



Safety in your building

30 May 2023

9-19 Robsart Street and 1-11 Thornton Street,
Stockwell,
SW9

The Hive
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Wembley
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Dear residents,

Project update – new draft completion date expected to be March 2024

We are writing to provide an update on the remediation project being undertaken to your building. To get to the point, the new completion date for the project is March 2024. We have explained in depth below why this is the case and I'd like to apologise for the additional disruption you will face while we remediate the issues found in your building.

Progress in the last few months

We recognise that there has been limited progress the last few months. The reason for this delay is because after scaffolding erection and removal of the render on 1 and 7 Thornton Street, we discovered further issues that were not fully known beforehand.

Therefore, in the last few months we have been working with the contractor and the professional team to agree the appropriate solution to resolve each issue. This has meant obtaining advice from architects, fire engineers, façade engineers, structural engineers, product manufacturers and building control.

Below is a summary of the issues encountered:

- **Aluminium cladding subframe:** The cladding panels are attached to this. We had some questions about the re-use of the subframe. Higgins will now be replacing the subframe.
- **Sheathing board:** Repairs were required to other parts of external wall such as sheathing boards. This has been agreed with Higgins.
- **Brickwork cavity barriers and cavity closers:** The most significant issue as Higgins advised us that localised remediation using traditional cavity barriers is not possible. The only way to fit traditional cavity barriers would have been to dismantle and re-build the brick sections of external walls which would have caused significant disruption to residents and cost significantly more. We have worked with the fire engineer and the rest of the design team to look at other alternatives. We have carried out a series of further inspections and have opted for a solution using an Injectaclad cavity barrier which our fire engineer is satisfied would lower the risk sufficiently if used in certain locations on the building. This solution is a material which is injected into the brickwork at certain locations and acts as a cavity barrier in the event of fire.
- **Inset balcony soffits:** Some of the Thornton Street flats have inset balconies. The soffit or ceiling of this balcony is combustible EPS insulation which we did not know about before. It has been agreed to replace this insulation to lower the fire risk at the building.

A summary of this letter

Due to a number of issues discovered during the remediation project, Higgins has advised us that the new draft completion date is March 2024. This could even extend further. We will keep you informed on our progress.

We've found limited issues with internal firestopping in communal areas surveys and will advise further on Higgins plans to put it right.

After fire door investigations, we found some issues with installation and some with maintenance. We should be able to repair them, so won't need new doors.

We'll be meeting with Higgins to work out their liability for the installation issues. We'll then send out any necessary section 20 notices for any costs which may need to be recovered through the service charge.

We've included some mental health support info for those of you who may be affected and need support.

A reminder

Your building's fire strategy is **simultaneous evacuation**, which means you must evacuate if you hear the fire alarm, even if you think it is a false alarm.

- **Balcony possessions:** We have found alternative storage facilities on the estate for resident possessions on balconies. We would appreciate residents to assist us by keeping balconies clear for the remaining duration of the works.

Revised completion date

The project was initially due to complete May 2023. We have asked Higgins for a revised programme which they have submitted to us in draft. The revised programme suggests the project can complete by March 2024. The application of the render system is dependent on weather conditions, such as low temperatures and rain so this has had to be factored into the programme. There are still a number of variables that could affect the programme so it is possible the works could extend further. We will keep you updated about this if this happens and will inform you as soon as we know.

What is happening now and what will you see the next few months?

Higgins are removing more EPS insulation from 11 Robsart street and will be completing any work needed to the sheathing boards behind. They will then start to fit new mineral wool insulation, fire barriers and then start to render. Cladding panels are also due to be replaced in coming months and the Injectaclad barriers system will be installed to the brickwork sections.

Common area compartmentation survey

We have carried out a common area compartmentation survey as recommended by our fire engineer. The survey has found mixed results. The majority of locations inspected found compartmentation was adequate but there were areas which had not been compartmentalised as they should have been. We have issued the reports to Higgins and our expectation is they will complete the remedial works as required. We will advise about this in our next update following our discussions with Higgins.

Fire doors update

We also wanted to provide an update on the fire door investigations that took place a few months ago. The investigations have also resulted in mixed results. Fire doors are normally manufactured with certification labels to identify the fire door manufacturer, model and fire performance that the door will deliver. We did not find these labels on the vast majority of the fire doors inspected. We have asked Higgins to review their original procurement records to confirm which fire doors were purchased for the building in an effort to answer this question.

The fire door investigations also found a mixture of issues some of which relate to their original installation and others which are more repairs and maintenance activity. The types of issue found are:

- **Installation behind frame:** We found they were not installed correctly to the wall, which is an installation defect.
- **Gaps around door to the floor or to the frame:** We found gaps exceeding tolerances around most fire doors. This tends to happen with doors as they age and is a maintenance issue.
- **Worn parts such as intumescent smoke seals, hinges:** This tends to happen with doors as they age and is a maintenance issue.

The fire door contractor we engaged with to carry out inspections – Ventro Group – has said it is possible to repair and upgrade the fire doors to achieve a notional/nominal standard. This is where a fire door undergoes significant repair/upgrade to accepted repair techniques. The fire door cannot be re-certified but is judged to be adequate and will perform as a fire door should.

We have issued the reports to Higgins to understand their views of their perceived liability. This is particularly relevant regarding the installation issues discovered behind the frame. We will wait on Higgins' comments on their liability position based on our findings and we will consider further how

best to procure the work. Any liability admitted by Higgins will only cover part of the cost of the required works, as a large part of the work is considered maintenance activity.

We will be considering how best to procure the work so it can be completed satisfactorily in a way that we can demonstrate value for money as the cost of the required work could be significant. We will also need to comply with leaseholder Section 20 requirements for any works considered as maintenance and will communicate further with residents once the position is fully known. We expect this process will take some time to complete and will advise about progress in our next update letter to residents.

More info about why delays can happen

You may have some questions about why these sorts of delays/issues are happening so we have included some information below which will hopefully help you understand:

- **Why don't you build contingencies into projects?**

We do build some contingencies into projects to account for smaller things like bad weather, lots of operatives on holiday at busy times, delivery delays, local authority permissions, parking etc. However, sometimes things happen which we could not have seen coming or the likelihood was so small that we didn't think it would happen. This is the case with many of the things listed above.

- **Why weren't they spotted during investigations?**

The way we plan our remediation programme is to look at the investigations we've done on a small area of the building and then scale it up for the rest of the building. Sometimes, we find things in other areas of the building that we did not find in the area we investigated.

- **Is the end date you've given us just a guess. Will it definitely change?**

The programme of your building's remediation is put together by detailing how long every task *should* take, and then adding small contingencies along the way. There can be many things which affect the finish date. With the information we have now, Higgins' draft programme says the completion date is March 2024. However, as we've discovered a lot of additional work, this could happen again and change the end date. We'll keep you informed along the way.

We hope this update is useful. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all residents for working with the team by allowing access to your homes and balconies so that the works could progress. We apologise for the unforeseen delays that have occurred and would like to reassure residents that the team will be working hard to bring the external wall remediation project to a successful conclusion in the coming months.

Further support

The resident led End Our Cladding Scandal campaign group has advised housing associations to share mental health support information with their affected residents. We know this update will be disappointing and may cause some of you additional stress. Please do check out their resources if you feel it may be helpful: <https://endourcladdingscandal.org/get-support/mental-health-support/>.

Check our website's dedicated page for your building's previous updates: <https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/robsart2buildingsafety/>. If you have any questions, you can also get in touch with us on customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk.

Kind regards

Raj Gandecha
Head of Resident Management (Building Safety)