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## Update no. 4: building safety works at Wellend Villas

### Residents Meetings

Thank you to all of the residents who joined us at our three virtual sessions at the end of April. We realise there has been some frustration and confusion amongst residents about what is taking place at Wellend Villas, and what this means for the people who live there, so we hope that these meetings gave you the opportunity to ask questions directly to those people working on the project.

We had hoped to host the three sessions on our website so that residents could have access to all of information within the meetings, particularly if there were unable to attend in person. Sadly, due to resident privacy concerns, we have been unable to do this. However, the meetings are all available for residents to view via these links:

Wellend Villas virtual resident session 1 - <https://vimeo.com/548421591>

Wellend Villas virtual resident session 2 - <https://vimeo.com/548432682>

Wellend Villas virtual resident session 3 - <https://vimeo.com/548440214>

Over the course of the three meetings, many questions were asked, and a lot of detail was given. The questions raised generally fell into three distinct categories – Expected timelines, costs, and legal processes.

### Timelines & Actions

We are currently at the stage where our consultant has begun a feasibility study. This study will assess the works that will be required, and allow us to get a full picture of what is required, and from there, we can pull together some specific timings and costings for that work to take place. We would expect to have the report timings before the end of June 2021, although this is dependent on the contractor.

Once all the work has been fully completed, then we will be in a position to have the buildings assessed for the purposes of receiving an EWS1 form. Until the work is completed, there would be little purpose in commissioning this survey, as Wellend Villas would not achieve the B1 rating that residents would be looking for.

As a guide, once we have assessed the findings of the feasibility study, we will then move on to looking at the design of the work, and what the specification will look like. At this stage, there will be a further section 20 process, which will let residents know that we are going out to tender to get the work

done, and exactly what this work will look like. It will also look at the costings involved, and we will be fully consulting residents through every step of the way. This, of course, takes time.

At this stage, the project timeline is very dependent on the findings of the feasibility study, and the recommendations made within that. We would expect the consultant to be able to give an indicative programme for each of the options that are given. When we have the feasibility report, we will be able to give further information on timings.

One thing that will make this process simpler is that the consultant who is undertaking the feasibility study, Oakleaf Group, is the same consultant who will ultimately provide us with the EWS1 at the end of the process. This process will ensure that we will know what is expected for us to guarantee the receipt of that form, and that there will be no unexpected blocks to this.

Residents questioned which homes would be used to undertake the intrusive works, and how these would be selected. Our first, and easiest option for this will be to use any void properties that are currently untenanted where possible. If other properties are required, we would make contact with the appropriate leaseholders about gaining access where needed. These would only be in places where the fire assessor has indicated he requires information from. If we do need to undertake these “intrusive” works in your home, we will work with you to create as little disruption as possible, and we would also “make good” the works – this would mean that holes would be filled, and redecoration would be done if required.

There is clearly a concern that work is only undertaken if absolutely necessary, and that a process is followed to prevent further, potentially expensive works being undertaken. This is very important to us, and we would expect our assessors to use their professional knowledge and experience to give a true account on what they see as required to bring a building in line with current legislation. We will have regular contact with them to discuss their findings, and if there are any concerns about the level of work required, we would look to seek full clarification to ensure that residents are not asked to pay more than would be absolutely necessary. We have a check-and-balance in place by appointing a fire assessment consultant to undertake the initial investigation work, and then pass over to a contractor to undertake the work. This means that there are no conflicts of interest.

## Legal Processes

During the meetings, it was confirmed that from the drawings available the engineers had identified a design fault within block 1. Following this, we are in the process of inviting the builders back to Wellend Villas, and will give them the opportunity to do an intrusive survey on the walls of the block, and “make good” the faults.

It is our understanding from the fire engineer’s report that this fault is likely to be found across all of the blocks at Wellend Villas, and we are proceeding on this basis. Our solicitors are fully engaged and we will keep residents updated as this process moves forward.

We remain committed to exhausting every legal route of recourse before we pass any costs onto residents.

