

XXNovember 2022

Copies via E- Mail to: **Development & R**
Council Offices
Market Street Newbury
Berkshire RG14 5LD
Our Ref:
Your Ref:
Please ask for: Bryan Lyttle
Direct Line: 01635 519638
e-mail:
bryan.lyttle@westberks.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Residential Fire Suppression Systems in England

On behalf of West Berkshire Council I write to petition you to bring the Building Control Legislation in England in line with that for Scotland and Wales and require new and converted residential homes to install fire suppression systems.

The Welsh Assembly adopted new Building Regulations in October 2013 for implementation in January 2016 and the Scottish Government introduced similar legislation in March 2021.

The consultation as a result of the terrible disaster at Grenfell Tower into “Sprinklers and Other Fire Safety Measures in New High-Rise Blocks of Flats” did not go far enough, it should have considered all residential development.

Indeed in the Governments response to that consultation, it is recognised that the harmonisation of guidance across the United Kingdom would be welcome (para 17 Government Response: Sprinklers and Fire Safety Measures in New High Rise Blocks of Flats May 2020).

As the building standards already require automatic fire suppression systems in high rise flats the option to extend the mandatory requirements to all new-build: residential development including open market housing, social homes; flats; and shared multi-occupied residential buildings so that they are fitted with automatic fire suppression systems is an easy option.

In 2019, the National Fire Chiefs Council have investigated the effectiveness, reliability and contribution sprinklers made for life and property safety using evidence from actual fires and found that: sprinklers are 94% efficient in their ability to operate and 99% effective in extinguishing or controlling a fire.

Whilst the lowering of the threshold to 11m from 18m is welcomed it is not enough. Only last year three properties were severely damaged in Red Cottage Drive and West Berkshire Council also had to open its major incident centre in response to a three storey townhouse fire which resulted in the loss of two lives and total building failure.

I appreciate that the recent consultation also resulted in the comment "There was a clear view that sprinklers provide life safety benefits, although respondents also noted that the costs can be significant for developers and that proper maintenance, including getting access to individual flats, can be challenging" (para 18 Government Response: Sprinklers and Fire Safety Measures in New High Rise Blocks of Flats May 2020).

However, there is no evidence from Scotland or Wales to show any decline in house building because of the introduction of this measure, so one must ask if it can be done in Scotland and Wales why are English house builders unwilling to do so?

I therefore urge you to bring the English Building Control regulations in line with those for Scotland and Wales with regard to the provision of automatic fire suppression systems in the next update of the regulations.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Somner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Somner
Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Countryside