

## FAQ's

### Who do I contact for further information

- **Leaseholders** - Rebekah Brydon (for Mulalley) or Harriet Long (for Wates), Major Works Officers.  
Email at [Major.Works@Stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:Major.Works@Stevenage.gov.uk) or telephone on 01438 242666
- **Tenants** – Greta Gardiner, Investment Project Support Manager.  
Email Greta at [Major.WorksInvestment@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:Major.WorksInvestment@stevenage.gov.uk) or telephone on 01438 242666

### Why are you doing the works now?

- In Stevenage the council manages over 9,000 homes. We balance our investment plans to try and make sure works aren't done too early or too late. We also need to make sure that we deliver excellent value for money for our residents. One way of achieving this is to make sure we do things in a planned, uniform way with only the best suppliers. This has meant that we have chosen to invest in all of our blocks of flats in the same contract.

### When will works be carried out to my block?

- The programme showing which year each block will have works carried out has now been made available to residents.
- You can find a list of the areas in each year on the Leasehold pages of the website.
- SBC plan to deliver the programme of work over five years. Year one was 2018/19, year two was 2019/20 etc.
- Due to Covid-19, there have been some delays to the programme. We will continue to update residents in regards to any changes based on the latest Government guidance.

### Why are you doing all of the works to the block at once?

- Staggering the works would increase the cost of the individual elements and be logistically detrimental to the Borough as a whole. An enveloping programme is the most cost effective proposal as we will all benefit from the economies of scale. It also allows us to complete all 550 of our flat blocks in a timely manner with the least disruption to neighbouring properties and the general infrastructure of the Borough.

### **When will I know what works are being carried out to my block?**

- Detailed surveys are currently being completed for the year 3 blocks and those affected will be informed shortly if they have not already heard from us. Further surveys will be carried out on an annual basis, for the blocks which fall into the coming year of the programme.
- For example, if your block is scheduled for year 4 of the programme, a detailed survey of your block will be done shortly before the works are scheduled to start at your block.
- When the surveys are complete, you will be contacted to let you know what works are required to your block and how long these works are anticipated to take. You will also be invited to discuss the works in further detail should you so wish.

### **Why are the tower blocks not included?**

- As tower blocks are a different type of build, separate contracts will be procured for works to these in due course.
- This is because contractors specialise in different areas of work, and it is felt that we will be able to ensure best value for money for residents by separating out these contracts from the main Major Refurbishment Contract.

### **How did you select the contractors?**

- The contracts were awarded on a competitive tendering basis, whereby contractors were invited to bid for the contract. The tender submissions were then assessed by a panel on the basis of quality and value for money.

### **Will I be consulted on the choice of materials or colours used?**

- Residents will have input into some of the choices of colour schemes etc that will be offered within the communal areas, such as paint colour inside the communal areas.

### **Is damp and mould included in the contract?**

- Damp and mould are caused by excess moisture. Moisture in buildings can be caused by leaking pipes, rising damp in basements or ground floors or rain seeping in because of damage to the roof or around window frames.
- The scope of works includes measures to address damp and mould including works to eliminate the ingress of water, presence of damp, free ventilation and thermal bridging.
- These works will not resolve any damp and mould issues which have been created from within the property. Please contact us if you would like some advice on how to reduce the likelihood of damp occurring.

### **Do you need to access my flat?**

- Although the works are to the communal areas of the block, we may need access to your flat.
- For instance, if you are a tenant, we may need to upgrade your windows. We will also need to connect your flat to the mains electricity if we upgrade the communal system.
- We have certain rights and responsibilities as the freeholder of the block. The Tenancy Agreement sets out the legal agreement between SBC and the tenant and the Lease sets out the legal agreement between the leaseholder and SBC. We will make sure that we give you plenty of notice should we need access and will discuss with you any concerns you may have.

### **Will access to my flat be affected?**

- Before work starts, our contractors will gather information regarding any residents requiring space to enter with prams or mobility scooters or any other issues which may be related to access.
- During the works, the contractors will ensure that you will have access to your property at all times and make special arrangements for those that require it.

