

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 17 January 2024
7.30pm via zoom

Attendance: 24

Meeting started: 7.35pm

AGENDA

1. Guest speaker: Thames Life/UCL, on independent community infrastructure research
2. L&Q failures
3. Dangerous dogs
4. Estate management tender update
- 5 Any other business

Minutes and matters arising

Pete Mason, chair of the Barking Reach Residents Association (BRRA) announced that item 2 is to be discussed first as the speaker is only able to join the meeting at 8pm.

1. Guest speaker: Thames Life/UCL (Pablo Sendra), on independent community infrastructure research

[Pablo Sendra](#) is an architect and urban designer and is an associate professor at The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL. He combines his academic career with professional work through his own urban design practice, Lugadero Ltd, which focuses on facilitating co-design processes with communities.

Pete Mason, the association's chair, introduced Pablo and mentioned Barking Riverside Limited's (BRL) notice of discussion on the estate's master plan that is up for review after its creation 16 years ago.

Pablo said that Thames Life and UCL are collaborating on a research project to co-design a community vision for social infrastructure for Barking Riverside and Thames View. In a workshop yesterday residents were asked to give feedback and vision on matters such as community facilities, green spaces, and the environment. The aim is to create a community-led vision for social infrastructure that can be presented to key stakeholders and work towards improving the neighbourhood.

Matt Scott, CEO of Thames Life, said the workshop had residents of both wards and some of the issues that came through were around green spaces (the shoreline, the nature reserve), roads, parking, but also transparency of decision making and other charges, including service charges.

Matt mentioned the Barking Borough master plan, which is time sensitive because of the elections coming up, but also the BRL master plan.

Pablo said the project is running until May, mainly in the Sue Brambley community hub, so there were more Thames View residents, but an online session could be done, and/or a workshop within Barking Riverside.

2. L&Q failures

Pete said that the discussion around L&Q is broad but mainly about heating, which was also discussed at last month's meeting, when it was also agreed that the Barking Reach Residents Association (BRRA) reach out to L&Q and ask that they double the number of staff dealing with issues on the estate. There has been a number of 'to and fro' emails between Pete and L&Q, including a [2000-word email](#) from Pete to L&Q outlining the details of all the failings, mainly focused on heating.

He originally reached out to the CEO, Fiona Fletcher-Smith after the Guardian exposé in which the government's Housing Ombudsman accused L&Q of ignoring them. The CEO passed the enquiry on to Luke Ahmed, L&Q PRS and Commercial Director.

As the L&Q guru system was down late last year, Pete contacted L&Q Energy, and the outcome of an extensive email exchange was that L&Q was to reimburse £10 to people that could not top up.

However a second issue is that Bellway residents continue to not be on L&Q Energy systems. Pete said that he called today to report an error on behalf of a resident and got through, selecting a call back. He was called back and L&Q Energy said they had the Bellway resident on record, so it's possible they've amended their procedures. However, Pete wants to push for further compensation, due to the denial of services for two years despite being charged.

Venilia Amorim, secretary of the BRRA, suggested a residents meeting with L&Q to discuss the multiple issues including energy failure (heating, hot water, malfunctioning Guru system, Bellway residents not on L&Q system), misallocated electricity meters, service charges, customer service (lack of).

The plan would be to come up with a list of issues/questions that we send to L&Q so they can respond to during the meeting.

A resident from Bishop Apartments mentioned the difficulties around the electricity meters and how they have been wrongly allocated to each flat in his block. He had some contact with Emma Walker from L&Q about it recently as well as Bellway, and on the 13 October Bellway got back to Emma and said everything was fine, there was no problems because Bellway had checked the meters.

Unfortunately that is not true, the resident said, because he asked the energy Ombudsman to investigate the situation and they have found, due to the resident's evidence and Scottish Power's evidence, that on a specific date his electricity meter was registered to a different flat, and his own meter had been registered to yet another flat.

For the last three or four months the resident has been hounded by Scottish Power, has been threatened with collections agencies, has had non-payment fines added to his account, and therefore, possibly markers on his credit score.

The resident also said that one of his neighbours said that someone tried to close his account but the bills being sent by Scottish Power are going to the wrong addresses because the meters are registered to the wrong flats and residents are being wrongly billed as well.

Pete said he would have to raise this issue with the L&Q director. He also said that a suggestion to Emma would be that the only way that this could be solved is if members of Bellway or L&Q come out with the national database list of meters and open up every cupboard and check them against what they are to people's meters.

Another resident, of Billington House and a committee member, question L&Q's caretaker management as many issues with various properties are still outstanding and L&Q is non-responsive to the multiple communications he has sent them. He agreed that a face to face meeting between residents and L&Q should be organised so questions are answered.

3. Dangerous dogs

Pete said that one of the outcomes of his emails to L&Q was a direct response from a newly appointed L&Q member of staff on the dangerous dog issue, Michael Bannocks.

Regarding the issue of the dangerous dog of 13 Lawes Way, Pete mentioned Community Protection Notices (CPNs) – which allow the Council or Police to issue such notices against landlords in respect of the behaviour of their tenants or visitors at their properties.

A CPN could be issued against L&Q – the landlord is responsible for tenants' breaking the rules of their lease.

Pete has emailed Michael Bannocks of L&Q about the specific dog on 13 Lawes Way which roams the streets of the estate on Phase 1 and has already sent two people to hospital as it has attacked a resident and a visitor. We are awaiting a response.

4. Estate management tender update

Venilia informed residents that BRL had communicated with residents through a [letter dated 11 December 2023](#) that the estate management contract was up for tender. The current estate manager for Barking Riverside is Tandem. They've been the manager of the estate for about two years now, or it will be two years when their contract ends at the end of July 2024.

The head of estates at BRL, Sarah Phillips, is in charge of the whole process and she was tasked with reviewing the contract with Tandem.

This new contract could be offered for a term of up to 5 years – which includes the management and maintenance of the public areas such as parks, roads and waterways, but does not include the block management of residential areas – and there is an obligation on BRL to keep all residents at Barking Riverside informed of this process.

Venilia added that Tandem participated in the initial stage of the tender process but are now not part of the next stage because they have decided to withdraw from the tender process. Two companies are now still in the race, having gone through a scrupulous procedure by a panel consisting of board directors of the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company (BRL CIC), local residents and an external consulting company.

The two managing agents through the next stage of the tender process are Encore – which some residents might be familiar with as they manage the Caspian Quarter buildings – and Rendall & Rittner. Details of both companies including prices charged per dwelling on the estate are included in the BRL letter and resident consultation is open until Friday 19 January. Residents can submit comments, ask questions, and request further information from Sarah Phillips at Barking Riverside Limited, Project Office, Project Road, Barking, Essex IG11 0YP or info@barkingriverside.london.

The final decision is made by the BRL CIC, taking into account research, the consultant's advice and residents feedback. The BRL has a majority of resident directors on the board, which is something that the BRRRA has always pushed for.

5 Any other business

A resident has contacted Pete to discuss the lack of phone reception on Phase 2 of the estate. Unfortunately he was not present in the meeting to carry the discussion further, but Venilia mentioned that there has been other residents reporting poor service in all areas of the estate, including internet service. It is unclear, though, how the RA would be able to help at all in this issue.

Another resident mentioned that it would be a good idea to share information about court cases won against PCM and Link Parking when parking fines are issued to vehicles parked in residents' own bays. Many residents feel bullied into paying for these fines when in fact they can legally fight against them.

The next meeting is on 21 February 2024.

Meeting ended 9.00pm