



HANOVER & PRINCESS COURT

MORIBUND REPORT



This report demonstrates how Hanover and Princess Court can be considered 'moribund housing' for the purpose of Homes England Grant Funding

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moribund housing refers to residential properties that are no longer viable or suitable for continued occupation or investment.

Hanover & Princess Court are large dilapidated residential blocks owned by Cambridge City Council located on a 0.76ha site in central Cambridge.

The buildings are blighted by significant fire safety risks arising from a lack of compartmentation. These safety risks cannot be practically remediated and are incurring the Council significant monthly costs in providing a 'waking watch' to safeguard residents.

Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue served 'Notices of Deficiencies' on the Council in 2024, relating to the compartmentation breaches in Hanover Court, a high-risk building. The same construction attributes exist in Princess Court.

The City Council are at risk of prosecution. It is practically challenging and financially prohibitive to remediate the compartmentation problems. Neither building is compliant with modern fire safety standards which results in unacceptable risks.

The buildings remain dilapidated despite £2.5 million having been spent on structural repairs, fire door replacements, asbestos removal, lift refurbishments etc over a 10-year period from 2011 to 2021. Inherent weaknesses in the building structures remain, linked to disproportionate collapse, structural defects and risks, despite mitigation works.

The buildings are at the end of their design life and ongoing deterioration is likely. It would not be practicable to attempt to make the existing buildings safe and compliant with modern standards. Demolition is the only viable option.

Other evidence demonstrating the moribund status of Hanover & Princess Court includes the fact that the buildings are not suitable for refurbishment due to their form of construction. The premises are also non-compliant with modern spatial standards and unsuitable for residents with mobility needs.

The buildings have a negative contribution to the conservation area. The scale, massing, and architectural style of the buildings are incongruous with the surrounding historic context.

The EPC ratings are below the desired standard and are not aligned with the Council's vision of being a net zero carbon by 2030.

The existing blocks provide substandard living conditions for residents and redevelopment is necessary to provide safe, modern, and contextually appropriate housing. The current layouts encourage antisocial behaviour which directly impacts the safety and enjoyment of the property by its residents and their visitors.

The regeneration of a deteriorating housing estate to create a safer, more inclusive and attractive neighbourhood will provide long-term benefits for residents' health, wellbeing, and community cohesion.

The Council have submitted a full planning application for the demolition of the existing buildings and the erection of 165 new homes, landscaping, community room, parking and associated works.

Development appraisal advice concludes that the site, in its present condition, could not be delivered by the private sector without public sector funding support due to a negative NPV of £-19,550,992.

Description of the site & buildings

The site falls within the jurisdiction of Cambridge City Council (the 'Council'). The address is Hanover and Princess Courts, Coronation Street, Cambridge CB2 1JH.

The 0.76ha site is located west of Hills Road and south of Lensfield Road. It is bound by Union Road to the north, George IV Street to the east, Coronation Street to the south and Bentinck Street to the west.

The site is currently occupied by two linear blocks oriented north-south. The western block (Princess Court) is five storeys high and parallel to Bentinck Street. The eastern block (Hanover Court) is eight storeys high and parallel to George IV Street. The blocks are linked to the north by a three-storey garage block, parallel to Union Road. Hanover & Princess Court accommodate 127 flats. The garage block provides 153 spaces.

Physical Condition

The most significant condition relates to fire safety, due to a lack of compartmentation, which is an ongoing risk incapable of resolution, incurring significant monthly costs associated with a waking watch policy, to safeguard the remaining residents.

The buildings remain in poor general condition despite £2.5 million having been spent on structural repairs, fire door replacements, asbestos removal work, lift refurbishments etc over a 10-year period from 2011 to 2021. Inherent weaknesses

in the building structures linked to disproportionate collapse remain, despite mitigation works.

These issues are explored in further detail below.

Fire Safety Deficiencies

Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) have served two Notices of Deficiencies on Cambridge City Council under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Act 2005, for breaches under Article 8(1) relating to fire compartmentation in Hanover Court, a high-risk building. The same risks have been identified in Princess Court.

