



## 5.0 Contribution of setting to the Cathedral's significance

- 5.1 When built, St Paul's could be experienced, and was intended to be experienced, across the whole of London and, therefore, the whole of the capital was within its setting. The ability to appreciate the interaction of topography, the city and the Cathedral was central to the experience of the building.
- 5.2 The current setting of the Cathedral continues to extend over considerable distances. It makes a major contribution to the exceptional national and international significance of the building and to people's ability to appreciate that significance.
- 5.3 That ability is often described in visual terms, particularly when considering the wider setting, but it is also shaped by other environmental considerations and important intellectual and cultural associations. The three main contributory factors are:
- The geographic setting of the Cathedral, which is the capital and the topography of the 'London Basin', ringed to north and south by higher ground, so that the building can still be appreciated from considerable distances.
  - The River Thames, historically the main artery for trade and transport both approaching and within the capital.
  - The experience of the Cathedral within the City of London as a place of worship, venue for national events and visitor attraction.
- 5.4 These factors combine in ways that are fundamental to St Paul's significance and how the building is experienced today, as set out over the page under these four headings:
- Elevated topography of the Cathedral
  - Clear skyspace
  - The river corridor
  - St Paul's Churchyard

## SB1: The key elements of the setting of St Paul's and their positive contribution to its heritage significance

### Elevated topography of the site contributes to:

- The historic interest of the symbolism of the building as the highest point in the City of London and connections to its predecessors on the site.
- Enhancing the intended visual prominence of the architectural design including its scale.
- Enabling appreciation of the architectural composition above the river corridor.
- Emphasising the architectural drama of the western towers and west elevation when approached from the west, which is integral to the Baroque style.
- Enabling an appreciation of St Paul's Cathedral in combination with and alongside other heritage assets.

### Clear skyspace contributes as:

- The optimum condition for appreciating the architectural composition and forms of the Cathedral, including the silhouette of dome, western towers and overall composition of the upper parts of the building, which is significant both architecturally and culturally.
- It enhances and ensures visual prominence and therefore the intended architectural effect.
- It enhances the dynamic impact of the Baroque west towers in the round.
- It allows an appreciation of the magnitude and scale of the Cathedral, including when appreciated at a distance.
- It is significant to the understanding and appreciation of the relationships of St Paul's with other heritage assets with a skyline presence, in particular the spires and towers of the City Churches and The Monument which amplifies the significance of the Cathedral.

## SB1 cont.

### **The river corridor contributes to:**

- An appreciation of the scale and visual prominence of the Cathedral.
- Illustrating the historic dominance of the Cathedral in, historically, the principal approach to the capital along the river from the east.
- Understanding of how the Cathedral was built by using the river for transporting construction materials and disposing of construction waste, and the associated relationship with St Benet Paul's Wharf.
- An appreciation of the architectural, visual and historical relationship between the Cathedral and the City Churches.
- An appreciation of the relationship between the Cathedral and the City of Westminster and London to the west, and providing visual connections between these.
- Making connections with artistic representations of the Cathedral usually depicted from the south and west with river in the foreground and, in particular, the views painted by Canaletto.

