



## Salix Homes

### Fire Risk Assessment for Blackfriar Court Salford M3 7FS

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## Contents

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1.0	Introduction .....	3
2.0	Background.....	5
3.0	The Inspection .....	7
4.0	The Report.....	8
5.0	Elemental Summary.....	9
6.0	Main Summary.....	13

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Appendix 1.....	Scott Schedule
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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 The Client**

Salix Homes

### **1.2 The Property**

The property is Blackfriar Court, Salford, M3 7FS.

### **1.3 Date of Inspection**

The property was inspected on 27 November 2008.

### **1.4 Brief Description**

The property comprises a 15 storey block of flats. The property is understood to have been built c1967, and comprises 88 purpose-built residential flats, with 6 flats per floor.

The property appeared to be of reinforced concrete modular construction, with two lift shafts and a single accommodation/Means of Escape staircase. Each floor is logically laid out, with a corridor around a central core, housing the staircase, lifts, refuse chute and service risers. The corridor on each floor is lobbied, each side serving three flats.

The property provides residential accommodation.

### **1.5 Proposal**

A proposal letter dated 21 October 2008 was submitted to Salix Homes offering surveying services.

### **1.6 Limitations**

The Report is for the sole use of the named Client and is confidential to the Client and their professional advisors. Consequently, no responsibility can be accepted to any other party in respect of its contents in whole or in part and the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 shall not apply. Before the Report or any part is reproduced or referred to in any document, our written approval as to the form and content must be obtained.

The assessment does not provide any indication of the condition of the building or its elements, fixtures or fittings, and is not for any statutory purpose.

The report summary provides an overview of the appended Fire Risk Assessment Schedule, highlighting significant and recurrent issues. Any generalisations made within the summary have been made by the surveyor using their judgement and based on the information recorded in the Fire Risk Assessment report.

The appended Schedule takes a general approach, recording the information deemed appropriate or relevant at the time of the inspection, following structured prompts. Where there may be a subjective judgement required, the surveyor has made this using their professional opinion based on the circumstances at the time of the inspection.

### **1.7 Fees and Expenses**

The Client will pay Pennington Choices Limited the agreed fee for the Report inclusive of VAT and disbursements.

### **1.8 Complaints**

The Company has a full complaints procedure and in the unlikely event of a complaint arising, please contact the author regardless of the issue who will be pleased to assist. If however, you cannot resolve the issue in this manner, please write to Mrs Chantelle Hayes, Managing Director.

## 2.0 Background

The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, as amended by the Fire Precautions (Workplace) (Amendment) Regulations 1999.

The regulations are designed to provide for a minimum fire safety standard in places where people work, including shared areas, workplace facilities, and the means of access to that workplace. This has been achieved by amending 'The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992' which requires all employers to conduct a risk assessment regarding health and safety matters and if you employ more than five persons it has to be a written assessment. The 1997 regulations now require you to consider the Fire Safety aspect (i.e. Part II of the 1997 regulations) as part of the risk assessment or as an addition to it.

In December 1999 the Fire Precautions (Workplace) (Amendments) Regulations 1999 came into force. These amendments brought larger employers, (those requiring a Fire Certificate), within the scope of these regulations and subsequently requiring them to carry out a fire risk assessment.

In 2005 the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 came into force.

The Order covers general fire precautions and other fire safety duties which are needed to protect 'relevant persons' in case of fire in and around most 'premises'. The Order replaces previous fire safety legislation. Any fire certificate issued under the Fire Precautions Act 1971 ceased to have any effect. You must carry out a fire risk assessment and keep it up to date to ensure that all the fire precautions in your premises remain current and adequate.

If a Fire Risk Assessment had been carried out under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, as amended 1999, and this assessment has been regularly reviewed, this should be revised the fire risk assessment taking into account the wider scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

## 2.1 Responsibility for Enforcement of the Fire Safety Order

Local fire and rescue authorities (the fire and rescue service) have responsibility for the supervision and enforcement of the regulations. It is, however, the employer's duty to identify and take appropriate measures to comply with the Regulations. In our opinion, Salix Homes have a responsibility to comply with the Order.

The Fire Safety Order requires employers to:

Carry out a Fire Risk Assessment to:

- Identify the fire hazards.
- Reduce the risk of those hazards causing harm to as low as is reasonably practicable.
- To decide what physical fire precautions and management arrangements are necessary to ensure the safety of people in your premises if a fire does start.
- Provide and maintain: means for detecting fire; Means of Escape; emergency lighting; fire safety signs; and fire fighting equipment.
- Monitor and review the risk assessment.
- Inform staff including providing training.
- Plan for an emergency.
- Nominate persons to assist.

