Tudor Palace and the enclosure of Greenwich Park that Greenwich became significant in a London, and for a time European, context, as the centre of King Henry VIII’s court. The view of the City from Greenwich became a popular subject for painters, with the work by Turner being perhaps the best known. At the time of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the area between Greenwich and the City was still agricultural.

3.3 The evolution of the formal architectural set-piece of the Queen’s House and Greenwich Hospital (later to become the Royal Naval College) around the Grand Axis to the Wolfe statue and beyond took several hundred years. At its fullest extent the Grand Axis, which forms the centre of the great composition extended north to St Anne’s church at Limehouse and south to All Saint’s church on Blackheath. The view of the former was lost with the commercial development of Docklands in the late twentieth century, which obscured the view. The Grand Axis still however forms the key part of the composition, the view from the Wolfe statue and also from Island Gardens.

3.4 The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the growth of a residential quarter in west Greenwich in the streets around St Alfege church. The re-organisation of the town centre by Joseph Kay in the 1830’s established its present day character. The development of East Greenwich followed mainly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with two and three storey terraced housing and wharves along the river as well as industrial and commercial sites.

3.5 The decline of the traditional waterfront economy has opened up a new chapter in the story of development with large areas stretching from Creekside in the west to Greenwich Peninsula in the east becoming available for redevelopment. It is on these sites that there are the most significant proposals for tall buildings, for residential use.

### **4 THE EXISTING SITUATION**

4.1 The composition of the Old Royal Naval College relates to the local geography as well as the geometry of its plan, a symmetrical setting of four “Royal Courts”. These are each the equivalent of 5/6 domestic storeys high rising to the two domes by Wren which frame the Queen’s House and form the visual climax of the composition, at just under 50 metres each in height. The Greenwich Park scarp, with the Wolfe statue and the Royal Observatory are an important part of the composition. The splendid view of the complex from across the river was immortalised by Canaletto in 1755.

4.2 The surrounding townscape has evolved as a mixture of traditional building forms of 3 or 4 storeys. Waterfront buildings in load bearing brick are often up to 6 stories high, although the power station built downriver in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is considerably higher and has four (now reduced) brick chimneys.

4.3 The complex at Canary Wharf in London Borough of Tower Hamlets has been growing since the 1980's after the erection of the Canada Square tower. New office buildings have been added to the cluster and there are proposals for more towers including some for residential use. The recent additions have clustered to provide a dense background scene to the view from the Wolfe statue. Even this cluster is now beginning to spread along the middle distance horizon.

4.4 A recent planning permission has been granted for Greenwich Peninsula which will include over 10,000 new residential units. These will be located in a scheme rising to 20 storeys. However, this will not impinge significantly on the view out from the WHS due to a combination of distance and being at the extreme end of the field of view from Greenwich Park.

4.5 As well as these two areas of intense development many of the former wharf sites along the river are or have recently been the subject of planning applications. In most cases the schemes are of a considerably greater scale and massing than the industrial sites which they would replace.

See Plan 1 overleaf, which illustrates the location of major development sites around the World Heritage Site.

## **5. WORLD HERITAGE SITE KEY VIEWS**

5.1 The townscape qualities of the WHS and its splendid setting can be appreciated from a variety of levels and distances. These range from distant views to panoramas and local vistas.

