

*This case study helps to bring to light the experiences of leaseholders living through remediation, although many of the lessons will have wider relevance for all building residents. It highlights areas where contractors, clients of construction and other parties including building owners and managing agents can play a proactive role to support leaseholders experiencing remediation.*

# Case Study: Supporting Best Practice in Remediating Occupied Buildings

## An Introduction from the Considerate Constructors Scheme

While remediation of occupied buildings has always been an element of the construction industry activity, remediation needs in the wake of the Grenfell tragedy has led to a programme of significant cladding and non-cladding remediation activity on occupied buildings often for extended periods of time. In many instances the remediation works follow several years of uncertainty for leaseholders in which they have been unable to sell their homes and have faced prolonged anxiety over costs of the remediation.

In recognition of the impact that occupied remediation projects have on members of the public and more specifically residents the Scheme has undertaken a project to look at the ways in which it can support the industry and public towards better outcomes. Our activity has included roundtables with contractors and clients, focus groups with members of the public experiencing remediation and connecting with others working on this issue including researchers, action groups and government. The understanding gained from this work is being used to review and amplify the guidance contained in the Scheme's Monitor's Checklist for occupied (full or partial occupation by residential owners, leaseholders and tenants) remediation projects and associated

monitoring, produce learning tools and best practice, and support wider industry initiatives beyond the Code of Considerate Practice.

In this case study we invite Dr Jenny Preece from the University of Sheffield and UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence to share insights from her important research on this issue. This case study helps to bring to light the experiences of leaseholders living through remediation, although many of the lessons will have wider relevance for all building residents. It highlights areas where contractors, clients of construction and other parties including building owners and managing agents can play a proactive role to support leaseholders experiencing remediation.



# A remediation case study from Dr Jenny Preece from the University of Sheffield and UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

## Understanding the issue

### THE CONTEXT OF BUILDING SAFETY REMEDIATION

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, investigations into the safety of other buildings revealed a range of problems, typically involving flammable cladding and insulation systems, but also missing fire breaks, inadequate compartmentation and fire doors, and flammable materials on balconies and walkways. Whilst most attention has been paid to high-rise buildings above 18 metres in height, these issues have also been identified in mid- and low-rise buildings. In some cases, there is a significant risk to the safety of residents, requiring interim measures such as fire safety patrols or the installation of fire alarm systems. Ultimately, however, the long-term solution is to undertake a programme of remediation works to buildings around the country, to replace unsafe materials and remedy other defects.

When we view remediation as a solely technical exercise associated with making the material fabric of buildings safe, we are missing an important element that sets remediation aside from many other large-scale construction projects – work is being carried out on occupied homes. Whilst a safe building is the outcome, how this is achieved also matters, because the lives of those living in close proximity to works are affected to a very significant extent. For contractors and clients undertaking remediation projects, this means putting the lived experience of residents at the forefront of thinking at every stage of the work, from planning through to sign-off.

### UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF REMEDIATION

The University of Sheffield’s research into leaseholders’ experiences of living through building safety remediation demonstrated negative impacts on mental health and how people feel about their home. There was often little evidence that those involved in planning and carrying out remediation had actively considered what life would be like for those living in their homes through the works. In some cases, leaseholders had not been given an opportunity to meet contractors and other key organisations prior to work starting, or given clear information about the scope, schedule, and impact of works. As leaseholders explained, they were **“not considered stakeholders in the process”**, meaning that often there was **“no resident voice in any of this at all”**.

Those involved in remediation will likely already have some awareness of what the work involves; but what is it like to live through remediation, when one person’s building site is someone else’s home?

#### As one leaseholder explained:



People need to take seriously the impact this has on residents’ mental health... It may be your place of work, but it’s actually our home. And if going forward there could be more understanding and empathy towards residents, I think that would go a long way.



Noise was one of the biggest stressors for leaseholders, described as **“like having a drill in your head”**, **“torture”** and **“completely abnormal”**. Importantly, it is not just the volume of noise, but its unpredictability that causes negative impacts.

