

Barking Reach Residents Association
Annual General Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 19th September 2018
7:30pm, Rivergate Centre

Attendance: 62

Meeting started 7.40pm

1. Welcome to guests and apologies for absence

Niall Mulholland, executive of the London federation of housing co-ops

Tony Forsyth, executive, Barking and Dagenham Tenants and Residents Federation

Cameron Geddes, Councillors, **apologies** from Bill Turner and Josie Channer, who are expecting their baby this week

Matt Scott and **Jamie Kesten** from the Thames Ward Community Project

Mickey Lincoln chair of the Scrattons Farm tenants and residents association and chair of the Barking Housing Forum, **apologies** from **Allan Thacker**, chair of the Thames View Tenants and residents association

Apologies if there are other visitors I've not mentioned

2. Officers Reports

Chair's Report

Chair Pete Mason started his report by stating that the role of the association is to represent residents for the whole of Reach area in a multitude of issues and conflicts they face. He added that all members of the committee are volunteers and, as we all live here and are proud of the area, the association will want to see the area to continue to grow and prosper.

Pete noted that there had been 640 items of correspondence over the past 12 months between the association and the developer (Barking Riverside Limited), the managing agent (Pinnacle Places), Adriatic, Homeground, lawyers, Margaret Hodge MP, councillors, and other property management companies along with other institutions relevant to the residents living in the Barking Reach area.

Pete noted that it would be impossible to summarise all those, but three main issues stood out for residents for the past year: parking, heating and service charges. On parking, there have been £10,000s worth of parking fines charged to residents, with cars plastered with these tickets. There have been several cases taken to court and residents have been steadily winning. The association has sought professional advice and recommends that all residents fighting a parking fine in court does the same.

After many months of fighting, the landlord agreed to a reviewed plan and planning permission was granted for extra parking spaces. The committee met with BRL last week who had finally apologised to all residents for the inconvenience caused due to the parking restrictions, stating that they have invested £1/4 million into the works being carried out to add extra parking spaces onto the Riverside Estate. Works are to start Monday 24th September.

On heating, approximately 200 flats across four blocks were affected by the lack of heating and hot water last winter. The association held an emergency meeting in December and, with the help of the councillors and our local MP, several decisions led to the removal of energy provider Zing Power. The association is still fighting for some sort of compensation for those residents that have suffered, but also clarification on what happened in terms of systems maintenance and what will be done in the future.

As for service charge, Pete, stated that there are a lot of angry residents because there are claims of duplicate charges, failure to properly service notices, failure to properly set the service charge amount itself and figures not adding up. Essentially, the dialogue between residents and Pinnacle has failed and the association has started a fund that will cover for legal advice on such matters.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Nuno Amorim started his report the association's relationship with the developer. Since Pete was elected chair at the last AGM, the association has been working particularly close with the superior landlord, BRL, on several issues brought forward to the association by residents of the area. The RA has met with BRL almost every month for the past year and has had numerous items of correspondence.

On parking, BRL has consulted with the association on what the best scenario would be, an area that so many residents have been fighting for. BRL has asked the association to engage with residents and ask for their views on how these extra parking spaces would be allocated. BRL has confirmed that the £250,000 to be spent on these extra spaces will be all paid for by the landlord. There will be no costs incurred to residents.

On heating, BRL has engaged with HomeGround and Adriatic, which in turn, led to the termination of Zing Power's energy contract at the beginning of the year, as the association had previously suggested. Nuno has stressed that this was a very sensitive issue leaving hundreds of residents very vulnerable during the coldest months of last winter with no heating or hot water. The association is still pursuing some sort of compensation for those affected and trying to hold Adriatic to account for the management of the heating systems around the blocks of flats it owns within the Riverside estate.

On service charge, possibly one of the issues that most residents now consider to be of utmost importance, Nuno noted that BRL is helping the association to engage with Pinnacle to make sure residents' questions on service charge bills are answered.

