

London Assembly Planning and Housing Committee

Investigation:

Fire Safety in London Combined Evidence Received

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FSR001 Building Control Alliance

London Assembly
GLA
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Dear Sirs
London Assembly - Fire Safety in London

18th February 2011

Fire Risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings - December 2010

I am writing on behalf of the Building Control Alliance (BCA) to offer our views on the above paper.

The BCA is the body representing all Building Control Bodies in England and Wales covering both public and private sector comprising of representative organisations with direct building standards involvement. The member bodies are:

- ABE - Association of Building Engineers
- ACAI - Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors
- CIOB - Chartered Institute of Building
- LABC - Local Authority Building Control
- RICS - Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyor

Firstly I would like to congratulate you on this paper which is welcomed by the Building Control industry. The Alliance agrees that it is appropriate to review the risks associated with Fire Safety in tall and timber framed buildings, particularly in the light of recent incidents.

Whilst members of the Alliance agree with many of the recommendations within this report we would offer the following comments for your consideration/information.

1. Recommendation 3: Members of the BCA have already taken steps to ensure that the Fire Service are alerted to proposed developments consisting of timber framed buildings. Under current procedures for consulting the Fire Service, Building Control Bodies have amended their consultation documents to include a section which identifies whether a proposed development consists of timber framed construction. There is currently no mechanism for Building Control Bodies to consult with HSE at pre construction stage. As there are crossovers in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order between the controls lying with the Fire Authority and the HSE, I would suggest that it would be more appropriate for the Fire Service to alert HSE to any timber framed developments with which they have concern.

1. Recommendation 5: This recommendation refers to Local Authorities. only when in fact the issue relates to all Building Control Bodies. There are many cases where, in a phased development, it is appropriate for occupation of properties prior to the completion of the whole development, these cases are assessed by the Building Control Body to ensure that it is safe to allow partial occupation. The BCA would be happy to contribute to any proposed guidance on this matter.

2. It is the Alliance's view that the issues and recommendations identified in the report should not be limited to London as the risks apply to other major towns and cities across England and Wales.

I hope that you find these comments helpful and offer the BCA's support to any further work

that you propose on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Chairman of The Building Control Alliance

FSR002 Concrete Block Association

To: Paul Watling
Subject: Fire Safety in London – fire risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings – Report recommendations

Attention of Paul Watling,
Scrutiny Manager London Assembly

Reference Report and Recommendations on Fire Safety in London – fire risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings

I am writing as Chairman of the Concrete Block Association in response to your invitation to comment on the above.

The Concrete Block Association is the manufacturing trade association for concrete block manufacturers and represents over 80% of manufacturing capacity for that product in the UK. Amongst the CBA's roles are regulatory technical input in to the safety and performance specifications of our products and the fabric (principally walls and floors) of buildings. We made written comment to the enquiry through our umbrella trade body, the British Precast Concrete Federation.

The view of CBA is that the reports recommendations will make a valuable contribution to safety in both the construction and occupational phases of household dwellings and other buildings where people work, shop, trade or take their leisure.

Our association cannot find fault with any of the 10 recommendations and concur with them all. It would appear to us that the London Assembly are taking a more robust stance on this issue than national government.

It only remains for me to commend the committee on a thorough and timely report and set of recommendations.

Yours Sincerely,

Chairman – Concrete Block Association
British Precast Concrete Federation

4th April 2011

Dear Mr Watling,

Fire Safety in London - fire risk in London's tall and timber framed buildings

I refer to Nicky Garvon's letter of 17 February which enclosed a copy of the London Assembly Planning and Housing Committee's final report into its investigation of fire risks in London's tall and timber framed residential buildings.

The London Assembly's report is very timely given the construction site fires involving timber frames in Camberwell and Peckham. The Assembly's work has given extra impetus to the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) focus on the regulation of fire safety on construction sites.

As you know, HSE's role and remit is confined to the risk of fire during the construction of buildings and structures. Our inspection regime prioritises the topics which inspectors judge and in this respect fire, particularly on timber framed sites, has been a priority for a number of years. Over the last year HSE inspectors have undertaken sustained campaigns on fire and taken robust enforcement action including when fire risks to others than site workers have been found to be inadequate.

Turning to the three recommendations in the Assembly's report that are of direct relevance to HSE: Recommendation 2 - In October 2010 HSE published revised and substantially updated guidance, HSG 168 - Fire Safety on Construction Sites. This includes guidance on the lessons learnt from a number of timber frame fires which occurred in 2009 and 2010. The guidance has been widely promoted through industry and other representative bodies and covers all the issues listed in this recommendation. The guidance emphasises the need to consider off-site risks and plan accordingly.

Promotional work is continuing particularly with the design community. We will also be publishing case studies on our web site to support the general messages. We continue to work with the UK Timber Frame Association (UKTFA), the Chief Fire Officers Association and others to further enhance the practical guidance available. In particular guidance is being developed to better assess off-site risk early in the design process so as to influence decisions about the nature of particular construction projects and controls required to protect neighbours. Work on this guidance is advanced and expected to be published within the next few months.

Recommendation 3 - Whilst specifically not directed at HSE an agreement is under development between UKTFA and fire brigades that such information will be supplied.

Recommendation 4 - A careful distinction needs to be made between the role of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 and the Building Regulations. The former are enforced by HSE and their aim is to provide protection to those carrying out construction work or who may be affected by the construction activities. Ensuring that fire safety measures for the completed structure are built to the appropriate standards, installed in the right place, etc falls outside of the ambit of the COM Regulations 2007.

The COM Regulations 2007 are currently being reviewed following a commitment given by the last government to do so 3 years after coming into force. In our view the COM Regulations in conjunction with the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 provide an adequate regulatory regime for fire safety risks during the construction phase.

We will continue to work closely with the construction industry (in particular the UKTFA), fire and rescue services, building control organisations and Department for Communities and Local Government to improve standards on fire safety in construction.

I hope these points help and assure you that fire safety risks to workers and members of public from construction site activities were already being addressed well before publication of your report in December and this work continues.

Yours sincerely

FSR004 British Precast Concrete Federation Ltd

1 April 2011

Dear Chair

The precast concrete and masonry industry puts health and safety at the top of our priorities as evidenced by our mandatory Concrete Targets scheme and our "Raising the Bar" charter scheme.

The BPCF submitted extensive information to your original inquiry on fires that have occurred. There has been extensive publicity about the ferocity, speed and spread of timber frame fires particularly in buildings over 3 stories and in care homes. There is now even a web site www.timberframefires.com that seems to capture the scale of the problem.

We agree with all of your recommendations. In particular there is a need for an urgent review of Part B. This regulation was written on the assumption that the building would be built from masonry. There is a presumption that timber performs the same in fire which it clearly does not, during or post-construction completion.

The risk of fire post-completion must be included in a fresh review. It is a very awkward subject for owners of existing housing stock including the GLA but this must not be allowed to jeopardize the safety of tenants and residents. Yesterday's announcement by Mitsui Sumimoto a front line insurer. Makes the point better than we can; see the attached piece.

Interested parties are doing all they can to stop this review and as such they are putting lives at risk

We will do everything possible to support GLA in your endeavors to put health and safety first.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive

Response to Fire safety in London – email 7 April 2011

Dear Mr Watling

This email represents the joint response of the British Woodworking Federation and the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers to the London Assembly's Planning and Housing Committee's invitation to comment on its report of its investigation of fire risks in London's tall and timber-framed residential buildings. I am sorry we have slightly overshot the original deadline.

