

Chelsea Bridge Wharf Residents' Association (CBWRA) Minutes – May 2021

Attendees

Chairperson: Stephen Thompson (ST)
Treasurer: Charlie Garton-Jones (CGJ)
Company Secretary: Catherine Thomé (CT)

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| Alexander Minakov | (AM) | Building representative for Oswald |
| Jean Dornhofer | (JD) | Community liaison |
| Jovdat Guliyev | (JG) | Building representative for Oswald |
| Kirt Bains | (KB) | Building rep for Horace |
| Louis Kendall | (LK) | Building representative for Warwick |
| Mike O'Driscoll | (MOD) | Building representative for Warwick and research |
| Patrick Savage | (PS) | Building representative for Centurion |
| Rui Ramalho | (RR) | Building Representative for Howard |
| Susan de Laszlo | (SDL) | Building representative for Howard |
| Toby Spoerer | (TS) | Building representative for Lanson and technology |
| Vasundhara Talwar | (VT) | Building representative for Warwick |

Ciara Callan (Warwick) - observer

Apologies:

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| Natalia Nyudyurbegova | (NN) | Technology |
| Hasher Marouf | (HM) | Building representative for Oswald |
| Qin Xie | (QX) | Building representative for Burnelli |

ST welcomed new Committee members to the meeting and after a round of introductions, proceeded with item one on the agenda, the R&R service charge, and reminded committee members that residents had shared concerns over a certain lack of clarity in the communications that we receive that set out how our service charge is calculated, what it is and also the underlying accounts information. ST said he and MOD had had a meeting with Richard Daver, the R&R MD, and his team and handed over to MOD.

R&R service charge

MOD said that he had circulated the notes of the meeting with R&R prior to the this meeting of the committee and that anyone who had not received could contact him. MOD reminded the committee that in February he had sent a critique of the billing format to R&R, outlining that it did not show clearly what was due, in arrears, or a request for advance payment. The latter issue in particular was causing confusion and stress for Warwick residents, because people were receiving invoices due immediately for a quarter's full advance charges and late charges applicable, when only monthly payments in advance were due.

MOD said that R&R explained that the accounting and billing system was a central function of the organisation and that substantial changes were not possible until they got a new system in a year's time, however that R&R had agreed to produce explanatory materials for residents, of how to interpret the statement and would prepare a draft for our review. They also agreed to rephrase some of the obscure terminology on the invoices.

LK added that in the Warwick building there were significant issues with forward billing from L&Q that were passed on to R&R who were investigating since September but still asking residents to pay and get a refund later. MOD advised against direct debit payments and informed LT that R&R were no longer requiring residents to pay immediately. He also said that R&R had agreed to move to monthly billing rather than quarterly, which was good news.

JG said he had written to R&R regarding increase for the service charges in Oswald building but had had no response. He asked how R&R could keep increasing it without our agreement. ST said that one of the main goals of the RA committee was to make R&R more effective and accountable, and to stop embarking on overpriced projects which would discuss later on. He said the aim was for the service charge not only to not go up, but to actually be reduced over the coming years. The refund which residents would be getting in July for the night patrols was a direct result of the lobbying that had been done.

ST moved on to the next item on the agenda, the main project issues. He said that by scrutinising proposed expenditure and contract renewals, PS, TS and he had started challenging R&R and looked into alternative quotations suitably backed up by professional indemnity insurance and technical spec packages. He handed over to PS to give an update on the ponds.

Ponds

By way of background, PS explained that R&R had stated that the ponds needed replacement. He and TS questioned whether refurbishment or a total replacement was actually needed. R&R had employed Antony Patrick Consultants to inspect the ponds as the original construction paperwork had been lost. They recommended a product called Triplex to use on the underlining, a massive job that would cost in the region of £2 million. Another company had been ruled out because there was not enough information on the product. TS and PS found four alternative companies two of which have now visited CBW and estimated a 30% price level. R&R subsequently advised they were in discussion with more suppliers. PS said a meeting was planned with R&R the following week to discuss the possibility of cleaning the ponds, revegetating the ponds and any serious cracks, if there were actually any. He suggested that refurbishing the ponds for another five years could be an option.

TS added that R&R had not actually given any evidence to show the ponds were leaking. He agreed with PS that a cosmetic refurbishment, such as filling the ponds with floating plants and waterlilies, might be a good temporary solution as there were other big projects to look at and not enough funds to do everything. CGJ concurred that he was not convinced there were any major leaks and that they would be evident in the car park if there were.

