



Newsletter – July 2020



Budget 2020-21

The budget this year, which was supposed to be for the new 5-year maintenance cycle following periodic external work starting in April, is severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic and a huge increase in property insurance costs.

It was not possible to start periodic work as planned and, as described in the March Newsletter, quoted costs were much more than in previous cycles. The Directors sought ways of limiting the impact on charges, explained in the accompanying item on periodic work.

By far the largest contribution to rises in charges is from the buildings insurance premium, which has more than doubled this year after a large increase last year. There is a very poor record of water damage, made worse by a small minority of owners not maintaining their flats, even when some are receiving rental income from them.

The insurer has imposed increased excesses, so **owners will now pay much more, up to £500, if leaks in their properties cause damage.** Water leaks will now always be referred to our solicitor for breach of maintenance obligations under the lease, so **these owners will also be liable for legal fees under the lease.**

Contractors including the managing agent, gardener and cleaning firm are entitled to an index-linked increase of 1.6% this year. Other annual costs apart from insurance have been reduced, so this causes no increase in charges.

To avoid even larger charge increases, non-essential costs have been reduced. There will be no garden planting and dumped waste will now have to be removed quarterly not monthly.

Costs of work on specific blocks in the last cycle have been paid for, so flats charges are now more consistent across blocks. Roof repairs are required for 1-71 St Benedicts Close, eaves-level work to deter pests for 21-26 and 31-36 Abbey Drive and major wood repairs to the clock tower.

Both houses and flats pay for Estate facilities, while flats additionally pay for services supplied only to them. No costs are borne only by houses. Insurance premium increases affect both.

Despite every effort to keep costs down and defer them, house charges need to rise by 11.4% and flats charges by 26.2% on average.



Property insurance

The Estate has a very poor claims record from multiple water leaks and two movement claims in recent years. Also affected by coronavirus, Axa has more than doubled premiums from last year.

Rendall and Rittner and the Directors sought alternative cover but no insurer is prepared to take on this risk with large open claims, so large charge increases are consequently unavoidable.



Periodic work

Periodic external work was planned to start in April after the section 20 consultation required by law with flat owners finished with no objections. It was unable to start because of the coronavirus pandemic as the contractor that tendered the lowest price suspended all work and it was not possible within Government restrictions.

As reported in the March Newsletter, the cost was much higher than previously and would have used all the reserves for both external and internal work, a large part of the contingency reserve and added to the big rise in charges.

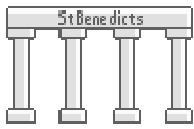
Advice on best practice was issued for the residential property management industry in response to coronavirus that reserves should be maintained and used to cope with its impacts.

Carefully balancing risks and benefits and considering this advice, Government restrictions and lease terms, the Directors have decided that:

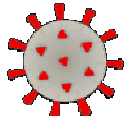
- Planned full external repair and redecoration cannot go ahead in 2020.
- Instead, a priority list of repairs will be carried out in late summer 2020 where essential to prevent deterioration and greater costs in future. This work has now been tendered and was covered by the Section 20 consultation. See <https://www.stbentooting.co.uk/periodic>.
- External re-decoration will be re-tendered in early 2021, aiming to start work in April 2021.
- Flats internal communal area re-decoration will be deferred and is proposed to move to a 7-year cycle recommended by the surveyor.

The Directors will seek confirmation of these decisions from property owners at the 2020 AGM, normally due in November (see panel).





Newsletter – July 2020



Coronavirus

Thank you to all following advice and restrictions for the coronavirus pandemic, especially NHS staff, carers, key workers and those who have volunteered to help others. Visitors were not allowed to properties at the time of writing and must follow strict rules in open Estate areas.

The St Benedicts website and Rendall and Rittner online system give the latest position.

From 11th March 2020, the flat block communal area cleaning contractor has been wiping all surfaces normally touched with diluted bleach to kill viruses. The cleaner is using protective equipment and the gardeners are maintaining social distancing, so this work is continuing.

Rendall and Rittner continues to provide its service working from home, although there will be a delay receiving mail by post. You should contact our property managers and pay charges by telephone or electronically to avoid delay.

Because we are continuing to receive regular services, payments to contractors are being made as normal, so there are no savings.

Maintenance and tree work had to be delayed for a period. Urgent maintenance and work that can be carried out safely in line with Government restrictions has now resumed.

Wandsworth Council closed its waste transfer station, so removal of dumped waste (which is at extra cost) had to be suspended. Following re-opening of the necessary services, removal has now resumed on a quarterly basis (see Budget).



Estate lights

The third and last phase of replacing security lights was deferred. When more old lights fail so useful life is not wasted, they will be replaced with new units already bought, using less power.

→ Annual meeting

The AGM is normally held in November. The Directors will keep under review when and how this can be held in line with Government guidance. Accounts will be prepared as usual.



