

IGT_FOI_10_ 5275 Legality of right to return to Balfroon Tower

I would also, like clarified as to how Poplar Harca have managed to have a decant declared/agreed on a block when they do not even have planning permission to do the so called work they are decanting block for. Balfroon Tower is a listed building and on checking planning applications out it seems Poplar Harca do not have planning permission or listed building consent to carry out the work they are decanting us for. Is this normal practice?

The absence of planning permission or listed building consent is not relevant to the Decant Homes Programme of works or, from that programme, the request as subsequently agreed that the residents of Balfroon Tower be awarded decant status. The rationale for this decision was thus:-

Poplar HARCA took transfer of Balfroon Tower and Carradale House with the Brownfield Estate in December 2008. Both blocks are listed (inside and out) and are considered of significant architectural significance due to their architect – Erno Goldfinger.

It was always anticipated that the major works required to bring the blocks to decent homes standard would be complex due to their scope and scale, and because of the blocks listed status.

HARCA advised that it had spent a year preparing for the works and how it would manage them with residents in-situ. However, on 20 August, it received confirmation that the works cannot be carried out with residents in occupation.

This was because:

- The need to carry out hot working on a new gas supply riser in the cramped confines of the service riser and the need to open up the service riser for extended periods to replace the existing services means exposure to a significantly increased level of risk from the spread of fire and smoke during the proposed works. These risks could only be partially mitigated by additional temporary fire protection measures during the works.
- The location and configuration of the distribution of the mechanical and electrical services create specific difficulties. The replacement of the existing soil and vent pipes creates the most difficulties as it impacts on the toilet and bathing facilities. The soil and vent pipes are located in a vertical riser that can only be accessed via the dwellings. Furthermore the configuration of the structural shear walls means that an access panel needs to be cut into the reinforced shear wall in each dwelling.
- At best, residents will have to put up with extremely limited toilet and bathing facilities for at least 3 months whilst the soil and vent pipes are replaced. They would then continue to suffer significant disruption whilst the main works are carried out. The prolonged reduction in these

basic facilities will be a particular issue for residents who are vulnerable, those with younger children and those with disabilities or health problems and, in addition, could be an issue for some faiths.

- The configuration of the building requires access to a number of properties all at the same time and over a prolonged period. There is a considerable probability that at least one resident will not provide access on any one day to carry out necessary works to service riser. Lack of access would delay the entire project. This is because it is not possible to work around a dwelling and put it to the back of the programme as typically occurs in many Decent Homes programmes. Of most concern would be the extended period without full services for residents.
- The fact that both the exterior and interior of the building is Grade 2 listed prevents a range of potential alternative options being explored. The listing of important internal features and finishes puts an additional risk on being able to deal with the refurbishment without lengthy inconvenience to residents.
- Effective mitigation cannot be identified for the identified risks. HARCA's consultants therefore recommended that *'It is therefore not advisable, feasible or reasonable for residents to occupy their homes during these works. The risk assessment, particularly with regard the increased risk of fire, means a recommendation that the block has to be decanted for the duration of these works.'*