

## **Camden Leaseholders' Forum**

### **Guide: Heating Options/Appraisals**

(last updated 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017)

### **Summary**

We understand that Camden has a responsibility to provide a heating system which will function satisfactorily both in the short-term and in the future. However:

1. Any system should be sustainable and energy efficient.
2. Any system should not be prohibitively costly to run – both in terms of fuel costs and maintenance costs.
3. Any works that take place should respect the architectural value of the estate and the existing principles of the external and internal design, establishing the principle of “like-for-like” replacement; for example, heating pipes under the floor, electrical wiring in the walls, etc as this is what residents have come to understand and enjoy within their homes.
4. Homes should not be damaged or defaced internally by the proposals with surface-mounted pipework or boxing-out on walls or ceilings; existing features such as floor to ceiling doors should not be interrupted or cut-into; there should be no loss of valuable storage space.
5. No estate should be damaged or defaced externally by the proposal, with surface-mounted pipework or flues expelling through walls.
6. The proposals should respect and be in keeping with the qualities of any Conservation Area. Existing examples of poor or insensitive infrastructure installation should not be used as a precedent for sub-standard proposed works. Indeed the rationalisation and amelioration of any such poor works should be considered as part of any proposal.
7. Any works should provide a detailed design for each individual dwelling, based on a survey of all properties to provide an assessment of practicability in terms of constraints posed by existing units.
8. Any works should ensure adequate zoning and isolation to provide ease of maintenance in the future.
9. Any works should be well planned before works begin, with good project management and tight control of quality of workmanship and cost throughout.
10. A proactive maintenance regime should be put in place as part of any proposal, with money set aside for this purpose.

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## Background

Camden's commissioning of Options Appraisals starts from the premise that existing heating systems are over 30 years old and therefore in need of total renewal.

Proposals under discussion relating to the heating systems have the potential to affect thousands of homes. We would like Camden Council to acknowledge that these proposals represent a considerable and complex piece of infrastructural work that will profoundly affect all residents – and as such will require careful and thorough consultation and analysis. The majority of residents value the physical and social fabric of their communities, and would be willing to commit their time and energy to liaise with Camden Council in order to inform the proposals.

Camden Council has an obligation to ensure that the heating systems they propose will sustain and improve the physical and social well-being of their properties – and at the very least have no negative impact upon them. The Council also has a duty to consult with all residents, listen to their views, act on their wishes and keep them informed of progress in a timely fashion.

## Considerations

The ethos behind the appraisals methodology must be challenged on every occasion as it is not based on any legal requirement and is not cast in stone. The appraisal is not designed to examine the present system with a view to improving the service, which might well be possible with partial replacement of e.g. radiators, valves, boilers, etc or a flush out of the system. No consideration is given to retaining and upgrading, if necessary, the system. Camden Council say their decision is also based on the number of call outs/breakdowns, but appear unable to back up these figures with any mitigating circumstances – such as the fact that on occasions we understand the Council saw fit to operate an entire system with only 1 of 3 boilers working. There can be 100 reports of one fault in the heating system affecting a number of residents. Each report is counted as a separate complaint despite the fact that there is only one fault, reported 100 times. The Council should not use these statistics to substantiate their claim that an entire new system is needed, without providing full details of the circumstances behind these statistics.

Tenders should not be sought until all homes have been surveyed, otherwise variation costs will be extremely high. We are aware that contracts have been tendered, with only a very few units surveyed. This meant that Camden Council has used diagrammatic layout plans, and not plans which show actual layouts.

## Method

Camden Council should identify the team that will be developing and implementing their proposals and establish effective means for this team to communicate and consult with residents. We feel that it is essential that this team should have the required technical expertise and decision-making power. Local knowledge such as that provided by caretakers or others with a good knowledge of the estates should be welcomed and utilised.

The Council should ensure that residents' suggestions and requirements are at the heart of any proposal and that residents will have a real say in deciding the best way forward for their heating system. Residents can request a breakdown of the consultation process and how queries/observations were taken into consideration.

Camden Council should demonstrate a detailed understanding of the functioning and make-up of the existing system and its component parts explaining how the existing system has been designed to be fit for purpose. A thorough analysis of breakdown data and maintenance records with a detailed and specific analysis of the cause and location of failures should be provided. Drawings / diagrams and thorough written explanations should be used to illustrate this clearly to residents. This evidence should be used as the starting point for any proposals for the system and if not forthcoming, can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act from Camden Council.

