

CHALCOTS WINDOW DESIGN EXPLAINED – VIRTUAL MEETING NOTES

19 August 2020

Attendees

Chalcots Estate Residents: Paul Urquhart (PU), Nigel Rumble (NR), Matt Jenkins (MJ), Hasan Shah (HS), Mandy Ryan (MR), Stephen Lawson (SL), Tony Wheeler (TW), Victoria Teggin (VT), Marc Da'Silva (MDS)

Councillors: Cllr Steve Adams (SA), Cllr Meric Apak (MA)

Camden Council: Astrid Kjellberg-Obst (AKO), Gavin Haynes (GH) Arup: Patricia Westerburg (PW), Russell Cole (RC) Chair: Oonah Lacey (OL)

1. Overview

- 1.1 All attendees introduced themselves and a brief description of their role.
- 1.2 AKO provided a brief overview of key themes covered in the previous window meeting held on 12 August and purpose of these meetings.
- 1.3 AKO covered a question put forward by PU at the previous window meeting held on 12 August about the option to open the windows at 90 degrees. AKO confirmed that the windows will open at 90 degrees with the different safety features – the first tilt, 300mm opening at the turn position, the key and a special key to open the restrictor to open to 90 degrees.

2. Technical Explanations

- 2.1 PW summarised the opening mechanisms for the tilt and turn windows.

Living room / bedroom:

- Handles can be turned to 90 degrees without a key that tilts the window with a 100mm opening.
- The window will have to be closed in order to use the turn position and key inserted on the handle and turned 180 degrees. This will open the window with a 300mm opening which will be restricted.
- There is the possibility to release the restrictor with the second key if more ventilation is needed.
- The keys should be handled by a responsible adult, and children should be supervised if windows are opened further than 100mm.

Kitchen / bathroom:

- This will be a tilt only window and has only two positions.
- Windows can be opened at 100mm opening without a key.
- You will need to use the key to open the window to 40 degrees.

- 2.2 PW shared screen (A.2 Resident Safety slide) to answer a question raised in the previous meeting about the opening direction of windows and potential risks from falling from furniture such as bunk beds. Arup has studied where beds can potentially be placed safely, looking at optimal opening direction for windows to prevent falls from the windows if a child is on the top bunk.

(Referring to the slide) If the beds are placed in any of the blue positions and windows are tilting, highlighted in purple, then the turn windows open against the bunk bed and will mitigate any risk as the window will act as a barrier from falling out. The contractor will be asked to consider this study when they detail the design of the windows for each room.

- 2.3 HS voiced that the slide doesn't consider where the wardrobe and radiator are placed and needs to be reconsidered as the risk assessments were only done on void properties. AKO reiterated that a lot of detail and work went into Arup's study which concluded this window design is still the safest option, and safer than the current windows.
- 2.4 NR made expressed worries about potential head injuries with the inward opening windows. AKO explained that the window's widest opening option is a controlled opening as the windows shouldn't need to be opened to 90 degrees all of the time. The 90 degree opening should be used at times when the first two openings don't offer enough ventilation.
- 2.5 NR asked if Arup have any current refurbishment projects in social housing to which PW confirmed they did. RC explained that Arup is involved in the process of refurbishing high-rise buildings, similar to the Chalcots Estate, on a council estate shortly after joining the Chalcots project. This estate had tilt and turn windows and RC found no concerns when engaging with residents.
- 2.6 VT said residents aren't convinced about the safety and how a window opening at 90 degrees on the 22nd floor can be considered safe.
- 2.7 HS raised concerns regarding issues of privacy and vertigo of tilt and turn inward opening windows. AKO explained that Camden Council asked Chalcots Estate residents in June 2019 whether they preferred opaque or glazed panels for the lower part of the window. 152 households responded and 66% preferred glazed.
- 2.8 PW presented photo examples of high-rise buildings with tilt and turn windows similar to the designs proposed as well as other examples of window designs commonly used in new built high-rise projects around London, such as fully opening doors with Juliet balconies.

3. Questions & answers

- 3.1 MDS expressed concerns as a parent for both types of windows. MDS has TRA members that represent eight different households representing 5.5% - 6% of Taplow. Not one single household has voiced opposition to the window type. All they want is the 'nightmare to go away and the job done'.

MDS stated there were a number of concerns about the disruption of the window installation raised in general meetings held in February 2020 (AKO and MA attended) and March 2020 but the discussion focussed on ventilation and safety of the windows. MDS said for the TRA members in Taplow, 'the window design is done and dusted and if they hear different, they will accept it'.

