



Newsletter – June 2013



Budget 2013-14

The Directors have made every effort to keep service charges down over recent years through the recession. Some small reductions were possible by using past surpluses and by deferring periodic maintenance a year to 2015.

We have continued to keep annual costs down, but must collect money over the next two years (2013-14 and 2014-15) to pay for the repairs required to blocks of flats (only from flat owners) and to Estate facilities (from all owners). The average increase is under 5% and some service charges will decrease.

All owners will have to pay part of the cost to repair or rebuild the damaged car park wall because the insurer will only pay part of the claim and no Estate surplus remains (see the article *Damaged Wall*).

Service charges for 73-103 and 105-135 St Benedicts Close return to more normal levels after the temporary reduction last year because they had paid higher charges the year before for investigation work, to which other blocks benefitting then contributed.

The estimated cost of repairs has been reduced from over £100,000 to around £25,000 (see the article *Maintenance Update*). Even so, the blocks requiring more extensive repair still have quite large increases in their service charges. These blocks are 31-36 Abbey Drive, 31-45 Church Lane and 105-135 St Benedicts Close. We are sorry for this, but the repairs are essential. The service charges for these blocks will reduce to normal levels in 2015-16 after the repairs.

Flat owners in 73-103 St Benedicts Close and 17-27 Carlisle Way also need to pay for replacement as they wished of their failed, irreparable and obsolete entryphone systems.

→ Items in Communal Areas

Residents of flats may not store items in communal areas for safety. This is because of the fire risk and the obstruction of exits in an emergency. Any items found will be removed without further notice and a note left.



Flat Lease Extension

Flats built on the Estate in the mid 1980s were let on 99-year leases to their owners. Directors investigated the possibility of extending these and this option was offered three years ago.

By the end of 2011, around two thirds of owners had taken up this option, many using the Management Company's solicitor to do this, with reduced fees reflecting the economies of scale.

The ability to sell flats should not be affected while over 60 years remain on the lease, until around 2025. However, the value of the property may begin to decrease now less than 100 years remain on 125-year leases. Extending the lease to 999 years may increase the property value again and, consequently, you may start to be liable for tax on this gain.

We are therefore reminding those flat owners who did not extend their leases before that they may still do so on payment of the Management Company's solicitor's fees, a small administrative charge to Rendall and Rittner to process the change and a nominal payment of £1. The expected total cost is around £400, to preserve the value of your flat around £200,000. You may use your own solicitor if you wish, at your additional cost.

We strongly recommend that flat owners who did not take up the lease extension to 999 years should take their own professional advice on this, because your potential tax liability may now increase and the value of your property may decrease over time.



Flat Sub-letting

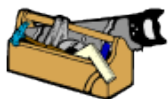
We are pleased to advise that flat owners can now submit initial applications to sub-let and changes of tenant(s) at [St Benedicts Online](#) as well as renewals with the same tenant(s).

We no longer require copies of documents for standard applications provided that you certify they exist, meet the conditions and you agree to provide them within 5 working days on request.





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Maintenance Update

Flat owners in 17-27 Carlisle Way have chosen to replace their partly working entryphone system. It cannot be repaired as it is obsolete. Service charges for that block will be slightly higher in 2013-14 and 2014-15 to pay for this.

As previously advised, we carried out a competitive tender for further survey work, which Hallas & Co won. It has carried out a photographic survey of flat blocks, specified repairs as previously recommended in the second opinion and estimated the cost of repairs.

We are very pleased to report that the estimated cost of repairs is around £25,000 compared to the first surveyor's rough estimate exceeding £100,000. This fully justifies the Directors' decision to query the unnecessary work initially proposed and to obtain a second opinion.

Service charges for repairs will be collected in 2013-14 and 2014-15 (see the *Budget* article).



Damaged Wall

In September, a vehicle damaged the wall between the St Benedicts Close car park and Church Lane. It is unsafe so needs rebuilding or major repair and has been fenced off for safety.

We complained to the insurance company about their original loss adjuster's refusal of the claim on apparently spurious grounds. The insurer then appointed an independent surveyor and we are now negotiating a settlement. The insurer will only pay part of the claim as Laing Homes did not originally build the wall properly and nobody saw the damage happen.



Tree Pruning

The council has approved work on trees subject to preservation order like the oaks and limes. Work will be carried out from July 2013.



Bicycle Stands

Bicycle stands and shelters were considered at the Annual Meeting in November 2012 and property owners decided that only racks were suitable, not shelters (which would encourage crime) and not to spend our money on these.

The Directors agreed to investigate whether any grants were available, as suggested by a property owner. Wandsworth Council has a budget for sustainable transport and agreed to install two sets of cycle racks at no cost to us.

There are few suitable areas, as the Estate was not designed with cycle parking in mind. We identified one area for 4 cycles in the middle of St Benedicts Close, in place of bushes by a bin store, and another for 6 cycles in place of a poor area of garden at the end of Limetree Walk near Hawthorn Crescent. Stands were chosen that loiterers could not sit on and should be durable.

The stands will be available for anyone to use, free of charge, on a first come, first served basis.

→ History of St Benedicts

The brief history of St Benedicts and Tooting Graveney is still available on the website, at <http://www.stbentooting.co.uk/history/>.

Wandsworth Museum held a recent exhibition of local historical paintings and some of these are now shown on our web site along with an old map of the area from 1894.



Part of *St Nicholas Church, Tooting* by Chidson
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