

Press release

Historic protected view of St Paul's cathedral from Richmond Park destroyed by new Stratford skyscraper

Friends of Richmond Park calls for temporary halt in construction and urgent GLA review

Conservation and protection charity, Friends of Richmond Park, is saddened and outraged that one of London's most cherished and historic protected views - from King Henry's Mound in Richmond Park to St Paul's Cathedral - has been destroyed by the construction of a large, new development adjacent to the Olympic Park in Stratford, East London.



Photograph: Patrick Eagar, www.patrickeagar.com/

St Paul's view before the Manhattan Loft development



Photograph: Paula Redmond

The St Paul's view as it is now

Before and after: left, the pristine, protected view of St Paul's from Richmond Park as it was. Right, St Paul's with the massive Manhattan Loft Gardens building under construction behind. GLA planning officials failed to raise concerns about how the building would damage the protected view.

The 42 storey Manhattan Loft Gardens building – comprising a hotel, restaurants and nearly 250 apartments now nearing completion – appears in the immediate background of St Paul's Cathedral.

Yet the current London View Management Framework (LVMF) planning guidance published by the Mayor for the King Henry's Mound to St Paul's view, specifically states: “**In determining applications, it is essential that development in the background of the view is subordinate to the Cathedral and that the clear sky background profile of the upper part of the dome remains.**”

The new development clearly and substantially compromises the profile of the whole of the dome of St Paul's and, for almost the entire east side of the building, the clear sky background is obliterated.

Friends of Richmond Park Chairman Ron Crompton stated:

“We call on the GLA and the developer to temporarily halt construction while an investigation of what has happened takes place and ways are found of mitigating the impact of the building on the protected view.

It's a tragedy that such a wonderful and iconic protected view, between two of London's most historic landmarks and created over 300 years ago, should be destroyed not just for today but for many years to come. We know thousands of people are very upset by this and that a view so important to Londoners will be spoilt for many generations."

"The failed process to protect this famous view calls into doubt the adequacy and validity of the LVMF process. We call upon the London Mayor and the Secretary of State to urgently look into why no objections were raised and why the LVMF directives were not applied to this site.

"We believe the developers, who have substantial experience building in London, were or should have been aware of the protected views especially when they and the architects are keen to promote environmental credentials. Their publicity brochure states:

Manhattan Loft Gardens has been designed to have a responsible impact on the environment and its surroundings.....enter into a dramatic new world - an accentuated mountaintop space planted with windswept pines. An extreme yet contemplative environment, enjoying unbroken views across the urban landscape below.

"We're sure that all Londoners will find these statements cruelly ironic and insulting when a 300 year old protected view that everyone can enjoy is destroyed by their new building."

Friends of Richmond Park has written to London Mayor Sadiq Khan and requested an urgent investigation into how GLA officers acquiesced in the proposal and did not raise objections under the terms of the LVMF. They also want the Mayor and Gavin Barwell MP, Minister of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, to ensure that any future application relating to the sight line will be referred to English Heritage and the Mayor.

The protected view and the London View Management Framework (LVMF) process

The view, which was created with the planting of an avenue of trees to mark the completion of Sir Christopher Wren's St Paul's masterwork in 1711, has been enjoyed by millions of Londoners and visitors for over 300 years. The view has also been protected for many years under the London View Management Framework (LVMF), part of Town and Country Planning legislation overseen by the Mayor and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Usually under the LVMF terms, the relevant local authority must consult English Heritage, the Mayor and all other councils along the sight line if proposed buildings are to encroach on any of the protected London views. The London Borough of Newham (the borough which includes Stratford) was not included in the schedule of councils listed under the Secretary of State's directions despite the fact that tall and large buildings in the area are directly in the St Paul's view line.

However, an application for the Manhattan Loft Gardens development was referred to the GLA in July 2010 by the Olympic Delivery Authority (acting as Local Planning Authority) because it was of potentially strategic importance. GLA officers, however, failed to raise any concerns about how the new building would encroach on the Richmond Park to St Paul's cathedral protected view.

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Photographs courtesy of Patrick Eagar, www.patrickeagar.com, and Paula Redmond.

Notes to editors:

Friends of Richmond Park

1. The Friends of Richmond Park (FRP) is a charity (Reg No. 1133201) dedicated to “the conservation and protection ... of Richmond Park and its peace and natural beauty for the benefit of the public and future generations” and to “advance public education about the Park”.
2. The FRP is 55 years old and its Patrons include Sir David Attenborough, Dame Jacqueline Wilson and Baroness Susan Kramer.
3. The Friends is entirely volunteer run with 2500 members, of whom 200 volunteer to work with us in the Park.
4. Full details of the Friends of Richmond Park on our website, www.frp.org.uk.

Richmond Park

1. Established as a deer park by Charles I in 1625, Richmond Park is the largest of the 9 Royal Parks.
2. It is a site of both national and international importance for wildlife conservation. It is London's largest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a European Special Area of Conservation (ESAC). It incorporates the most important area of lowland acid grassland in the Greater London region. Lowland acid grassland is a priority habitat in the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan.
3. With the Park's status as NNR, ESAC and SSSI, the Park's wildlife is rich and diverse and includes the following :
 - 1,350 species of beetle (including stag beetles and cardinal click beetles) – one third of all beetle species found in the UK
 - 120 bird species recorded with over half nesting
 - over 30 bodies of water including large ponds and a 2 km stretch of Beverley Brook
 - over 130,000 trees including many veteran oaks over 500 years old, together with veteran black poplars and sweet chestnuts
 - amphibians including the great crested newt and smooth newt
 - 700 acres + of rare acid grassland, almost one third of the Park's total area
 - 630 wild red and fallow deer
4. 5.5 million people visit Richmond Park yearly and growing numbers mean more pressure on the Park's environment and wildlife.

Tread lightly in Richmond Park

The Friends of Richmond Park encourages all visitors to Tread lightly in Richmond Park to minimise impact and reduce damage to the Park's precious wildlife and ecology.

See www.frp.org.uk/park/tread-lightly-in-the-park