



UKCAG



Dear Rishi,

We write to make you aware of a crisis which is gripping this country, a crisis which is ruining our lives, the lives of our neighbours and the lives of thousands of other residents of blocks of flats.

We are talking about the crisis of buildings which are not fire safe. The best-known issues are with combustible cladding, but the crisis extends far beyond this, to insulation, missing fire breaks and serious internal defects. It is a scandal which is having multiple serious impacts on human lives and the economy.

First, thousands of leaseholders are being asked to pay for the work to make their buildings safe. These bills can exceed £80,000. Residents are facing the dual threat of financial ruin and fear over the safety of their homes.

Second tens of thousands – perhaps hundreds of thousands – of flats are currently unsellable and valued at £0 while work is carried out to identify the cladding on their walls. This is placing lives on hold and is a major problem for the mortgage sector as well as damaging the economy by holding back property sales.

Interim measures, in the form of waking watches, are ruinously expensive for leaseholders to fund. Individuals are billed hundreds of pounds a week to keep these measures in place: forcing people to take loans and retirees back into the workplace. These were supposed to be short term fixes but in some cases have now been in place for almost three years.

Finally, in the social housing sector, housing providers are being forced to scale back ambitious house building plans to fund the remediation work to their stock. This has major implications for the government's affordable housing agenda.

As yet, all government efforts to solve this crisis have failed.

The £600m of funding is strictly limited to buildings clad with aluminium composite material cladding above 18m. This has created a lottery where those who live in buildings not covered by the fund are totally abandoned. The £200m fund of this funding made available for the private sector has also proved woefully difficult to access – with only one building so far approved.

The efforts to cajole or persuade private sector organisations to act by appealing to their moral duty has also largely failed. We need tough action not tough talk. Tinkering with official government advice notes has also only served to widen the crisis. There appears to have been no strategy, no plan. That's why we're asking you to finally provide the leadership needed.

First, a building safety fund must be established – open to all buildings and not just limited to the very specific materials used on Grenfell. The government can give itself the power to recoup this money by pursuing developers, insurers or others who are liable through the courts. Similar measures, backed by legislation, have been implemented in Australian states.

Providing the money up front allows this vital work to go ahead without delay and without burdening homeowners with the cost.

Second, a taskforce must be established which has the power to oversee this work. In particular, it is necessary for central government to take the lead in prioritizing the work so that funding and industry efforts can be directed to the buildings most in need of remediation.

We also firmly believe residents groups should be represented on this taskforce, and should be involved in decision making as a whole. After Grenfell, politicians promised to listen to the voice of residents on issues of safety. So far, it is failing to.

We are aware of reports that you are considering a loan scheme to address this crisis. We urge you not to proceed with these plans. Burdening stretched leaseholders with debt is unfair and would simply legitimise the transfer of costs to residents.

We remind you that these homes were bought in good faith – in many instances with direct government support. Most of us are not wealthy, we have poured our life savings into a flat which was supposed to provide a home and security. That has been taken away. Young people are having their futures ruined, older people are losing the peaceful retirement they have worked for and families are putting lives on hold. The human cost of what is happening is devastating and will only get worse. Continued inaction also increases the very real risk of another Grenfell-style disaster.

We are tired of waiting, tired of warm words and false promises of action. We are tired of hearing how difficult a problem this is to solve. The government has a duty to act and it is beyond time to start taking this crisis seriously. We hope your budget will finally start that process.

Yours sincerely,

Fran Reddington, Manchester Cladators

Ritu Saha, UK Cladding Action Group

Abigail Tubis, Leeds Cladding Scandal

Jennifer Reid, Birmingham Leaseholder Action Group