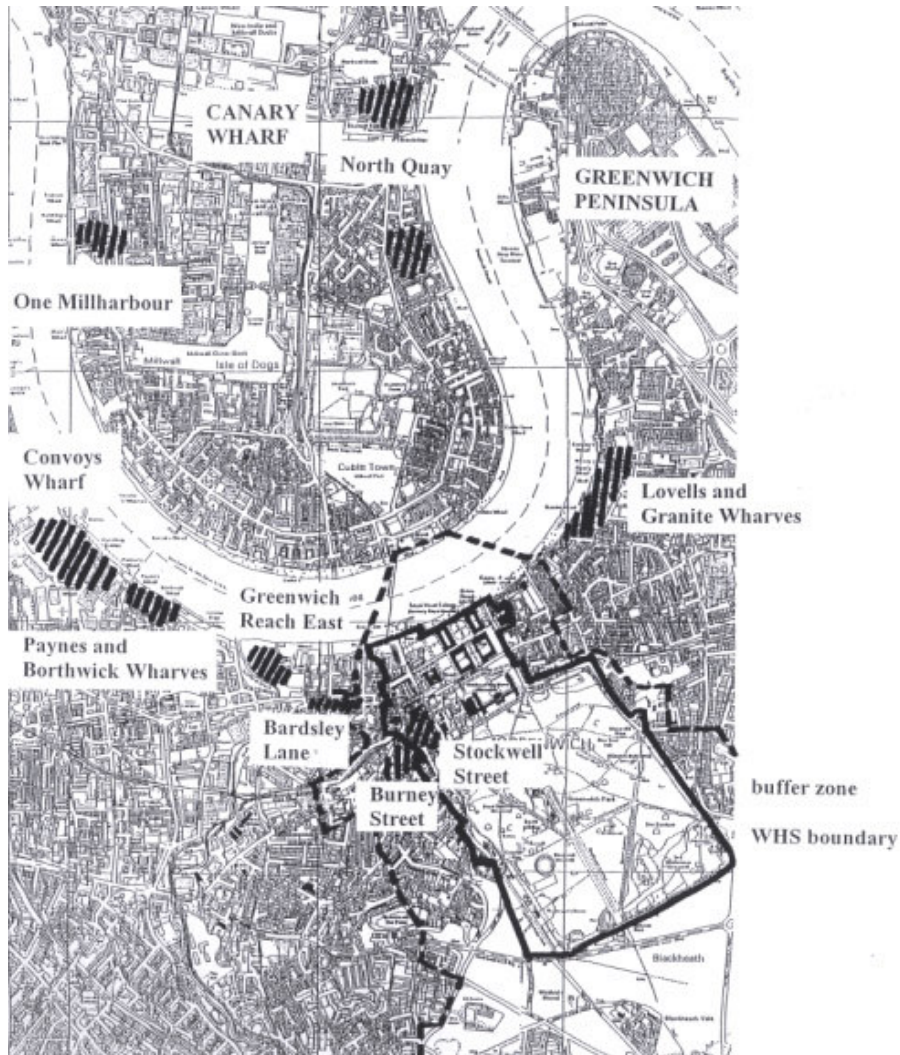
5.2 The Mayor of London's London View Management Framework identifies the view from Wolfe statue as a "London Panorama" within which the view of St Paul's is designated a "protected vista". The view from Island Gardens is a "Townscape View".

The following is a summary of these and other important views from outside and inside the Site.

### **5.3 Broad prospects**

#### **Wolfe statue**

The elevated viewing platform provided by the natural scarp in Greenwich Park located on the "ox-bow" bend of the River Thames has been a place for mankind to gather since the earliest times. Whilst once the landscape of the Thames and its flood plain formed the dominant subject of the view, the establishment and subsequent development of the City of



PLAN 1

Major development sites  
around the World Heritage Site

London has created an ever- changing prospect. The placement of the statue of General Wolfe in 1935 further emphasised the importance of the place.

Wolfe Statue continues to be a major visitor destination within the World Heritage Site. The area will be even more of a focus with the completion of the National Maritime Museum's "Time and Space" scheme in 2007.

The panorama from Wolfe Statue in Greenwich Park extends in an arc of almost 90 degrees.

### **Island Gardens (the "Canaletto" view)**

The splendid composition of the Old Royal Naval College, the Queen's House and the Royal Observatory forms a centrepiece at the southernmost extremity of the extensive oxbow formed by the River Thames, which surrounds the Isle of Dogs. This is seen to advantage from the north bank of the Thames in a panorama of some 180 degrees. This means that all waterfront developments from Deptford Creek to Lovell's and Granite Wharves affect the panorama. Greenwich Hospital purchased the land opposite the Royal Naval Hospital in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to protect this view. This land has since become the public park of Island Gardens.

