

### Meeting Summary and Question and Answer Sheet

The questions in this Question and Answer document were raised by residents who attended the introductory meetings held at 1 Helmsdale House on Wednesday 21 September and the online meeting held on Monday 26 September 2022.

#### **Consultation meetings:**

21 and 26 September 2022 at 6pm

#### **Location:**

1 Helmsdale House and Online via Microsoft TEAMS

#### **Westminster City Council project attendees:**

Kaivery Heslop, Client Surveyor, Asset Strategy Team  
Vicky Simpson – Resident Advocate  
Sophia Amedume – Resident Advocate

#### **Westminster City Council ward councillors:**

Cllr Iman Less  
Cllr Geoff Barraclough  
Cllr Nafsika Butler-Thalassis

#### **Summary:**

The Westminster project team introduced themselves and gave a short presentation covering the scope of works, timetable and initial cost estimates.

A copy of the slides used for the presentation can be found on our website here:  
[www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104)

If you do not have access to the internet and would like a copy of the slides, you can pick one up from the TMO office at 1 Helmsdale House.

<b>Q&amp;A</b>
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#### **Queries relating to the scope of works**

**Q. During the presentation, it was noted that all current single glazed windows would be replaced with double glazed units as part of the works, there are some lessees who have extended out to the balcony line and fitted new windows. In those cases, we will not be changing the windows. One of the residents asked if we could not just extend all out to the balcony line for all properties? It was thought this would be cheaper?**

A . Unfortunately, it would not be cheaper to do this as it would require a fundamental change to the building's layout and design. It would require both planning and legal approval as it would mean a change to the lease. Both of these would be very costly and time consuming.

**Q . The lateral mains were fully renewed in 2001. Do they really need doing again?**

A. Kaivery advised that the consultants who reviewed the block noted that some works are needed and therefore a budget has been included for full renewal. A more detailed survey will be carried out during the next stage to determine exactly what work is required. Full renewal may not be necessary; however we will confirm once the more detailed survey has been done.

**Q. The gardens to the rear of Strome House are easily accessible, with just small, low railings. Residents feel insecure as anyone can access the grassed area that backs on to the residents' gardens easily. Can a higher fence be fitted?**

A. This is not currently in the proposed scope of works but given the concern here, this is something Kaivery confirmed will be looked at. We will ask the contractor to look at and price some options here and will discuss this with residents at the next meeting.

**Q. If tidying up by cables, can you not run these for security cameras?**

A. The plans are to tidy existing cables and to remove redundant ones. The addition of security cameras would require new cabling and come at an additional cost both for installation and ongoing maintenance. Because of the maintenance cost, we only look to install security cameras in areas of high ASB (supported by frequent police call outs and reports to the housing team etc). This has not been highlighted as necessary for these blocks.

**Q. Lots of flats suffer with low water pressure. Will this be fixed as part of the works?**

A. This is not currently included for in the work, but this is something our technical team are going to look into. Our technical team will visit site to carry out further investigations in the next few weeks to see what is possible. We will update you following the outcome of these investigations.

**Q. Some residents commented that they suffer with rust in the pipes as they are old. Are these being replaced?**

Full pipe replacement is not currently included in the works and would be expensive and disruptive as the pipes are not easily accessible. Our technical team will also look at this issue when they visit site to see what may be causing this and what can be done. Once the new cold water tanks are fitted, we have include for a full water treatment and flush of the system and this should hopefully clear the existing pipework.

**Q. Rather than spending money on tidying up cables, could this not be used to focus on things that are more important, such as water pressure and security?**

A. Unfortunately the cost to tidy up the cabling is very small and simply makes sense to do while scaffolding is in place for other large scale repair works. Removing the cabling wouldn't give any significant extra budget for other works, however as noted above, we may be able to include works to improve the water pressure.

A resident also added that by making the block look nice and well-maintained, it should help to reduce ASB as people tend to give more respect to well-maintained blocks.

