



### Budget 2023-24

Despite rampant and continued inflation, the Directors have managed to keep average charges well below general price increases. Flat charges go up by 2.7% on average after reducing last year, while house charges now reduce by 1.6% having increased in the last couple of years to replenish reserves.

There was a spike in service industry wages last year, so the cleaner, gardener and managing agent were entitled to a 10.3% index-linked increase then. ONS later corrected this figure and wage increases are now moderating, so they are entitled to a further 4.7% increase this year, based on the revised ONS figure last year.

This is assisted by reserves being on track for the reduced costs of periodic work now this is split into smaller packages that local contractors can carry out at lower cost than large firms.

It is also assisted for the majority of flat blocks by costs being allocated to the blocks requiring work, according to the leases. However, as a result, blocks requiring more work face larger increases to pay for this while still collecting reserves to afford periodic work due from 2026.

17-27 Carlisle Way required sewers unblocking and a survey to identify the issues (see separate article). 18-28 St Benedicts Close needed roof repair with further scaffolding at high cost as the leak was advised after maintenance when scaffolding was already present. Both blocks consequently face charges increased by between a quarter and a third for several years.

*We strongly urge people not to flush sanitary waste down toilets or pour fat down sinks and to report building issues as soon as they are seen.*

Electricity costs are now reducing slightly but Government support for non-domestic customers like the Management Company has been withdrawn. Rendall and Rittner has failed to get Electricity to bill correctly for over a year. The Directors and accountants have therefore had to step in to determine the correct costs of actual use at contracted prices to December 2022 and make a best estimate of costs from January to June 2023. This is necessary to meet the company's legal duties. Prices are now forecast to remain around current levels for another year.



### Tree work

Ultrasound survey of the lime tree with decay near its base and the ailing ash tree near the St Benedicts Close entrance showed the trunk cores are still sound, so planned work is sufficient. Work to the limes is due in 2024.

Branches of the oaks overhanging Rectory Lane and the ash overhanging Church Lane and the car parking will be removed for safety in July 2023 in line with the Council consent granted.

Unfortunately, the annual tree survey identified that the other ash towards Abbey Drive is also now diseased and another couple of trees are in poor condition, so these need monitoring.

Tree maintenance costs are increasing because more safety work is needed with the increasing frequency and violence of storms in recent years as well as age, disease and climate conditions.



### Emergency lighting

Emergency lighting is now operational in all flat blocks following re-wiring in those that needed it. If the electricity supply fails, the lights remain on for two hours to illuminate the evacuation route.



### Wooden flat windows

Owners of flats still with wooden windows are reminded that they should seek consent and replace these with uPVC. The Management Company did this for the communal windows.

Safe access at height is now very expensive so the 2023 General Meeting will be asked to confirm that those flats should pay additional charges towards the costs of decorating wooden windows from 2027, in line with flat leases.



### Flat 999 year leases

Fees for 999 year leases will increase from July as decided by the 2022 meeting. Over 90% of flats have these, several more are in progress.



## → Insurance excess

After a huge claim, the insurer is increasing the excess for escape of water from 1 July 2023. **Flat owners whose plumbing causes damage will now pay the first £2,500 of every claim.**



## Fibre broadband

*Community Fibre* surveyed flat blocks on 19 May for installation of fibre broadband to the premises and we await its proposal.

*BT Openreach* suggested surveying when unsafe during the pandemic then stalled for months for spurious reasons, eventually admitted it had a large backlog and finally carried out its survey on 14 June.

We will keep flat owners informed of installation plans. House owners should be able to get fibre broadband as the street cables have been laid.



## Maintenance

Updates on the [website](https://www.stbentooting.co.uk/maintenance)

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

Recent work includes touch up of paintwork around communal lighting installations, repair of rotten fencing by the clock tower and other minor repair work such as stair treads and door knobs.

Once we know the plans for fibre broadband installation in flat blocks, we will decide whether to go ahead with the final fire safety improvement before or after fibre installation. This is to repair fire seals in riser cupboards after electrical re-wiring and upgrade them to the higher standards now required following fire tragedies.

## → Don't flush fat / solids

Flat charges in blocks where residents misuse sewers causing blockage are increasing under the revised budget approach since 2022.

Do not flush fat down drains, this sets and blocks them. Fat should be allowed to cool to set then disposed of in household waste when solid.

Only use toilets as intended and do not flush solids like tampons, pads and baby wipes. These should be wrapped and put in household waste.

## → Smoke alarms

You are reminded to fit a smoke alarm, test it weekly and change it when due for your safety.



