

## Historic and Ongoing Issues – Brief {Draft}

### Introduction

Central West is a block of 69 apartments on Ruislip Road, Greenford. The block is owned and managed by Shepherds Bush Housing Association (SBHA). The block has significant building safety issues, which has subsequently given rise to historical issues - that remain ongoing - i.e., no gas and electrical challenges. In light of these issues SBHA has, in principal, given approval for a 'Buyback' scheme to purchase each individual flat from the respective leaseholder contingent upon all 69 households agreeing to sell. NewmanFrancis have been appointed by SBHA to provide impartial mediation and resident engagement services during the 'Buy-back' proposal consultation phase.

### Key points

There are strong concerns and questions from leaseholders regarding the SBHA handling of the buybacks, the ballot process, and the remediation of Central West:

- **Resident Queries:** There is confusion about whether SBHA or Guinness Partnership is responsible for decisions, with a need for transparency on the roles and responsibilities.
- **Buyback Process:** Leaseholders have been urging for a swift decision on the buyback offers (including obtaining supporting data on the valuations they received), expressing frustration over the prolonged uncertainty affecting their ability to sell their properties.
- **Ballot Concerns:** Questions are raised about the binding nature of the ballot, the fairness of requiring 100% agreement, and the communication surrounding it (i.e., lack of clarity and factoring in public and school holidays.)
- **Remediation Process:** There is a clear concern among leaseholders about the timeline and specifics of the remediation works, including whether there will be internal works within properties and how these will affect leaseholders' living conditions.
- **Communication and Decision-Making:** Leaseholders are seeking transparency and speed in decision-making, particularly regarding buybacks and the ballot process. There is a sense of urgency for SBHA to act timely and provide detailed information.
- **Financial and Legal Queries:** There are numerous questions about financial implications, such as mortgage arrangements during remediation, compensation for ongoing disturbance, stress, and the coverage of costs related to decanting and relocation.
- **Wellbeing:** Leaseholders describe being distressed due to inadequate heating and living conditions, leading to difficulties in daily activities like bathing and cooking. The situation, they say, not only affects their comfort but also consumes additional time and financial resources. Damp, mould, leaks, and heating inefficiencies exacerbate these challenges.
- **Relocation & Accommodation:** Leaseholders express concerns about temporary accommodation, and rising rent and service charges. They seek assurances that their needs will be met, including like-for-like housing and the suspension of any rising costs.
- **Compensation:** Leaseholders are concerned about compensation for the stress caused over the past years and the financial implications of moving.

Leaseholders are seeking compensation, direct answers, clear deadlines, and detailed information on the entire processes to alleviate the stress and uncertainty they have been facing.

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### Ongoing issues

#### 1. Building Safety Concerns

- Leaseholders have raised concerns about building safety – specifically addressed in the Fire Risk Appraisal External Wall (FRAEW) document. Other leaseholders have described the presence of mould, holes in walls, and pigeon infestations, indicating potential health and safety hazards.

- Leaseholders explained that there is a lack of clarity and transparency regarding the remediation process (as they feel that the unanimous acceptance of the buyback proposal in its current form is not attainable), leading to uncertainty among them about the safety of their living conditions.

#### 2. Lack of Consultation

- Leaseholders felt that they have not been adequately consulted or involved in the decision-making processes related to the remediation of Central West. Leaseholders said that the main focus has been around the buyback proposal (with little to no remediation involvement.)

#### 3. Financial Burdens and Uncertainties

- Leaseholders said they are facing financial burdens, including increased rent and service charges, without a clear understanding of how these costs can be made given their current living conditions. Moreover, leaseholders do not know how this will be managed during a remediation process.

- Concerns have also been raised by leaseholders about the affordability and location of alternative/like-for-like accommodation – if the buyback is agreed and if remediation proceeds – and the potential impact on leaseholders' financial stability.

#### 4. Lack of Clarity and Communication

- Leaseholders expressed frustration over the lack of clear and detailed information provided by SBHA regarding buybacks (i.e., lack of supporting data/research for the assertions made in the landlord offer communications), and remediation (the works, timelines, and financial implications.)

#### 5. Individual Needs and Vulnerabilities

- Leaseholders pointed out that some of their neighbours have specific needs due to disabilities and other vulnerabilities, which needed to have been considered in the unanimous buybacks acceptance stipulations (and for any remediation plans or rehousing arrangements.) They said that they required assurances that these individual circumstances would be taken into account and that appropriate support will be provided to address those needs.

### Conclusion

The experiences of leaseholders at Central West, are further detailed in the report, “Central West Leaseholder Engagement and Mediation project” issued by NewmanFrancis to SBHA (23 December 2023.) The key recommendations of the report included: 1. SBHA reviewing the buyback proposal feasibility and efficacy of the current ‘one size fits all’ approach. 2. That if remediation becomes necessary, the Landlord offer sets out a leaseholder orientated plan to for the decanting and recanting approach, which leaseholders can feed into. 3. That SBHA grant each leaseholder a minimum of at least a 5-year lease extension or grant shared owners an additional share/staircasing amount.