



John Aird Court – Major Works update meeting

John Aird Court Meeting Room, block 107-115 and online via Microsoft Teams

Date: 29 March 2023 (in person), 6-7pm and 3 April 2023 (online)

Meeting summary

Attendees

Kaivery Heslop, Westminster Asset Strategy client surveyor

Vicky Simpson, Westminster Resident Advocate

Jayne Stretton, Westminster Leasehold billing manager

Ward councillors: Melvyn Caplan and Lorraine Dean

9 residents attended in person

3 residents attended online

Scope of works update

Core scope of works is the same, however all works have had to be reviewed, in particular the budget due to the current economic climate.

Key items to note:

- An additional allowance has been made for asphalt works to private balconies in case this is required.
- The work planned to tenant front entrance doors has been removed from the project and will now be picked up separately by Westminster's fire safety team. Regulations are changing so they will lead on all door upgrades needed across the city. This work is currently being planned and is expected to start later this year. Leaseholders will still be given the option to opt-in for fire door replacements.

Full details on scope of works can be found on our website here:

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

Budget update

Kaivery gave an update confirming the budget for the works to all blocks has increased from £6.6million when we initially met last September, to £8.6million now. The current financial climate is challenging for everyone, and prices are rising across the board, so it has been necessary for us to review the works and ensure we are allocating sufficient budget aside to cover the likely cost. If we don't allocate sufficient budget at the start it will cause delays in getting the work to site as we would need to go back and seek additional funds.

It is important to note that the new budget figure covers all possible costs for the project, including quite a few provisional items and items that are not rechargeable to leaseholders.



For example, we will be fitting PV (photovoltaic) panels to all the roofs as part of the work at a cost of over half a million pounds. This element of work is fully grant funded however and not chargeable to leaseholders. Ventilation works to tenant flats are another aspect of the works which are not chargeable.

We have provided a very rough guide of possible estimate costs for leaseholders in the table below, however it is important to note this is based on the total budget cost and doesn't take account of non-chargeable items of individual lease differences. We will only be able to work out each individual lessee liability once our contractor has fully priced up for the work and we are ready to issue formal Section 20 consultation notices.

Highest: £71,682.38

Lowest: £6,116.90

Average: £43,327.32

Payment plans

At the last meeting we had, leaseholders were very concerned about payment plans given the size of bills they faced. Since the last meeting, the cabinet member for housing has reviewed the payment plans and added some additional extended payment options.

Jayne outlined the range of options now available depending on individual circumstances:

Works cost:	Payment term
Up to £2,000	12 months
£2,000 and above	24 months
£2,000 and above (Resident Leaseholders only)	60 months
£20,000 and above (Resident Leaseholders only)	120 months
£20,000 and above	300 months * <i>* This is a Discretionary Service Charge loan, available to leaseholders who are unable to secure borrowing from their mortgage company or a personal loan.</i>

Jayne noted that whilst it wasn't possible to agree a specific payment plan with anyone until the Section 20 estimate had been issued, she said leaseholders were able to contact her team at any time for advice, or to discuss concerns.

Phone: 0800 358 3783 (ask to speak to a leasehold adviser)

Email: housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk

Book a 20-minute online appointment by visiting our website:

www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/leaseholders/contact-us

Once the Section 20 estimates are issued, we will carry out further engagement with leaseholders to ensure everyone knows the details of the options and support available to them.



Timetable

- Q. When will the S20 notices be issued?
- Q. When will work now start on site?

Vicky ran through the updated timetable for the coming months as follows:

Milestone	Estimated dates *
Issue client brief to contractor for design stage	March 2023
Detailed design stage, including planning application for new windows	Anticipate 12-month period
Resident engagement – present final plans and costs	March 2024
Notice of Estimate S20 leasehold consultation	March / April 2024
Resident meet the contractor session	May 2024
Start on site	June 2024

Vicky noted that the key element over the coming months would be agreeing a window design and obtaining planning approval. The length of time this takes could vary however we will keep residents updated as things progress.

**note all dates are estimates.*

Windows working group

Vicky noted that the windows were a key aspect of the works and the look and design of the windows was of particular interest to residents. Westminster has therefore set up a Windows Working Group for John Aird Court to enable interested residents to work with WCC and Axis to look at window options.

The group has met a couple of times, with the third meeting taking place on Tuesday 18 April. Further meetings are expected in May.

