



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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Dear Mr Boff,

Thank you for your letter on 14th December. I am replying on behalf of the Department. As you have noted, the Secretary of State's decision to incorporate second staircases in tall buildings will enhance safety in high-rise residential buildings, providing more options for both firefighting and evacuation in the event of a, thankfully very rare, catastrophic event.

I understand you are seeking clarity on when guidance will be published in order to allow the transition period to begin.

The transitional arrangements have been designed following engagement with the construction industry, local authorities, fire safety services and the financing and insurance industry. The time given for these arrangements will secure the viability of projects which are already underway whilst evolving fire safety standards as quickly as is practicable for such a significant change to the way in which tall buildings are constructed.

The Department recognises that detailed second staircase design guidance is needed for the sector to fully understand the implications for design and viability. The Secretary of State confirmed in his written ministerial statement of 19th February that the Building Safety Regulator will publish this before the end of March 2024. This new design guidance will call for the provision of a second staircase in new multi-occupancy residential buildings that have a top occupied storey above 18m.

It is important that the introduction of second staircases is seen in context with the other significant enhancements in fire safety that have been introduced as part of evolution of safety standards. Combustible materials in and on external walls have been banned, provisions for sprinklers in residential buildings have been increased, additional signage in new buildings to assist firefighters must now be provided, and provision made for secure information boxes. Second staircases, alongside the changes already introduced, together with the enhanced scrutiny of the new building safety regime that is already in place, will see a world-leading fire safety regime in which the public can have every confidence in the safety of new homes.

Finally, it would be appropriate to point out that your assertion in Motion 3.1 that buildings with a single staircase pose a fire risk is incorrect. As was clearly set out in the Secretary of State's written statement of the 24th October 2023, existing and upcoming single-staircase buildings

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are not inherently unsafe when built in accordance with relevant standards, well-maintained and properly managed.

I hope that is helpful and the department appreciates your interest in this important matter.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.M. Adams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Catherine Adams

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