The British Woodworking Federation

The British Woodworking Federation is the leading representative body for the woodworking and joinery manufacturing industry in the UK. The BWF currently has almost 500 members, who turned over just under £400million in 2009. The BWF-CERTIFIRE Fire Door and Doorset Scheme was established in 1997 to provide credible third-party certification of fire doors, and currently represents around 75-85% of all fire doors sold on the UK market.

The Guild of Architectural Ironmongers

The GAI is the only trade association representing the interests of architectural ironmongers in the UK. It has 200 members which include the majority of architectural ironmongers as well as the leading manufacturers of architectural door and window hardware. The GAI also administers the benchmark qualifications for professional architectural ironmongers and is dedicated to raising specification standards and encouraging best practice in all aspects of this sector.

General

We congratulate the Committee on the work undertaken in producing this report, which we believe presents a fair and balanced analysis of the situation, particularly in relation to timber-framed buildings, and makes sensible recommendations for the future. We wish comment specifically on the question of the specification, installation, inspection and maintenance of fire doors in all types of buildings.

Recommendation 7: We agree that there needs to be greater coherence in the training and accreditation of fire risk assessors, and are contributing to the work of the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council via the umbrella body for the passive fire protection sector, the Passive Fire Protection Federation. We are aware that the PFPF has responded separately to the report.

Fire risk assessors require a wide range of knowledge in order to assess a whole building properly. Our organisations' focus is specifically on fire doors. The British Woodworking Federation, through the BWF-CERTIFIRE Fire Door and Doorset Scheme, and the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers are jointly developing an online education training programme and diploma qualification to provide targeted professional training to raise the competence standards for those involved in the specification, installation, inspection and maintenance of fire doors. We expect the first students to begin the course in July.

We intend that the diploma will also be the qualification required for the third-party certification of competent fire door inspectors, and of competent installers and maintainers of fire doors which we will also launch later in the year.

Recommendation 8: We agree. As part of our planned inspection scheme, in order to assist social landlords and other building owners with the management of this task, we are developing an online

database which will contain an inventory of all fire doors inspected by qualified, competent inspectors, along with the outcome of any inspections undertaken. The database will contain an independent report of the location, condition and date of inspection of each door, along with any remedial action which is required. We believe this will build up into an asset register which will assist building owners and facilities managers in maintaining the buildings for which they are responsible. We consider that this will prove to be a genuine benefit: we have several anecdotal reports of new public buildings where the managers have no idea of the number or location of fire doors. A register would make management and maintenance easier. Our ambition is to expand the database to cover fire doors as they are installed.

Recommendation 9: We agree. For a number of years, we have expressed grave concerns over the mis-use of fire doors, in terms of incorrect specification and installation, poor workmanship, poor maintenance and the removal of fire doors and the re-installation of non fire-rated PVC or timber doors for 'security' or other purposes. It is perfectly possible to achieve additional performance requirements in areas such as security, energy efficiency or acoustics through correct specification and installation. However, there is no excuse for compromising of the standard required for fire doors, which is the only performance requirement relating to life safety.

We would urge you to insist that contractors and residents are made aware of the fire safety requirements, and the correct installation and use of third-party certificated products in order to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Recommendation 10: We agree. We would particularly stress the need for all residents to understand the need for, and role of, fire doors in the event of a fire. This should include explaining how fire doors are clearly marked, why they must be able to close correctly, and why they should not be propped open, whether by other devices or, as is all too common, fire extinguishers. Any fire door not in working order should be reported immediately, to the appropriate department or responsible person for prompt remedial action.

We ask the GLA to recommend in the strongest possible terms that all fire-rated products, especially fire doors, fire door frames, and their essential ironmongery, should be specified as third-party certificated products, and wherever possible, installed by third-party certificated installers, as encouraged in Approved Document B of the Building Regulations. We are all too aware of how often specifications are compromised in the interests of cost-saving, and of the culture within the construction and facilities management sectors to assume that it is for someone else in the chain to take the responsibility for ensuring that the fire doors are correct.

We would ask also that the GLA advises all London Boroughs to adopt a similar recommendation, for all buildings or building conversions under their control, or applications where fire doors are required. We would welcome the issue of a public statement to this effect.

We look forward to seeing the recommendations and relevant comments adopted by GLA and other authorities.

Chief Executive
British Woodworking Federation

Chief Executive
Guild of Architectural Ironmongers

Dear Mr Watling

FIRE SAFETY IN LONDON – FIRE RISKS IN LONDON’S TALL AND TIMBER-FRAMED BUILDINGS

Further to Nicky Gavron’s letter of 17 February enclosing a copy of the London Assembly Planning and Housing Committee’s final report into its investigation of fire risks in London’s tall and timber framed buildings, I am responding formally on behalf of the Department of Communities and Local Government.

The results of the Department’s review of Building Regulations were announced in December last year. We have no plans to amend the fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations but we do recognise that levels of compliance and workmanship could be improved. Work with industry is underway to consider what can be done.

The Department’s response to the report’s key findings and recommendations are as follows:

There is a need to improve fire safety during the construction phase of timber-framed buildings. We call for a mandatory requirement to inform the Fire Brigade of new timber-framed sites so they are better prepared to tackle fires if they occur. Partial occupation of timber-framed sites should be forbidden.

The Department have recognised the need to improve fire safety for timber framed buildings during construction and Ministers hosted a round table meeting with the key organisations in November 2010 to ensure that the necessary steps are being taken by the sector. Ministers plan to follow up the progress that is being made by the key players at a further meeting to be held in May.

Last year, the Department facilitated the development of a voluntary procedure for building control bodies to advise fire and rescue authorities of the type of construction being used, not just timber frame. The Chief Fire Officers Association have confirmed the notification systems put in place by both the UK Timber Frame Association (UKTFA) and by the Building Control Alliance (BCA) appeared to be working and that this allows fire and rescue services to be proactive and scope sites for themselves to identify any risks potentially not picked up by other assessments. We have no plans to make this procedure mandatory.

You will be aware that the HSE issued new guidance on fire safety during construction last October (HSG 168). This represents an important prompt for the industry to give fire safety matters proper consideration. We understand HSE have been working with the Fire and Rescue Service and industry to ensure fire safety matters on construction sites – both on and off site – are effectively addressed.

The fire risk assessment process must be improved by ensuring the people conducting them are properly qualified for the task. We call on the CLG to draw up mandatory minimum standards of competence for training and accrediting all assessors.

We have no plans to introduce a mandatory minimum standard of competence for training and accrediting fire risk assessors. But, we very much welcome the fire sector’s decision to lead the work to develop and agree criteria against which to assess the competency of those offering risk assessment services. We will continue to support the work of the ‘Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council’ and expect the outcome of its work to be one or more registers of competent risk assessors whose certification process has been independently quality-assured. This will offer those with responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 greater confidence in identifying those with an appropriate level of competency to help them comply with the legislation.

Residents of tall buildings need better information about evacuation procedures and the way DIY modifications, like installing extra plug sockets, can compromise fire safety measures.