LK commented that he had noticed at the Warwick Burnelli end of the carpark in P1 that whenever it rained a lot of water was coming down but that it did not seem related to the ponds, but seemed to come from the expansion gaps near the roundabout. KB concurred that the issue seemed to be with the expansion joints rather than the ponds. VT mentioned a massive gush of water in P2 on 12th December and that residents had shared videos on the Facebook group. She said emergency repair work had been carried out shortly thereafter and that it seemed to be more than a rainwater issue.

Fountains

ST proceeded to update all on the fountains (the central water feature). He pressured R&R that this highly visible item had been constantly neglected and needed attention. R&R said the new Estate Manager, due to start on May 25th would monitor this closely and ensure proper working order.

Intercom system

ST moved on to discuss the intercom system and said he and TS had met various providers of systems, manufacturers and contractors. TS said he was expecting quotations from the companies that they had met onsite the previous week. He said R&R had proposed a complete overhaul with quotes of £600,000 for a wireless system, or 1.6 million for complete replacement. The experts he had met said the wireless system was unviable for all of CBW because the signal strength would not be strong enough. He had suggested a mix of wired and wireless system would be the best way forward. Warwick and Burnelli only have handsets and not video monitoring and would be costly to have completely rewired. With Centurion being the most problematic building, they suggested to start off with a small Howard core which is only 25 apartments, then other cores, then get the Centurion building working again (by potentially harvesting the parts from Howard for it) and then gradually work the way around the development. This seemed a more cost effective and slower approach, rather than doing the entire system in one go.

CGJ enquired about any plans for a 5G mast at the Power Station which would solve the wireless option's lack of connectivity. It would be worth finding out as it would potentially make the least expensive but overall project viable. TS explained that the proposal was to do it in smaller stages, starting with each of Howard's six cores, as Centurion building is one block of 101 apartments and then other buildings. This would be more cost effective and would keep the system going and well maintained for a reasonable amount of time.

Insurance

ST moved on to introduce the discussion on insurance, another big item where commissions were high and could potentially present big saving opportunities for residents. He handed over to PS who stated that CBW currently had four freehold owners: Fairhold Artemis, L&Q, Berkeley Homes and one more, all with different policies, with L&Q the cheapest as discussed in the previous meeting. The concern was with the other 8 blocks which seem to be managed through an offshore in Guernsey, and whilst this may be unethical and wrong, it unfortunately was legal. PS added that he was seeking to see the application forms so that we could tender our own application for a comparable insurance policy cover to then take to R&R. A meeting was planned for the coming week with R&R to try and obtain these forms.

MOD referred to an article¹ published in Leasehold Knowledge Partnership website circulated prior to the meeting indicating that R&R sometimes purchased insurance from affiliated entities that resulted in increase costs for policies of up to 40%. ST stated that he would ask R&R whether or not this was the case for any CBW buildings and revert to residents accordingly. MOD stated that this was not standard practice in the industry and that while probably not illegal, it was unethical and may have violated some professional body rules in not declaring the profits that R&R are getting through reinsurance via their captive company.

¹ leaseholdknowledge.com/rendall-and-rittner-no-insurance-commissions-but-it-owns-an-offshore-captive-insurance-company-making-a-40-profit-on-leaseholders-premiums/

ST reminded all that the strategic goals in the next two years was to acquire the freehold and revisit the right to manage when we would be able to directly tender all contracts.

New real estate manager

ST then briefly raised the newly-recruited real estate manager, Maarten Van der Velde who will start on May 25th. He said he had interviewed him as well as another contender and felt that he seemed to be a good person for the job, with relevant hands on experience and attention to detail. He invited all to comment on his work once they had the opportunity to observe it.

Accounting audit

ST moved on to discuss whether to instruct an accounting firm to undertake an audit in relation to past expenditure. Three quotes had previously been circulated to all. He shared his personal view that the potential benefit of any money that legally could be claimed back did not outweigh the costs of the audit and would prefer to focus on scrutinising and challenging future proposed expenditure. He proposed that all email their views to CT by Wednesday to indicate whether in favour of an audit (if so, which company), full or partial (if so, which top items), and whether we should then ballot the residents about this before making a decision.

The committee members discussed what the possible biggest line items would be, in the event of a targeted audit. CGJ suggested the main items were staff wages and insurance, however low staff wages were unlikely to bring savings and felt insurance costs could only be challenged by providing comparable quotes going forward. ST agreed with this view. TS suggested challenging the low level of service charge which Berkeley Homes are paying which seemed disproportionate to what residents pay.