MDS then asked the question on behalf of a TRA member who is a taxi driver who works nights and has five children, 'From start to finish, how long approximately will this take to install? He (the TRA member) wants to know what impact this will have on his life and that of his five children.' PW explained that Arup are only in charge of the technical design, and the installation method and timeline will be decided by the contractor. The installation timeline is not within Arup's control.

MDS expressed that the installation duration should be considered when appointing a contractor and asked Arup what they would expect to hear from the contractor as a realistic installation timeframe for the windows. PW repeated that Arup are not experts on installation and could not give an estimated timeframe.

MDS said they were surprised that Arup, after designing the windows, would not have an idea of how long the design would take to install. GH explained that there are different responsibilities between the design and construction roles.

AKO gave an example of Wates noting the new contractor may not operate the same way. Wates' proposal was to lower the window sill as the scaffolding goes up and would take three days per window to install. All rooms could be done at the same time or consecutively and the windows would be replaced from the outside which would take a day per window. The proposed approach was to replace the windows, followed by recladding and then striking the scaffolding. The whole process (scaffolding, cladding, window replacement) for all five tower blocks would have taken 22 months.

AKO reiterated that the new installation timeframe depends on the new contractor. The contractor is to give the method of work which is a key part of the procurement process. Camden Council has made it absolutely clear to all contractors that disruption to residents must be kept to a minimum and ideas are needed about how this can be achieved. We have engaged with eight potential contractors and all have been flexible in terms of the installation approach. For example, not all contractors would carry out the works with scaffolding – it could be a combination of cradle system and mast climbing, and because of Covid there might be a different approach to what was previously planned. The majority of the installation could be done from the outside where the property could be protected by a temporary screen.

- 3.2 GH brought questions posed by PU to all attendees' attention on why we moved away from the outward opening window.

GH provided two points. We have had a history with windows at the Chalcots, which are on the face of it, well designed but actually prone to wind damage when opened at a certain degree so we wanted to design out that risk. Also, the inward opening windows can be maintained from the inside. What we found at the Chalcots is that when we had the wind damage and broken windows, we would have to line up abseilers which needs more than one operative involved and it is time consuming for residents. With the inward opening windows, you can maintain it from the inside – it is a straightforward quick operation and it presents a low risk to operatives.

The other question PU asked was if Camden Council asked Arup to change the design to include windowsills at 800mm to comply with regulations, how would Arup respond and what would the design look like. GH said we determined the best solution was to have the window opening to allow ventilation with a guarding height of 1100mm.

- 3.3 GH presented a document of questions that were put forward that will be answered and shared with the attendees including the two questions mentioned above.
- 3.4 GH mentioned a question that was asked about Approved Document K. PW explained that the question referred to the accessibility of the handle and that there is guidance on that. PW confirmed that PU's interpretation of the question was correct. PW confirmed that it is not recommended that anybody should be reaching more than 600mm to operate a window handle although a person's height / reach should be taken into consideration.
- 3.5 PW read out answer to question 3(a) which will be sent to attendees.
- 3.6 PW expanded on answer to question 3(b) – Technically there are two ways of reducing the depth of the sill. You could, in theory, do it but it has major implications. You would either have to bring the whole line of windows / façade in or you will have to move the sill out in which case you will have to deconstruct the brick wall which forms the sill and replace it

with plasterboard. It creates issues around acoustic separation and it somewhat defeats the purpose of not lowering the sill because if you have to deconstruct the sill anyway, the disruption is similar.'

- 3.7 PW expanded on answer to question 4 with elements of question 3(b) – A sill of 100mm – 140mm could still be a step that a child can climb onto. It would really have to be 50mm sill as to not pose any risk of climbing on it at which point you are more or less at the depth of a window profile. This begs the question what the difference is between a full window system with a transom at the sill level 50mm deep and an opaque spandrel panel.
- 3.8 PU – These windowsills, as a lot of us have remarked, are effectively a step and given that from the sill to the window opening, you still have your 1100mm barrier height which you are required to have – you could use the window sill as a step and reach the handle that way.
- 3.9 PW presented Elevation Section slide.
- 3.10 MJ expressed concern that the lower windowsills (in comparison to the existing windows which have a sill with radiator attached) pose a risk to vulnerable residents and referred to the living rooms and bedrooms / Chalcots windows / safety risk mitigation slide diagram (first presented at the meeting on 12 August).

