

MAYOR OF LONDON

Date: 20th April 2020

Sian Berry
Assembly Member
Greater London Authority
(via email)

Dear Sian,

Thank you for your recent letter to myself and the Mayor, who has asked me to respond for both of us.

We are living in unprecedented times, and it is our responsibility to use all the powers available to us to protect the lives of Londoners.

From the beginning of the lockdown period, the Mayor has forcefully called on the Government to provide the industry with the support that it needs to close all construction sites not deemed to be critical to the safety of Londoners. Transport for London and Crossrail brought project sites to a temporary pause at the end of March, only keeping open those crucial to operational safety.

Construction firms need to be confident that they can protect their workers and pause construction without fear of liability for contract breaches. The reality is that complying with the 2-metre social distancing rule on sites is almost impossible. While the Construction Leadership Council has provided guidelines to reduce the risk of infection on sites, these are difficult and costly to implement and will have disproportionate impacts on SMEs in the sector.

In light of this, we are engaging directly with the highest levels of Government about the need for Government to issue a statutory instrument alongside the Coronavirus Act, imposing tougher restrictions on non-safety critical construction work. To be clear, I regard cladding remediation as safety critical. However, there are practical reasons why cladding remediation work will not be able to continue in many cases. For this reason, I am urging the Government to fund the cost of waking watches to remove this financial burden from leaseholders.

We have also stressed the need for the Government to introduce a package of support to remediate costs associated with sites closing, to avoid developers and contractors having to choose between risking litigation for not delivering on contractual obligations, and the health and welfare of their employees and Londoners more widely. Lastly, we continue to engage with local authorities and housing association partners on how best to support measures that reduce the risk of infection through construction.

On the issue of good quality, empty homes on estates where regeneration is planned or underway, there have always been compelling reasons for landlords to let these homes – both financial and in order to meet housing need. The current crisis has undoubtedly deepened housing need. Local authorities are working hard to secure self-contained accommodation for homeless households who might ordinarily be in accommodation with shared facilities, which make it impossible to self-isolate effectively and difficult to follow other aspects of Government guidance. Accordingly, local authorities are likely to be exploring all potential options, which include the use of empty homes.

In relation to new homes that have been completed but not yet let or sold, I am working with investment partners and other developers to explore what scope exists for using these homes to help meet some of that pressing housing need.

Thank you again for your letter, and please be assured that the Mayor and I will continue to work with partners and Government to ensure the necessary action is taken to keep Londoners as safe as possible during this difficult time.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Copley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Copley

Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development