# London flat dubbed ‘death trap’ sparks urgent safety rethink in housing design



A two-bedroom Victorian flat in Brockley, South London, has sparked widespread concern among potential buyers due to a disconcerting design feature that many have labelled a ‘death trap.’ On the market for £500,000, this property initially presents as a charming home with a modern aesthetic, boasting polished floorboards and a sleek kitchen. However, a closer inspection reveals a gaping chasm in the living area, directly opposite the double bed, with a staircase leading down to the lower floor, but without any railings or glass barriers.

Online critics expressed alarm at this apparent safety oversight, with comments highlighting the danger posed by the unprotected opening. One user provocatively commented, “Deathtrap stairs to master bedroom. Yikes. How is there no railing around that?” Another chimed in, “I'd be dead in a week if I lived there. How have they survived?” Such sentiments echo a growing awareness around safety in housing design, especially in densely populated urban areas where architectural features sometimes prioritise aesthetics over functionality and security.

Interestingly, this incident taps into a wider discourse about housing design within London. The trend of innovative yet risky architectural elements—such as the so-called floating staircases—has surfaced in various properties around the capital. In a luxury rental apartment in Covent Garden, a similarly precarious staircase has attracted criticism for its jagged, unsupported steps. Guests there have labelled these stairs ‘scary’ and ‘dangerous,’ illustrating a growing unease over modern design choices that seem to flirt with danger.

The Brockley flat’s listing, managed by Conran Estates, maintains a focus on its aesthetic appeal while downplaying the apparent risk associated with its stairwell setup. Advertised as “bright and stylish,” it places emphasis on the desirable area, known for its tree-lined streets and access to amenities. Yet, it raises questions about the balance of form and function in residential design.

Safety concerns surrounding architectural features are not confined to private sales but resonate throughout public housing discussions as well. Recent commentary on housing design flaws in Southwark highlights issues in local estates, which have been plagued by inadequate provisions for residents’ safety and wellbeing. Historical context sheds further light on this problem, with incidents such as the tragic death of a schoolboy in a poorly designed public estate serving as a somber reminder of the consequences of oversight in urban planning.

Critics point to evidence suggesting that certain design choices, including the use of safety railings, can create more hazards than they mitigate, raising the question of whether aesthetic choices overrule common sense in contemporary architecture. As municipal authorities reconsider such features, the Brockley flat’s questionable design might prompt a critical reevaluation of how future housing projects are conceptualised.

In a city grappling with a housing crisis that challenges its inhabitants to find secure, affordable living spaces, these design dilemmas affect not only individual safety but also the overall quality of life for Londoners. Buyers looking at properties like the one in Brockley must navigate these fraught issues, weighing the allure of contemporary design against the fundamental need for safety.

