

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 22 November 2023
7.30pm via zoom

Attendance: 27

Meeting started: 7.35pm

AGENDA

1. Guest speaker: Sarah McCready, head of placemaking at BRL – review of the estate’s master plan, and Sarah Phillips, head of estates at BRL – update on estate management tender
2. L&Q heating
3. Mice/rat infestation
4. Lighting
5. Dangerous dogs
- 6 Any other business

Minutes and matters arising

None raised.

1. Guest speaker: Sarah McCready, head of placemaking at BRL – review of the estate’s master plan, and Sarah Phillips, head of estates at BRL – update on estate management tender

Sarah M introduced herself

Sarah P introduced herself

Sarah M said there is a big plan for the estate this year. More detailed planning work in certain neighbourhoods and a fundamental review of the master plan, which is now 16 years old. Barking Riverside Limited (BRL) will be promoting a series of engagement events (two events happened so far at Rivergate centre and another at The Wilds) plus an online webinar next week.

Sarah M said that Station Quarters will be a mix of residential properties (1,000 homes) plus commercial properties. The plan is likely to be approved in March and construction will follow in 2025/26. BRL is asking residents to map their journeys around the area so residents' needs are better understood.

Sara Bloch, community partnership lead at BRL, talked about the ideas shared so far for Station Street and other open spaces from the previous engagement sessions. Residents have mentioned more shops, a space for kids to play, a skate park, markets/stalls, more lighting, and replicate the ‘beach/near water’ themes. For retail, many residents mentioned having a pub/bar, gym, themed events, family-friendly restaurants, post office, dry-cleaner/laundrette, butcher, baker, heavy focus on local talent/shops, more green spaces, EV charging for residents.

Sarah M said now work on the master plan will start. This is the key document for creating the estate, that helped seed a lot of the changes that have already happened in the area, but it is 16 years old. BRL will be launching a more fundamental review of the Barking Riverside masterplan in December, working in partnership with the community on this process.

There are also online surveys and Thames Talk polls for residents to engage if they will not be able to attend the engagement sessions. The aim is to evolve and refresh the current masterplan to make sure it is flexible and sustainable, whilst delivering more vitally needed homes for the borough, Sarah M said.

Sara Bloch gave an update of the previous and upcoming planning consultations and events and shared contact info for residents that want to engage further ([online](#) and by [email](#)).

Q&As

Q: What is the status for the health hub?

A: BRL no longer leads the Health Hub project but it is working with Be First to conclude it. There is a funding gap at the moment and direct engagement sessions are being planned.

Q: What input/decision making will the BRL Community Interest Company (CIC) have on these plans?

A: The CIC will have a statutory quality of this project. It has overall responsibility for the management and maintenance of the estate's public realm. The CIC should have a big role and directors should work closely on this project.

Q: Will there be assets or income-generating activities to decrease service charge for residents?

A: It's part of the long-term plan for the estate. There is an acknowledgement that funds are still not self-sufficient so some funding is coming from BRL.

Q: The gap between the closing date for the residents' consultation on 19 January and the planning permission submission on 25 February seems to be too tight. Will there be wiggle room for any other changes meanwhile?

A: Sarah M said that in regard to the dates and having time for feedback, she'll take that back to the planning team and try to get a bit more detail on the submission date. It depends how/if there are very fundamental changes, then the earlier potential changes are known, the better so that BRL can respond to those and think about whether it's appropriate to alter the plans if it's stuff that actually doesn't impact this sub-framework plan.

Q: Parking is still an issue. Is there a chance of being more flexible to provide visitor parking?

A: Sarah M says hopefully the fact that there is now a temporary car park, which wasn't part of the original master plan, shows that BRL does listen to residents. And BRL does try as much as possible to respond to genuine feedback in regard to the master plan. The parking and the electric vehicles' charging points are some of the reasons why the masterplan needs to be revisited. What was right 16 years ago isn't right now, and it's useful having an opportunity to revisit that on these sort of more complex issues. Our proposals are to start in the New Year thematic engagement, specifically on these. Parking is one issue. But there needs to be a balance between managing expectations, being honest with people, but also hopefully demonstrating that BRL does generally want to listen and talk.