Camden Council should assess what parts of the system and installations could be retained and what installations would need to be replaced and provide an assessment of how any liability issues at the junctions between the two would be covered. For example, degraded steel distribution pipework could be replaced along with radiators/valves if necessary while the longer-lasting and anecdotally less-corroded copper pipework could be retained.

Residents are within their rights to request that no work is undertaken before any concerns (that the above process uncovers) are addressed. **The most important thing to stress is that Camden Council must prove that the work is necessary.** Other councils have had their charges nullified for undertaking unnecessary works (see full article about a 2012 case involving Islington Council [here](#)).

## Examples

- In March 2013, on the Curnock Street Estate, there was a breakdown of the heating and hot water system which Camden council says that is aiming to fix this by the end of the next month. This meant that the residents will have been without adequate hot water for a total of three months – or of course it may take longer. These repairs are after the end of major heating works worth millions of pounds and countless repairs. The estate did not have water for 32 days in 2011 and 24 days in 2010. The Council's employees are creating difficulties for themselves by not providing residents with relevant information about these issues.
- On the Whittington Estate, an Apollo worker told a resident that her heating problems were due to a leaseholder carrying out works to a unit within the same block. Not only is this divisive but it was untrue as there are no leaseholders within that particular block. An Apollo worker has previously blamed “a leaseholder carrying out works” for problems with the heating system, when it transpired that the true cause was due to defective pumps/valves letting air into the system.

Another resident was without heating for over 3 weeks and Apollo blamed the age of the system and complete blockage of the pipe work/radiators within the unit. The actual cause was an Apollo operative having “adjusted” the riser so it was OFF and it had been left turned off.

- At Kiln Place, the new heating system is not only more expensive and more inconvenient for residents to run but it is also is not working as it should, temperatures being inconsistent between different floors in duplex (two-floored) flats.

During a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) case, relating to the above work in Kiln Place, it decided that, according to the respondents’ leases, Camden Council did not have the power to insist on the replacement of the hot water systems in individual flats (only central heating systems); this was after 99% of the estate had had their systems replaced. The LVT also ruled that Camden Council had failed to fully consult in regards to the cost of installing heat meters for Kiln Place estate – the cost was 50% of the overall package, so this particular element should have been consulted on in detail. Case reference and clickable link: [LON/00AG/LSC/2011/0522](https://www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk/cases/lvt/LON/00AG/LSC/2011/0522).

## Conclusion

We understand that Camden is now considering allowing residents to opt for individual boilers and that this strategy may enable leaseholders/freeholders to install their own systems within their homes. It is essential that the detailed practical implications of individual boiler installations are thought through and workable solutions identified before residents are asked to indicate their preferences.

It is essential that strategy for providing the necessary flues is identified that will avoid damaging or defacing the external appearance of the existing buildings, and avoid negatively impacting on air quality. Through-wall flue outlets from each dwelling could be unsightly and impractical and if in a Conservation area would be unacceptable.

The ramifications of the gas installation and new requirements and best practice should be assessed in detail as there can be safety and aesthetic considerations relating to gas pipework.

Any Options Appraisal must be scrutinised by residents and errors of fact highlighted.

It is not satisfactory for errors to be picked up once work is in progress. By then, it is too late.

## Updates

- In September 2013, Councillor Julian Fulbrook, the then-current Cabinet member for Housing on Camden Council, announced that at a Leaseholders' Forum meeting that community central heating would no longer be presumed during upgrade works and that individual boilers would be actively considered... specifically: "the gist is correct; we will not necessarily replace district heating systems with new district heating systems, but will consider the circumstances of each location."
- The council's latest heating and hot water policy can now be found [online](#). Technically this August 2015 document is an "appraisal brief"; it lists the considerations the Council must go through before upgrading or replacing heating and hot water systems. If you are currently undergoing such a scheme, then this is the document for you!

## Appendix: More information about Camden Leaseholders' Forum

We are a volunteer group representing all the leaseholders in Camden Council properties and freeholders paying service charges to Camden Council. We scrutinise Camden Council proposals, examine working practices and lobby on behalf of leaseholders to Camden Council.

More information is available at <http://www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk>

If you know of anyone who would like to receive regular updates from us, please direct them to <http://www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk/mailling-list> where they can sign up. Subscribers can also adjust preferences by clicking on the link at the bottom of any email we send.