



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

Case Reference : CHI/21UG/LDC/2023/0096

Property : Wickcliff Court, 27-29 Sackville Road,
Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex, TN39 3DJ

Applicant : Vitae Investments Ltd

Representative : Oakfield P.M. Limited Managing Agents

Respondents : The Leaseholders

Representative :

Type of Application : To dispense with the requirement to
consult lessees about major works
section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant
Act 1985

Tribunal Member : Mrs J Coupe FRICS

**Date and Venue of
Hearing** : Determination on Papers

Date of Decision : 29 September 2023

DECISION

The Application

1. The applicant seeks dispensation under Section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 from the consultation requirements imposed on the landlord by Section 20 of the 1985 Act. The application was made on 10 August 2023.
2. The property is described as a “converted three storey building located near Bexhill seafront”.
3. Dispensation is sought in relation to the urgent upgrade of the fire detection system.
4. The applicant stated that the existing fire alarm system does not meet current fire safety regulations and is no longer serviceable. The applicant intends installing a new Grade A LD2 control panel fire alarm system to include smoke detectors and fire alarms within communal areas, break glass call points at each entrance/exit, smoke and heat detectors within each individual flat and a new fire alarm panel.
5. The applicant states that the proposed works are urgently required to ensure sufficient protection in the event of fire.
6. A quotation dated 18 March 2023 and provided by Triac Electrical in the sum of £2,701.54 was provided.
7. On 15 August 2023 the Tribunal directed that the application would be determined on the papers without a hearing unless a party objected in writing within 7 days. A copy of the application and Tribunal Directions were sent to each respondent leaseholder by the Tribunal.
8. The respondent leaseholders were informed in the Directions issued that the question of reasonableness of the works, or cost, was not included in the application, the sole purpose of which is to seek dispensation.
9. The Tribunal required the respondents to return a pro-forma to the Tribunal and to the applicant by 25 August 2023 indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with the application.
10. The Tribunal received no response from the respondents either agreeing or objecting to the application.
11. On 11 September 2023 the applicant confirmed that they had not received any response from the respondents.

Determination

12. The 1985 Act provides leaseholders with safeguards in respect of the recovery of the landlord’s costs in connection with qualifying works. Section 19 ensures that the landlord can only recover those costs that

are reasonably incurred on works that are carried out to a reasonable standard. Section 20 requires the landlord to consult with leaseholders in a prescribed manner about the qualifying works. If the landlord fails to do this, a leaseholder's contribution is limited to £250, unless the Tribunal dispenses with the requirement to consult.

13. In this case the Tribunal's decision is confined to the dispensation from the consultation requirements in respect of the works under section 20ZA of the 1985 Act. The Tribunal is not making a determination on whether the costs of those works are reasonable or payable. If a leaseholder wishes to challenge the reasonableness of those costs, then a separate application under section 27A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 would have to be made.
14. Section 20ZA does not elaborate on the circumstances in which it might be reasonable to dispense with the consultation requirements. On the face of the wording, the Tribunal is given a broad discretion on whether to grant or refuse dispensation. The discretion, however, must be exercised in the context of the legal safeguards given to the Applicant under sections 19 and 20 of the 1985 Act. This was the conclusion of the Supreme Court in *Daejan Investments Ltd v Benson and Others* [2013] UKSC 14 & 54 which decided that the Tribunal should focus on the issue of prejudice to the tenant in respect of the statutory safeguards.
15. Lord Neuberger in *Daejan* said at paragraph 44

“Given that the purpose of the Requirements is to ensure that the tenants are protected from (i) paying for inappropriate works or (ii) paying more than would be appropriate, it seems to me that the issue on which the LVT should focus when entertaining an application by a landlord under s 20ZA(1) must be the extent, if any, to which the tenants were prejudiced in either respect by the failure of the landlord to comply with the Requirements”.
16. Thus, the correct approach to an application for dispensation is for the Tribunal to decide whether and if so to what extent the leaseholders would suffer relevant prejudice if unconditional dispensation was granted. The factual burden is on the leaseholders to identify any relevant prejudice which they claim they might have suffered. If the leaseholders show a creditable case for prejudice, the Tribunal should look to the landlord to rebut it, failing which it should, in the absence of good reason to the contrary, require the landlord to reduce the amount claimed as service charges to compensate the leaseholders fully for that prejudice.
17. The Tribunal now turns to the facts. The Tribunal is satisfied that it is necessary to carry out the proposed upgrades to the fire detection system on health and safety grounds and that such works are urgent. The Tribunal accepts the applicant's explanation that there is now

insufficient time to undertake full statutory consultation, although the Tribunal is unclear as to why additional quotations were not sought between the date of Triac's quotation in March 2023 and the date of application to the Tribunal in August 2023 or, if additional quotations were sought, the outcome of such enquiries. However, the Tribunal takes into account that there have been no objections from any respondents and no prejudice has been demonstrated or asserted.

18. On the evidence before it the Tribunal is, therefore, satisfied that the leaseholders would suffer no relevant prejudice if dispensation from consultation was granted.

Decision

19. **The Tribunal grants an order dispensing with the consultation requirements under S.20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in respect of the proposed upgrades to the fire detection system on the condition that the quotation from Triac Electrical is provided to each leaseholder.**
20. The Tribunal directs the applicant to supply a copy of the decision to the leaseholders and to confirm to the Tribunal that it has done so.

RIGHTS OF APPEAL

1. A person wishing to appeal this decision to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber) must seek permission to do so by making written application by email to rpsouthern@justice.gov.uk to the First-tier Tribunal at the Regional office which has been dealing with the case.
2. The application must arrive at the Tribunal within 28 days after the Tribunal sends to the person making the application written reasons for the decision.
3. If the person wishing to appeal does not comply with the 28 day time limit, the person shall include with the application for permission to appeal a request for an extension of time and the reason for not complying with the 28 day time limit; the Tribunal will then decide whether to extend time or not to allow the application for permission to appeal to proceed.
4. The application for permission to appeal must identify the decision of the Tribunal to which it relates, state the grounds of appeal, and state the result the party making the application is seeking.