

## Statement of Witness to the Grenfell Public Inquiry

Statement of: Stephen Blake

### 1. Introduction

1.1 My name is Stephen Blake and my date of birth is [REDACTED] My current job role is Refurbishment Director for Rydon Maintenance Limited, a position I took up in October 2010. I make this statement to assist the inquiry in response to a request I received dated 23 July 2018. I make this statement in my personal capacity and not on behalf of any Rydon Group company. In my career I have worked for both Rydon Maintenance Limited and Rydon Construction Limited. In this statement I refer to both of them as "Rydon" for ease of reference, unless I have been specific.

1.2 By way of background, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I went to Imberhorne School, where I passed A levels in Maths and Physics. After this I went to Southbank Polytechnic and began a full time HND course in building studies which I left in May 1985 to join Rydon as a Trainee Surveyor. I continued my education by undertaking an HNC in Building Studies over the following two years by day release at East Croydon College. I continued to study there for a further 2 years to become an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Building, which I continue to subscribe to.

### 2. Career

2.1 After joining Rydon I gathered experience on a wide range of construction projects working as a Quantity Surveyor which I did for 13 years, progressing from Trainee to Senior Surveyor. At the end of 1997 I transferred into Contracts Management, typically managing 2-3 contracts at any one time.

2.2 The role of the Contract Manager in the Refurbishment team is to deliver refurbishment contracts secured by Rydon, this includes:

- 2.2.1 Overseeing procurement;
  - 2.2.2 Overseeing safety of the construction work in conjunction with the Health, Safety, Quality and Environment ("HSQE") team, contractors and the client;
  - 2.2.3 Attending meetings and briefings to ensure a framework is established to achieve timely and effective communication between clients, residents, stakeholders and the project team;
  - 2.2.4 Arranging regular coordination meetings between all relevant parties;
  - 2.2.5 Managing a Rydon site project team and utilising other Rydon staff when required. A site project team typically consists of Site Managers, a Trainee Site Manager and a Resident Liaison Officer. The wider Rydon staff includes, for example, Commercial Managers, Surveyors, Health and Safety Advisors and Human Resources;
  - 2.2.6 Monitoring contractors, consultants and suppliers to ensure the aims of the refurbishment project are met;
  - 2.2.7 Monitoring project progress in order to report to the client and Refurbishment Director;
  - 2.2.8 Managing financial risks by recognising and reporting the implications of any changes occurring during the contract; and
  - 2.2.9 Reporting to the Refurbishment Director on a regular basis on all key aspects of the project including; safety, progress, performance management and financial issues.
- 2.3 After 12 years as a Contract Manager, from January 2009 I was promoted to Construction Manager. This role involved management responsibility for other Contract Managers, while also managing a contract myself.
- 2.4 Then, in October 2010 I was appointed Refurbishment Director for Rydon Maintenance Limited. The Refurbishment business is distinct within the

Rydon group as the contracts it undertakes are mainly conversion works to existing buildings which are often occupied.

2.5 My role as Refurbishment Director is to assist in the development and implementation of the business plan of Rydon Maintenance Limited. This sets out its strategic objectives with the ultimate aim of meeting its business mission statement. It is a leadership role in which I oversee the following aspects of the refurbishment business stream to achieve the strategic objectives, whilst working in accordance with the company values:

#### 2.5.1 **Business Development**

Leading a business stream as Director with responsibility for the strategic direction of the business, reviewing existing business plans, and developing plans for the future on an annual basis. In liaison with the Business Development Director opportunities in the market, which are advertised through the formal OJEU process in relation to government contracts, are identified against the criteria set in the business plan. As Refurbishment Director I am an ambassador for Rydon. A key aspect of this is creating relationships with prospective clients and maintaining relationships with current ones.

#### 2.5.2 **People Development**

I have an overview of the personal development of all the individuals within the business via their line managers. I use this to inform succession planning and pay reviews, which are recommendations I make to the Managing Director. The corporate services teams support me with Health and Safety, Human Resources, and IT issues in order that I can maintain an overview of the aspects of these functions relevant to my area of the business. I report to the Managing Director in relation to my own personal development.

There is a Rydon Group Safety Directors Forum, which I attend. The purpose of the forum is to ensure consistent behaviours and culture



around matters of safety across the business. The forum members are ambassadors in health and safety culture for their areas of the business. This forum is chaired by the Director of HSQE. An annual plan with performance criteria is set and reported against at the forum meetings.

### 2.5.3 **Finance**

In my role as Director, I oversee the estimating process when tendering for new work. For ongoing projects the finance team produces a set of budget forecasts which are reconciled with the management accounts on a monthly basis. I produce a board report which summarises the financial aspects of individual projects, upcoming tenders and reviews progress against previous forecasts relating to my business stream. As Director I have an overview of expected income and outgoings for my business stream and keep up to date with this alongside the Finance Director.