### **5.4 Long vistas to landmarks (prominent buildings or structures):**

The panorama from Wolfe statue contains a number of views to individual landmarks. These landmarks are:

St Paul's Cathedral

Millennium Dome (O2)

Meridian line (zero degrees longitude extending from the Royal Observatory) (*not strictly a landmark but a design parameter*)

Vanbrugh Castle on Maze Hill to the east (at present this view is free from modern development)

All Saint's church on Blackheath along Blackheath Avenue to the south (part of the Grand Axis)

### **5.5 River approaches :**

Approximately a quarter of all visitors to the World Heritage Site come by river from The Tower of London. The view of the Old Royal Naval College and Cutty Sark as the visitor approaches from the west is spectacular. Any large development behind this view could easily spoil this setting.

The approach to the World Heritage Site from the west by pedestrians and cyclists is important. The riverside path emerges on to Cutty Sark Gardens passing the new development at Wood Wharf. Development on the far side of the ORNC including that proposed for Lovell's and Granite Wharves will affect the views from this side.

The approach to the World Heritage Site from the east will grow in importance with the development of the Greenwich Peninsula and the riverside. At present the riverside walk



includes a good panorama of the World Heritage Site particularly seen from the stretch around the Alcatel industrial site. Here there is a fine view of the depth of the World Heritage Site stretching from the high ground of Greenwich Park and the Royal Observatory to the Old Royal Naval College on the river edge.

It is likely that more use should be made of the river for public transport as development progresses. It is expected that a tourist business relationship will grow between the new commercial and residential uses at the Peninsula and the historic area of Maritime Greenwich.

#### 5.6 **Local vistas** (see Plan 3, page 9):

Good local views exist all around the World Heritage Site, in addition to the formal views associated with the Grand Axis and the Baroque set-piece composition. The view west along Romney Road to St Alfege church and tower is pleasant, despite the traffic. There is a possibility that tall buildings built on the sites to the west would interfere with this view. There are proposals for large-scale developments on a number of sites to the west of the World Heritage Site.

Standing in Grand Square at the centre of the Old Royal Naval College offers one of the finest views of the Site, up and down the Grand Axis. To the north the Canary Wharf complex is distant enough not to be imposing when seen from ground level. It is also (at present) mainly off-axis and this helps to make it less dominant in visual terms. However any development in the foreground of Canary Wharf, that is on the southern part of the Isle of Dogs, would have serious implications for the setting of the World Heritage Site buildings.

There are not likely to be any development proposals that would affect the Grand Axis view to the south of Greenwich Park. However all developments involving tall buildings should be assessed for their possible impact on Maritime Greenwich.

Views east and west along College Way from within the ORNC are important and need to be recognised. The view to the east stops beyond the east gates on the concrete coal bunker of the East Greenwich Power Station. The now-disused bunker itself is an eyesore and its demolition would significantly improve the ability of visitors to appreciate and understand the historic environment and the view.

The view from College Way to the west and the Town Centre is enticing and one of the key views outwards from the ORNC. There is a danger that tall buildings to both the west and east of the WHS could impinge on this view. Developments including tall buildings should be assessed for their impact.

As well as views from the landscape around the WHS there are also significant views out (or prospects) from the buildings themselves. Of particular note are prospects from the ORNC. The Nelson Room, off the Painted Hall, has been renovated by the Greenwich Foundation to give excellent prospects, east over the King William courtyard, and west towards the Town Centre. Tall buildings impinging on these views would cause concern.





The Old Royal Naval College is one of the finest groups of Baroque buildings in the country and Inscription is as a World Heritage Site is in part a recognition of this unique ensemble. The buildings appear now much as they did on their completion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and provide an important historical and cultural resource freely open to all. The ORNC and its grounds are used for a variety of functions including conferences and film/tv work.

### **5.7 Aspects of individual buildings**

Maritime Greenwich contains a great many individual buildings, and groups of buildings, of great architectural and historic interest. Their individual settings are of great importance. As well as the Royal Courts of the ORNC and the National Maritime Museum complex including Queen's House there are many other significant buildings. Cutty Sark and St Alfege church are historic buildings of comparable status (listed grade 1). In addition there are many other historic buildings, located mainly in the Town Centre, which command an appropriate setting.

Such settings require protection and enhancement. The effects of all new buildings in the area on key buildings should be evaluated. Tall buildings can affect settings from a distance where they appear behind their silhouettes.

