**Britain's building safety legacy is a terrible one, but we are leading the way in putting it right.**

By Dame Judith Hackett

Last week the Government made an important announcement which will go a long way towards relieving the concerns of residents living in the highest - and therefore highest risk buildings - about the cost of remediating unsafe cladding on their properties.

This guaranteed Government funding means that remediation work which should have been undertaken long before now can now move swiftly so that residents can be safe and truly feel safe again in their homes.

 It is important to unpick why higher buildings are a priority and to put the risk of lower buildings into context.

 Statistics show clearly that buildings above 18 metres have a four times greater risk of fatality in the event of a serious fire than lower rise buildings.

It is these buildings where the Government has, rightly, prioritised funding.

Taller buildings will have more occupants and when combined with combustible cladding it means the overall risk from fire, and to life, is greater than in lower rise buildings.

Grenfell was a heartbreaking tragedy that should never have happened.

There are many lessons to be learned and we are addressing this through the comprehensive new regime, which has put safety back at the heart of regulation and will mean that from the products used in and on buildings, to how they are designed, built and managed, homes will be safer.

It remains the case that the likelihood of a major fire in any building remains low; and for buildings below  18m the data indicates that people are able to get out and to safety even when a fire does occur.

 Some buildings below 18m will still need some remediation but what is really needed now is more work to properly assess the risk of all buildings.

We need to see professionals who assess for both fire safety and valuation purposes recognising the need for a proportionate approach and being ready to exercise professional judgment rather than continuing to  feed the idea that all cladding, or all wood, is bad news. That is not the case.

 Not all high rise buildings have cladding and not all cladding systems are unsafe. Whether or not cladding and wooden balconies are likely to contribute significantly to fire propagation needs to be judged by qualified people carrying out fire engineering assessments.

The assessment of some buildings may conclude that no remediation is required. Here again the training programme to provide many more skilled people to carry out this work is already underway with 400 people enrolled, and has been funded by Government.

The concern and distress to residents has already been going on for far too long but it has also been added to by some of the disproportionate responses we’ve seen from some parts of industry.

What we now need to see is a measured, sensible response based on proper assessment of risk.

Otherwise, they are needlessly adding further to the anxiety of thousands of people who we all should want to reassure that they are safe in their homes, as well as being able to buy and sell freely.

The announcement also included a plan for a levy and a tax on industry to contribute towards making homes safe again, which feels just - given that people bought properties in good faith, the industry must be made  to fund repairs of the poor practices of the past.

The announcement last week also needs to be seen as part of the very much broader suite of legislative changes and funding which the Government has in train.

For example, where high rise buildings have a waking watch system in place as a temporary measure, there is now funding for this to be replaced with fire detection and alarms – which bring a long term benefit.

 The Government’s approach is sensible and based on addressing buildings where there is the highest potential for loss of life in the unlikely event of a major fire.

It is also consistent with the proposed scope of the new regulatory regime which will ensure that all high rise buildings are designed, built and managed throughout occupation so that residents’ confidence is regained.

The legacy of building safety defects we are addressing is a terrible one for all who are caught up in it and it is not unique to the UK. But we are leading the way in putting it right.

Dame Judith Hackitt is the independent advisor to the Government on building safety and author of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety