

# Grove End Gardens Residents Association

## Minutes of Annual General Meeting 17-Sep-2018 at Arnold House School

Members of the General Committee present were:-

David Burr (DB) – Chair  
Maureen Deeley (MD)  
Finlay Edridge (FE) – Vice Chair  
Linda Diamond (LD) – Secretary  
Piero Falcucci (PF) – Treasurer

Invited guests present were:

Gary Medazoumian (GM) – CEO, Grove End Housing Limited (GEHL) and  
Maintenance Fund Trustee  
Julian Butcher (JB) – Property Manager from Rendall & Rittner

Apologies:

Matthew Wilson-Tate (MWT) – Building Manager, Grove End Gardens

**DB** welcomed members to the AGM, saying he was very pleased to see such a good turnout. DB went on to explain the purpose of the AGM was to update everyone on what's going on at the block and with the residents association and to give everyone an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.

**DB** went on to welcome 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, for giving up their evenings and for all that they do for the block. Thanks were also extended to Arnold House, who had once again allowed us to use their facilities at no charge.

**SH (Flat 100)** thanked **DB** and GEGRA's committee for all their hard work on behalf of GEG and this was supported by those present.

### **1) Chairman's report**

The Chairman started his report by thanking the GEGRA committee for all that they do and in particular:

- Fin for transitioning from the role of Treasurer to Vice Chair
- Piero for taking on the role of Treasurer
- And Linda for being prepared to continue in the role of Secretary

The following updates were also given:

- Membership – GEGRA have maintained membership numbers above the level necessary to automatically retain legal recognition as the tenants' association of Grove End Gardens. This requires a major effort as whilst we enjoy the support of residents they don't always get around to renewing their membership that quickly. Members were asked to renew promptly each April as otherwise the association could be left vulnerable so that the freeholder choosing to withdraw recognition. Members were requested to consider setting up a standing order to save the committee chasing membership renewals, instead of spending time on block issues.
- Communications – GEGRA have transitioned our email newsletters to the Mailchimp system. This has helped us comply with GDPR requirements and made it much easier to keep in touch with people. Anyone wanting to be added to our mailing list should let us know.

- Gardens – We are delighted to see the improvements to the gardens, particularly to the church side gardens. Particular credit should go to MWT, to Linda who heads GEGRA’s garden committee and to volunteer residents, Janice and Josie for their huge efforts and commitment.

As a committee we continue to try to scrutinise management of the block and the maintenance fund.

Whilst we don’t want to encourage projects to be started prematurely, we continue to be concerned at how long it takes to progress matters at the block. It doesn’t seem to matter whether it be service charge projects or the completion of the freeholder’s own projects. It is hard to see why we have to wait so long and still not reach completion.

These delays get in the way of residents enjoying the homes they have paid for. We also fear that these delays may result in far larger management and consultant costs. It can cost more to manage something slowly than quickly and certainly at GEGRA we recognise the strain of chasing for things for such long periods of time. To illustrate the point, **DB** gave three examples:

- a. We still chase the delivery of penthouse commitments made in 2009 and 2010. Development began in Jan-2014 and was scheduled for completion in Jul-2015. GEHL engaged their own surveyor to supervise the project throughout and then GEHL took over the site in Mar-2017. Despite our repeated requests we are yet to see a list of all of the outstanding items. We would like transparency on the situation. We understand there remain significant issues including making the roof watertight, some fire safety works, decoration and various other matters including some that impact communal amenities.
- b. The freeholder began their Grove End Road forecourt and reception renovation in Nov-2013 and although works were scheduled to finish no later than Mar-2014, areas were not handed back until Jun and Jul-2014. We were very grateful that GEHL chose to pay for this project but it is regrettable that more than four years later we are still waiting to hear when and how all the snagging items are to be addressed.
- c. Management became aware of inadequacies in the fire-worthiness of doors at least as early as May-2014. More than four years later the issues haven’t been rectified, we haven’t built up a reserve and residents haven’t received guidance on how much the remediation will cost them and when they will need to find the monies. We worry that service charge money and too much time may have been spent investigating grand plans which were beyond the affordability of residents. We were concerned to learn as late as last Friday that management plan a large increase in the October service charge demands and we feel they were in a position to give lessees far more notice. It will be counterproductive to send out demands that lessees cannot pay as it will put everyone in conflict. We are also concerned that the front door proposals go beyond what is necessary and will therefore cost more than strictly necessary. We haven’t received positive comments from residents regarding the enlarged front door side panels and we believe they are going to add further to the already unaffordable cost.

