

Dame Meg Hillier
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee

9 February 2023

Dear Dame Meg,

Further information following the oral evidence session: Restoration and Renewal Recall, held on Thursday 2 February 2023.

Thank you for inviting us both to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday 2 February. During last week's session, we undertook to provide further information and clarity on several points that were raised.

Asbestos Register (Q16)

The Committee requested a copy of Parliament's asbestos register.

Parliament uses a space driven electronic database to record locations where asbestos containing materials (ACMs) on the estate are known or presumed to be present, derived from our asbestos management surveys.

These surveys are undertaken in line with the Health and Safety Executives' industry guidance (HSG 264 – "Asbestos: the survey guide") using competent external surveyors. During the surveys, any suspect material is sampled and analysed at a UKAS¹ accredited laboratory with the results input into the database to produce the asbestos record.

This record, often referred to as the asbestos register, includes the following:

- accurate drawings of our buildings and details of the locations of the ACMs;
- the extent, condition and type of ACM (e.g., amphibole – blue / brown; serpentine - white);
- the form (e.g., the product type – tiles, boards, cement sheets)
- photographs of the ACM, so it can be easily identified.

The record and drawings also record details of any area not accessed or inspected. That area is assumed to contain asbestos unless there is strong evidence that it does not.

Any confirmed ACM is subject to an annual reinspection to check the material's condition and inspect for any signs of deterioration, with information updated into the live register on each occasion. Additional reviews and updates are made as a result of new asbestos management surveys being undertaken, and following any asbestos removal work, to ensure that the register remains accurate and up to date.

Given the size of the database, which holds 1,456 positive space identification entries across the estate, it is not easy to provide the Committee with a physical copy of the record. However, screenshots of the database have been provided as an appendix to provide an illustration.-Due to

¹ United Kingdom Accreditation Scheme

the inclusion of security-sensitive information relating to the estate we request that these are redacted for publication. We would be happy to show you or your colleagues the full live record.

Fielden House investigation (Q23)

We committed to write to the Committee with our overall assessment once the investigation has concluded. The matter remains ongoing so we are unable to provide an update at present. However, we will write to you before the end of February 2023, once the investigation has been completed.

Safety Resourcing (Q26)

We committed to providing you with additional information regarding the additional health and safety specialists recruited in the last 12 months.

In total, an additional six new health and safety posts have been created and filled during this period within Strategic Estates to supplement the existing team who have operational oversight for construction and maintenance safety management. This takes the total compliment of safety posts within Strategic Estates to fourteen, which includes three vacant posts still subject to ongoing recruitment. The list of new health and safety posts are as follows:

- Senior Construction Manager
- Health and Safety Manager
- Health and Safety Apprentice
- 3 x Construction Design Management Advisor

Clerks' ability to prevent Members accessing the estate if it is considered unsafe (Q99)

During the meeting, we discussed our ability to prevent Members attending the Palace if we had reached the view that it was unsafe and agreed to provide further clarification on this point.

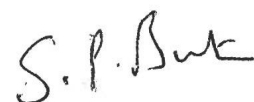
If we as Corporate Officers were to reach the view that it was unsafe for Members to attend the Palace, we would strongly advise that the two Houses should no longer sit there and should move elsewhere. If that advice was ignored by either House and it continued to sit in the Palace, we would have no power to exclude Members, who would have a constitutional right to attend proceedings.

However, as Corporate Officers we also have responsibility for the safety of staff, contractors and visitors, and we would be able to close the building to all other users if necessary. The Houses would, therefore, be sitting entirely without staff support. Were a Member to suffer personal injury in those circumstances as a result of the state of the Palace, we would expect to resist any claim for compensation on the grounds that in attending the Member had acted voluntarily at their own risk and contrary to the advice given.

Yours sincerely,



Sir John Benger, Clerk of the House of Commons



Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments

Appendix: Example of the Asbestos Register

General

Audit info


Code

HZ5154

Description

##ASB## Stair nosing

Photo



Assessment required?

Yes

No

Location details

Property code

00POW, Palace of Westminster

Space number

22503, Lobby

Asset code

Hazard

Hazard type code

C1, Asbestos

Hazardous component c...

Hazard classification


05, Chemical hazards

Risk level value


1

External ID

Start date-time

 04/12/2020 09:00

End date-time



Last log

Risk level

1, Low


Hazard presence

4, Asbestos found

Recommended action

1, Manage

Last assessment date

 22/04/2022 00:00

Next assessment date

21/04/2023

General

Asbestos assessment

Survey info

Comment

Audit info

Material

Product type

1, Asbestos reinforced composites (plast

Extent of damage

1, Low damage: a few scratches or surfa

Extent change reas...

Surface type

0, Composite materials containing asbes

Surface change rea...

Asbestos type

1, Chrysotile

Material score

3

Priority

Activity

1, Low disturbance activities (eg office ty

Location

2, Rooms up to 100 m2

Accessibility

3, Routinely disturbed

Extent of range

3, >50 m2 or >50 m pipe run

Number of occupa...

1, 1 to 3

Frequency of use o...

3, Daily

Average time area i...

0, <1 hour

Maintenance type

1, Low disturbance (eg changing light bu

Maintenance frequ...

1, 1 per year

Priority score

7

General

Asbestos assessment

Survey info

Comment

Audit info

Survey info

Surveyor

Report number

P-349682

Project dossier ref

Survey Details

Certificate number

P-349682

Sample number

176

Survey type

1, Management survey

Sample taken? (Y/N)

N, No

S/P/X

X, Cross referenced sample

Limitation

Recommended acti...

1, Manage