

Licences To Alter - Do You Really Need a Surveyors' Report?

The Status Quo

The role of Landlord's Surveyor in the context of Licences To Alter and other related services in connection with considering a Leaseholder's intention to carry out alteration works are broadly speaking well known and are for the most part understood by all those involved. The surveyor in question will, more often than not, be well versed with the whole affair and will follow the same processes of assessment, reporting and monitoring. Very efficient and a proven approach to service delivery. But is there room for improvement?

Surveyors do love a process and a structure. And don't get me wrong, for the most part this serves all parties very well indeed. Having a structure and a process in place is a very effective way of maintaining standards and ensuring that all due protocols are followed and helps to negate things getting missed. Having an entrenched approach to service delivery and with the roll out of LTA Landlord's Surveyor Services broadly the same (and they have been for many years) across the sector, it can leave little room for innovation and can certainly result in a lack of flexibility of thought; particularly when it comes to reporting output.

Breaking the Reporting Mould

At Harris Associates we focus on using our time and expertise efficiently and focus our energies on where we can bring value to the Licence To Alter process. Value in terms of technical expertise, value in terms of leadership and value in terms of time and cost.

One of the ways we achieve better value is breaking away from the mould when it comes to assessing the leaseholder proposals and reporting. In fact, on ninety nine percent of our instructions where we act as the Landlord's Surveyor we do not prepare a report at all. Instead we focus more time and energy on extracting information from the leaseholder, working with the leaseholder teams and where necessary cajoling them to work up their proposals to an acceptable standard. We can then reach the point where we are able to advise the Landlord that the scope is clear, in line with regulations and standards and consent can be granted.

Our view when it comes to reporting is probably at odds to many of our surveying colleagues. To us there seems little point or value in reporting to a landlord in a standard reporting format that recommends that some works are acceptable whilst advising in the same report that other works are not. How this actively assists in moving the consent process forward is debateable. Even more debateable is why it is considered appropriate to append such a report to a licence to alter. A report, which probably requires interpreting, that is addressed and directed to a landlord, which is then appended to a legal document between a landlord and leaseholder! Bonkers!

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Schedule of Landlord's Requirements

What do we do different? We have developed a more dynamic and flexible (and more proportionate) approach to dealing with licences to alter. Unless specifically requested to do so, we do not produce the typical industry standard LTA Report. We use our time more dynamically to lead on LTA instructions, help solve problems, liaise with landlord's and leaseholders directly and agree technical detail and rather than produce a surveyors' report we produce a Schedule of Landlords Requirements.

The Schedule of Landlord's Requirements sets out all relevant guidance, do's and don'ts, technical stipulations, references to relevant documents and importantly the content is property and flat specific and is a published document (so for the benefit of a landlord and a lessee) that is then appended to the LTA.

There are no unanswered questions which leaves no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding and removes the need for solicitors and property managers to interpret a surveyors' report. Our Schedule of Landlord's Requirements is therefore a single document that is as clear to a landlord as it is the lessee, with both parties benefiting from the precise and specific content. It is also used as a direct referencing document by leaseholders and their teams throughout the works phase and it assists us as we monitor the works and eventually sign off the works on completion.

We have won praise from landlords, tenants, property managers and solicitors for this new approach and we would be happy to discuss your requirements and answer and questions or queries you may have.

For further details and for a sample of our Schedule of Landlord's Requirements please contact

Shaun Harris on 0203 195 0857 / 07950 336450 / shaun@harrisassociatesuk.com

Other publications include:

- Flood Reinstatement
- The Challenges of Asbestos removal
- Principles of Repair for Historic Buildings