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The only way is up

Skyscrapers are often said to be the totems of a great city. Famous cities the world over are known for their impressive skylines, and it is the high-rise buildings that give cities their distinct identity.

Across the globe, residential high rise in particular is on the up as developers strive to maximise returns on expensive and often limited urban land mass, combat rising housing costs and reduce urban sprawl. Building tall is seen as a greener, more environmentally friendly and responsible solution to urban regeneration, delivering more energy efficiency and offering the opportunity to make urban spaces greener.

In Newcastle, a clear sign of growing market confidence is that developers are starting to build and are planning to build high. Mixed use properties combining commercial, residential and retail are proposed for brownfield areas of the city that have long stood neglected and derelict. It is great news and crucial for Newcastle's economic survival and competitiveness - Newcastle needs tall buildings.

The city needs to keep pace with other leading regional cities - Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool have already stolen the march by starting the race skyward. We can't afford to get left behind - changing the city's skyline is not only symbolic; without it we risk the loss of investment, jobs and people.

No one is proposing whacking up tower blocks that have no architectural merit. Rather, each city centre brownfield site presents an opportunity to complement and add to Newcastle's iconic skyline. Newcastle is famed internationally for its beautiful, impressive architecture. But to grow and develop, a city needs to evolve.

A modern, cosmopolitan city needs to look skywards to maintain its relevance and economic prosperity - skyscrapers transform a city. Dramatic, new, high-rise buildings make it a more appealing place to work, visit, invest and to live. Crucially, they also enable residential density when space is at a premium. Height is not the goal, rather it is the opportunity for greater commercial and residential density that tall buildings provide. It is also hugely important that these buildings work at street level, at the human scale. An attractive skyline is good to have, but it is how people interact with these buildings that define their success.

What's crucial for Newcastle and other Northern cities is that we need more people living in the city centre. Unlike London that is bursting at the seams, Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester are all focusing on getting the infrastructure right to encourage growth in the city centre's residential population.

We need the city to look attractive to prospective investors - as London's prices continue to rise and investors are priced out of the market, Newcastle needs to demonstrate that it is a worthwhile and viable proposition. We want businesses looking to invest and relocate to choose Newcastle knowing that the infrastructure is in place to accommodate them and their workforce.

Combining residential, commercial and retail in the high rise development mix is crucial for urban regeneration and economic growth. None of these sectors, on their own, will be a silver bullet for success. A bold, confident vision of what Newcastle is, and what it can become, will define the city's future.

Stephen Patterson, director of communications at NE1