We have commissioned Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) to develop appropriate sector-owned fire safety guidance primarily for the landlords, risk assessors and enforcing authorities of purpose built blocks of flats across all housing sectors. We expect this guidance to clarify a number of issues including managing fire safety and ensuring residents in these buildings get appropriate advice on what to do in the event of a fire. LGID plan to consult widely on the draft guidance, which will be available in May and we expect the final guidance to be available in the summer.

The CLG should ensure all social landlords publish a full register of fire risk assessments online; provide existing and new residents with better information about what to do in the event of a fire; and ensure that inspecting for unauthorised or damaging works are part of routine estate inspections by housing staff.

The Department agrees that as a matter of good practice social landlords should make fire risk assessments available to their tenants and representative bodies. Some landlords already do this on-line and we are considering how we can promote existing good practice so it is more widely adopted by social landlords.

Yours sincerely

Deputy Director

Dear Paul,

My company, Intelligent Wood Systems (IWS) commend the Assembly's report on "Fire Risks in London's Tall and Timber Frame Buildings" on a subject that has for too long been overlooked. IWS's reference is for the timber frame section of the report and not the tall building element.

Fire safety needs to be considered in timber frame in particular multi-storey timber frame projects during the construction phase, as with any construction material. For completed and occupied timber frame buildings the report accurately states, correctly built they are no more vulnerable to fire than any other method of construction. However, during construction the timber frame elements can be left for a period without finished fire protection applied and recently reported fires have highlighted the vulnerable nature of the build method to arson attack during construction.

The report provides an opportunity to focus on concerns and to identify appropriate and viable solutions to mitigate risks highlighted. The following comments reflect views of IWS and come from the expertise that IWS have in the timber frame construction industry. IWS is a research and development provider for timber frame partners and represents a number of industry companies.

Recommendation 2 in the report proposes the use of temporary fire suppression systems to minimise the risk of fires spreading. IWS agree that suppression systems in completed buildings are one method that can greatly reduce the potential for fires spreading in occupied and completed buildings. There are issues with sprinklers within completed buildings such as houses with maintenance an-crfalse alarms and the design is more suited to public buildings. For homes, higher specification smoke and heat alarms, and strict compartmentation rules would be more advantageous. For the construction process sprinklers do not work as they require insulation from cold weather and protection during the construction process and the installation of the system would mean areas of timber frame being exposed and at risk before the system is operational as it would be the timber frame structure that would physically support the sprinkler system.

Damage to the sprinklers would be common place on a construction site.

Rather than adopt temporary suppression systems we strongly believe that the building fabric should be made significantly more robust through the use of innovative building systems and flame retardants. There are various issues that need to be overcome such as ensuring the retardants are suitable for framing components but building system providers such as IWS have spent many months developing a system that, where adopted, will minimise concerns regarding fire in timber frame products during construction as it:

- Reduces ignitability, fire propagation and spread of flame
- Reduces generated heat
- Provides extra time to escape the site
- Behaves in a predictable manner
- Extends response times for fire crews to tackle situations
- Improves structural performance during and after incidents
- Can reduce separating distances by at least 50%

The Assembly should also consider a holistic approach when performing fire risk assessment, i.e. address both walls and floors. Floors are regularly overlooked but critical to a building's performance during fire and are of particular concern as the majority of today's floors are engineered joists such as openweb and I-Beams which both perform poorly under fire conditions. The HSE report on Fire Safety in Construction points out that " Timber engineered Beams are susceptible to structural collapse at an early stage".

Studies show that openweb joists perform even poorer.

Currently, the only other option available is to move to a solid timber floor joist that performs significantly better as a base material and has the added advantage of being treatable with specialist flame retardants through a low pressure treatment process. For this to be successful timber suppliers would need to create an engineered package similar to openweb and I-Beams and would need to reduce the moisture

content and prevent water ingress through water repellents, as per IWS-Floors. Simultaneously IWS believe that the onus should be placed on engineered flooring systems to develop a more robust fire performance. IWS have written an interim report on "Enhanced fire resistance during construction" and welcome the opportunity to present to the Planning and Housing Committee. We are very close to finalising our system and releasing a final report and believe that dialogue with you could greatly impact upon our final findings and be of benefit to the London Assembly.

Yours faithfully,

Director

Dear Nicky,

Thank you for your letter of 17 February with which you enclosed a copy of the London Assembly Planning and Housing Committee's final report into its investigation of fire risks in London's tall and timber framed residential buildings. I fully appreciate and understand why, following the tragic events in Lakanal House in July 2009 and the incidents in Camberwell and Peckham, the committee decided to launch this investigation.

As you might expect, this Government has not been idle whilst your investigation has been in progress. We have been looking closely at these issues with the Fire and Rescue Service, the Health and Safety Executive and industry with a view to seeing what steps can be taken, within the sector, which would be more effective than simply regulating. On the basis of these discussions, we have concluded that further regulation is not an appropriate approach at this time.

You may be interested to know that I chaired a round table meeting regarding fire risks associated with timber framed buildings on 29 November last year. This was attended by representatives of the sector including two representatives of the Chief Fire Officers Association. At this meeting there was a consensus that the existing technical requirements of the Building Regulations did not need to change but there were issues with compliance and workmanship that needed to be addressed.

I note that you have also written to my officials regarding the findings of your investigation. I have asked them to respond more fully, setting out the Departments position in response to your report. You will be reassured to find that a number of your recommendations were already being addressed well before publication of your report in December.

Yours ever,
Bob Neill MP

Report title

GLA Planning and Housing Committee Report into Fire Safety in London

Agenda item 6

Meeting Community Safety Committee

Date 15 March 2011

Report by Assistant Commissioner (Fire Safety Regulation)

Document Number FEP 1716

Public

Summary

This report outlines the findings of the GLA Planning and Housing Committee's review of fire safety in timber framed and tall buildings and the Brigade's response to them.

Recommendations

That:

- (a) Officers respond to the Committee's report, welcoming and supporting its recommendations, as outlined in paragraphs 12-16 of this report.
- (b) The Head of Fire Safety Regulation ensure that appropriate actions for the Brigade are reflected in the Brigade's Fire Safety Regulation Strategy and are included in departmental plans for 2011/12 onwards.

Background

1. The GLA Planning and Housing Committee has conducted a review into fire safety in London. The review was prompted by a series of fires that included the fatal Lakanal blaze in July 2009 that cost six lives. This review was commissioned in January 2010 specifically to look into issues around fire safety in London's residential buildings, with a particular focus on timber frame structures and tall buildings, and to make recommendations to the Mayor of London and the Government with regard to building regulations. London's tall and timber framed residential buildings present very different issues in terms of fire safety and the potential impacts on lives and property but they were considered together in the review because these two types of buildings are set to increase in the capital. The terms of reference for the review were: To identify existing planning policies and guidance as well as current regulations applicable to tall and timber framed buildings in London, for buildings under construction and subsequent occupation. To determine how effective building and fire safety regulations, together with the London Plan and other guidance, are in reducing the risk of and number of fire incidents in tall and timber framed buildings in London.

To establish what the Mayor and Government can do through the London Plan and other guidance to address the issues and if amendments to current London-wide and national regulations are required.

2.

