



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

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| Case Reference | : CHI/21UG/LDC/2023/0153 |
| Property | : Belgrave Court, De La Warr Parade, Bexhill On Sea, East Sussex TN40 1NW |
| Applicant | : Belgrave Court (Bexhill) Limited |
| Representative | : Oakfield P.M. Limited |
| Respondent | : 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 | : D Banfield FRICS, Regional Surveyor |
| Date of Decision | : 20 December 2023 |

DECISION

The Tribunal grants dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in respect of the replacement of the stopcock and provision of backflow prevention.

In granting dispensation, the Tribunal makes no determination as to whether any service charge costs are reasonable or payable.

The Applicant must send copies of this determination to the lessees.

Background

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 received on 22 November 2023.

2. The Applicant has included an estimate of the works from Booker & Best Ltd dated 10 May 2023.

3. The property is described as,

..... A PUPOSE [SIC] BUILT BLOCK OF FLATS LOCATED ON BEXHILL SEA FRONT

4. The Applicant explains that,

AFTER INVESTIGATING A LEAK ON SITE WITHIN THE BASEMENT OF THE BUILDING FOR FLAT 32, IT WAS CONFIRMED A NEW STOPCOCK WAS REQUIRED AND THE WATERBOARD NEEDED TO BE INVOLVED TO TURN OFF THE WATER TO THE BUILDING DUE TO DESIGN. THERE WAS ALSO CONCERN RAISED ON THE LOCATION OF THE ELECTRICAL MAINS TO THE MAINS WATER SUPPLY PIPE. THERE IS NO BACKFLOW PROTECTION WITHIN THE SYSTEM AT ALL. THERE IS CONCERN THAT SHOULD THERE BE A LEAK THERE IS NO WAY OF STOPPING THIS AS THE SYSTEM HAS CEASED, BUT ALSO SHOULD THERE BE A LEAK THE MAINS WATER IS LOCATED DIRECTLY NEXT TO/CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE MAINS ELECTRICS.

THERE IS ADDED COMPLEXITY TO THIS WORK DUE TO THE EXTENT OF THE UNKNOWN. WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT THERE ARE FACTORS OF THE WORK WILL NOT BE KNOWN UNTIL THIS WORK HAS COMMENCED.

IN ADDITION, THIS WORK IS SPECIALIST DUE TO THE VARIATIONS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT.

5. Further,

Dispensation is sought due to the complex nature of this job and requirement for multiple specialist tradespeople. It is considered that there may be challenges in obtaining like for like tenders on the basis that there may be limited companies capable of this type of work, and additionally the fact that the extent of work needed is likely not to be fully clear until work on site actually starts. This means we cannot accurately estimate the full cost of the work.

Section 20 Consultation has not been carried out.

6. The Tribunal made Directions on 21 November 2023 which required the Applicant to send it to the Lessees together with a

form for them to indicate to the Tribunal whether they agreed with or opposed the application and whether they requested an oral hearing. If the Leaseholders agreed with the application or failed to return the form they would be removed as a Respondent although they would remain bound by the Tribunal's Decision.

7. No responses were received and no requests for an oral hearing were made. The matter is therefore determined on the papers in accordance with Rule 31 of the Tribunal's Procedural Rules.
8. Before making this determination, the papers received were examined to determine whether the issues remained capable of determination without an oral hearing and it was decided that they were, given that the application remained unchallenged.

The Law

9. The relevant section of the Act reads as follows:

S.20 ZA Consultation requirements:

Where an application is made to a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal for a determination to dispense with all or any of the consultation requirements in relation to any qualifying works or qualifying long-term agreement, the Tribunal may make the determination if satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with the requirements.

10. The matter was examined in some detail by the Supreme Court in the case of *Daejan Investments Ltd v Benson*. In summary the Supreme Court noted the following.
 - a. The main question for the Tribunal when considering how to exercise its jurisdiction in accordance with section 20ZA is the real prejudice to the tenants flowing from the landlord's breach of the consultation requirements.
 - b. The financial consequence to the landlord of not granting a dispensation is not a relevant factor. The nature of the landlord is not a relevant factor.
 - c. Dispensation should not be refused solely because the landlord seriously breached, or departed from, the consultation requirements.
 - d. The Tribunal has power to grant a dispensation as it thinks fit, provided that any terms are appropriate.
 - e. The Tribunal has power to impose a condition that the landlord pays the tenants' reasonable costs (including surveyor and/or legal fees) incurred in connection with the landlord's application under section 20ZA (1).
 - f. The legal burden of proof in relation to dispensation applications is on the landlord. The factual burden of

identifying some “relevant” prejudice that they would or might have suffered is on the tenants.

- g. The court considered that “relevant” prejudice should be given a narrow definition; it means whether non-compliance with the consultation requirements has led the landlord to incur costs in an unreasonable amount or to incur them in the provision of services, or in the carrying out of works, which fell below a reasonable standard, in other words whether the non-compliance has in that sense caused prejudice to the tenant.
- h. The more serious and/or deliberate the landlord's failure, the more readily a Tribunal would be likely to accept that the tenants had suffered prejudice.
- i. Once the tenants had shown a credible case for prejudice, the Tribunal should look to the landlord to rebut it.

Evidence

- 11. The Applicant’s case is set out in paragraph 3 and 4 above.

Determination

- 12. Dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 of the Act may be given where the Tribunal is satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with those requirements. Guidance on how such power may be exercised is provided by the leading case of Daejan v Benson referred to above.
- 13. No objections have been received from the lessees and in these circumstances I am prepared to grant conditional dispensation.
- 14. **The Tribunal therefore grants dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in respect of the replacement of the stopcock and provision of backflow prevention.**
- 15. In granting dispensation, the Tribunal makes no determination as to whether any service charge costs are reasonable or payable.
- 16. The Applicant must send copies of this determination to the lessees.

D Banfield FRICS
20 December 2023

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.