



Meeting summary and Question and Answer Sheet

The questions in this Question and Answer document were raised by residents who attended the introductory meeting held at City of Westminster College on Tuesday 20 September 2022.

Consultation Meeting:

20 September 2022 at 6:30pm

Location:

City of Westminster College, Paddington Green Campus

Westminster City Council project attendees:

James Long, Client Surveying Manager, Asset Strategy Team
Kaivery Heslop, Client Surveyor, Asset Strategy Team
Vicky Simpson – Resident Advocate

Ward councillors Melvyn Caplan and Lorraine Dean also in attendance. Apologies from Cllr Sara Hassan.

13 residents attended the meeting.

Summary / Introduction:

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

A copy of the slides used for the presentation can be found on our website here:

www.westminster.gov.uk/john-aird-court-refurbishment-works-project-y107/

If you do not have access to the internet and would like a copy of the slides, you can contact us on 0800 358 3783 and ask to speak to Vicky Simpson in the Resident Advocate Team.

Q&A

Queries relating to the scope of works

Q. The higher numbered blocks have all had roof replacements (116-228). Block 127-165 is currently listed as needing a new roof as part of these major works but a resident stated that this was also done previously with all the other higher numbered blocks.

A. Kaivery advised that this would be checked and the client brief would be amended if necessary.

Post meeting update – We can confirm that the roof to block 127-165 will still be included for replacement. Repair works to block 127-165 were carried out previously, which consisted of an overlay system however leaseholders were not charged for this work. Based on current condition surveys, it is our intention to replace the roof.

Q. Some blocks are affected by large trees that block out the light. Will these be removed or cut back?

A. Our intention is to look at crowning of the trees where possible. Westminster's arborculturalist does not usually authorise the removal of trees without significant justification for it. Simply put, we will be led by WCCs arborculturalist on what we can and can't do.

Q. Why are front doors being replaced again? These were done in 2006-08?

A. The recognised national guidance for purpose-built blocks of flats is, "Fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats 2012". Under this guidance, flats in blocks over six storeys are required to be fitted with FD30S doors. Whilst some doors in these blocks appear to meet this standard, many do not. FD30S doors offer additional protection over an FD30 door, as they also include self-closers and strips and seals against smoke. All doors will be individually surveyed by the contractor onsite and any doors that do not meet the FD30S standard will be replaced with doors to that standard.

For blocks over three storeys, the flat entrance doors should be FD30 doors. Whilst many appear to meet the standard, there are examples that do not. Therefore, these doors must be upgraded.

As front entrance doors are demised to leaseholders, we are only due to change doors to tenanted flats where required. This item is therefore not recharged to leaseholders.

Q. Will leaseholders have the option to have new front doors fitted?

A. Yes – we will offer leaseholders the option to opt-in to have a new front door fitted. Details will be sent once the work is onsite and the contractor is able to carry out surveys and confirm the exact price. If leaseholders choose to opt-in they will be invoiced separately for the door.

Q. Are balcony doors included? Most were replaced in 2006-08.

A. Some tenanted properties had new balcony door/ window sets fitted previously, and in those cases, they do not need to be replaced again. Where the original balcony door/window set is still in place, then this will be replaced as part of these works.

Q. Is balcony drainage included? Can an overflow be put in?

A. Yes, we can confirm that balcony drainage works are included in the major works. By carrying out works to the balcony drainage, this should alleviate the need for any additional overflow pipe however a provisional budget has now been included for additional works here if needed.

Q. The replacement of the cold-water storage tanks includes ‘associated pipe work replacement’ – does this mean that all the old water pipes serving flats are also going to be replaced?

A. There are no plans to replace all the pipework across the estate. The associated pipework to be done alongside the cold water storage tanks refers to the pipework directly off the tank within the tank room only.

Q. Will the tanks be changed like for like?

A. Yes.

Q. A number of areas are affected by tree damage – a wall to the rear of 216-228 and an area under the balcony at block 127-149. What can be done about this?

A. The contractor will be asked to allow for lopping or pruning of the trees in conjunction with recommendations from Westminster’s Arboriculturist. Repairs to the damaged areas will then be carried out as necessary. Following the meeting, Kaivery has been out to inspect the crack to the property in block 127-149. He has confirmed that this crack is not structural or connected to the trees outside in anyway. This is a hairline crack only to the balcony and not a cause for concern.

Q. If solar PV panels are fitted to the roofs, what will happen to the power generated?

The power generated from solar PV panels would first be used to power the communal services at the block. As the power cannot be stored, any excess generated may be sold back to the grid or used to power other local service (an electric vehicle charging point for example). Residents will benefit from a reduction in their communal service charge for electricity.

Queries relating to the new windows

Q. What is the likelihood that windows will be aluminium?

A. We have sought initial guidance from Westminster’s planning department, and they have advised that aluminium frames would be preferred to uPVC as they would more closely match the existing slim profile of the windows. They have said however that uPVC could still be considered. In light of the extent of work needed to the blocks, and likely high cost of the works, our preference will be to fit uPVC windows. The Westminster Asset Team believe that uPVC offers the best value for money for residents, however this will be subject to planning approval.

During the design stage of the works, we will ask our contractor to obtain some comparative prices of both uPVC and aluminium to share with residents for further discussion.

Q. As John Aird Court borders private blocks in a conservation area, do the private owners have any input into the type of windows fitted at John Aird Court?

A. As part of the planning process, any resident in the surrounding area will be notified of the proposed window design and will be able to submit comments, either in favour of the proposal or state objections. By involving residents in the design process for the new windows we hope to have a design that all John Aird Court (JAC) residents are happy with. We would therefore hope all JAC residents will send their support to the planning department when the application is submitted. The planning department will consider and review all comments received to aid their decision making, so the more support they have from residents, the greater chances of approval.

Q. How do the weather conditions affect the different window materials (uPVC and Aluminium)?

A. Both materials are required to meet rigorous standards so this should not matter.

Q. What are the differences between aluminium and uPVC, is one better than the other?

A. The main difference is in the profile of the windows. Aluminium can be much thinner and would more closely resemble the current style of windows. Aluminium are more expensive than uPVC (approximately a third more).

Q. How long will the guarantee be on the new windows?

A. During the meeting, Kaivery responded that this would be up to 25 years. To clarify however, it was meant that the lifespan of the new windows would be at least 25 years, the length of formal guarantee however would be dependent on the manufacturer selected. Most window manufacturers also have different terms of guarantee for different window components, for example ironmongery is usually only guaranteed for a couple of years, whereas the window profiles are often guaranteed for much longer (around 10 – 15 years). The length of window guarantees available will be assessed during the design stage of the works and we will engage residents in this process.

Q. Cllr Caplan stated that he had received a confirmation from the Cabinet Member for Housing at the last full council meeting that she would respect the previous regime's commitment to residents. This commitment is that residents will be involved in the selection of a specialist window contractor for John Aird Court that provides affordable double glazing for all residents. Please confirm.

A. As noted during the initial presentation, Westminster is committed to fully engaging with residents in relation to the new windows for the block. A windows

working group will be set up to allow all aspects of the windows to be discussed ahead of a planning application being submitted.

Q. Will the proposed windows working group be representative of both tenants and leaseholders?

A. Yes. We will write to all residents with more detail about this shortly and will ask interested residents to put themselves forward. We aim to have around 10% of the block involved in the group and intend to have this reflect the tenure of the blocks overall.

Q. Windows can have a coating to reduce solar gain. Can this be considered?

A. Westminster will consider this and will be added to the client brief for Axis Europe to explore.

Q. Did you considered triple glazing?

A. The cost of triple glazing would be much higher than double glazing. The improvement from single to double glazing will be significant for residents and we do not feel the additional cost of triple glazing would bring much greater benefits.

Q. Can you considered acoustic glass to help reduce the noise levels?

A. As above, the additional cost associated with acoustic glass is not felt to bring significant additional benefit to residents over the move to double glazing from the current single glazing.

Q. Can leaseholders be offered an opt in / opt out of the window replacement?

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.

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.

Q. Why is scaffolding needed to change the windows? These could be changed from inside the flat and would be significantly cheaper?

When we carry out major works, we must comply with strict health and safety guidelines. This is important to ensure the safety of both our contractors and our residents. Scaffolding is necessary to enable the safe replacement of windows across a large block such as John Aird Court. This is because the transportation of large windows through the communal parts of the block, and particularly up several flights of stairs carries significant risks. One of the key elements involved in window replacement works is the making good required around the areas where the old window is removed, and new one fitted. The new window also needs to be properly sealed from the outside to ensure it is watertight. It is not possible for this external work to be carried out safely by someone hanging out of a window.

It is also worth noting that the scaffold will also be utilised to enable other works to be carried out alongside the window replacement (roof renewal to some blocks, and external repairs and decorations). Scaffolding is the safest access route for all the necessary works.

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.

[Leasehold / cost related queries](#)

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

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 (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.

Q. Why have costs not been shared in advance of the meeting when this was previously promised?

A. We were unfortunately not aware of this commitment having been made. We do not normally share costs at this early stage of the planning process as they are our budget estimates only and may not be accurate. Full cost estimates are shared at the next stage, once our contractor has been able to review the planned works and can give a more accurate estimate of how much the work will cost.

Q. Can you give approximate costs? Leaseholders need to have an idea of how much this will cost.

A. The total budget estimate for the all the works to the blocks is £7,014,664

Based on this budget figure, leasehold liabilities are anticipated to range as follows:
Highest: £59,136 Lowest: £5,046 Average: £35,744

The figures noted above are slightly higher than the figures given at the meeting on the 20 September. Following feedback from the meeting, our Asset Team have reviewed some aspects of work and made additional budget provisions. An additional budget has been included in the client brief to cover asphalt repairs to tenant balconies, repairs to asphalt walkways, repairs to cracks to soffits and possible replacement of cast iron downpipes. It is important to note that this is a very rough guide only. It doesn't take account of items in the budget that are not rechargeable to leaseholders, or any adjustments needed based on different block sizes, bedspaces or lease terms. The total figure also includes a 10% contingency. We will only be able to give accurate leasehold estimates for each flat at the Section 20 consultation stage.

Q. Leaseholders asked for clarification on the basis for the “low”, “average”, and “high” anticipated costs (i.e. is this based on the number of windows/bedspaces etc?)

A. The estimate high, low, and average leasehold costs are very guide calculations only based on the total budget figure and divided by bedspaces. These figures do

not take account of individual lease conditions, and they also do not account for items of work which may not be rechargeable to leaseholders (the total budget figure includes a budget for flat entrance door replacements to tenant only properties for example).

Once we have costs from the contractor, we will be able to give more accurate cost estimates to leaseholders and these will take account of individual lease conditions.

Q. Residents requested a detailed breakdown of the estimated costs for the windows and other components of the major works programme.

A. We don't normally share a breakdown at this stage as these are our budget estimates only. We have considered resident feedback on this however, and can confirm a breakdown of our estimates for the key components can be shared on request. We cannot publish this detail on our website due to commercial sensitivity, so residents will need to contact us using the details on page 10 to request a copy.

Q. Why is this work being done now when there is a 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.

We are mindful of the cost to leaseholders and this is why we offer a range of payment plans. 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. Could payment plans be extended given the current cost of living crisis – up to 10 or 15 years, rather than 5?

A. Leaseholder concerns regarding repayment terms has been fed back following the meeting to our Leasehold team. As noted above, the terms of our deferred payment scheme are currently under review. We will share details of any further flexibility we can offer leaseholders as soon as we are able.

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.

Queries relating to the delivery of the works

Q. Previous major works carried out were done poorly, what assurance do residents have that these works will be done to a good standard?

A. We are very sorry to hear that residents have had a bad experience of works in the past. Westminster entered into new 10 year partnering contracts in 2018 and we now have 2 contractors dedicated to delivering major works across the City – United Living in the South and Central areas, and Axis Europe in the North and West areas. Axis Europe will be carrying out the work at John Aird Court and given their 10-year partnership with us we have a good working relationship with them. It also means they have added incentive to do a good job as we can easily call them back to rectify issues if they arise.

We also have strong processes in place that ensure works are monitored whilst in progress. We are also keen to include residents in this process and invite residents to attend our end of works inspections before the contractor leaves site.

Q. Residents noted that they should not be charged for any corrective or additional work that may need to be done due to the initial work not meeting requirements or being poor quality.

A. All work carried out under the major works will be covered by a 12-month defects liability period on completion. This means the contractor is required to return and address any issues with the work at no additional cost. Key items such as the new windows and roofs will also come with their own bespoke guarantees.

Q. What order will the blocks be worked on?

A. This will be decided during the detailed planning stage by the contractor. The contractor is likely to start one end of the estate (either high or low numbers) and work across in sequence.

Q. Does all this work need to be done at the same time, can we not spread the works out over several years?

The reason for grouping large scale items of work together into a package of major works is to enable cost savings and efficiencies. Full scaffolding is required to enable the safe replacement of windows across the block. Given the cost of scaffolding, it is more economical to ensure all other scaffold dependant works that are needed, are picked up at the same time. Delaying some works by a few years and then having to put full scaffold up again would result in much higher costs to leaseholders and the

council. There would also potentially be interim repairs needed in the meantime at a further cost. During the next planning phase of the works, our contractor will be asked to review all the proposed work and provide cost estimates. If there are any elements of work that could potentially be postponed to help keep costs down, we will consider this.

Summary and next steps

- A dedicated webpage for the John Aird Court 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/john-aird-court-refurbishment-works-project-y107/
- We have reviewed the feedback from the introductory meeting and updated the client brief as needed. A copy is available to view on the webpage.
- The client brief will now go through an internal sign off process at Westminster which will see the brief passed to Axis, our major works contractor, to start developing a plan to deliver the works. 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.
- Further investigation will take place into specific areas of tree damage and a referral to our insurers will be made if necessary.
- We will write to residents asking for interested residents to put themselves forward to be part of the windows working group. We will look at all aspects of the proposed windows to ensure we have a design the majority of residents are supportive of.
- We will keep the RA updated on our progress, however 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. We expect this meeting to take place in the early part of 2023.

More information

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 in the Resident Advocate Team
- Emailing residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk and quote project reference Y107
- Website – www.westminster.gov.uk/john-aird-court-refurbishment-works-project-y107/