### 2.5.4 **Procurement**

I am responsible for overseeing the procurement process in relation to each new project. The Contract Manager and Commercial Manager produce a procurement schedule, which outlines procurement requirements and timescales for the delivery of the contract. I then oversee the appointment of suitable contractors, suppliers and consultants. I also ensure timetables and budgets are set by the surveying and production teams, which are then monitored against progress.

### 2.5.5 **Project Involvement**

With regards each project, a team of Managers report to me as Director on all matters of progress including safety and whether the project is on time and to budget. My role is to have an overview which I report to the maintenance board on a monthly basis.

### 3. **Projects**

- 3.1 The majority of the work carried out by Rydon is as Principal Contractor under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations. As with all Principal Contractors, Rydon engages architects, engineers and consultants to undertake design work and provide technical expertise, and contractors (including specialist contractors) to carry out the work.
- 3.2 I first worked on a residential tower block project in 2006, when I was given the task of contract managing the Chalcots Estate contract. This project related to 5 residential towers in Camden close to Primrose Hill. Rydon was appointed Principal Contractor to undertake major refurbishment work of each of these towers, which included the installation of rainscreen cladding and replacement of over 3500 windows. The specialist contractor engaged to design and install the rainscreen cladding, insulation and windows was Harley Curtain Walling Limited (later Harley Facades Limited). I refer to both collectively as "Harley" below for ease of reference. I worked on the Chalcots project until 2010.
- 3.3 I worked in the role of Construction Manager on another residential tower block refurbishment project at Ferrier Point in Canning Town from January 2009 until February 2011. Ferrier Point included the addition of rainscreen cladding and replacement windows. The specialist contractor appointed to undertake this work was Harley.
- 3.4 After Ferrier Point the next refurbishment project involving tower blocks that I worked on was the Ashmole Estate project. This consisted of 2 tower blocks close to the Oval cricket ground. The Ashmole Estate was different to Chalcots and Ferrier Point because it was a rendered finished (not rainscreen cladding), and the windows were overhauled but not replaced.

#### 4. **Refurbishment of Grenfell Tower**

4.1 I first became aware of the Grenfell Tower project in April 2013, when Robert Powell of Appleyards (part of Artelia) asked if Rydon would prepare a "check price" for the project.

4.2 In August 2013 Mark Harris of Harley also drew the project to my attention asking if we were tracking the Grenfell project. As I recollect he thought that Harley and Rydon were well placed to undertake this work and I agreed.

4.3 The OJEU was issued by KCTMO who were the Client on the project. In due course Rydon received an invitation to tender for the work. I became involved in the tendering process in my capacity as Refurbishment Director. Studio E, KCTMO's architects, who had already been appointed (see further below), issued the Grenfell Tower Regeneration Project NBS Specification, which Rydon tendered against. This included a provision asking those tendering to tender for Zinc Proteus rainscreen cladding and an alternative price for aluminium rainscreen cladding, specifically Reynobond rainscreen cladding and Alucobond rainscreen cladding.

4.4 Rydon submitted a tender, dated 14 February 2014. Subsequent to Rydon's tender, I received an email dated 13 March 2014 from David Gibson of KCTMO attaching a spreadsheet indicating the areas where KCTMO sought to achieve savings in the order of £800,000. The potential savings identified included using aluminium rainscreen cladding as an alternative to zinc rainscreen cladding. My impression at this time was that Rydon was the successful tenderer and that KCTMO wished to enter into a contract with Rydon. KCTMO committed to a pre-contract service agreement with Rydon, which allowed work to get underway whilst these savings were finalised.

4.5 In due course the specification was varied via post tender amendments resulting in a reduction in the tendered sum from £9,249,294 to £8,556,133. Referring to Artelia's Contract Sum Analysis I have reminded myself that the following amendments were made to the scope of work in order to achieve this reduction:



- 4.5.1 M&E specification changes- alternative flue manufacturer and carbon steel distribution pipework in lieu of stainless steel;
  - 4.5.2 Cassette fix aluminium cladding in lieu of zinc cladding;
  - 4.5.3 Remove louvre panel over tilt and turn windows;
  - 4.5.4 Pre-finished (MDF or Softwood) to window board in lieu of Birchwood surround;
  - 4.5.5 Additional works to housing office and estates office;
  - 4.5.6 Revised landscaping works.
- 4.6 In the course of a project such as this it is commonplace for discussion to take place about what savings can be made. As part of these discussions, consideration is given to value engineering. This is a process which considers whether savings can be achieved by using alternative materials and methods.
- 4.7 Rydon was appointed Principal Contractor on 30 October 2014 for the Refurbishment scheme at Grenfell Tower by KCTMO.
- 4.8 In October 2015 I assumed the role of Contract Manager in place of Simon Lawrence who moved on to other employment. I felt best placed to assume this role for three reasons. Firstly, the project was well advanced by this stage. Secondly, I had the experience as a Contract Manager. Thirdly, I had the capacity because I had recently passed on Directorial responsibility for a significant contract in Islington. As Contract Manager I was not based on site, but attended regularly. I maintained this role until completion of the project in July 2016 while continuing to oversee other projects in my position as Refurbishment Director.

## 5. Scope of Work

5.1 The original scope of the Grenfell contract included the following works:

5.1.1 External rainscreen cladding;

5.1.2 Installation of new windows;

5.1.3 New communal heating and hot water system;

5.1.4 New boosted cold water mains;

5.1.5 New mechanical smoke extraction and ventilation system;

5.1.6 Remodelling of lower 4 floors to provide:

- improved nursery accommodation
- improved boxing club accommodation
- offices and concierge desk
- new main entrance lobby
- 7 new residential flats
- Soft and hard landscaping works around the tower.

5.2 There were changes to the design in the course of the project. I was not involved in the detail of all of these changes at the time but I am now aware that these included:

5.2.1 The redesign of the lower floors to create an additional 2 residential flats (making 9 in total);

5.2.2 Redesign of lower floor to create a community room and remove offices and concierge;

5.2.3 The relocation of the hydraulic interface units (HIU) from the kitchen cupboards to the hallways of each of the 120 residential flats;



5.2.4 The resizing of windows;

5.2.5 Revised landscaping;

5.2.6 A revised smoke extract and environmental control system (incorporating automatic opening vents, or AOVs) linking the lower remodelled 4 floors to the system already in place. The design and build of this system route became a critical path for the project as it affected the ability to construct and complete the 9 new flats on the bottom 4 floors. I did become more involved in the detail of this work from October 2015, see further below.

5.3 Extensive work was being undertaken in the immediate vicinity of Grenfell Tower. In particular I understand that Leadbitter, which became Bouygues, had been appointed Principal Contractor for work to the adjacent site which related to the Aldridge Academy and the Kensington Academy Leisure Centre. The significance of this was that there was an established architect and team of consultants who had undertaken planning and design work for the Grenfell Tower project before Rydon was appointed Principal Contractor. The following were novated to Rydon:

5.3.1 Studio E (architects);

5.3.2 Curtins Consulting (structural engineers).

5.4 In addition, during the course of the project there was a significant number of parties working on the project including in the order of 48 different contractors engaged by Rydon. These parties included:

5.4.1 Artelia (KCTMO's agent, quantity surveyor and CDM co-ordinator, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);

5.4.2 Max Fordham (M&E consultants, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);

5.4.3 Exova (fire consultants, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);

5.4.4 Carl Stokes (fire risk assessor, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);

- 5.4.5 John Rowan (clerk of the works for construction, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);
- 5.4.6 Silcock Dawson (clerk of the works for M&E, appointed on behalf of KCTMO);
- 5.4.7 Harleys (external works, including design, supply and installation of the rainscreen cladding, insulation and associated works, appointed by Rydon);
- 5.4.8 JS Wright (internal works, including design, supply and installation of heating, plumbing and ventilation, appointed by Rydon);
- 5.4.9 S D Plastering (internal works including dry lining, plastering and window reveals, appointed by Rydon);
- 5.4.10 Apex Lift Engineers (alteration of lifts, appointed by Rydon); and
- 5.4.11 Royal Borough Kensington and Chelsea Building Control (advice and inspection of works to confirm compliance with Building Regulations, appointed by Studio E and paid for by Rydon).

## 6. **Role of Principal Contractor**

- 6.1 As Principal Contractor Rydon's role was to manage the project and coordinate the various contractors to ensure, so far as possible, that the refurbishment was completed safely, on time, and to budget. This is achieved by appointing and coordinating contractors to implement the design work undertaken by them or by others. As Principal Contractor Rydon's role is not to undertake any design work or to carry out the construction work itself.
- 6.2 The designs were undertaken by Studio E and Curtins, and those other contractors who had design responsibilities, including JS Wright and Harley.
- 6.3 For example by reference to the rainscreen cladding:
  - 6.3.1 Studio E specified the materials to be used, including Reynobond rainscreen cladding and Celotex insulation;

