

From the leader of the council

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Lord High Chancellor
Secretary of State for Justice



2 September 2013

Dear Chris

SQUATTING ON COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

The change in the law last year to criminalise squatting in residential properties has brought a welcome relief to homeowners in Lambeth. Unfortunately, the problem of squatters for commercial property owners has since worsened, and Lambeth has seen an increase in the number of squatters now specifically targeting non-residential buildings. We are writing in support of a change to the law to cover commercial properties, and I am pleased that you are sympathetic to this cause.

At present, businesses with an empty property are concerned that they not only have to pay full business rates, but that they also have to spend significant sums of money securing their premises and face lengthy and costly legal proceedings to evict squatters. The impact on Lambeth's local communities is profound, especially when nuisance and noise is involved.

I have included two recent examples of squatting in the borough to illustrate the local concern.

111 Westminster Bridge Road

Squatters evicted from the Buddhist Temple broke in and took over 111 Westminster Bridge Road on the same day. The squat was shortly taken over by a range of other groups of squatters. The building's assets were quickly removed and sold. There was one allegation of rape, a series of violent assaults and an attempted suicide during the eight-week duration of the squat. Costs to the developers are estimated to be £100k plus. The impact on the local community was devastating, with the local councillor referring to it as 'the worst case of squatting in 19 years on the council'. The policing to support the warrant to evict had to include the Territorial Support Group and costs to Lambeth police have been significant.

Patmos Lodge

Patmos Lodge is a former sheltered housing scheme and was squatted for two-and-a-half years. The eviction and on going security costs are £150,000. These costs do not include council officer costs (for

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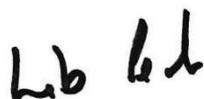
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on going organisation, planning, and procurement of UKEvict). The policing costs were significant as a secondary group of squatters moved in several months before the eviction, compounding the problems. Patmos Lodge contained asbestos, which was exposed following the stripping of the lead and metal that made the fabric of the building. The squatters subsequently relocated to another commercial premise nearby.

No proprietor wants to hold empty property for any length of time. However, landlords will want to ensure that any vacant properties they own remain empty of unwelcome occupiers. Extending the law to protect businesses would be a welcome move for businesses in Lambeth and throughout the country.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lib Peck".

Clr Lib Peck

Leader of the London Borough of Lambeth

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuka Umunna".

Chuka Umunna MP

MP for Streatham and Shadow Business Secretary

Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tessa Jowell".

Tessa Jowell MP

MP for Dulwich and West Norwood