

## Time for silly season stories: being nice to tenants is not one of them – and neither is the Candy apology

Landlords, look in the mirror: you don't really like tenants, do you? That's fine, there is no need to feel ashamed. A self-help group is available, run by the gentle Howard Morgan of RealService in Pinner.

The former BAA property man runs an eight-strong consultancy that helps to re-educate property owners into thinking of tenants as valued customers, not as damned nuisances.

Not easy, but help is at hand, lent by Morgan's RealService Best Practice Group. The 22-strong, not-for-profit organisation includes Land Securities, British Land, Grosvenor and the Crown Estate. This month, a service charge compliance index has been launched to allow members to see how well (or badly) they fare against rivals.

What Morgan wants now is for the unconverted to recognise their wrongs and join the club, set up in 2004 to help members recognise that it might profit them to be nice to customers. Managing agents who have seen the light are welcome; firms such as DTZ, GVA Grimley and Savills have already joined.

Monthly sessions (well, lunches) are held at which you



**Fortunes will one day be made by changing the use of retail premises. But to schools?**

can network as well as learn to mind your manners with tenants – sorry, customers.

But let's not bore on about how to be good. Instead, here are a few ways to annoy your tenants, kindly provided by Morgan himself.

- Park your Bentley in the tenant's dedicated parking bay then wander off for lunch.
- Grant a lease to one shopkeeper, then grant another to someone close by who sells the same stock.
- Blanket the block in scaffolding without notice.

The best tip for managing agents is, of course, to promise repairs and do nothing. But this has its dangers. Morgan says that, in one case, it led to

the fibbing agent being locked out on the roof of the property and told he could not come down until the repairs were carried out.

■ **Lessons in recycling**  
School's out; time for the silly season stories.

This one comes from the normally sensible EC Harris, a 3,000-strong firm of built asset consultants, once proud to call themselves quantity surveyors. Their idea is that old shops can be turned into new schools.

EC Harris's office at Kings Cross, N1, does have a ground-floor bar that opens in the early evening. Can this be where, after a few pints, the wheeze of turning unrentable shops into classrooms was born?

The abandonment of plans to build 700 brand-new schools will have concentrated minds at the partnership, which plans to float in 2013. But, to give the firm credit, the basic idea of coming up with an alternative use for the zillions of feet of forever-empty shops is a good one.

Fortunes will one day be made by levelling retail premises and building homes for the young and very old. But that will only happen on a large scale when a political consensus is reached to allow

for an automatic change of use for these useless sites.

But a change to schools? Well, maybe a few. But who wants their seven-year-old taught in a patched-up tertiary shopping centre?

■ **Watch for the rebound**  
How much did the Candy brothers get in return for the abject apology given to the Qataris and Prince Charles last Friday, following the sudden settlement of their £81m claim on Chelsea Barracks? Not the faintest idea, sorry.

Mr Justice Vos carefully sealed the details in a brown envelope at the end of the half-hour hearing in the Royal Courts – and forbade anyone to say. Nick and Christian presumably got a good wedge of that £81m. Let's take a complete guess and say £40m.

But the price they paid was a very public humbling.

Will the irrepressible pair bounce back? Probably, in one shape or form. After all, Christian says that he is to make a £36m offer to take full control of a gold-mining business which operates in the western Pacific.

*Former EG editor Peter Bill contributes to [estatesgazette.com/blogs](http://estatesgazette.com/blogs)*