

'Expect more skyscrapers'

Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat chair Timothy Johnson discusses UK skyscraper growth ahead of the council's London conference



What factors and obstacles are shaping the future of UK skyscrapers?

The most important factors are economic. Global capital is still attracted to London for its connectivity, creativity and culture. Many projects planned prior to the recession are now being built, as construction costs remain low and there is optimism that tenants will be found sooner or later. While public perception does play a role in slowing down projects, it's clear that at some level the public has embraced the presence of skyscrapers.

What role can tall buildings play in solving the housing crisis?

There is clearly a need for affordable housing in the UK. Most of the pre-Canary Wharf tall buildings were housing blocks done in a style unsympathetic to the community fabric (ie: Brutalist), so Britons might feel a bit 'burned' by the high-rise housing experience. It is incumbent upon government, community and developers alike to create high-density urban living that can accommodate a mix of incomes.

Could UK skyscraper growth take off in the same way as Asian markets, like Shanghai?

We will see increasing appetite and acceptance of tall buildings in the UK. But, compared with China, which is overcoming a historical gap with the West at

breakneck speed, there doesn't appear to be the motivation to build as tall, as fast and in such volume.

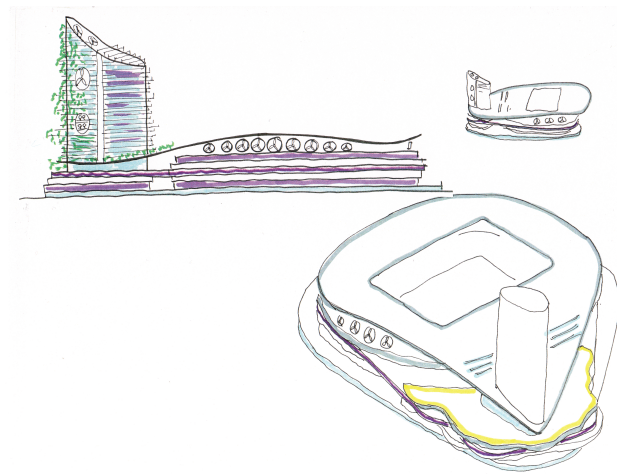
Which UK cities or areas do you expect to see the most skyscraper growth in the coming decade?

We can expect to see continued growth in London's established skyscraper districts of Canary Wharf, the City and now the South Bank. Regional metropolises such as Birmingham and Manchester may carry appeal for those companies that are priced out of London.

Is there a commercial/practical limit to a tower's height?

The practical limits have yet to be reached – structural engineering and elevator technologies continue to improve. There are limits regarding aircraft navigation and ground effects from wind that must be considered in some areas. Most mega-tall buildings over 600m don't necessarily have a commercial justification to be as tall as they are, at least not when built. The justification has more to do with the possibilities they promise; commercial profit generally follows, but not immediately. Some of the tallest towers have significant portions devoted purely to achieving that height, with no other function. But that's not to say the next supertall tower won't be filled with human activity. We have to show what's possible first, and there is considerable risk in that.

NEW PRACTICES



DRAWN WHILE AT AFL

Koussa Architects



MAIN PEOPLE Abdel Koussa
BASED Manchester
FOUNDED March 2013
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Where have you come from?

Koussa has worked at Skidmore Owings & Merrill, Michael Aukett Architects and AFL Architects.

What work do you have?

We're working on preliminary designs for some interesting residential projects involving bespoke solutions and have inquired about offering a sports design consultation service to some of our existing client contacts. We'll enter competitions to expand our portfolio and will look for work through our network of contacts in the UK, Europe, Asia and the USA.

What are your ambitions?

To grow steadily based on a reputation for quality, excellence and discretion, as

we offer full non-disclosure confidentiality agreements to all clients. Our sectors include housing, sport, commercial, retail and masterplanning and we would like to extend our services within the education and healthcare sectors. A London office is an ambition, and hopefully abroad as well.

How optimistic are you?

Very. However, it is common that the first two or three years are the hardest. Hopefully we are seeing signs of recovery within in the industry in London, and we will be out of this recession in the next 18 months to two years.

What marketing are you doing?

We are using existing contacts and identifying potential clients through Linked-In and Twitter.