The first notice is dated 16 April 2024, and the second notice is dated 23 August 2024. The City Council are at risk of prosecution, as it is practically challenging, and financially prohibitive, to remediate the compartmentation issues within Hanover Court, and Princess Court.

The compartmentation breaches are present in the service risers which extend throughout the entire height of the buildings and traverse all floors. Within these risers, there are a combination of bathroom ventilation, soil vent pipes (SVPs), electrical components, water pipes, and gas pipelines. Breaches have also been recorded beyond the service risers impacting adjacent areas.

The scope of the required remedial work is extensive and complex and would also require the removal and re-fitting of kitchens and/or bathrooms, in full or in part, in the majority of the 127 flats to undertake the necessary works.

The prosecution risk is currently being mitigated by a waking watch policy to safeguard the residents. This involves 24/7 security patrols on site to provide early warning of a fire event. A meeting with the Chief Fire Officer on 9 July 2024, and the issue of a second Deficiencies Notice in August 2024, highlighted that the waking watch policy should only be in place for a period of 12 months in normal circumstances. This period has been exceeded.

The Council have taken legal advice following receipt of the Deficiencies Notices from Trowers & Hamlins LLP, the key elements are summarised below.

'The most recent Notice of Deficiencies dated 23 August 2024 outlines CFRS's current view that fire safety breaches are still present. To be satisfied that such breaches exist, CFRS must be satisfied that the Council is the responsible person, that there has been a breach of a duty, and that the breach places persons at risk of death or serious injury in the event of a fire. Due to this, there is an ongoing risk of enforcement proceedings.'

If convicted, proceedings under the FSO attract unlimited fines and so can be very damaging financially and reputationally.

If the council do not comply with the Notices, and the hazards are allowed to persist, it is possible that the Council may also face enforcement action from the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). Under the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA), the Regulator has the power to serve a compliance notice on the Council as the accountable person for Hanover Court, if the BSR considers that the Council is contravening a relevant requirement of the BSA 2022.

Additionally, under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has the power to inspect social housing properties, including properties owned by local authorities, and if necessary, undertake emergency remedial action and/or require a registered provider to implement a Performance Improvement Plan and monitor its progress closely.

Such additional intervention from the RSH seems unlikely given the current involvement of the CFRS, but should you receive any notices of this kind we recommend you obtain legal advice as a matter of urgency.

Going forward, the Council will need to consider the use of compulsory purchase powers to gain vacant possession of the buildings as soon as possible, given the on-going safety risks.'

Fire Risk Assessments were undertaken in July 2020 and May 2023. The following substantial risks remain despite the undertaking of repairs and maintenance works between 2011 and 2021:

- Inadequate fire doors - flat entrance doors to leasehold properties are not all fire-rated, compromising escape routes. Storage cupboard doors to leasehold properties on escape routes are also not all fire rated.
- Poor compartmentation – the service risers lack adequate fire separation, allowing fire and smoke to spread between flats.
- Inadequate fire detection & warning systems – there are no communal fire alarm systems.
- Escape route hazards – there are ventilators that breach escape staircases, allowing smoke to travel from a fire's origin into escape routes. Halls and stairways are designed in such a way that make it easy for obstructions (e.g. bicycles, stored items) to block escape routes.

Neither building is compliant with modern fire safety standards which results in unacceptable risks.

Supporting evidence

- Cambridge Fire & Rescue Service, Notification of Deficiencies, Reference 286325, File number 200004292211, 23 August 2024, Premises Hanover Court, George IV Street, Cambridge, CB2 1JH
- Cambridge Fire & Rescue Service, Notification of Deficiencies, Reference 282845, File number 200004292211, 16 April 2024, Premises Hanover Court, George IV Street, Cambridge, CB2 1JH
- Trowers & Hamlin LLP, Advice Note, 20 September 2024
- Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Hanover Court, 07 May 2023
- Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Princess Court, 08 May 2023
- Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Hanover Court, 17 July 2020
- Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Princess Court, 17 July 2020

Risk of structural collapse

Millward Consulting Engineers were instructed by Cambridge City Council in May 2021 to review the structural stability and capacity of the buildings for accidental loading resulting from a gas explosion, focused on the risk of disproportionate collapse.