As well as contributing, or detracting, from the overall townscape tall buildings can inadvertently spoil the setting of individual buildings. For example the masts and rigging of Cutty Sark are traditionally seen against the clear sky. The delicate tracery would be lost seen against more solid building forms.

### **5.8 The changing riverside**

The changing role of the riverside and its hinterland over the last 20 years has produced a very different riverside scene. During the era of waterfront commerce the riverside was screened from the surrounding areas by wharves and industry, which were served from the river. Views of the river were limited to breaks in the frontage where river access was possible. This tended to make the limited views available very special. Walking along the riverside path was a rich experience, nodal viewing points being interspersed with riverside activities. In some cases the footpath ran through such operations as barge repairers, defined by two simple white lines amongst the craft being repaired. Since the decline of the Thames as the main transport thoroughfare the waterfront has progressively been given over to residential use. Blocks of flats much higher than the traditional 6 storey wharves line the river, looking at an empty river and clones of themselves on the bank opposite producing a canyon-effect. The once interesting riverside footpath with its twists and turns has too often become a featureless and windy "boulevard". It is important that such riverside footpaths, particularly where they join the World Heritage Site, display a strong character.

### **5.9 Changing visitor patterns**

With greater numbers of visitors to the World Heritage Site and new arrival points visitor perception has changed over the last few years. New attractions including the National Maritime Museum's Time and Space scheme at the Royal Observatory will alter visitor patterns further. In this case there will be a greater focus at Wolfe statue and concentration

on the panorama. This point will be a focus for the 2012 Olympics as the centre of the equestrian course. The panorama will also take in other Olympic sites, with the equestrian arena in the foreground in front of the Queen's House.

## **6 PROPOSED TALL BUILDINGS GUIDANCE**

6.1 The following summarises the approach taken in this paper in respect of developments in and around Maritime Greenwich and will be adopted by the Greenwich World Heritage Site executive when commenting to developers and the local planning authorities.

6.2 The local planning framework includes policies on good design and there is no need to re-state such policies in detail here. Applicants are advised to look at the relevant Boroughs' LDFs and at the London View Management Framework which is currently being finalised by the Greater London Authority. However it should be stressed that all new developments associated with the World Heritage Site should be of high quality and well-designed, respecting surroundings and character.

6.3 The Greater London Authority London View Management Framework sets out a detailed methodology for assessing strategic views. Locally we have also used to "inverted cone" principle to flag up proposals that may pose particular problems.

### **6.4 The inverted cone principle (see Plan 4, page12)**

The principle of an "inverted cone" is a helpful concept for establishing in general terms maximum building heights around the Site that would not significantly damage the setting of the World Heritage Site. This concept applies the simple principle that impact decreases with distance.

The cone is centred in Grand Square on the Grand Axis and extends out in contours representing building heights. It is assumed that it would be preferable from the WHS perspective if new development did not exceed these height contours, defined by storey heights that are assumed to be of 3 metres. The proposed contours are attached as Plan 4. It should be stressed that this concept offers general guidance and is not intended to be absolutely definitive. Each case should be judged on its merits in respect of the impact on particular views defined at Section 5 above.

