

# Your Questions Answered – St Jude’s Housing Refurbishment

## Your Questions Answered page – updates for final reports

This document contains any questions you might have in relation to the letter delivered to you on Wednesday 7 May. We recommend reading the letter before reviewing these questions. If you have a question that isn’t covered, please email [stjudes@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:stjudes@bristol.gov.uk)

### Is my home safe to live in?

Yes, your home is safe to live in. While the surveys have been ongoing, since June 2024, any issues or risks that have been raised have been mitigated and addressed immediately.

### Is there an immediate danger to life?

No, the final reports demonstrate that there is no immediate danger to life.

### What do the structural survey results say?

The final reports received from Ridge, a building environmental consultancy who the council employed to conduct structural and fire risk assessments, have provided an overview of Charleton House, Haviland House, John Cozens House, and Langton House blocks’ building and fire safety status.

#### **Ridge have confirmed that the flats in the St Jude’s blocks are safe to live in.**

The reports confirm that the blocks are safe to live in. They also identified works to further improve the safety of the blocks. These works include updating the fire evacuation procedure, and in September a waking watch service was introduced in Charleton House, Haviland House, John Cozens House, and Langton House block to assist you and your family to evacuate in the event of a fire.

Following visual surveys of the balconies, crash decks have been installed at the base of two of the blocks to remove the impact of any potential falling debris. Further works to the balconies are expected to be needed and we will share more details of those once further surveys have taken place.

The reports explain that: "under accidental loading the concrete section of the structure is assessed to be inadequate in the event of a non-piped gas explosion". There is no gas piping nor any gas hobs inside the buildings. It is also absolutely essential that **no** gas canisters are brought into the building, under any circumstances.

Gas canisters could pose a risk to the building structure should one explode inside the building. While this event is very unlikely to happen, it does mean that Ridge have made recommendations for some immediate and medium term works that need to take place to maximise the buildings’ safety.

We take your safety very seriously and we are focussing on the recommendations made by Ridge as a priority.

The structural surveys also assessed the concrete frame, external wall cladding, handrails, and balconies.

These intrusive investigations found that the building is safe, “with the exception of certain elements, namely the balustrades”. The balcony balustrades (the small row of columns with a rail

on top) will be investigated further and some repairs will likely be needed. We will provide further information on this as soon as we know more. For now, you can use your balconies as you normally would. As always, if you have any issues with your balcony then please visit the [Repairs page on our website](#).

You can read the reports for each of the blocks surveyed, along with executive summaries from the council and our contractors, Ridge, on the council's website.

## What do the final reports mean for the proposed refurbishment project?

In June, we advised that in order to move ahead with the full proposed refurbishment programme we first needed to complete and then review the building surveys for each block. This was an important and vital first step to ensure that we have as much detailed information as possible to inform the refurbishment programme.

The final reports show that further works and therefore more investment is required to maximise the safety of the blocks. Ridge's recommended works are additional to the already planned building and fire safety works. The immediate and medium-term actions recommended by Ridge will help to ensure you and your family's continued safety".

This additional investment was not budgeted for in the original proposed refurbishment plans. As a result, we have made the very difficult decision to not move forward with all of the proposed St Jude's refurbishment at this point in time and to instead prioritise the recommendations from Ridge.

We understand that this will be disappointing news. Our priority is always residents' safety and therefore we must prioritise these additional building and fire safety works first.

These works mean that there will be significant investment in the buildings' structures which extends the life of the buildings. These additional works will also improve your living standards, increase the energy efficiency of the building and your homes.

## What you can do to keep your home and the building safe

- Do not keep the following items within your home:
  - gas cannister/bottles/cylinders
  - portable gas cookers
  - High-capacity batteries which can be found in e-scooters, e-bikes, and some models of mobility scooters. If you are unsure whether your battery is high-capacity or not, please speak email [estates@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:estates@bristol.gov.uk)
- Regularly check and maintain electrical items and appliances within your home.
- Notify Housing Officers or caretakers about any safety concerns or hazards that you see in communal areas.
- Ensure you familiarise yourself with the evacuation routes for you and your family.
- Allow us access to your property to carry out Tenancy Audits and Person-Centred Fire Risk assessments.
- Limit hoarding to minimise blocking walkways or doors in your home.
- Always keep communal areas clear.
- Do not store personal items in the communal areas.

## What is the council doing to improve fire safety?

In September the council received an initial update from Ridge and the evacuation procedure was

updated and a waking watch service was introduced. Waking watch carry out regular patrols and inspections of the blocks to maximise fire safety.

Since June, we have continually taken steps to improve building and fire safety such as implementing scaffolding around some of the blocks, removing the gas supply from laundry services, concluding a first round of tenancy inspections for gas canisters, and inspection and immediate repairs to the balustrades on the balconies.

Council properties are already fitted with smoke detectors. The smoke detectors fitted will be either battery operated (with a 10-year life battery) or connected to the mains (with a 10-year life battery back-up). If you want any more information please visit [the smoke and heat alarm booklet on our website](#). Part of the immediate recommendations from Ridge is for a fire alarm to be installed across the St Jude's blocks, this will happen over the next six months.

You can find out more about how you can improve the fire safety of your home, by visiting:

- [Gas safety for council tenants](#)
- [Fire safety for council tenants and leaseholders](#)

## You evacuated Barton House as an emergency, why isn't an emergency evacuation needed in the St Jude's blocks?

The structural surveys demonstrate that the flats in St Jude's are safe to live in.

The structural surveys that took place on St Jude's in 2024 were informed by our experiences at Barton House and the process of investigating a housing block of similar construction. As a result, we have a much clearer understanding of the safety and design of the building structure of St Jude's. This meant that we didn't wait for the final reports before reviewing our approach to the blocks. We have worked consistently with the contractors and when any potential risks have been identified we have resolved these.

This additional knowledge and insight into the structures of the blocks in St Jude's have helped us take immediate actions needed to improve fire safety and we can now move onto additional works in such a way that you can stay in your homes throughout. Many of the immediate actions identified by the survey report have already been actioned and measures are in place to maximise fire safety, with more work planned to further improve the overall condition of the building.

## Are Avon Fire and Rescue Service satisfied that the building is safe?

Yes, Avon Fire & Rescue Service: "support the decisions taken by Bristol City Council and the mitigations".

Our teams have regular engagement and communication with Avon Fire & Rescue Service. When appropriate we have consulted with them while the structural surveys were taking place.

We will continue to work in collaboration with the fire service, and they will always review our approach to fire safety and any proposed changes before they are implemented.

Following a review of these reports and the work carried out, Avon Fire & Rescue Service has reviewed the reports and advised: "Avon Fire & Rescue Service have been informed of structural issues and subsequent mitigations in place following pre-planned building surveys on the St Jude's housing blocks, commissioned by Bristol City Council. We understand this may be a stressful and challenging time for residents, family members and the community. We would like to **reassure residents that we have seen the reports and support the decisions taken by Bristol City Council and the mitigations** they have put in place, including continuation of the simultaneous evacuation strategy and waking watches.

"Avon Fire & Rescue Service will continue to liaise and engage with Bristol City Council to ensure that residents remain as safe as possible.

“We want to take this opportunity to remind everyone to test their smoke alarms at least once a month, if there are issues, please fix them as soon as possible if you are a homeowner, or report to your landlord immediately if you are a tenant.”

### When did the council become aware of the issues highlighted in the reports?

Structural surveys were carried out on each block during July to December 2024. These surveys were commissioned to fully assess the building and fire safety features of the blocks. While the surveys were taking place we proactively worked with the contractor to begin mitigating any potential risks that were identified. This means that work to maximise the safety of the blocks has already begun.

### Do the results of these reports mean a change to the fire evacuation procedure in my block?

No, the fire evacuation procedure that was implemented in September last year remains the same. In the event of a fire anywhere in the block, you should evacuate your home to a safe space. You can find out more about the evacuation procedure on the council's website.

### Were these building surveys the same as those carried out at Barton House?

These surveys are part of a set of investigations commissioned in October 2022. Whilst the surveys that Ridge carried out were for the same purpose as those commissioned at Barton House, the surveys were needed to ensure that the proposed refurbishment works would be appropriate for these blocks. It is important to note that every block is different and therefore the investigations carried out are unique to the building being surveyed.

The inspections that took place were not because we had any immediate concerns about the safety of the blocks in St Jude's. It was essential that we finished the inspections (that began in October 2022), so that we had as much detailed information as possible to help inform the refurbishment programme.

### I live in Langton – why are fire safety measures still needed?

Through the investigations, Langton was identified as a slightly different construction type. This is known as an “in-situ reinforced concrete frame building.” This means that this block does not have a similar to LPS construction type and therefore poses less risk. However, because Langton is physically connected to the other blocks, Ridge have provided similar recommendations.

### I live in Tyndall House – why can't the refurbishment happen?

The surveys were phase one of the refurbishment proposals, and moving ahead with phase two depended on the survey results. Tyndall House has not been identified as a potential LPS block and therefore did not require the same investigations as the other blocks. Tyndall is still part of the same overall refurbishment proposals. Because we are prioritising the immediate and medium-term recommendations from Ridge, this means that none of the previously proposed refurbishment works can go ahead at this moment in time on any block.

