



## Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and  
Communities**

2 Marsham Street  
London  
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Our reference: TO2024/05242

Mr Russ Timpson  
Email: russ.timpson@tallbuildingfiresafety.com

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Dear Mr Timpson,

### **Two Stair Debate in Higher Risk Buildings**

Thank you for your email of 10 January 2024 to Lord Gascoigne, which included the article supporting the need for a second staircase in tall buildings.

I thought it would be helpful to set out the government's action in this area. In December 2022 we published a consultation which sought views on the inclusion of a second staircase in tall buildings. In July 2023, the DLUHC Secretary of State confirmed his intent that the threshold height beyond which second staircases would be called for was 18m. Proposed transitional arrangements were then published in the Building Safety Update Written Statement of 24 October 2023 (Annex A). These arrangements minimise the impact on housing supply by giving generous, but not excessive, periods for existing projects to progress as planned – if they choose to.

Projects will have 30 months from the point of statutory guidance being updated to submit building regulations applications which conform to either the previous guidance or the updated guidance. After that point, all applications will need to conform to the new guidance; then 18 months from the point that application is submitted to “progress work” on site.

The arrangements have been designed following engagement with the construction industry, local authorities, fire safety services and the financing and insurance industry. We believe the times given for these transitional arrangements will secure the viability of projects which are already underway whilst evolving our fire safety standards as quickly as a practicable for such a significant change to the way in which our tall buildings are constructed.

We recognise that detailed second staircase design guidance is needed for the sector to fully understand the implications for design and viability. We will publish this as soon as possible. Officials will continue to provide updates on the guidance and transitional arrangements where available.

I think it is important that the introduction of second staircases is seen in context with the other significant enhancements in fire safety that this government has introduced. We have banned the use of combustible materials in and on external walls, increased provisions for sprinklers in residential buildings, provided additional signage in new buildings to assist firefighters, and made provision for secure information boxes.

Second staircases, alongside the changes already introduced, together with the enhanced scrutiny of the new building safety regime that is already in place, will see a world-leading fire safety regime in which the public can have every confidence.

I appreciate your interest and contribution in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Fred Smailes  
Head of Ministerial and Public Correspondence  
**Correspondence Unit**

## **Annex A – Written Ministerial Statement**

This Government is committed to ensuring that people can be confident that our buildings are safe. The Building Safety Act set up a new, robust regime, with a new Building Safety Regulator at its heart. In recent years, we have also changed statutory guidance on fire safety, with new measures including:

- a ban on combustibile materials for residential buildings, hotels, hospitals and student accommodation above 18m, and additional guidance for residential buildings between 11m-18m;
- a lower threshold for the provision of sprinklers in new blocks of flats from 30m to 11m;
- a requirement for wayfinding signage for firefighters in residential buildings above 11m;
- requirements for residential buildings over 18m to have an Evacuation Alert System, and for new residential buildings over 11m to include a Secure Information Box (SIB).

We must never be complacent in our approach to safety. In July, I confirmed that I intend to introduce new guidance requiring second staircases in new residential buildings in England above 18m. This not only reflects the views of experts including the National Fire Chiefs Council and Royal Institute of British Architects, but also brings us into line with countries – including Hong Kong and the UAE – in having a reasonable threshold for requiring second staircases.

I can now announce the intended transitional arrangements that will accompany this change to Approved Document B. From the date when we publish and confirm those changes to Approved Document B formally, developers will have 30 months during which new building regulations applications can confirm to either the guidance as it exists today, or to the updated guidance requiring second staircases. When those 30 months have elapsed, all applications will need to conform to the new guidance.

Any approved applications that do not follow the new guidance will have 18 months for construction to get underway in earnest. If it does not, they will have to submit a new building regulations application, following the new guidance. Sufficient progress, for this purpose, will match the definition set out in the Building (Higher-Risk Buildings Procedures) (England) Regulations 2023, and will therefore be when the pouring of concrete for either the permanent placement of trench, pad or raft foundations or for the permanent placement of piling has started.

With these transitional arrangements, we ensure that projects that already have planning permission with a single staircase, the safety of which will have been considered as part of that application, can continue without further delay if they choose. This means that, for some years yet, we will continue to see 18m+ buildings with single staircases coming to the market. I want to be absolutely clear that existing and upcoming single-staircase buildings are not inherently unsafe. They will not later need to have a second staircase added, when built in accordance with relevant standards, well-maintained and properly managed. I expect lenders, managing agents, insurers, and others to behave accordingly, and not to impose onerous additional requirements, hurdles or criteria on single-staircase buildings in lending, pricing, management or any other respect.

Those who live in new buildings over 18m can be reassured that those buildings are already subject to the additional scrutiny of the new, enhanced building safety regime. Their fire-safety arrangements are scrutinised in detail at the new building control gateways and planning gateway one.

I realise that developers and the wider market are waiting for the design details that will go into Approved Document B. The Building Safety Regulator is working to agree these rapidly, and I

will make a further announcement soon. In the meantime, I am confident that this announcement of the intended transitional arrangements will give the market confidence to continue building the high-quality homes that this country needs.