If anyone is interested in joining the group, they are very welcome. Please contact Vicky Simpson at residentadvocates@westminster.gov.uk

Q&A from in person meeting on 29 March 2023

General works related questions:

Q. When do you expect the work to start?

The revised start date is now expected to be June 2024, however this will largely be dependent on the planning process for the new windows.



Q. The roof to block 228 was done previously and there was a small amount of funding towards the improved insulation to the roof. Is there any such grant funding now available?

As the situation with grant funding is changing all the time, it is difficult to confirm what may be available at the time the work is onsite. Current requirements are that funding is only available for properties with an EPC (energy efficiency rating) of D or below. Assessments will be carried out nearer the time to see if the blocks due for roof renewal and insulation may be eligible.

Q. How long will all the works take once it starts?

The works to the whole estate are expected to be onsite for 18 months.

Q. How long will scaffold be up at each block?

Axis will provide a detailed programme of works as part of their planning process which will be shared with residents. This will confirm the order the blocks will be worked on and the expected duration of scaffold to each block.

Q. The communication around the works and in particular noisy works will be very important. It was noted there are current issues with lack of notice of noisy repair jobs disturbing residents working from home.

A. We agree that good communication with residents about the works will be essential. As part of our contract with Axis, they are required to have a full time Resident Liaison Officer (RLO) onsite. They will be responsible for keeping residents updated on the works, arranging access for surveys and the window installations.

Q. Will the new windows be easier to clean?

A. The design for the new windows is something the windows working group are looking at. This will include different opening options to help with access for cleaning.

Q. Could WCC not carry out window cleaning and incorporate into the service charge?

A. As the freeholder, Westminster (WCC) is only responsible for cleaning communal windows. The window panes form part of the leaseholders responsibility and do not form part of the reserve property (that owned by WCC). The cleaning of the individual flat windows is therefore the responsibility of residents. Including window cleaning to the entire block would also be very expensive as abseilers would need to be used. If we can incorporate easy window cleaning into the new window design, this will be a more cost-effective solution.

Q. The current windows are likely to have some scrappage value. Will this be utilised to help bring the cost of the new windows down?

A. This is something the contractor will be asked to look into as part of their detailed planning.

Q. What happens when there is no space to drill through the wall to fit a fan and the only option is to have the fan through the window?

A. Each flat to be individually surveyed and fan location agreed with the resident.



Leaseholder specific questions:

Q. Are you not able to tell us what the estimate cost is for a 1, 2 and 3 bed flat?

A. Unfortunately not at this stage. We have high level budget costs only, so the figures shared are just a very basic guide. It takes a long time to calculate individual leaseholder liability by flat size, lease terms and accounting for items that are not chargeable. This is why accurate estimates are only given at Section 20 stage when we have the final estimate costs from the contractor.

Q. Hopefully inflation is going to start coming down soon, so that means these estimates may come down as well?

Our revised budget has had to account for continued inflation until the works are on site, so yes, if inflation comes down this will be reflected in the actual Section 20 estimates.

A resident noted that the estate was offered new windows in 2006 but leaseholders at the time said they weren't necessary as the windows weren't over 30 years old. It would have been much cheaper to do the windows back then. Unfortunately costs are now much higher, but the windows are very much needed.

Q. Is there a point at which the prices are fixed and therefore cannot go up or down regardless of the market? At what point is that?

As part of the detailed planning phase Axis will firm up prices for all key aspects of work. Items such as the roof replacements and new windows will be subject to mini-procurement exercises to establish best value for money options. Once this process has been completed, the prices will be fixed as they will form the costs for the Section 20 notices.

Q. When will the Section 20 notices be sent? And when will leaseholders need to start paying?

A. Based on our current timetable, we expect to issue the Section 20 notices to leaseholders around March 2024. The estimate costs will be included in the March service charge bills following the issue of the Section 20 notices, so if the Section 20 is issued in March 2024, then leaseholders will be expected to start paying from March 2025.

Q. When the bills come out, will it be clear how much the monthly payments will be?

A. As outlined in the slides, there will be a range of payment plan lengths depending on individual circumstances. All payment options and the monthly payable amount are outlined in the payment agreement form which is included in the estimated bill and will need to be sent back to the leasehold team to set up on the system.

Q. Why is there no deferred payment option? Why can a charge not be added to the property to pay at point of future sale (this would be particularly helpful for pensioners)?

