



**FIRST - TIER TRIBUNAL
PROPERTY CHAMBER
(RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY)**

Case Reference : **MAN/30UK/LDC/2022/0061**

Property : **Ashton – Beech Grove, 31 Beech Grove,
Ashton, Preston, Lancashire PR2 1DU
(Flats 1 -15)**

Applicant : **Ashton (Beech Grove) Mgt Co Ltd**

Representative : **Homestead Consultancy Services
Limited**

Respondents : **The Residential Leaseholders of the
Property (See Annex)**

Type of Application : **Landlord and Tenant Act 1985- section
20ZA**

Tribunal Member : **Regional Surveyor N. Walsh**

**Date and venue of
hearing** : **Determined without a hearing**

Date of Decision : **14 February 2023**

DECISION

DECISION

Compliance with the consultation requirements of section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 is dispensed with in relation to works comprising repairs to the flat roof above flats 14 and 15, as described in paragraph 4 of the following reasons.

REASONS

Background

1. On 29 November 2022, an application was made to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) (“the Tribunal”) under section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (“the Act”) for a determination to dispense with the consultation requirements of section 20 of the Act. Those requirements (“the consultation requirements”) are set out in the Service Charges (Consultation Requirements) (England) Regulations 2003 (“the Regulations”).
2. The application was made on behalf of Ashton (Beech Grove) Mgt Co Ltd and relates to premises known as Ashton- Beech Grove, 31 Beech Grove, Ashton, Preston, Lancashire, PR2 1DU (“the Property”). The Applicant is the management company and freeholder of the Property. The Respondents to the application are the long leaseholders of those apartments. A list of the Respondents is set out in the Annex hereto.
3. The only issue for the Tribunal to determine is whether or not it is reasonable to dispense with the consultation requirements.
4. The works in respect of which dispensation is sought comprise of repairs to the flat roof above flats 14 and 15 at a total cost of £4,664. The works require cleaning out, filling with unibond/screed, and boarding over all indentations with 4mm plywood. All affected areas should be re-covered with FIX-R sanded polyester underlay felt. Once all board and felting repairs are completed, the 12m x 13m area should be painted over with solar reflective roof paint.
5. I gather that each of the Respondents have been given notice of the application and afforded the opportunity to view the Applicant’s supporting evidence. They have also been provided with a copy of the case management directions issued by the Tribunal on 30 December 2022. The Tribunal accepts that the Applicant complied with paragraph 4 of the directions and sent a paper copy of their bundle of documents to each Respondent on 12 January 2023. The directions subsequently required any Respondent who opposed the application to notify the Tribunal of their objection by 2 February 2023. No such notification has been received.

6. I have determined this matter following a consideration of the Applicant's case, but without holding a hearing. Rule 31 of the Tribunal Procedure (First-tier Tribunal) (Property Chamber) Rules 2013 permits a case to be dealt with in this manner provided that the parties give their consent (or do not object when a paper determination is proposed). In this case, the Applicant has given its consent and the Respondents have not objected. Moreover, having reviewed the case papers, I am satisfied that this matter is indeed suitable to be determined without a hearing: although the Respondents are not legally represented, the application is unopposed and the issues to be decided are readily apparent.
7. The Tribunal did not inspect the Property, but I understand it to be a purpose-built block of apartments built in 1977. The building is of brick construction and has 3 floors containing 15 apartments.

Grounds for the application

8. The Tribunal is advised that the works at the Property have now been completed. The Applicant states that works were ordered immediately due to the level of health and safety risk and to prevent additional damages caused by water ingress.
9. According to the Applicant, the building requires a new roof, however the residents were unable to provide the money within the desired timeframe. The management company therefore decided to carry out patchwork repairs and have created a 5-year plan for the full roof replacement instead.
10. It is submitted that at the time of the application to the Tribunal, water was running into the flats below the roof and into the electric consumer unit. The Applicant advises that dispensation is sought given the urgent nature of the works, as it was thought that the repairs could not be halted to follow the full section 20 consultation process.

Law

11. Section 18 of the Act defines what is meant by "service charge". It also defines the expression "relevant costs" as:

the costs or estimated costs incurred or to be incurred by or on behalf of the landlord, or a superior landlord, in connection with the matters for which the service charge is payable.

