

Grove End Gardens Residents Association

Minutes of Annual General Meeting 25-Sep-2017 at Arnold House School

Members of the General Committee present were:-

David Burr (DB) – Chair
Maureen Deeley (MD)
Finlay Edridge (FE) – Treasurer
Jacky Erwtman (JE)
Linda Diamond (LD) – Secretary

Invited guests present were:

Gary Medazoumian (GM) – Executive Director, Grove End Housing Limited (GEHL)
Julian Butcher (JB) – Property Manager from Rendall & Rittner

Apologies for absence were received from:

Suja Eltringham (SE), Peter Jenks (PJ), Clare Usher (CU)

DB formally opened the meeting at 19:35 and thanked all for coming. He thanked and introduced the guests: Gary Medazoumian, CEO of GEHL (the freeholder) and also one of the two Maintenance Trustees responsible for the service charge, and Julian Butcher – our property manager from Rendall & Rittner. **DB** also thanked Arnold House School for once again allowing us to use their facilities at no cost. **DB** thanked committee members for all they do and he added that he tended to get all the gratitude as his name is all over everything we do, but GEGRA's committee is very definitely a team and they all deserve your thanks.

1) Chairman's report

DB reported a rather frustrating time since the last AGM. The first half was spent watching the penthouse developer fail to complete the project and the second half has been spent watching GEHL's team fail to pick up the pieces. It is not clear why the risk of the collapse of the penthouse project wasn't flagged to GEGRA by GEHL's supervising surveyor and why there wasn't more redress and contingencies for such a failure.

GEHL planned to pick up the remaining tasks but to date there hasn't been a lot of progress with the exception of the Abbey Road reception project which, barring some snagging, has been completed extremely successfully. GEHL completed this project at their expense following the very long period when the penthouse developer was allowed to take the entrance out of service seemingly without the means to complete the works. It is not understood why GEHL's supervising surveyor allowed this to happen. The freeholder's works have been well received but it is frustrating that snagging continues around two months after the reception was substantially completed. **DB** asked for a show of hands as to whether residents liked the new illuminated sign over the Abbey Road entrance and those present indicated they did, no one raised their hand to say they didn't. **DB** explained that GEHL planned to fit a similar sign over the Grove End Road entrance as it would be more visible after dark.

DB added that the penthouse saga seems to have waylaid all of the other initiatives in the block, and the situation had not changed since his report last year. As a block we continue to have difficulty finding sufficient momentum to get projects started and finished on time. Much that was being planned at last year's AGM is still being planned:

- Completion of penthouse project.
- Pond area remediation along with the low garden retaining wall remediation.
- Completion of the Grove End Road entrance project.

- Resolution of the boundary wall issues.
- Pipework replacement project along with the corridor refurbishments.

We very much hope the coming year will bring:

- 1) increase in the level of meaningful consultation with GEGRA.
- 2) increase in the speed that things get done.
- 3) reduction in the day to day expenses of the block.

DB reported on the pipework replacement project and explained that he had represented GEGRA at all the meetings on this to date. As there continues to be reason to believe that a large project is needed, GEGRA continues to support the collection of the reserve. GEGRA also continue to be supportive that the project is being held up whilst plans are refined, tested and debated. Whilst it makes sense not to push the block's management to embark on a project whilst there isn't a robust plan, we are starting to lose confidence in some advisor's ability to reach a robust plan. **DB** stated we have been asking for cost/benefit analysis for certain ideas for some years and these are still not forthcoming. GEGRA's objectives are to ensure that the project:

- 1) involves the least disruption possible.
- 2) the costs are considered in total (i.e. the communal costs together with the in-flat costs) so that the most efficient proposal in totality is selected.
- 3) There is no abortive spending. i.e. works that are undertaken only to be undertaken again.
- 4) No works begin until a clear plan to success is identified.

DB finished by thanking the various resident volunteers for their efforts in the gardens. The removal of ivy and the re-working of the church-side garden has been nothing short of transformative.

2) Treasurer's report including resolution to approve GEGRA accounts

The Treasurers report was circulated at the meeting. Income was slightly down principally because we are no longer accepting 3 years in advance membership. Our expenditure was also down. We had a surplus for the year of £308 and our reserves were healthy at £6,302.43

A resolution to approve GEGRA accounts was proposed by **FE** and seconded by **DB**. No one voted against and so they were approved.

3) Election for General Committee

Since existing committee members had expressed their wish to stand again and as no new names had yet come forward, there was no election.

DB asked for volunteers to come forward for the committee promising those that volunteered would gain a huge feeling of satisfaction from the work.

The GEGRA AGM was then adjourned for the question and answer session with Julian Butcher representing Rendall & Rittner.

a) Estate Management and Porterage

JB reported sick leave had fallen sharply and that there was a general feeling that porterage standards had improved. The Estate Manager had resigned and there were no plans to recruit another at the moment. He was pleased that Mathew Wilson-Tate had been doing an excellent job as Head Porter.

