

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 25 January 2023
7.30pm via zoom

Attendance: 28

Meeting started: 7.36pm

The agenda: was agreed.

AGENDA

1. Closer collaboration with Thames Life
2. Health Hub
3. Heating and hot water
4. Service charge
5. Neighbourhood Watch
6. Caspian Quarter remediation update
7. Parking
8. Create London
9. Any other business

Minutes and matters arising

Minutes of previous meeting held in November 2022 were not approved as they were not produced. They will be available online and addressed at the next residents meeting.

1. Closer collaboration with Thames Life

Venilia Amorim, the residents association's (RA) secretary, reported on a conversation she had with Alex Anthony from community group Thames Life (previously known as Thames Ward Community Project) last week, noting that they can help with setting up separate meetings, following up on individual issues such as heating, fly-tipping, rats, safety and so on, considerably helping the Barking Reach Residents Association (BRRA).

Thames Life just needs to be aware to communicate with residents clearly that they are a separate community group to the RA as many residents are getting confused especially since there are meetings being held on the same date/time as the RA residents' meetings.

Chair Pete Mason suggested that since they meet weekly, they could just avoid the one Wednesday when the RA meets and attend our meeting as a group.

2. Health Hub

Pete said that many residents are still complaining that it is very difficult to get a doctor's appointment at the local GP surgery on Bastable Avenue. It was his own experience too.

He reported, for the benefit of new residents at the meeting, that the estate was promised, by the developer Barking Riverside Limited (BRL), a Health Hub which would include a doctor's surgery, gym and swimming pool.

Yet it is 10 years since the first residents moved on to the estate and no GP service has arrived, showing that BRL had broken their agreement with the council on the planning of the estate, which requires health services be provided.

He said that while the Health Hub should be pushed to completion, given the many delays, a temporary GP service based, for instance, in the Rivergate Centre, should be provided as soon as possible and that this RA should campaign for it.

Pete sent an email to Sara Bloch of BRL asking for an update and asking for someone to attend tonight's meeting and outlining in full the nature of residents' concerns (see addendum 1). Subsequently she called Pete this morning stating that Sarah McCready of BRL is leading on the Health Hub project and there is going to be a meeting tomorrow (Thursday 26 January 2023) between the Clinical Commissioning Group (the NHS top management), BRL and BeFirst on the topic.

A contractor has been appointed and they are looking at a temporary GP solution. "The project is getting back on track," said Sara during the call.

Pete said that this should not stop residents and the RA from continuing to campaign on the issue, because otherwise this project seems to continually lose steam.

Pete said the RA and residents need to put together a list of demands to BRL and the council about delivering health services in the area, since the number of people in the ward has most likely doubled in the last 10 years.

Venilia proposed that demanding for a walk-in centre should be the first item on that list and to be treated as a priority while residents wait for the completion of the health hub. This was agreed.

ACTION: RA to set a list of demands regarding health provision on the estate.

3. Heating and hot water

Heating and hot water failures at Argent House have been reported over the past few weeks. Residents have written several emails to L&Q complaining since it has now been two winters with no heating or hot water for at least one resident, with at least five families also having suffered this winter with only temporary fan heaters.

Pete suggested writing another email complaining that this is still a constant issue, pulling together all the reports and reaching out to the tops of L&Q, BRL, etc. Venilia suggested to also reach out to the council, MPs and media. A protest could also be possible since people are still paying a standing service charge but getting no heating/hot water.

This was agreed.

4. Service charge

Pete reported that L&Q said service charges for 36 properties on Rhodes Mansions were miscalculated for the past two years. A refund is due to residents. Pete thanked the tremendous persistence of one RA committee member, who even had to go through the complaints procedure, in order to force L&Q to recognise their error and rectify it.

On Fielders Quarter properties, L&Q has also sent a letter to residents confirming a rebate due to poor estate services that were charged by Pinnacle Places.

Elsewhere on the estate (Caspian Quarter) a resident said she was confused and suspicious of the recent service charge received by Encore.

Venilia suggested to get a group of residents together to look at the service charge comparing what services have had inflated prices, comparing them to previous years so that residents could demand copies of receipts for those items/services with inflated prices. Pete said that since the RA had won recognition from the landlord, their managing agent Encore is obliged to deal directly with the association on this. He also said that it was quite likely that the bulk of the increase was energy costs, which had tripled and insurance costs. This was subsequently confirmed.

Another resident from Phase 2 said that the main problem for residents on service charges is the lack of transparency from managing agents. She said it would be helpful to have a meeting disclosing information on service charges for all residents.