## Considerate Constructors Scheme

### Remediation Case Study

The loss of light through the use of plastic sheeting was also a cause for concern, and contractors should think about the way in which materials may affect the feel of people's homes, and how to minimise negative impacts.

Privacy was another key issue for leaseholders during the research, due to the constant presence of people working on balconies and moving through buildings. Women were particularly likely to link the loss of the home as a private space to feeling unsafe.

#### As one leaseholder explained:



I'm not comfortable at home... When there are builders working... they like to have a good look in... I worry about my safety. I worry about the fact that I'm a single female living in my apartment.



Linked to this, site security had also been a problem for some leaseholders in the research, with **74% of survey respondents reporting that their building did not feel secure during remediation**. Several interviewees referred to people gaining access to the scaffolding or the building, for example through doors that were propped open.

#### As one leaseholder explained:



The big impact on our lives has been not feeling safe and secure whilst this work goes on.



These areas of concern highlight the importance of establishing robust safeguarding procedures related to individuals working on-site (e.g., the use of DBS checks) and risk assessments for site security.

Interviewees frequently reported issues like dropped nails causing punctures, untidy work sites with rubbish left around, and not sweeping up at the end of the day. Many smaller issues added together to create the impression that behaviour was not adjusted to the fact that **"this is not a building site, this is people's homes"**. Issues such as smoking on balconies was particularly

stressful to witness, but avoidable noise and taking lunch breaks outside people's homes also added to the impression of **"thoughtlessness"**.

Finally, whilst contractors may not always be communicating directly with residents during remediation works, they will often be responsible for providing information that forms the content of progress updates. In our research there was considerable demand for more detailed and frequent updates once work was underway, and transparency around the timelines for different elements of work.

#### For example, as one leaseholder explained:



The contractor have always point blank refused to inform us when they will be working where... They could say 'this week we're going to be here and making a lot of noise', so that you could think to yourself, 'okay, I'll postpone a call or do something else'.



## KEY LEARNING FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The good news is that we can improve things for the many people living in buildings which have not yet been remediated. There is a significant opportunity to improve practice and demonstrate that we can make people's homes safe whilst at the same time minimising the harms that are caused during the process. The first step is changing how we think of remediation from a solely technical exercise to a technical and experiential process. This means engaging with, valuing, and learning from the experiences of those whose homes are affected, and undertaking remediation as a dynamic process that can be adapted to maximise the liveability of homes during works.



## 10 PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Leaseholders should be viewed as key stakeholders in the remediation process
2. The views, opinions and preferences of leaseholders should help shape the approach to undertaking remediation work
3. Promoting a liveable environment should be a core part of decision-making
4. Measures that negatively impact liveability should be in place for the shortest possible time
5. Hold an open meeting with contractors and key organisations involved in remediation
6. Give leaseholders meaningful choices in the conduct of remediation works
7. Provide information on the advantages and disadvantages of different choices
8. Transparently explain decisions
9. Ensure transparency around decisions on moving people from their homes
10. Build in quality assurance mechanisms and communicate outcomes .

## TIPS FOR CONTRACTORS WORKING ON-SITE

1. Get briefed about the context of the building safety crisis
2. Remember that many homes are occupied
3. Use a lunch and rest area away from homes
4. Minimise avoidable noise
5. Keep conversations appropriate
6. To maintain privacy, avoid looking into people's homes
7. Never smoke outside a designated area
8. Clear away rubbish to maintain a tidy site
9. Follow site security and safety procedures including closing doors to reduce unauthorised access to buildings, and checking communal and public spaces for hazards
10. Establish and adhere to robust safeguarding procedures to maintain the safety of residents.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research fieldwork was carried out between May and June 2022 and comprised a survey (149 responses) and in-depth interviews with 21 leaseholders in England. The research was funded by the Crook Public Service Fellowships at the University of Sheffield, and the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (ESRC grant number ES/P008852/1). The full report and key principles for action can be found here: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/learning-from-experiences-of-remediation-in-the-building-safety-crisis/>