Failure to comply with the Regulations, resulting in one or more persons being placed at serious risk is a criminal offence in itself and in these cases the fire and rescue authority may consider immediate enforcement action and/or secure prosecution of the offence via the court.

### **3.0 The Inspection**

#### **3.1 Inspection**

The aim is to follow a normal and logical approach, entry and route through the building and make a visual assessment of the premises with regard to adequacy of fire safety.

#### **3.2 Limitations**

The inspection will be restricted to those communal areas agreed with the Client and specified in the brief. The inspection specifically excludes private flats or dwellings or premises outside the communal areas within the responsibility of the Client.

#### **3.3 Recording**

The Fire Risk Assessment is undertaken with a checklist that has been drawn up to reflect fire safety measures as described by 'Fire Safety Risk Assessment– Sleeping Accommodation' published by HM Government.

#### **3.4 Consultation**

The Block Superintendent for the premises was consulted briefly over fire safety issues relating to the premises.

## 4.0 The Report

### 4.1 Reporting

Unless agreed otherwise at the time of instruction, comments are to assist you to meet your duties under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 as amended by the Fire Precautions (Workplace)(Amendment) Regulations 1999.

### 4.2 Costs

The Report does not include any detailed costing or estimates, and for these reasons any advice on the cost or scope given will be based on 'spot prices' only for guidance and would exclude allowances for Preliminaries, Contingency Sums, professional fees and VAT.

### 4.3 Action

Each item has been given a priority weighting to categorise and assist scheduling improvement work. Our definitions are as follows:

- A Immediate - Urgent action required to reduce, or eliminate serious threats to Fire Safety. Failure to act may contravene statutory requirements and could lead to the issue of notices of legal proceedings by the Enforcing Authority.
- B Improvement Required - Short to medium term action required. Planned Action required to reduce, or remove lesser but real threats to Fire Safety. Contravention may lead to the issue of Notices, legal proceedings or a letter by the Enforcing Authority.
- C Improvement Required - Plan as part of a programme of similar work, repair or renewal. Action desirable to demonstrate that precautions or techniques are consistent with good Fire Safety controls and practice. Serious harm unlikely.
- D Management - An issue of policy or procedure to be addressed by Management

## 5.0 Elemental Summary

### 5.1 Fire Hazards

The main sources of ignition in the building are the electrical switchgear and lift motor room equipment. Where possible, sources of ignition should be removed from the building. If this is not possible, management controls must be put in place to restrict unauthorised access, remove contact with combustible materials, improve warning capabilities and provide regular maintenance.

A temporary repair was noted to have been carried out to the main electrical switchgear where a fuse carrier is understood to have burnt out. A permanent repair must be carried out by the Electricity Supply Company to ensure that the installation is safe.

Flats within the building are understood to have electric heating. Some flats are understood to have gas cooking appliances. Residents who have gas fired appliances must provide evidence of regular servicing of the appliances.

Artificial plants were found in the ground floor reception area and on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. A flammability test was carried out and the material was found to be highly flammable. The material ignited readily and gave off black smoke. The plants must be removed immediately. The Block Superintendent was advised of this at the time of the inspection. It is understood that the Block Superintendent undertakes daily inspections to check that all communal areas and escape routes are kept clear. This regime should also include the identification and removal of such plants.

Bin stores are locations which can be subject to arson. Bin stores and other plant rooms must be maintained locked.

### 5.2 People who are at significant risk from fire

There is understood to be a 'Stay-put' fire policy for occupants of flats, whereby the degree of fire compartmentation is such that any potential fire is likely to be contained. See also the points under the Heading 'Means of Escape'.

### 5.3 Structural Features

The building construction comprises non-combustible construction, i.e. elements of structure; floors, walls and staircases, comprise supporting structure of brick or concrete. The construction of the escape routes should prevent the fabric of the building from being involved in the spread of any fire which may occur.

Rubbish chutes located in accommodation lobbies constitute potential means of transmission of fire and smoke up the building. The smoke seals appeared to be worn. The affected smoke seals on the hoppers should be replaced.

#### **5.4 Monitoring during maintenance and refurbishment**

Sources of heat or combustible materials may be introduced into the building during periods of maintenance or refurbishment. Where maintenance or refurbishment involves 'hot works', careful control is necessary. Method statements for safe working should be requested from the contractor and approved prior to commencement, and a Permit to Work system should be put in place. Furthermore, all materials brought onto the site in connection with the works should be stored away from sources of heat and must not obstruct exit routes.

As part of the Permit to Work system, contractors visiting the building should be logged in and out, to ensure that security staff are alert to their presence in the building in an emergency, when a contractor may be working in remote plant areas.