The Members of the GLA Planning and Housing Committee were: Nicky Gavron, Chair, Labour Jenny Jones. Deputy Chair, Green Tony Arbour. Conservative Gareth Bacon, Conservative Andrew Boff, Conservative Steve O'Connell, Conservative Navin Shah, Labour Mike Tuffrey, Liberal Democrat

3.

The Brigade assisted the review by informing the Committee and its secretariat on aspects of the Terms of Reference, providing briefing sessions to committee members on aspects of fire safety legislation and its application and the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, Fire Safety Regulation providing expert testimony to the two public hearings held in March and June. The Brigade formally submitted evidence, based on a number of pre-set questions, to the Committee in March last year and the GLA's report was issued in December. This report provides a summary of the Committee's findings and the Brigade's response to them.

Summary of Review Findings

Timber framed buildings

4.

The Committee noted that over the last 40 years building standards and regulations have been reviewed and updated but retain a requirement for materials and construction methods to offer a minimum period of fire resistance. While the report shows that timber construction can be safe and building at greater heights does not automatically equate to great danger, the committee highlights a number of gaps in fire safety policy and practice. There is a view that the regulations have not kept pace with innovation in the construction industry and some within the design, building and fire safety community believe that the regulations governing the way that timber framed construction have developed is flawed.

5.

Timber framed construction offers potential benefits to London but the Committee recommends that Government, in conjunction with industry partners, should take action to examine recent concerns over the safety of this building system. The Committee also recommends that a review of the Building Regulations needs to focus on the relationship between current guidance and how it is being put into practice on site and that there needs to be a prompt resolution to this debate to address the crisis in confidence developing in the industry.

6.

Fire risks in timber framed buildings are greatest during the construction phase when the fire resistant elements such as internal fire separating walls, protective linings and claddings and fire stopping in cavities are incomplete. Only once the buildings are complete are all the necessary fire measures in place. The Committee recommends that fire suppression systems such as temporary sprinklers should be installed in large timber framed construction sites as well as some form of surveillance during non working hours. It also recommends that it should be a requirement for all building inspectors to inform the emergency services when a timber frame building is being built (in London, a register of such construction sites is already maintained).

7.

The Committee goes on to recommend that the building control process should be strengthened to ensure a minimum number of visits are made at key and safety critical stages during the construction process for timber framed buildings and that the Government should issue guidance to local authorities that, as a matter of strict safety policy, they do not permit the partial occupation of timber framed developments until the whole development is complete and signed off as complying with the approved building regulations.

Tall buildings

8.

The management of fire risk in occupied residential buildings is governed by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the "Fire Safety Order") enforced by the Brigade, and the Housing Acts 1985 and 2004 (enforced by housing authorities). The Committee recommends that the Brigade should consider whether more proactive enforcement activity is needed with managers of large scale tall residential buildings who are not able to demonstrate a history of compliance with the Fire Safety Order.

9.

The Fire Safety Order requires the owners of buildings or "the Responsible Person" to undertake regularly reviewed risk assessments of their buildings but evidence suggests that many of these risk assessments fall below the standards required. The Committee therefore recommends that there must be mandatory minimum standards of competence for training and accrediting fire risk assessors and this should be a legal requirement to comply with the relevant fire safety regulations.

10.

The Committee also recommends that residents must be informed of the findings of the assessments and whatever remedial action plans are in place. By 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government should require all social landlords to publish a full register of fire risk assessments for the residential properties that they are responsible for. This register should be available online but also available to residents.

11.

In addition, the Committee recommends that landlords must ensure that alterations carried out to their properties either by approved contractors or tenants do not compromise the fire safety of their buildings. The "responsible person" should work with the construction and installation trades to ensure works are

carried out by appropriately certified professionals who are aware of the fire safety requirements. All landlords should provide residents with the necessary information (ideally when taking up a tenancy) on what to do in the event of a fire, tailored to the specific circumstances of each residential building, updated and communicated regularly in different languages where appropriate.

Brigade's General Response

12.

As London's population continues to grow and we look to preserve London's green spaces we are going to see a lot more people living at heights - already more than half a million Londoners live in tall buildings. The Brigade therefore welcomes and supports the Committee's report as contributing to improving fire safety for people living in high rise flats and also recommending ways to reduce the fire risks inherent in constructing timber framed buildings.

13.

The report's recommendations serve to remind all those with responsibility for fire safety of their obligations and the measures they should be taking to protect residents and occupants of these premises across London. Many of the report's recommendations are aimed at other bodies, notably the Government in terms of improving Building Regulations, but where applicable, actions which can be taken by the Brigade will be reflected in its Fire Safety Regulation Strategy and included in departmental service plans for 2011/12 onwards.

14.

As regards more proactive enforcement of the Fire Safety Order in tall buildings (recommendation 6), since the Lakanal fire and the issues it highlighted regarding regulatory compliance generally, the Brigade has already reviewed the risk assessment data which determines the audit and inspection programmes and had worked closely with the responsible persons to ensure that their risk assessment programmes are adequate and where not and have taken robust enforcement action where required.

15.

The Brigade continues to promote the use of sprinkler systems, on a risk appropriate basis, as an effective means of controlling and reducing fire risk and has developed particular training interventions assist fire crews when attempting to control, extinguish and contain fires in timber framed buildings (and affected surrounding buildings).

16.

A full list of the review's ten recommendations, together with the Brigade's response, is provided below:
Timber framed buildings

Recommendation 1 proposes that CLG should act immediately to review Approved document B of the Building Regulations in relation to timber framed buildings, instead of waiting until the scheduled review date of 2012/13 and further considered that this be supplemented by further government advice and guidance to landlords regarding the safety of their tenants.

Response: The Brigade supports this recommendation

Recommendation 2 proposes that by the end of 2011 the UK timber frame construction industry should actively promote to its members a variety of fire safety measures, including fire suppression systems and site security measures that are designed to reduce the risk of fire on construction sites during non working hours when the danger of arson or accidental fires is highest. The HSE should then consider whether any of those fire safety measures should be promoted for use on construction sites.

Response: LFB officers have worked closely with the UK Timber Framed Association and the HSE (who are the responsible enforcement agency for construction sites) for a number of months now to progress these aspects and therefore this further impetus is welcomed.

Recommendation 3 is that the Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors (ACAI) makes it a requirement to inform the HSE and Fire Brigade that inspected buildings are being constructed using either timber frame or modern methods of construction. This should be mandatory across the building inspection industry by the end of 2011.

Response: Again LFB officers have worked closely with the ACAI, the HSE and Local Authority Building Control and already have in place a process for notification of planning applications for timber framed buildings in London. This information is then used by fire safety staff and operational crews for operational preplanning.

Recommendation 4 proposes that CLG and HSE should review the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations and the Building Regulations to ensure that the building control process is strengthened in relation to timber framed buildings. Following the review of the building regulations, the industry must identify the safety critical stages of timber framed buildings (for example the installation of cavity barriers in buildings) and ensure a specified minimum number of visits are made by building inspectors during these stages.

Response: The Brigade supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 5 is that CLG should issue guidance to local authorities that, as a matter of strict safety policy, they do not permit the partial occupation of timber framed developments until the whole development is complete and signed off as complying with the approved building regulations.

Response: This is supported by the Brigade and a mechanism will need to be devised that provides clarity to both the HSE who administer construction sites and the Brigade, who regulate completed premises, as to when the transition point occurs.