The Hanover and Princess buildings are both masonry structures, consisting of precast concrete floors and roofs with no vertical or horizontal ties present, other than the precast concrete floor built into the masonry walls.

The buildings were constructed in the late 1960s prior to the Ronan Point accident, which introduced the requirement to check the robustness of structural designs within the subsequent 1970 building regulations.

Detailed analysis and calculations confirmed that all the wall panels fail robustness testing. The degree of failure varies from a factor of 1.926 to the lower floor up to 22.565 to the upper floors. These failures are significant.

Due to a lack of original design information, it is not possible to predict the probable extent of damage, however it is reasonable to assume that this would result in a progressive collapse of the building should a gas explosion occur, that would be beyond the acceptable limits of the building regulations.

The report concluded that the structures are unable to support the required accidental load that a gas explosion would cause, and it was recommended that all gas supplies and appliances are removed from the buildings. The gas supplies to the Council owned properties have been removed but some remain to the privately

owned leasehold flats in Princess Court. Consequently, the building has an inherent disproportionate collapse risk.

General Condition

A structural report prepared by MLTS Limited Structural Engineers in February 2020 reviewed completed maintenance and repairs works, and also made recommendations relating to further works and periodic inspections.

Remediated condition issues include the following:

Category	Defect(s)	Cause(s)
<i>Cracking and Movement in Structural Elements</i>	<p>Extensive cracking was found in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gable end walls • Flank walls • Internal communal areas • Bin chute and lift towers 	<p>Cracks were attributed to:</p> <p>Wind loading (especially from the west).</p> <p>Thermal expansion and contraction.</p> <p>Inadequate structural design (e.g. slender piers, lack of movement joints).</p>
	<p>Some gable ends were acting as dislocated masonry plates, reducing their ability to resist lateral wind loads.</p>	<p>Comparison between surveys undertaken in 2018 and 2020 showed that the buildings had cracked further due to the wind loading.</p>
<i>Concrete Deterioration and Falling Hazards</i>	<p>Parapet and balcony panels evidenced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spalling • Carbonation • Corroded reinforcement <p>Loose concrete was found that could fall onto people below and emergency ‘tap tests’ revealed dangerous loose material.</p>	<p>Spalling damage due to weathering.</p> <p>Carbonation due to loss of protective alkalinity in the concrete.</p> <p>Reinforcement corrosion due to lack of cover protection and weathering.</p> <p>Inappropriate paints used on concrete have trapped moisture, accelerating corrosion.</p>

Remaining condition issues include the following:

Category	Defect(s)	Cause(s)
<i>Inadequate Masonry Bearings</i>	Many concrete lintels and beams had insufficient bearing lengths. This compromises the building's ability to resist disproportionate collapse and is deemed a severe safety concern.	A result of original design and construction detailing.
<i>Tower Instability</i>	Bin chute and lift towers are slender and poorly restrained, with a risk of collapse if car park structure is removed. Serious structural failure could occur.	Cracking from sway and thermal movement. Weak base support (partial pinned condition).
<i>Brickwork Failures</i>	The brickwork showed the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor mortar bonding • Frost damage • Lack of wall ties • Crumbling under load The weakness of the bond between the mortar and the bricks is considered a significant structural defect.	Poor design/workmanship related to mortar mixes and wall ties. General weathering. Old scaffolding fixings left in the façade have corroded and burst the brickwork.

The buildings are approaching the end of their design life. They suffer from multiple serious structural defects, and ongoing deterioration is likely without major intervention. It would not be practicable to attempt to make the existing buildings safe and compliant with modern standards. Instead, demolition is the only safe option.