Pete said that for houses it's certainly possible because Tandem is answerable to the Barking Riverside Limited Company Interest Company (BRL CIC), which is getting a majority of residents on the board of

directors. But for residents in blocks of flats it is slightly more difficult. However, leaseholders do have the right to demand clarification of their service charge bills.

Pete also said that another option would be adopting the 'Right to Manage' route, in which leaseholders are certainly more in charge of how things are run for each block of flats, because they appoint their own managing agent. This is not necessarily a cheaper option, but it does give leaseholders more control.

Another resident from Beach/Breacher House has made a comparison from last year's charge and noted that building insurance and electricity having been the two items that have increased the most and essentially accounted for the bulk of the increase in service charge costs, and this would likely apply to Cornelius and Sandy houses.

Venilia said that at [the last meeting](#) held with Margaret Hodge MP at the beginning of December 2022, Margaret was pushing for Adriatic, Caspian Quarter's landlord, to pay for the increasing building insurance charges.

ACTION: RA to request an update from Margaret Hodge on her conversations with Adriatic.

ACTION: RA to assist residents on Sandy/Cornelius blocks to verify service charge bills.

5. Neighbourhood Watch

Venilia gave an update on the Neighbourhood Watch group. A proposal for funds has now been sent to BRL, who have in principal agreed to fund the RA's costs for posters, leaflets, high visibility vests, torches, whistles, and so on.

Venilia said that more volunteers are needed and hopefully the campaigning will help grow numbers. There are presently about 20 volunteers and perhaps five actively participating in patrols almost every week.

Venilia also said there was a 'Coffee with a Copper' session at the Rivergate Centre last week where three police officers attended. A discussion was had about which areas of the estate are more prone to crime. The police are aware of recent complaints about anti-social behaviour at The Wilds car park as well as various unsafe vehicles parked on Handley Page Road. The police said they usually do a weekly patrol in an unmarked vehicle around the area.

The officers said there is a ward meeting that occurs every three months and they promised to inform the RA of dates for the next ones. The last one occurred on 10 January with very little notice and the RA members were unaware of it.

6. Caspian Quarter remediation update

Pete said that remediation works for Caspian Quarter are certainly underway and reports received by the RA's committee note that works are actually ahead of schedule. In fact, Bellway seems to have gone completely off plan with regards to previously agreed dates for each block.

The liaison officer/company continues to issue updates to residents via email, but it seems the liaison officer is no longer on site. The RA has requested an update as to why the officer has stopped attending the site since the beginning of the year.

7. Parking

Venilia said the RA is waiting for an update from BeFirst following the demands posed by the RA at a [meeting held in November 2022](#) with BRL, BeFirst and Councillor Cameron Geddes. An email was sent to the RA this week stating that BeFirst and BRL are "collating a detailed response" which will be sent shortly. Venilia also mentioned the RA conducted a [parking survey](#) last year for Phase 2 residents and is now looking to revive it since many more people have moved to the area. This will collate information about what visitor parking provision would be needed in the area.

8. Create London

Pete said that one of the RA's committee members had been in touch with Create London a few weeks ago. The organisation works with local communities to commission art and architecture that is ambitious, purposeful and useful for local communities.

Create London is interested in the Barking Riverside area to create a local project focused on previous flooding in 1953, which is of historic interest, but also relevant due to concerns about flooding due to global warming, which has shaped the estate in the way it is raised up and cut through with drainage channels to anticipate a possible flooding event affecting the river Thames.

Pete said the next step is to make residents aware of the incoming project (through a letter – see addendum 2) and for Create London staff to come for a walk around the area.

9. Any other business

Venilia noted the next residents meeting is Wednesday 22 February 2023.

Meeting ended 8.46pm

Addendum

Addendum 1

Dear Sara,

Very sorry for short notice but we are discussing the proposed Barking Riverside Health Hub at the Residents Association meeting tonight and, critically, whether a walk-in GP service can be provided at the Rivergate Centre in the meantime.

I wanted to know if you could provide any input to this discussion either in person – or by email before the meeting?

I've added more detail of our thoughts below if you have time to glance through. The link to our meeting tonight is below. The health item will be taken early, between around 7:45 and 8pm and will be no more than 15 minutes.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82371095109?pwd=WHhMQk10TWZaWlIvaWZ5N2lUckR0Zz09>

Meeting ID: 823 7109 5109

Passcode: 794765

Cheers

Pete Mason,

Barking Reach residents Association

More info:-

We will return to this topic at our 25th February Residents Association meeting with more concrete proposals. All welcome. We will be formulating a campaign to try to drive forward both some immediate provision, possibly developing on the initiative of Creative Wellness, with daily sessions and GP provision, and the longer term realisation of the proposed Health Hub.

