



# Soap Box

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During the Second World War, one incident stands out for me and represents all that is abhorrent about politics and all that is good about community. In 1941, 173 people died entering Bethnal Green tube station during an air raid. If you haven't read or heard anything about this tragic event I would strongly recommend finding out.

The point in this context is two-fold. Firstly, there was real community spirit and people pulled together to help each other through; and secondly, such a needless tragedy was caused by our own side and worse still was covered up and not even acknowledged for years.

We are in a time where experts claim we need 3 million homes over 10 years and the developers are tasked with building upwards and integrating mixed uses. Now more than ever we need to make sure that our blocks are managed effectively and for the good of all. In short we need to make sure that the managing agents foster communities.

## **Learning from the past**

Most people would be aware of the ghastly mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s with concrete jungles and the soulless monstrosities that were created. What caused the problems? The architecture? The concrete? The poor management?

Probably a combination of all three, but if we think lessons were learned and that mistakes will not be repeated, then there needs to be a reality check. You only have to

look at the current financial crises to see that lessons are not learned.

Sure our towers and housing developments look much nicer architecturally but that may be just taste and in 20 years the next generation could be looking and wondering what we were playing at? This is only part of the picture for the design does not always consider how maintenance strategies can be implemented, nor always ensure that longevity is possible in terms of materials.

For example, external window cleaning that can only be done with access to a penthouse balcony is only possible if the lease reserves the right to access the penthouse balcony. The materials used will not last as long as the ownership of the lease if it is 999 years. And how can you co-ordinate rejuvenation or redevelopment on an estate of 400 units when residential legislation precludes improvement? What will happen to the values of the flats at this point?

## **Active management**

The only way that the estates and communities can see themselves given cohesion and longevity is if there is active, competent management. Management that ensures standards are maintained and enhanced as well as bringing harmony to all sections from private to affordable.

It would be very easy to be glib on this, but at the present time there is no tie for managing agents into current legislation, which only deals with landlords and leaseholders. Unbelievably there is neither restriction on who can set up as an agent nor any requirement on financial controls. This needs to be addressed and the responsible agents should take the lead highlighting and stamping out bad practice and poor service.