# UK councils increasingly opt for demolition over costly tower block refurbishments



Councillors in a yet-to-be-named city face a pivotal decision regarding the future of two distinctive 75-flat tower blocks, with a committee meeting scheduled for December to determine the next steps. The city’s Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee will consider a report highlighting a substantial increase in the estimated costs of retrofitting these blocks, from an initial figure of £51.4 million to an escalating £86 million. This sharp rise is attributed to unforeseen complications stemming from the unique architectural design of the buildings. The council has drafted a variety of proposals ranging from scaled-back repairs to outright demolition and replacement with new residential buildings.

The blocks, Inchmickery Court and Oxcars Court, have already seen partial tenant decants in anticipation of the refurbishment, with 50 tenants relocated from Inchmickery Court and plans underway to move the remaining residents, as well as the 68 tenants in Oxcars Court. Officers are contemplating accelerating the decanting process early next year to reduce ongoing maintenance costs. The retrofit plans were designed to address damp issues and improve energy efficiency, alongside essential mechanical, electrical, and plumbing repairs. However, a council officer at a recent briefing stated that the challenges faced with these particular towers are unique and not reflective of the broader multi-storey housing stock owned by the council.

The report under review offers several potential pathways: scaling back the retrofit to £57 million, restricting works to crucial repairs at £13.6 million, or demolishing both blocks to erect new six-storey buildings that would increase the number of flats to 150 at an estimated £48 million. These options reflect the complexity and costliness of specialised repairs to the buildings’ steel framing and other unique structural elements—a situation intensified by a lack of competitive bids for the required specialist contractors.

The timeline of events shows that the retrofit initiative gained momentum in August 2022, with residents initially supporting the decant and renovation plan when consulted in September 2023. By January 2025, decants commenced at Inchmickery Court, and project designs were largely completed by February. However, by March, it became clear the original budget was unfeasible, prompting cost-saving evaluations. Since then, councillors have been gradually briefed, and tenant information sessions are planned to communicate ongoing developments and potential demolition proposals.

This council’s predicament aligns with a broader UK trend, where local authorities are increasingly considering demolition and rebuilding of tower blocks due to financial, structural, and safety pressures. In Glasgow, for example, three 1960s tower blocks at the Wyndford estate were demolished in March 2025 to make way for nearly 400 new homes, illustrating a push toward regeneration rather than costly refurbishments. Similarly, Leeds City Council has recently approved the demolition of six high-rise buildings deemed past their design life, citing prohibitive investment required for refurbishment. These cases echo the complex considerations councils face in managing aging social housing stock built in similar eras.

Further afield, Brighton and Hove City Council has faced safety-related demolition decisions, with eight tower blocks recommended for replacement following structural assessments identifying failings that compromise fire and explosion resistance. These actions illustrate the ongoing challenges for local governments in balancing safety, cost, and tenant welfare. The Brighton council has committed to supporting tenants through relocation, an issue likely pressing for the city where these two towers stand, especially given the already underway tenant decant.

The financial and operational challenges linked to specialist repair contractors, as well as the growing cost estimates, underpin the council’s consideration of demolition as a potentially more viable long-term solution. The debate is not merely about buildings but about housing quality, safety, cost efficiency, and tenant stability, reflecting a delicate balance local government must strike amid rising refurbishment costs and evolving housing standards.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c93n44x473go), [[4]](https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/senior-councillors-set-to-agree-demolition-of-six-high-rise-buildings)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2025-06-23/report-recommends-eight-tower-blocks-are-demolished-and-replaced), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2025-07-20/plans-to-demolish-eight-tower-blocks-approved), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c03l205d93do)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25463083.proposal-demolish-tower-blocks-refit-costs-increase/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c93n44x473go> - In March 2025, three 1960s tower blocks in Glasgow were demolished using controlled explosions to make way for nearly 400 new homes. The Wyndford estate, built in the late 1960s, previously housed around 6,000 people across four 26-storey blocks. The demolition was part of a redevelopment plan to replace the existing structures with new housing.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg5q9gx1w5o> - In May 2025, South Tyneside Council approved plans to demolish Durham Court, an 18-storey tower block in Hebburn, and rehouse its 96 elderly residents. The decision faced criticism from opposition councillors, who described it as a 'staggering waste of public money' and raised concerns about the tower being a 'substantial customer' for the Hebburn Energy Centre.
4. <https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/senior-councillors-set-to-agree-demolition-of-six-high-rise-buildings> - In October 2023, Leeds City Council's executive board was set to approve plans to demolish six high-rise buildings constructed in the 1960s. The council cited the buildings' exceeding their original design life and the significant investment required for refurbishment as reasons for the demolition. The future use and development of the sites were to be subject to further review.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2025-06-23/report-recommends-eight-tower-blocks-are-demolished-and-replaced> - In June 2025, a report recommended that eight tower blocks in Brighton and Hove be demolished and replaced with new council homes. The buildings, constructed using large panel systems, were found not to meet current safety standards. The council considered regeneration as the preferred option after careful consideration of refurbishment costs and safety concerns.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2025-07-20/plans-to-demolish-eight-tower-blocks-approved> - In July 2025, Brighton and Hove City Council confirmed plans to demolish eight tower blocks across three locations in the city due to safety concerns. The buildings, containing 554 flats, no longer met modern safety standards. The council stated that tenants would be assisted through the relocation process as part of the redevelopment plan.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c03l205d93do> - In July 2024, Brighton & Hove City Council acknowledged that structural failings in eight tower blocks could potentially lead to their demolition. Preliminary surveys found that the buildings did not meet standards for resisting collapse in the event of an explosion or large fire. Temporary regulations, including bans on e-bikes and e-scooters, were implemented while awaiting a full report.