Supporting evidence

- Millward Consulting Engineers, MA11229, Hanover & Princess Calculations, May 2021

- MLTS Ltd Structural Engineers, Preliminary Report on the Apparent Cracking within the External Façade Brickwork, Concrete Façade Panels and Year 2 Urgent Remedial Works of Princess and Hanover Courts, Cambridge, CB2 1JJ and CB21 1JH, February 2020

Disproportionate Investment on Repairs & Maintenance

The council spent approximately £2.5 million between 2011 and 2021 on repairs to the existing buildings to facilitate continued occupation. The costs expended are detailed in the tables below.

Hanover Court	Work Year	Invoiced Cost
Emergency lighting & concrete repairs	2011/12	£35,634.45
Asbestos removal	2013/14	£3,446.50
Balcony refurbishments	2012/13	£120,285.53
Communal flooring	2015/16	£58,515.61
Lift refurbishment	2015/16	£48,160.14
Re-roofing / insulation / structural brickwork repairs	2016/17	£434,932.55
Flat doors	2016/17	£11,996.00
Concrete repairs	2018/19	£200,986.00
Heli-fix brickwork repairs	2018/19	£205,334.57
Walkway drain surveys/repairs	2018/19	£5,800.00
Replace fire doors	2020/21	£90,000.00
Total		£1,215,091.35

Princess Court	Work Year	Invoiced Cost
Emergency lighting & PTR / Concrete Repairs	2011/12	£35,634.45
Re-roofing / insulation / edge protection (HHSRS)	2011/12	£300,000.00
Balcony refurbishments	2012/13	£335,219.17
Asbestos removal	2013/14	£3,446.50
Communal flooring	2015/16	£29,257.81
Lift refurbishment	2015/16	£46,121.29
Structural brickwork repairs	2016/17	£163,461.64
Flat doors	2016/17	£597.00
Emergency escape / access ratches to roof	2017/18	£48,068.93
Concrete Repairs	2018/19	£108,869.53
Heli-fix brickwork repairs	2018/19	£103,329.61
Walkway drain surveys/repairs	2018/19	£7,446.00
Replace fire doors	2020/21	£50,000.00
Total		£1,231,451.93

Functional obsolescence

Layout, size, design unsuitable for modern living

The buildings adopt cross wall construction which relies on loadbearing internal masonry walls (party walls and gable ends) for stability. These walls cannot be moved or removed without seriously compromising the structural integrity of the whole building, making it extremely difficult to reconfigure layouts or combine smaller flats into larger, modern homes. Due to the loadbearing nature of the internal walls, it is not feasible to reconfigure rooms to meet modern expectations.

Any attempt to retrofit services, insulation, or create new connections between flats risks weakening already stressed brickwork and could trigger disproportionate collapse.

The floor to ceiling heights are low preventing the installation of modern mechanical and electrical installation, such as mechanical ventilation heat recovery (MVHR), for example.

Failure to meet decent homes standard

None of the existing homes meet the decent homes standard. The existing homes are around 20% smaller than current space standards.

Failure to meet energy efficiency targets

The current buildings were constructed in 1968 and are not aligned with the Council's vision of being a net zero carbon council by 2030 and delivering sustainable housing solutions.

The EPC ratings of these buildings are below the desired standard, and this is impacting on the operational carbon of the buildings and the energy costs that are being incurred by the residents.

Lack of accessibility/adaptability for current/future needs

There are no flats that can be considered accessible or adaptable due to the design and spatial attributes of the existing buildings.

The current site has 0% wheelchair homes provision. This makes the buildings non-compliant with modern accessibility standards and unsuitable for residents with mobility needs.

Occupancy & Demand

Only 14 of the 127 flats remain occupied comprising two Council tenants and ten leaseholders. The Council have utilized the properties for predominantly temporary accommodation over the last couple of years.

Economic viability

Cost of refurbishment or maintenance exceeds value or benefit

It's not viable to refurbish or continue maintaining the buildings given the fire risks and anticipated increasing maintenance costs due to the overall dilapidated condition of the buildings.

The value of the existing buildings in their current condition is limited, and the sub-standard level of accommodation doesn't offer residents tangible benefits.

Financial modelling shows negative Net Present Value (NPV)

The financial modelling undertaken provides a negative NPV of £-19,550,992. A Development Appraisal prepared by Savills' concludes that the site, in its present condition, could not be delivered by the private sector without public sector funding support.

Supporting evidence

- Savills, Development Appraisal Report, Hanover & Princess Court, Cambridge, CB2 1JH, October 2025.

Impact on wider regeneration

Housing stock is a barrier to area improvement

A Built Heritage Statement has been commissioned which concluded that:

- The existing site has a 'negative element' within the New Town and Glisson Road Conservation Area.
- The scale, massing, and architectural style of the buildings are incongruous with the surrounding historic context.
- The site fails to enhance or preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Delivery of better quality, mixed-tenure housing

A planning application has been submitted by the Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) which is a 50/50 partnership between Cambridge City Council and Hill Partnerships Ltd. A full planning application for the demolition of the existing buildings and the erection of 165 new homes, landscaping, community room, parking and associated works was validated by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service on 28 October 2005.

The re-development proposals provide the following benefits:

- 165 new homes in a mix of one to three bed units, replacing outdated and substandard accommodation that has had to be vacated due to building safety concerns

- All homes meet Nationally Described Space Standards
- 5% of homes are wheelchair accessible (M4(3))
- All-electric, gas-free homes with enhanced building fabric
- Designed to meet Cambridge's high sustainability standards (Cam Standard)
- Larger, more energy-efficient affordable units with improved layouts and amenities
- Increase in the amount of affordable floor space and affordable bedspaces

Community safety, cohesion, or wellbeing

The current layout of the buildings, the staircases and circulation routes means the properties are prone to antisocial behaviour which directly impacts the safety and enjoyment of the property by its residents and their visitors.

The proposed redevelopment will provide:

- New pedestrian and cycle routes through the site
- Secure cycle parking for all residents and visitors, including oversized cycles
- Car-free design with parking limited to disabled and car club spaces, integrated into the landscape
- A new c. 80m² community room with flexible uses (e.g. events, classes, resident meetings)
- 61.5% of the site retained as open space benefiting the public realm
- High-quality landscaping with play areas, sensory gardens, and rain gardens
- Enhanced biodiversity and a projected increase in tree canopy cover
- 20% Biodiversity Net Gain
- Regeneration of a deteriorating housing estate
- Creation of a safer, more inclusive and attractive neighbourhood
- Long-term benefits for residents' health, wellbeing, and community cohesion

Supporting evidence

- RPS Group, Built Heritage Statement, Hanover & Princess Court, Cambridge, August 2025
- Carter Jonas, Planning Statement for Hanover & Princess Courts, Cambridge, September 2025

Strategic fit

Local authority regeneration plans

Cambridge City Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee approved the decanting of Hanover & Princess Court on 20 January 2022. Approval was provided on the principal that Hanover and Princess Courts are beyond economic viability when set against current standards. Redevelopment would produce an increase in the number of homes.

Cambridge City Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee subsequently approved the redevelopment of Hanover & Princess Court on 14 March 2023 based on a scheme of 138 homes, a small increase in the total number of homes. The planning application proposals exceed this base line figure and provide an extra 27 homes.

A Planning Statement has been prepared by Carter Jonas which highlights the strategic fit the proposed development will have with the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

As defined by the Cambridge Local Plan Policies Map (2018), the site is designated as 'white land' inferring that the site is not designated under any specific policy allocation.

The existing use of the site is residential and the redevelopment for the same use on this site is considered acceptable. Paragraph 125 of the NPPF further advises that planning decisions should promote and support the development of underutilised land for housing. The proposed development will help to address local housing needs and contribute towards meeting housing requirements across Cambridge.

The scheme will utilise sustainable materials and construction, and in doing so will far exceed the requirements of Policy 28 (carbon reduction, community energy network, sustainable design and construction, and water use) of the Development Plan, thus ensuring that the proposed redevelopment is highly sustainable and energy efficient. This is supported by paragraph 164 of the NPPF which states that new development should help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through suitable design and location.

The principle of residential development is found to be acceptable and compliant with the relevant policies and principles of the Development Plan. The proposed development will deliver a high-quality public realm and in doing so, will respond positively to the local context as required under Policy 55 (responding to context); and would have a positive impact on its setting as required under Policy 57a (designing new buildings).