### **What disruption should I expect?**

- These works are quite extensive and will unavoidably create some dust and noise. Our contractors will do their best to keep levels down and will clean up daily.
- Parking may be restricted initially to allow large vehicles to bring materials to the block. All residents will be given lots of warning and the restriction will be minimised to the shortest time possible.
- If you have any breakable items in the gardens, we would recommend that they are moved to allow the scaffolding to be erected.
- We do not anticipate the need to move any residents from the block while the works are ongoing.

### **Will repairs still be done to my block?**

- Our repairs team have a copy of the five year programme.
- Should a repair be raised, they will liaise with the Project Manager to determine the best course of action.
- If repairs are of an urgent nature and the block is not programmed for works in a reasonable time then repairs will need to be carried out.
- Each situation will be assessed on a case by case basis.

### **Will people start working as soon as the scaffolding is erected?**

- The erection of the scaffolding allows clear, visible access to the flat block and allows the contractor - alongside SBC - to inspect at eye level elements such as brick repairs, chimney repairs, gas flues and windows. We can then proceed with asbestos surveys but must wait for the results before we are able to proceed with the works.
- The cost of the overall contracts was priced by the volume of properties. With this in mind, works/trades are carried out in many blocks at one time. For example, a plasterer may start in one block and move to another later that same day. A decorator could follow and do the same. Scaffold time has been reduced by prioritising top level works on all blocks. Once the scaffolding is removed, the contractors move on to the low level works.

### **What happens if the contractor doesn't perform well?**

- Contractors have been selected that have demonstrated a strong track record of delivering works of this nature and that work closely in partnership to ensure high standards of workmanship and customer care. Contractor's performance requirements are detailed in their contracts and will be managed using robust mechanisms which are also set out in their contract.

### **Do the contractors stop works over the Christmas period?**

- Works cease for approximately two to three weeks each Christmas.
- We will aim to minimise disruption at this time through careful planning and the Contractors do operate an emergency callout service during this period.

### **I have a satellite dish on the external wall, how will the works impact my signal?**

- If there is an IRS at your block (Integrated Reception System), we will be removing the dishes if there are no permissions for these to be attached to our building. If you believe that you should not have your dish removed, please contact us to discuss.
- Very small blocks which do not have an IRS will find that the contractors will relocate satellite dishes to the outside of the scaffolding upon erection of any scaffolding to the blocks. This may cause temporary disruption to the service.

### **Will my rent rise to pay for the works?**

- No, the way in which SBC set the rent is set out by law, and is detailed in our Rents Policy.

## Leaseholder Questions:

### What is Section 20?

- Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 sets out how a landlord must consult with leaseholders, where the landlord intends to carry out '**Major Works**', or enter into a '**Qualifying Long Term Agreement**'.
- **Major Works** are any works which will cost the leaseholder **over £250**.
- A '**Qualifying Long Term Agreement**' or QLTA, is an agreement entered into by the landlord with a wholly independent organisation or contractor for a period of more than **12 months**. Landlords must consult where the amount payable by *any one* contributing leaseholder **exceeds £100** in any one year.
- For more information, please go to The Leasehold Advisory Service website- <http://www.lease-advice.org/topics/?topic=section-20-consultation> or contact the Major Works Officer at SBC.

### Can I recommend a contractor?

- While the opinions and views of leaseholders are invited and will be considered, leaseholders **do not** have the right to nominate a contractor for the Major Refurbishment contract.
- For some contracts leaseholders are able to nominate contractors. When and how leaseholders can do this is detailed in the Section 20 legislation.
- For this contract, the works will be of such a high value, that EU procurement rules apply and the contract was advertised by public notice in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). This means leaseholders were not able to nominate a contractor.

### How is my contribution calculated?

- Each block is billed on a block by block basis. You will not be charged for works to other blocks.
- Charges will differ from block to block, because a) the amounts of works can vary widely between blocks; b) charges depend on the size of the block and the number of flats it contains.
- Your individual charge will be calculated using the Government Rent Formula that we use for the calculation of the tenants rents. This will ensure that smaller properties will pay a smaller percentage of the costs. We will calculate based on all properties within the block, both Leasehold and tenanted.