## Why were some people moved out of their homes in St Jude's?

To finish phase one of the programme structural surveys had to be done on several flats across the blocks in St Jude's. To complete the structural surveys quickly and to a high degree of accuracy, several households moved into temporary serviced accommodation whilst the surveys were carried out. All residents returned to their homes once the survey work was completed.

## My home didn't have a structural survey take place – how do you know it's safe?

Only a small number of flats were needed to complete the surveys. Each flat was carefully selected based on its size and location within the block. The flats selected were sufficient to provide Ridge with a sample of surveys that provide an overview of the buildings structure. No further surveys on additional flats are required, and structural engineers are satisfied that the information obtained from the flats surveyed provide an overall picture of the whole block.

## Were the blocks in St Jude's built using the Large Panel System (LPS) method of construction?

The four blocks share a construction design which is similar to the Large Panel System (LPS) method of construction which was commonly used for multi-storey blocks built in the 1960s and 1970s. The surveys undertaken already indicate that the method of construction used for these blocks is similar, though not exactly like the traditional method of LPS construction. What this means is that when conducting our surveys, the structural engineers have had to make certain adjustments to their methods to accurately calculate each building's robustness.

## What can residents expect over the next few months?

### **Repair works**

Over the coming weeks contractors will be extending the scaffolding to help carry out inspections and repairs to the balconies, balustrades and walkways. A wireless fire alarm will also be installed during this period.

Over the next six months to two years a sprinkler system will be installed and where applicable more in-depth repairs to external walls, walkways, and balconies will take place.

### **Tenancy audits**

We will continue to conduct tenancy audits more regularly across the blocks. These audits help us ensure we have up-to-date contact details for you and your family, and accurate information about the people living in your home. We will be asking you to allow us into your home to make sure we have taken your and your family's personal circumstances into account when working in your block, for example to answer any fire safety questions you may have. We request you provide access to enable Housing Officers to keep you and your family safe.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and should you have any comments about this process, please do let us know. By working together and allowing access we can maintain safe and secure homes.

Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment (PCFRA) are available to all who feel that they may need some assistance in the event of a fire, they:

- Identify fire risks a resident may pose to themselves. Such as oxygen, smoking, hoarding etc.
- Identify those who cannot respond to an alarm and or evacuate the building unaided.

We can then support people to access services to help them manage their own risk.

## Homes and Housing Delivery Committee meeting on Friday 30 May

The St Jude's refurbishment project update will be presented to the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee on Friday 30 May. The report is for information only and the committee will not be making any decisions. You can find out more details about the meeting, closer to the time, [on our website](#).

### Can I be re-housed?

We understand that information regarding fire safety can cause concern, and we want to assure you that your home is safe and there is no reason you cannot or should not remain in your home. If we had any concerns about the safety of your home, then we would let you know and immediate action would be taken.

If you have had any recent [changes in your family circumstances](#) and wish to discuss a housing application, please visit the [HomeChoice Bristol website](#).

We understand that information about fire and building safety can appear complicated and sometimes be difficult for children and young people to understand. Our Housing Officers and housing teams are available to answer any questions, and support can also be provided from your child's school or college.

### How will tenants living in St Jude's blocks be kept informed?

Tenants and leaseholders in Charleton House, Haviland House, John Cozens House, Langton House, and Tyndall House will receive hand delivered letters for any significant announcements related to this project. For any other updates we will post letters, email, and text residents.

Our webpage will also be regularly updated with further information for residents: [www.bristol.gov.uk/stjudesrefurbishment](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/stjudesrefurbishment).

If you have a question that isn't covered in this document or on our website, please contact [stjudes@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:stjudes@bristol.gov.uk). We will respond to your query directly and update this Your Questions Answered document with the information.

Officers conducted a tenancy audit of blocks in St Jude's in 2024 and gathered contact information for residents. If your email address or phone number has changed recently, or you want to check we have the correct contact details for you, please email [estates@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:estates@bristol.gov.uk)

### What is the council doing to make sure that other residential blocks are safe?

No other council house blocks were built using LPS method construction or construction similar to LPS method.

We have been assessing other blocks on our estate over recent months as part of a thorough estate review. This review is being conducted on the council's oldest council blocks first to inform decisions about their future. These blocks already have enhanced fire safety measures in place and a number are due for further works to remove problematic cladding and install new sprinkler and temporary alarm systems. Waking watches remain in place at a number of blocks whilst these works are carried out.

### Is this document called "Your Questions Answered" available in another language or format?

Yes, all letters to residents and this "Your Questions Answered" document are translated into the other languages for tenants. If you require the text in another format or language, please email

[stjudes@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:stjudes@bristol.gov.uk) or speak to your Housing Officer. We also offer an on-demand translation service by phone. You can request this by speaking to your Housing Officer and advising that you need a translation.