

North Kensington Tower Block transformed by £10m refurbishment

13 May 2016

The Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Cllr Nick Paget-Brown, and the Deputy Leader, Cllr Rock Feilding-Mellen, saw for themselves on Wednesday 11 May the transformation of North Kensington's Grenfell Tower following a major £10m refurbishment.

Funded by the Council as part of a wider £67m investment of the area, the wide-ranging improvements include the installation of insulated exterior cladding, new double-glazed windows and a new communal heating system. All of this will greatly enhance the energy efficiency of the tower and help reduce residents' living costs. There will also be an impressive new foyer.

Nine much-needed new homes were also developed from unused spaces in the building which is managed by Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO). There are also new facilities at the Dale Youth Amateur Boxing Club and Grenfell Under 3s Nursery. These, along with the new Kensington Aldridge Academy and the Kensington Leisure Centre, with its café, have helped to transform the neighbourhood.

The two-year project, which was designed and delivered by KCTMO in partnership with Rydon Construction, was a complex one as it took place with all 120 flats occupied throughout. The logistics had to be carefully managed to minimise disruption. Essential to the progress of the project was close consultation with residents, ensuring that access to their homes was possible at all key stages. Residents were kept informed through regular newsletters and meetings and there were also demonstrations of the new heating and door entry systems.

"It is remarkable to see first-hand how the cladding has lifted the external appearance of the tower and how the improvements inside people's homes will make a big difference to their day-to-day lives", said Cllr Paget-Brown.

"As well as this investment, in a relatively short space of time Grenfell Tower residents have benefited from a brand-new academy and leisure centre which

represents our ongoing commitment to North Kensington.”

Robert Black, KCTMO’s Chief Executive, added: “We’re delighted to have worked in partnership with the Council to deliver this major regeneration of the tower. This has improved the homes overall and residents can now have the benefits of living in energy-efficient homes, all in a vastly improved environment. I am especially pleased with the nine new homes, which cost £878,000 to deliver, and add much-needed family homes for the Royal Borough. The whole project was done within budget too.”

Cllr Robert Atkinson notes ...

Nowhere in the Council’s self-serving paean of praise does it bother to thank the residents of Grenfell Tower for their incredible forbearance while they endured two years living beside the construction sites that became the Kensington Aldridge Academy and the Kensington Leisure Centre. Neither does it thank them for what they went through when the building site came into their very homes during the refurbishment of the Tower itself. This caused a further two years of very severe disruption and it must have seemed to residents that it would never end.

During that time they lived daily with noise, dust, reverberation and the frequent breakdown of essential services, as well as delay due to one contractor going into liquidation. Despite assurances that disruption would be kept to a minimum, residents had to queue for lifts during busy times because both were being used by the contractors; some flats were badly flooded and are still subject to outstanding claims; windows were badly installed and some still not rectified; contractors entered their homes without knocking first, leading to sad little notes on doors reminding them to ask for permission before entering. Some boiler units were installed in hallways when residents wanted them in the kitchen; some boiler installations may be hazardous to small children; one resident’s front door key was stolen by a TMO contractor, who later attempted to enter the flat while the daughter was home alone; and a number of residents are being forced into fuel poverty because heating and hot water bills have rocketed when they were supposed to reduce. Worst of all, two new-born babies were brought home into this mayhem with no special respite arrangements being made for them and their mothers to allow them to bond in peace. I know as a parent and grand-parent how important those first few months are for a baby’s development and I know that this should not take place in an atmosphere of environmental chaos.

Despite all this - and the Council’s failure to thank them - Grenfell Tower residents are keen to work jointly with the Council and the TMO to agree a “Grenfell Pathway” for future refurbishment projects the Council proposes to undertake while residents are in occupation. The next two blocks where this is planned are Treverton Tower and Raymede Tower in Dalgarno Ward. There is much to be learned from the Grenfell experience and my colleagues and I sincerely hope that the residents’ offer to

assist will be accepted by both bodies. Yes, the regenerated area is now looking lovely, but some words of thanks to all the residents of Grenfell Tower for what they experienced during the process would not go amiss either.