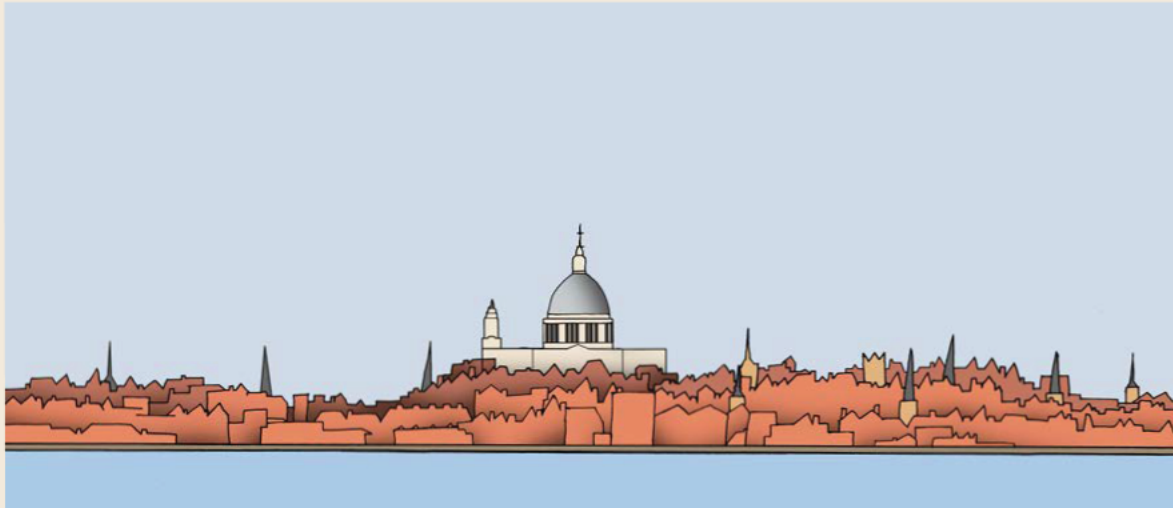
- An appreciation of the architectural and cultural significance of the Cathedral through a kinetic experience of the Cathedral in its wider urban context, from the water, the bridges or the south bank.

### **St Paul's Churchyard or close setting contributes to:**

- Experiencing and understanding the architectural scale and composition of the building at close proximity as it towers above you.
- An appreciation and experience of the high quality of architectural detail and decoration including the iconography.
- The cultural importance of the Cathedral, in particular the part played by the west entrance and steps in London's cultural and ceremonial life.
- The culmination of the ceremonial route which is integral to the role of the Cathedral historically and culturally.
- The designed connection with the river over the Millennium Bridge which enhances appreciation of the architectural significance and an understanding of the historic river connections of the Cathedral.

## St Paul's changing setting: an illustrative diagram

These sketches illustrate how the close and intermediate setting of St Paul's has evolved since its construction:



As designed by Wren, the Cathedral above aisle level rose clear above the city, and its monumental Portland stone form contrasted with the red-brown brick and tile-roofed buildings of the city. These buildings were of similar height and, through the narrow plots and spans, pitched roofs and chimneys, created a roofscape of finely-scaled texture from which the stone and lead spires and towers of the City churches emerged as delicate vertical counterpoints to the Cathedral.



In the twenty-first century, commercial development has changed this setting in four principle ways: because of the height of new buildings, the Cathedral is no longer pre-eminent; by the agglomeration of plots, buildings in its setting are much longer and wider; through modern materials, the tonal contrast between the Cathedral and the city building stock has reduced; and finally, roofscape forms are now predominantly long planes.



The changing view from Waterloo Bridge, in the 1950s, 2007 and 2024  
(picture credits: top left - copyright Historic England Archive; bottom left - copyright Chris Redgrave; bottom right - copyright Historic England)



- 5.5 PART FOUR: Evidence Base analyses in detail the history of the Cathedral's setting, its evolution and its contribution to setting. It includes a series of summary boxes that encapsulate the analysis in concise form. These are listed here with links. In particular, summary box SB1 and the boxes for the wider, intermediate and close setting (SB9, SB10 and SB11 respectively) are recommended to readers developing and determining development proposals.
- 5.6 Taken together these boxes provide a robust foundation on which to build greater understanding when carrying out step 3 of the process described in *GPA3 The Setting of Heritage Assets* (Historic England, 2017).