JR (Flat 270) suggested that we should not give power to one porter only and that we do not need a manager.

SH (Flat 57) asked since we are not using the Abbey Road reception office built for the manager, would it be possible for residents to hire the room for private meetings.

NB (Flat 241) said she had received a letter to vacate her storage locker by Christmas. She needs this space and wanted to know would another locker be made available. **JB** explained that GEHL is taking back some storage lockers to increase the size of the neighbouring flat which they rent out. Suitable locations for new lockers will be considered and there is space near the lift in the garage area which might be suitable.

b) Lifts

Written question: The lifts are always going wrong and they never seem to get any more reliable. What can be done? **JB** answered that Langham have employed a new engineer who seems to understand the new lifts. A report is being prepared currently and a log is being kept of any breakdowns or other matters pertaining to the lifts in general and we are hoping that taken together this will improve matters.

c) Noise disturbance

SH (Flat 57) said that many more children are now living in the block. They are very young and tend to run around on wooden floors in the flats and disturb the flats below. **SH** said he had written letters and complained on many occasions without results. **JB** responded that sound insulation should be fitted as a licence condition but that it was not always possible to establish what had been fitted in the past. Licences include a stipulation that permission for hard flooring will be revoked if there are reasonable complaints. We can also encourage rugs to be used over the wooden floors.

A-BA (Flat 251) complained that some residents make noise well into the night including the use of radios until 2am. **JB** responded that such occurrences should be reported to the porters who will investigate and deal with any issues. He also suggested that residents should also complain directly to their neighbours. **DB** said that he thought noise travelled particularly well in the block and that some residents may well not realise they affect they were having on others. **JB** said that a reminder would be included in the next newsletter regarding noise and that people are being disturbed by some residents playing music late into the night. People should be considerate of other flats and should not play loud music, use washing machines or make other loud noise after 11pm.

d) Outside spaces.

Garden report from **LD** (Chair of GEGRA's garden sub-committee):

LD thanked Janice Lloyd and Matthew, who together had cleared away all the ivy, making an enormous difference to the gardens. **LD** went on to report that:

- Grove End Road front garden – was now looking very good and is attended by Janice constantly who plants seasonal flowers to give more colour.
- Arcade – LD has kept triangle at the entrance up to date with seasonal planting. It looks pretty and deters people using the triangle as a rubbish dump.
- More trees have been planted along the boundary with 20 Abbey Road, beside the garage access road. These are intended to be sufficient to allow the branches to grow together forming a barrier. The border under these trees has now been planted with small shrubs which LD has been told will give a small white flower.
- Abbey Road entrance:
 - Many residents wish to see more colour in this area, and larger planting to provide some privacy as the previous planting had.
 - The planting here is terrible – one tree is dead and as for the railway cuttings shale under the windows this should go. It's purple, messy, looks terrible, GEGRA were not consulted and the first we knew was when it was put there. Where are the old stones? Boxes have now been placed on the shale and two of the boxes (either side of the door have been planted by Matthew) which is a huge improvement. The remaining 4 will be planted over the next few weeks.
 - Matthew is also hoping to spend more time on planting over the next 12 months and bring back all the colour that is missing on the front of Abbey Road.
- Back garden:
 - Still lots of rubble to be removed
 - Lawn is dangerous to walk on. **LD** explained that she had nearly fallen and it needs to be flattened and the turf relayed.
 - Wall shared with Arnold House School still needs rebuilding – The lean was identified in Aug-2016 and it was unclear why work was so delayed. There is a move to cut down the trees to make the work easier but this should not be allowed.
- Pond side garden:
 - This needs a lot of work done to it.
 - GEHL promised they would fit new pathways at their cost as part of the penthouse development. The question now is when will this work be carried out? Is there a commencement date?
 - In the meantime, Matthew had regularly planted some seasonal plants to give colour, so everything is looking very much better and there are fewer complaints from the garden flats about why is their side being neglected.
- Church side garden:
 - Here there is the greatest improvement largely due to Janice clearing away the ivy. This exposed some rather nice stone steps leading up to a flat patch near the church which we are hoping to pave and place a bench for quiet reading.
 - Josephine Le Grice is a keen gardener and has been helping very enthusiastically and has brought plants and she and Matthew have planted the area either side of the steps and this now looks very pretty.

- The plants in the planted area near the dustbins will gradually be moved over to this area.
- Planted area near the dustbins:
 - Over the years has got out of control and looks a mess. It has been decided to move the best plants to other parts of the garden and this patch will then be re-turfed and become a lawn. There will be a smaller patch which will contain a new large magnolia tree and under planting of seasonal plants. More and more people want to sit out on the grass now the garden is looking so nice and grass will be easier to keep.
- Reception areas:
 - From time to time people have donated flowers for the reception area, sometimes when they have guests coming. It would be nice if we could continually have some form of plant or flowers at both receptions. Both entrances are greatly improved when they do have some form of floral decoration. **LD** asked for a show of hands and those present indicated their agreement.

Finally, **LD** explained that any residents who would like to volunteer to help in the garden would be very welcome and they should please give their name to Matthew.

DB thanked **LD** for all her work on improving the gardens and for her report.

Written question: Why has pond area garden been neglected as against the garden on the Church side. **JB** explained that it was very difficult to do any work on this side at present because there is a lot of structural work to be done for the boundary wall and the low retaining walls. The boundary wall needs to be taken down and rebuilt and this is currently expected to cost in the region of £400,000 to do. There is a debate about the trees. We wish the trees to remain to give us privacy, but some feel it's the tree roots which have damaged the wall and it would be cheaper to remove all the trees before rebuilding the wall. Trees cannot be removed without the permission of the council. Because of the huge expense to carry out this work the other parties are not in a hurry to agree to this work. Our side is lower than the other side, so it is the weight of the earth and tree roots on the other side which is pushing the wall over to our side.

JLG (Flat 22) asked why not have a qualified tree surgeon to review all the trees. **LD** commented that a report had been made on all the trees in the gardens and as a result a number of trees had been removed and some more would have to come down. Any tree removed would have a new tree planted in its place but of course this would be a young tree and quite small and not give the shade or privacy given by the more mature trees.

SH (Flat 57) raised concern regarding the layout of the new Abbey Road forecourt and whether the exit is safe to use due to a lack of visibility of the low curb. He suggested putting rubber or a crumple zone round bollard to protect cars. He also asked when will the underground parking be made available on a shared basis in line with the original plan and undertaking? **JB** responded that there were some problems that will hopefully be resolved soon and then there will be 9 spaces for the use of residents. **DB** reminded the meeting that WCC had imposed a planning condition that mandated that the penthouse flats may not be occupied until the shared parking had been made available and therefore the absence of this parking meant that GEHL were in breach of their planning consent as the flats had been occupied.

e) Plumbing (incl. heating, hot and cold water, drainage)

JB stated that more information concerning the pipework replacement project will be circulated over the coming weeks.

f) Refurbishments of common parts

JB explained that they intended to renovate a part of the sixth-floor corridor as a prototype so residents could see what was intended and give their feedback.

g) Rubbish collection and recycling

A-BA (Flat 251) asked if there were facilities for battery recycling. **JB** said not at present but that this would be investigated.

DB stated that in the past rubbish had been collected every day except Christmas. It was now intended to exclude New Year's Day and Boxing Day as well as many people were away and it was expensive to make arrangements for the bank holidays.

JC (Flat 100) felt that the rubbish collection for Boxing Day should be retained as those in residence are likely to have food waste, gift wrapping paper etc. There was a show of hands and consensus that New Year's Day could be cut but Boxing Day retained.

h) Security (incl. CCTV, Entry fobs, Intercom)

JB explained that it was intended to replace the intercom system during the corridor renovation project.

JE (Flat 313) raised concerns about being followed into the block on the Abbey Road side when no porter is present. The sliding doors take a long time to close. Can we speed up door closing?

JLG (Flat 22) reported that some people knock on the door to be let in. CCTV cameras are not good enough for the porter to recognise who is trying to enter on Abbey Road side. Is it possible to have some system whereby the porter can speak to the person trying to gain entry?

i) Service charge accounts

RZ (Flat 180) asked when the penthouse project would be completed and when would the service charge subsidy end? **DB** explained that to GEGRA's view the project was not complete as certain works had not yet been completed as indeed WCC had confirmed that occupation planning conditions had not been discharged. Sir John had written to lessees in Nov-2010 promising compensation by way of a service charge subsidy during the construction phase. Now GEHL seems to have decided unilaterally that the project had been completed even though tasks were outstanding and that they would cease to pay the full subsidy from 31-Mar-2016 and would pay just 25% for a limited time thereafter.

j) Other business

A-BA (Flat 251) Alissa Ben Air asked about the cleaning of the exterior of the windows. **JC (Flat 100)** said that Dekra had promised to clean windows following the penthouse project but this had still not been done.

ND (Flat 285) asked whether the penthouse flats themselves had been completed. **DB** answered that they had been sold but there were outstanding issues.

JE (Flat 313) raised the problem of children riding their scooters and bicycles in the corridors. **JB** agreed that the next newsletter should include a note stating that children were forbidden to ride their bikes or scooters in the corridors.

Recommended GEGRA AGM

4) Other Association business

None.

DB closed the meeting at 21:30.