On the subject of the new-ish cross corridor doors, which are apparently not firesafe and therefore need to be replaced, we don’t feel it should have been left to GEGRA to suggest the maintenance trustee seeks reimbursement from those that advised on the original replacement. We are yet to hear whether the

trustee intends to pursue reimbursement but we feel that lessees should not be paying twice to replace the same doors.

**DB** asked for more clarity in project initiation and progress reporting, as we believe this would improve efficiency and stakeholders would have a better understanding of how they will be impacted. GEGRA are here to help with this.

Finally, GEGRA would like to see a consolidated, transparent task list created so we can have a better understanding of what is to be done when. Even if it isn't possible to complete projects more quickly, we would at least benefit from more quickly reaching a shared understanding of what is to be done so fewer open items remain in discussion soaking up management and GEGRA time.

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

**FE**, outgoing Treasurer, gave his report. Membership revenue was up and he urged everyone to set up standing orders for their subscriptions each 1-Apr as it is by far the most efficient manner to support GEGRA. Our expenditure was less, and we have a healthy balance of £6,759.10 at the year end. For the current year, revenue is even stronger and to aid GEGRA's work we have invested in a modest laptop.

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.

## **4) Update regarding the proposed penthouse development**

**DB** gave the following update to the meeting:

GEHL submitted a planning application on 1-Aug to build two further penthouse flats on the roof. Their plans include reallocating two shared underground parking spaces to the new flats and replacing the two Grove End Road lifts.

At this stage there is no indication when development may begin, but gaining planning consent and organising the construction will take time.

GEGRA respect GEHL's rights to exploit their land and we are also realistic that WCC will be looking to permit the building of new flats once they consider the proposals acceptable. Therefore, our main objective has been to try to ensure:

- the development doesn't impact amenities permanently
- that we are totally clear on what changes there will be so there isn't a repeat of the surprises we had with the first development
- that quality of life during the development is protected as far as possible
- lessees are compensated for any reduction in amenities during the development

Given our modest aims it has been surprising how much of a struggle it has been to make progress with GEHL's team. **DB** felt we are made to push far too hard to have our reasonable questions and concerns addressed substantively.

**DB** further reported that we were surprised that:

- GEHL didn't take the time to consult with GEGRA meaningfully before submitting their application.
- GEHL submitted their application with some misleading claims and we are pleased to see they have since accepted these concerns and corrected for them.
- GEHL continue to say in their application that the first penthouse development is largely completed. It is difficult to reconcile that claim with what we can see and what we understand.
- GEHL's application includes a computer-generated visualisation of the new penthouses behind full leaf trees that obscure the extension. We are yet to see a picture of what it will look like from the street.
- GEHL did not undertake the research needed to be able to guarantee certain amenities won't be affected, including as an example the current functionality of the Grove End Road lifts. They have been expecting us to accept that they won't be able to commit that the lifts' existing functionality will be maintained until sometime later, possibly after planning consent has been obtained. Our view has been that as they have initiated these proposals and chosen the timing, it was their responsibility to have completed any research needed to be able to reassure residents. We really don't want to have to arrange a campaign of planning objections and so we hope we will be able to close off the remaining open issues.
- Currently GEHL are resisting our requests that they commit to compensating lessees for temporary loss of amenities during the development. This is a strange position for them to take. This development would be the freeholder's private commercial project and is only possible if they take certain amenities away from lessees' during the works. This goes beyond simple disturbance; actual amenities will be unusable during the project. Why should the freeholder expect lessees to suffer a loss without appropriate compensation?

**Written questions:**

A number of residents had written to request that there not be another penthouse development. Comments included that the last project wasn't finished yet and it was time we had a long rest. One resident felt that there were too many problems at the block.

**MJ (Flat 701)** asked for clarification on what amenities would be affected during the works. **DB** listed those that were clear from the planning documents, namely:

- Lift 3 and Lift 4 will each be out of service for an undisclosed period of time. This is likely to be for quite some months as during the last development outages were promised to be 3 months but, in some cases, took multiples of this.
- Parts of the GER forecourt. The draft documents indicate that the half of the forecourt nearest the synagogue will be off-limits, with consequential loss of parking and pedestrian access.
- The loading bay/recycle bin area.
- Probably interruptions to the TV service.