### **6.5 Protection of views**

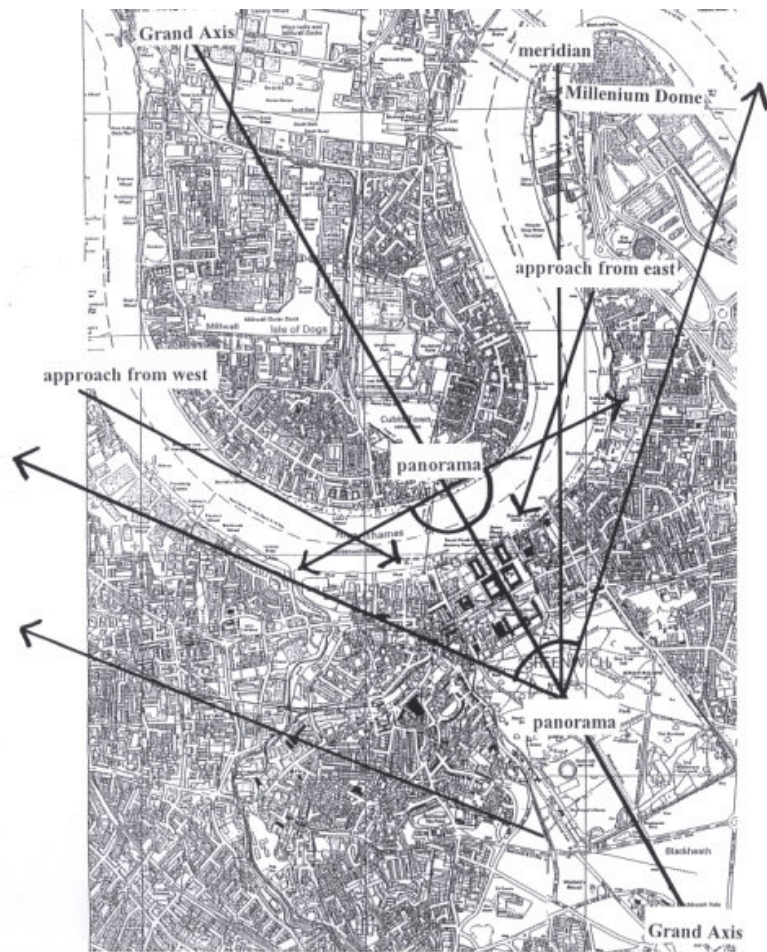
The specific views identified in the text above are illustrated at Plan 2 on page 13. Development proposals should respond to these and their effect on the setting of key buildings and landmarks. The methodology adopted in the GLA London View Management Framework should be used to assess the impact of development proposals with buildings in excess of the contours given above.



PLAN 4

The "inverted cone" principle of preferred maximum storey heights around the World Heritage Site.





# PLAN 2

Important strategic views to and from the World Heritage Site.

## **7. IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDANCE**

7.1 A key area of influence should be comment by the WHS on planning applications both within LB Greenwich and also the adjacent Boroughs, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets. It will fall to the Local Planning Authorities to request the assessment of the impact of tall building proposals according to the views identified in this document.

7.2 The above may be used by parties and groups concerned with formulating development.

7.3 Maritime Greenwich is located within the Thames Gateway area and is therefore included in a number of partnership interests, all of which will be concerned with the future of the World Heritage Site.

7.4 The World Heritage Site Steering Group has links with Canary Wharf through its Marketing Group with joint marketing undertaken by the two sites

7.5 Greenwich Peninsula Partnership is formed from LB Greenwich, English Partnerships and Meridian Delta Leisure and is a major influence on the area to the east.

7.6 The successful bid for the 2012 Olympic Games in London will mean a growing involvement for Maritime Greenwich, which will host the equestrian events. There will be good scope to influence associated development both in the long and short term

*The following pages show views in and around Maritime Greenwich.*



The Canary Wharf development forms a cluster with its centre to the east of the Grand Axis. There are now proposals to build towers on the west side of the Isle of Dogs which would be on the west side of the Grand Axis. The Canary Wharf towers may be considered a background to the panorama from Wolfe statue. However, towers any nearer could seriously affect the setting of the World Heritage Site.





Wolfe statue is a focus on the Grand Axis which used to extend to St Annes in Limehouse (Hawksmoor) before redevelopment on the Isle of Dogs obscured the view.



All Saints church was sited to form an extension to the Grand Axis along Blackheath Avenue in Greenwich Park.



The view from Grand Square with the “coal bunker” of the London Underground power station looming over Trafalgar Quarters.



The riverside view east from Queen Anne frontage includes Lovells and Granite Wharves.





The view east from College Approach within the Old Royal Naval College showing the historic skyline intact, but with threats from tall buildings beyond.



The emerging riverside to the west of Maritime Greenwich includes Wood Wharf (now complete at 8 storeys), Fairview development (completed 8 storeys), Paynes and Borthwick Wharves (proposed 25 storeys) and Convoys Wharf (proposed 30 storeys).



The view of Greenwich Park, the Royal Observatory, the Old Royal Naval College and Cutty Sark from the riverside walk. The redevelopment of Lovells and Granite Wharves will obscure much of this view.