MJ – I cannot believe we are seriously faced with the prospect of these things [windows] installed in the buildings. It is inevitable that someone will kill themselves, either deliberately or inadvertently by falling from one of these windows, either under the influence or because of mental health issues and I think the risk is not to children here. The idea that window cleaning should even be mentioned as a benefit is laughable. What is the implication that we are supposed to open one small pane of glass, clean it and look out of that square when the rest of the large glazed area is unreachable. Window cleaning should not be discussed as a benefit.

PW – You can never prevent someone from doing something deliberate. The height of 1100mm is the equivalent height to a balcony, that is considered safe in every building in London. There is no obligation to open that window that far either, you need two keys to open it. If somebody doesn't feel safe opening it that far, they are not obliged to do it. It just gives people options.

MJ – The people are already in situ. The change here is one that will change the risk profile and I don't think it's appropriate to do that on a building of this type with the profile of residents we co-habit with.

- 3.11 MJ feels the floor plan used is inaccurate and that therefore he cannot trust the overheating calculations carried out by Arup. PW answered that the margin of error is small that they won't affect the overheating calculations. AKO added that the floor plans are intended to give an overview on principles regarding safe opening sides and that a lot of work has gone into the heat calculations.
- 3.12 TW – What is the impact going to be for the residents? From an equalities point of view, what potentially are going to be the problems to the residents? TW mentioned a medical condition associated to the height and noted there are three other people with a similar condition.

PW – Camden have offered to include a specialist film for those who have issues with height, on the glass that can be translucent or completely opaque if they are uncomfortable

with the lowered sill. That will be included in the specification and Camden will be liaising with people on whether they want it or not.

TW – It is not about looking down, it is about having that physical barrier there. My issue is I don't have that physical barrier.

PW responded 'Camden will make provisions for people with special requirements'. AKO suggested a visit to the show flat, which didn't occur originally due to Covid, and will follow up / arrange.

- 3.13 GH provided an update on the effect of Covid on all repairs and capital works and the risk assessments in place across all of the Council's work programmes.
- 3.14 PU asked whether the film is actually installed across the windows so you can see what the real effect is as people will need to be able to see this live. AKO confirmed that this will be arranged.
- 3.15 SA – The combination of the sill issue, Covid, cost of contract, practicability of the execution of the works leads me to believe a bigger set of questions need to be asked in order for this project to progress. There is a vast amount of questions that are being asked again and again that are not being answered. The intention of the action is lagging behind events. We know it can't be started now but we also don't know exactly what we are grappling with. We seem to be going backwards. I don't think the biggest question to be asked at the moment (regarding tilt and turn windows) and I don't think it will get us further forward.
- 3.16 MA – I haven't heard anything that convinces me that the window design as proposed are not safe and that we can't proceed as planned. I arrived at this meeting prepared to be convinced that an alternative would be safer but I haven't been convinced. I have heard a lot of concerns about the proposals but I have heard similarly other concerns about the existing windows. I agree with SA that we need to move on from this now and we need to move onto other issues that are being raised. We have offered resident representatives to send us a 'shopping list' of concerns and we have exhausted the window design discussion from my perspective anyway.
- 3.17 SA – What I am less convinced of is that it shouldn't be configured in such a way that it is possible to have a fully obscure more solid element below it with a radiator mounted on it all in the window reveal. So, it doesn't pose a falling risk or a step risk that also limits the works to the window reveal area and simplifies the whole project. It is that part that hasn't been addressed.

MA disagreed that it had not been addressed. MA asked PW or GH to reiterate.

PW – There are possibilities. I think the issue of what type of radiator and where it exactly it goes is still something that can be discussed. I don't think it is fully bottomed out at this point. That can be co-ordinated with the contractor.

SA – That suggests this is not a fully designed specification.

PW – As an architect, you will be aware that facade design, windows and cladding always require a contractor design element. It is impossible to do a full stage four design for those elements because otherwise you would be specifying a system and you can't nominate a subcontractor at the tender stage. Tender documents have to be open to competitive offers including different systems.

SA – On the other hand as the performance specification, you could limit position of the location of the radiators within that performance specification.

PW – We haven't gone that far yet. You can't decide where to put them solely on an architectural basis. You need to look at their performance as well. It is an MEP question that needs to be resolved and currently that's not within our scope.

3.18 SA said to AKO, GH and MA – Perhaps Camden should be looking at the radiators and integrating this into the specification requirements rather than leaving it to the option of interested parties tendering for the process.

PW – That will happen now that we are retendering the process.

3.19 OL concluded the meeting.