12. Section 19 of the Act limits the amount of any relevant costs which may be included in a service charge to costs which are reasonably incurred, and section 20(1) provides:

Where this section applies to any qualifying works ... the relevant contributions of tenants are limited ... unless the consultation requirements have been either—
(a) complied with in relation to the works ... or

(b) dispensed with in relation to the works ... by the appropriate tribunal.

13. “Qualifying works” for this purpose are works on a building or any other premises (section 20ZA(2) of the Act), and section 20 applies to qualifying works if relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works exceed an amount which results in the relevant contribution of any tenant being more than £250.00 (section 20(3) of the Act and regulation 6 of the Regulations).

14. Section 20ZA(1) of the Act provides:

Where an application is made to the appropriate tribunal for a determination to dispense with all or any of the consultation requirements in relation to any qualifying works ... the tribunal may make the determination if satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with the requirements.

15. Reference should be made to the Regulations themselves for full details of the applicable consultation requirements. In outline, however, they require a landlord (or management company) to:

- give written notice of its intention to carry out qualifying works, inviting leaseholders to make observations and to nominate contractors from whom an estimate for carrying out the works should be sought;
- obtain estimates for carrying out the works, and supply leaseholders with a statement setting out, as regards at least two of those estimates, the amount specified as the estimated cost of the proposed works, together with a summary of any initial observations made by leaseholders;
- make all the estimates available for inspection; invite leaseholders to make observations about them; and then to have regard to those observations;
- give written notice to the leaseholders within 21 days of entering into a contract for the works explaining why the contract was awarded to the preferred bidder if that is not the person who submitted the lowest estimate.

Conclusions

16. The Tribunal must decide whether it was reasonable for the works to go ahead without the Applicant first complying with the full consultation requirements. Those requirements are intended to ensure a degree of transparency and accountability when a landlord (or management company) decides to undertake qualifying works – the requirements ensure that leaseholders have the opportunity to know about, and to

comment on, decisions about major works before those decisions are taken. They also ensure that leaseholders are protected from paying for inappropriate work, or from paying more than would be appropriate for necessary work. It is reasonable that the consultation requirements should be complied with unless there are good reasons for dispensing with all or any of them on the facts of a particular case.

17. It follows that, for it to be appropriate to dispense with the consultation requirements, there needs to be a good reason why the works could not be delayed until the requirements had been complied with. The Tribunal must weigh the balance of prejudice between, on the one hand, the need for swift remedial action to ensure that occupiers of the Property are not placed at undue risk and, on the other hand, the legitimate interests of the leaseholders in being properly consulted before major works begin. It must consider whether this balance favours allowing the works to be undertaken immediately (without consultation), or whether it favours prior consultation in the usual way (with the inevitable delay in carrying out the works which that will require). The balance is likely to be tipped in favour of dispensation in a case in which there is an urgent need for remedial or preventative action, or where all the leaseholders' consent to the grant of a dispensation.
18. I accept from the details provided that in the present case, the remedial works concerned were clearly of an urgent nature to prevent water ingress at the Property. While the Applicant has not adhered to the full consultation requirements, it is apparent that an estimate cost for the works and notice of intention were circulated to the Respondent leaseholders at the time that the Application to the Tribunal was made. In reaching this decision, I have had regard to the fact that no objections were raised by the Respondents when provided with the opportunity to do so. There is no evidence that the Respondents have been, or would be, prejudiced by the lack of compliance with the consultation requirements. I therefore conclude that unconditional retrospective dispensation should be granted.
19. Nevertheless, the fact that the Tribunal has granted retrospective dispensation from the consultation requirements should not be taken as an indication that I consider the amount of the anticipated service charges resulting from the works is likely to be reasonable; or, indeed, that such charges will be payable by the Respondents. I make no findings in that regard.

Signed: N Walsh
Regional Surveyor of the First-tier Tribunal
Date: 14 February 2023

ANNEX- List of Respondents

Mrs E C M Rawsthorne
Mr KT Duffy & Ms F Young
Mr R G McKay
Rev P Houghton
Ms Vivien Berry
Ms S Husain
Mr D P Banister
Mr J Rigby
Mr R Firth
Mrs D Galligan
Mrs S Spencer
Mrs T L Redfern
Mr B Pye
Mr & Mrs Jackson