



Keeping down future costs

There were no comments from the Section 20 consultation required by law on the electrical upgrade work for flat communal areas (so called 'landlord' supplies) that affected the outcome.

Accounting work after year end showed that there are just enough common flats reserve funds, so the work was ordered from local firm CSCS, which provided the lowest tender. It will be carried out in September 2022, as it is critical to cut electricity use before prices increase.

The increase in electricity prices from 1 October is even more horrific than predicted when the budget was drawn up, so there will be a shortfall this financial year and service charges may well have to increase next year to make this up.

The Directors opted to participate in the Rendall and Rittner electricity tender scheme across multiple developments as this is likely to attract lower tendered costs than we could obtain individually. Communal supplies are **not** capped by Ofgem. Rendall and Rittner wrote to owners explaining this scheme and earns a small fixed commission that does not depend on the price.

After upgrade, communal hallway lights will only turn on when people pass by at night rather than being on all night, greatly reducing use. **You are encouraged to turn off the light outside your flat door if you do not need this on all night.** Use the large switch on the side of the riser, *do not* use switches on the light fitting itself. Porch lights will remain on at lower power for safety.

Relevant flat block reserves also have enough funds to replace wooden flat communal staircase windows with uPVC. This will be done by the end of 2022. The cost is under the threshold for Section 20 consultation, so the work was ordered from City Windows & Glass, which provided the lowest quote and a volume discount. This will save money overall by the next periodic communal decoration in 2027.

→ Flat communal areas

Items must not be left flat communal areas as this is a fire risk and obstructs emergency exits. Notes are left and items may be removed. If items remain or fire doors are open / obstructed, solicitors will contact flat owners at their cost.

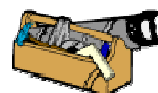
→ Annual meeting 2022

The Directors are considering holding the annual meeting due in mid-November online, like the last two years. This saves the hall hire cost and is more convenient for many, so more owners attended. Those present can now vote on the evening. If you have any views on this, please tell our Rendall and Rittner property managers.



Flat leases

Flat owners with 125 year leases have been warned of the potential consequences of not taking out 999 year leases, such as to flat value.



Maintenance

Work is updated monthly on the Estate website at <https://www.stbentooting.co.uk/maintenance>.

Now Rafal Wiatek, the handyman used by the Estate, has returned from holiday, he will complete safety work to fit thresholds and block overlarge gaps under riser fire doors.

Once electrical upgrade work in flat communal areas is complete, he will then upgrade and repair communal riser fire seals. Costs to repair damage by contractors replacing flat electricity meters will be re-charged to those flats.

After the higher priority work to save costs and for safety has been carried out, work will start to replace lock cylinders and all owner and resident keys. This follows loss off the Estate of a set of keys by the cleaner. The first replacements will be where residents have also lost keys, posing more risk to other owners and residents.



Tree work

Quotations have been obtained for tree work necessary for safety and to keep trees not subject to preservation order under control. With increased risk of damage from more violent and frequent storms, more work is needed for safety.

Work will be prioritised to reduce risk, start this autumn and continue over the next two years, with slightly higher Estate charges for this period.



→ Electricity overbilling

We identified that Ecotricity, bulk supplier to Rendall and Rittner's portfolio including St Benedicts, is seriously overbilling compared to meter readings, out of line with contracted prices.

We stopped payment, served a contractual breach warning on Rendall and Rittner to rectify the accounting errors and we continue to investigate with our accountants.



Work this year

Work carried out and arranged by the Directors and Managing Agent this year includes:

- Carrying out tenders for smaller affordable periodic work packages to re-decorate flat block oriels (projecting features), high level and low level flat windows (by different contractors to keep costs down) and the Estate cupola feature in St Benedicts Close.
- Undertaking contract administration of this work by two different contractors, saving the additional cost of employing a surveyor.
- Carrying out a pilot to upgrade the communal area flat electrical installation in a pilot block then checking that this operated as required.
- When this proved successful, tendering the communal area electrical upgrade for the remaining 20 flat staircases, allowing work before further huge electricity price rises.
- Obtaining quotes for replacement of flat communal staircase wooden windows with uPVC instead of decorating them to save money over time and negotiating discounts.
- Finishing re-working the budget reserves calculations completely for periodic work split into multiple smaller work packages for different flat blocks over different periods.
- Emergency tree work following damage by a series of severe squally storms.
- Safety examination of all Estate trees after this damage, obtaining quotes for work to reduce risk to be carried out over three years and applying to the Council for consent needed for work to protected trees.
- Repairing Estate fences.

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- Repairing an uneven parking area damaged by tree roots and rodent burrowing.
- Unblocking sewers and drains as required.
- Piloting work to fit thresholds and block overlarge gaps under riser fire doors and adjusting the specification so this is effective.
- Sealing gaps between flat block fire doors and walls with fireproof mastic and around services into flats with mortar for fire safety.
- Redecorating flat communal area damage caused by leaking roofs, water meters and water supply stop valves once repaired.
- Replacing faulty flat block light switches.
- Arranging a new flat block master security key system to be fitted when lock cylinders and keys are replaced following loss or when they reach end of life through wear.
- Routine repairs to flat block entry and fire doors, locks, closers and stair edgings.



Water leaks two years on

Since policies on water leaks were revised in July 2020, the number of water leaks into other flats has reduced dramatically. There were no insurance claims for water escape in this time, so the claims record has also improved greatly. Premiums have still risen for other reasons but this is likely to have avoided even higher rises.

There have been no leaks into another flat from plumbing maintained to the required standards, so this concern has proved not to be valid.

Because of greatly increased solicitors fees, after a leak, the Management Company will now write to the owner responsible but will need to involve solicitors if they do not respond, do not allow access or do not make repairs needed quickly. The Management Company's contractor will inspect the plumbing to identify work needed to bring it up to the required standard, with the flat owner responsible for all costs under the lease.

→ Smoke alarms

Fit a smoke alarm, test it weekly and change the batteries and alarm when due for your safety. This is required by law in rented properties.