

Written evidence submitted by Mr Stephen Slay [PDR 073]

I wish to make representations about the Permitted Development laws that were passed in Parliament last year.

Whilst there may be some merit in some aspects of the law around converting old offices into residential housing, the law seems to be incredibly poorly thought out in terms of the impact of flat owners, specifically leasehold flats.

I am a flat owner and resident of a block of residential flats in Oxford, Eastfield Place, which is a five block 15 flat development in Cowley, Oxford. I am also a director of Eastfield Place Management Limited, which a residents property management company.

A planning application was put in last August to build two additional storeys on top of the flats, this application was rejected in September.

A further planning application was then put in in December 2020 which was again rejected, this time in February 2021.

This planning application has been appealed with the Secretary of State in Bristol and we have to make representations by 11th May for this appeal.

The planning application is completely out of keeping with the local environment and the street plan and would cause untold disruption both the residents of the flats, the neighbors of the surrounding area due to the amount of building work that it would involve and in terms of a number of neighboring properties then it would cause a huge reduction in their privacy and access to natural light in their properties because of the impact that an additional two storeys would have. Our area already has a problem with parking and last September we became part of a Controlled Parking Zone.

This has caused an enormous amount of work for myself and my fellow directors to try and fight this and co-ordinate with other residents. We have also had to spend money on legal fees and planning consultants to help us which has been costly.

We have been in contact with other residential blocks whose freeholders have put in applications in [REDACTED]. In all cases the residents have been severely adversely affected and have incurred large bills fighting it, the [REDACTED] residents have spent around £20,000!

This new law does very little to help with housing shortages and just helps to compound the previously ill thought out way in which leasehold properties have been treated over years. We were offered to buy our freehold back in 2018, but at an asking price of £220,000 and needing a minimum of two thirds of the residents to get involved this was not an option.

I am aware of a number of residents who have tried to remortgage their properties in this development whilst applications are ongoing and they have been told by their mortgage broker that previously offered rates and mortgages have been rescinded and that they have mortgageable values of nil.

This creates a situation whereby residents can be stuck in their properties, unable to get on with their lives, all so as a small number of greedy freeholders can make potentially huge profits for relatively little outlay.

This law creates another group of people, along with those who have had the misfortune to buy flats with cladding issues for whom buying a flat causes untold problems. Flats are traditionally a way on to the housing market as they are generally cheaper than houses and this is another example of those people being treated very badly.

Unlike the cladding problem which will take years and tens of billions of pounds to rectify the problems I have described above could be easily corrected allowing the people who live in flats to carry on their lives, unburdened by the enormous stresses that this can cause.

Whilst the law is only in its infancy there is a very large potential population of people who could be affected hugely by this and not yet know it if they live in a leasehold flat, that is three storeys presently and also the neighbors and communities of those blocks.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss any of this further.

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