As the property market continues to evolve, potential residents may find themselves advocating for designs that uphold both style and sense—a balance crucial for the future of urban living.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14760817/London-flat-sale-500000-terrifying-feature.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/07/floating-steps-london-flat-death-stairs/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/07/floating-steps-london-flat-death-stairs/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14760817/London-flat-sale-500000-terrifying-feature.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/category/london/page/5/), [[4]](https://brockleycentral.blogspot.com/2010/02/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.onlondon.co.uk/londons-housing-emergency-perils-of-a-purley-low-cost-block/)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14760817/London-flat-sale-500000-terrifying-feature.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/07/floating-steps-london-flat-death-stairs/> - A floating staircase in a luxury rental apartment in central London has been called 'death stairs' by guests who were forced to climb its jagged and uneven steps. The flat in Covent Garden features a winding staircase with eight disconnected steps hanging from the wall with only a metal pole to hold on to. The staircase, which leads to the bathroom, has been called 'scary', 'dangerous' and 'bonkers' in reviews and social media posts by guests. One pensioner said she struggled to access the bathroom while a tourist claimed he had to walk down the steps backwards. A floating staircase has steps that are unsupported by traditional risers or stringers, giving the impression that they are floating in mid-air. The design became fashionable in the UK in the 1960s when architect Ernő Goldfinger included a floating staircase in the Balfron Tower in London. Yet the owners of the one-bed studio apartment, which costs £450 to rent for two nights, have come under fire for the design. On Booking.com, on which the apartment is listed, one review said: 'The stairs going to the bathroom and terrace [are] very dangerous as they were steep and narrow.' Another review said: 'Some people may find the steep floating stairs up to the bathroom and roof terrace a little scary!' Dutch tourist Marius de Graaf posted an image on Facebook of the stairs. His post, describing the ascent as 'death stairs', has earned more than 5,000 reactions and 1,200 comments. He said the host contacted him shortly after booking his November 2023 trip to warn him about the stairs and to ask if he had any mobility issues. Mr de Graaf said: 'When we entered the apartment we immediately saw them. They cannot be missed. It was like comfortably climbing out of a bunk bed. 'Walking on them proved not to be too big of a deal when you start with the right foot. Going down was easy when you faced the stairs. 'When we booked the place we got a message from the owner asking if we had any mobility issues and he informed us about the stairs. 'We didn’t have issues and we thought the stairs looked interesting on the photos on the booking website. I understand why the owner made sure we were OK with them. 'We love the place as it’s perfectly located between Leicester Square and Covent Garden so the stairs only added to the experience.' A Booking.com spokesperson said: 'Reviews left by previous guests are a great way for travellers to check that the accommodation is right for them, alongside pictures provided by the property owner and accessibility details, with our accommodation partners responsible for the experience guests have staying at their property.' The property owners have been contacted for comment.
3. <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/category/london/page/5/> - This blog post discusses the diverse origins of Southwark’s so-called ‘Five Estates’ and the ideals which inspired them. It examines how these ideals failed or were betrayed by wider society, assessing some of the broader charges levelled against much of the mass housing of the period. The post highlights issues such as the design flaws in the Gloucester Grove Estate, including the amplification of noise due to its snake-like design and the presence of towers and rubbish chutes that became stinking and verminous. It also mentions the 1994 bid for Single Regeneration funding, which claimed £250,000 a year was being spent on repairing vandalised properties in the area. The post provides a more matter-of-fact assessment of one long-term resident, who noted that while the area wasn't all that bad once you lived on it, you had to be sensible and avoid flashing your cash. The post also references the tragic death of Damiola Taylor, a ten-year-old Nigerian schoolboy who was killed in an isolated stairwell of the North Peckham Estate in November 2000.
4. <https://brockleycentral.blogspot.com/2010/02/> - This blog post reports on the tragic death of a Brockley woman, Nga Diep, who was killed when a skip lorry pushed her into railings at the junction of Ilderton Road and Rotherhithe New Road, Rotherhithe. After hitting the railings, the 33-year-old fell under the lorry’s back wheels and suffered massive head and chest injuries. The post highlights that this incident has prompted Southwark Council to consider the removal of 'safety' railings in Rotherhithe. Local MP Simon Hughes is quoted as saying: “I hope the council is positive and speedy in doing something at this junction to remove this danger to cyclists. The railings should be moved to make sure cyclists can leave the road in emergencies.” The post also discusses the broader issue of safety railings in Brockley, noting that studies have shown these safety measures can actually make roads less safe, trapping cyclists and pedestrians, encouraging people to vault them, and causing drivers to speed up because they send the signal 'this road belongs to you.' The post mentions that across London, councils are removing safety railings in response to the mounting evidence against their use in many situations.
5. <https://mason.zoopla.co.uk/for-sale/property/london/brockley-rise/> - This page lists properties for sale in Brockley Rise, London SE23. It allows users to search for properties within a specified radius and price range, including two-bedroom flats and houses. The listings provide details such as property type, price, number of bedrooms, and additional features. Users can filter the search results based on their preferences, including property type, price, and number of bedrooms. The page also offers information on the local area, including amenities and transport links, to assist potential buyers in making informed decisions.
6. <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/londons-housing-emergency-perils-of-a-purley-low-cost-block/> - This article discusses the challenges faced by residents of a low-cost housing block in Purley, London. It highlights issues such as unreliable lifts, which have caused significant inconvenience and distress for residents, including those with mobility issues. The article also touches upon the broader housing crisis in London, emphasizing the difficulties faced by residents in accessing essential services and the impact of housing design on residents' quality of life. The piece provides personal accounts from residents, illustrating the real-life implications of housing design and maintenance issues.
7. <https://www.onthemarket.com/for-sale/property/se10/?max-price=800000&min-bedrooms=2&min-price=500000&more-like-this=true&radius=1.0> - This page lists 2+ bedroom properties for sale within 1 mile of SE10, with prices ranging from £500,000 to £800,000. The listings include flats and houses, with details such as price, number of bedrooms, and additional features. Users can filter the search results based on their preferences, including property type, price, and number of bedrooms. The page also offers information on the local area, including amenities and transport links, to assist potential buyers in making informed decisions.