

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes
Wednesday 28 May 2020
7.30pm, online video conference

Attendance: 29 online

Meeting started: 7.30pm

The agenda was agreed.

Minutes of the previous meetings in February and March were approved. And Items were added to AOB.

Fire enquiry and fire safety

Pete Mason, chair of the residents' association (RA) mentioned the fire inquiry report that the RA had completed and the meeting scheduled for 10 June.

Venilia Amorim, the RA's treasurer, explained who was invited and who had confirmed that would be attending the inquiry meeting. Invitees included superior landlord Barking Riverside Limited (BRL), estate/block managers Pinnacle Places, RMG and Encore, house builders Bellway Homes and Mace group, as well as landlords L&Q, Adriatic and its agent Homeground. The RA also invited local councillors Cameron Geddes, Bill Turner and Josie Channer, in addition to council leader Darren Rodwell. MP Margaret Hodge, the minister for housing, solicitors Edwards Duthie Shamash and various members of the press.

Also invited were the inquiry's commissioners and supporters, which included Dr Jonathan Evans, who is chair of the technical committee for the Metal Cladding and Roofing Manufacturers Association. Dr Evans is an expert witness on flammable cladding who is often quoted in the media on these issues. Another supporter is Suzanne Muna, Unite the Union National Executive Committee member, and Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC) communications officer.

And other supporters include the Bishop of Barking, Pip Salvador-Jones, chief officer of Citizens Advice Barking and Dagenham, and Jennifer Frame from Richmond House Residents Group in Worcester Park, which unfortunately also saw a fire take over their estate in September 2019.

Pete mentioned that almost a year on there is still flammable cladding on the estate's town houses, Samuel Garside House (SGH) and its 'twin' Ernest Websdale House, in addition to other flammable materials in balconies all over the estate. Pete invited all present to also attend the fire inquiry meeting the following week.

Heating

A resident of Pedley House, and member of the RA's committee, has written to Pinnacle Places with regards to a poll completed by Pedley House residents on the block's WhatsApp group. Not every resident is a member of the social media group, but the poll showed that 17 residents have problems with drafts through and under windows and doors, air flowing behind plaster boarding and out of electrical and multimedia sockets as well as panels being blown off.

He believes this to be a significant cause of thermal loss in the winter months in Pedley House. More importantly, he added, free movement of air around the building and behind plaster board leads to concerns that fire could rapidly spread and that fire stops are not in place or adequate. This is a concern for the safety of residents, the committee member added.

Pinnacle had passed on these points to Bellway, but the committee member anticipates that when September comes, these issues will still be unresolved and after a year elapses and defect stage ends, residents will have to liaise with NHBC.

Pete added that these issues are very dangerous especially when winter comes and flats are cold.

Right to Manage (RTM)

Pete said SGH residents were ready to start setting up an RTM company quite soon.

A resident from SGH updated the meeting on its RTM process, by saying that around 48% of leaseholders are in favour, but Southern Housing doesn't seem to be supportive of the process.

Venilia suggested that service charge be discussed under this item.

A resident complained about the service charges for a town house on phase 2, which seemed to be increasing every six months. Pete explained that it is within a resident's legal right to request information on invoices for all costs the managing agent is incurring and in turn charging leaseholders.

Venilia added that there were template letters of such official requests by leaseholders on the RA's website, asking the estate managing agent directly for invoices and breakdowns of estate service charges.

In response to a resident, Pete noted that RTM does not apply to houses on the estate, only blocks of flats. He suggested, however, the alternative of buying the freehold of houses.

CIC learning forum

Pete explained to residents that the BRL Community Interest Company (CIC) was set up around 2012 and highlighted the fact that on its constitution, it states its board of directors should be resident majority.

Venilia explained the importance of a resident-majority board when it came to decision on how to maintain the estate, what repairs to conduct, which contracts to sign up, by directly taking control of contracts with estate managing agents via the CIC. The learning forum is a group of residents that are learning about governance structures of CICs and how to influence the governance structure for the BRL CIC. It is a nine-month process and it starts next month with two independent chairs and 17 local residents as members.

Residents asked how they could join the learning forum and Pete supplied the independent chairs' details.

AOB

Swans: Pete said baby swans in the main pond by the Rivergate Centre should be protected. Foxes kill and eat them. He has proposed a concrete platform to be placed in the middle of the pond. Residents voted in favour of the RA contacting BRL/Pinnacle to see what can be done.

Technology and meeting in the future: it was discussed and agreed that even when lockdown measures ease, the RA will continue to host meetings online for those residents who do not wish to attend a physical meeting.

Criminal activity and anti-social behaviour: residents have seen an increase in anti-social behaviour around the estate. The RA will raise questions with BRL and Pinnacle regarding CCTV and TCS, the security company patrolling the estate.

Next meeting: to be confirmed.

Meeting closed at 9pm.