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Tall Buildings Recommendation 6 is that by 2012 LFEPA should review whether more proactive enforcement activity is needed with managers of large scale tall residential buildings who are not able to demonstrate a history of compliance with the Regulatory Order.

Response: This recommendation would suggest that the Authority return to a more prescriptive role in ensuring compliance than it is resourced to undertake and that the RRO contemplates. Notwithstanding this, since the Lakanal fire and the issues it highlighted regarding regulatory compliance generally, fire safety inspection teams have revisited their building risk assessment profiles which are used to drive their audit and inspection programmes. Fire safety managers and team leaders have worked with the relevant responsible persons to determine the adequacy of their risk assessment programmes and have taken a robust enforcement line where required. It should also be noted that the Authority is still only responsible for the common areas in these premises, with the primary and more comprehensive responsibility falling to the local authority under the Housing Act 2004.

Recommendation 7 is that By 2012, CLG in association with relevant bodies such as the Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and Chief Fire Officers Association should draw up national guidance to ensure mandatory minimum standards of competence for training and accrediting fire risk assessors.

Response: The Brigade welcomes this recommendation and to date has been working with CFOA and the Institution of Fire Engineers towards developing standards in this area. At present these are all voluntary however and compulsory registration is seen as the necessary step in taking this forward.

Recommendation 8 is that by 2012 CLG should require all social landlords to publish a full register of fire risk assessments for the residential properties that they are responsible for. This will enable all residents to be informed of the findings of the relevant risk assessments and whatever remedial action plans are in place. This register should be available online but also available to residents in their buildings for inspection and to tenant and residents representatives.

Response: The Brigade welcomes this recommendation in the interest of transparency and accountability, (but exercises a word of caution with regard to the administration and upkeep of such a register). At this stage, it is unclear as to the penalties and sanctions that would be available for not displaying this information and how landlords would maintain and review these documents in order that they are current.

Recommendations 9 and 10 deal with the landlord/tenant relationship and the need to advise and communicate fire safety information to tenants. These recommend that CLG should write to public sector

“responsible persons” as identified under the Regulatory Reform Order 2005 and Housing Acts of 1985 and 2004 to remind them of the need to:

- o Make tenants aware of the need to seek permission to undertake relevant modifications to their properties and ensure that the terms of the tenancy agreements are enforced should unauthorised actions be discovered.

- o Ensure that contractors are appropriately certified professionals who are aware of the fire safety requirements.

- o Ensure that inspecting for unauthorised or damaging works are part of routine estate inspections by housing staff.

And CLG should immediately write to all social landlords to advise them of their responsibility to ensure that they provide residents with the necessary information on what to do in the event of a fire. This advice must be tailored to the specific circumstances of each residential building, updated and communicated regularly in different languages where appropriate. It needs to form an essential part of the “key collecting” process for all new tenants and new tenants should confirm they have read and understood the information provided. Social landlords should be asked to report these actions to the Homes and Communities Agency (when it takes over responsibility from the Tenant Services Authority) to ensure this takes place.

Response: Again the Brigade supports these initiatives as tenant fire safety awareness and understanding is paramount in achieving their safety in a fire. The practical application however of some aspects of these recommendations could prove problematic for landlords. We would also have wished to see a more general responsibility placed on all landlords, not just public sector responsible persons.

Interim Head of Legal Services Comments

17. The Brigade’s response to the review is consistent with its duty to promote fire safety under section 6 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and its enforcement responsibility under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Acting Director of Finance and Contractual Services Comments

18. The Acting Director of Finance and Contractual Services has reviewed this report and has no comments.

Environmental Implications

19. As a renewable resource timber use in construction is widely encouraged and is on the rise to meet sustainability objectives of client organisations and local planning requirements. As we build at higher densities and with more environmentally friendly materials such as timber framed it is vital that fire safety is taken into consideration to ensure the safety of residents and to reduce the environmental damage caused by fires. Improving fire safety and thus reducing the risk of using more sustainable materials will support their ongoing successful application in the construction sector.

Equalities implications

20. Many of the residents in high rise flats are from minority groups known to be at risk from fire and are therefore targeted by the Brigade with a range of community safety initiatives, such as Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs). HFSV are tailored to the needs of the individual and adjustments are made where possible, e.g. by the provision of an interpreter or by fitting a specialist alarm for the visually or hearing impaired. Risk based community fire safety work and targeted enforcement of fire safety legislation together contribute to improving the safety of vulnerable groups in London.

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List of Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

List of background documents

1. LFB evidence to GLA Committee 2. GLA Planning and Housing Committee report

FSR009(2) London Fire Brigade (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority [LFEPA])

Letter sent to:

Heads of Housing, all London Boroughs.

Date 4 March 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

FIRE SAFETY IN LONDON'S RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS – TIMBER FRAME STRUCTURES AND TALL BUILDINGS

I am writing to you regarding the recent report commissioned by the London Assembly's Planning and Housing Committee concerning the fire risks associated with London's tall and timber framed buildings. As you will be aware the review was commissioned in January 2010 specifically to look into issues around fire safety in London's residential buildings, with a particular focus on timber frame structures and tall buildings, and to make recommendations to the Mayor of London and the Government. London's tall and timber framed residential buildings present very particular issues in terms of fire safety and the potential impacts on lives and property but they were considered together in the review because these two types of buildings are set to increase in the capital.

The report's recommendations serve to remind all of us with responsibility for fire safety of our obligations and the measures we should be taking to protect residents and occupants of these premises across London. Many of the report's recommendations are aimed at national bodies, notably the Government in terms of improving Building Regulations, but there are a number of actions that can also be taken locally and therefore the purpose of this letter is to highlight these actions.

Notifying the Fire and Rescue Service of specified methods of construction

In regard to timber framed construction, a recommendation is made for the Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors (ACAI) to make it a requirement to inform the HSE and London Fire Brigade (LFB) that inspected buildings are being constructed using either timber frame (or other modern methods of construction) and that this should be mandatory across the building inspection industry by the end of 2011. This is a process that had already been adopted in the capital with information being forwarded by both the London District Surveyors Association (LDSA) and the ACAI to the LFB. To this end both the LDSA and the ACAI have agreed to a revised consultation pro-forma which now identifies if a project is utilising timber frame as the main construction method and is received by the LFB as part of the Building Regulations consultation process. I would therefore ask for your continuing support in ensuring that your Building Control staff ensure that the pro-forma used is indeed the new one for the provision of this information.

Partially constructed timber framed buildings

A further recommendation regarding timber framed construction is that DCLG should issue guidance to local authorities that, as a matter of strict safety policy, they do not permit the partial or full occupation of timber framed developments until the whole development is complete and signed off as complying with the approved building regulations.

While clearly there will be occasions when the proximity of construction areas to finished areas of a development will mean the safety of occupants could seriously be compromised, there will be other circumstances where impending risk is more open to interpretation. We would ask then, that wherever early occupation is considered we are consulted and our officers will be pleased to offer our professional opinion regarding the risks presented from a fire safety perspective.

Occupied tall residential buildings

The report discusses a number of areas concerned with fire risks in occupied tall residential buildings.

The first of these deals with the adequacy of fire risk assessments and competency to carry them out. These are both areas that have been the subject of much discussion both between us and the respective Local Authority forums where we are represented.

