

Meeting between Camden Leaseholders Forum Major Works Group and Capital Works, Camden

11 March 2024

Present: Susanne Afra, Head of Capital Works, Paul Cansick, Property Data, Programmes, and Systems, for Camden; Brigitte Ascher, Azra Bloomfield, Patrick Hagopian for CLF

Paul briefed us about the process in which Camden residential properties are selected for the capital works programme.

Stock Condition Survey

Every five years there is a Stock Condition Survey. Consultants review the condition of all Camden residential properties, although the inspections are not as full as a Homebuyers Survey. The consultants inspect/access elements such as windows, roofs and communal areas. They estimate the remaining life of these elements and review their repair history. Within a horizon of the next 30 years, they prioritise the repairs that are required and estimate the year when the repair will be necessary.

Five-year Plan and Budget

Based on the identified priorities, Camden arrives at a list of planned works and budget for the next five years. Because of the pressures on Camden's financial resources, there is a significant gap between the cost of the investment currently needed (£533 million) and the available resources (£292 million). The gap between the investment needed and the available resources has grown: five years ago it was £182 million. Fire safety has recently placed considerable demands on the required works. It has so far imposed £40 million of costs, with another £40 million still to be met. No extra funds are provided to meet those needs. Pressures on resources required a number of Better Homes works to be postponed last year.

The Draft Programme

Camden works up a draft 5 year programme of works based on available resources, both financial and staffing, using results from the stock condition survey, repairs history, casework and officer feedback to prioritise this. This includes feedback from caretaking and other locally based staff. This is then consulted upon as widely as possible via resident groups, DMC's and through workshop sessions across the Borough that are advertised for attendance. Cabinet Member for Better Homes is briefed on this activity along with other councillors. The draft programme is reviewed and approved by the Director of Property Management. A report is presented to the Housing Scrutiny Committee before final sign-off by the Cabinet.

Scoping and Consultation

Steps are taken in advance of the start of works. A consultant will do the scoping and produce a report. Contract documents are produced for the purpose of tendering and procurement. A project manager is appointed to liaise with residents. The contract goes out to tender and is awarded, usually on a lowest price basis. A Section 20 consultation process takes place, as required by law.

In response to a question from Brigitte, we had a brief discussion of the opportunity for residents to make suggestions at the consultation stage. For example, once the process described above had identified works as being necessary, leaseholders would face a challenge in proposing that they were not. Susanne said that any suggestions should be accompanied by evidence or justification for works taking place.

[Explanatory note about “Section 20”: although this was not stated during the meeting, Section 151 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 sets out the legal requirements for consulting leaseholders. It replaced the previous consultation procedure in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, section 20, but the old title ‘section 20’ is still used. Source: Leasehold Advisory Service, <https://www.lease-advice.org/advice-guide/section-20-consultation-council-other-public-sector-landlords/>]

Planned Works and Open Data

We touched on the difficulty of finding the “Planned Works” link in the Camden Account, acknowledging that the Camden Account is the responsibility of Leaseholder Services.

Brigitte raised what she perceived as the unhelpfulness of the information in the Open Data portal.

Paul said that the financial information from Camden Opendata that feeds into the Camden Account is not updated once Camden’s contractors are on site, doing the work. He raised the question of whether this was needed and, if so, where best to hold the data when the work is live.

We contemplated some questions from which CLF might obtain feedback from leaseholders:

- How detailed and how economical the data about projects and their budgets should be
- Where it should be made available to residents/leaseholders
- At what stages should more detailed information be provided and updated

We acknowledged that the above questions need to be considered not just by residents/leaseholders but also by Leaseholder Services because of the possible sensitivity of the information and potential legal issues.

Patrick Hagopian, March 2024, with marginal comments by Susanne Afra

Commented [SA1]: Leaseholders will be provided with information in their camden account that is relevant to them. They will also be provided with regular updates by the Project Manager and can contact them at any time for an update as required.

Commented [SA2]: A detailed scoping survey is provided for most projects

Commented [SA3]: This should be available in the camden account or via the PM

Commented [SA4]: Early stages and updates on progress during the project