

Barking Reach Residents Association Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 27th February 2019

7:30pm, Rivergate Centre

Attendance: 27

Speakers: Tamara Khan from Architects Sans Frontiers (ASF); Matt Scott from Thames Ward Community Project (TWCP)

Meeting started 7.40pm.

The agenda was agreed.

Minutes and matters arising: the minutes were agreed.

Matters arising:

On security, residents reported many thefts, violence and attempted break ins.

These included an attack outside the Rivergate centre which the residents' association (RA) raised directly at its last meeting with the landlord Barking Riverside Limited (BRL) and estate managing agent Pinnacle Places. Thefts of cars and bikes and the mugging of a young boy were discussed. One issue is the poor maintenance of the security doors and the shutters on several blocks of flats, which is not sufficient to provide the necessary security.

Action: it was agreed to ask Pinnacle to look at costs of increasing the security on the estate, specifically CCTV and night wardens, so that the RA can put it to residents. Residents mentioned the need for service level agreements, and this will be looked at.

1. Guest speaker: Tamara Khan from ASF

Tamara introduced ASF's role and spoke on the aim of setting up a citizens' charter for the ward.

Treasurer Venilia introduced the topic of a citizens' charter by explaining the aim was to develop perhaps six demands, which would positively put forward the needs of the residents of Thames Ward as it rapidly changes with the development of the Riverside estate across the ward.

ASF together with residents, the RA and the TWCP, proposed that the ward residents be canvassed on what they wanted in the charter. Venilia suggested that if 20 residents (or pairs) involved in the campaign to develop a citizens' charter successfully canvassed 50 people each, that would be 1,000 residents and Matt Scott suggested that this would be a genuine and marvellous engagement of the community and their views which would be difficult to ignore.

In a group exercise, residents filled in forms with suggestions of what to include in the charter, including the need for health services and facilities, shops and security.

Venilia emphasised the need for transparency of decision making. Chair Pete Mason emphasised that the RA had discussed more than once that the Riverside estate had set into its foundation that it would be resident controlled. This is written into the founding documents of the Barking Riverside Community Interest Company. He believed that ought to be defended against any attempt, such as from the new majority shareholder of BRL, London & Quadrant (L&Q), to remove this democracy from the estate. So it ought to be enshrined in the Citizens' Charter.

Action The chair proposed to bring the resolution on the RA Committee's views to the next meeting.

2. Service charge

Chair Pete Mason outlined the current situation regarding the investigation into the service charge. As posted on social media, the RA officers visited Pinnacle's HQ to view the service charge accounts for the

first year, 2014-15. However, the actual invoices were not to hand because they were archived, and it was necessary to write a long letter, (14 February 2019) which was reproduced in the RA's newsletter, listing all the invoices requested for viewing and that they be sent to the RA within 21 days. Pete reported the RA had a reply apologising for the delay and promising that the requested invoices were being obtained and would be sent by 7th March, namely within 21 days. The RA intends to continue to pursue this matter and view subsequent years.

The RA's solicitor, who has been very helpful, is now requesting that before proceeding further fees should be discussed. The chair emphasised that the committee will not irresponsibly plunge the RA into legal action without due diligence and is seeking second opinions from other solicitors before committing to the courts. He outlined two of the three points that have emerged as genuine clear cases, however, Pinnacle have said they have checked with their lawyers and feel confident they have not contravened any laws, and the law is an ass, as they say, so the RA continues to sharpen the residents' case.

In the meantime, later on the agenda is the question of residents block sub-committees so that going forward, residents have discussions in advance before budget setting so that all residents are involved in decision making on the service charge in the future.

In the discussion, it was made clear that managing agents must provide a breakdown on written request within 30 days. A resident said he had requested this 14 months ago and was only contacted when he was chased for payment. He reminded Pinnacle of his request. This illustrates the reason Pinnacle lost its operations on the Adriatic-owned areas of the estate.

Action: The association was charged with clarifying whether house owners in the RMG areas will be getting a second bill after the superior landlord bills went out last week.

3. Heating and hot water

Negotiations are pending on both L&Q and the RMG properties where heating and/or hot water is still a pressing issue.

4. Parking

The chair outlined the developing campaign among residents around the Robert Lewis House and Handley Page Road area. The following points: that the Minter road restrictions, 7pm until 7am, are onerous and need only be in operation during school drop off and collecting, and the part outside Robert Lewis House needs no restrictions. Residents were severely ticketed during Christmas with their visitors parked on Handley Page Road getting parking tickets. There's no reason for double yellow lines on this road.

The RA raised this at the last meeting with BRL and they said they agreed but that Transport for London (TfL) had insisted that a bus lane needs double yellow lines. The RA has written asking that the bus lane be removed apart from at the junction with River Road. Additionally, the roads that service the blocks south of Handley Page Road have lots of room where visitor bays can be created from the shrubbery and have been given double yellow lines, which in some cases are unnecessary. Residents have already begun to form a team that can go round getting the necessary verified signatures on proposals of this nature.

Action: The first thing is to meet up on a weekend day to draw up plans.

A resident explained how her space is rarely available when she returns in the evening as vehicles park in it and she ends up parking off the estate and getting a bus to her flat in Robert Lewis House. Link Parking told her they may be staffed in the evening and that there will be an app to upload photos of the vehicle in your bay and a ticket gets sent to them in the post.

The chair noted that Link Parking gets its money from the tickets and so has no interest in being fair to the community, and that as a result appeals for unfair tickets always fall on deaf ears and residents end up in court. BRL had held an open day to discuss what level of service residents want, such as a professional

service, which would be paid from the service charge instead, but could be out of hours or just evenings etc. The RA must meet with BRL and find out the costings so that they can be involved in the discussions.

5. Block sub-committees

These are essential to residents participation in budget setting. The representatives must be accountable to the block as a whole and report back to block meetings.

A resident pointed out that these committees are essential with Pinnacle as well as RMG and it was noted that Pinnacle had indeed offered this facility of oversight and this must be taken up. Samuel Garside House and Robert Lewis House have WhatsApp groups that can be used to discuss, organise and share this information.

This leaves the question of whether L&Q have facilities to involve residents in their operations and decisions. Venilia pointed out that they had told the RA that they intended to set up a forum but that given the upset at a number of problems with the landlord there, several residents felt it would be better if the RA played a lead role in any such forum.

6. Any other business

Annual general meeting (AGM): the chair proposed that residents discuss moving the AGM back to June from September. There will need to be a change of date in the constitution so this can be looked at next meeting.

Community interviews: Venilia announced a new project undertaken by Eastside Community Heritage within the Thames Ward. The organisation is interviewing local residents who would tell their stories to help influence the future of this fast-developing area. Details have been posted on social media.

Stop the new plan to close King George Accident and emergency, 30 March, meet outside King George hospital at 2pm, march to Ilford Town Hall for 3pm. Speakers include Pete Mason, the chair of the RA.

Date of next meeting has is 20th March 2019.

Meeting closed at 9.15pm.