



Proud to be EG...

Jess Harrold

Property and planning law underpins every aspect of real estate, says EG's deputy legal & professional editor, and our expert team is on the case

How did your career path as a legal journalist for EG evolve?

Property law coverage has been part of what we do since the very first edition of Estates Gazette in 1858. I always say, you can't spell "LEGAL" without "EG" – property and planning law, as shaped by centuries of legislation and cases, underpins every aspect of real estate, from its inception, through development to occupation and beyond. And, as the pandemic underlined, the legal system is constantly evolving to meet our changing needs – albeit usually far more slowly than it did in response to Covid-19 – so there is always plenty to write about in this field.

Oddly enough, I was writing stories for what was still Estates Gazette before I even finished university. Having studied law, but decided not to become rich, I embarked on a postgraduate diploma in journalism, and on work placement during that course I arrived at UK Law News, an agency based at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, which provided EG's court copy at the time. I ended up covering the courts for EG during various periods over the next 15 years.

In 2015, seeking a fresh challenge, I came in-house to work on the legal & professional desk with the wonderful Sarah Jackman and, eight years on, I'm still here. That period covers Brexit, Covid, global energy and cost of living crises, and even our rebrand, so there's rarely time to catch a breath.

What does a typical day involve and what's the best part of your role?

It varies widely, but a typical week includes such activities as meeting with lawyers at major firms to discuss their work and possibilities for content. There may be important judgments for me to co-ordinate on with our current court reporter, James Lumley, and our case coverage team, who produce case summaries, practice points and legal notes on key decisions.

More often than not there is a legal

podcast to prepare. I never foresaw doing them, but the demand for accessible, easy-to-digest legal analysis in audio form is clearly there, and they are actually very enjoyable to record (rather less so to edit). But absolutely my favourite part of the job is the bread and butter – making sure we have the requisite amount of expertly written content to serve the EG Radius website and our magazine section, and editing articles and comment pieces from the strongest voices in the field, covering all the latest legislation, court cases and trends. I may be biased, but I happen to think the content in the legal & professional section is among the most engaging, informative and thought-provoking on offer in EG.

What notable changes in property law have you observed as social and environmental concerns become more critical for businesses?

Up to this point, the evolution has largely been self-driven, with a genuine desire on the part of many landlords, tenants and investors to improve the sustainability of their buildings through ever greener lease terms. However, as the government faces up to the challenge of its net zero targets, the trend is towards increasing regulation. The most obvious example is the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, which came into effect on 1 April and made it unlawful for landlords to continue to rent out commercial premises with an EPC rating lower than E. That bar will be rising in the years ahead, and EG has warned that, by 2030, more than £16bn of rental income could be at risk.

In terms of social concerns, the cladding crisis in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy has led to the Building Safety Act 2022, the impact of which is still playing out. And there seems to be a genuine commitment to improving the lives of residential leaseholders, with legislation like the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation)

Act 2018 and the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act 2022, with more leasehold reform on the horizon. The societal pace of change shows little sign of slowing, so the years ahead will no doubt see even more for us to cover. Bring it on.

As the host of the EG Like Sunday Morning podcast, if you could interview anyone, who would it be?

Sitting in the easy chair of EGLSM, just asking the questions, I am constantly in awe of my colleagues who have such a tremendous command of the real estate industry and their areas of specialism. I hope our dedicated army of listeners appreciates how they manage to sum up the week's major news with expertise, enthusiasm and a real sense of fun. It may not surprise people who know me that for my dream guest I would pick the late, great Stan Lee. I had the pleasure of meeting Stan once, albeit briefly – but I know that he could happily hold forth on any topic, and I have little doubt he would have had some fascinating insights into real estate to share. After all, he helped build the Marvel Universe as a window on the real world, and added plenty of new landmarks in among the familiar ones.

What makes EG a great place to work?

It's the people. I work primarily with those in the content and production teams, and they are an absolute joy to collaborate with. They work tirelessly hard to deliver for our readers (and listeners), which inspires you to do the same, but we all have a great amount of fun. Over the past couple of years, I have come to know many more people from across EG and I have discovered that that spirit holds true throughout the company, at all levels. My default setting is to work hard, but always enjoy it as much as possible. I'm pleased, and grateful, that such an approach can find a welcome home here.