Freeview aerials

We reported previously that contractors were not interested in carrying out just the work needed to extend reception to the remote channels to which some Freeview transmissions were moved.

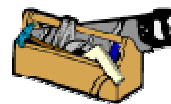
The final option, Community Vision, has also only quoted for additional unnecessary work. The work cannot be carried out at economic cost.



Tree work

The tree surgeon suggested delaying tree work until the autumn. It is planned to cut back the trees on Church Lane, the cedar behind 31-36 Abbey Drive and the oak overhanging houses on Rectory Lane as much as the Council will permit.

Firms used by our insurer over the claims for two blocks wish to fell the Church Lane protected sycamore and are negotiating with the Council. An oak between Abbey Drive and St Benedicts Close and some bushes will be removed.



Maintenance

Updates on the [website](#)

Snowik re-laid uneven Estate parking areas to level them as much as possible, for which it had been difficult to find a contractor, in February.

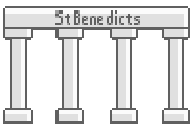
The handyman fitted metal grilles to airbricks of those flat blocks that opted to pay for this and completed this after replacing a faulty padlock.

Maintenance work was suspended but has now resumed where it can be carried out safely, such as painting Estate gates and fences outside. Meanwhile, a Director cut down some overgrown bushes near windows for safety in March.

Unblock completed sewer repairs near 21-26 Abbey Drive in April, under the insurance claim.

→ Suspicious activity

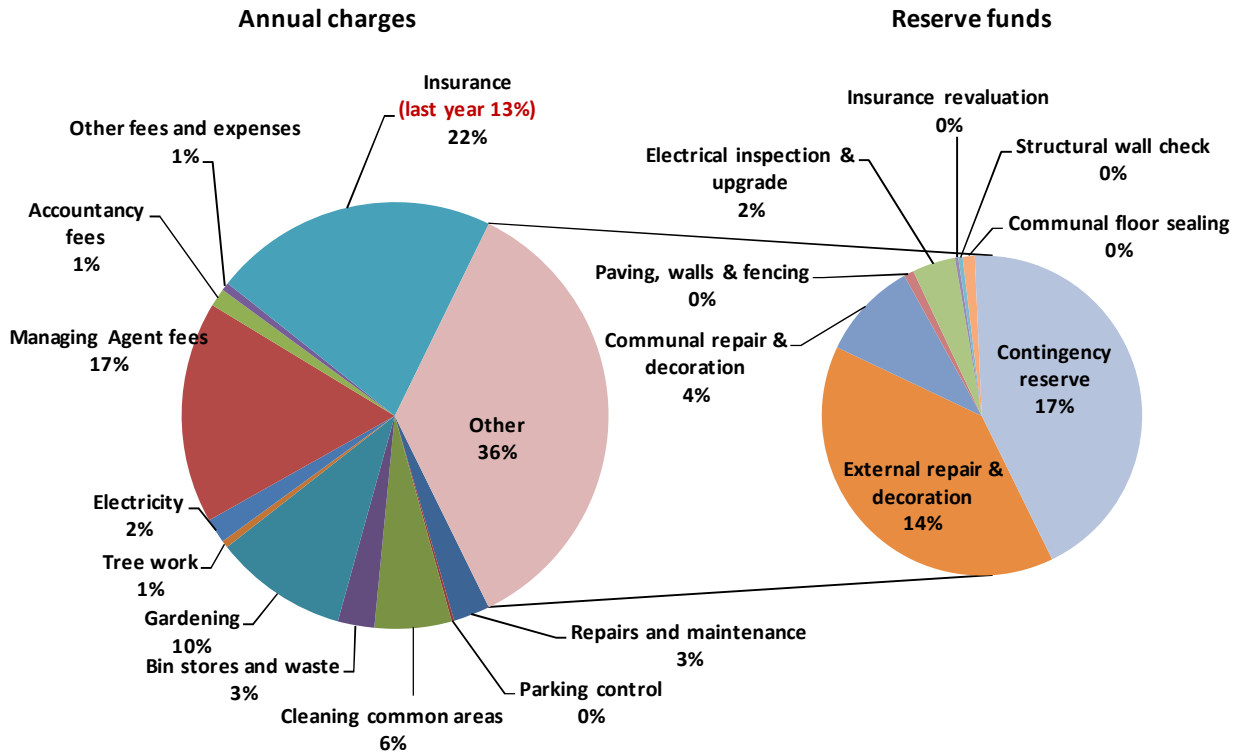
The police advised there are not enough reports to reinstall CCTV as discussed at the 2019 AGM. Please report all suspicious activity including possible drug dealing on the non-emergency 101 number so these reports are logged.



Newsletter – July 2020

The diagrams below show where your charges will be allocated in 2020-21, to the nearest percent (those shown as 0% are less than 0.5%). Annual expenditure is shown on the left, reserves on the right.

Leasehold flats breakdown



Freehold houses / Wandle Housing Association breakdown

