

**Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday 22 January 2020**  
**7.30pm, Rivergate Centre**

**Attendance:** 24

**Meeting started:** 7.40pm

**The agenda** was agreed.

**Minutes and matters arising:** the minutes from the previous meeting were agreed.

The chair, Pete Mason, introduced James King from Eastside Community Heritage (ECH), who is recording testimonies from residents about the fire at Samuel Garside House (SGH). This is for the residents' association (RA) resident-led inquiry into the fire. Pete suggested that all residents willing to be interviewed about, not just on the experience of the fire at SGH, but also on the lack of communication from landlords and managing agents, should put themselves forward.

### **Heating and hot water**

Several residents from Pedley House and Rhodes Mansions have complaint of lack of heating and excessive charges, including a standing daily charge of £1.05, while heating is not being provided and houses/flats remain cold.

A resident from Pedley House prepared a presentation for residents explaining how the current heating system works on phase 2 of the development. Details of this were released in a 2017 planning report, which sets out the estate's energy strategy with regards to district heating. The resident explained that this system is being used more widely throughout the country for its 'supposedly' efficiency. The system is meant to distribute heat generated in a centralised location through a network of insulated pipes for space and water heating. He explained that this type of system is imbedded in the estate's planning policy at the request of the local council.

The resident also made a price breakdown of how residents are being charged, including the standing charge, and that compared with other service providers, the price actually seems to be fair. However, Pete noted that residents are indeed paying for cold rather than heat, as their properties remain freezing. The resident has agreed to formulate a questionnaire for all residents that have heating problems on phase 2. This will be shared on social media so that the information can be collated and presented to L&Q and/or the superior landlord, BRL.

Following this, Pete moved a **motion on communal heating and hot water supply**, seconded by Phil Crisp of Pedley House, (see Appendix) which applies to all residents on the estate, phase 1 and phase 2, that have had persistent problems with lack of heating. This motion was necessary following the lack of heating for residents of Ernest Websdale House (EWH) who suffered over the Christmas period. And indeed on the day of the residents meeting, heating on EWH has again failed.

**The motion was passed unanimously.**

It was also agreed that the motion is to be shared with the press and that protests outside L&Q premises are arranged.

### **Cladding**

Pete attended a meeting on January 9 organised by the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on combustible cladding and leasehold reform. Pete asked questions and took notes on cladding and leasehold rules. He proposed that, as the speakers to the APPG meeting had indicated a "systemic failure" of government guidance on the building regulations, the government was culpable and should pay for cladding removal.

There is another meeting on February 6 organised by the UK Cladding Action Group (UKCAG) that Pete is also willing to attend on behalf of the RA.

As for updates for the Barking Riverside Estate, the RA is due to meet with the developer BRL next week. Residents were promised updates by early January and nothing has been received yet. With regards to the resident-led housing inquiry, the RA has set the date of **March 4** for an interim meeting with several commissioners to discuss the progress of the inquiry. There is also a meeting set for **June 10**, when a report on the inquiry will be presented to all those accountable for the fire, marking the first anniversary of the tragic incident.

### **Right to Manage**

Pete explained to residents the process of Right to Manage (RTM), recalling that the previous emergency meeting in December attended by Pam Ross of BRL and by 40 residents, had unanimously passed a resolution to take the estate blocks into Right to Manage. Residents in several blocks were already committed to this process for their own blocks due to a failure of services from RMG. Pete proposed bringing several experts for the next few meetings as speakers, including Canonbury, and any recommended by the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership (LKP).

### **CIC**

Venilia Amorim, the RA's treasurer, explained to residents what the BRL's company interest company was about and noted that several residents, including the RA's committee members had applied to be part of the CIC's learning forum. The deadline for applications was January 6, and on the day of the meeting, those that applied, received an email explaining that soon an independent chair would be selected. Once the chair was in place, he/she would select members for the learning forum. The 'learning' process is meant for members to understand the various options of governance that would best suit the CIC, and is expected to last 9-12 months, with members engaging once or twice a week, mostly in the evenings. Some form of remuneration is expected for those participating, but plans are still not clear. The RA will request clarifications and updates from BRL.

### **Pest control, rubbish and water contamination**

Several residents have complained of missed rubbish collections yet again. The RA is reporting these online through the LBBD's website as and when residents get in touch. It was proposed that more bins and 'no littering' signs are put around the estate in a way of educating people and reducing rubbish on the floor. It was also noted an increase in fly-tipping and Venilia mentioned that residents will be charged for Pinnacle's rubbish collections on the service charge. There is a free service for white goods offered by LBBD and a cheap service for other items to be collected. The RA has recommended residents use these services instead to avoid an increase in the service charge.

### **Any Other Business**

Matt Scott from Thames Ward Community Project (TWCP) mentioned that its Growth Summit is scheduled for February 3, where local residents and members of the TWCP steering group will be celebrating their latest achievements. There will be performances from children from Riverside School, and food and drink. It will take place at the Warehouse on Thames Road, starting at 5.30pm.