Pete Mason, the chair of the residents association, explained that he had raised with Sarah directly that every parking space should have a charge point from now on. And this ought to include the blocks of flats. The ban on new internal combustion engines is only 12 years away. 54% of prospective car buyers in the UK today will consider a battery electric car this year. Sales increased 88% year on year in July. Prices continue to fall and some EVs could be considerably cheaper than petrol cars to purchase by the end of next year, or soon after. They already break even when running and maintenance costs are included.

Estate management tender process

Sarah P provided a short update on the estate management tender process. Residents will soon receive another letter from BRL on this (11 December). The tender has gone out and submissions have been received, with interviews executed and a round of short-listed companies selected. Some clarifying questions have been asked for those participating companies before a decision can be made. In December, residents can access details of the participating companies and can see their submissions.

Around March the successful manager will be announced to start on 1 August 2024, with a healthy mobilisation period.

2. L&Q heating

Pete posted on Facebook a letter he wrote (see [addendum 1](#)) about the heating loss to L&Q (guru failure) over several days. Another big problem related to this is the lack of communication between L&Q Energy and Bellway residents, who don't seem to be on any of the L&Q systems as customers.

Pete said this is a serious systemic issue between Bellway, who are initially the landlord, and the heating company. It might in fact be Bellway's responsibility as the landlord to provide the maintenance of the heating by whatever company provider.

A resident mentioned exactly this – she has been trying to get in touch with L&Q Energy for over a year and they claim she does not exist as a client.

Pete also said that residents on the Fielders Quarter and around other areas of Fielders Crescent have been complaining of very poor provision of heating in some of the flats. Radiators seem to be smaller than standard, especially for the size of some flats, with the duplexes having high ceilings.

The RA has raised these issues with L&Q and is waiting on a response.

3. Mice/rat infestation

A residents and committee member has raised this with L&Q following an infestation in Argent House, on phase one. But it's also an estate-wide problem, right across the estate from east to west, north to south, Pete said. The RA didn't actually raise that with L&Q but has been discussed with Tandem previously, as well as Margaret Hodge.

A resident said that there are also rats near The Wilds and in the bin store rooms around Billington House, as well as the bins on the street.

4. Lighting

Pete said the lighting problem near the station was resolved – Pete had been emailing with Councillor Cameron Geddes – a fuse was blown off.

Another resident mentioned solar panel provision for the new part of the estate. He said this should also be put forward for consideration.

5. Dangerous dogs

Pete said he had written to L&Q complaining about a particular dangerous dog which is owned by a resident in an L&Q property. This particular dog roams around the roads of phase 1 on its own and has hospitalised two people (a resident and a visitor). The dog owner has broken their tenancy agreement with L&Q, and serious stuff has to be done: removal of the dog, removal of the tenant, or whatever it is.

Pete said residents can't continue to be terrorised by a very large dog roaming around the street.

Mark Kyle of L&Q has been contacted about this.

6 Any other business

A resident mentioned that lighting is very dim and some areas of the estate are very dark. She asked if more can be installed.

Venilia said that before Tandem even came on board, the RA approached the then estate manager (Pinnacle Places) about lighting on the estate. Their excuse was that more lighting could disturb the wildlife around the estate. And that's one of the reasons why the lighting is not as bright.

However, motion-activated solar powered lighting should be considered in the new revival of the masterplan, Venilia said.

Next meeting 17 January 2024.

Meeting ended 9.05pm

Addendum 1

Dear Lukman,

My apologies that it has taken so long to respond to your reply to my initial email.

The primary reason for the delay was the need to consult with residents on a way forward, since you entirely disregarded my complaint.

