



Flood of complaints

Residents up in arms over housing once hailed as beacon of Elephant's regeneration

By Amelia Burr

amelia@southwarknews.co.uk

ANGRY RESIDENTS are up in arms over the problems in their housing block, once hailed as a beacon of regeneration in Elephant and Castle.

Flats have been flooded from windows not being fitted properly, rain water "tormented" down the stairwells after drain pipes were not connected to down pipes, the lifts have been on the blink and pretty much everyone on the ground floor has damp, according to the tenants' and residents' association at Garland Court in Wansey Street.

The 'design and build' project, which means the build is not overseen by the original architect, was hailed as an example of the kind of high quality new blocks that could be expected in the regeneration of the area as the first lot of residents were decamped from the Heygate Estate into Garland Court.

"This was presented as a beacon of the standard of housing we could expect in Elephant and Castle," said Niall Connolly, 62, co-chair of the Garland Court TRA, who says the block of 31 flats is more like a good example of low cost local housing.

"The health risks to Southern Housing's own tenants on the ground and first floor is the biggest worry. They've suffered the worst from damp. I don't know how Southern Housing can show their face in public. It's truly shameful," said Niall.

Garland Court won several design awards in 2007, but the reality has been far from rosy for residents like Zeljka Nekić and Paolo Lacchini, who were transferred there from the Heygate. "I was over the moon," said Paolo, 44. "I thought I'd won the lottery. Now I wonder why I signed the papers and I wish I could go back. They were going to build something new and better but now I wish I could go back."

Mother of one, Zeljka, 42, has rising damp throughout her flat but said she was "apprehensive" from the beginning. "We don't have a hall and it didn't look secure," she said. "We pay our rent. It isn't right."

Leaseholders like Mark Reynolds, 53, are

now considering taking their cases to an ombudsman after years of fighting Southern Housing.

"I was shocked at the poor work that had been done," said Mark. "I've complained year after year about the damp."

"We are aware of the issues at Garland Court and would like to apologise to our residents for the problems they are experiencing," said Duncan Howard, regional director at Southern Housing Group. Mr Howard said Southern Housing are currently in discussions with the contractor following a structural survey of the whole building in 2013. "We wrote to residents earlier this week to update them on our progress. As soon as we have an agreed action plan we will communicate this to residents," added Mr Howard.

Councillor Fiona Colley, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Corporate Strategy, said: "Garland Court was the one single Heygate replacement social housing development built under the previous Lib Dem administration and it is very disappointing to hear about the problems facing residents, particularly as Labour councillors in East Walworth have raised issues on behalf of tenants at Garland Court with Southern Housing - the housing association who manages the block - on a number of occasions.

"The council expects the maintenance of its stock to be of a high quality for tenants, but we cannot regulate how housing associations run their businesses. The 11,000 new homes that Labour is building in Southwark will be council run, meaning the council will have control over rent and can insist on certain standards of repairs and monitoring.

"I will be raising this issue directly with SOUHAG, our group of housing associations, to investigate the allegations on behalf of the Southwark tenants who have been allocated to Garlands Court. I am also seeking an urgent meeting with Southern Housing and residents at the site, along with East Walworth ward councillors, to look into the issues and find out what steps are being taken to address residents' complaints."

Southwark Council

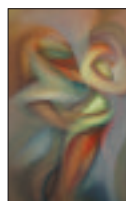
"Don't get me wrong, I like a pint with my mates but I want to take care of my health too."

Add years to your life in 20 minutes

A free NHS Health Check can help prevent heart disease, vascular dementia, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease

If you are aged between 40-75 years old contact your GP or visit www.southwark.gov.uk/healthcheck for community and pharmacy venues. For more information, call 020 7525 1792, or email healthcheck@southwark.gov.uk.

www.southwark.gov.uk/healthcheck



Elusive love

Arts
Page 26