A. Jayne confirmed that the payment plans were recently reviewed, and the options are currently as outlined in the slides. Other leaseholders had also queried the lack of deferred payment option and Cllr Caplan also confirmed he has raised this with the Cabinet Member. If there is any change or additions to the payment plans, we will let leaseholders know and update our webpage.



Q. Cllr Caplan noted that the criteria for who qualifies for the discretionary loan is very important. Can details of this be sent out?

Jayne confirmed that the leaseholders will only qualify for the discretionary loan if Westminster are the lender of last resort. It will be dependant on individual circumstances, so anyone interested in this option will need to meet with us to discuss the details.

Q. Are we able to see the cost breakdown?

A. Yes – the budget for each of the core elements of work is broken down as follows:

Item	Guide budget cost
Windows	£2,945,345.00
External repairs and decs	£1,359,891.00
Internal repairs and decs	£332,350.00
Roof renewal and rainwater goods	£1,145,602.00
Estate works	£169,758.00
Walkways	£351,000.00
Fire safety works	£1,374,298.00
M&E	£336,375.00

Q. Will leaseholders be able to opt-in for the ventilation fans?

A. Yes. More details and costs will be sent once the contractor starts work.

Q&A from online meeting on 3 April 2023

Q. Given the huge budget for these works, will this increase the property's value by the same amount?

A. Unfortunately we are not qualified to answer this question however as the freeholder we have a duty to maintain the building. As a rule, blocks that are well maintained tend to be more attractive to perspective buyers than those that are in need of work.

Q. It's good that you will be looking at options for cleaning the windows, but will the aesthetics of the new windows also be considered as this is also important?

A. Yes that will be a consideration, but we do not expect a significant change in the look of the window set up as the configuration is likely to remain the same (i.e. where you have a small or large pane of glass currently, these will remain in the same positions). The difference will be in how the windows open and operate, and also the potential the thickness of the frame profile depending on UPVC or aluminium.



Q. Where in the lease does it clarify responsibility for windows?

A. Vicky will send this to the leaseholder directly. Vicky clarified that the general rule is that WCC own and are responsible for the window frames as these are part of the structure of the building, but leaseholders own and are responsible for the glass. When replacements are required, and these are replaced with double glazed units, this changes and Westminster is then responsible for the whole double-glazed unit. More information is available in the lessee handbook available online at:

www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/leaseholders/about-your-lease/your-lease

Q. In regards to the UPVC vs aluminium debate, a leaseholder pointed out that there should be no reason for WCC planning to refuse an application for UPVC as a precedent has already been set at John Aird Court. Prior to his purchase of the property over 10 years ago, his flat had UPVC windows already fitted. Whilst these may not have necessarily had all the right approvals, they have been in place a long time with no issue, hence the precedent. There are other flats that are similar.

A. It was agreed that there is a strong case for UPVC to be accepted for John Aird Court. Following the consultation with residents, we hope to be able to submit a design to planning which has the support of the majority of residents. The more residents in favour of the proposed design, the greater the chances of approval.

Q. Leaseholders are concerned about the huge cost, so there is a preference to keep costs down where possible.

A. This is understandable and is why the WCC major works team have stipulated a preference for UPVC at the moment. In regards to costs, it is important to reiterate the figures shared this evening are our budget estimates only. We will only have accurate estimates to share with leaseholders at Section 20 stage which is likely to be around March next year (2024). The current budget estimates include all WCC costs and don't take account of items that are not rechargeable to leaseholders.

Q. At what point will we have the schedule of work detail i.e. What kind of disruption there will be for people living in the properties when having windows taken out?

A. The contractor will share a proposed programme of works with residents on completion of their detailed planning phase (this will be around the time the Section 20 notices are issued). This programme will outline the order the blocks will be worked on and the order each work element will be carried out.

Prior to the work starting onsite, we will also hold a 'meet the contractor' meeting for residents to come and meet the team doing the work. At this meeting, the team will be able to talk through the process and time needed in each flat. Based on window replacement schemes on other estates, the actual window replacement element tends to be very quick and can be done in 1-2 days depending on the size of the flat. Every window taken out will be replaced the same day. Additional visits will be required for making good, but these can generally be arranged to suit the resident. The contractor will have a dedicated Resident Liaison officer (RLO) who will be onsite full time and be responsible for meeting residents and scheduling appointments for the works to suit residents.

End.