**DB** didn't know what other amenities may be affected as GEHL hadn't given more details of their plans and what had been submitted to WCC was just a draft outline approach. **MJ (Flat 701)** asked whether there was not an obligation on GEHL to state clearly what amenities would be affected and how. **DB** explained that he thought that GEHL were intending to meet the planning requirements in their submission document

and these didn't require the details **MJ** was seeking. **DB** stated that GEGRA intended to push for further information in due course and had already submitted a set of mitigation proposals to GEHL, but this could only cover those issues which GEGRA were aware of. GEGRA intend to continue to appeal to GEHL to understand the need to respect lessees' rights to amenities and that these cannot be taken away without explanation, mitigation and compensation.

**SH (Flat 100)** asked why GEHL felt they didn't need to compensate lessees for the loss of amenities.

**RA (Flat 315)** explained that ever since the first penthouse development was built they had had water pressure issues in their flat. This had been addressed by the freeholder fitting a water pump but this takes up much needed cupboard space and when it operates it's noisy. They are also disturbed by the noise of the pump fitted to resolve the same issue affecting their neighbour. The pumps do not solve the problem entirely and when there is a build-up of air plumbers need to release it. **DB** explained that the first penthouse development was built at two levels. Four of the flats were built above a service void which houses communal pipes but flats C and F were built lower, and to achieve this, various communal pipes were re-routed. **DB** said that he had been told by management that all plumbing issues caused by this had been resolved. **JB** explained that had been what he was told and apologised if that was not the case and said he would look into it.

*Following the meeting **JB** advised GEGRA that he believes the plumbing issues affecting this area either pre-dated the first penthouse development or had occurred not as a result of the penthouses but as a result of renovation work undertaken by the residents.*

**DJ (Flat 705)** asked whether with the second penthouse development we will see a repeat of the ongoing lift reliability issues caused by the first penthouse development. **JB** responded that for the second penthouse development R&R have insisted that GEHL prepare the lift specification rather than leave it to the developer.

**ND (Flat 285)** asked where the new penthouse flats were to be built. **DB** explained that the new development would begin from the end of the first development and extend towards, but not quite reach the Grove End Road façade.

**LM (Flat 4)** raised parking concerns. As two communal underground spaces were being reallocated to become dedicated to the two new flats, can GEHL agree not to allow these flats to use the GER forecourt spaces. **DB** confirmed that GEHL had agreed to this.

**RA (Flat 315)** complained that scaffolding was still up from the first penthouse development and that it was unattractive to look out onto. Others at the meeting agreed. **RA** asked when the scaffolding would be removed. **DB** stated that GEGRA had been complaining about this throughout as it is unsightly and for those that have flats that look back onto the block it spoils the calm one might expect when looking out of your window. No date was given.

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

**a) Estate Management and Portage**

**Written question:** Porters are not as helpful as they used to be four years ago. It feels like they are discouraged from helping residents in their spare time. They used to help changing fuses and now they say they are not allowed. Can you say if there is a policy? **JB** explained that Porters are not allowed to do electrical work because of health and safety reasons and they are not insured. However, if they wish to help residents with other issues in their spare time then they just need to request consent from the Building Manager. No such requests have been received in recent months.

The overwhelming mood of the meeting was that the porters did a very good job and it was appreciated that MWT was very visible in his Abbey Road reception office.

**Written question:** Could porters wear name badges? Not many people at the meeting felt this was necessary and residents were urged to ask porters their names if they wished.

**b) Lifts**

**Written question:** The new lifts are very unreliable and this particularly affects the Abbey Road reception. They have been a problem since they were put in. What can be done about this?

**JB** replied the lifts are from Portugal and it often takes time for spare parts to come to fix the lifts. Lift consultants have been appointed to advise on what to do.

**NB (Flat 64)** asked if the contractor was meeting the quality obligations in their contract. **JB** felt they were and were paid a flat rate and so were not profiting from the multiple call-outs. **JB** felt one issue was they don't keep spare parts which have to come from Portugal.

**MD (Flat 125)** suggested we may need to change our lift contractors with engineers able to deal properly with our lifts so once repaired they continued to work. On one occasion when the engineers had just got into their van to depart the 'repaired' lift had broken down again.

**RZ (Flat 180)** said the notice on the new pond lift explaining that the emergency phone is out of order had been there for well over a year.

**MJ (Flat 701)** stated that his impression is that the new lifts are of an extremely low quality and cause leaseholders a great deal of trouble. Some of their friends use wheelchairs and are unable to visit when the lifts to the seventh floor are not working. The lifts have been an ongoing issue for the two and a half years since the penthouses have been occupied. **DB** explained that unfortunately GEHL had not specified the lifts in the development contract and so the developer had used the lifts they wished. **DB** feels that the evident reliability issues had been allowed to go on for far too long.