You ask for a response and state that "I will need to understand what you feel has not been addressed and how you would like to see it resolved."

So let me explain what I mean by "disregarded".

My email stated:

"Our proposals to L&Q for Barking Riverside

"Our September 20th Residents Association meeting agreed that L&Q should at the very least double the funding of resident services to this estate, so that issues can be dealt with properly. This was agreed unanimously.

"This must be without additional charge to residents...."

Your response stated:

"You raise valid questions about staffing levels and make a reasonable point that more support may be required as Barking Riverside expands." (my bold)

Did we make such a point? No. That is self-evident. That is what I mean by "disregarded".

On the contrary, we demanded the doubling of staffing such that issues can be dealt with properly. You disregarded this demand. Our email could not have been interpreted in the way you misrepresent it.

The entire rest of the email backed up and gave reasons for this immediate request. You disregarded it.

Irony

The irony is that the email was sent in response to news coverage of the Housing Ombudsman condemning L&Q for disregarding their warnings: England's big social housing landlords ignoring official complaint warnings, (Guardian, 19th September, 2023). Hence the subject of this email thread is "Barking Riverside and the Ombudsman's complaint against L&Q"

Your reply could have been intended to confirm that report. Courageous, yes, if that is the case, but we therefore felt that you are not fit to answer the complaint, and it should be passed to someone else as you may have seen, but we have heard nothing of this.

The second reason for my delay in replying was the failure of the Guru system, which diverted my attention and I along with many other residents now have a complaint with L&Q Energy.

L&Q Plans to Improve

Now, we welcome the plans to put a new housing management system in place, as the one in place is not fit for purpose. You say you hope to begin introducing changes from summer 2024. We also welcome the new complaints operating model, which is an improvement.

I outlined the case of Mrs Pollitt, who had called L&Q Group Housing in Greater Manchester and who was passed on to your contractors. This action removed her from the system, and she died of hyperthermia. I outlined multiple cases where heating had failed on our estate and there was no monitoring of contractors and no development of the case. Repeated call-outs attempted the same fix that had failed before, due to a lack of monitoring of progress. If I understand you correctly, your new system will stop this.

So, looking forward, you ask what are the issues we are concerned about today?

Heating failure - radiators too small

On heating, however, you failed to address this point raised in my email:

On 15 December 2021 we wrote to L&Q: "The Duplexes remain underspecified... survey results from a survey conducted by L&Q... demonstrate that the radiators are too small for the space to be heated."

This remains the case. We believe legal action resolved at least one case, although we have no details of the case, as discussed in my email.

Owners of many duplexes are facing another winter with inadequately heated apartments. In the discussions surrounding my reply to you, it was stated that they had complained but had got nowhere.

Must we bring a class action to force L&Q to abide by its own survey to multiple residences?

Fire hazard: Balconies made of wood composite

We remain concerned that there are blocks, such as Robert Lewis House, Argent House, and Bluebird House, where the balconies are made of wood composite.

In the case of Bluebird House, there is extensive use of wood as shown in the enclosed photo. What are the current plans to remediate this?

Dangerous dog

We have tried to have action taken against the owners of a large dangerous dog in an L&Q property in Lawes Way that gets loose and prowls around the estate. It has bitten off the end of a finger of one resident and bitten another. Police have been involved but have been unable to take action. The owner falsely claims it is very friendly. Even if this was true, this is irrelevant since it has hospitalized a resident, and the law states that if a dog causes fear, which it does, it is a dangerous dog.

If your property managers looked into this properly, they would discover that the neighbours of this property are too frightened of a dog attack to allow their children to play in their own gardens. That one family had to approach the owners of this dog to get agreement to keep him indoors, in order for them to be able to hold a barbeque. This is the very definition of a nuisance neighbour, yet no action has been taken to our knowledge.

Action must be taken.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Pete Mason

Chair

Barking Reach Residents Association