**Residents Meeting 13.04.2024 – Minutes**

200 in attendance

£427.00 collected towards hall hire costs. George holding onto funds.

**George welcome/update:**

Mentioned the meeting held by the council the previous Saturday had no H&S references.

Advised fire safety procedure and assembly point of the building.

George introduction on his personal situation and feelings regarding the letter. When George received the letter it was really upsetting and horrible, as was for many of us.

Discussion of loan – concerns for legacy to relatives.

Two petitions in circulation, one online and one for those who aren’t online/email.

If you need an interpreter please bring someone along with you.

Its everyone’s own decision to make in the end. Vulnerable should contact others in the group and take with you to meetings. Advice on ensuring you get things in writing, if you speak to the council ensure you get the name of the person you are speaking to.

It was suggested to not attend one to one meetings alone or sign anything sent from the council without checking it out first.

Next meeting to be held on 22nd June, preference for afternoon meeting was expressed by some residents.

**Caro & Ali update:**

**WhatsApp/Email** - At the time of meeting there was 165 members in the WhatsApp group. Since the meeting this has now increased to 182 members. The email flyer group was 147 members this since increased to 158 after the meeting.

If you signed up for the email updates and are not receiving anything when it is mentioned on the group, please in the first instance check your junk/spam folders. If you still have not received anything in there then contact Alison to check the email address submitted. Hek will be available after the meeting to help anyone fill in the online Google form to receive email updates and Alison will be available for anyone wishing to join the WhatsApp Group.

**Website** – [www.residentsresponse.com](http://www.residentsresponse.com)

Remember to check the website regularly for updates. There is the timeline on the main page as well as the link to the online petition, email update form and when our next meeting will be. Ahlam will be available after the meeting to help anyone who wishes to sign the petition.

**Evening Standard Article** – this article about our situation should hopefully be coming out in the next week. A group photo was taken to use for the article. Once it is out, we will share it on the WhatsApp group/website so everyone can circulate it.

**Cladding Feasibility Report** – this is the survey report done by Capital on behalf of Barnett Council that identifies the risks and makes suggestion for remediation work. The report can be found on our website here - <https://www.residentsresponse.com/_files/ugd/08d5f9_1578b30f81274a10b7d928617f20a33b.pdf> and we suggest everyone take the time to read the report as it provides context.

**Petition** – the online petition asking the government to extend the funding to under 11 metre buildings went live last Friday 05.04.2024. We need 10,000 signatures to get a response from government. At the time of meeting we had 1,051 signatures and today we have 1,456 signatures.

It was highlighted that everyone in each household needs to sign this (most houses have multiple residents with their own emails, each person should sign the petition) and we all need to share it constantly with friends, family, work colleagues, WhatsApp/Facebook groups, on social media etc

We need a lot of people doing a little, not a few people trying to get to 10,000 signatures.

A paper petition was bought to the meeting and although this won’t count towards the online petition, will be used for future collective letters/emails.

**Our personal focus** – Caro & Ali are focusing on 3 main aspects

1. Obtaining from the council what other options were looked into and why was replacing the cladding decided to be the best option?
2. What fixes actually need to be done legally? What fixes could be optional? The council in their houses and the price they provided is to eliminate all risk, but what about the option to take the houses from Category 1 to Category 2 and have different ranges of packages so that residents can choose what they wish to get done, and hopefully this will lower the costs to residents.
3. Lobbying government for funding. We’ve been working with David (labour candidate) on strategy and potential avenues to go down. David previous suggested contacting the End Our Cladding Scandal group who have a lot of information on the subject, and one of their members is at the meeting this evening.

**Freedom of Information** – Becky has requested from Barnet Homes a freedom of information request asking for all correspondence relating to the decision to choose concrete cladding to replace timber cladding, all information held by Barnet Homes detailing which alternative options to concrete were considered and why these were not chosen, all information held by Barnet Homes regarding the specific fire safety regulations the current cladding breaches and for any documentation that relates to any risk assessment that has been performed for replacing timber cladding.

Since the meeting Caro has also submitted a further freedom of information request from the council asking to specify what interest free loans have they provided in the last 20 years and why were interest free loans provided (unlike the loans we’ve been offered which will be with interest).

**Ahlam & Jennifer** –

Provided an update on the social media platforms were using. Emphasised that social media can bring the community together. Were a community, people are anxious we want people to know they’re not alone.

Promote the issue and petition through social media. Tag and comment on celebrities, influencers, politicians and anyone with lots of followers to share our story and petition.

Through social media Ahlam was able to connect with Jennifer who is from the national End Our Cladding Scandal group. Use # - see Ahlam for more information on this.

If we support Jennifer’s group and they support ours, then our numbers will grow and create more attention.

**Jennifer:** were just like you, were residents that have all been personally affected. Jennifers own house in South West London in Worcester Park had a fire.

Jennifer can help put us in touch with contacts and has probably been campaigning the most the last 4 years, the campaign in SW London has requested funding for cladded housing under 11ms.

There have been some amendments put forward in SW London, nobody expects the motions to be approved but they are creating media attention.

The SW London group are trying to find new angles to lobby their Council. 3 x buildings are going after developers on a case by case basis. The key point is to try and change regulations.

At the end of the day it shouldn’t be residents responsibly to make the building safe. The responsibility lies with the government for setting the regulations and approving the materials used.

1.3 million people affected – doing a case by case approach trying to go to the developers to pay.

**Beware Of Scams** – be careful of people coming to your door or calling you. At this stage no money should be being paid. If you are unsure ask the group. The council should tell us when to expect a representative to visit so if in doubt don’t provide any personal information, call the council back to ensure it is legitimately from them.

**Mental Health** – remember you are not alone! If you are struggling you can reach out to others in the group, [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org/), <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/mental-health-and-wellbeing>, your GP.

**Language Barrier** – if English isn’t your first language and you would like help, please contact us and let us know what language you speak and we can see if we can translate the documents.

**Next Steps** –

* Continue to promote and share the petition with everyone
* Evening Standard news article should be coming out in the next week – share once released
* Continue to chase the council for unanswered questions regarding the works
* Continue to chase the council, our local MPs and government to lobby for funding
* Next residents meeting will be held on the **22nd June 2024 - Annunciation Church** (please bring a donation to help with hall hire costs)

**Open to the floor:**

**Question/statement:** Can the paper petition be used?

**Discussion:** Yes we will start paper ones which can still be helpful with other aspects, however we would stress that those who can should fill in the online petition as this is what counts towards getting a response from government.

Manual copy of petition: keeping a paper one, can collect names tonight in addition to other petitions. 600 people are members of the Annunciation and can sign.

**Question/statement:** Last meeting it was mentioned about insurance and ours is not cheap. You need to ensure you put non standard construction so that it is valid.

*Jennifer* – its about the timber frame actual construction as well as the combination of timber cladding.

*Caroline* – they shouldn’t be cancelling policies at this point. Advised the council if your insurance gets voided as they’ve been speaking with different insurance companies. Were with Frontier Insurance and we sent the letter to them who checked it over with the underwriters who didn’t have an issue with the letter. They stated our policy continues as normal and we only need to advise if work begins and when it finishes.

We should be insured for non-standard construction, brick & timber frame should be ticked. Insurance Companies will not honour claims if you do not choose the above categories.

**Question/statement:** How many fires has actually happened?

**Discussion:** we know of 2 in recent years that have happened in the area in the wooden clad houses, and in both the fires didn’t spread to neighbouring properties. 1 was a cannabis factory and 1 was when a car crashed into the house.

*George* – the wooden isn’t the same as UVPC so the word ‘similar’ shouldn’t be being used in the councils reports/survey as it is a different product. The council shouldn’t be basing their suggestions on ‘similar’ its either fact or not. At time of getting his house and getting their mortgage they were responsible for their own house maintenance and it was in the contract that they had to paint the houses with special fire proof paint every 5 years.

House Fire in Finchley: Guardian & The Telegraph reported constructed 50’s & 60’s houses had UPVC cladding and we are not sure this is factually correct – are they also timber frame or UPVC only? Jennifer said – it’ a structure of timber frame and plastic, the cavity is what causes the fires to spread.

Caro commented that she has heard of a person who updated their insurance Company only for it to be cancelled. The Council have said this should not be a reason to cancel insurance. It is unsure as to why the insurance Company cancelled – was it due to cladding or inadequate firebreaks? Caro said she has had no problem with Frontier Insurance.

**Question/statement:** her parents house on Gervase Road – house was on fire next door and fire didn’t spread. Go back to the council with these examples and situations as proof that the wooden clad houses are not the same risk as UVPC.

**Question/statement:** they built an extension and had to use cladding and it was the council who came and approved it. Perhaps these tenants can use this information as an angle as they were misadvised?

One group member applied for an extension and was told she had to use wood.

**Question/statement:** brother worked in Bromley Council, done some digging about building regulations and there are no regulations that the council have any right to enforce this on houses of our age. Taller buildings yes, but not normal houses. This will have an incredible far reaching effect across the whole country if its enforced.

*Jennifer* – the age of our houses is an interesting fact we should look more into this. There may be something about a 30 year time line between 1992 and 2022 – where build regs and control was out of control.

Will these regulations now spread to cottages with thatched roofs and listed buildings?

**Question/statement:** no legal reason as present that you need to do this, he works in building industry. Council is trying to get us to agree to party wall if there is 6-7 houses it going to cost loads. Building control was the first department the council should have gone to, but apparently building control has only heard about it any not actually been involved. Building control is the higher authority so if Barnet Council has problem with the buildings they should have gone to them. Barnet council has gone straight to Barnett Homes.

*Ross Houston* – the council doesn’t want to do this. Its new territory for everyone and is a national issue. Council has a statutory duty to act on category 1 hazard risk. We need to press central government and acknowledges it’s not our fault. Ross Will ask about loans to those who don’t get building works through council contractors. He cannot make a committed to no cost remedial work as they don’t have the funds for that.

Barnet Council have stated that if they believe there to be a Category 1 hazard they need to look at it under their responsibilities as a Council. NFFPS?

**Question/statement:** How did they come to this £23K

George is concerned that we don’t have money for these repairs so please explain how the Council arrived at £23,000. Why don’t the Council help us to go to the Government for a grant? They have made everyone despondent with the lack of information and we deserve a written apology.

*Ross Houston* – the figures were done by reputable contractors. Ross advised that details of how the loans will work are not yet available.

We should be kept informed.

**Question/statement:** the councilneeds to be transparent in the company they’ve chosen is the right one. Saracens was given interest free loan to build a stand so why would we not be given loan interest free – point to research.

What other companies were looked at?

**Question/statement:** how did they choose this material, do windows have to be changed?? He doesn’t think Capital have done the analysis very well. How many companies were looked at.

**Question/statement:** Concerns if surveys done on same street on council homes as freeholders, will the council condemn the whole street as category 1 on basis of probability.

**Discussion:** this hasn’t actually happened yet. The council could base on probability issue a category 1 hazard notice to non surveyed homes if multiple other homes have had surveys and show the risk. However, if we would appeal the enforcement category 1 the council has to prove this for each individual house and they wouldn’t have that proof without the survey.

**Question/statement:** concern that this will be widespread and looking at statistics over 2 million homes may be affected nationwide, which if you do £23K x that amount of homes it could be a bill up to £45 billion to replace all.

**Question/statement:** Caro asked if once the surveys were carried out, if copies would be made available and that if our property is deemed hazardous, the Council could take residents to court. Caro suggested we should only have the survey carried out on the proviso that no enforcements can be made as a result of the survey. Barnet Council have said the risks are not imminent which suggests we should be given time to ‘make good’ any issues.

It was asked if we could have a letter to say there would be no enforcements as a result of the survey, Ross said he can not promise that but would work with the residents on this.

Ross stated he wants the government to take responsibility – the residents questioned that if this is the case - before the Council acted - shouldn’t they have waited for a response from the Secretary of State?

One resident asked if the letters they had sent to the Secretary of State could be shared on their website to show their support of the residents, Ross said he could ask if this was possible and told the group he has a meeting coming up with Michael Gove soon.