The meeting were unanimous in their feelings about the bad state of the new lifts. It was said that as it had not been possible to resolve the issues in over two years it was surely time to replace the lifts with new reliable lifts that were fit for purpose. **JB** committed to producing a lift action plan within one month.

### **c) Noise disturbance**

**JL (Flat 153)** complained about the noise from flats that had been permitted to fit hard floors. **JB** explained that hard floors were only permitted if a licence is obtained and noise insulation installed. Licences require that the floor be removed if there is excessive noise. Anyone suffering from noise should report this to the porters in the first instance.

**PW (Flat 128)** is badly affected by noise from children running in the flat above on a hard floor and there is also a bad smell of cannabis reaching her flat via the communal ventilation system. **JB** stated that she should report the issues to the porters or Building Manager who will investigate.

### **d) Outside spaces**

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

Back garden:

Has proved a great success especially at weekends during the hot weather. The new lighting does a good job without being too intrusive. Unfortunately, generally the appearance of the garden has deteriorated a little:

1. The grass lawn is very uneven and needs to be removed, the ground flattened, and a new lawn laid. MWT has advised that the gardeners will treat the lawn this autumn, levelling it off and general maintenance and it will be complete by Spring.
2. The hedge has several dead bushes which need to be replaced and this work will be carried out when we start the works on the wall.
3. The flower bed bordering Graces Mews is not good. It has some flowering plants but needs some large bushes to be planted along the perimeter which will give colour and interest throughout the year ie flowers, berries and leaves changing colour. MWT is in talks with Greenmantle about this area and what we can do now to create more impact next year.

Grove End Road forecourt:

The front flower beds bordering the pavement have been replanted and look very nice and passers-by have been seen taking photographs. We have also fitted irrigation pipes to make watering easier during hot weather. We must thank Janice for all her hard work making this something special.

Abbey Road forecourt:

In contrast the Abbey Road side looks very dull at the moment, but I have been informed that the green plants will have white flowers eventually which will give off a nice perfume. The planted boxes either side of the actual entrance look wonderful and through careful watering during the hot weather are still looking good.

Church-side garden:

The dead trees have been removed and the tree roots are to be lifted out. We have had to get new people in to carry out this task which the previous company

unfortunately failed to do. It is hoped that this work will be carried out in the next few weeks. This garden used to be covered in ivy but once Janice got to work removing all the ivy there has been a complete transformation and she has been busy planting under the trees bringing in splashes of colour to the woodland part of the garden. As a result of the ivy being removed a flight of stone steps leading up a slope was discovered. This part of the garden has been transformed by Josephine, who has done a wonderful job. The plants she planted earlier in the year have now come through and started to flower and it looks wonderful. The tree at the top of the steps was rotten and has now been chopped down. The wood has not been wasted but has been cut into different lengths to form a 'table and 5 chairs'. Josephine unfortunately is moving out but we do thank her for all her hard work which is greatly appreciated.

Further along in the church side garden on the semi-circular terrace – the garden furniture is on its last legs and we hope that new furniture can be put into next year's budget. We also feel that this would be an ideal spot for a water feature as it is rather shady and does not get much sun, so plants do not do so well here.

Pond-side garden:

This needs a lot of attention, but nothing has been done pending resolution of the boundary wall issues.

Volunteering:

If anyone would like to get involved please do get in touch. Even if you are just renting your flat for a short period of time your input would be greatly welcomed.

Anyone with suggestions on how we can improve the gardens should please be in touch with GEGRA or MWT.

**Written question:** The church garden has improved so much and the main garden is much worse than it used to be. **LD** re-iterated that this was pending the boundary wall repairs.

**Written question:** At the Abbey Road forecourt, people seem to be driving in and out the wrong way. Can clear 'In' and 'Out' signs be added to the pillars? Could these be illuminated? **JB** said he will investigate.

**Written question:** It can be difficult to turn into and out of the forecourt due to cars parked on Abbey Road. Could WCC be asked to paint double yellow lines adjacent to the entrance/exit? **JB** said he thought residents may wish to park there. **DB** said that if people wished they could write to WCC.

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

**AH (Flat 170)** reported that her flat had been flooded by a neighbour's flat four months ago and she was still waiting for a response from the insurance company. **DB** explained that his flat had been damaged very badly by the same flood and he was finding the insurance company extremely difficult and the managing agents didn't seem to be involved. **JB** promised to look into the issues.

