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## Iconic Blocks

In the first of our series on iconic flats we have scoured the country for some of the greatest and most unusual buildings that leaseholders call home.

### THE MANSION HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM – MANAGED BY CURRY & PARTNERS

The Mansion House was conceived and built by Chase Midland Homes approximately 10 years ago to an impeccable standard.

The Estate on which the building is situated is Grange Park, an award winning development, which was once the home of Lord Austin, of motor car fame and lies on the southern slopes of the Lickey Hills. The estate, including the Mansion House, has 27 acres of beautiful park like grounds containing a jogging/walking track, three hole pitch and putt course, two tennis courts and a children's adventure playground.

The Mansion House comprises of 5 apartments and a penthouse suite which occupies the entire second floor, which has been completed to an exacting specification including a magnificent stone spiral staircase to the interior communal areas. This is arguably one of the finest apartment buildings within the Midlands area and situated within a prestigious development providing the ultimate luxurious living arrangements.

Curry & Partners 0121 233 0500



### WOODFOLD HALL, BLACKBURN – MANAGED BY HOMESTEAD CONSULTANCY SERVICES LTD

Of all the grand houses in Blackburn's affluent west end, Woodfold Hall probably ranks as the grandest. Built in 1798 for cotton magnate Henry Sudell, it soon after became the home (in 1827) of John Fowden Hindle, High Sheriff of the County, before eventually becoming the property of

the Thwaites Brewery family, in 1849.

Set in 400 acres of land, surrounded by a 9 feet high wall, which was 4 miles long, Woodfold Hall was a magnificent place.

The contents of Woodfold were auctioned off in 1949 and the roof was taken off the the hall soon after (it was a way of avoiding paying the rates and certain taxes). Derelict, it then deteriorated for the following five decades.

Homestead Consultancy Services Ltd 01253 640040



### THAMES REACH, LONDON – MANAGED BY FARRAR PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Thames Reach – a Richard Rogers building – sits by the Thames on the Fulham/Hammersmith border. The three separate, five storey blocks have brick external envelopes and the river elevation is an all glass curtain wall. There is a nautical theme with timber decked walkways to the main entrance doors and the balconies between blocks and to the river front are held up with complicated steel ties and struts. The stainless steel pipework projecting through the flat roofs are reminiscent of ships funnels. The maintenance of the building has required some sensitive and detailed research and design work to ensure that all works are carried out to the highest standards and that they conserve the unique character and significance of the building.

Farrar Property Management 020 7341 0220



### SHORTS REACH, ROCHESTER – MANAGED BY CAXTONS



Shorts Reach was constructed by Pelham Homes in 1990. It's on the site of the former Shorts Factory on The Esplanade Rochester where sea planes were manufactured during the war. The Esplanade was formerly an industrial site with many factories, workshops etc and after they were all closed during the 70's and 80's Shorts Reach was the first residential site to be built. The site comprises 65 prestigious units with wonderful views of the River Medway. It has two water features, piazza, underground tunnels, and extensive gardens maintained 5 days a week by two members of staff. The company is run by Directors, some of whom have been resident since the site was built. Caxtons have managed for some 20 years now. Caxtons Commercial Ltd 01474 537733

### HERITAGE MANAGEMENT LIMITED

This estate in East Molesey comprises 24, substantial detached houses located within its own private grounds entered via electronic security gates complete with its own communal island (surrounded by the river mole). The island contains weirs and lagoons and is accessed via a main bridge. A number of the private properties have their own bridges spanning from their back gardens onto the island (as shown in the picture).

Heritage Management Limited 01737 850260



### SHEFFIELD PARK GARDEN, EAST SUSSEX – MANAGED BY JJ HOMES



Henry VIII here and during the 18th Century, James Wyatt was called in to remodel the house in the fashionable 'Gothic' style and 'Capability' Brown was commissioned to landscape the garden.

