

# Peveler property management faces tenant rebellion over service

Excessive fees and poor service are some of the accusations residents level against Peveler. Now they are taking action

## The Peveler tenants who are fighting back



**Patrick Collinson**

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Tenants Frank Gadd and Bernard Allwork of Church Crookham, Hampshire. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

Three years ago Frank Gadd saw a two-bed maisonette for sale near Fleet in Hampshire that seemed perfect for his retirement. Yes, it was small, but it was affordable and it was relatively new, so maintenance would be minimal.

"When I saw it, I thought what a lovely place to be in," says Gadd, now 67. "But after just eight or nine months I felt I'd made a mistake. It was grim."

It wasn't the property that was a let-down. It was the huge service and maintenance charges Gadd was being forced to pay out of his modest pension. The bill hit £4,400 a year for a run of four maisonettes with no common parts. This year, after taking on the agents, he will pay just £200.

Gadd's story is one of despair both at the lack of service and excessive costs for things such as buildings insurance. And his tale may not be unfamiliar to leaseholders and flat dwellers around the country.

His managing agent was a firm called Solitaire Property Management, which in 2008 became part of the Peveler group of companies. Peveler is one of Britain's most

controversial property companies. It owns or manages hundreds of thousands of properties across Britain, under brand names such as OM, Consort and Pemberton's Property Management. It looks after 65,000 retirement homes, largely at McCarthy & Stone developments. It runs security company Cirrus, which installs CCTV and entry systems for flats, and Kingsborough, which organises buildings insurance.

Behind Peverel and a web of connected companies stands multimillionaire property tycoon Vincent Tchenguiz, whose flamboyant spending – before the credit crunch at least – was legendary.

Aside from the Rolls Royce (at one stage he reputedly owned five), he boasts a £10m-plus luxury yacht, called Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, I conquered). His brother Robert also built a huge financial empire, much of it based on loans from Kaupthing Bank in Iceland.

As Iceland's financial system collapsed in October 2008, many of the loans were called in, wiping out a large swathe of Robert Tchenguiz's business empire, and also affecting Vincent.

But far from the yachts on the French Riviera, numerous tenants of properties around Britain ultimately controlled by Tchenguiz are furious at the charges they pay, and the service they receive.

One website alone, where tenants share stories about their treatment and what they can do about it, has received nearly 120,000 visitors over the past 16 months. The awkwardly named The Truth About OM Property Management (formerly Solitaire Property Management) & Peverel Group Companies, was set up in 2008 by a disgruntled Solitaire customer

When he spoke to Guardian Money it was on the basis that we only publish his first name: Adam. "I was fed up with being palmed off with various stories, services not being provided yet the fees kept going up. But it soon became apparent it wasn't just me."

The site is now peppered with allegations, although they are firmly rejected by Peverel. In a statement, it said: "Solitaire Property Management only became part of the Peverel Group in mid 2008. Given Solitaire's poor history, immediate changes were made by Peverel to improve the company, including centralising customer service management and closing poorly organised regional offices ... Since taking control of Solitaire we have made it our number one priority to make a fresh start with residents who felt they had been let down by Solitaire."

But some leaseholders continue to press ahead with tribunal claims. In the coming months, a tribunal will hear a £2.6m claim for overcharging alleged by more than 300 leaseholders at the striking St George Wharf development on the river Thames. Residents of five blocks in Nottingham, called City Heights, set off fireworks to celebrate wresting control of their development from Peverel after a long legal battle. Across the city, residents at Weekday Cross have won £730,000 at a tribunal, although Peverel is appealing this.

Every tenant's story is different, but there are a number of strands that feature regularly

