

Planning comments in respect of Shad Thames designation as a Strategic Cultural Area

History of designation

The London Mayor in the first London Plan in 2005 required the Council to designate Strategic Cultural Areas. One of the aims being to encourage the movement of visitors, in London generally, east along the river. The Council undertook that process of designation as part of the process of forming the 2007 Southwark Plan. Strategic Cultural Areas are characterized by a historic environment containing, cultural institutions, galleries, theatres, museums and visitor attractions.

Area designated

It is understood that the area of concern is the area east of Tower Bridge Road, west of St Saviours dock and north of Tooley Street running up to the river Thames.

Planning designations of Shad Thames

Shad Thames is within the Central Activity Zone, which is of strategic importance in terms of commercial activity and a relevant designation for the density of proposed development. It is outside of the London Bridge Town Centre and the Bankside, Borough and London Bridge Opportunity Area, both of which are to the west of Tower Bridge Road. Approximately 70% of the area is within either the Tower Bridge or St Saviours Dock Conservation Areas. A number of historic warehouses either side of Shad Thames the road are grade II listed as is the former Magistrates Court. Tower Bridge is grade I listed.

Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTAL) vary widely across the area. Close to Tower Bridge Road, the highest level possible of 6b is achieved, whereas on Maguire Street a level of 2 is achieved. The area is bounded by bus routes but none go through the area itself. That contrasts with the remainder of the Central Activity Zone that has uniformly high PTALs

Reference to strategic cultural areas in current planning policy

London Plan 2016

Policy 2.11 Central Activities Zone – Strategic Functions

(f) extend the offer and enhance the environment of strategic cultural areas along the South Bank, around the Kensington Museum complex and at the Barbican

Policy 4.5 London's Visitor Infrastructure

(f) promote, enhance and protect the special characteristics of major clusters of visitor attractions including those identified in Strategic Cultural Areas in Map 4.2.

Southwark Core Strategy 2011

Strategic Policy 10 Jobs and businesses

(2) Protecting existing business floorspace and supporting the provision of around 25,000sqm - 30,000sqm of additional business floorspace to help meet general demand for office space in the following locations:

- The CAZ.*
- Town and local centres.*
- Strategic cultural areas.*
- Action area cores.*
- Camberwell Action Area.*
- On classified roads.*

(5) Protecting creative, cultural and tourism facilities and encourage new facilities, particularly in strategic cultural areas.

(6) Allowing development of hotels within the town centres, the strategic cultural areas, and places with good access to public transport services, providing that these do not harm the local character.

Saved Policies Southwark Plan 2007

Policy 1.4 –Employment Sites outside the Preferred Office Locations and Preferred Industrial Locations

Outside Preferred Industrial Locations and Preferred Office Locations, on sites which have an established B Class Use and which meet any of the following criteria:

- i. The site fronts onto or has direct access to a classified road; or*
- ii. The site is in a Public Transport Accessibility Zone; or*
- iii. The site is within the Central Activities Zone; or*
- iv. The site is within a Strategic Cultural Area.*

Development will be permitted provided that the proposal would not result in a net loss of floorspace in Class B use.

Policy 1.11 - Arts, Culture and Tourism Uses

i. Existing Facilities:

Changes of use from arts, cultural and tourism uses will not be permitted unless the applicant demonstrates a lack of requirement for the facility and either:

- a) The site's use for an alternative arts, culture or tourist activity is not possible; or*
- b) A facility with similar or enhanced provision is provided locally.*

ii. New Facilities:

Planning permission will be granted for new arts and cultural and tourism uses if they meet the following criteria:

- a) Where the character of an area within a Strategic Cultural Area is not unacceptably compromised; and*
- b) Outside the Strategic Cultural Area, where the activity does not have a significant detrimental effect on the environment or local amenity, and has good public transport accessibility; and*

c) All new visitor attractions will be expected to provide and implement a visitor management strategy to mitigate local impact on amenity.

Please note: The Schedule of Protected Shopping Frontages lists all protected shopping frontages. These are also shown on the Adopted Policies Map, 2012

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Reasons

Bankside, The Borough, London Bridge and St Mary's Church, Rotherhithe, have been designated Strategic Cultural Areas to protect and enhance the provision of arts, culture and tourism. These attractions generally increase the popularity of an area which can cause environmental problems for residents. However if successfully managed, arts, culture and tourism can complement and stimulate office and mixed use areas. This is through a combination of investment and spending, employment generation and improved public and business perception.

Development of the tourism sector has significant local economic benefits through employment, regeneration and visitor spending in other local businesses. However, these developments must focus on effective visitor management and accessibility for all.

Conclusion

In planning terms a strategic cultural area is a broad designation around clusters of uses that have a cultural value. The designation is intended to protect and support cultural uses. Clusters of cultural uses have economic and social benefits, providing employment and improving the quality of life of those visiting or using cultural facilities. As always in a planning assessment all policies and impacts need to be considered; it does not follow that any cultural use anywhere within any strategic cultural area will be acceptable. The area does not have a uniform character or identical planning designations throughout as noted above.

It is desirable for the planning and licensing regimes to complement each other. There is nothing inherent about a strategic cultural area that should require or dictate that premises licences in a strategic cultural area should have specific hours. The broad thrust of planning policy is supportive of commercial and cultural activity in a strategic cultural area, which licenced premises can in some instances provide or support. To provide guidance as to what are likely to be acceptable operating hours in one part of a strategic cultural area, having regard to the particular characteristics of that area would not be irrational or contrary to planning policy, but a more nuanced assessment of character at a more local level.