

Frustration at housing association no show for RAAC meeting

Homeowners in Livingston have accused one of West Lothian's biggest Housing Associations of "hiding" from the crumbling concrete crisis that has hit homes in Livingston.

Dozens expressed anger that representatives from Almond Housing Association did not join West Lothian Council officials at a meeting in Craigshill.

And local politicians have criticised Almond's refusal to attend.

The housing association said it sympathised with home-owners affected by RAAC concrete roofs in their homes but could not afford to "utilise income to meet costs incurred".

The public meeting was the latest in a series agreed by West Lothian Council after a joint Labour/Conservative motion accepted that council officers should meet home-owners and tenants in areas affected by RAAC housing.

Meetings have been held or organised for Broxburn, Linlithgow and Bathgate.

In Craigshill the affected tenanted homes are owned by Almond Housing Association. Home-owners in streets including

Chestnut Grove have been rebuffed in trying to secure meetings with Almond.

Speaking after the meeting on Thursday night Ashleigh Mitchell, who chairs the local home-owners association told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: " I am extremely disappointed in Almond Housing Association because that's now the second big meeting being held in Craigshill and they didn't even show up to their own community.

"One resident stood up and stated 'they are clearly hiding'.

"Some residents left early because of this disappointment and frustration."

Ashleigh continued: "We as home-owners are suffering and can't sleep at night because of it. The worry was clearly shown in the room.

"We raised our concerns about the dangers of RAAC. First of all, our safety being the number one priority with many home-owners unable to pay for structural tests and second concern how many structural tests are going to be needed, and how often surveys would need done."

She added: "The purpose of the meeting was to raise our urgent concerns to put forward to the Scottish housing minister, Paul McLennan who will be visiting West Lothian very soon, but has not actually confirmed a date as of yet.

"We really hope he will visit West Lothian as an urgent housing crisis matter and engage with the council and Almond Housing Association of how serious this matter about RAAC actually is."

Hannah Bardell, the former Livingston MP had set up a meeting with Almond Housing prior to the election being called. That meeting has yet to take place

She called on the council and housing associations to work

with governments, both in Edinburgh and Westminster to find a solution.

She told the LDRS: "I'm incredibly disappointed that Almond Housing did come along and meet the home-owners and tenants."

" We need to find a solution. It's not acceptable in modern Scotland to leave people in homes which are decaying or where they don't feel safe."

She urged the housing association sit down with developers, to engage with local politicians and with the council to seek a solution.

She added: " We found a solution in Deans South. It took far too long and I don't want to see things taking that long elsewhere.

"It's clear we have a blueprint for a solution."

Local councillor Damian Doran-Timson said Almond had a " moral duty" to the home-owners.

He told the LDRS: "At the last meeting in Craigshill around 80 people attended which demonstrated the concerns and worries that the home-owners have."

He added: "It was however, extremely disappointing that Almond Housing Association did not attend despite being requested to do so. To not turn up to the meeting showed only disdain for the concerned home-owners.

"I have written to the Chief Executive of Almond Housing, expressing my disappointment and the home-owners understandable anger. Like the council, Almond Housing may not have a legal duty to the home-owners at this time, but they certainly have a moral duty and need to take responsibility."

A spokesperson for Almond Housing Association told the LDRS: "Whilst we very much empathise with the position of homeowners concerned they have RAAC in their properties, the Association does not have any responsibility to owners for the maintenance or repair obligations in relation to privately owned properties.

"Property owners are solely responsible for inspections and any works required to be carried out on their property. The properties containing RAAC were built in the 1960's by Livingston Development Corporation (LDC) and subsequently refurbished in the early 1990's prior to LDC's stock being transferred to a number of organisations including Almond HA. This pre-dates the RAAC guidance of April 2023.

"The Association's income is almost wholly from tenant rents. As a Registered Social Landlord regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator we are unable to utilise income to meet costs incurred by homeowners.

"We wrote to affected home-owners in advance of the meeting advising of the above and that we will share general information from the outcome of the survey programme that has been carried out on the Association's stock once this has been received.

"We have also recommended to owners that they should arrange for their property to be inspected by a qualified Chartered Structural Engineer in accordance with the guidance issued by the Scottish Government and the Institution of Structural Engineers. The chartered Structural Engineer will be able to assess the condition of the concrete planks, whether RAAC is present, and advise on any necessary mitigation works."

Hannah Bardell is standing as the SNP candidate for Livingston in the forthcoming General Election. Damian Doran-Timson is standing as a Conservative candidate. Also standing the same constituency is Cameron Glasgow for the

Greens. Gregor Poynton for Labour and Caron Lindsay for the Lib Dems.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter