Building Safety in Brief
The Golden Thread during design and construction

Background
Following the Grenfell fire in 2017, the “Hackitt Report” into the tragedy identified the need for a “Golden Thread” of information for higher risk residential buildings:

- being a digital record “from initial design intent through to construction and including any changes that occur throughout occupation”
- to be “used by the dutyholders to demonstrate to the regulator the safety of the building throughout its life cycle”.

- The Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) reflects this, referring to the need to keep “information”.

A key consultation on implementing the new building control regime ran in late 2022 (Consultation), seeking industry views ahead of introducing secondary legislation to supplement the BSA. This Consultation set out proposals for the Golden Thread for higher-risk buildings (HRBs) during the design and construction phases – with key points highlighted in this factsheet.

BRAC and the Golden Thread
The Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC), working with government and other stakeholders, published its Golden Thread Report in July 2021. In it, BRAC defined the Golden Thread, and identified 10 Principles.

BRAC’s 10 Golden Thread Principles

1. Accurate and Trusted – must be accurate and trusted so that relevant people use it
2. Residents feeling secure in their homes – providing residents the assurance that their building is being managed safely
3. Culture change – requires increased competence and capability, different working practices, updated processes and a focus on information management and control
4. Single source of truth – brings all information together in a single place
5. Secure – must be secure, with sufficient protocols in place to protect personal information and control access to maintain security of the building or residents
6. Accountable – will record changes, when these changes were made, and by whom
7. Understandable/consistent – uses standard methods, processes and consistent terminology
8. Simple to access – must be accessible so that people can easily find the right information at the right time
9. Longevity/durability and shareability of information – formatted in a way that can be easily handed over and maintained over the entire lifetime of a building
10. Relevant/proportionate – must be reviewed periodically to ensure that the information comprising it remains relevant and useful

What’s an HRB?
• Broadly, HRBs are buildings of at least 18 metres in height or at least 7 storeys, and contain at least 2 residential units.
• The government has consulted on proposals to exclude certain buildings from the scope of being HRBs (such as hospitals, care homes, prisons and hotels), with the consultation outcome awaited.

What’s the golden thread?
BRAC’s summary definition: “The Golden Thread is both the information that allows you to understand a building and the steps needed to keep both the building and people safe, now and in the future” (For their full definition, see para 3.3 of their Report)

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The Consultation and the Golden Thread

Remember these are Consultation proposals only – the Consultation highlights the possible shape of secondary legislation, but the government’s response to consultation feedback and timescales for implementation are awaited. The Consultation refers to the Golden Thread 170 times, and discusses:

- how dutyholders for HRBs must cooperate with each other, including in relation to the Golden Thread
- the key roles the Client, Principal Designer and Principal Contractor have in creating, developing, maintaining, managing, finalising, and handing over the Golden Thread throughout the design and the construction phases.

For more on dutyholders including the Client, Principal Designer and Principal Contractor see our factsheet on Proposed Changes for HRBs.

The Consultation and the 10 Principles

Building on the BRAC Report, the Consultation says it “sets out more details on our proposals on how we intend to turn these principles into regulations” including:

- requiring the Golden Thread to be digital i.e. information and data is stored electronically and can be transferred electronically
- aligning the approach with the broad requirements of the International Standard ISO 19650 series and the guidance contained in the UK BIM Framework
- requiring that an information management process is in place, setting out the steps enabling those who need to provide, access, and modify information to do so
- the Client setting out a transfer plan on how information will be transferred throughout the building lifecycle
- regulating that the Client has to do “as much as is reasonably practicable to ensure the Golden Thread is secure”
- requiring that the language and information in the Golden Thread is consistent for the project and building
- the Client ensuring there is a record in the Golden Thread of who inputs information, when information is updated, and responsibilities for approving changes.

The Consultation says the government intends to provide further guidance to help the Client, Principal Designer and Principal Contractor determine what information is relevant and should be retained in the Golden Thread. This guidance is currently awaited.

What should be in the Golden Thread

There is no definitive or comprehensive list of what information/documents should or should not be included in the Golden Thread, and it is anticipated that this will vary on a building by building basis.

The Consultation states that the government intends to provide further guidance to help the Client, Principal Designer and Principal Contractor determine what information is relevant and should be retained in the Golden Thread. This is currently awaited.

What we do know is that the information needs to be:

- relevant
- evidence of compliance with building regulations
- planning permissions
- applications made to the BSR (including at Gateways 2 and 3), including supporting documents – remember that handing over the Golden Thread to the Accountable Person at the end of construction is necessary to achieve Gateway 3 certification
- certificates
- relevant fire safety information
- plans
- information about construction products

but the focus is on quality over quantity. Further detail is awaited.

For more on dutyholders, see our factsheet on Proposed Changes for HRBs.

For more on the Accountable person, see our factsheet on fire safety duties for occupied buildings.

What next?

The industry is waiting for the guidance referred to in this factsheet, the government’s response to the Consultation feedback, and the form of the secondary legislation.

In the meantime, those involved with HRBs (including where working on or intending to work on HRBs in the near future) should start considering which of these HRBs may need a Golden Thread, what information they have about them, how best to store that information, and what further information they consider would be relevant for the Golden Thread on each HRB bearing in mind that this may differ per building or project. Start gathering and storing this information now.

Remember

Maintenance of the Golden Thread is an ongoing obligation for the entire life-cycle of the building. It is crucial to the proper design, construction and maintenance of HRBs. The government has consulted also on the new safety regime for occupied HRBs, including on the Golden Thread in the occupation phase (outside the scope of this factsheet), and the outcome of that consultation is awaited.

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