

John Aird Court windows Working Group - Meeting summary

Date:

30 November 2022, 6-7pm

Location:

Hybrid – in person at 155 Westbourne Terrace and online via TEAMS

Introduction:

This windows working group has been set up given the high level of interest in the new windows planned for John Aird Court under major works project Y107. Westminster City Council is keen to ensure residents are involved in the process and want to ensure that the windows fitted are of a design that is supported by the majority of residents, whilst also ensuring value for money.

All residents were given the opportunity to register interest in joining the group and 18 residents expressed an interest in being involved. This is the first meeting of the group and further meetings will be held as the planning process for the new windows develops. Residents will have further opportunities to join the group if there is interest.

1. Introduction and welcomes

Vicky Simpson, Resident Advocate for Westminster City Council, introduced herself and the purpose of the meeting.

Attendees:

Kaivery Heslop (KH) – Asset Strategy Team, Westminster City Council

Vicky Simpson (VS) – Resident Advocacy Team, Westminster City Council

7 resident attendees from John Aird Court (3 tenants and 4 leaseholders)

2. Code of conduct

VS ran through the key aims of the group:

- To work with WCC and the contractor to assist with the window design, materials and possible supplier selection.

VS also ran through some basic code of conduct principles for the group:

- All voices are equal whether tenant or leaseholder
- Treat others with respect
- No talking over each other
- Use respectful language at all times

3. Project update and current proposal for windows:

KH gave a general update on the planned major works project. The Client Brief is currently going through a budget review. The main content of the brief is complete,

however the budget summary is having to be looked at again due to rising costs of materials and inflation generally. This is not unique to John Aird Court, and all projects are having to be re-looked at and reviewed to ensure there are sufficient funds set aside for the projects.

KH confirmed that the current budget for the windows (based on UPVC) is c.2.5million.

Unfortunately this budget review has delayed the sign-off of the client brief and this is now expected to happen in January. The project will then pass over to the contractor to start working on it. KH confirmed that John Aird Court is being prioritised, so we hope this will be ready in early January.

Q. Does that mean you expect the outcomes from this group to be complete by end of January, as fear that timescale is too tight?

VS clarified that was not the case. The groups' role will run beyond Kaivery's involvement in the project. Once the client brief is handed over to Axis, we expect the windows group to work with Axis (and WCC) to further develop the design of the new windows. The group will only disband once an agreed design and planning approval has been achieved.

4. Round table – window priorities:

VS went around the room to ask why residents wanted to join the group, and what their priorities for the new windows are:

Resident 1 stated she joined the group as she wanted new windows yesterday. The new windows will improve the quality of life for residents (both by reduced sound and increased warmth). Resident was also keen to be involved in the design of the windows, but queried whether residents would be allowed to have a say in this, or do the windows need to be a like for like configuration?

KH advised that this will be for Axis design team to look into. Planning are likely to prefer a like for like design, but if a new configuration is still in keeping then slight changes may be possible. Options can be looked at during future sessions and Axis can possibly put forward something for pre-planning application guidance.

VS advised that all applications are reviewed on merit and from experience on other estates, changes have been allowed (white to grey for example). So if there is a change residents want to see, then its worth putting forward a change to be considered.

ACTION – KH to try and get some initial guidance from planning as to whether a change in configuration would be considered.

Q. Did you say at the last meeting that it was up to the mansions opposite to approve the window design?

VS confirmed this is not the case. As part of the planning approval process, the design will be out for wider public consultation and any local resident can make comments and support or object the proposal. The point of this group is to get a

design that JAC residents are supportive of, so when it does go to planning, you can put forward your support. This gives the application a much greater chance of success.

Resident 2 queried why would we want the same material window fitted as now given all the problems with condensation and mildew build up on the current windows?

Resident 1 stated that she would prefer to keep a slim line profile over thicker UPVC as she is concerned about loss of light from the thicker UPVC frames. Unless you can get slim line UPVC windows?

VS advised that she had seen a company online that offer slim line UPVC windows. It is certainly something we can ask Axis to explore.

Resident 3 agreed with others that it's not worth fitting new windows that are the same as the current ones as they are not fit for purpose. The current design is an issue as she can't clean the middle pane of the window. If we had UPVC we could have a tilt and turn option to allow cleaning.

Another resident however stated she did not want inward opening windows. The window needs to open outwards as windows are a possible second means of escape.

Resident 4 said he had the same cleaning difficulties as Resident 3 so would be interested in a different configuration.

Resident 4 said one of his priorities is to focus on costs. Like others, the safety and warmth qualities will be important as well but he wants to ensure we are mindful of costs for leaseholders.

Resident 3 stated the reason she wanted to be involved is because she wants to have a say on what's fitted to her home. Contractors don't live here, the planning team don't live here. If you don't get involved, you can't complain further down the line if you're not happy with what's put in.

KH advised that he had carried out a site visit recently to a void property and saw the configuration difficulties with a window located above a sink and being unable to open it. It would make sense to look at this as part of the design process.

The overriding view of those present is that the new windows are essential and necessary to improve residents' quality of life. Several residents stated that water currently trickles down all windows in the morning and needs to be cleaned down daily.

Resident 5 asked whether all windows be changed including the bathroom and toilet ones?

KH - Yes.

Resident 6 agreed with views of others but said she would like some expert opinions to come to these meetings to go through the pros and cons of different designs.

Resident 7 also agreed with this suggestion. She would like more detail on what is suitable for her flat.

5. Future meetings:

The round table discussion leads on nicely to what residents want to see covered at future meetings.

VS confirmed that they will ask Axis to invite some potential window companies along to discuss design options at future meetings.

KH confirmed the contractor should be able to bring samples of profiles so residents can see the difference.

Q. when you say contractor, do you mean Axis? Yes.

MB noted that new windows are currently being fitted at Wharncliffe Gardens estate and these are not bulky.

VS suggested that residents could go and have a look at these. We will also see if we can get some samples brought down for a future meeting.

Q. Can the group be given feedback from other residents on other estates to see how the windows are? As an example, one of the residents had seen that Hallfield has scaffolding going back up for some reason. Is there a fault with those windows?

VS explained the situation at Marlow House on the Hallfield estate as this is a project she is also involved in. There is no fault with the windows, however the change in window profile did bring to the fore, an issue with the tiling around some of the windows, which resulted in water ingress. It is this issue with the tiling that is now being rectified.

Q. What impact does this have on leaseholders billing?

VS confirmed that leaseholders at that block were only being charged for the works to the tiling. There is no cost for the scaffolding going back up.

Q. about ventilation. Mould and damp is a key concern following recent events in Rochdale.

KH confirmed that the project includes fitting new extractor fans.

VS clarified that this is only included for tenants, but there will be the option for leaseholders to opt in.

Q. Will the fans be Positive Input Ventilation fans to properties that don't currently have them?

KH confirmed that they will be.

Q. Could residents have these fans fitted sooner if they contacted repairs?

KH confirmed that, yes they could.

Q. One of the residents was interested in getting a portable air conditioning unit for the warmer months, but these need to vent out of windows. Could any consideration be given to that as part of the design?

KH advised that this was unlikely as it would be quite niche and not a priority for the majority of people.

Residents did agree that some of the flats do get very hot so would be interested in whether there are other options to help with the high heat levels?

Q. Could solar protection film be added to the windows? This has been included in the window design for Wharncliffe Gardens as they have this same issue.

KH confirmed it was possible, but would be at an extra cost.

VS agreed it is something we can ask the contractor to cost up and see if it's something residents see as good value. VS asked KH whether adding a solar film would need to be for every window, or could it be done as an opt in?

KH stated that the contractor will need to advise on this.

Residents agreed that all these things being talked about need to be costed up so we can discuss and understand what is best value.