The third Earl, inherited the estate in 1876. One of his first tasks was to establish a cricket field. The Australian XI opened their tour at Sheffield Park between 1884 and 1896. Lord Sheffield's team included W.G. Grace.

By 1885 an 'arboretum' was being established consisting of mostly of exotic and native trees. Arthur Soames purchased the estate in 1910 and continued the massive planting programme, much of which still exists today.

During the Second World War the house and garden became the headquarters for a Canadian armoured division and Nissan huts were sited in the garden and woods. The estate was split up and sold in lots in 1953.

JJ Homes (Properties) Ltd 020 8296 0181

Mentioned in the Domesday Book, Sheffield Park has a fascinating history. In August 1538 Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk entertained

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## Service Charge Protection dropped by Government

Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister, will not be introducing the long-awaited accounting regulations which would have afforded protection to flat owners service charge money. The announcement follows Shapps decision earlier this year not to introduce formal regulation of the property management sector.

### Managing agents are dismayed.

Brett Williams, Chairman of ARMA said, "...we are given to understand [Shapps] reason is to reduce the

regulatory burden. On whom? The very rogues who do not handle lessee money properly." The expected accounting changes were heralded by the

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 and would have required service charge funds to be kept in a separate designated bank account,

usually by their managing agent. Flat owners would also have had the right to a full set of annual service charge accounts and an accountant's report.

## Lease and LVT under threat

The Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) and the Residential Property Tribunal Service are amongst 180 "quangos" which are under threat of government cuts,

according to a document leaked to the Daily Telegraph and BBC. The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal is part of the RPTS and may be merged into the wider Tribunals Service system.

By contrast, the future of LEASE is itself under review as government austerity measures are introduced. **What do you think? Have your say at www.flatsforum.co.uk**



News on the Block is the leading independent magazine providing help and advice to flat owners, landlords, managing agents and their professional advisors.

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### BLOCK MANAGEMENT

## How to communicate effectively with flat owners

DEAN COOPER explains what residents should expect from their managing agent

ONE OF THE MOST common complaints managing agents are accused of is 'lack of communication'. Communication across all levels is key to the success of any good managing agent and is a fundamental aspect in developing, securing and maintaining long client relationships. Good communication increases both trust and faith and is the most important contributing factor to the success of effective management.

Communication is fundamental in keeping clients and contractors informed of current events surrounding the building in question. However communication is a two-way process. Just as it is a requirement to be kept informed of situations from the managing agent, it is important to have valuable feedback from residents to understand and effectively deal with situations, no matter how trivial these are. There are various legal implications and reasons which can be affected through poor communication. One example is the requirements under the legislation of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in reference to 'Section 20', where formal communications and notice of qualifying works or long term agreements over £250 for any one tenant is required. If consultation is not undertaken, the landlord may not be able to recover service charges over £250 per tenant, which could have a major impact on the residents, the development and the agent, especially if the works are urgent. Another area which residents are not always familiar with is

Health, Safety and Fire legislation. Again, this will be down to the managing agent to communicate and inform the residents. The first steps to take for improving communication when faced with an underperforming managing agent are to arrange a face to face meeting with all parties involved at a mutually convenient venue. Brainstorm the issues which your clients have been facing to understand the situation and better meet needs and expectations. List the problems/actions and agree a reasonable and achievable target timeframe for when these can be resolved or finalised. If you find that you can not keep to the original timescale then inform your clients with the reasons for delay. Honesty will go a long way: you

may find that your clients can be reasonable and even help keep things moving in the right direction, providing they believe that you are working in their best interests. Another way of effective communication is to set up distribution lists on email for all parties and send regular updates via this. There is also another revolutionary solution called 'Your Block Online' where a website can be setup for each building in order for members to see regular updates or register concerns. Whether you are trying to obtain new clients or to stay in touch with those we all currently value so much, everything we say and do is a reflection of ourselves as managing agents.

Dean Cooper is a Senior Property Manager with JJ Homes (Properties) Ltd

www.newsontheblock.com

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