## Costs

Until we have the feasibility study, we really cannot give any guide as to potential project costs. We know that residents are keen to have this information, and we promise that as soon as we have a clear idea, we will pass the information onto you. We stressed in the meetings that whatever happens, that if residents are to face any costs, this will not happen, at the earliest, until the 2022/2023 financial year at the earliest. There is no risk of a bill landing with residents before this.

We explained on the calls that when major works are carried out on blocks owned by social landlords like Southern Housing Group, the onus is on the landlord to cover the share the cost of works being undertaken on buildings that house social rented tenants. Some social landlords have sought to recover the proportion of the cost of associated fire safety works for rented properties from their leaseholders. We need to make it clear that Southern Housing Group is not one of those landlords, and that we are responsible for works undertaken for rented tenants at Wellend Villas.

### Section 20 notices

In the event that all potential legal routes to recourse are closed to us, the first step is to begin what is known as a “Section20 process”, which will advise residents of the work required, and what the potential costs are.

It is clear that there is some confusion regarding the two Section20 notices that have been sent to residents at Wellend Villas recently, and what their purpose is. It’s important to note that these notices do not mean that costs being passed on to residents is a forgone conclusion – at this stage, they just form part of the legal process that we have to follow. It has always been our intention to seek to cover these costs from third parties if at all possible.

The first Section20 notice that you will have received is in regards to a Long Qualifying Agreement. This refers the contractor(s) that are appointed for all types of maintenance work, including building safety work, across the Southern Housing Group portfolio. This letter has been sent to every Group resident who lives in a building with communal stairways and will cover fire related maintenance and improvements.

The second, which was the one you received from Bradley Cooper, is in relation to Type4 Fire Risk Assessments (or FRAs) and External Wall Surveys. In the case of Wellend Villas, as it is further along the process than many other properties, the external wall survey has already commenced as part of the feasibility study. FRAs are a legal requirement, and currently we only have the minimum requirements of a visual Type 1 FRA. As part of this programme of surveys we will be completing an intrusive Type 4 FRA that will confirm that everything is covered by the remedial work, and nothing is missed. It will also include looking at the structure of balconies.

### Reserve Funds

Across all three meetings, we were asked about the availability of the Reserve, or “Sink” fund for the works required at Wellend Villas.

If legal methods fail, and we do need to pass costs onto residents, at the annual service charge review, the team will review the costs incurred for the block and review the reserve fund. If the funds in the reserve will not cover the work needed, or are required for other major work, then either the service charge will be amended or a bill will be sent to the resident. We do understand that this will be unwelcome, and may be difficult for some residents. We will have spread payment options available if this is required, and we can discuss these with individual residents if we get to that stage – we are currently a long way from it. During the meetings, we were asked possible eventualities such as lease-forfeiture. This is not something that we are even thinking about at this stage.

### Insurance Costs

Many residents are concerned that having this work undertaken will impact negatively on costs such as buildings insurance, and the contribution that they would need to make to that through their service charge. On the contrary, as this work will lower the perceived risk of fire at Wellend Villas, we would expect building insurance costs to reduce following this work.

### Next steps

We reported that the operation to fit properties at Wellend Villas with additional detectors was progressing well, although there were still a few residents who had not granted access to their homes. This has not stopped the system being made live, and we are happy to report that although there were a few teething troubles, these have now been rectified, and the system is fully operational and working well.

We should soon have the findings of the feasibility study, and will then be able to fully brief residents on the options available to us.

### Your questions

We are keen to communicate what’s happening more clearly with you, and we have a dedicated website for Wellend Villas at [www.shgroup.org.uk/WellendVillas](http://www.shgroup.org.uk/WellendVillas). We will upload copies of all our updates regarding the work being carried out and this will be updated regularly.

A number of residents are actively using our email address at [wellend.phase1@shgroup.org.uk](mailto:wellend.phase1@shgroup.org.uk) to get in touch with us. As many of you have similar questions for our team, we are pulling the answers to all your questions together and adding them to the website so that everyone has the information, and that you can access all the relevant material for your building in one convenient place.

If you are receiving this update through the post, that is because we either do not have a useable email address for you, or because you have previously unsubscribed from Southern Housing Group mailings. If you would prefer to receive future updates via email, please let us know at the above address, and we will ensure that you receive everything you need.