The report recommends that by 2012 LFEPA should review whether more proactive enforcement activity is needed with managers of large scale tall residential buildings who are not able to demonstrate a history of

compliance with the Fire Safety Order. In this regard your staff should all by now have had meetings with Fire Safety staff from the LFB and have had discussions regarding your fire risk assessment strategy for your housing stock where applicable. These will be kept under continued review by our inspecting staff and I look forward to our continued close working relationships in this regard.

As to the competency of those carrying out fire risk assessments, the report calls for the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to draw up national guidance to ensure mandatory minimum standards of competence for training and accrediting fire risk assessors. This work is already in train and I am sure you will agree this work will benefit everyone in the long term.

Availability of Fire Risk Assessments

You will be aware the law requires the completion of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) for your premises and we can ask you to review them at any time. The recommendation in the report is for all social landlords to be required to publish a full register of FRAs for the properties they are responsible for, preferably online, and for the relevant FRA to be available to residents in their buildings for inspection and to tenant and residents representatives.

It is recognised that each borough has very specific local arrangements for social housing supply and that some of you don't have social housing responsibilities. Where the Council does have ongoing responsibilities however you may wish to consider how this might be done within your organisation and the ways in which this requirement might be managed.

Modification and alterations to buildings

The Planning and Housing Committee recognised that there is an issue that arises from modifications and alterations being carried out during the life of a building which could compromise the original fire integrity of the building. This can arise from modifications by contractors and tradesmen and indeed by tenants themselves.

The report recommends that landlords make tenants aware of the need to seek permission to undertake relevant modifications to their properties and ensure the terms of their tenancy agreements are enforced should unauthorised actions be discovered; it also recommends that the routine estate inspections carried out should be used to identify these issues.

It also recommends that contractors working on any premises are appropriately certified professionals and aware of fire safety requirements.

Raising Awareness – Fire safety information for tenants

The final recommendation recognised that tenants play an important role in both their own and other residents' safety in the event of fire. It also recognised that each building will have specific characteristics that residents need to be aware of. It therefore recommends that all social landlords be reminded of their responsibility to ensure they provide residents with the necessary information and what to do in the event of fire and must account for specific circumstances of each residential building. It recommends that this information is reviewed regularly and should be provided in different languages where necessary. It recognises however that those tenants need to play a part in this process and suggests a feedback mechanism where the tenants sign to say they understand the procedures.

In summary then there are a number of recommendations contained in the GLA report that are aimed at making these buildings and their occupants safer. While I understand that many of these initiatives are already part of your current procedures I would like to confirm London Fire Brigade's commitment to working with you on all fire safety related matters in order that we can ensure a safer environment for all. To that end please do not hesitate to contact your local Borough Commander or Fire Safety Team for any assistance in this regard.

Yours faithfully

Assistant Commissioner
Fire Safety Regulation

FSR009(3) London Fire Brigade (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority [LFEPA])

Letter to:

Social Housing Providers (ALMOs, Housing Associations etc)

Date 4 March 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

FIRE SAFETY IN LONDON'S RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS – TIMBER FRAME STRUCTURES AND TALL BUILDINGS

I am writing to you regarding the recent report commissioned by the London Assembly's Planning and Housing Committee concerning the fire risks associated with London's tall and timber framed buildings. As you will be aware the review was commissioned in January 2010 specifically to look into issues around fire safety in London's residential buildings, with a particular focus on timber frame structures and tall buildings, and to make recommendations to the Mayor of London and the Government. London's tall and timber framed residential buildings present very particular issues in terms of fire safety and the potential impacts on lives and property but they were considered together in the review because these two types of buildings are set to increase in the capital.

The report's recommendations serve to remind all of us with responsibility for fire safety of our obligations and the measures we should be taking to protect residents and occupants of these premises across London. Many of the report's recommendations are aimed at national bodies, notably the Government in terms of improving Building Regulations, but there are a number of actions that can also be taken locally and therefore the purpose of this letter is to highlight these actions.

Notifying the Fire and Rescue Service of specified methods of construction

In regard to timber framed construction, a recommendation is made for the Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors (ACAI) to make it a requirement to inform the HSE and London Fire Brigade (LFB) that inspected buildings are being constructed using either timber frame (or other modern methods of construction) and that this should be mandatory across the building inspection industry by the end of 2011. This is a process that had already been adopted in the capital with information being forwarded by both the London District Surveyors Association (LDSA) and the ACAI to the LFB. To this end both the LDSA and the ACAI have agreed to a revised consultation pro-forma which now identifies if a project is utilising timber frame as the main construction method and is received by the Fire Brigade as part of the Building regulations consultation process. I would therefore ask for your continuing support in ensuring that any new housing development proposals support this process where applicable.

Partially constructed timber framed buildings

A further recommendation regarding timber framed construction is that DCLG should issue guidance to local authorities that, as a matter of strict safety policy, they do not permit the partial or full occupation of timber framed developments until the whole development is complete and signed off as complying with the approved building regulations.

While clearly there will be occasions when the proximity of construction areas to finished areas of a development will mean the safety of occupants could seriously be compromised, there will be other circumstances where impending risk is more open to interpretation. We would ask then, that wherever early occupation is considered we are consulted and our officers will be pleased to offer our professional opinion regarding the risks presented from a fire safety perspective.

Occupied tall residential buildings

The report discusses a number of areas concerned with fire risks in occupied tall residential buildings. The first of these deals with the adequacy of fire risk assessments and competency to carry them out. These are both areas that have been the subject of much discussion both between us and the respective industry bodies and associations in recent times.

The report recommends that by 2012 LFEPA should review whether more proactive enforcement activity is needed with managers of large scale tall residential buildings who are not able to demonstrate a history of compliance with the Fire Safety Order. In this regard your staff should all by now have had meetings with Fire Safety staff from the LFB and have had discussions regarding your fire risk assessment strategy for your housing stock where applicable. These will be kept under continued review by our inspecting staff and I look forward to our continued close working relationships in this regard.

As to the competency of those carrying out fire risk assessments, the report calls for the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to draw up national guidance to ensure mandatory minimum standards of competence for training and accrediting fire risk assessors. This work is already in train and I am sure you will agree this work will benefit everyone in the long term.

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You will be aware the law requires the completion of Fire Risk Assessments for your premises and we can ask to review them at any time. The recommendation in the report is for all social landlords to be required to publish a full register of FRAs for the properties they are responsible for, preferably online and for the relevant FRA to be available to residents in their buildings for inspection and to tenant and residents representatives.

You may therefore wish to consider how this might be done within your organisation and the ways in which this requirement might be managed.

Modification and alterations to buildings

The Planning and Housing Committee recognised that there is an issue that arises from modifications and alterations being carried out during the life of a building which could compromise the original fire integrity of the building. This can arise from modifications by contractors and tradesmen and indeed by tenants themselves.

The report recommends that landlords make tenants aware of the need to seek permission to undertake relevant modifications to their properties and ensure the terms of their tenancy agreements are enforced should unauthorised actions be discovered and recommends that the routine estate inspections carried out should be used to identify these issues.

It also recommends that contractors working on any premises are appropriately certified professionals and aware of fire safety requirements.

