

Only way is up, says skyscraper king

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The designer of the Shard, one of Europe's tallest buildings, has hit back at critics who say that skyscrapers will ruin London's skyline for ever.

Renzo Piano, who has been compared to Leonardo da Vinci, has defended his contribution to the "building up" of London. "I don't think it is sacrilegious to build new towers. Cities face a choice of building up or building out," he told *The Times*.

He spoke after unveiling plans for a 224m cylindrical tower on the site of a former Royal Mail sorting office in Paddington. Next month, a planning application will be submitted for the project, which would create 200 new homes and ease access to the railway station for 300,000 people a day.

With more than 260 tall towers being built or planned in the capital, critics of the changing skyline have called for greater planning control, claiming that "inappropriate" designs are too often waived through.

Barbara Weiss, an Anglo-Italian architect who launched the Skyline Campaign last year, warned that London's character was at risk. "There are other solutions to the housing crisis. London could be a very successful mid-rise city instead of one that is in danger of losing its character and worldwide status because it is becoming like any other metropolis of watered-down towers."

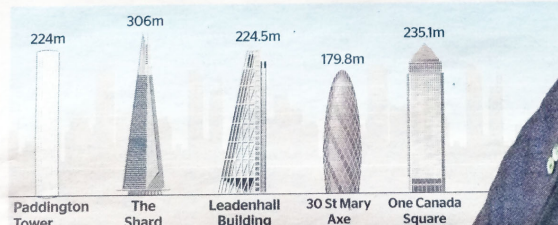
She said that Skyline accepted towers as long as they were "very high quality and in the right place". "This [Piano's] proposal is completely inappropriate: it will be seen all over the capital and have city-wide repercussions."

Dan Cruikshank, the art historian and television presenter, said towers "have an honourable history" but have become "a monument to greed".

"In the rush to make London a city of towers, the capital's special character will be diluted once again as individual and distinct architecture gives way to



Renzo Piano, designer of the Shard, denied that high-rise developments would be ghettos for the rich



the bland and the generic with London's skyline transformed out of all recognition."

Last night, Mr Piano rejected accusations that high-rise developments created exclusive "ghettos" for rich people. "There's nothing wrong with making a tall building if it gives back more than it receives from the city. The tower gets a lot — view, location — but

it gives back a lot. It gives back to the city what the city most needs: space on the ground. It keeps people living in the city, which is one of the most important things to do. It gives the city the energy of people, so it's not just a place for banks. And in this scheme, we're creating a pre-

cious little jewel on top — a small public garden that anyone can go to for free. "We have to accept growth will come by increasing the density inside cities. They should grow by implosion not explosion."

Marcus Binney, the chairman of Save, the campaign group for preserving heritage, is lobbying for stricter controls.

"We're concerned about the loss of historic views," Mr Binney said. "It's turned into a free-for-all."