



Anger over fire safety measures in tower blocks

By Janet Maitland

Barnet Homes sparked concern last month with plans to install sprinklers, smoke alarms and smoke extractors inside every flat in Prospect Ring and Norfolk Close, N2, in order to improve fire safety. Many residents saw this equipment as unnecessary, unsightly and obstructive. They were also worried about costs.

"This is nothing more than an expensive cosmetic exercise," said one leaseholder. "The buildings are entirely concrete and brick-built with no flammable materials involved."

Barnet Homes say the works were deemed necessary following a fire risk assessment, and that all residents were sent a letter and a booklet explaining the plans, followed up with two resident meetings in the spring. The plan includes replacing the front entrance door and other communal doors and will be completed by April 2021.

will ruin my home."

Costs

We asked Barnet Homes if the equipment was compulsory. "We strongly advise all residents, including leaseholders, to have the works carried out within their property," said a spokesperson.

We also asked about the costs to residents, and whether these could be reduced or spread over time if people could not afford them. "Tenants will not be charged for the works but may have to contribute to the maintenance of the sprinkler system," said the spokesperson. "Charges for leaseholders will differ depending on the terms of their lease and the size of their flat; some may not be charged. Residents would probably be able to seek some financial assistance."

Stop press

Just as we went to press, we learnt from their Fire Safety newsletter that Barnet Homes have changed their mind about installing smoke extractors in each flat. Instead

Reactions

"As keen as I am to support fire safety there must be a better way than making people's lives a misery, having to look at this every day," one tenant told us. "I was a contract electrician for over 40 years and I've never seen anything like this in a private dwelling."

"Only someone that doesn't have to live here would ever impose such a scheme on someone else," said another leaseholder. "Three sets of trunking running through the whole flat and the loss of a window, which will have to be boarded up to allow the extraction duct to exit,

the current system will simply be upgraded. However, plans for a fire alarm and sprinkler system in every flat are still going ahead.



Extractor: Ceiling ducting in one Prospect Ring flat



Outlet: The ducting ends at one of the flat's windows



Bunting is a fun ting: Fran Hills sewing in her music room. Photo Mike Coles

Classical pianist finds crafty way to stay creative

By Ellie Franklin

When talented local musician Frances Hills found all her performance work cancelled by the pandemic she decided to get crafty in the face of Covid-19 by making and selling bunting online.

Frances, a classical pianist, has worked as a répétiteur, an accompanist and a tutor to opera singers, for 30 years. It's the most amazing job, she says, as "one minute you're playing *West Side Story* and the next you're playing *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana".

Having trained at Guildhall School of Music & Drama and the National Opera Studio she has worked for many prestigious festivals including Garsington Opera and Glyndebourne. Fran has also played for Simon Cowell, appeared on TV on *This Morning* and played in Wandsworth Prison.

But she suddenly found her work diary was empty

until May 2021 so now her creativity has taken a new direction. Fran has turned her hand to crafts and set up an online Etsy shop selling beautiful, handmade bunting with designs ranging from vintage to glow-in-the-dark for Halloween. "When you shake things about sometimes it can unlock something new," she says.

Fran hopes to expand her business by taking commissions for upcycling and refashioning fabric with sentimental value, such as old children's clothes. Any ideas



Colourful: Fran's bunting

are welcome. "If someone wants 'Marry me' written onto bunting, I can do it!" To see more of Fran's creations, check out her Instagram page at [musosgetcrafty](https://www.instagram.com/musosgetcrafty) and Etsy shop www.etsy.com/shop/musosgetcrafty.

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