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Top 10 Design Initiatives Overlooked When Building Residential Developments

Chairman and Chief Executive of Chainbow, Roger Southam, has expressed his concerns regarding common design flaws developers and architects are guilty of implementing when building residential developments which cause ongoing headaches for managing agents and leaseholders alike.

With more than **25** years experience in the industry and currently working across 3,800 residential units, Roger has nominated the top ten building elements that affect residents, their service charges and inevitably the maintenance of a property.

1. Refuse collection systems

According to Chainbow, refuse collection areas and the ease with which recycling systems are managed are often an afterthought for designers as they neglect to think about the practical logistics of the collection.

Roger comments: "I was involved with one development that had discreetly located the main waste dumpsters in the underground car park of the complex. Unfortunately the entrance into the car park was significantly lower than Council trucks' minimum height. The result was that the trucks could not access the waste and we, as managing agents, were brought in to work out an ongoing system to correct the design flaw and minimise the cost passed on to the tenants through service charges."

Roger continued: "More commonly, though, designers do not consider how Council trucks can access refuse areas. Generally it is easier for the trucks to collect industrial waste bins that are located outside a complex, at the front of a development or where drivers do not need a security pass to be let into a development. Needless to say, it is never pleasant for residents to endure the odour of uncollected rubbish."

2. Fire escape doors

Chainbow has witnessed numerous developments where residents regularly use fire exit doors instead of main entry and exit routes because of a scheme's poor design. Chainbow argues in these situations, maintenance of fire exit staircases and doors increase because of frequent usage.

3. Car park gates

When it comes to underground car parks, Chainbow argues designers often install security systems that only require drivers to swipe a security pass when entering, which creates a situation that jeopardises the safety of residents' cars.

Roger explains: "Developments where car park gates automatically open when cars exit take a security gamble. Potentially a person off the street can walk into a car park when the gates open for a car and then potentially break into a car and drive away because there is nothing stopping them from exiting. Having a security system that makes drivers swipe out of a car park prevents the likelihood of cars being stolen."

4. Security access in car parks

Chainbow also highlights that developments where designers have installed double-swipe car park security often neglect to focus on car park lifts and fire staircase security. It is often assumed that this is enough to ensure untoward people do not enter a residential complex.

Roger argues: "People off the street can enter a car park when the gates open for residents to drive in and for this reason it is important to have restricted access via a lift and fire staircases into residential buildings. That is why security passes should be used to enter a lift or stairwell."

Roger continues: "It is more beneficial for residents to have security systems in place when a development is being built rather to add them at a later date. The expense of installing security after a building's completion is not factored into costs and leaseholders often have to pay increased service charges to have these systems installed."

5. Postman and deliverymen access

Access for deliverymen and postmen to enter a building is also often an overlooked logistic designers fail to consider according to Chainbow. Roger comments: "Many new developments that do not have concierges, have no systems in place to allow postmen to enter a building or mailboxes are located in areas where the public can easily them. What results is postmen randomly buzzing apartments in the hope someone will let them in or residents go without post until a postman can access the building. Security is important and by allocating individual post boxes in a secured central foyer, managing agents can arrange

to give postmen keys into a certain area of the development while restricting them to other, private areas thus ensuring residents receive their post and other deliveries.”

6. Separating utilities in mixed use developments

Chainbow argues that a key area overlooked in mixed use developments is the need to separate the supply of utilities in the commercial and residential elements of the scheme. Residential customers are only required to pay 5% VAT on utilities such as gas, electricity and 0% on water, however commercial occupiers are charged VAT for these services at the standard rate of 17.5%. Failure by developers to separate the supply of these services will lead to residents paying hundreds of pounds in unnecessary tax each year. In addition, the division of commercial and domestic refuse can also be an issue, with the inclusion of commercial refuse in residential bins leading to additional charges. As a result, developers need to plan for two separate refuse areas to ensure that situation does not arise.

7. Balancing commercial and residential facilities in mixed use developments

Roger Southam explains: “Schemes have to be designed to meet the needs of both businesses and residents. Businesses have requirements for delivery access, refuse collection, and customer parking all of which need to be factored in to a scheme’s design, whilst the position of shops, bars and restaurants needs to be carefully considered to minimise the impact on residents’ lives. In short, if you locate somebody’s bedroom 10 feet above a noisy bar then it’s a case of when, not if, friction arises.”

8. Lift access for disabled individuals

When designers are briefed to create wheelchair-friendly apartments, Chainbow argues little consideration is given to wheelchair access outside an apartment. Roger comments: “I have been to one development that had fantastic apartments suitable for a wheelchair-bound individual but unfortunately they were located on the top floor of an apartment block that had no lift. More commonly though, architects neglect to think what would happen to those living in a wheelchair-friendly apartments above the ground floor if the block lifts brake down or if there was a fire.”

9. Integrated social and private housing within developments

As most new residential developments allocate between 20 to 30 per cent to social housing, Chainbow argues it is important for a scheme’s design to help foster instead of segregate private and social housing residents. Roger comments: “The integration of social housing in

a development is often handled fairly insensitively. I recently advised on a site that wanted to incorporate an alarmed door to separate the social and private housing elements of a scheme. Not only does this go against the spirit of inclusive communities it encourages friction and would undoubtedly have led to the alarm being deliberately set off at all times of day and night.”

10. Designing with maintenance in mind

Chainbow also believes that a scheme’s architecture should be designed with maintenance in mind. Chainbow has regularly encountered completed buildings that have used extensive exterior glazing but have incorporated no system for window cleaning.

In conclusion, Chainbow argues schemes that are designed with security, safety, accessibility, maintenance and, generally tenants’ day-to-day activities in mind when complexes are being built will save tenants paying inflated service charges if they have to be incorporated from a later date.

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