**Q. Will the work planned to the balconies include looking at drainage as there are currently problems with excess water accumulating?**

A. Yes, we can confirm that balcony drainage works are included in the major works. Balconies will be inspected individually, and recommended works would be submitted to Westminster for approval once on site.

**Q. There is asbestos in some areas of the flats. Has this been accounted for?**

A. Westminster are required to share all records we hold regarding asbestos within our buildings with our contractors in advance of the works. Any areas without current information and where asbestos is suspected, will be tested prior to works taking place. We would like to assure residents that there is no risk from asbestos unless it is disturbed and damaged. If asbestos needs to be removed ahead of any works, all necessary precautions will be taken and residents notified.

**Q. Will Renfrew be getting solar (PV) panels? This block benefits from being south facing so this would be a good idea.**

A. Yes. We are looking to fit PV panels to Renfrew, Keith and Strome as part of the works (PV panels are already in place at Helmsdale, Invergarry and Melrose).

**Q. At Invergarry many leaseholders have double glazing already. What will happen here?**

A. Whilst some leaseholders have fitted double glazing already at this block, this is not the majority. As noted to one of the earlier answers, where leaseholders have obtained the necessary approvals from us to change their windows then these will not be changed again as part of the works. The leaseholder will still be liable to pay towards the cost of the window replacements to the rest of the block however.

**Q. Will communal area glazing panels be replaced as well?**

A. Yes – communal area windows will also be replaced across all blocks.

**Q. Will front doors be replaced? Some front doors have small windows to the left-hand side, so surely these would both need to be changed together?**

During the meeting we advised that the front doors are not due to be replaced as part of the works. Following the meeting however, we have checked with our fire safety team and properties on the upper floors will need to be replaced with fire rated

doors. All tenant front doors in these areas will now be included in the works. As leaseholder front doors are demised to them, we cannot include these as standard, but will offer leaseholders the option to opt-in to have their door changed. Doors to flats on the ground floor at street level are not required to be fire-rated so these will not be changed. The small windows to the side of the front doors of these properties will still be changed as these can be cut and replaced separately.

**Q. Can residents have input into the window design? It is important the windows are functional and fit for purpose, not just the lowest price.**

A. Yes. Our contractor will ultimately be responsible for the window design however we want to ensure residents are happy with this. We will ask our contractor to share the proposed design with residents in advance of submitting the planning application. Prior to rolling out the windows across the blocks we will also ask our contractor to fit windows to a pilot flat (this is likely to be a void property). This will give residents a chance to view the windows and give feedback.

**Q. Will the sliding balcony / rear garden doors be replaced?**

The original design for the rear doors is an open and close door rather than a sliding one. The new rear doors will be in line with the original design only.

**Q. Ground floor properties at the front of the blocks currently have obscured glass. Can the new windows also have this?**

A. Each property will be individually surveyed in advance of the window installations and the glazing will be agreed with the resident. If there is obscured glass currently, then there will be an option to retain this.

**Timing and cost related queries:**

**Q . Does all the work need doing now? Can you not delay a few years given the cost of living crisis?**

A. We acknowledge that the timing is not ideal and the current climate is challenging for everyone. Unfortunately all the works noted for inclusion in the major works are needed to maintain the block in good order and leaving this work to a later date would run the risk of ongoing expensive day to day repairs. There is also no guarantee that things will be better in several years' time and repairs could be even more expensive.

A resident also added that there were some positive measures included in the proposed work that will help people with the cost of living and rising energy bills. New double-glazed windows, new roof insulation and the PV panels are all excellent steps to improving the energy efficiency of the blocks and in turn should help with peoples rising bills.

Westminster is mindful however of the costs to leaseholders and this is why we offer a range of payment plans.

**Q. What payment plans are available?**

A. Westminster City Council offer a range of payment plans for leaseholders depending on their circumstances. Our payment plans were reviewed in January 2022 and we offer the most generous repayment plan of any London borough.

