

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 17th January 2018 at the Rivergate Centre. 7:30pm

Committee: Pete Mason, Nuno Amorim, Venilia Amorim, Fran Mitchell, Nishma Patel.
39 residents were present.
Apologies from Matt Scott (Community project) and Gary Jones (Council environmental health)

Agenda agreed.

Minutes of previous meeting (13th December 2017) agreed. No matters arising.

Heating

Chair summarised events: Four blocks of flats (Ernest Websdale House, Samuel Garside House, John Miller House and Leslie Hitchcock House) went without heating over a period of about 40 days, with the initial reports from residents to Zing Power, the service provider, issued on 10th November 2017. Zing has taken over TGE, which went bust, but a lot of residents claim there is no maintenance or service contract between Zing and residents.

The Association held an emergency meeting on 9th December 2017, in which Councillor Cameron Geddes attended and wrote to the Trading Standards, reporting the issue. MP Margaret Hodges gave her apologies. Reports from various sources indicated that there was a dispute between Pinnacle and Zing Power and neither party would take responsibility for the problem.

The Association wrote to Southern Housing and they intervened. The association also wrote to BRL and MP Hodge also sent a letter to BRL on behalf of Residents Association.

On 5th January Zing Power wrote to the Association, BRL, Pinnacle and Southern Housing, threatening to remove all communal heating equipment on 25th January. Gary Jones from the Environmental Health Department contacted the Association so that he and his team could conduct a full assessment of the blocks and their respective heating systems to understand what happened.

Chair Pete Mason replied to Zing Power's threat with a powerful letter, which was supported by many of the affected residents and gained media interest. Residents then received a letter from Homeground assuring them that Zing Power would not go through with the removal of equipment. The Association has raised several issues with the parties involved, as they have also been raised by MP Hodge on behalf of the Association, that are still unanswered: permanent heating, future service provider, report on issues, compensation.

There was a brief discussion regarding the Chair's letter to Zing Power, in which a resident argued that the political views of the letter were unnecessary to try to solve the issue, claiming that said letter made it more difficult for residents to approach the service provider for a solution to the problem. A resident responded that the letter correctly pointed to the underlying problems which need solving. Other residents, , were of the opinion that the political tone did not matter as long as the association was trying to best tackle the situation and come to a solution for all residents affected.

Parking

BRL held an informal consultation on 11th January 2018 at the Rivergate Centre to showcase the plans for extra parking spaces. The Association was pleased that plans had advanced so far, and that BRL had decided to change the double yellow lines to single yellow on McAllister Grove. There were some issues which the Association disputed on behalf of a resident which were then agreed verbally.

An additional space on Drake Close was suggested by a resident, and another resident from Davey Gardens stated that the disabled car spaces, right outside three houses specially adopted for people with disabilities, were misallocated to other residents on the street by Pinnacle, with their own bays far down the street. With the new spaces being proposed on Galleons Drive, moving spaces from Davey Gardens, it should soon be possible for their bays to be restored and for everyone on Davey Gardens to have parking nearer their own houses.

At the consultation BRL once again affirmed, as they have in writing, that they would absorb all the costs involved. They will now submit a planning application to the council, which will involve a formal council consultation taking up to 13 weeks. If all goes well, the first works will commence by summer.

Update on Constitution/Bank Account

Amendments to points 6.1 and 6.2 as well as 12.2 suggested and noted.

Motion Passed:

That the association sets up a bank account according to the association's new constitution, with two to sign, the signatories being three in total. The signatories are to be Chair Pete Mason, Secretary Nuno Amorim and Treasurer Venilia Amorim. We agree that the treasurer, with a second signatory, should be permitted both to deposit and withdraw funds as agreed by the residents association committee in pursuance of the aims of the residents association. The association proposes to opening a bank account with Metro Bank.

Moved by Pete Mason, chair, Barking Reach Residents Association,

Seconded by Nuno Amorim, Secretary, Barking Reach Residents Association

Passed overwhelmingly with 3 abstentions.

Service Charge & Security

The committee held a special committee meeting to discuss the many service charge issues. Many have leases which stipulate that the service charge should not be more than a set figure, such as £450 and Pinnacle have exceeded that. Some residents have completely the wrong bill. One resident on Galleons Drive received a bill for Ernest Websdale House. Residents are being charged different percentages of the estate charge despite having the same number of habitable rooms. Residents who have just moved into the estate are being charged for the service charge due for the period 2014-15.

Pinnacle did serve a notice saying that the service charge will be more than originally estimated for the period 2014-15 within the 18 month period allowed, namely on 15th December 2016, but did it do so properly and can it be challenged? The letters from Pinnacle, called section 20B letters, did not identify specific amounts that had increased or show what the new amounts would be per household, and said that the amounts could change. The Association has had differing advice on whether this is within the law.

Residents are challenging individual items of expenditure. Residents of the blocks of flats are outraged to see heating charges, when the radiators in the common areas have been switched off, among other issues, and residents of the houses seem to be charged for the gates of the

flats and other items which are not part of the estate-wide area which their leases say they are responsible for. Residents can write to Pinnacle requesting invoice by invoice summaries.

At this stage the Residents Association wants to write to Pinnacle but was considering whether to do so through a solicitor. A committee member has questioned his solicitor and was told that initial advice would be in the region of £940 plus VAT. The estimated costs to challenge the service charges may outweigh the amount due under the service charge arrears, unless you can get other properties on board who wish to pursue this matter further and contribute towards the overall legal costs. We noted the suggestion of specialist legal advisors, that building insurance may cover the costs, and the advice that we would pursue the matter jointly with a number of residents.

It was suggested that the Association forms a subcommittee to specifically look at this issue. Right to Manage (RTM) was also mentioned as a way to perhaps deal with Pinnacle's hefty fees. This would work best for individual blocks of flats but more research will be needed if more residents show interest.

A resident proposed a meeting with Pinnacle for residents to be able to look at their books and come to a conclusion on the varying service charge fees.

Freehold Debate

Several residents questioned why MP Margaret Hodge has not signed the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) list on the leasehold reform as she is one of the few not to have committed to it. Some residents asked how they could buy their freehold. The association has been informed by BRL that residents of houses wishing to buy their freehold would need to get in touch with BRL directly.

AOB

A resident mentioned fly-tipping at the bottom of Crossness road, right by the entrance to the estate. Councillors should be informed for something to be done.

A resident suggested an FAQ section on the Association's website.

A resident suggested that Pinnacle should inform residents of how to access the Pinnacle Places portal.

A resident announced that 'Coffee with a Copper' was taking place at the Riverside Coffee Lounge on every other Wednesday afternoons.

Meeting closed 9:15pm