

**Barbican estate concrete: surveys, repairs, and charging**  
**Questions / Answers**

1. It is clear from the previous reports we have now seen, notably *Barbican Estate—Spalling Concrete*, report dated 5 April 1986 for Barbican Residential Committee, 14 April 1986 and the *Physical Future of the Barbican Estate* 1991, that the existence of some defects to the concrete has been known to the City since at least 1986.

For example, in para 2.2.6 of the 1986 report it describes a number of minor defects “due to local instances of insufficient cover to reinforcement and less dense concrete.”

The fact that the attendees at the 1986 meeting to consider the report included the town clerk and senior officers from the city engineer’s department suggests that there was concern at a high level within the City about the nature of defects to the concrete at that time.

1) Prior to the April 1986 concrete report there had been a number of issues concerning the Barbican Estate and all of its building components, including health & safety implications, some of which had involved possible litigation against Chamberlin, Powell and Bonn, the architects of the estate. In view of this, subsequent issues that arose at that time concerning the concrete were also reviewed by senior officers. With regards to the concrete aspect, the April 1986 report states that “none of the defects are of structural or other particular significance. No such defect has constituted a potential safety hazard” and “the condition of the concrete was discovered to be generally good, and free from major defects.”

2. Both the 1986 and 1991 reports state that the consultants consulted at the time said that the defects should be mitigated by repairs followed by regular monitoring and maintenance.

For example, in the 1991 report Section 2 on pp. 4-5, covers the “Structure and Exterior”. Within sub-section 2.1, Concrete, it says: “The concrete should be durable, provided that proper maintenance is carried out.”

2) Periodic inspections of the concrete have been carried out; either by commissioned specialists or by Barbican Estate staff and contractors in the course of their normal duties or through carrying out conditions surveys to inform other works specifications e.g. external redecoration. Whenever defects have been identified these have been attended to either individually or as part of a wider programme e.g. mastic works to concrete joints. In all cases these defects have been minor and most did not require any remedial action.

3. The defects identified in the concrete in the 1986 report were not listed in schedule 4 to the leases that were issued by the City when people started to buy long leases to the flats.

3) The defects identified in the 1986 report were not included in schedule 4 of the leases issued to prospective buyers because they are not considered to be a structural defect.

4. The repairs and regular inspections and maintenance recommended in 1986 and again in 1991 were not carried out.

4) Following the 1986 report, repair works were carried out. This is confirmed in the Ove Arup report.

5. The work done in 2012, the subject of the current reports, is the first repair and maintenance that has been done to rectify problems first formally identified in 1986. We accept that the concrete generally is in good condition (something residents are pleased about). However, the main areas that have needed repair this year clearly have needed it as a result of low compaction and poor coverage (and inadequate initial repairs to those defects) that were present from the outset, at the time the buildings were built. The costs have primarily arisen from the need to remedy these initial defects.

5) The works carried out in 2012 were not unexpected and were considered to be reasonable for a building of this age and type.

6. The costs of the 2012 works to the three Barbican towers are due to be charged in full to the long leaseholders. The known existence of the defects in 1986; the lack of declaration of these defects in leases issued subsequently to 1986; and the lack of the planned monitoring and maintenance recommended in 1986 and 1991 until this year make it manifestly inequitable that all the costs should fall on the long leaseholders.

We therefore seek a discussion with you and your officers about the equitable distribution of the costs for the current concrete works – and any future similar repairs to the terrace blocks.

We also have concerns that the work done in 2012 was more expensive than it need have been (in particular, in the use of the scaffolding).

6) The scaffolding was required for the protection of the residents and the public and was a necessary requirement of the CDM Co-ordinator and the contractors. It was cost effective to leave the scaffolding in place whilst the cosmetic repairs were carried out rather than strike the scaffolding and re install it.

7. Given this last concern about a lack of cost control, together with the failure to follow up on the 1986 and 1991 reports, we also want to discuss with you the future procedures for asset management on the estate. As you know, we have long pressed for better asset maintenance planning and this has led to a working party on this issue. However, the only tangible result has been the selection of asset maintenance software. Proper implementation should significantly improve matters but we believe that 1) this effort needs to be accelerated so we can attempt to head off future issues such as this one, and 2) residents need to be more fully involved in the major maintenance decisions.

It is clear to residents that section 20 notices no longer provide long leaseholders with the level of consultation that they need and are entitled to (as major payers) about major works. Such consultation needs to include much more initial discussion of the details of the work, its rationale, its specification, and the methods of working.

We trust that the BRC will not consider further the report it already has before it until we have had a chance to discuss these issues with you and your officers. We will, of course, make ourselves available for a meeting at your earliest convenience.

- 7) Section 20 consultation is required by the Housing Act. However, where possible the BEO exceeds this requirement consistently. We consult through a variety of mediums; house groups, newsletters and individual letters to leaseholders. We use public forums such as the RCC and the BA, and we hold open meetings as evidenced in the Beech Gardens and Redecoration projects.

Asset Management has been provided through planned inspection cycles and condition surveys. In 2010 the Asset management working party was convened with a remit to develop an Asset Maintenance Plan in order to:

- maintain the fabric of the property in good condition, especially in view of its listed status, and therefore extend its life
- manage Health and Safety requirements – for example, the asbestos register and Health and Safety equipment
- gather and analyse information from day to day maintenance work
- avoid unplanned costly major repairs and to plan future financial commitments both for the landlord and residents with a view to saving money in the long term
- identify any opportunities for savings that can be made – for example, whole life cycle costings
- survey and monitor the condition of the buildings, make an assessment of the life expectancy of components so that replacement works can be programmed
- assess the buildings in terms of their sustainability and energy efficiency.

The introduction of the Asset Manager role, within the new Property Services structure, will lead this group in the development of the Asset Management strategy and the implementation of new asset management software will ensure that this aspect of the service is more visible in the future.

Specific projects to maintain or improve the asset will be delivered in accordance within the City of London's project governance arrangements; reporting through a local programme board and Project Sub Committee as required.

Our commitment to resident involvement can be evidenced as mentioned above and we will continue to consult with residents both in terms of development of the strategy and specific asset management plans and projects.