



Goscote House and Sprinkler Systems

Housing Scrutiny Commission : 4th. November 2019

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Cutkelvin
Lead director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

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- Report version number: V.2

1. Summary

This report has been prepared to update members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the current situation regarding the demolition of Goscote House and the installation of sprinklers in the four remaining tower blocks.

3. Supporting information including options considered:

Goscote House

A brief history:

Goscote House was built in 1973 and was council flats until the early 1990's when it was leased to Leicester University. The university returned it to the council in around 2003 as it no longer required it. They had used it predominately to house overseas students, however a few council tenancies did remain in the block during that time.

In 2013 When the tower block refurbishment project started it was decided that vacant flats in Goscote House would be used to accommodate the decanted (temporarily rehoused) tenants until their flats had been refurbished. The first block we refurbished was Framland House, followed by Clipstone, Gordon and finally Maxfield House. The flats we didn't need for the block refurbishment project we let to people on the housing register as normal.

The final tenants that had been decanted to Goscote House moved back to their homes in Maxfield House on the 2nd. August 2019

Goscote House consists mainly of bedsits and 1 bedroomed flats therefore the majority of the tenants were single people. It's fair to say that the block suffered from unwelcome visitors and anti-social behaviour, this resulted in some tenants feeling intimidated and regular activations of the communal fire alarm cause by in appropriate behaviour.

To mitigate this, security services were commissioned which had a positive impact in reducing much of the reported ASB. However, this is a costly service and cannot be sustained indefinitely.

It was clear that something had to be done with Goscote House and that now would be a good time to make a decision.

It was agreed that significant investment was required to Goscote House to ensure that

it was in a good and safe condition to continue to provide much needed affordable housing in Leicester.

The original plan was to refurbish and reconfigure the block to make the accommodation suit current demand, reduce the number of bedsits and increase the number of 1- and 2-bedroom flats.

As part of the process we commissioned a full structural and condition survey of the block. This confirmed that all the main elements were at the end of their economic life, that the structural alterations required to reconfigure the block were technically possible, but they couldn't guarantee the structure and recommend that it be re-assessed every 5 years.

Due to the significant investment required to reconfigure and refurbish the block with no guarantee that the structure would last enough years to make this financially viable the decision was taken, on the 8th. January 2018, to demolish the block and redevelop the site for new affordable housing.

At that time, it was estimated that the cost to demolish Goscote House would be circa £3m. Consultants have now been appointed and whilst the actual cost of the demolition is still expected to be similar they have recommended that we look to add additional monies to cover any possible contingency costs.

There were 73 secure tenants in Goscote House when the decision was made to decommission the block. On 9 September 2019, the situation was that there were only 5 tenants left in the block, one of whom was due to move on 12 September. Properties have been identified for the remaining four tenants. Each tenant who loses their home is due to statutory Homeloss payment, which is currently set at £6,300 by central Government. This payment is used to compensate the tenants who have had to move and allows them to set up a new home. We have also arranged removals for the displaced tenants. We anticipate that the block will be empty of all residents by 30 September 2019

What's happening now:

Consultants were commissioned to investigate and report back on the best way to demolish the block and recommend how this is done.

The report has recommended that the block be 'deconstructed', taken down piece by piece, this is due to the proximity of neighbouring building which makes it impossible to 'blow it up'

We have appointed a consultant to oversee the demolition for us and they are now in the process of arranging for some specialist surveys which will help obtain firm prices when we go out to tender for a demolition contractor.