Details of payment plans available can be found in our 'major works service charge booklet', which can be downloaded from our website here:

[www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/major-works](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/major-works)

The key ones to highlight are as follows:

- Any leaseholder with a bill over £2,000 will qualify for 2 years interest free repayment.
- Any resident leaseholder (i.e. those who live in the property as their main home) with a bill over £2,000 will qualify for up to 5 years interest free repayments.
- Residents who will be in financial hardship, may qualify for an option to defer payment of the works. In these cases, repayment will not be required in the usual time frame, and can be repaid once the property is sold at a later date, subject to terms and conditions. We are currently reviewing the terms for this scheme and we will make the details available to residents as soon as these have been confirmed. Applications for the deferred payment option cannot be considered until the Estimated bill has been issued.

It is important to stress that no bills have yet been issued for these works, and we are still approximately 12 months away from having accurate estimate costs to share with you. If anyone is concerned about how they will pay however, we encourage you to speak to us. Our leasehold advisors offer one to one appointments over the phone, online or in person as required. We can also link you to an independent advisor for financial guidance as well if this is preferred.

**Q. What funding is available for this work? Are there grants for the windows or roofs?**

The funding streams available are changing regularly, however it is our intention to apply for any funding that we are eligible for. The new PV panels for example, are expected to be fully funded and fitted at no cost to leaseholders.

Unfortunately the way funding streams are currently set up, means that there are different schemes for tenants and leaseholders. There is currently a scheme which we intend to apply to which may help towards the cost of tenant windows. The requirement is for the current EPC rating of flats to be 'D' or below and brought up to a 'C' or above following the work. Assessments are due to be carried out in the coming weeks, however it could be several months before we know if we will be successful in securing any funding. There may also be funding available for leaseholders to apply for directly (most likely those on low incomes) however we will update leaseholders nearer the time with details of any schemes available.

**Q. How many blocks are included?**

A. 6 blocks – Helmsdale, Invergarry, Keith, Melrose, Renfrew and Strome.

**Q. What is the cost per block?**

A. We don't have this level of detail yet. We only have an overall budget estimate for all the blocks at this stage. Once we have refined the scope of works and our contractor has tendered for key items we will be able to share detailed costs with lessees through the Section 20 consultation process.

**Q. What order will the blocks be worked on?**

A. This is also not known at this stage. The contractor is ultimately responsible for planning their programme and order of works, though we can ask them to prioritise a certain block if necessary. The works will be phased however and we will not have scaffold up at all the blocks at the same time.

**Q. Why can't leaseholders change their own windows? This would cost a lot less?**

A. As the freeholder, Westminster City Council is responsible for the windows across the block. Under the terms of the lease, leaseholders do not own the windows specifically in their property, they are liable to pay their lease percentage towards the cost of works to all windows in the block. If all leaseholders changed their own windows, they would still (under the terms of the lease) be expected to pay towards the cost of the window replacements to all the tenanted properties. Therefore it is unlikely there would be any saving for leaseholders in this approach and could even cost more. The works proposed are also not simply changing the windows. There are a wide range of external building repairs and roof renewals required alongside the window replacements. By grouping these works together into one programme of works we will benefit from cost efficiencies, particularly in terms of scaffolding.

It is worth noting however that there are some cases across the blocks where a few leaseholders have already changed their windows. We have in the past given alterations approval to leaseholders to change their windows in advance of major works. Whenever we give this approval, the above point is made clear to leaseholders – that when the windows are changed across the block during a major works project, they will still be liable to pay towards the cost of the wider window replacement. Assuming the leaseholders' windows have the relevant approvals and are in good condition then these will not need to be changed as part of the major works.

**Resident engagement related queries:**

**Q. The timetable for resident feedback at this stage seems very tight. Can we include a 'you said', 'we did' as part of the summary?**

The timetable outlined on the slides is intended as a guide only. Given the number of questions and queries raised by residents we will fully consider these before moving to the next stage in the process. We have included a summary on page 10 confirming items which will now be included or considered during the detailed design stage of the works. We have also outlined the next steps in the process.

**Q. There was some concern about who residents could contact for help or advice about the major works.**

A. The Resident Advocacy Team at Westminster City Council are the main contact for residents with any queries regarding the major works. Vicky Simpson and Sophia Amedume are working together on this project and can be contacted at [residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk). A dedicated webpage on the Council website has also been set up for the major works and all important information and documents will be uploaded here: [www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104)

The Maida Vale ward councillors can also be contacted at any time and can help residents with any council related matters.

Geoff Barraclough - [gbarraclough@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:gbarraclough@westminster.gov.uk)

Nafsika Butler-Thalassis - [nbutler-thalassis@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:nbutler-thalassis@westminster.gov.uk)

Iman Less - [iless@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:iless@westminster.gov.uk)

**Q. Will there be regular engagement with residents?**

A. Yes. This is only the first meeting regarding these works, we aim to meet with residents regularly as our plans progress.

**Q. Can the WCC project team attend regular TMO meetings to keep residents up to date?**

A. Yes. We will attend TMO meetings when we can and provide a written update as a minimum.

**Q. What does the sign-off process actually mean? Can the TMO have a role in the client brief sign-off?**

A. The sign-off of the client brief sounds very formal, but it is merely an internal review of the planned works (at Westminster) and authorisation to move to the next stage in the planning process. The client brief, which has been introduced to residents during this meeting, is reviewed by various teams at Westminster including health and safety, repairs and maintenance, mechanical and electrical, leasehold operations, finance, major works delivery, communications and sustainability. Once the brief is signed-off, it is passed to our term contractor, Axis, who will then start to review the proposed works and start developing a plan to deliver it.

Whilst the TMO does not have a formal role in the sign-off process, we will seek their input and feedback ahead of the sign-off taking place.

**Q. Can residents see the outcome of the introductory meeting before the client brief is signed-off?**

A. Yes. We have included as much detail as we can in this Q&A to explain what additional items we will now consider following your feedback. Some updates have already been made to the client brief, however further updates are likely to be required following the investigation into the water pressure issues. An updated

version of the client brief for residents to comment on, will be uploaded to our website in the next couple of weeks. We will write to residents again to confirm when this is available to view.

#### **Additional questions received via email:**

**Q. Solar panels were fitted to Invergarry House in 2012. It was confirmed by the management organisation (CityWest Homes) at the time that there would be no cost to leaseholders for the installation of the panels, or any future maintenance. Leaseholder requested confirmation that this was still the case.**

A. There is no work planned to the panels themselves during the major works, however there maybe a small cost to safely remove and reinstate the panels on completion of the roof renewal works. We have therefore checked and confirmed with our leasehold operations team that any costs associated with relocating the panels will not be recharged to leaseholders.

**Q. The scope of works plans to remove redundant cabling which is welcome, however a lot of this was put in place for cable TV many years ago which residents were never consulted on and was never even made operational. Leaseholders should not be charged for its removal.**

A. This has also been checked and confirmed with our leasehold operations team that there will be no charge to leaseholders for the removal of the redundant cable TV cables.

#### **Additional questions raised during the online residents meeting:**

**Q. The scope lists Georgian wired panels for replacement – where exactly are these located?**

A. These are on the private balconies, and the walkways at the front of the blocks.

**Q. Will residents have a choice in the colour scheme?**

A. Yes. We will carry out a colour ballot for residents with a couple of options for the communal areas (one of which will be like for like colours). We will work with the TMO to agree options for the colour ballot.

**Q. What work exactly will be done for fire compartmentation? Will this be partitioning the stairwell areas?**

A. No, the compartmentation will be within the service cupboards and internal areas to prevent spread of fire between floors.