### When will I know how much I have to pay?

- Under Section 20 we are required to inform you of an estimated cost.
- Detailed surveys will be carried out on an annual basis, for the blocks which fall into the coming year of the programme.
- For example, if your block is scheduled for year 3 of the programme, a detailed survey of your block will be done shortly before the works are scheduled to start at your block.
- At this point we will be able to provide you with an estimated cost.
- Final costs will be calculated around 6-90 months from the completion and sign off of works at your block. It is only when we have the actual expenditure that we will be able to produce an invoice.

### Why isn't the cost capped as per Florrie's Law?

- Stevenage Borough Council is a self-funding authority which means that our only funding is that raised through rents/business rates etc. As a result, we are not entitled to any funds from central government and have therefore not been able to apply for any grants for the works. As Florrie's Law only applies to works carried out with Government funding, it does not apply in this case.

### When will works actually start on my block?

- Once we have sent you the Notice that contains your estimated cost, you will have 30 days to come back to us with any observations you may have.
- We will look at all the observations and implement any changes to the proposed works that may be necessary.
- Once the 30 day period is over and we are satisfied that there are no concerns that may delay the works, we will send the contractor a works order and they can begin shortly thereafter.

### How long will the works take?

- We do not have exact timescales for all of our blocks but anticipate around 10-18 weeks for most, dependant on the size.
- Scaffolding will be removed as soon as possible but we must ensure we have checked and signed off on all works requiring the scaffolding before it can come down.

### When will I have to pay?

- You will be invoiced once the works have been carried out at your block and verified by the independent surveying company.
- The pandemic has caused some significant delays to our invoicing procedure and we have been adapting our processes to best assist all of our leaseholders. This includes maintaining the offer of one to one discussions regarding the works and payment options, albeit at a recommended distance.
- We are currently looking to begin the invoicing process for the year 1 blocks in June 2021.

### Can I see the full details of the works and costs for my block?

- Yes. If you wish to see more detailed information, we invite you make an appointment to attend the office during working hours where you will be able to review any documentation related to the procurement of the contracts and/or the works related to your block. You can also request to see copies of certification and qualification for the contractors who will be working at your block.
- We do not send all of this information in the post to you as we would have to pass on the significant costs involved in doing so.
- DUE TO THE CURRENT COVID SITUATION, WE ARE NOT OFFERING THESE ONE TO ONE MEETINGS UNLESS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. PLEASE CONTACT US TO DISCUSS OTHER OPTIONS THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE.

### How do SBC know that the survey is accurate and not just a way for the contractors to make more money?

- Surveys are undertaken by an independent surveying company along with the contractor and are subject to review from a works order panel comprising staff from SBC. We scrutinise recommendations and can make changes to these if we deem necessary. We then produce the resident pack which Leaseholders receive for consultation. Following these stages, a final review panel is convened to determine what works are ordered. When the site access arrangements (normally scaffolding) are in place, an SBC surveyor agrees final measures with the contractor. In order to do this it may require testing to be carried out first e.g. intrusive roof surveys. It is only at this time that final instructions are issued.

### Will I be charged a share of *all* the works that are proposed for my block?

- Not necessarily. If we are doing any works to a tenanted property, these charges are not going to be forwarded onto any Leaseholders.
- We may look to remove other charges based on the history of the block and any long term issues. These will be assessed block by block and each estimate/actual invoice within the block will also be looked at individually.
- All blocks that can accommodate secure communal front and rear doors will be receiving a new door entry system which we will not be recharging to the Leaseholders.
- Other elements which we have agreed to not recharge for include tidying of IRS cables, French drains and UK Power Networks costs associated with electrical works.
- Your estimate will have a column for the costs before the adjustments and a column for the costs after the adjustments so that you can see the value of the items we will not be recharging to you.

### Are you recharging for improvement works?

- Depending on the terms of your individual Lease, we can recharge you for improvements as long as they are considered reasonable.

### What are my options with the Council to help pay my bill?

- SBC have in place a Leaseholders Payment Options (Major Works) Policy. This can be found on the Leasehold – Major Works page of the SBC website.
- There are various payment options available to leaseholders. The options available depend on the leaseholders individual circumstances.
- Leaseholders will receive a percentage off their invoice if they make payment in full within specified timescales. This is as follows:

Invoice amount	Discount
£1,000 - £5,000	2.5%
£5,000+	5%

### If my block is in a later year, will it cost me more than those scheduled for works in year 1?

- The Major Refurbishment Contract does include a provision to adjust prices after 31 March 2019 to reflect inflation and therefore works carried out in the future will be adjusted to reflect such changes.
- It is therefore likely that the cost of the works will be higher in **cash** terms.
- However, as inflation reflects increases in both prices and incomes more generally over the medium to long term, the cost of the works in **real** terms should remain broadly the same.