The proposed development follows the design principles set out under Policy 56 (creating successful places) including (inter alia) successfully integrating with the surrounding area, creating an attractive and appropriately scaled built frontage that would positively enhance the townscape, using materials suitable to the location and context, and increasing natural surveillance. It would also follow the design principles set out within Section 12 of the NPPF.

Policy 45 (affordable housing and dwelling mix) requires a balanced mix of houses to be provided. Across the private and affordable homes, 55% are to be one bed

and 40% two beds. Whilst just over half of the flats provided are one bed, this meets a significant need within the city.

Resident consultation & community engagement

There has been extensive public consultation carried out to inform the design of the re-development proposals.

Public consultation events were held in August 2022 and November 2024 and residents and stakeholders described the buildings as:

- *“Ugly and inefficient”*
- *“An eyesore”*
- *“Horrible and outdated”*
- *“In poor condition, with homes below modern space standards that do not achieve suitable energy efficiency levels”*
- *“No longer fit for purpose”*

There was broad agreement during consultations that the buildings should be replaced.

Homes England’s objectives

The proposed development will increase the supply of affordable housing by providing 72 affordable homes comprising a mixture of social rent, affordable rent and 80% market rent homes in central Cambridge. This is a unique opportunity in to provide affordable homes in this location which are in very short supply and not met by the market.

The lack of affordable housing in Cambridge is widely reported, and very challenging, resulting in increased levels of homelessness.

The proposed redevelopment of Hanover & Princess Court will adopt sustainable development, high-quality, well-designed housing, stimulating regeneration and community wellbeing.

Supporting evidence

- Housing Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 22/8/HSC Report on Hanover and Princess Courts and Kingsway Flats, 20 January 2022
- Housing Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 23/20/HSC Update on Hanover and Princess Courts Options Appraisal, 14 March 2023
- Full planning application for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of 165 new homes, landscaping, community room, parking and associated works, ref. 25/04187/FUL
- Concilio, Statement of Community Involvement, May 2025

Appendices

- A. Cambridge Fire & Rescue Service, Notification of Deficiencies, Reference 286325, File number 200004292211, 23 August 2024, Premises Hanover Court, George IV Street, Cambridge, CB2 1JH
- B. Cambridge Fire & Rescue Service, Notification of Deficiencies Reference 282845, File number 200004292211, 16 April 2024, Premises Hanover Court, George IV Street, Cambridge, CB2 1JH
- C. Trowers & Hamlin LLP, Advice Note, 20 September 2024
- D. Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Hanover Court, 07 May 2023
- E. Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Princess Court, 08 May 2023
- F. Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Hanover Court, 17 July 2020
- G. Fire Risk Assessment, Housing Services, Princess Court, 17 July 2020
- H. Millward Consulting Engineers, Hanover & Princess Calculations, May 2021
- I. MLTS Ltd Structural Engineers, Preliminary Report on the Apparent Cracking within the External Façade Brickwork, Concrete Façade Panels and Year 2 Urgent Remedial Works of Princess and Hanover Courts, Cambridge, CB2 1JJ and CB21 1JH, February 2020
- J. Savills, Development Appraisal Report, Hanover & Princess Court, Cambridge, CB2 1JH, October 2025
- K. RPS Group, Built Heritage Statement, Hanover & Princess Court, Cambridge, August 2025
- L. Carter Jonas, Planning Statement for Hanover & Princess Courts, Cambridge, September 2025
- M. Housing Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 22/8/HSC Report on Hanover and Princess Courts and Kingsway Flats, 20 January 2022
- N. Housing Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 23/20/HSC Update on Hanover and Princess Courts Options Appraisal, 14 March 2023
- O. Full planning application for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of 165 new homes, landscaping, community room, parking and associated

works, [25/04187/FUL | Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 165 new homes, landscaping, community room, parking and associated works | Princess Court Bentinck Street Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB2 1JJ](#)

P. Concilio, Statement of Community Involvement, May 2025