



Newsletter – March 2013



Snow and Gritting

The snow on Friday 18 January was quite light. Prompt spreading by a resident of grit / salt from the bin provided cleared key paths from St Benedicts Close to nearby roads before the evening freeze and this was extended to Limetree Walk and Carlisle Way on Saturday.

After more extensive snow on Sunday, the gardeners cleared snow from key paths, flat entrances and road entrances and laid more grit on Monday, focusing on icy areas, like the entrance and other areas in Abbey Drive.

After all this hard work, it was galling to receive an unfounded complaint from Abbey Drive that no grit had been provided there, especially when the bag left for residents to use was in direct sight of the property. This remained unused.

It is impractical to clear the whole Estate and residents, particularly in houses, need to clear by their own properties, as others do elsewhere.

Snow in February did not lay on paths and roads.



Street and Security Lights

Thank you to the resident who reported problems with two St Benedicts Close street lights. One just needed a new bulb but the other needed more work, so took longer to repair.

While an electrical contractor was on site, we replaced the old security lights in the alleys between St Benedicts Close and both Rectory Lane and Carlisle Way, as these needed frequent lamp replacement. The new lights will reduce maintenance and so save costs.

We will replace more old security lights, several no longer working, in Abbey Drive and Carlisle Way over the next few months.

The Fault Report at [St Benedicts Online](#) now has a map of street and security lights to just click faulty lights, having first selected the fault type. This is the best way of reporting faults.



Sub-letting Renewal

Flat owners with existing permission to sub-let are reminded that this permission must be renewed each year and that a new application is required on change of tenant(s).

You may now apply for annual renewal of permission with the same tenant(s) free of charge using [St Benedicts Online](#). This maintains our commitment to those who co-operated with the new process decided at the 2011 AGM.

For the time being, a paper form is still required for new tenant(s), accompanied by the new tenancy agreement, references, any insurance cover note and the fee to Rendall and Rittner.

Once the current solicitor action against owners breaching their lease by sub-letting without permission is complete, we plan also to allow application online without charge for first-time sub-letting and for change of tenant(s).



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 and has been fenced off for safety.

Unfortunately, the loss adjuster appointed by our insurer has so far refused the claim, despite it being covered by the policy from what we can see. It appointed a structural engineer who raised other matters seeking to avoid the claim.

We have appealed directly to the insurer at a senior level. We may need to employ another structural engineer to support the claim and will involve the Financial Ombudsman if necessary.

If we do have to pay the repair cost of around £8,000 ourselves, this will add about £5 per quarter on average to service charges for the next two years. We will need to pay part of the cost as the new wall will be better than the old. Large wooden posts will be installed in front of the new wall to prevent future vehicle damage.



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Maintenance Update

Because they were beyond repair, the door entryphone systems are being replaced in blocks 73-87 and 89-103 St Benedicts Close. This may also be required in 18-28 Carlisle Way. Flat owners in those blocks will need to pay higher service charges in 2013-14 to pay for this.

Some flat block roofs have started to leak again, particularly on the top floor or near the door. This is due to the original design, as the sealing required only lasts for a decade or so. Gigney repaired the leaking seal in February and this will probably also be needed for other flat blocks in the periodic maintenance in 2015.

Smith Baxter was unable to carry out the photographic survey and amend the statement of work for flat block repairs, so it agreed to credit the invoice for the specification, which we had not paid as the work was not satisfactory.

We are now carrying out a competitive tender for the survey and specification, so the work can be completed and repair costs estimated in time to start collecting money for repairs in 2013-14.



Tree Pruning

As reported in December, because of the cost of tree pruning, we put the work out to tender. This saved around 15% of the cost. Trees not subject to preservation order were pruned in February.

Once we have Council permission, trees like the oaks and limes subject to preservation order will be pruned early in the new financial year, from July 2013 onwards, to spread the cost.

→ 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.



Normal Flat Noises

Unfortunately, the construction of the flats and the level of sound insulation required in the 1980s when they were built mean that sounds can be heard in adjacent properties. This is not a fault of the flats and is normal. Sounds include:

- Normal living noises, like conversations.
- Creaking and cracking noises, caused by normal movement of the timber joists, which can be triggered by temperature changes and by water running through the supply pipes laid across the joists.
- Noises of toilets flushing and water falling through the sewer pipes.

The Management Company can only take action if there is a nuisance as set out in the legal agreements (head leases) for the flats. Copies are available on the website. This must be verified by a competent authority like the Council noise team, the police or a court and the complainant must pay the costs of taking action.

If you wish to improve the sound insulation of your own flat, you must provide full details and obtain the permission of the Management Company before any work starts. Work must comply with building regulations, not damage the structure or fire resistance of the building and not inconvenience your neighbours. You must pay any Management Company costs, for example, for qualified professionals to advise us on the proposed work, as well as pay for the work itself.

→ Parking Control & Permits

As agreed at the AGM, we have renewed the parking control scheme with Ace. This costs around £3 per property per year. **Existing permits will remain valid until 31 May 2013**, not as shown on them. We will replace them with our own permits at lower cost before they expire.

As also requested at the AGM, we investigated jet washing faded parking space dividers. This would cost around £1,000 (£5 per property on average) so we cannot go ahead for now because of other potential costs, like the wall.