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The final recommendation recognised that tenants play an important role in both their own and other resident's safety in the event of fire. It also recognised that each building will have specific characteristics that residents need to be aware of. It therefore recommends that all social landlords be reminded of their responsibility to ensure they provide residents with the necessary information and what to do in the event of fire and must account for specific circumstances of each residential building. It recommends that this information is reviewed regularly and should be provided in different languages where necessary. It recognises however that those tenants need to play a part in this process and suggests a feedback mechanism where the tenants sign to say they understand the procedures.

In summary then there are a number of recommendations contained in the GLA report that are aimed at making these buildings and their occupants safer. While I understand that many of these initiatives are already part of your current procedures I would like to confirm London Fire Brigades commitment to working with you on all fire safety related matters in order that we can ensure a safer environment for all. To that end please do not hesitate to contact your local Borough Commander or Fire Safety Team for any assistance in this regard.

Yours faithfully

Assistant Commissioner
Fire Safety Regulation

FSR010 Passive Fire Protection Federation

4 April 2011

Dear Mr Watling

We refer to the letter dated the 17th February from Nicky Gavron AM regarding the above report and would wish to make the following comments:

First of all we congratulate the GLA Planning and Housing Committee on the work done to produce this report and find ourselves in agreement with many of the findings and recommendations. In particular we would make the following comments:

Recommendation 3: We do agree and feel that this should be an automatic advice as, under the RR (Fire Safety) Order there should be liaison between the regulatory body, be that the Local Authority or an Approved Inspector, and the Fire Safety Enforcement Authority from the inception of a planning approval. We also note that HSE have just issued new Guidelines for Fire Safety In Construction that should be taken into consideration.

Recommendation 4: There are no statutory stages at which inspections must be done by the Regulatory Authority, merely stages at which they must be advised and so there are no statutory inspections so far as we are aware. It is our understanding that the DCLG are not minded to alter this.

Recommendation 7: The Risk Assessment Competency Council was established last year by the DCLG to provide a standard for the use of Certification bodies in assessing competence, this will be available later this year.

Recommendation 9: We fully endorse this recommendation and particularly the second bullet point. This can be done by ensuring all such work is undertaken by contractors who are members of a UKAS accredited, Third Party Certification Scheme for installers of the particular fire safety element. There are many such schemes in existence covering all aspects of fire safety materials and systems in construction. We would further ask if the Greater London Authority will ensure that this advice is followed in all its own contracts and in all the London Boroughs when work is being undertaken under their auspices? We would welcome a public statement to this effect.

We welcome the report and hope to see the recommendations adopted by both the GLA and the other authorities involved.

Best regards

Chairman
Passive Fire Protection Federation

FSR011 UK Timber Frame Association (UKTFA)

Hi Paul,

Here's the UKTFAS' comments on the report, thanks

Fire Safety in London- fire risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the London Assembly's report Fire Safety in London- fire risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings

Our comments are as follows:-

With regards to Recommendation 1, whilst a review of the building regulations is welcome, the CLG have already expressed their opinion that they do not envisage amending the regulations with regards to this matter. They consider that Site fire safety is primarily a matter for the HSE. The UKTFA agrees with this position. Additionally the building regulations cannot discriminate against any construction material. The regulations role is to set the performance standards for buildings of any material or combination of materials. However, any review and improvement to the regulations would have equal benefit to all construction methods.

Moving on to Recommendation 2, the UKTFA agrees that more must be done to combat site arson. It is a mandatory condition that members of the UKTFA adopt best practice fire safety measures both during working hours and after hours. This is being achieved via the mandatory use of the Sitesafe fire safety management policy and adoption of the "16 steps" fire safety document from the UKTFA. These measures would be given additional weight if the Assembly were of the view that all developments must use UKTFA Member companies to supply and build the timber frames. Non-Members of the UKTFA are not within an organization which has mandatory fire safety procedures in place, therefore their actions will be less effective and more difficult to police. The use of suppression systems such as construction-site sprinklers are not appropriate and would be largely ineffective, due to real logistical problems with water pressure, frost protection, susceptibility to deliberate or accidental damage and coverage of a constantly changing building.

Recommendation 3. The UKTFA agrees that notification of the Fire Service is essential, and that notification of the HSE is to be welcomed. UKTFA SiteSafe procedure ensures member companies must notify the fire service, but any additional awareness would be beneficial. Additionally the UKTFA are in detailed discussions with CFA to provide a web based information system to ensure the relevant fire brigades are informed of the location of a timber frame construction site.

Recommendation 4. Agreed as good practice. The UKTFA SiteSafe procedure requires mandatory inspections of the fire safety procedures during construction. Additional inspections from a CDM co-ordinator would be beneficial.

Recommendation 5. Clarification would be required to determine what constitutes completion of the whole development means. Clearly, a low rise housing site poses a negligible risk to occupants who lives a considerable distance from another, incomplete part of the site. A medium rise building which is partially complete would potentially pose a greater risk. A blanket ban on occupation would not be practical or acceptable.

The UKTFA and CFOA have established a timber frame working group including a wide stakeholder representation. This includes the HSE, ABI, FPA FBU and others. The UKTFA/CFOA working party aims to resolve the issues surrounding timber frame site fires to the practical satisfaction of all parties. We will of course advise you of the workings of the group and the outcomes thereof.

The UKTFA would be pleased to further discuss our comments and hope to be involved with the London Assembly in this matter at any future date.

Regards

Technical Manager
UKTFA

FSR012

No response under this code; please see next response

FSR013 Concrete Centre

Dear Nicky,

Re: "Fire Safety In London" Greater London Authority 2010

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the report by the Planning & Housing Committee. The report has addressed the issue of fire risk in tall and timber framed buildings and we do not have any comments on the recommendations.

However the report has content on issues other than fire safety. This content has been provided to give context, but it has not been as thoroughly researched as the content on fire. Some of this extra content is incorrect and some is opinion that is reported with more gravitas than it warrants. The report repeats the myth that timber is a more sustainable construction material and the myth that it can deliver faster and more efficient construction and therefore undermines the recommendations relating to Fire Safety in relation to the selection of Timber frame as a form of construction.

Detailed Comments

HCA Incentivisation of Timber

Page 56 paragraph 4 states "The Homes & Communities Agency insists that 25% of its available grant must be used for developments that incorporate some form of MMC". This is no longer the case, and I provide an attachment of correspondence with the HCA demonstrating this. ***Please see attachment below***

Government Policy

Policy priorities are referred to in the Executive Summary on p11 paragraph 5 and p18 paragraph 1.7 as being the justification and cause of more timber frame. However the paragraphs on 'policy priorities', 1.8 to 1.11, do not provide any evidence of which policies have the purpose or intended consequence of increased timber construction.

Paragraph 1.8 refers to homes being delivered more quickly and cheaply and quite rightly does not attribute these benefits to anyone material. A quarter 4 2010 market share for timber in England of only 13% would indicate that market forces think that

Paragraph 1.9 relates to density and house height and does not mention material. Paragraph 1.10 refers to zero carbon by 2016. All government definitions of zero carbon relate to operational carbon and not embodied carbon and hence zero carbon has nothing to do with embodied carbon of construction materials.

The only material properties that affect operational carbon are conductivity (i.e. insulation effect) and thermal mass. the former is delivered by insulation materials the latter by heavyweight materials. Hence a policy of zero carbon points designers away from lightweight timber.

Paragraph 1.11 states that 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10 are driving more use of timber, but as explained above, they do not.

