

Safety in your building

1 October 2021

Cumnor House, Helmi House, Lidcote House,
Stockwell,
SW9

Dear residents,

Latest update on building safety project – next update by 3 December latest

I'd first like to thank you all for your patience while we try and progress this project. I know there have been significant delays to dates we had previously communicated with you, and I'd like to apologise again for that.

Progress so far

We still have not reached a final agreement with the original contractor Higgins which will allow us to get started on-site. I appreciate your frustration in this matter and I would like to explain a little about why it is taking so long. Firstly, I'd like to let you know the progress we have made as a result of our fortnightly meetings with Higgins:

- **Higgins production team** – Higgins have appointed their internal production team. We will work with this team who will provide a programme of work and once agreed we'll let you know what the programme is.
- **Design team** – Higgins have appointed the design team for the project. These are professionals such as architects and energy consultants.
- **Building control** – Higgins has approached Basildon Building Control to review the works proposal. We'll be meeting soon to agree things like retention of panels and material choices etc.
- **Building safety fund** – we are liaising with the Ministry of Housing (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – DLUHC) to keep them updated about our progress, so that our building safety fund application represents the latest technical and cost position.
- **Building scans** – there will be some equipment set up in mid-late October (date TBC) to provide us with extremely accurate scans to ensure we get the right approach on-site.

Current priorities and challenges

While we are pleased to have made the above steps, we know the one you want to hear is the start date. We're not quite there yet and the reason is that we are caught between some differing priorities. Our top priority is resident safety and ensuring that the solution we agree is compliant and will be of low enough risk for us to be able to provide you with an EWS1 form.

Alongside safety, we have the somewhat conflicting priorities of time and money. We are trying to get your project on-site as soon as possible, but at the same time we must not compromise the financial position just to achieve this. To put it simply, we could potentially solve the time issue by agreeing to cover a larger portion of the cost. But we are responsible for achieving good value on our projects and must ensure we reach a fair agreement. We also need to do everything we can to try and minimise any costs which may have to be recovered from leaseholders. So to be able to achieve a fair financial settlement, we are having to sacrifice some time to get there.



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A summary of this letter

We will write to you next on **Friday 3 December** to give you the latest update (or sooner).

The design team and lead contractor have been appointed, and we have got in touch with building control to ensure we get the correct permissions for the project. These are all big steps towards being ready to start on-site.

Some scans of the building will be taken in mid-late October to give us extremely accurate information.

Resident safety is our top priority. After that we must balance the timescales and cost of the project to ensure we reach the best final position that is fair and agreeable to all parties. We're also finalising the technical position on the aluminium panels.

This is a complex situation and conflicting priorities are the main factor behind us not starting on-site yet. We're doing everything we can to get an acceptable agreement as soon as possible.

I know this won't help too much as you are still hoping for us to communicate a start on-site date. But I hope you understand we are not able to sacrifice too much either way when dealing with the cost and timescale of the project. We want to reach the best agreement possible for ourselves and for you, and so this is taking a lot longer than we hoped.

Aluminium panels

Following a review of the materials being used on the external wall, building control has advised that it is not as simple as removing the exterior rain screen aluminium panels and changing the insulation behind. As part of their sign-off procedure, they have now implemented a requirement for fire safety certification testing data to be submitted, as they are operating in a more risk averse environment due to building safety.

Higgins are reviewing the revised approach following the update from building control and we are waiting for their comments to form part of the negotiation.

Expectations for start on-site

The cladding panel composition is not the sole reason for the delays. Other factors that have had an influence on the timeline include discussions about settlement of liabilities, cost contributions, agreeing contractual terms, Building Safety Fund requirements, and industry capacity. We are working to achieve the best possible outcome both technically and financially for all relevant stakeholders and hope to be in a position in the coming weeks to announce a programme start date and details of a webinar.

Higgins and Network Homes are committed to resolving the issues at Robsart Street and we want to get started on-site before the end of the year. But this is dependent on being able to achieve the balance between our priorities as above and is **not confirmed**. We will write to you by **Friday 3 December** to give you an update on the position or sooner if we have something confirmed.

We are doing everything we can to reach a final position which is fair and agreeable to all parties. Thank you again for your patience and understanding, as we try to reach the best outcome.

Further support

If you need further support, you can:

- Visit the London Fire Brigade's website, which is offering a free online tool which guides you through a fire risk assessment of your home (home visits are available for more vulnerable residents): <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/home-fire-safety/>
- Visit our website where we have a building safety section with lots of information and frequently asked questions: <https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/your-home/building-fire-safety-and-cladding/>.
- Remind yourself of our top fire safety tips, including not using BBQs on balconies: <https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/advice/health-and-safety/fire-safety-top-tips/>
- Check our document library for a reminder of the letters we have already sent out: <https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/your-home/my-building-fras-documents-and-newsletters/>. It may take a little while to load as there are lots of documents on there.
- Get in touch with us on customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk if you have any questions.

Best wishes

Peter Park
Project Manager – Building Safety