11-15 Moss Hall Grove, N12 8PE- Response to [redacted]'s report

[redacted]'s report was provided by Mrs A[redacted]. Italicised comments are taken directly from Mr [redacted]s report which is a desktop report based on evidence available in the public domain, Capital PCC report and my HHSRS assessment following the fire and comparisons with a house in Watling Estate.

The purpose of his report is to try and compare the fire at Moss Hall Grove to possible risks at Watling Estate houses. This is a desktop case study comparing archetypes that are similar in so far as they both have timber frames. The age of the dwellings and external cladding are different.

The paragraph numbers reflect Mr [redacted]s report for ease of reading. Where no additional comments are necessary, this means that the original evidence and reasoning was taken from the Capital report and response to Mr [redacted]s report.

1.0 Introduction.

1.1 *A fire starting in a back yard caused severe damage to a terrace of four houses.* There is no evidence available to Mr [redacted] of how the fire ignited. The theory provided by Barnet Homes is that a motorbike parked against the side of the house was responsible for the ignition. Mr [redacted] makes no acknowledgement that the UPVC cladding is fixed to a timber frame which was important to the formation and ongoing spread of the fire.

1.2 No additional comment necessary.

1.3 All the houses across the 4 archetypes have timber frames. This is the point of the investigation and remediation exercise. Mr [redacted] has not indicated an awareness of the other option being piloted in Playfield Road, Edgware. Other options are also being considered.

1.4 No additional comment necessary.

1.5 No additional comment necessary.

1.6 The report appears to be focussing solely on the external wall cladding and not the timber frame the cladding is attached to.

2.0 Information on the fire.

2.1 No additional comment necessary.

2.2 The only materials that were available for the rapid development and spread of fire was the UPVC (plastic) cladding and the timber frame. Mr [redacted] has not acknowledged this or provided an alternative explanation for the rapid spread of fire across the rear façade.

2.3 No additional comment necessary.

2.4 Mr [redacted] acknowledges that the fire burned externally which suggested the external envelope was ablaze producing large quantities of dark smoke when the image was taken. This suggests that the material burning was producing the dark smoke, for example PVC cladding.

2.5 No additional comment necessary.

2.6 No additional comment necessary.
2.7 No additional comment necessary.
2.8 Access was not permitted by Barnet Homes to the end terrace house at the time of my external visit on the grounds of safety. Mr [redacted] makes a valid point on the lack of testing to remaining materials. The damaged terrace has since been demolished preventing any samples to be taken.
2.9 No clear evidence is available about the fire, other than it spread very rapidly externally and the fire service were unable to contain it or prevent the entire terrace of four houses from being destroyed.
2.10 No additional comment necessary.
2.11 No additional comment necessary
2.12 Agreed that an internal inspection was not undertaken as access was not permitted. Even if access had been permitted there may have been little of value to see as much of the terrace had been destroyed by fire. An internal inspection of a similar house in Moss Hall Grove was completed on 20th August 2024.
2.13 Only very limited evidence was available to make an HHSRS assessment in unusual circumstances. No evidence was available from Barnet Homes of the original wall covering, or whether it had been replaced in the past.
2.14 Direct photographic evidence was available of charred plywood and undamaged plywood (or similar wood material) below the UPVC cladding to largely undamaged parts of the building at the front of the terrace.
2.15 As above
2.16 Comments made by Capital are agreed with.
2.17 Comments made by Capital are agreed with.
2.18 It appears that Mr [redacted] is speculating here. The date of his photo is unknown and any structures in the rear garden may have been moved in the intervening time, and other items possibly tidied away. In any event it seems unlikely that a shed fire (or similar) could spread to the house across a concreted yard or grassed garden with such intensity to cause such extensive damage to the terrace. Even if this were the case the house was not sufficiently resistant to the spread of fire which will put occupiers at significant risk. This must be considered as a relevant matter in an HHSRS assessment.

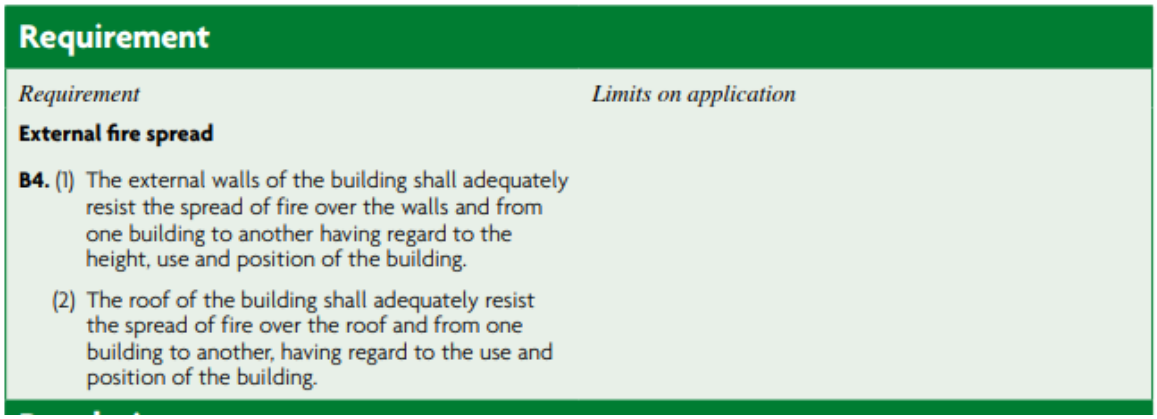
3.0 Discussion

3.1 *In my opinion, the high fuel load in the yard presented a far greater hazard to health and safety than the cladding or any other defects in the buildings.* There was no evidence of a high fuel loading in the rear garden or how the fuel was ignited. Mr [redacted] has not visited the site and made this assumption based on some images from an indeterminate date. Whatever the ignition source was, the fuel loading provided by timber frame and the UPVC cladding cannot simply be trivialised or explained away. Mr [redacted] has not supported his theory with a possible ignition source or how the fire fully developed to

such an extent that resulted in external spread from the source to the house either by radiation, conduction.

3.2 I agree with the comments made by Capital and can add nothing more of value.

3.3 Mr [redacted] is referring to former standards that were acceptable at the time of construction, which have been superseded. It is highly likely that Building Control professionals would agree that these timber framed houses and those on the Watling Estate would not meet Requirement B4 of Approved Document B 2010, the current building control standards.



Requirement

Requirement	*Limits on application*
External fire spread	
B4. (1) The external walls of the building shall adequately resist the spread of fire over the walls and from one building to another having regard to the height, use and position of the building.	
(2) The roof of the building shall adequately resist the spread of fire over the roof and from one building to another, having regard to the use and position of the building.	

The HHSRS operating guidance makes is clear to practitioners that they must keep up to date with current evidence. Simply relying on past building standards is not relevant when considering the HHSRS.

1.04 The HHSRS is evidence-based. It is supported by extensive reviews of the literature and by detailed analyses of statistical data on the impact of housing conditions on health. This evidence is summarised in the Hazard Profiles section of this Guidance and these are intended to inform professional judgement.

Note –
Research on the relationship between housing and health is a continuing process, and it is the responsibility of professionals using the HHSRS to keep up-to-date on current evidence.

The hazard profile for fire directs inspectors to the current building regulations when considering preventative measures and the ideal to reducing a hazard to as low as a risk as possible.

24.30 For further information see – Building Regulation *Approved Document B*, and British Standards *BS5588, Code of Practice 5839*, and *BS5446*.

3.4 Mr [redacted] states, *However, the size of the external fire was probably so large that flames might have reached to the eaves in any case.* There is no evidence that a burning external structure was the cause of the ignition that

spread to the terrace. The fact is that the houses did ignite, and fire spread to neighbouring dwellings very quickly putting householders at risk. The risk to householders would have been higher if the fire had occurred at night. An HHSRS assessment is concerned with the potential likelihood of a fire over a 12-month period that may cause harm to include mental and physical harm and prevent it by the quick and safe escape of occupiers. There is clear evidence that cladding breached the party wall (not meeting the current building control requirements) and a lack of cavity barriers have contributed to the rapid spread of fire.

3.5 No additional comment necessary.

3.6 Clear evidence was noted of no cavity barrier at eaves level which is clear path for fire. This is confirmed by Capital and Mr [redacted] and is a relevant matter when judging deficiencies using the HHSRS.

3.7 The roof void was opened up between 38-40 Playfield Rd as part of the pilot detail project work. There is evidence of a historic fire that has partly spread across the party wall at roof level into the neighbouring house, indicating inadequate fire separation at roof beams level.

3.8 I agree with the comments made by Capital and can add nothing more of value.

3.9 It would have been helpful if Mr [redacted] had provided justification for this opinion and why he considers a fire in the cavity to be unrealistic, especially as a fire may spread from a neighbouring house which is a relevant matter as part of a HHSRS assessment. The houses have internal plasterboard linings fixed onto the timber frame. This has not been commented on by Mr [redacted]. It is very possible that plug socket outlet boxes inserted into the plasterboard lining do not have intumescent linings increasing the risk of an unseen ignition within the cavity. In my experience it is not uncommon to find damage to the internal linings exposing the cavity and the timber frame made accidentally by the householders. If repairs are made there is no guarantee that the standard of fire resistant internally will be sufficient.

A pair of semi-detached houses in Watling Estate have been opened up extensively exposing the cavity. There was clear evidence that the internal plasterboard has been breached by occupiers hanging pictures and similar items to the walls with wall plugs (or similar fixings). An internal fire would find a hole into the cavity readily, the internal hardboard would ignite very rapidly and spread to the timber frame

4.0 Conclusions.

4.1 There is no evidence to this

4.2 The fire originated at the rear of the terrace and spread across the rear elevation externally before breaking internally and spreading to the roof space above the height of the UPVC cladding. The fire service tackled the fire at the rear and front the terrace. It is very possible that they had doused the flames sufficiently preventing spread to the front elevation, in combination with the fire being in the roof void by this time and being fuelled from the roof timbers. This possibility has not been considered.

4.3 I agree with the comments made by Capital and can add nothing more of value.

4.4 Mr [redacted] acknowledges a common building defect that can result in spread of fire. This is a defect that must be considered as relevant in an HHSRS assessment.

4.5 This is not substantiated

Response prepared by Richard Lord Environmental Health Officer
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21st August 2024