#### **f) Refurbishments of common parts**

**JB** explained that the plans to refurbish the corridors had been scaled back to make them more affordable. The new project focusses mainly on addressing the fire-safety

needs as a notice has been serviced by the fire department that our fire safety measures are not up to present day standards.

**JB** went on to say that whilst corrections had been made and 90% of the tasks have been dealt with (i.e. emergency lighting, alarms) all the doors are still to be replaced as they fall far below present standards. The plan is to replace all doors including riser doors, service doors, cross-corridor doors and flats' front doors, to ensure they meet current fire protection standards. Also, a basic refurbishment will be undertaken, but this will not involve new carpets or lowered ceilings. The plan is to start the works in Mar-2019.

When asked what this would cost **JB** stated that the cost would be in the region of £3.5m and would result in a 40% increase in the service charge. Following various questions from the floor there wasn't a clear answer on how long the increase would be necessary. Also, it became clear that replacing front doors would not be funded from the service charge collection and lessees would need to spend approximately £3,000 to pay for these. It also became clear that the management intended to collect the service charge increase with the October demands and those present felt this gave far too little notice. Those present felt the sums of money were unaffordable, and the notice too short.

There were various concerns and questions from the floor:

**DB** felt that a front door shouldn't cost £3,000 and that he had replaced his for around £1,000 some years ago including two Banham locks and had been told it met fire standards. **MB (Flat 293)** agreed and said he had fitted a fire door with a Banham lock at another property recently for £1,100.

**JB** commented it depended what quality one wanted.

**NB (Flat 64)** said we needed to reduce the cost of the fire door. He felt it needed to comply with regulations but didn't need to be 'penthouse' standard.

Those present had been unaware of the two prototype front door designs that had been fitted to Flats 113 and 114 as this work had not been publicised. **DB** explained that one had been fitted with a wider side-panel and the other with a traditional symmetrical door frame. **DB** said that the side panel hadn't been supported in residents' feedback to the sixth-floor prototype and that we certainly shouldn't support it if it adds to the expense.

**AG (Flat 71)** proposed that money accrued into the plumbing project reserve be used towards the fire safety works to ease the cost. **DB** explained that this would leave us without a pipework replacement reserve and so what would we do when those works were required?

**FE (Flat 255)** asked when the cross-corridor doors were last replaced. He complained we are having to pay for them to be replaced twice and we should be compensated if the recently replaced doors were now found to be not fit for purpose. **RZ (Flat 180)** asked were the new cross-corridor doors not certified. **DB** explained that GEGRA had asked the maintenance trustee about the previous new cross-corridor doors and were awaiting a response.

**PF (Flat 44)** asked how the building is fully insured if the doors are not adequate. **JB** answered that the insurance is predicated on the fact that the inadequacy of the doors has been declared to the insurers.

**SW (Flat 220)** said it seemed that we were not only going to have to put up with a loss of amenities due to the penthouse development, but also a substantial increase in service charges.

**GF (Flat 215)** said it seemed there was utter confusion about the proposals and that it needs to be explained in writing. She also felt that accruals to the pipework reserve should be suspended whilst residents are paying for the corridor works. **JB** stated that collection towards the plumbing reserve would be suspended whilst the fire strategy works were undertaken.

**JA (Flat 315)** said she appreciated her views would be controversial but she felt the common parts were lagging behind other blocks. The view of the meeting was that works needed to be affordable and that the proposals were not.

**JR (Flat 270)** said she had been advised that intumescent strips could be fitted around doors to act as a safeguard for far less money.

**JB** said that he would look into how the pain of the service charge increase could be eased.

#### **g) Rubbish collection and recycling**

**JR (Flat 270)** said that the bins are left out on the Abbey Road forecourt without lids and this results in mess and smells.

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

**Written question:** The intercom at Abbey Road is unreliable and this makes it difficult for visitors to enter, particularly as there is rarely a porter in attendance. What can be done about this?

Some residents complained that the push to open button for the garden gate at the west side of the Grove End Road forecourt doesn't give enough time to get to the gate to open it.

#### **i) Service charge accounts**

It was reiterated that more information was needed in writing to explain the money that was needed, when and for what.

#### **j) Other business**

**Written question:** The TV system has become increasingly unreliable. What can be done about this? **JB** said that there had been a problem since Sky Q but they were looking to upgrade the system.

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*Recommended GEGRA AGM*

#### **5) Other Association business**

**ND (Flat 285)** asked if GEGRA could provide written circulars to those not using email. **DB** said that significant circulars were put through all doors.

**DB** closed the meeting at 22:00.