From the various meetings that the association has attended with BRL, the landlord has shown keen interest to engage with residents outside of the estate as well. It has organised a picnic this summer, which was by the sandy beach that they set up just by their offices. It has also organised a community questions and answers session on Thursday 27th September at the Rivergate Centre, to which all residents are all welcome to attend.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Venilia Amorim started her report by announcing that the association registered with the council and the Tenants & Residents Federation earlier this year, being eligible to a grant worth £200. This was paid into the association's bank account at the end of June. And for this to happen, the association opened a bank account with Metro Bank in early March.

This was after residents were told at the previous AGM by the exiting chair Yvonne Thomas that an account for the association had already been opened in which a cheque for £500 from L&Q had been deposited. Unfortunately, the current committee, soon after being elected last year, found out that this in fact was not true, there was no association account. But now, there is and we are very transparent about it all.

Venilia stated that since opening the bank account, the RA has had resident donations worth £75 plus the Federation cheque worth £200. The association has incurred some printing costs for the past six months worth £46.40, with additional transaction fees and account maintenance fees worth £21.80. We have a balance worth £206.81.

As for the RA's legal fund for the service charge, there have been donations from roughly 50 residents in the past 5 months, amounting to £1,421.50, minus the Paypal fee worth £56.48. With this legal fund, the association has undertaken to seek legal advice on behalf of Riverside Estate residents to challenge Pinnacle Places and its service charge bills.

The association has also engaged with the Thames Ward Community Project, which has been in place since October last year. This is a Lottery-funded community development programme, worth around £300,000, that aims to transform the face of Thames Ward over the next few years. The project aims to transform the environment and strengthen the community and is led by Matt Scott and Jamie Kesten.

Venilia said the RA has also recently approached Sustrans, a charity that promotes walking and cycling, which has received close to £500,000 from the Greater London Authority and BRL to improve greenspaces in Thames Ward. They are looking for residents with ideas on how to spend that money on improving the area. For instance, residents on Estuary Close have been complaining for years that the road has no lighting, as well as residents on Puffin Close and Shearwater Close, so some of that money could be used to fund lighting in these three streets. The RA is looking to have a speaker on this at the next residents meeting.

3. Niall Mulholland on Right to Manage

Niall started by giving some background information on the London Federation of Housing Coops, stating that it is owned by landlords and tenants, who decide what service charge they pay and which contractors or property management companies should be used. All members are also volunteer and many coops will employ one person in addition to the contractors carrying out maintenance/services to the properties. There are quarterly meeting and an annual general meeting as well for all members and the management committee meets once a month. Niall noted that overall it is a very strong democratic system.

Pete then stated that the RA has already consulted with at least two property management companies for advice on Right To Manage and said that the RA supports the following:

- To replace Pinnacle Places on the Riverside Estate, and any other managing agent residents wish to remove, using Right To Manage legislation, and give residents every assistance in this campaign.
- To stop the Riverside landlord, BRL, from removing the right to majority resident control over the Barking Riverside estate, as set down in the articles of incorporation of the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company.

- To challenge the service charge through the legal funds set up by the association for that purpose.

4. Elections

Officers – the chair announced that no other nominations have been received.

Chair: Pete Mason, nominated by Habib Qazi, seconded by Nuno Amorim. Pete Mason was elected with one opposed.

Secretary: Nuno Amorim, nominated by Pete Mason, seconded by Fran Mitchell, was elected unopposed.

Treasurer: Venilia Amorim, nominated by Pete Mason, seconded by Fran Mitchell, was elected unopposed.

Committee – the chair announced that Habib Qazi, Marta Varesi, Nabila Sherkhan and Fran Mitchell were members of the association's committee.

Auditors – Yasir Imran and Rezwana Narmeen have been nominated as auditors by Pete Mason, seconded by Venilia Amorim.

Meeting ended at 9pm.