### Summary Boxes

SB1: The key elements of the setting of St Paul's and their positive contribution to its heritage significance p.22

SB2: Summary of relationships between St Paul's and the City Churches p.61

SB3: Summary of the relationships between St Paul's and The Monument p.68

SB4: Summary of setting changes from construction until c1800 p.80

SB5: Summary of key changes to setting 1800-1900 p.86

SB6: Summary of key changes to setting 1900-1950 p.94

SB7: Summary of key changes to setting 1950-2000 p.100

SB8: Summary of key changes to setting 2000 to the present p.107

SB9: Summary of the positive contributions of the physical surroundings in the wider setting p.116

SB10: Summary of the positive contributions of the physical surroundings in the intermediate setting p.122

SB11: Summary of the positive contribution of the physical surroundings in the close setting p.131



30 CANNON ST

UNDERGROUND  
SUBWAY

a2o despatch

Red double-decker bus



## 6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 In the first of his Tracts written during the design and construction of St Paul's, Wren advised the architect:
- “... to think his judges, as well those that are to live five centuries after him, as those of his own time”
- 6.2 He was designing for posterity and seeking in this, his masterpiece, to demonstrate the enduring absolute principles of architecture as he understood them. In order to conserve this element of the historic and architectural significance of the Cathedral some three centuries after its completion we also need to think about how those who live after us will judge our actions.
- 6.3 Today, the legacy of Wren's intent is the architectural expression of his Cathedral, including the composition and interplay of architectural forms and how these are appreciated from its setting. This is fundamental to the heritage significance of the Cathedral and of great importance when considering the impact of new development on the setting of the Cathedral.
- 6.4 The Cathedral remains a physical and spiritual landmark for London and for the nation and, although its historical pre-eminence has been eroded by later development, the contribution it makes to the skyline of London is still appreciable, discernible, and distinct. And so its setting remains fundamental to our appreciation of its heritage significance. Consequently, the facets of setting identified in this study, such as the legibility of the Cathedral on the skyline, clear skyspace around it, the elevated position, the role of the river corridor and the building's close setting, all contribute strongly to the significance of St Paul's.
- 6.5 Therefore, where the silhouette of the major architectural elements remains clearly appreciable as part of the horizon, or against clear sky, any visual obstruction of the Cathedral's outline would cause harm to its significance and any incursions into the sky space around the Cathedral have the potential to cause harm to its significance.

- 6.6 The pressure from what is often described as minor, or incremental, change is another considerable challenge to the management of the Cathedral's significance, for though individual changes and proposals may have a modest impact, cumulatively such change could cause further harm the significance of the Cathedral. This should be taken into consideration during the development management process.
- 6.7 By no means has all change to the setting of the Cathedral been harmful, however. There have been changes in recent times which have removed past mistakes and, in addition, taken the opportunities to provide new ways to engage with the building. It is not inevitable that the Cathedral will continue to be challenged or harmed by new development: schemes such as Paternoster Square, Millenium Bridge, and the reflecting pool on the corner of Cannon Street and New Change, demonstrate that change can make a positive contribution to the Cathedral's setting if it is informed by a thorough understanding of the ways in which setting contributes to the significance of St Paul's and the historic environment of the City and London.
- 6.8 This goes further than simply managing strategic views and the architectural appearance of buildings, it involves understanding how people engage with the building, on a physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual level, all of which changes over time. How the building is approached and how its relationship to its setting is appreciated from St Paul's itself are part of the foundations for successful future conservation management.
- 6.9 Such management will require informed and detailed understanding of the Cathedral's significance, its history and the contribution of setting to that significance. That is why this study has been prepared. It is expected that it will require revision as new evidence comes forward. In trying to manage different expectations and aspirations for a study of the setting of the Cathedral it inevitably cannot address every emphasis or nuance that different audiences would wish to see. However, if it does deliver a better appreciation of the special importance of St Paul's then it will have achieved its primary objective.



## 7.0 Methodology

7.1 It might appear a deceptively simple task to establish what matters about the setting of a historic building and why it matters, but in reality it is a major challenge for somewhere as complex as St Paul's. What matters about the Cathedral is different for different individuals and diverse communities across the capital and beyond.

