

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 21st November 2018

7:30pm, Rivergate Centre

Attendance: 15.

Speakers: Sophie Merriman from Creative BD, Paula Vandergert from UEL

The agenda was agreed.

Minutes and matters arising.

The minutes were agreed.

Matters arising: chair reported on the latest developments in the heating saga which affect Adriatic-owned blocks of flats.

A letter was delivered by a collection agency to residents of John Miller House asking for the sum of £82,292.73, dated 30 October 2018. It states that if there is no single point of contact then all residents are equally responsible for the bill.

The chair stated that his view is that Barking Riverside Limited (BRL) is ultimately responsible as the superior landlord. This was shown, in his view, by the fact that Pinnacle Places, BRL's managing agent, was forced to step in to supply heating and hot water to residents as Christmas approached last year.

Action: The residents association (RA) is actively chasing this up and will be meeting with BRL and Pinnacle in early December to raise this issue.

1. Pinnacle and Service charge

Chair updated residents as to the actions taken following the previous meeting decisions on the administration charges and legal action.

Seven days notice of administration charges of £90 and £180 plus VAT

The RA committee had conveyed the complaints of residents about these charges to Pinnacle as per the newsletter and social media posts.

The charges had been rescinded by Pinnacle as a result of these **complaints but Pinnacle placed conditions on this decision.** These were that the RA would agree to Pinnacle teams visiting residents individually to come to an arrangement on their arrears.

The committee met and agreed that first, Pinnacle should deal with those issues of the service charge which affected large numbers of residents collectively, and which gave rise to the withholding of parts of the service charge due. The RA had been tasked with this job and asked Pinnacle to respect that, prior to these visits.

The chair reported that the committee replied to Pinnacle on the 12th November giving one very prominent example, which involved committee members. This email explains that residents of the Adriatic-owned properties, whether residents of flats or houses, were apparently all served the same budget and summary charges, which detail costs for lifts and door entry systems, cleaning and other block services.

Therefore, fifty or sixty leaseholders in houses owned by Adriatic appear to have been served with service charge budgets and summaries, according to numerous reports from residents going back to 2014, which are wrong. Since these leaseholders do not have lifts or door entry systems, they felt they were being wrongly charged and have withheld portions of their service charge (particularly the balancing charges where lift services and so forth are listed as expenses), while awaiting clarification, which they signally failed to get to their satisfaction. They have asked the RA to intervene and resolve this since they had no success going directly to Pinnacle.

No reply had yet been received from Pinnacle on this query.

Action: This will be brought up when the RA meets Pinnacle and BRL on Monday 3rd December. The RA will also organise to see the service charge accounts.

Legal action

The chair updated the residents on the legal advice received. The solicitor thought that there were two grounds on which to proceed to challenge the service charge for the period in question.

Action: The chair proposed that since negotiations were underway with Pinnacle, that legal action be delayed in the hope that an agreement could be reached, particularly to rescind the balancing charges.

2. Speaker: Sophie Merriman from Creative BD (CBD)

Sophie, admin and projects manager of CBD, talked what the organisation is about: six-year project (2014-2019) for people living, working and socialising in Barking and Dagenham. Its mission is to enable local people to create, commission and curate arts and creative activities in their areas, and to promote the borough as a place where exciting art – of all forms – is made and shown. Sophie mentioned projects the organisation has already organised with local residents, which included Glow, Dagfest and Thamesfest.

At the heart of the programme is the Culture Connector (CC) network, which is an open and growing network of more than 180 local residents who are the decision makers and advocates for CBD. CCs make decisions about which projects and partnerships should be developed and delivered, responding to applications and proposals made to CBD. They also contribute to steering and focus groups, they attend research trips and help to spread the word to other local residents about what is happening within the CBD programme.

Two CCs, Catia Baxter and Alison Cormack, shared their stories on volunteering for CBD as a culture connector.

CBD has also engaged with several other arts organisations and has put in place cheaper options for residents of Barking and Dagenham, for example with the Royal Opera House, there are cheaper tickets to see The Nutcracker. CBD is core funded by the Arts Council England's Creative people and Places Programme and supported by Barking and Dagenham Council.

Sophie also mentioned the REACH fund, which provides funding of up to £500 to support marketing or artists costs for confirmed events taking place in Barking and Dagenham. The aims are to enable promoters of arts events to more effectively market their events to new audiences in the borough and to support community events organisers to strengthen the artistic content of events through help with commissioning artists. In both cases, in addition to the financial support of up to £500 from the REACH fund, the CBD team will provide advice and support with marketing for new audiences and commissioning artists. The deadline for applications is 15th February 2019.

3. Speaker: Paula Vandergert from UEL

Paula is a senior research fellow in the Sustainability Research Institute at the University of East London (UEL). She is currently part of the Horizon 2020-funded programme Connecting Nature and works with local authorities, strategic development organisations and local community groups on adaptive governance methods, supporting sustainable and resilient communities and places. Adaptive governance is a framework for analysing complex social-ecological systems and relations between different scales of governance from community level to formal strategic government.

Paula said she has worked on several local projects with local residents and schools (such as gardening and landscaping) and also to understand the local innovative sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) features and wildlife around the area.

She mentioned that residents should take advantage of community assets through the CIC. There are some challenges that will persist once the development is complete in 15/20 years' time, for instance how to accommodate different voices and community interests, how can residents develop the required management and business skills for a resident-led CIC, and how would the CIC transition from a public/private governance structure to a resident-led structure. Paula said these challenges can be overcome by building resident skills and providing opportunities to co-design and contribute to master planning.

4. Healthwatch report

Marta Varesi, RA's committee member, reported on her meeting with Richard Vann, Healthwatch officer. The organisation helps people find out about local health and social care services. It tries to listen to what people think of health and care services around the borough and helps improve the quality of those services by letting those organisations running those services and the government know what people want from care. Healthwatch also encourages people running health services to involve local people in changes to care. For more info, please see full Healthwatch report.

5. Any Other Business

Matt Scott reported on the meeting of the three residents and tenants associations in the ward

Agreed actions (summary):

1. Evacuation Plan – draft statement to be drafted by Pete / Susie
2. Letter of support regarding Barking Riverside Community Development Community Interest Company (BR CD CIC) – to be drafted by Pete / Matt
3. Engagement with B&D Tenants Fed – everyone to engage proactively
4. Barking Reach & Riverside Residents Association to raise the issue of the £12,000 bid with Barking Riverside Limited (BRL) – Pete / Venilia

Parking: the proposed permit restrictions of 12-2 on the visitor bays was agreed.

Chair is speaking at the Save King George A&E meeting in Ilford Town Hall at 3pm

Meeting closed at 9pm