**Question/statement:** One resident expressed their confusion over who has issues the actions being taken by Barnet Council – is it the Council themselves or the government? On the website, the actions are stated as being carried out by Barnet Council but it is unclear who instructed them.

**Question/statement:** Some residents have not received all of the letters and that Grenfell is different materials to our houses so is not a comparable to our properties. Barnet Council have not studied the statistics closely enough before issuing instructions to residents.

*Jennifer* said this instruction has not come from the government, it is s new standard instruction PAS9980 which is for low-rise flats. A company called Capitol carried out surveys for this and they are on the governments list of recommended Company’s.

One resident has asked that we should be informed of how and why Capitol was chosen? What criteria did they meet?

One resident asked how many Companies put forward a tender to the Council?

One resident said there are only 580 homes in Barnet so the contractor should be national?

One resident said there have been no examples of any of the materials being used and there could be better quality materials available.

It is rumoured the Barnet Council want to change windows and doors as well as cladding.

*Ross* says as no surveys have been carried out yet, a best estimate has been used – it is a best estimate by professionals. Until the scope of works is determined by the surveys all they can give is an estimate.

Ross said in the next borough to us there are examples of cladding and insulation that have been charged at £35,000. Capitol are a reputable company.

There is a timeline of how long works are expected to take on Barnet’s website.

**Question/statement:** One resident commented that high-rise evacuation is an issue and this is not the same for our houses. We have fire alarms and sprinkler systems which Barnet Council has not taken into account. We can surely take these as a cheaper option to re-placing cladding?

**Question/statement:** Barnet Council should get planning permissions and building control as a blanket for the Borough to help residents as it will collectively lower costs.

*Ross* said that Category 1 criteria can be discussed. The West Finchley fire spread very quickly even in the daytime. Surveys are critical. If after remediation you still have a Category 1 property, then action will be taken.

**Question/statement:** We should speak to the opposition party to see what their views are on cladding and what they are going to do with our Council tax payments. Referenced Shakespeare’s house.

Ross said the Council have tried to work ‘cross-party’. We need to work together. A letter has gone to the government from both parties.

**Question/statement:** What can Ross do to help us? Why is it just Barnet Council issuing demands of their residents? Ross said other boroughs have been informed as well as the Fire Brigade and the London Assembly.

**Question/statement:** What will the Council Survey be focused on? Fire safety? What does this mean for residents? Ross said the Council are looking at cladding specifically and other unique features. Barnet Council will sign off houses as Category 1 if they are deemed by the survey. A resident said that Barnet Council do not even know what our houses are built of.

It was asked if we can get our own survey? It was said that we are not informed of what qualifications Capitol have, will they use one house for the whole road?

Caro commented that surely a survey has to be carried out on every single house?

Hek said he sent a letter to the local MP, Matthew Offord who replied saying he didn’t believe that cladded houses are high risk to why are Barnet Council pursuing this?

*Jennifer* explained that Matthew’s comment was generalised across all cladded properties and that the government does not have the money to deal with all of the cladded properties across the UK.

**Question/statement:** The residents want to know if any assessments/surveys of homes have started. One resident said someone claiming to be from the council had knocked on their door, been inside their home and looked around.

**Question/statement:** It was mentioned that the houses with party walls are double bricked and a fire taking place in one of these houses did not spread. The Finchley house involved in a fire was covered in UPVC – there is no report available yet. The wood is not the issue on these houses – it is the gap between the inner and outer wall. The fire brigade said they did not know what started the fire in the Finchley property. The fire report has been requested. In the 1980’s the houses were ‘fire boarded’. We have time to leave out properties should we need, the Finchley house is different to the ones in Burnt Oak, the Finchley houses were built in the 1960’s.

**Question/statement:** It was mentioned that residents have asked the Council for the next steps but we have not heard anything yet.

**Question/statement:** The going rate of a cladded house in Burnt Oak was discussed and whether the Council would buy all of the houses back.

**Question/statement:** if central government is not paying funding, can all the previous owners be contacted to pay pro rata fees.

*Ross Houston* – not how it works.

Meeting closed.