

An academic enquiry into the Grenfell Tower disaster: Causes, Implications and lessons for twenty-first century housing

**Call for Papers
June 1st 2020.**

In the early hours of 14 June 2017, a fire broke out within the kitchen of flat 16 on the fourth floor of Grenfell Tower, a residential high-rise block of flats located in the Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington W11. The block sits within one of the richest neighbourhoods in Europe. Within a matter of hours, the majority of the tower was substantially destroyed by fire, with the tragic loss of 72 lives; this was the worst loss of life to fire in domestic premises since the Second World War.

An Inquiry was set up on 15 August 2017 to examine the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the fire under a retired judge, Sir Martin Moore-Bick. Phase 1 of the Inquiry focussed on the events on the night of 14 June 2017. Hearings for Phase 1 began on 21 May 2018 and concluded on 12 December 2018. The Chairman published his Phase 1 report on 30 October 2019; he concluded inter alia that:

there was compelling evidence that the external walls of the building failed to comply with Requirement B4(1) of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 2010, in that they did not adequately resist the spread of fire having regard to the height, use and position of the building. On the contrary, they actively promoted it.

Phase 2 of the Inquiry is examining the causes of these events, including how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition which allowed the fire to spread in the way identified by Phase 1. Hearings for Phase 2 began in January 2020, but have been suspended since 16 March following the COVID-19 outbreak.

This series of seminars (2 -3 chaired panels of papers, author presented to an audience, with discussant comments and general discussion), hosted by the Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management in association with the [School of History at Bangor University](#) , seeks to accompany the Inquiry by discussing the key financial, economic, management and social phenomena in urban housing that led to the disaster in an academic setting. Four seminars will examine the key aspects of the climate and context in which the disaster occurred to try to extrapolate the wider implications and lessons for how urban housing is funded, managed, and supports the social and working lives of urban inhabitants. The seminars will be held at dates to be fixed in the autumn of 2020, either in person or virtually, depending on the regulations then in place.

We will accept individual twenty-minute talks as well as complete panel submissions and roundtables. Individual abstracts should be 250-300 words. Panels are expected to consist of three or four papers and should be submitted by one person who is willing to serve as the point of contact. Complete panels should also include a chair. In addition to abstracts for each individual paper, panel and roundtable submissions should also include a 100-150 word introduction describing the main theme. Applications are welcomed from experienced practitioners, tenant groups, BSRs and BSR groups, legal and business fields as well as academic researchers. All submissions should be received by Monday 29th June 2020 with decisions on inclusion announced by Friday, 17 July. **Submissions should be made by email to j.stephenson@ucl.ac.uk or t.williams@bangor.ac.uk. The decision to include a submission rests with the organizers. Please submit all information in the body of your email (no attachments or PDFs, thank you) and in the following order: name, affiliation, email, paper title, abstract, keywords.**

Theme 1.

Funding, finance and social housing. Contact Dr Judy Stephenson j.stephenson@ucl.ac.uk

The purpose of this first session would be to set the scene for the financial basis of Grenfell's ownership, occupation, management, and refurbishment. Specifically, it will examine the funding of social housing in London boroughs and changes both in levels and structure of funding in the three decades up to the Fire, in the context of increasing financialization of key services, budget cuts, decreasing home ownership and increasing house prices, rising wage and income precarity. Papers on housing benefit, allocation of social housing, borough and council finances, borough and council debt, central govt and council funding balances, tax and fiscal load, and comparative studies (nationally or internationally) will be welcomed.

Theme 2.

Class, race, economic status and housing: Contact Prof. Peter Shapley, p.shapely@bangor.ac.uk

Housing is both a determinant and product of inequality. This theme will focus on the allocation of public or social housing and how that has changed since the late twentieth century in the context of council and government processes and regulations for the allocation of housing. Specifically, this session will ask to what extent exclusion and discrimination were determinants of the system for allocating, managing, and maintaining blocks like Grenfell and whether residents' well documented voices or agency in questioning and condemning the safety of the building were an isolated or general case of institutionalized negation of rights. Papers that look at the housing and service allocation to groups with protected rights in a broader cultural context will be welcomed.

Theme 3.

Building regulation and deregulation: Contact Dr Vanessa Davies vanessaldavies@me.com and Sam Stein QC Sam.Stein@nexuschambers.com

This session will examine why building regulations in Britain are written, and operate the way they do, and the history and practice of building regulation, particularly in public sector housing and, crucially its enforcement. Papers that take a legal or historical analytical approach to how regulation works in practice, including discussion and analysis of lay involvement within regulators, comparative or historical case studies and how enforcement of general and specific rules lead to deficiencies in safety will be welcomed. Studies of how regulation are impacted on by funding, council management and ownership processes and other institutions are also welcome, as are discussion of the Government's proposed improvements to the building safety regulatory system and comparisons with other countries' regulatory regimes or with regulatory systems affecting other sectors.

Theme 4.

The fundamental problem of co-ordination and procuring building services and contracts. Contact Dr Adrian Williamson QC adrian.williamson@ucl.ac.uk

This final session will look at the business of contracting for building services, with a particular focus on public sector housing – and why coordination of budgets, design, safety, utility, and consultation are so fraught with problems. Papers that examine the distribution of risk, liability, bidding incentives, project management conflicts or good practice, in case studies or other format will be welcomed.

Outcome:

It is envisioned that some form of publication, of both papers and proceedings (recorded video or text or otherwise), will follow from the conferences.

For enquires please contact the theme /session chair listed or j.stephenson@ucl.ac.uk

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