Q. Will tenants have the choice to opt in and not just leaseholders?

VS said it wasn't possible to answer that at the moment as we will need to understand if it can be done on an ad-hoc basis to some windows or if it needs to be on all.

Q. What is the situation was with building control and fire escapes. If a window opens outwards, would it not block the balcony as a fire escape route? Will window opening need to be restricted?

KH advised that the designers will need to look at this and it will be agreed on a flat by flat basis.

Q. Will we be able to recycle the old windows in order to get some reduction (even if small) off the cost of the new ones? The current windows are high quality steel so there should be some benefit.

KH confirmed he will ask the contractor to look into this possibility as part of the client brief.

Residents are keen for the contractor to look at a number of different manufacturers to ensure we get a range of costs and try to keep this down where possible.

KH stated that cost is only one aspect. The manufacturers need to be able to follow through with supplying the number we need and on time. They will also need the relevant guarantees.

Q. What is the length of the window guarantee?

VS explained that the length of guarantee is likely to vary depending on the supplier. There is also likely to be a cost difference between a 10 and 15 year guarantee for example. Minimum stipulated in the client brief is usually 10 years.

The lifespan for windows would be expected to be at least 25 years.

It was noted that there are benefits to leaseholders of double glazing. The current windows are only single glazed and therefore whilst the frame is the responsibility of Westminster, the glazing and locks are currently the responsibility of the lessee. Once a double-glazed unit goes in, Westminster will be responsible for all the maintenance of that unit.

When do Westminster expect the planning application to be submitted?

VS explained that we had previously anticipated to have the planning application ready around April time, but now with the budget review taking place, this will likely be pushed back a month or two.

Dates are not set however as we need to strike a balance – we want to use this group forum to hopefully get a design residents are happy with and we don't want to rush that, but at the same time, we don't want to drag it out either.

6. Information sharing:

Q. Will all residents be sent details of the discussions taking place at each of these meetings?

VS confirmed that we want to keep residents informed, but there is a balance needed between keeping people updated and bombarding them with too much information. We will share updates with residents at key stages but not necessarily after every meeting. The website will be updated however with the notes of every meeting.

A resident agreed that whilst they are keen for openness and transparency, the point of the group is to have the detailed discussions and then share the important information and key stages.

Residents need to be kept informed at every stage as no single group should take decisions that effect everyone.

VS confirmed that the group was not a decision-making body. It was a consultative forum only. Any decisions needing to be made would need to be put to the wider residents.

It was queried whether residents will be given further opportunities to join this group going forward, or will we only stick with this group and that's it?

VS confirmed that when the next major works update goes out, we will mention the group again and give residents a further opportunity to join. There were also some residents who indicated they were going to join tonight and haven't, that will be included in the circulation of the notes and future meeting dates. VS expects the next

update to be sent towards the end of January once the client brief budget has been reviewed and confirmed.

Other residents suggested the Residents' Association also has a role to play in ensuring feedback to their members on what is covered at these meetings. Word of mouth can also be used.

VS asked residents to let her know if they were happy to share email addresses on a collective group email. It would help as the group goes forward to be able to discuss things over email and share ideas this way, not necessarily always in a meeting.

Key actions summary and meeting close:

- VS to email out a summary of the meeting. Notes to also be published on the website.
- All attendees to email back and confirm if ok to share email or not
- VS to send location details for blocks in Wharnclyff Gardens where new windows are being fitted so anyone interested can walk up and have a look.
- VS to arrange the second meeting of the group in January.

Post-meeting summary table of design items for contractor to look at and give pros/cons and indicative costings:

| Design feature: | Options to look at: |
|--------------------------|--|
| Window frame material | UPVC vs Aluminium |
| Frame profile/ thickness | Variations in UPVC options? |
| Window configuration | Like for like. What other options available and cost differences if applicable |
| Window openings | Inwards / outwards / tilt and turn |
| Solar protective film | Required for all/ none or can this be optional? |
| Guarantee length | 10yr /15 yr etc |