Residents' consultation

ST moved on to discuss the consultation with residents and reminded all that the RA existed to present and protect the interests of the residents. He handed over to MOD who has expertise in research. MOD referred to a document he had circulated the day before and ran through the main topics, inviting all to comment on or add to it. ST congratulated MOD on this excellent start. The deadline for comments was set for Monday 17 May and MOD said he would aim to prepare a final version by the end of month. MOD suggested the survey to be open for two to three weeks, giving residents the time to respond, which meant survey results would potentially be available mid to late June. It was agreed to spend around £300 for a Survey Monkey subscription.

Communications

ST moved on to discuss communications with residents and the importance of being able to get our message across and for residents to be able to contact us. The rapid app design and launch was a great start. ST indicated that the intention is for RA to communicate with residents via the app and email rather than Facebook. ST said that he had had a chat with MOD and felt it was probably incumbent on ST to issue an identical statement on both Facebook groups, indicating that the RA does not intend to use Facebook for official communications as some residents had expressed concerns about the tone and content of some posts.

TS said there were 537 members registered on the app 370 of which are owners and 167 are tenants. Meter readings and maintenance reports were popular. There had been 90 maintenance issues reported on to R&R and the RA, which are consolidated monthly and then discussed with R&R. Garton Jones became the first paid sponsorship partner in April for sales and lettings area of the website. They enrol all new tenants into the RA and collect the £10

annual fee. CGJ confirmed he was a minority shareholder and had no involvement or interest in the sponsorship.

Committee members enquired whether we could make any official bullet point announcement about plans. TS said that some community guidelines had been added however that he had not added any RA updates to avoid the danger of over promising but proposed to work with ST and CT to develop a better way to communicate with residents. CT agreed and clarified that one suggestion was to mention a residents' survey was being drafted.

Jean enquired about residents who were not on the app. ST explained that he had initiated one outreach based on the existing email database but had received complaints from many people about their data protection rights. He plans to develop a residents' database that only the committee has access to and meets data protection rules and requirements over the next four weeks. Communications would then be sent both via the app and via email. VT suggested a push was needed to get more residents on RA official platforms. She agreed with ST that Facebook was not policed and regulated and not ideal as an official platform. She also suggested we communicate the role of the RA, its composition, and the role of the building representatives who should take the lead to be proactive, talking to their neighbours, putting out letters, posting it in our neighbour's doors, or in the lifts, in the cores, to push for more engagement to enable change. TS mentioned that a database was available through the app and that we were in a position to see which flats were not registered and reps could potentially approach them.

Building representatives

Moving on to the role of the building reps, TS said he had been discussing with CT about listing them on the app and suggested setting up email addresses such as "xyzbuildingrep@gmail.com" so that residents could contact their building rep. He also suggested that the reps could have admin control over the relevant building groups in the app. ST summarised by saying the building reps would be the eyes and ears of the committee and help get RA messages across to residents. It was agreed to announce the building rep names together with a contact building gmail address on the app.

Neighbourhood

ST moved on to the last item on the agenda, that of Wandsworth neighbourhood meetings for which JD had very kindly agreed to be the RA representative. He said JD would also kindly take the lead in organising a residents' meet up when restrictions allow. JD gave an update on the issue of the racing cars on Chelsea Bridge and explained that the Wandsworth Health and Safety Officer had been made aware of the issue and was now discussing it with colleagues in other councils to ascertain what they were doing and would come back to us. JD has also been gathering YouTube videos and press information about the issue during the last two years and planned to email him a great deal of information. She invited anyone with further evidence to share it with her. The next meeting of the Wandsworth Safety Neighbourhood Group is on June 9th. ST suggested that if anyone witnessed antisocial, criminal, or generally unpleasant that damages your quality of life to safely gather evidence. JD said it would be most effective to report it to the police online if it was not an emergency and to take a screen shot of the report.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 13th June at 10am.

Action points:

1. Service charge invoice: follow up with R&R about draft explanatory materials for residents on how to interpret the invoices for our review - ST and MOD
2. Ponds: meet with R&R and enquire about evidence of the leaks. - PS
3. Intercom system: submit proposal to RR for a phased (building by building) replacement intercom to be implemented by our preferred contractor that will be included in the tender process -TS
4. Obtain insurance application forms from R&R and tender insurance cover - PS and TS
5. Accounting Audit vote - all (was due Wed 12th)
6. Residents survey:
 - make suggestions on MOD's draft document by Monday 17th May - all
 - draft a final version by end of May – MOD
7. Develop a residents' email database by mid June – ST
8. Put a statement on Facebook regarding RA official communication channels – ST
9. Announce building reps on app and generic gmail contact addresses (to be created) - TS