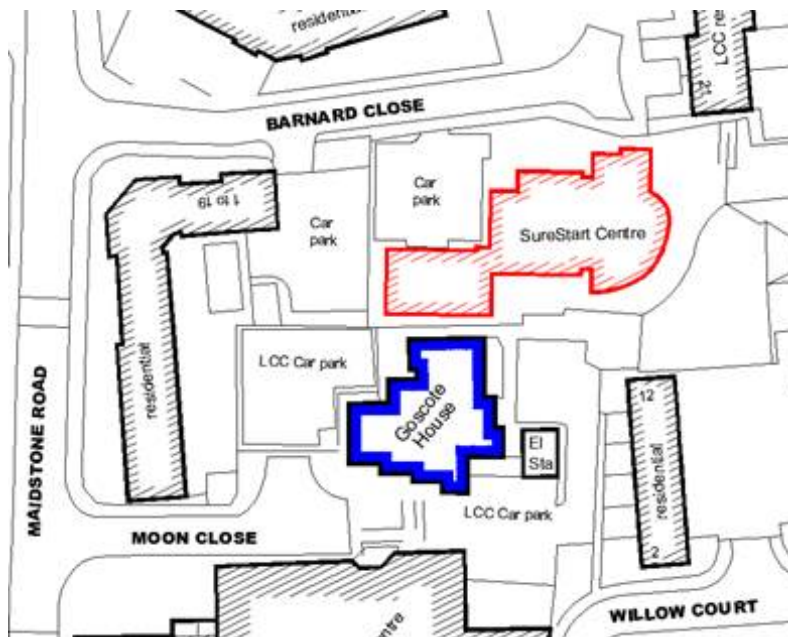
We expect the tender process to start toward the end of this year and the block to start being demolished in the summer of 2020.

During the demolition we will be looking at redevelopment options for the site, we are hoping to deliver a low/medium rise block of flats but no decisions have been made

yet.



Ariel view of Goscote House



Location map

Sprinkler installations:

Post Grenfell the decision was made to install sprinklers at all 5 council owned tower blocks.

The refurbishment of Maxfield House was nearing completion so it made sense to install sprinklers ahead of the tenants moving back in. This caused an inevitable delay but caused less inconvenience than fitting the system whilst the tenants were living

there.

Installing a sprinkler system in a tower block was something we hadn't done before, so we needed help and advice from others. We appointed a specialist fire consultant to help us with the specification and the interfaces the sprinklers would have with other systems in the block. We also worked closely with Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service to make sure they were happy with our proposals and we had their support and we consulted with our Building Control Department who made sure the installation was compliant with the specification.

The two biggest challenges were storing the water for the system and what happened when a sprinkler head was activated ?

We had hoped that there would be enough water storage from the existing tanks but this proved not to be the case, you need a lot of water to allow the system to operate for the required amount of time and potentially extinguish any fire until the fire service attend. Also, there were concerns about utilising the existing stored water for use by residents and the sprinkler system as the tank size would need increasing considerably and this may have created possible issues of legionella (due to standing water and insufficient water turn over). Therefore, large tanks had to be fitted in the plant room and the water is pumped up rising mains, the pipes are fully charged which means they are always full of water and ready to go if a sprinkler head is activated.



Pumps and water storage tanks that supply the sprinklers:

We had to work out what did we want to happen if a sprinkler head went off, did we

want to leave it to the tenants to raise the alarm, did we want the block alarm to go off to alert all the residents or did we just want to notify a few neighbouring properties ? We decided that if a sprinkler head went off then this would automatically send a message to the Fire Service who would attend and the councils duty manager. The fire panel would tell them which floor the fire was on and by the time they attended the sprinkler system would have contained the fire if not already extinguished it.

One thing we were also concerned about was the potential for false activations, however to date we haven't had one, we are still monitoring the system but so far we are very pleased with it. **Appendix A** – tenants guide to sprinklers.

The cost to install sprinklers in Maxfield House was £400k.

What next:

We now must fit systems in the other blocks, the challenge now is to do it while tenants are living in the flats. We are waiting a few months to see how the installation at Maxfield House fares, so we don't repeat any potential mistakes. During this we will be upgrading the incoming communal electrical supply to the other blocks so it is good enough to power the new sprinkler system. (we did this at Maxfield House) but things are looking good and we hope to start the next block in the coming months.

We are proposing to install sprinklers at St Leonards Court next and hope to start this in the summer of 2020, followed by Framland, Clipstone and Gordon at 6 monthly intervals. The budget for these works is £1.3m

4. Details of Scrutiny

Report prepared for HSC

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

Report for information only

5.2 Legal implications

Report for information only

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Report for information only

5.4 Equalities Implications

Report for information only

Summary of appendices:

Appendix A. – Tenants guide to sprinklers