

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 19 July 2018

7:30pm, Rivergate Centre

Attendance: 23 residents present.

Agenda

Apologies from Sophie Merriman, Creative Barking and Dagenham. Heating and Ground rent was added to the agenda in place of the speaker.

Minutes of last meeting

Minutes were agreed. No matters arising not covered in items already on the agenda.

Pinnacle and Service charge

Chair opened the discussion. He reminded residents that at our May meeting we agreed to set up a legal fund. It reached over £1000 in two weeks from donations from residents. We contacted a number of solicitors.

Chair reminded meeting that at our last meeting in June, we decided there was no point in further direct correspondence with Pinnacle on this issue and agreed instead to go ahead with legal action using this fund. We have been successful in finding a sympathetic solicitor expert in the field who has agreed to act for us. We have exchanged 17 messages and the solicitor now states that the service charge ought to be challenged. He will now get on with advising us formally and we will get a quote for this.

Chair reported that Pinnacle held a residents meeting. Our treasurer Venilia produced our own minutes of this meeting and got a "thank you" from Pinnacle as they used these minutes almost word for word. Many questions asked on the service charge were unanswered. The planned second meeting was rescheduled to give Pinnacle time to produce a reply to our queries.

Chair asked, Will their meeting on service charge issues be too little too late? He reported that when we met with the landlord, Barking Riverside Limited (BRL), on the 5 July 2017, we told them that the relationship between Pinnacle and the residents had broken down irretrievably, as evidenced by the June residents association meeting. That there should be a divorce. We asked to be involved in the appointment of a new managing agent as per the right of a recognised residents association. We were told this is under discussion but is related to the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company which will be resuscitated by BRL. We asked if we are a recognised residents association but got no reply. We subsequently sent an email to that effect but also got no reply.

The meeting agreed that we must pursue this issue of recognition. The association Secretary stated that since we meet regularly with BRL and they have carried out an extensive planning application to resolve issues we have fought for, we are surely recognised. The chair confirmed that involving the solicitor in pursuit of recognition was within the remit of the original residents association agreement which set up the legal fund.

Ground Rent

Residents from Samuel Garside and Ernest Websdale House stated that HomeGround or its agent, acting on behalf of Adriatic, the landlord of these blocks, had sent out demands for

double the annual fee for ground rent. Residents had complained and got an apology and retraction. Ground rent for the original houses is essentially zero – “peppercorn”.

Right to Manage

Treasurer Venilia opened the discussion on the Right to Manage. At the June meeting the director of Warwick estates, a managing agent, had been the main speaker. We are not endorsing this managing agent but had asked him to enlighten us on our legal rights and the procedure we should adopt.

Venilia reiterated the main points made by the director and reported on the correspondence subsequently entered into.

We have subsequently set up a whatsapp group as per agreement at the June meeting of the Samuel Garside house residents who are pursuing this issue. At current rate of growth it will soon have a majority of residents on it. We will invite Warwick estates back for further discussion at that point.

Residents made the point that all managing agents have their faults. All work within the budget of the service charge costs and charge a management fee. However, Chair made the point that the essential difference with Right to Manage is that residents have control. This residents association has often agreed that public ownership of the common areas (streets, parks etc) meaning that they would be council run, would bring the possibility of greater resources. At least, despite all the cuts to council services, they are run by elected representatives. And the council should campaign for more resources from the government.

However residents do not see public ownership as a realistic prospect in the near future. Chair reported that on the same date as the Pinnacle residents meeting, he had attended the first joint meeting of the three residents associations in our ward, which had discussed this very issue. The meeting agreed that if the council did not stand up for the residents, the three residents associations would stand anti-cuts candidates for the council. The residents of Scrattons Farm are threatened with compulsory purchase of their properties, making their properties currently impossible to sell. Residents of Thames View appear certain to face the same, because the future plans of the expansion of the Riverside appear to go northwards. This meeting had agreed that the current housing on Scrattons Farm and Thames View should be renovated in accordance with residents' wishes rather than being demolished.

In the meantime on this estate, residents want to get more control over their estate through right to manage and gaining control over the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company.

Barking Riverside Community Interest Company (CIC)

A statement on the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company, produced by the residents association committee, was circulated and read out. Chair noted that this statement had been circulated two weeks ago in the newsletter, on our website and posted to the Barking Riverside Facebook group. The statement explains the case for democratic control over the CIC by elected residents. The CIC is supposed to run the estate.

Riverside will be the size of Windsor when complete and yet the landlord wishes to remove the democratic provisions in the CIC that propose that four of the seven directors in the completed project will be elected residents.

It was agreed to amend the statement to make clearer that the CIC will not be involved in the actual building development of the estate but only the running of the estate. To be brought back amended to a future meeting.

Leasehold

A resolution on leasehold was circulated and discussed. It was agreed unanimously as amended:

Resolution on leasehold

Leasehold has been condemned in parliament as “deliberately engineered to exploit would be homeowners for no other purpose than to supplement the profits of an already lucrative industry.” (Justin Madders MP)

This BRRA meeting therefore believes that the existing properties and the expansion of the Barking Riverside development should be on the basis of publicly owned land, freehold and commonhold ownership and good quality council housing at genuinely affordable rents, instead of land privately owned by a monopoly landlord with nothing but leasehold for residents.

Proposed by Pete Mason, Chair

Seconded by Nuno Amorim, Secretary.

Heating

The chair reported that he had spoken that day with Margaret Hodge’s senior case worker, where it was agreed to write to Adriatic, Homeground, Pinnacle and BRL to insist on further information regarding the questions residents were asking, namely, that the cost of the temporary heating and repairs would not be passed on to the residents, that they would get compensation for the loss of heating during the winter months, that residents required clarity on the statement from HomeGround that residents had not been charged since Pinnacle power took over – does this mean that in lieu of compensation, residents will have their heating charges annulled and if so for how long?

Parking

The chair reported on a meeting with BRL 5 July:

BRL reported that the planning permission for 104 extra spaces had not yet been signed off because the council has required information on the trees that will need to be moved.

BRL proposed a further meeting with BRRA very soon to discuss an implementation plan, with respect to the reallocation of bays in particular, which BRL needs to take ownership of.

BRRA reported that while planning permission was pending, Link Parking had decided to plaster the estate with parking tickets, including a disabled vehicle properly parked and a resident who had been given a temporary permit from Pinnacle because Pinnacle was unable to supply him with an updated permit despite him twice taking time off work to do so. This had upset and angered a great many on the estate. The chair asked, would it not be sensible in BRL’s eyes for Link Parking to cease inflaming the estate just at a time when BRL itself was attempting to mend bridges and spend considerable money creating additional parking spaces? Pat Lee, of London and Quadrant, was to look into the issues with Link Parking.

Link Parking is self funding. The parking ticket fines raised on the private parts of the estate by Link Parking are kept entirely by Link Parking themselves.

BRRA asked BRL to instruct Link Parking to cease ticketing residents who are parked in their own bay, as per a resolution of a recent residents' association meeting.

Any Other Business

None

Meeting closed 9:10pm