# Residents fear for safety as lifts break down at Balfron Tower for nearly a week



Residents of Balfron Tower, a striking 26-storey structure in Poplar, London, have voiced their frustration and anxiety as they have been left to navigate life without functional lifts for nearly a week. This situation has turned what was once a home for many into what some are calling a 'death trap,' especially for those with disabilities or health issues.

Living on the upper floors has become an arduous challenge for tenants like Vasundhata Gupte, who, despite recovering from a hamstring injury, finds herself climbing 84 metres—equivalent to the height of 17 double-decker buses—every time she leaves her flat. Others, such as Peter Yu, who suffers from a spinal cord injury, face the painful reminder that their homes offer no refuge when essential services fail. Yu noted, “At the end of the day, it’s a safety issue,” highlighting the potential risks of being unable to evacuate quickly in an emergency.

The situation has led to severe isolation for some, with residents unable to reach essential services. Sophie's flatmate, who has mobility issues, has temporarily relocated, while Sophie herself struggles to carry her elderly dog down the stairs. These personal accounts underline a broader safety concern: residents have expressed fears about the consequences of being trapped during emergencies, particularly fire incidents. One resident lamented, “What if I have a heart attack? Who will come and get me?"

Balfron Tower, designed by architect Ernő Goldfinger, is not only notable for its architectural significance—it was completed in 1967 and has been a Grade II listed building since 1996—but also for its cultural resonance. The tower is thought to have inspired J.G. Ballard's dystopian novel "High-Rise," which explores themes of societal decay and chaos linked to failing infrastructure. This literary connection raises questions about the real-life implications of neglecting building maintenance and tenant safety in an iconic structure that has seen rising rental prices—Mr Yu pays £3,500 a month for his flat, while Ms Gupte pays £2,500.

The management company, Way of Life, acknowledged the ongoing lift issues in an email to residents, remarking that the situation was “incredibly unfortunate” and noting that “major components within both lifts require replacement parts.” However, residents have expressed dissatisfaction with the management's responsiveness, particularly when assistance was sought. Yu detailed an instance where a staff member “point blank refused” to assist beyond the seventh floor.

Despite assurances from Way of Life that at least one lift was operational, residents soon reported further breakdowns, exacerbating their distress. An anonymous resident even took to social media, pleading for help and expressing feeling trapped in their home. “I have not been able to leave my home. This situation is inhumane and deeply distressing,” they wrote, urging anyone who might offer assistance to reach out.

The refurbishment efforts that began in 2011 had aimed to restore Balfron Tower’s architectural integrity while making it suitable for modern living. However, it seems these initiatives have yet to adequately address essential infrastructural challenges that can affect not just comfort but safety and accessibility for residents.

As the city grapples with rising living costs and housing shortages, the case of Balfron Tower highlights a critical intersection of historical preservation and modern residential needs. The ongoing lift failure is an alarming reminder of how essential building services can rapidly transform a desirable living space into a site of stress and vulnerability—a situation that demands immediate attention from both the management and local authorities.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14732761/Fury-residents-left-trapped-iconic-London-tower-block-lifts-break-nearly-week.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.homeviews.com/development/balfron-tower-e14> - This page provides reviews of Balfron Tower, a 26-storey residential building in Poplar, London. Residents share their experiences, highlighting aspects such as location, facilities, design, and management. Some tenants mention occasional lift issues, but note that management responds promptly to repairs. The building's proximity to Canary Wharf and local amenities is appreciated, though some residents wish for more nearby restaurants. Overall, the reviews offer insights into living conditions and the community within Balfron Tower.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balfron_Tower> - Balfron Tower is a 26-storey residential building in Poplar, London, designed by architect Ernő Goldfinger and completed in 1967. It is a notable example of Brutalist architecture, featuring 146 homes and a distinctive design with a separate service tower containing lifts, laundry rooms, and rubbish chutes. The building has been Grade II listed since 1996 and underwent refurbishment starting in 2011 to restore its original form and bring it up to modern standards. The tower has been featured in various films and music videos, reflecting its cultural significance.
4. <https://www.ctbuh.org/news/former-public-housing-high-rise-in-london-to-be-repurposed> - This article discusses the repurposing of Balfron Tower, a former public housing high-rise in London. Designed by Ernő Goldfinger and completed in 1967, the building is being transformed to appeal to buyers interested in mid-century architecture. The renovation aims to restore the tower's original features while updating it for modern living, reflecting a renewed appreciation for Brutalist design.
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/fire-safety-balfron-tower> - This document addresses concerns over fire safety in the renovated Balfron Tower. The London Assembly questioned the Mayor about issues such as windows that cannot be opened and floors that would easily fill with smoke. The response indicates that the refurbishment is under the oversight of the Health and Safety Executive, with the London Fire Brigade aware of the concerns and planning a full fire safety audit once the building is ready for reoccupation.
6. <https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/in-pictures-refurbishment-of-goldfingers-iconic-balfron-tower/5124503.article> - This article provides an overview of the refurbishment of Balfron Tower, a Grade II\*-listed landmark in East London. The renovation includes the addition of a library, gym, and yoga room in the former utility tower. The project aims to bring the 27-storey tower up to modern standards while preserving its architectural significance, reflecting a renewed interest in Brutalist architecture.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/sep/26/balfron-tower-exhibition-erno-goldfinger-brutalist> - This article discusses an exhibition showcasing Ernő Goldfinger's work, focusing on Balfron Tower, a Grade II-listed building in East London. The exhibition highlights the building's architectural significance and its role in the Brutalist movement. It also touches upon the building's history, including its design challenges and the experiences of its residents, reflecting on the impact of Goldfinger's vision on urban living.