### **There are no works inside my flat, why do I have to pay?**

- The Council owns the freehold of the building that your flat or maisonette is in, and is responsible for the upkeep of it. Leaseholders are required to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the structure of the building and common areas under the terms of their lease.
- Your lease is a legally binding contract with your landlord, the Council.
- These works include (but are not limited to) external repairs, decoration of communal areas, roof works, rainwater gutters/pipes/drains, communal doors, entry phones/intercoms, landscaping and boundary walls and/or fences.

### **As a leaseholder, am I paying for the tenanted flats?**

- No. Leaseholders pay for their works directly through major works service charges whereas tenant's contributions are paid from their rent.

### **Is the money you are collecting from Leaseholders being used to fund any other projects?**

- No. We are only recharging for the items of work carried out at your flat block. You are not contributing to any other works in the Borough.

### **Can I refuse for the works to be carried out?**

- The details of what we are able to charge for and what you are obliged to pay for are detailed in your lease. The lease is a legal contract so there is an obligation from both parties to abide to its terms, including maintenance responsibilities of the landlord.
- This does not mean that we will not take your comments into account; there is a period after each notice is sent to you that allows all leaseholders to make observations and we are legally bound to have due regard to these.

### **Are there any guarantees or warranties for the works?**

- Works are quality inspected at regular intervals during the project progress and are covered by a 12 month defect period which commences once the works are signed off by the Council as complete.
- Additionally, all materials are covered by manufacturer's guarantees.

### **I am claiming benefits; do I still need to pay?**

- The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) may be able to assist people receiving job seekers allowance, universal tax credits or pension credit with the costs of certain works or interest on amounts borrowed. You must send them a copy of the invoice within one month of the date on the invoice or they may refuse to consider your request.

### **If I don't have the means to pay, will the council buy back my flat? If yes, can I revert to being a tenant again?**

- SBC do operate a 'Buy Back' Policy, however the budget for this is extremely limited, and there is only enough for a small number of purchases per year.
- There are criteria which apply in order to qualify for this scheme, and applicants are assessed on an individual, case-by-case basis.
- Under this policy, we will only consider home owners becoming tenants again where they may be suitable for sheltered housing accommodation.
- SBC will only consider purchases that are financially viable and if the property is deemed suitable
- For more information on this, please contact our Housing Advice Team on 01438 242666.

### **I already pay service charges, why is this work not covered within that?**

- Your service charge pays for the day to day actual costs incurred in maintaining and running your block. It includes things such as buildings insurance, grounds maintenance, caretaking, communal electricity supply, a management fee and general day to day repairs, which you are billed for as and when they are carried out.
- There is no charge within your service charge for a 'reserve' or 'sinking' fund, so all major works have to be billed for at the time the works are carried out.

### **Will my annual service charges rise as a result of these works?**

- When considering the works required in this project, SBC are taking into account the repairs which have been carried out over the recent years.
- For example, a roof may have had some patch repairs carried out as it ages, the cost of which is recharged through your day to day service charges. By replacing the whole of the roof, it is expected that the roof will not need interim patch repairs for some time, and therefore you may even notice a decrease in some of the repairs costs.

### **How are SBC planning to ensure the maintenance of the flat blocks once the works are complete?**

- Once the works are completed, we will be inviting residents to meet with us and discuss the caretaking and gardening scope of works that we are currently offering and see if any changes are required.
- We will also be looking to put in a place a few new maintenance contracts to ensure the long life of the components that we are using. We want to ensure that the individual blocks are well maintained and reduce the cost of ongoing repairs as well as help to ensure the individual elements have a long and robust life.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ALL THE LATEST UPDATES, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:**

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/>

*For Leaseholders –*

Click on Housing – Leaseholders – Major Works and details can be found under the Current Major Works and Current Long Term Agreements headings.

*For Tenants –*

Click on Housing – Home Improvements – Major Refurbishment Contract