**Q. Can leaseholders opt-in to have extractor fans fitted?**

A. We will ask our contractor if they are able to offer an opt-in for leaseholders. It has been done on another estate before, so is possible, however our contractor would

only be able to fit the fan, they are not able to fully connect a fan in a leasehold property. Our contractors are not able to touch the electrics within a leasehold flat and therefore leaseholders would need to arrange for their own electrician to complete the final connection. We will send leaseholders more detail about this once the contractor is onsite.

**Q. What is the expected increase in property valuation following these works?**

A. Unfortunately we are not qualified to answer this question however as the freeholder we have a duty to maintain the building.

Cllr Barraclough added that properties that are poorly maintained are likely to have a lower value as perspective buyers would anticipate a significant bill for works in the near future.

**Q. Will there be any visuals to show us what the blocks will look like on completion?**

A. We do not produce any visuals for planned works, however during the design phase, there will be visuals of the new windows shared with residents. We will aim to fit a pilot flat with the new windows so residents can view these in advance of the roll out across the blocks.

**Q. Can leaseholders choose whether they have new windows or not?**

A. As the freeholder, Westminster City Council is responsible for the windows across the block. Under the terms of the lease, leaseholders do not own the windows specifically in their property, they are liable to pay their lease percentage towards the cost of works to all windows in the block. If leaseholders were able to opt-out of having their windows replaced, the lease terms unfortunately mean that they would still be liable to pay towards the cost of changing all the other windows in the block (tenant ones and the leaseholders that chose to opt-in). Our condition surveys have noted the windows are beyond their serviceable lifespan and therefore need to be replaced. Allowing some leaseholders to not have their windows changed at this time would result in costly ad-hoc repairs going forward which would have to be recharged to others. We do not believe this is a fair approach. Our responsibility as the freeholder is to maintain the block for the benefit of all residents and therefore we will be replacing all the windows as required across the block.

As noted on page 6, where a leaseholder has obtained approval previously to fit new windows, we will not be replacing these.

**Q. Will the windows be aluminium or uPVC?**

A. We are proposing to fit uPVC windows, and this is what has been budgeted for. The cost to fit aluminium would be approximately 30% higher.

**Q. What is the current EPC rating for the blocks? What will the EPC rating be on completion of the work?**

A. This is not yet known, however we will be carrying out EPC assessments for tenanted properties in the coming months in order to aid our application for funding towards the cost of new windows. As noted above, properties would need to improve from a D rating or below to a C or above in order to qualify. We would expect most leasehold properties to have similar EPC ratings to the tenant flats, however leaseholders would normally have their own EPC ratings from when the property is bought, sold, or let out.

<b>Summary and next steps</b>
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- A dedicated webpage for the Carlton Vale major works has now been set up on the council website. This meeting summary and any future updates relating to the work will be uploaded here: [www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/carlton-vale-refurbishment-works-project-x104)
- Key things which will now be looked into, or included as part of your feedback are:
  - Consider options for improved fencing / security to the rear of Strome House
  - Options for improving water pressure
  - Resident involvement in the window design process to ensure they are fit for purpose.
  - Additional time for residents to review the draft client brief and provide further feedback
  - Leaseholders to have the option to 'opt-in' for extractor fans to the kitchen and bathroom.
- Once we have completed further investigative work into the water pressure issues, we will send a further update to all residents, along with details of how to review the updated client brief. We are now aiming to seek internal sign-off of the client brief by the end of November, however this will be pushed back if residents feel something has been missed. It is important to highlight that this is only the start of the planning and design stage. We will continue to engage with residents and involve you as the next stage progresses.
- We will keep the TMO updated on our progress and will ensure an update is provided at all future TMO meetings. We will also ensure that a specific major works meeting is held for all residents once Axis have completed their first review and outlined their initial plans.

<b>More information</b>
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If you have any questions about the planned works, we will be happy to help. Please contact us by:

- Calling our Customer Services Team on 0800 358 3783 - ask to speak to Vicky Simpson or Sophia Amedume in the Resident Advocate Team
- Emailing [residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk) and quote project reference T156