Paragraph 2.11 2nd sentence repeats the statements "Government policy encourages timber frame...."and provides a reference, however the reference is 12 years old.

We request that in a revised report:

- ☐ Paragraphs 1.8, 1.9, 1.10 and 1.11 are removed
- ☐ In paragraph 1.7, "Is the result of wider policy priorities but they also" is removed

□ Paragraph 2.11 is amended to remove out of date government policy.

Potential Benefits of Timber

“Potential benefits” (of timber frame) are referred to in the Executive Summary on p12 paragraph 4. However this paragraph contains conjecture which is distracting and unhelpful in the context of a rigorous review of fire safety. It is based on paragraphs 1.15 to 1.18 in the report which I comment on below..

No useful evidence is provided in paragraph 1.15 & 1.16 that timber frame offers any benefits over conventional building materials because these paragraphs are based on an inconclusive NAO report that states “should be possible” implying it isn’t now and might not be in the future, and a marketing statement from the UKTFA respectively. Paragraph 1.17 gives market statistics showing the rise of timber frame. That trend has now been reversed (refer latest NHBC statistics). It should be noted that the rise did happen when government policy via social housing funding did incentivise timber frame. But as shown above this incentive has been removed.

Paragraph 1.18 refers to “available projections” indicating a likely increase in timber frame and yet no reference is given. This is conjecture. In each of the last 4 quarters timber frame market share has fallen in England (NHBC statistics). Paragraph 1.18 repeats the myth that building sustainability will lead to more use of timber.

We request that in a revised report:

Paragraph p12 sentence 2 “Timber frame offers potential benefits to London” is deleted.

Paragraph 1.15 sentence 2 is removed

Paragraph 1.16 is removed

Paragraph 1.17 is updated with 2010 statistics (though I acknowledge these were not available at the time the report was written)

Paragraph 1.18 is removed

I would be happy to explain any of the comments above and to meet with you if that would be helpful.

Yours Sincerely,

Executive Director
MPA - The Concrete Centre

FSR013 -Attachment

Correspondence with Homes and Communities Agency stating that the obligation for 25% MMC to obtain funding has disappeared.

From:
Sent:
To:
Subject: RE: London Assembly; Fire Safety in London Report Dec 2011

Hi,
Your understanding below is correct. MMC is not a specific target anymore for NAHP but we continue to collect the data for NAHP monitoring purposes as it still fits with the whole construction efficiency theme and the data is useful for answering PQ's etc.

Regards

Homes and Communities Agency
Maple House
149 Tottenham Court Road
London
W1T 7BN
www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

From:
Sent:
To:
Subject: FW: London Assembly; Fire Safety in London Report Dec 2011

All ,

Please see the email below from the Concrete Centre. My understanding was that the 25% MMC obligation disappeared a few years ago for P+R schemes and that for NAHP RPs' / RSLs' are required to submit MMC data only for monitoring requirements. Please let me know if you have any thoughts on this.

Regards,

From:
Sent:
To:
Cc:
Subject: London Assembly; Fire Safety in London Report Dec 2011

We are currently reviewing the above report at the request of The London Assembly and have noted that on page 56 , Appendix 9 (Achieving efficiency in the construction industry) it states that" The Homes and Community Agency insists that 25% of its available grant (for publicly funded social housing) must be used for developments that incorporates some form of MMC.

Could you please advise whether the above correctly represents current HCA policy as I was under the impression that funding for MMC had been dropped in *2008/9*

Many thanks for your help.

Head of Architecture, Housing and Sustainability, MPA . The Concrete Centre

FSR014 Modern Masonry Alliance (MMA)

Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter.

In common with the fire authorities, insurance companies and other experts we believe timber frame fires pose a great risk to fire fighters, construction workers and residents.

We are very worried about the ferocity and speed of timber frame fires particularly in buildings over 3 stories and care homes.

The MMA. submitted extensive information on fires that have occurred to your original inquiry to support our concerns.

This seems to be further evidenced by a new web site we have been alerted to

www.timberframefires.com

We agree with your recommendations and in particular there is a need for an urgent review of Part B. This regulation was written on the assumption that the building would be built from masonry.

There is a presumption that timber performs the same in fire which it clearly does not, during or post construction. The view being put forward by parties with an interest in timber suggests that this is just about buildings under construction which are not captured by Part B. This is early untrue and misleading.

Interested parties are doing all they can to stop the scheduled review of Part B in 2012 and as such they are putting lives at risk. DCLG are failing in their duty of care in this respect.

The primary purpose of Building Regulations is to protect life and this responsibility must be upheld!

The MMA will support GLA in your endeavors to put health and safety first and deal with growing issue of timber frame fires.

Yours sincerely

MMA Director

FSR015 Pittsburgh Corning

To: Paul Watling

Subject: Comments on the "Fire risks in London's tall and timber framed buildings"

Whilst I believe that the report has had significant influence and pressure from the masonry industry, the fact remains that fires in these types of building occur on a regular basis and most recently with tragic consequences. There is a an opportunity for the construction industry to finally have some joined up thinking as we continue to strive for environmental and sustainable excellence at the expense of human safety.

Our industry is under-policed and it is the enforcement of building standards that will drive down these failures in the future – whilst the timber frame industry can argue that the fire load of the building contents exceeds the load of the fabric, it is still a fact that this method of construction is prone to attack from arson and has a history of poor detailing which subsequently contributes to failure in fire situations in the future.

In relation to the tall buildings where we have seen loss of life in recent years, a higher onus of responsibility should be placed on social landlords, contractors and occupiers alike to identify, report and maintain the high standards required in order to ensure that fire safety is maintained or not compromised.

I also personally believe that the move away from regulatory requirements that were enforced by third parties (Fire Certificates etc) towards Self Regulated (FSO 2005 – Responsible Person) has in my opinion increased the risks rather than reducing them, as too often commercial pressure comes between meeting responsibilities and compliance. Under the old system you has no choice, now it is about running the risk of getting caught after the event rather than before. The 2005 Act was poorly thought out, badly implemented and whilst it may now identify who the responsible person is for litigation, it fails to console the bereaved in what theoretically was avoidable.

Anecdotally, I remember from 15 years service with a County Fire Service that those properties constructed in traditional materials and methods, faired far better than those of modern construction - maybe there is a parallel that can be drawn here and acted upon. I only see an industry that is hell bent on cost and thermal efficiency rather than reducing risk.

regards

Director - UK & Eire

FOAMGLAS

Building

PITTSBURGH CORNING (UK) Ltd

www.foamglas.co.uk

FSR016 Powerwall

To: Paul Watling
Subject: Timber Framed Buildings and MMC

Paul

I have read , and for the most part agree , with the report and recommendations for the use of timber framed buildings.

My only (some what biased) comment would be that in Recommendation 3 there is a statement that reads “either timber buildings or modern methods of construction” .

This implies that all MMC’s are being “lumped” in with timber kits. As a manufacture of volumetric buildings , which uses 100% non combustibile materials , I feel a distinction should be made regarding other non timber kit MMC’s as after the recent fires in London involving timber kits , some housing associations appeared to put a blanket ban on all non traditional building construction.

With the current state of the building industry being what it is , any “bad press” for any kind of MMC , especially if it is not deserved , will make promoting non traditional construction even harder.

Regards

Business Developement Manager

[END]