#### **5.5 Fire Detection and Warning**

The degree of fire compartmentation and the non-combustible construction is such that the installation of fire alarms in communal areas is not required under the guidance given in HM Government 'Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Sleeping Accommodation', providing that other risk management measures are in place. It is therefore recommended that independent smoke detectors are installed in each flat. This is in order that occupants can be alerted to a potential fire within their accommodation.

#### **5.6 Means of Escape**

There is understood to be a 'Stay-put' policy for occupants of flats, whereby the degree of fire compartmentation is such that any potential fire is likely to be contained. Evacuation from a flat in which a fire occurs, into the communal corridors, as a place of safety, is deemed to be acceptable under the guidance given in HM Government 'Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Sleeping Accommodation'. It is, however, important that no flammable items are stored in the communal corridor or staircase areas.

In the event of evacuation being required, the Means of Escape comprises the single staircase in the property, which is accessed directly off the lift lobby on each floor. The lift lobby doors to the accommodation corridors appeared to have been upgraded to half hour fire resistance. The staircase exits at ground floor level into the main reception area via a locked door, secured with a conventional door handle. The potential for entrapment is therefore high. The door handle must be replaced with a push pad latch in order that the door can be easily opened in one movement, in the event of an emergency.

The alternative Means of Escape from the entrance reception is through the secondary entrance, which is narrow and does not meet required standards for egress of people using wheelchairs. Structural restrictions preclude improvement of this situation.

A full review of the strategy for emergency escape is required that should lead to a statement of procedure for evacuation of residents, visitors and staff including those with different types of impairment.

## 5.7 Doors

The final exit doors are currently secured by electromagnetically locked doors with remote door releases. The doors are not provided with manual 'break glass' units to allow the doors to be released in an emergency. Green break glass units should be installed for these doors.

The refuse chute is accessed in lobbies off the main lift lobbies on each floor. As previously reported, the single staircase for the building is accessed directly from the lift lobby. Refuse chutes constitute potential means of transmission of fire and smoke up the building. The lobby doors currently are not fire resisting doors and should be upgraded to a minimum half hour fire resistance with smoke seals to inhibit transmission of smoke into the lift lobbies.

The seals on the refuse chute hoppers appeared to be worn and must be replaced.

## 5.8 Lighting

The lighting within the building did not include Emergency Lighting. It is recommended that Emergency Lighting should be installed.

The Emergency Lighting must be inspected and tested at least every six months and the results recorded in a fire precautions log book.

## 5.9 Signs

The current signage to the building does not meet the relevant requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996.

Exit signs on doors, or indicating exit routes, should be provided and should be in a position where they can be clearly seen. The signs must take the form of a pictogram, which may incorporate a directional arrow. Signs on exit routes should have directional arrows, 'up' for straight on and 'left, right, or down' according to the route to be taken. Advice on specific fire signage can be found in 'Fire Safety Signs'.

There were no fire action signs providing instructions for actions in the event of an emergency. Fire Action signage should be installed on each floor landing.

### 5.10 Fire fighting Equipment

The building is provided with a dry riser installation for use by the Fire and Rescue Service. It is understood that this is inspected and pressure tested by the Fire and Rescue Service on an annual basis.

The dry riser outlet on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor was noted to be obstructed by plants. The daily inspection by the Block Superintendent must include all such appliances, to ensure that these are accessible at all times.

### 5.11 Training and Instructions

Escape routes should be inspected regularly as part of the maintenance policy to ensure that these are kept clear.

All existing residents should be updated on any changes to emergency procedures. New residents should receive a briefing on emergency procedures and this should be documented in their induction pack.

### 5.12 Maintenance and Testing of Fire Safety Equipment

To safeguard the occupants, all equipment and devices provided as part of the Fire Safety Plan should be the subject of a suitable system of maintenance.

Written records are to be kept of all actions taken in case evidence is required at a possible future inquiry or legal action.

### 5.13 Emergency Plan

An Emergency Plan should be in place to carry forward information and recommendations from the Fire Risk Assessment. The aim of the plan is to ensure that in the event of a fire, everyone, including employees, residents, visitors and contractors etc. are sufficiently familiar with the action they should take, and can be safely evacuated to a location out of danger.

## 6.0 Main Summary

The building does not currently comply with the Regulations specified above and hence there are urgent works required to remedy this situation. Such works include:

- Permanent repair of electrical switchgear in the plant room.
- Removal of artificial plants.
- Relocation of recycling bins.
- Replacement of the seals on the rubbish chute hoppers.
- Installation of independent smoke detectors in flats, if not already fitted.
- Upgrading of fire resistance of lobby doors to the refuse chute.
- Replacement of Reception lobby door handle.
- Installation of green manual 'break-glass' units for final exit doors.
- Upgrading of Means of Escape and Fire Procedure signage.

We would recommend the implementation of work following the prioritisation categories listing within the attached Scott Schedule.

**Appendix 1**

**Scott Schedule**