

Newsletter – January 2011



Service Charges

This newsletter is being sent out with the notices for service charges due on 1 January 2011 to minimise postage costs.

Owners are requested to pay the quarterly service charges promptly, no later than 1 January. It is with regret that we can no longer allow the concession to pay monthly, up to two months in arrears.

Following the periodic redecoration last summer, the available cash in the flats maintenance reserve fell to about £2,500 and the company only just had enough money to pay monthly bills.

The Directors are making great efforts to keep service charges down. They have only increased by 6% over the last 6 years, much lower than the rate of inflation of 17% over that period.



Water Standpipe

At the Annual General Meeting, Mr Derek McLean advised of standpipe licences available from Thames Water for about £100.

We have investigated this and could not use a licence for one day, but would need an annual licence for each of the cleaning and gardening contractors, as they cannot be shared.

For a 30mm standpipe, the annual cost of two licences would be £536 (compared to the annual cost of a water supply of £596), or around 51p to £1.02 per quarter additional service charges per property, depending on property type. A standpipe would avoid the one-off cost of around £1,300 to install a fixed water supply.

We will not consider going ahead with this until a cleaning contractor is appointed after re-tendering this work and we know if it needs a water supply on site and if it would reduce cleaning costs.



Items in Communal Areas

The annual Health and Safety inspection advised that we must take action to remove items that residents have left in communal areas. They pose a safety risk as they hinder escape from a fire and flammable items are especially dangerous.

The Managing Agent has now put a warning label on items remaining. If the owner or tenant does not remove them, the matter will be referred to solicitors at the flat owner's expense.



Periodic Maintenance Update

Minor remedial work following the periodic redecoration of blocks of flats and their common areas was completed in October 2010. Some payment is being retained until February 2011, so please report any remaining defects to the Managing Agent straight away.

Unfortunately, during the redecoration, defects were found in two blocks requiring further investigation and repair. We have written to individual owners in those blocks because, under the legal agreements, they need to pay for the investigation and repair (not all flat owners). Other blocks do not require further work.



Tree Pruned

The cedar tree in the communal area behind 31-36 Abbey Drive, which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, was pruned by the maximum of 20% allowed in November 2010. This followed approval by the majority of nearby owners and the Council.

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Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of St Benedicts (Tooting) Management Company Limited was held at 7pm on 1 December 2010 in St Nicholas Church Hall. This is the company through which all owners control the running of the Estate.

Despite very cold and snowy weather on the evening there was a good turnout. We thank everyone who attended or appointed proxies.

Full draft minutes will be posted on the web site when they are available and the web site was updated on the evening of the meeting with a summary of key decisions.

1. The **Minutes** of the previous annual general meeting were approved.
2. The Report of Directors and the **Accounts** for the year ended 30 June 2010 were approved. The issues caused by the previous managing agent have finally been resolved.
3. The **Auditors** were formally reappointed. However, now the accounting issues are resolved, the Directors will tender the audit. As approved at the meeting, we will now seek the minimum work under company law rather than a full audit to reduce costs.
4. The Directors reported on the **periodic maintenance**.
5. The Directors reminded flat owners of the opportunity to **extend their leases** to 999 years. The special fees will increase from January 2011 and will cease during 2011. Contact the Managing Agent or see the web site for more information.
6. The few people who had looked at the **web site** thought that it was useful and it was agreed that this should be maintained, although at no cost.

The Directors then presented a series of proposals that they had been asked to investigate for owners to decide whether they wished them to be carried out at the cost involved. Details were distributed with the notice of meeting and are on the web site.

7. The proposal for Thames Water to provide a **water supply** at around £1,300 then £596 per year was rejected. Mr Derek McLean helpfully advised of the availability of standpipe licences and agreed to provide details for the Directors to investigate. *See the separate article in this Newsletter.*
8. There was considerable discussion over **recycling enclosures** and rubbish and recycling in general. The proposal to build wooden enclosures for recycling bags at up to £1,300 plus VAT was not approved in a tied vote. Unfortunately, nobody has been able to come up with any proposals acceptable to the Council and the majority of owners. Owners also disagree, for example, over expenditure and the location of any new stores. This leaves the Directors powerless to take any action. Ms Jacqui Kelly kindly offered to consider this issue to try to identify a way forward that might gain approval. *This will be reported in future Newsletters.*
9. The possible work to **replace flat mailboxes** across the Estate, costing at least £24,000 plus VAT, was rejected. A further proposal from Mr Ian Fenn that all flat owners should fund work for the three blocks by public rights of way at higher risk of mail theft was also narrowly rejected.
10. The possible work to **replace flat entryphone systems** across the Estate, costing at least £16,000 plus VAT or £7,000 plus VAT for just the front panels was rejected. Faults that develop (but not damage through abuse) will continue to be repaired as part of routine maintenance.

For both flat mailboxes and entryphone systems, the Directors were authorised to allow individual blocks to carry out work compliant with building regulations provided that no owners in the block object and owners in the block fully fund the work.
11. In the **election of Directors**, Mr Ian Fenn was not elected and Mr Kevin Herrmann was re-elected.
12. Several matters were raised under **any other business**, including fly-tipping, gritting and cleaning. *See the web site for details.* The Directors will re-tender the cleaning contract for flat communal areas following recent poor performance and to keep costs down.