

**Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday 20 September 2023**  
**7.30pm via zoom**

**Attendance:** 24

**Meeting started:** 7.35pm

**AGENDA**

1. Healthwatch speaker Ruby Yip
2. Security (Co-op robberies)
3. CCTV
4. BRL Community Interest Company (CIC)
5. Service charge
6. Parking (new visitor car park)
7. Any other business – dangerous dogs and Guardian article about L&Q, perhaps replacing item 3 (CCTV)

**Minutes and matters arising**

Pete has suggested a discussion about a Guardian article on L&Q to be added to the service charge item.

**1. Healthwatch speaker Ruby Yip**

Ruby Yip, assistant at Healthwatch talked about the organisation [Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham](#), which is a local health and social care champion. From the River Roding to Eastbrookend and everywhere in between, they make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear residents' voices and use feedback to improve care.

The group is running a [social prescribing project](#) and there is an [online survey](#) where people can share their views/experiences of using the social prescribing service.

The primary goal of the project is to gain insight into individuals' experiences with social prescribing, particularly in the context of mental health support. Additionally, it aims to identify the challenges people face when accessing social prescribing services.

Ruby said the group had been actively engaging with various local groups and individuals with mental health needs and are actively seeking for more individuals who have benefited from the social prescribing service to share their valuable insights and experiences.

Venilia Amorim, the residents' association secretary, mentioned that Barking Riverside is an isolated estate are with no health provision and asked what Healthwatch can do for residents. Ruby mentioned that when residents call the group they have access to a network of services that can be available to residents, including finding health and medical clinics close to and available for residents.

Venilia also mentioned that some free GP sessions had been organised recently – the last one is on 13 October between 12pm and 6pm at the Thames Community Hub (Sue Bramley Centre) on Bastable Avenue by a group of organisations, including the developer Barking Riverside Limited (BRL), Thames Life and the local GPs and nurses, who volunteered their time.

Pete Mason, the residents' association chair, noted that it's incredibly important for these drop in sessions to continue so funding is needed because the Health Hub on the Barking Riverside estate has been massively delayed in construction.

If you have any questions, please email [rubbyyip@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk](mailto:rubbyyip@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk) or call 07951021625.

**2. Security (Co-op robberies)**

Venilia kicked off the discussion by referring to the persistent robberies that the local Coop on Fielders Crescent has suffered. Local residents and committee member Zahra is the co-chair of the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Ward panel (along with Thames View resident Lucy) which is composed of residents of the whole area ward (Thames View and Riverside), with the local police and the council.

The last ward panel meeting took place on 2 August. At the meeting the police noted that one person was arrested, but many other crimes have been committed after that and it seems to be the same offenders. The police met with the shop managers and were told that staff can't approach shoplifters. It seems a security guard was hired but there has not been much improvement. The police also said they would approach BRL for help.

Venilia said that the committee agreed to write an open letter to Coop management as well as L&Q and Bellway because they have an interest in selling properties in a safe neighbourhood.

Pete noted that in a conversation with Sarah McCreadie, head of placemaking at BRL, before the residents meeting, she said she had spoken to the Coop management who said it's not their model to have a hands-on security officer. The police also told her that the robberies at the local shop are no less frequent than elsewhere. Sarah had replied that while this may be so, it ignores the nature of the robberies, which are brazen, including sweeping shelves of their contents, and that the newly developing community on Barking Riverside, partly a building site, naturally feels a sense of isolation, which is aggravated by these crimes.

A discussion between residents followed, with many highlighting the lack of local police presence and several noting some cases of people illegally gaining access to blocks of flats.

Residents can contact the local Safer Neighbourhood Team police on [Gary.Jones2@met.police.uk](mailto:Gary.Jones2@met.police.uk)

A discussion about CCTV on the estate followed with Pete suggesting to raise with BRL again to add CCTV cameras on areas of relatively high criminal activity, which for now would be near the Coop.

**ACTION: The residents association to write open letter to Coop, BRL, Bellway and L&Q, police and council**

### **3. Guardian article on L&Q**

Pete wanted to raise awareness of a recent [article on the Guardian](#) about L&Q's failures towards their residents, ignoring official complaints and how they were fined by the ombudsman. Pete mentioned several cases on mould, lack of heating and so on that have happened not only nationwide, but also right here at Barking Riverside.

