

Background and Context

The blast ripped through the heart of Manchester causing widespread damage to buildings up to half a mile radius and leaving hundreds of shops, offices, dwellings open to access, many of which were unusable due to the extent of the damage which varied considerably in degree. Also, streets throughout the city were strewn with broken glass and other debris.

How the Topic was Handled

The recovery began on the afternoon of Monday 17 June when control of the site was handed over by the Police to the Local Authority. The immediate priorities were to maintain security and make the streets and buildings safe as quickly as possible to allow people access to their premises. Planning this task fell to Manchester City Council Building Control and was managed from their offices in the Town Hall which were undamaged by the blast.

The broad strategy was first to maintain the Police cordon, make the streets safe by taking down dangerous structures, fixtures and fittings on buildings that could collapse onto the highways, removing broken glass from windows and clearing debris from the highways.

With more than 1500 buildings in need of safety inspections, the area affected was split into zones with a team of surveyors working in each zone assessing damage and making arrangements for the necessary works to make areas safe for reoccupation and removal of all debris.

Arrangements had been made with street cleaning services, and once buildings had been made safe within the zone, street cleaning equipment would be brought in to remove debris, load it into skips and take it to local landfill tips. This operation was co-ordinated from the Building Control control centre in the Town Hall and took a matter of days to clear the streets and open them to public access.

The process in the central zone (ground zero) was different because of the amount of building debris and the demolition operations that had to take place. This task was undertaken by the City Council's contractor - taking down unsafe structures, loading debris into skips, removing it to a transfer station for sorting and recycling, and tipping materials to landfill that could not be reused.

Some of the buildings eventually had to be demolished entirely, a process that took quite a long time partly due to the presence of asbestos contamination.

The work undertaken by the City Council was done under the provisions of section 78 Building Act 1984 (emergency measures for dangerous buildings) the costs of which are recoverable from the owners of the building. This means keeping accurate records of what work is being done where for the purpose of debt recovery.

Lessons Identified

The Manchester bombing did not present any particular problems on site clearance. Apart from asbestos, there were no contamination issues. The volumes of debris were manageable within normal arrangements for disposal of demolition debris. The key here is to bring in the companies that have the resources, facilities and contacts to clear the site and dispose of the materials.

Contacts for Further Information

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