We are aware that neither BRL nor the council can commission health services per se, but only request them once facilities are available. But we also know that the Section 106 agreement that BRL has with the council for the development of the Barking Riverside estate has a section on the provision of health facilities on the estate, and we believe that BRL have so far failed to honour this provision, notwithstanding future plans, leaving us without a GP service many years after the estate started to be occupied.

The situation is not static but getting worse as more flats are occupied. New blocks of flats are being built and occupied on the Barking Riverside development, along Fielders Crescent, and there is the development being built on Thames Road also, which will further add to the strain.

We understand from Creative Wellness that GP facilities were proposed to be housed at the Rivergate centre but that these were declined by the NHS for funding reasons. However we do not have this information first hand, and we do not accept that, if true, this should be the last word on the subject. On the contrary.

We very much welcome the Creative Wellness initiative, which provides non-prescriptive services at the Rivergate centre for two hours once a week and at the Wilds once a fortnight.

We also welcome the fact that the Thames View health centre is taking steps to improve their phone call reception facilities which are inadequate.

We must reiterate our often-expressed sympathy with the Thames View Health Centre reception staff, who have to deal with the fact that however many people do get through to them, possibly a very small fraction of those calling during the 8am slot to get an appointment, those appointments have gone within the first few minutes and they have nothing to offer the callers, making the job very stressful.

We initiated a meeting in the summer with the Doctor John, chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group for our area, and the council, facilitated by Councillor Cameron Geddes, which resulted – in advance of the meeting – with the council agreeing to fund the deficit that was preventing BRL from building the Health Hub.

[This was the email we sent](#), detailing the difficulties we were having getting appointments. It is shocking. But now, when I asked for an update, councillor Geddes wrote on the 22 January 2023:

“I have asked for an update, but I believe we are struggling to cope in this project as with all our construction projects with the increased and increasing costs.

“Once that’s tackled then we can face up to the difficulties in attracting and retaining staff!”
This is most concerning. It means we must step up the pressure for some temporary provision, in the meantime.

NHS England’s primary care director [states](#) :-

‘I don’t get complaints like, “I contacted my surgery, and no one could see me for two weeks”.
‘What we get are endless, enormous numbers of complaints, which say, “I couldn’t get in touch with my surgery, couldn’t get through on the phone, couldn’t get to speak to anybody, nobody got back to me, I had to keep trying again and again.”’

Further:

‘People who do get through then tell us that they were asked to go somewhere else or call back tomorrow. I don’t think it’s acceptable,’ said Dr Doyle.

[Our experience exactly](#).

Pete

Addendum 2

To whom it may concern,

We write this letter in support of Create London's National Lottery Heritage Fund application, for a 2023 programme of events, community engagement, and new art exploring industrial and environmental heritage, local to Barking and Dagenham.

We have witnessed Create London's work across the Borough in recent years; from their recent celebration of the Becontree Estate with the large-scale Living Together programme, to the events and workshops at the White House on Green Lane. We were very interested to meet with their staff to learn more about their plans for 2023 and the possibilities for direct engagement and collaboration with local communities.

As a Residents Association made up of elected representatives, we are committed to delivering the best for our local communities, and upholding their interests in discussions with organisations like Create London. We see significant opportunity for collaboration across this programme of work - with the potential to connect with the lived experience of local residents, their personal accounts of Barking & Dagenham history, and projects tailor-made to amplify this understanding of our heritage across the community.

In particular, we are interested in marking the anniversary of the devastating flooding event of 1953, to which Create London has drawn our attention, and which is very relevant to this period of global heating and sea level rise, as well as the earlier story of a ship wreck off our coast line, which Create London has discovered and which was unknown to us. To see this local history expressed in art form would be very moving and relevant to the residents we represent.

We welcome Create London's dedication to providing the members of our community with art work to tell their stories – as well as facilitating the work of history experts, archivists, and well-researched artists, so as to present the untold histories of our local industrial heritage, and show how it continues to have impact and relevance today.

We look forward to working alongside Create London, to engage with our local community, and we support the promotion of project outcomes to a significant local audience.

Yours sincerely,
Victoria Man, Committee member,
Pete Mason, Chair,
Barking Reach Residents Association.