Venilia also mentioned the public exhibitions by Corporation on London on the three markets (Billingsgate, Smithfields and Spitalfields) will take place all around the borough next week. Details have been shared on social media.

**Meeting closed at 9.05pm**

## Appendix

### District and block heating failures on Barking Riverside

#### This motion was passed unanimously at the Barking Reach Residents Association meeting 22nd January 2020

The communal heating and hot water supply throughout the Riverside estate is a complete disgrace. Furthermore, the cost to residents of the London and Quadrant (L&Q) heating supply is outrageously expensive.

This residents' association notes:

#### Heating and hot water supply

As this meeting convenes 79 flats in Ernest Websdale house are again without heating. At the Christmas just gone, the 79 flats, under RMG management were intermittently without heating from the 22nd to the 28th of December, ruining Xmas.<sup>1</sup>

On the new Verde/Parklands phase 2 of the estate, where the communal heating is under L&Q management, residents' flats are cold. They are told by engineers that the heating system simply is not up to the job. The same applies to Robert Lewis House. Residents are even giving up on the communal heating and using fan heaters instead.

It is common for residents to complain they have \*never\* had heating in their flat. The first resident we interviewed when the Residents Association visited Robert Lewis House told us she had never had heating and had mould in her flat. In the Parklands/Verde, typical temperatures this week are between 15.5° and 16° in flats after the system is left on all day, as shown on the display.

Residents who have fiercely pursued L&Q in Robert Lewis house after suffering fuel poverty and childhood illnesses through the cold and damp, have forced L&Q to reveal pipes that are not lagged, losing significant heat before they even get to the flat. The very significant costs residents are incurring for very little heating suggests similar issues may well affect phase two.

There are still temporary boilers outside two blocks of Adriatic owned flats, a testimony to the failure of the heating system and the months-long previous failure of heating and hot water that ran almost into Christmas day 2017, affecting 200 homes.

#### Cost

The daily standing charge for L&Q heating and hot water has just gone up from £1.05 to £1.10. This is outrageous. At Royal Wharf the standing charge is £0.34. L&Q state that some of the Riverside standing charge costs are placed on the service charge at Royal Wharf instead. For example, we have unlimited callouts, whereas at Royal Wharf, callout costs go on the service charge and if these costs are included, L&Q say the costs are equivalent.

But the experience of residents is that L&Q's "unlimited" means either none or at most one visit from L&Q, whereupon the situation is declared impossible to improve. Follow up calls are ignored, in residents' experience. Costs on a service charge are, in theory, by law transparent, whereas we have yet to see a precise breakdown of costs included in the L&Q standing charge, to make an independent judgement on this argument.

If L&Q can provide transparency of charges and demonstrate an ability to resolve the heating issues, through numerous call outs if necessary, then the current unlimited call outs on a reasonable standing charge would be acceptable.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: RMG have claimed that the heating was restored on xmas day and that the second instance of failure was due to resident vandalism. This is a half truth at best. Heating was not restored to the flats until very late evening on xmas day, and some remained cold. The 'vandalism' was a resident gaining access to the heating plant and opening all the valves. While mistaken, it's clear this is a symptom of a wider problem of failure of management to adequately keep the heating system in good repair in the first place

However, the standing charge is only £30 of bills that often exceed £100. The main problem is the failure to provide heat and the outrageous running costs of paying for cold flats.

### **Lack of support**

Residents have been passed from builder to supplier to engineers and back, without resolution to their issues.

### **We state**

That heating is a basic right and a legal duty of all landlords where residents are tenants.

### **We believe**

That all landlords have a duty to provide decently heated homes for all residents with communal heating.

### **We demand**

1. A moratorium on all heating charges until these issues have been resolved.
2. That L&Q revisits all residents who have complained about their heating and ensure their issues are resolved satisfactory. The excuse that the heating system is not powerful enough is not good enough. Flats become full of mould and children become ill from the damp. It threatens a return to the Rachmanite conditions of the 1930s, fuel poverty and the rapid decay of the housing on the estate.
3. That if the communal heating system is not adequate, then additional communal boilers must be added to boost the supply, as has been done at two blocks owned by Adriatic.
4. That L&Q fully accounts for all cost calculations that go into the price it charges, and matches the standing charge of similar communal systems elsewhere such as that quoted. Communal systems should be cheaper to run than individual homes each running a separate boiler as a result of the economies of scale. Council communal systems always were considerably cheaper.
5. We demand L&Q recognise the unusually high heating and hot water costs and commits to a reduction of these costs.
6. We demand from Adriatic the resolution of the heating failures in their blocks.
- 7.

### **In pursuance of these demands, this residents' association meeting resolves to:**

1. Arrange with Pat Lee, head of L&Q on Barking Riverside, a mass meeting of L&Q residents with L&Q energy on the question of heating and hot water.
2. Organise a series of mass protests outside the sales office on Fielders crescent
3. Organise, in collaboration with estate residents, press publicity over these demands.

**Moved by Pete Mason, Chair**

**Seconded by Phil Crisp, resident of Pedley House and committee member**