- 6.3.2 The detailed design for the cladding and associated work (including rails, insulation, cavity barriers) was undertaken by Studio E and Harley; and
  - 6.3.3 The installation of the cladding and associated works (including rails, insulation and cavity barriers) was undertaken by Harley.
- 6.4 By reference to the M&E works:
- 6.4.1 Max Fordham specified the performance criteria to be achieved by the new installations;
  - 6.4.2 The detailed M&E design and installation was undertaken by JS Wright; and
  - 6.4.3 JS Wright in turn contracted aspects of their work, for example contracting the design and installation of the specialist smoke extract system and environmental control system.
- 6.5 With respect to the Grenfell Tower project:
- 6.5.1 It was originally part of the larger project referred to above;
  - 6.5.2 There was an existing architect and consultant team in place prior to Rydon's appointment as Principal Contractor. This included Studio E, the structural engineer, services engineer, fire consultant and planning consultant. I was comfortable with this because the overall project was much larger than the Grenfell project itself, and because the team would not be novated to Rydon or retained by KCTMO if there was any doubt about their ability.
  - 6.5.3 Normally in a Design and Build contract a Principal Contractor would have planning drawings with no construction details developed at all. Here, because of the earlier work the philosophy and detail of the design had been set at tender and by the time the contract was awarded to Rydon. For example, it was already decided prior to Rydon's involvement that a key objective was to make the building



environmentally efficient. My understanding was that the design and selection of materials specified to Rydon achieved this. I had no reason to question the design work already done.

6.6 The original planning permission had been granted on the basis of zinc rainscreen cladding. The change from zinc to ACM rainscreen cladding and the specific colour and fixing (face fix or cassette fix) required planning permission. As a result of discussions with the planners, Rydon was asked to arrange for samples of the Reynobond cladding to be installed on Grenfell Tower and for the planners to visit other buildings where it had been used. The planners were not in favour of face-fix, and planning permission was granted for Reynobond with concealed fixings.

## 7. **Fire Safety**

7.1 In relation to fire safety I had no reason to question the suitability of the materials or the design that had been specified to Rydon.

7.2 I was aware that a fire consultant (Exova) had been engaged on behalf of KCTMO, and that all of the work was inspected by Building Control as work proceeded.

7.3 Rydon came to appreciate that the existing smoke extract system was not functional and needed to be replaced. I was not involved in the detail of this initially, but from October 2015 when I became the Contract Manager for the project this was the first task I became involved with. Getting the system installed and operational posed significant challenges, which were intimately related to the reconfiguration of the lower floors of the tower including the new atrium and public spaces. Therefore work to this area became a particular focus of my attention. From a practical point of view there were many aspects which needed to be resolved in the building in order for the smoke extract system to be installed, commissioned and tested. The smoke extract system was completed in March 2016.

- 7.4 As the work neared completion Building Control provided a letter of comfort dated 2 June 2016, and upon completion the work was certified as compliant with Building Regulations.
- 7.5 Rydon cooperated with CS Stokes (KCTMO's fire risk assessor), the London Fire Brigade and others to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place in the event of a fire.
- 7.6 Prior to the opening of the entrance lobby and the subsequent issuing of a completion certificate, Building Control recommended that KCTMO arranged for the completion of a Fire Risk Assessment which addressed the building, access routes and building systems. This was subsequently undertaken by CS Stokes.
- 7.7 London Fire Brigade attended Grenfell Tower and was consulted about the position of and access to the dry riser. There was also a specific demonstration day for London Fire Brigade, arranged by KCTMO to show them how to access the building and use the building management system, which I attended.

## 8. **Inspection of Work**

- 8.1 Primary responsibility for ensuring that work was undertaken in accordance with the design was with the individual contractors and their foremen and supervisors. In addition Rydon, KCTMO's Clerk of Works, and Building Control inspected the work as the project progressed. At no time whilst I was Contract Manager was it brought to my attention that there were any significant concerns about the quality of the completed work.
- 8.2 Upon completion of work and in agreement with Artelia (the employer's agent) a handover tracker, which included all documentation required to demonstrate practical completion, was compiled.

## 9. **Compliance**

- 9.1 Rydon, and in my experience Principal Contractors in general, rely upon the specialist designers and consultant team who specify the materials to be used. As far as I am aware, no one raised any concern with Rydon about the

materials used or the combination of materials used at Grenfell Tower. Building Control were provided with all that they requested as part of their process for satisfying themselves that the work was compliant. Building Control certified that the building was compliant with Building Regulations. None of the professionals involved in the design and construction of the work gave me any indication that the building was not or might not be compliant.

**Statement of Truth**

I confirm that the contents of this statement are true to the best of my knowledge and further confirm that I consent for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's web site.

SIGNED: 

DATED: 26/9/18