### Guidance

7.2 The approach therefore taken here is based upon the established best practice methodology set out by Historic England in HEGAP 3, *Historic Environment Good Practice in Planning Advice Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2nd edition, 2017).

7.3 The study addressed steps 1 and 2 of the HEGAP 3 approach. In addition, by providing in chapter 9 an analysis of the changes to setting over time it also assists in addressing step 4, which is the exploration of ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm when proposing changes within the setting of a heritage asset.

7.4 This study cannot address step 3 of HEGAP 3, which is the impact assessment of a proposed development, but it does provide the foundation upon which the necessary further detailed assessment for step 3 can be carried out for each individual project in the future, as explained earlier in Chapter 5.

### Terminology

7.5 The terms "wider setting", "intermediate setting" and "closer setting" are used in the study to help articulate the different characteristics of the setting of St Paul's. The concepts are not based on defined boundaries that can be drawn on a map and they have no formal meaning other than being descriptive. Neither are they hierarchical: the strength of the positive contribution made by an element or feature of setting does not correlate with proximity to the Cathedral, though their nature may be experienced differently depending on distance.

- 7.6 The study also recognises the clear distinction between setting and views, as set out in the relevant Historic England advice (GPA 3 on Setting and GPA 4 on Tall Buildings). This is discussed further in Appendix 1, p.166.

## Research

- 7.7 The study is based upon professional knowledge of the site and setting gained over several decades, augmented by site visits during its preparation that have focussed upon assessing the current setting. These visits have predominantly been to the closer setting of the Cathedral, although parts of the wider setting have also been visited.
- 7.8 Site visits were supplemented by examination of a range of secondary sources including academic research and publications and policy, guidance and other material published by Historic England, the Greater London Authority and the Corporation of the City of London. A bibliography and list of sources can be found at Appendix 4, p.164.

## Consultation

- 7.9 The legitimacy and strength of the assessment presented in this study is in large part derived from the extent of consultation on its preparation. A workshop was held on 4 October 2023 to present and discuss the research. It was attended by representatives of the Cathedral, its Fabric Advisory Committee, the Cathedrals Fabric Committee for England, Historic England, the City of London, the Greater London Authority, and independent peer review experts. This group was consulted on a draft and their comments and observations informed the development of the document.
- 7.10 In April 2024, version 9 of the report was presented to and discussed by Historic England's London Advisory Committee.
- 7.11 Further review by the City of London and the Greater London Authority is likely and any further comments and observations will inform the final version of the report.
- 7.12 Beyond that, future iterations of the study would benefit from the results of public consultation, either undertaken specifically for the project or as part of other programmes.

## Illustration

- 7.13 The study contains a range of illustrations, some commissioned specially for the publication, others reproduced from other sources. These include photographs taken by Chris Redgrave of Historic England specifically for the project. Other photographs were taken by the author. Unless otherwise stated, the photographs are the copyright of Barker-Mills Conservation.
- 7.14 None of the photographs or images are “verified” or Accurate Visual Representations (AVR’s) as defined by the Landscape Institute. They are simply illustrative and intended to assist the user of this document to comprehend the points being made.

## Limitations

- 7.15 The study does not, indeed cannot, provide a definitive statement of significance and how setting contributes to it, not least because of the geographical scale and complexity but also because both are continually evolving and seen through different lens by different communities. In light of the complexity of the asset and the nature of the assessment direct public consultation was not possible.

## Author and project team

- 7.16 Barker-Mills Conservation was appointed to prepare the study. Nigel Barker-Mills, author of this report, has over 40 years’ experience in the management of the historic environment including roles in local government, English Heritage and Historic England. His last role at Historic England was as the Planning Director for London. He is a full, founder, member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. Further details of the relevant experience and qualifications of Barker-Mills Conservation are provided in Appendix 5, p.188.
- 7.17 Alan Baxter Ltd has been extensively involved in the later stages of editing and refinement of the study, including typesetting, graphics and the design of this report.
- 7.18 The project team also includes the Surveyor’s Office of St Paul’s Cathedral, which has provided assistance and guidance during the preparation of this report on behalf of the Dean and Chapter.

