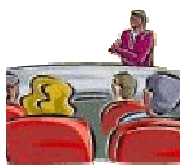


Newsletter – December 2012



Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held on 28 November 2012. Apologies that the key holder opened the church late, especially in the cold.

The minutes of the previous meeting and accounts were agreed without objection.

The Directors listed maintenance work carried out over the last year. They also explained the second opinion on defects to blocks of flats, what is being done currently and planned repair work. See the separate article in this Newsletter.

The proposal for emergency lighting in flat blocks, which is only a recommendation not mandatory, was rejected by 15 votes to 1. This was because of the high cost of the work and the resulting increase in electricity use and cost or unsightly extra wiring depending on the approach taken.

The Directors explained the options investigated for bicycle storage, which led to some debate. Buildings would be very expensive and require planning permission. Open racks would be less secure but, in general, opinion was that owners should install hoops in their own parking spaces, with permission, at their own cost. The proposal for work funded by all owners was rejected by 10 votes to 2. Therefore, no vote was held between options or on fees for use by bicycle owners.

The Directors reported on the recent law change on parking control. Nobody objected to a scheme similar to the current one continuing.


The Directors reported that the policy on sub-letting last year had already been successful, with a tenant that caused deliberate damage removed and that owner paying, which saved all owners paying for repairs or higher insurance. Only around 50% of owners living off-site had co-operated, requiring a fee to be introduced, and the rest are being referred to solicitors at their cost. Owners gave guidance that the agreed controls should not be relaxed for council or social tenants.


There were no objections to Mr Ravi Joshi and Mr Kevin Herrmann continuing as Directors.

When asked under any other business, the property manager confirmed that nuisances of nappies in recycling and washing lines had been dealt with. The Directors agreed to look at cleaning the faded markings between parking spaces.



St Benedict's Online

By February 2013, when the first approvals expire, owners who already have permission to sub-let their flats will be able to renew this permission online with the same tenants for another year free of charge. Do this using  at web address <http://www.stbentooting.co.uk/forms/>

 also allows you to contact the Managing Agent and Management Company by completing online forms for change of owner contact details, fault reports and other applications for permission.

The website now has a search facility powered by Google to make finding information easier.



Service Charge Arrears

Service charge arrears are increasing slightly. This is unfair on other owners because we then need to charge everyone more to have enough money to pay our bills.

We may now refer arrears over one quarter's payment to solicitors for collection and possible court action (previously over two quarters' payments). Those owners then also have to pay the solicitor's fees and any court fees.

The property legal agreements entitle the Management Company to add interest to payments more than two weeks late. If arrears continue to rise, we will need to do this in future.

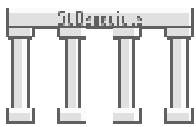
→ Christmas

The Directors and Managing Agent wish all St Benedict's owners and residents a happy Christmas and New Year.

→ Snow and Gritting

Residents are reminded that there is a bin containing grit and salt at the centre of the Estate, in the middle of St Benedict's Close. If snow is forecast or falls, this will be unlocked for you to use, and the gardeners will also scatter grit / salt on main paths when on site.





Newsletter – December 2012



Maintenance Update

As reported in the September newsletter, the Directors obtained a second opinion on the causes of defects to blocks of flats and the necessary repairs from Ellis & Moore.

This agreed with the cause of thermal expansion proposed by Smith Baxter but identifies that there must also be other causes of some cracking. It proposed significantly less repair work, which had been the Directors' concern because of the possibly unnecessary expense.

We then held a meeting with the structural engineers from Ellis & Moore and Smith Baxter. They agreed on the possible causes, that what is happening is unusual, that there is uncertainty over the causes and even extensive investigation and work may not resolve this.

Consequently, the engineers also agreed that limited repairs should be carried out before the next periodic maintenance, rebuilding only the upper courses of the most damaged brickwork, sealing less damaged areas and installing expansion joints around corbels (the concrete features below the roofs) only in damaged areas.

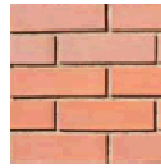
We will commission a photographic survey so that the work can be quantified and are in discussions with Smith Baxter to correct its Statement of Work to reflect the work now agreed as required. This would allow costs to be obtained in time to set the budget for 2013-14. We hope to repair the most affected blocks in 2013, with work on others in 2013 or 2014 depending on available reserve funds.

We will then monitor the situation at each redecoration, carry out similar repairs if more areas develop defects and only consider more extensive work if problems recur.



Tree Pruning

Unfortunately, the first quote for tree pruning greatly exceeded the available budget. We are now seeking other quotes to keep costs down and the work will be done during the winter.



Damaged Wall

The wall between the car park off St Benedicts Close and Church Lane has been damaged again by vehicle impact. There is no evidence that it was caused by a resident and it may well have been caused by a visitor or a contractor.

For safety, the loose pillar was taken down immediately. The remaining wall is cracked through and is unsafe, so needs to be demolished and rebuilt. A temporary fence has been erected to protect it until it is rebuilt.

We have obtained three tenders to rebuild the wall and are urgently seeking insurance company approval for the work.

This is at least the fourth time that the wall around this car park has been damaged by vehicle impact in the twenty-five years since the Estate was built. Therefore, when the wall is rebuilt, large wooden posts will be erected in the concrete area between each parking space and the wall to protect it and prevent further vehicle impact. Drivers will need to take care when parking to ensure that their vehicle stops within the parking space to avoid damage to the vehicle.

→ Dumped Rubbish

The cost of disposing of rubbish dumped by residents in 2011-12 was £1,048. This averages £5.50 in service charges per property.

→ Fly Tipping

The flat owner whose builders illegally fly tipped the building waste from renovating a flat in St Benedicts Close has been reported to the police and charged £160 for its removal and commercial disposal.

→ Large Waste Items

Please label large items for which you have arranged and paid for Council collection, so we know that they have not been fly tipped. Council charges start at £20.