

Building Safety Bill – Submission to the Public Bill Committee

The Get it Right Initiative (GIRI)

October 2021

1. Executive Summary

- I. The Get It Right Initiative (GIRI) is a group of UK construction industry experts, organisations and businesses, focused on improving productivity, quality, sustainability and safety in the construction sector by eliminating error. Our membership includes many of the UK's largest developers and construction providers, as well as small and medium sized enterprises in the sector. GIRI's leadership team includes senior executives from the Institution of Civil Engineers, HS2, Weightmans and GRAHAM Group.
- II. GIRI has produced extensive research on the benefits of eliminating error at the start of a building's lifecycle. We believe that error and waste have become culturally accepted parts of the industry. This is preserved by a lowest cost approach which means procurement is focused on cost over value and high quality – leading to compromises over the specification of materials and services which ultimately impact building safety.
- III. We want to bring this issue to the attention of the committee as it scrutinises the bill. As it stands, the bill proposes a new framework of regulation, training, and oversight to improve safety standards. However, GIRI's view is that rules and regulations only go so far. As we move towards the implementation of a new regime, we must make sure the legislation also pursues cultural change in our industry. To make buildings safe, economical and deliverable, the new system has to tackle a fundamental fault in parts of our industry: that error is considered an unavoidable and even permissible feature of construction.
- IV. We are passionate about this issue, for the sake of the end users of buildings, but also for our sector itself. Our research indicates that the acceptance of error within our industry costs between 10% and 25% of project cost in the UK – or between £10-25 billion every year. And that is just the financial impact. On top of that it increases health and safety risks, wastes time and materials, and adds to the carbon footprint. Put simply, unless we remove this acceptance of error, the proposals put forward through the bill cannot be assured to succeed.
- V. The bill must be seen as an opportunity to reinforce the value of eliminating error and getting buildings right first time. That is the way to bring about genuine change and ensure all buildings are made safe.

2. Our analysis of the bill

2.1. Value versus cost

To put safety at the heart of construction, the new regulatory regime – particularly the golden thread of information – must work in a way which convinces everyone in the industry that implementing thorough processes, choosing competent designers and contractors, and mandating suitable products and materials, is more important than simply finding the cheapest option.

- VI. The bill is clear on the rules and regulations which will form the new regime, but it does not touch on the cultural change which will be required to successfully put safety at the heart of construction

- VII. Evidence and reaction from the Grenfell inquiry has been clear – residents were failed by a lack of transparency and honesty and the lowest cost culture which still exists across the sector was a contributor to the tragedy.
- VIII. Cost remains the most dominant factor in procurement, and this legislation offers an opportunity to make an effective change to that. While affordability and an understanding of cost is integral to our and any industry, it should never be achieved to the detriment of appropriate specification and qualifications for the work being delivered. Unless we see this change, there will always be an incentive to cut costs in the supply chain resulting in reduced resources, imperfect processes, or low quality at some point in the pursuit of viability. Value through the improved productivity associated with error elimination needs to be a guiding principle.
- IX. We are encouraged and excited by the golden thread principle, where each phase of a building's lifecycle will be closely monitored and recorded, and hope it will lead to more long-term thinking. However, we suggest that its intention must be clearly outlined and should be to encourage thorough processes, competent designers and contractors, and suitable products and materials.
- X. The golden thread can record the materials and components used in a project and provide insight into how they are procured and why they are chosen. This should encourage those decisions to be made on the basis of value, not cost, and promote the use of long-lasting and high quality specification of products and services over the cheapest options.

2.2. Training and skills

Technical skill in the industry is already proficient. Training and education must focus on culture and behaviour and promote the value of eliminating error and waste in the construction phase.

- XI. The bill will also introduce a number of new competences and qualifications for those working on new tall buildings. However, we feel it is vital for training to focus on behavioural competence as well as technical skills.
- XII. Our sector already has a wealth of practical training available, much to its credit, but something more is needed. Education must focus on the approach and mindset which influence decision making in the industry. Culture should be put at the heart of new accreditations and training to encourage decision makers in the industry to emphasise value over cost and to move away from the lowest cost culture which currently exists. These are areas where GIRI already delivers advice and training to our members, and we are committed to continuing that initiative.
- XIII. The bill also rightly places emphasis on righting wrongs and remediating mistakes, through increased warranty periods and powers for residents and landlords to make historic legal claims against developers. However, it must not allow those measures to be seen as a palliative for the making of mistakes in the first place.
- XIV. New standards and competencies give us all the opportunity to learn how we avoid the errors which have become synonymous with high rise buildings in particular in the past four years. Training is the basis for changing and improving culture, ingraining positive values, and abandoning the lowest cost approach.

2.3. Reducing error

Retrospective powers to seek redress for historic construction errors are not sufficient to encourage genuine culture change in the industry. We have to encourage builders to be better and reduce error at the beginning of the building lifecycle.

- XV. The bill includes a range of new powers for flat owners and the regulator to seek costs from developers who don't build things up to code. While these measures will help to balance the evaluation of cost during the build process – offsetting low cost at construction with the risk of retributory costs later down the line – we are concerned that approach won't bring about the level of change which the Government is pursuing.
- XVI. Reforming the culture of construction will only work if we emphasise the best possible practice in the sector, rather than applying punishment and restitution to mistakes which have already been made. A robust system of redress and compensation for residents is an important tool and a fundamental principle of strong consumer rights, but that cannot succeed without an equally formidable framework encouraging high construction standards and eliminating errors in the build phase.
- XVII. The bill should support a push for the best and brightest to enter our sector, placing value and emphasis on experience and expertise. This can be delivered through the new regulator, which will play a major role in infusing these values throughout the industry under the new regime. However, the bill provides us a unique chance to achieve genuine change and we would ask the committee to examine whether culture could be focused on more closely than it is in the current iteration of the legislation.

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