# PART TWO: Evidence Base



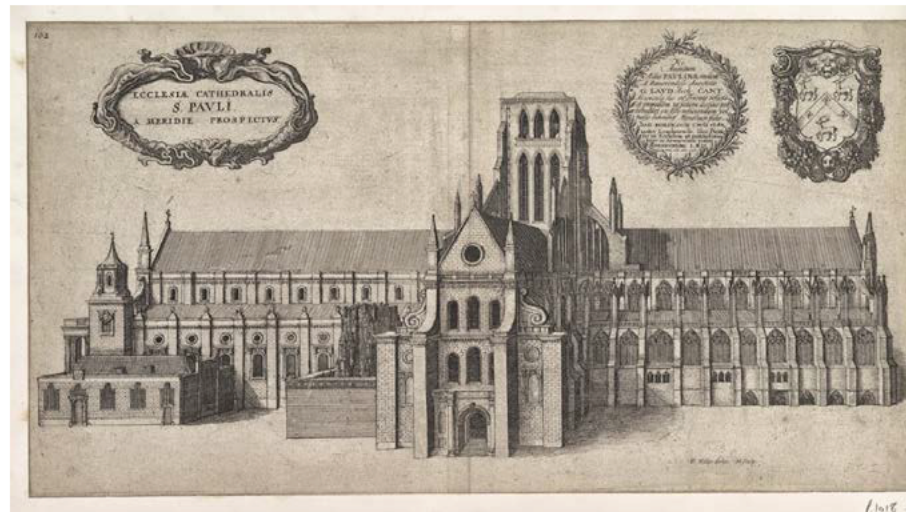


## 8.0 Heritage significance of St Paul's

- 8.1 The heritage significance of St Paul's forms the basis for its designation as a Grade I listed building. It is an asset of significant complexity that has been the subject of considerable analysis and description. For those interested in gaining a greater understanding of its chronology, architectural history and archaeology, further sources have been identified in *Appendix NPBM 5*. This assessment is therefore a synthesis of existing analysis and does not set out to be exhaustive.

### A brief history of the building

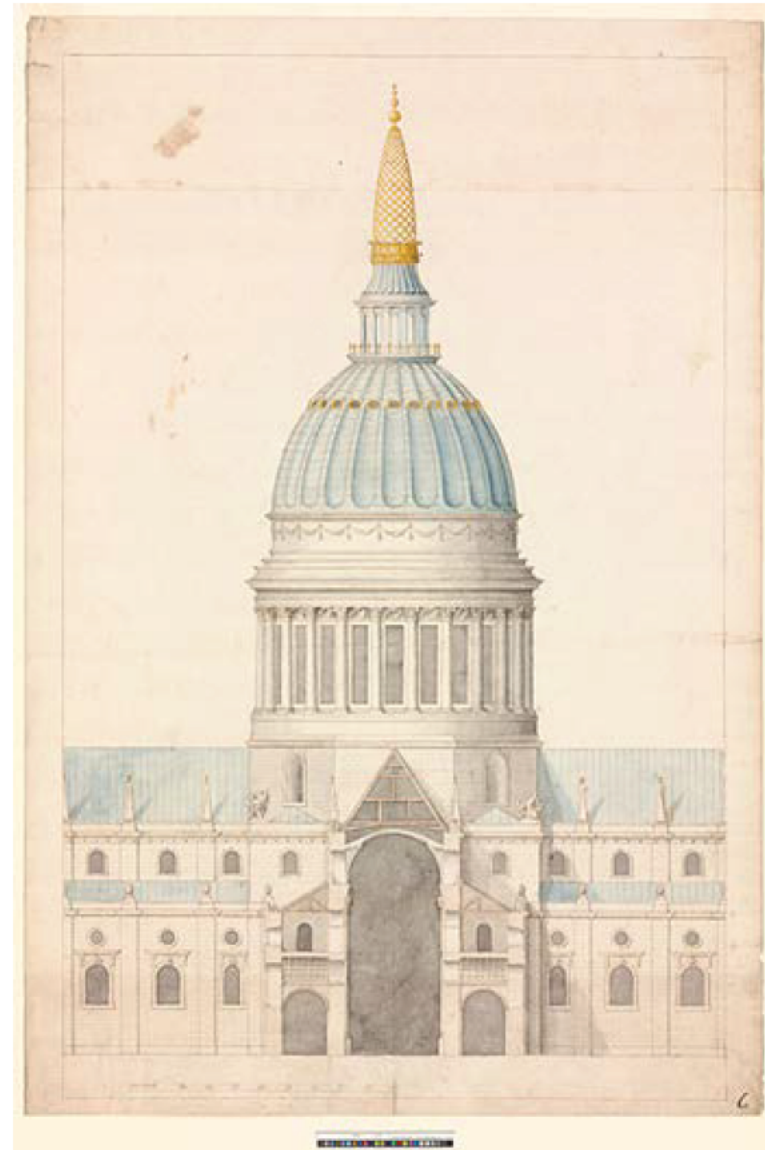
- 8.2 The current building stands on the site of at least two and probably more predecessors. The Normans commenced the rebuilding of an earlier Saxon church in 1087 and construction continued until the later 12th century. The immediate predecessor to the current building, "Old St Pauls" contained within it some of the Norman nave, although encased by Inigo Jones in the 17th century. The medieval cathedral was 12 bays long with a crossing tower and two western towers outside the line of the nave and it stood within a broadly oval precinct. At the time of its completion, it was the tallest building in the capital.