Pete said L&Q had cut down on staff and many were dealing with complaints remotely, which is not ideal. Pete proposed that L&Q double the number of front line staff. This was agreed unanimously. Pete said he would convey his observations and the agreed proposal to L&Q.

### **4. BRL Community Interest Company (CIC)**

Venilia introduced the item on the BRL CIC, which has been in operation since construction of the estate started in 2012. The directors included Matt Carpen, managing director of BRL, Cameron Geddes, local councillor, Darren Rodwell, council leader, and an L&Q director. A reform of the governance structure started in 2020 with a resident group formed with two independent chairs called the Learning Forum. Up to 20 local residents went through 18 months of training and discussions on what best governance the CIC should adopt. It was the consensus that local residents should also form part of the new CIC's board and so those were the recommendations made by the Learning Forum almost two years ago. Myself and one other resident from Phase 2 were appointed 'observers' and for all this time we have been pushing for these changes to happen.

Finally at the beginning of August the new CIC was registered with Companies House, myself and the Phase 2 resident were appointed resident directors and three more local residents have been put forward for appointment, bringing a total of 5 resident directors on the board, in addition to a BRL representative (Matt Carpen), an L&Q representative (Paul Miller), a council representative (Councillor Cameron Geddes) and an independent chair will soon be appointed as well.

The purpose of the CIC is to run the estate, taking charge of contracts for estate management (Tandem holding the contract currently) as well as managing real assets such as the Wilds and the Rivergate Centre. One of the main reasons the RA pushed for a majority of residents on the CIC board was for the estate service charge to be thoroughly scrutinised. It was unfortunate that for the second year Tandem was able to put forward the estate service charge budget without resident directors being in place yet. However, the directors argued with the main board over the summer that this was not acceptable and that the directors' views would need to be taken into account even before incorporation with Companies House. And so they were. The budget put forward by Tandem was rejected at least twice as Tandem was asked to rework the numbers and bring the budgeted increases down, reducing several services while giving priority to the most important ones.

## **5. Service charge**

Venilia continued the discussion clarifying that the Barking Riverside estate service charge is split in two: Phase 1 and Phase 2 – residents only pay for the phase they live on. The unapproved budget presented by Tandem to the BRL CIC board at the end of June showed that for Phase 1 the service with the highest charge was landscaping and for Phase 2 was the Envac system. Figures for the 2023/24 budget included an increase of 22.3% for Phase 1 and of 77.7% for Phase 2, catering mainly for those two services. A revised and approved budget has now been shared with residents on 21 August that shows £661,300 for phase 1 (9% increase from the previous year) and £273,311 for phase 2 (17% increase from the previous year).

Tandem had been running several sessions (bookable and drop in) to answer any questions residents may have with regard to the estate service charge.

Responding to a resident, Venilia said that there is also the issue of recently moved-in residents who do not receive their service charges after up to two years of moving in. This puts the CIC balance sheet in a very vulnerable position. In a meeting with Sarah Phillips of BRL last week, she noted that currently there is a misalignment with when blocks of flats are completed per plot and when people start moving in. For instance, a plot can be made up of four blocks but if only two blocks are completed, residents would usually only be charged when all four blocks are completed. This is something that BRL has been heavily subsidising for now but will need to be aligned sooner rather than later.

Zara, a committee member and local resident, questioned the ownership of solar panels at Caspian Quarter buildings because of the extremely high energy costs. She said she tried to contact Encore on this but things have come to a halt because there is no information on how the solar panels are contracted and managed. Venilia provided some information about a company that owns and maintains the solar panels of the town houses on phase 1.

## **6. Parking (new visitor car park)**

Pete said the new car park near the station was very welcomed by all residents, which shows the constant pressure of some residents that can't use public transport for whatever reason. The residents association has raised with Sarah McCreddie that the car park should be open in the evening and through the night. She mentioned that at the moment it is a security risk because there is no lighting and there have been reports of anti-social behaviour near the area at night time, but that BRL was in agreement with increasing the opening hours.

## **7. Any other business**

Pete raised the issue about dangerous dogs. It is a national issue, but also a local problem. Following a conversation with Sarah McCreadie, she informed Pete that Tandem would be putting up notices about dogs being walked on a lead.

Next meeting is on Wednesday 25 October at 7.30pm.

**Meeting ended 9.01pm**