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# £1BN FIGHT FOR LIGHT IN THE CITY

## THREAT TO SCRAP 62-STORY TOWER SET TO OVERSHADOW DOZENS OF BUILDINGS

Mark Blunden and Jonathan Prynn

AN INCREASINGLY desperate "fight for light" in central London is threatening to kill off a £1 billion plan for the City's tallest ever skyscraper.

The developers behind the 62-storey block have warned they may have to abandon the scheme because of the risk of court action from the owners of dozens of overshadowed buildings. The legal row is thought to be the biggest of its kind in Britain.

New figures show there has been a dramatic intensification of London's tower-building "gold rush", increasing the likelihood of more light loss disputes. There are 436 structures of 20 storeys or more in the pipeline, a rise of 119 in a year, according to think tank New London Architecture.

Campaigners warn the "absolutely horrific" volume of planned towers means tens of thousands of residents and office workers face loss of light. Clem Cecil, of heritage group SAVE, said: "There is a real danger that large areas of London are going to be in darkness a lot of the time."

Property company Lipton Rogers is behind the plan for the 295-metre glass and steel tower at 22 Bishopsgate, which would be three times the height of Big Ben.

The scheme is under threat after months of stalled "right-to-light" talks with the owners of neighbours including Tower 42, the Baltic Exchange and St Helen's church.

Lipton Rogers is so concerned it has asked the City of London Corporation to use emergency "Section 237" planning powers to override the rights of other freeholders to block

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## 'Wall of towers would block light for thousands'

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the scheme in the courts. Developers of the 1.4 million sq ft tower have told officials that without swift progress they will struggle to meet projected completion date for of spring 2019.

The agenda for tomorrow's meeting of the Corporation's planning and transportation committee states "the owners have advised that there is a significant threat to progressing the scheme", and there are "very large numbers of parties who may wish to bring claims". Just 17 out of 90 neighbours have so far signed agreements to "release their right to light".

Barbara Weiss, co-founder of the Skyline Campaign, said: "Light is a big, big issue." Mr Cecil added: "It is a real issue for people and should not be skirted around by the planning system."

"I think people are only beginning to wake up to the fact that their environment is going to be strongly affected by losing light and they can object."

Section 237 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act allows local authorities to take temporary ownership of a development and effectively forces objectors to accept compensa-

tion for loss of light rather than allow them to block the scheme altogether through an injunction.

Another developer, Land Securities, is requesting a similar solution for its 510,000 sq ft office and shops scheme 21 Moorfields, centred around a plaza above Moorgate Crossrail station.

Land Securities has already spent nearly £80 million and told officials the project is "at risk due to the inability to settle and conclude legal agreements in respect of a significant number of remaining rights of light claims".

Tomorrow's meeting comes days after Mayor Boris Johnson scrapped a public hearing to decide the fate of the Bishopsgate Goodyard development in Shoreditch.

Campaigners said the "wall of towers", ranging from 26 to 46 storeys, would "block light for thousands of people". No reason was given for the postponement but potential "right to light" claims are thought to have been a major factor.

New London Architecture revealed that 94 tall buildings were submitted for planning last year, up from 72 in 2014. Of these, 43 were also approved and only three were refused. Right to



light rules date back to the Twenties and use a yardstick drawn up by light surveyor Percy Waldram, who decided that property owners should have at least enough natural light to be able to read an article in The Times with only a one foot high candle in the room as illumination.

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**Tallest tower:** computer image of how the 62-storey skyscraper at 22 Bishopsgate would look as part of the City landscape

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## Don't let skyscrapers block out the light

THE right to light is a little-talked-about aspect of the debate about skyscrapers in London but it's no sooner articulated than we recognise its validity. There is an unprecedented amount of tower-building in London right now, with 436 buildings of over 20 storeys at various stages of development, which amounts to a rise of 119 in a single year. Collectively this represents a startling change to the built environment, not least in the effect on light.

The owners of buildings near the site of what could be the City's tallest ever skyscraper – 62 storeys, three times the height of Big Ben – at 22 Bishopsgate are protesting at the plans on the grounds the building would block their light. The property's owner, Lipton Rogers, is so concerned at this action on the part of neighbours including the Baltic Exchange and a parish church that the developer is trying to get the Corporation of London to use emergency planning powers to override the objections. This is not the only attempt by would-be builders of skyscrapers to get the Corporation to force through a development threatened by protesters at light loss; there are several groups and property owners voicing the same objections to new developments on the basis of light.

The merits of each case differ but it is plainly necessary that planning authorities should take this consideration seriously. We are familiar with the impact of proliferating tall buildings on the skyline and on views of London from particular vantage points. The light effect of skyscrapers is different; it affects the quality of life of many people living in the vicinity of these buildings. By definition they cast a very large shadow. Access to light once removed cannot easily be restored. At the very least the authorities should be wary of using emergency powers to override protests based on the right to light; it matters.