Old St Paul's as amended by Inigo Jones engraved by W Hollar when the spire had been lost

## Wren and Old St Paul's

- 8.3 The first documented involvement of Christopher Wren with the pre-existing building was when he was consulted about its repair in 1661 and he subsequently prepared actual proposals in the Spring and Summer of 1666. Christopher Wren has a strong claim to be England's most famous architect and his genius was recognised from an early age. He came from a prominent Royalist and church family whose members included a Bishop of Ely and was born in 1632, the son of a Dean of Windsor. He died in 1723. His early scientific interest and education led to his appointment as Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College at the age of 25 until 1661, when he was appointed Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford; a post he held until 1673 and overlapping with his appointment as Surveyor General of the Kings Works from 1669. His earlier career was thus in the sciences and he became involved in architecture only later, with his first commissions being the result of his acknowledged abilities and skills in geometry and mechanics. These abilities remained an integral element of his architecture underpinning much of his architectural theory and exploration of the origins of architectural style, both through study but also in his practice.



Old St Paul's: Wren's pre-fire proposals for the crossing © All Souls College, Oxford

8.4 The proposals prepared by Wren in the 1660's for St Paul's were obviously informed by his visit to Paris and the Ile de France the year before when escaping the plague. He never visited Rome but did meet the great Italian Baroque architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini then in Paris working on proposals for the Louvre. In May 1666 Wren submitted a formal proposal for repair of old St Paul's and in August drawings for a new domed crossing to the medieval building were developed; which clearly intended to continue the process of improvement of the old cathedral begun in the 1630's by Inigo Jones. The dome was to provide London with a new landmark in place of the decaying central tower of the existing cathedral which had lost its crowning spire about a century earlier. It was described as a "rotundo, with a cupola, or hemispherical roof, and upon the cupola, a lantern with a spiring top" Diarist John Evelyn, one of the Commissioners who supported the proposal, described a "noble cupola, a forme of church-building not yet known in England", which he believed would provide a distinction to the London skyline akin to the major Renaissance centres of Europe. For Wren, the use of a dome had greater antecedents to be found in the architectural legacy of "the Levant", (or Middle East) and in particular the model of the early Christian cathedral of St Sophia in Constantinople.