## Key system

Once work that requires key sets is complete, the key system replacement can proceed to replace locks cylinders worn after over 8 years and where security keys have been lost.

This was intended to be started late last year or early this year, but other work has taken longer than hoped and *BT Openreach* especially delayed fibre broadband work by many months.

We do not want to place the new key system at unnecessary risk by issuing key sets to unfamiliar contractors like *Community Fibre* and *BT Openreach* or their unknown sub-contractors.



## Sewer work

After repeated blockages made worse by fat and solids that needed clearing, *Unbloc* surveyed the sewer serving 17-27 Carlisle Way. The section that is our responsibility repaired some years ago remains in good condition. The problems now are with common sections that are *Thames Water's* responsibility as they also serve houses and probably a flat block in Limetree Walk.

When *Thames Water* finally investigated after multiple calls, it confirmed these sections are damaged and an inspection chamber is nearly blocked. Unfortunately, this chamber is buried as *Laing Homes* failed to provide the necessary access when the Estate was built. We need to excavate this so are tendering the work to do so and fit a frame and cover to provide access.

Once this is done, *Thames Water* will repair the damaged and blocked sections of sewer, which should resolve the repeated blockages.

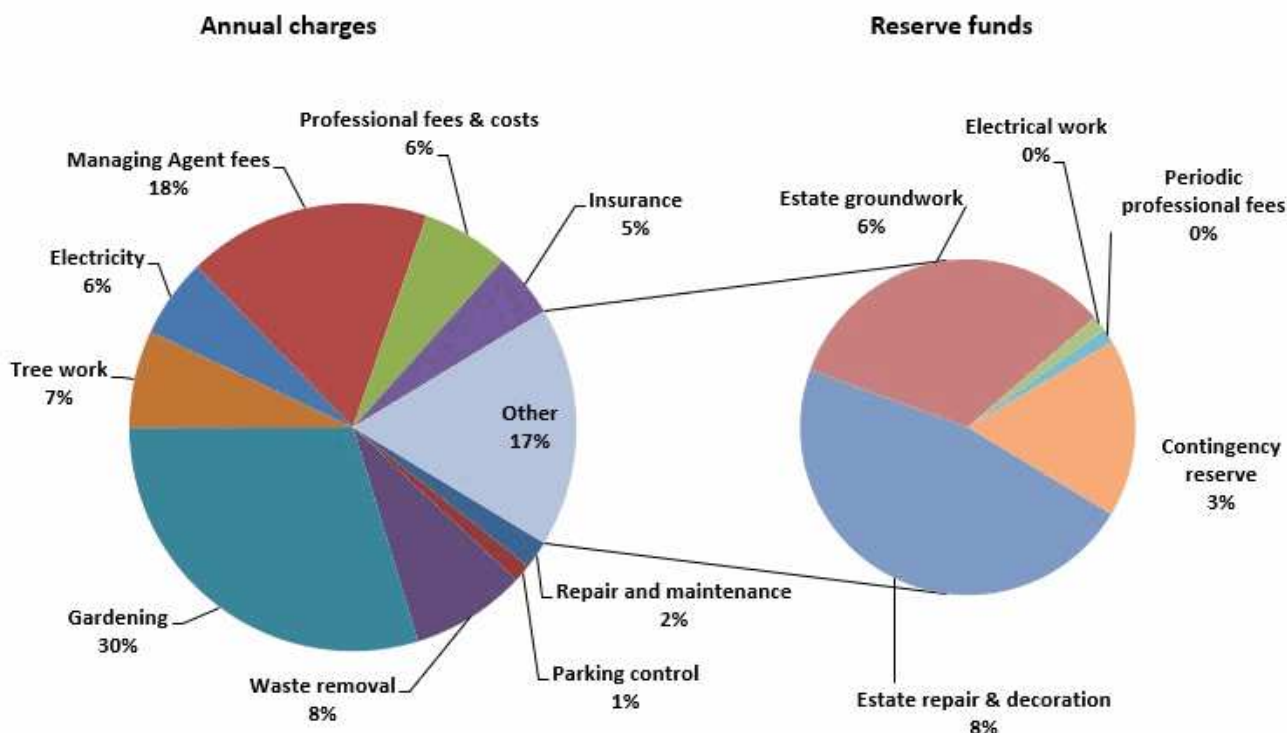
While *Thames Water* was surveying the sewer to locate the issues and buried inspection chamber, it noticed someone had poured white spirit down the drain. This is dangerous, illegal and, if they discover where this came from, the resident will be reported for possible prosecution.



## Newsletter – June 2023

The diagrams below show where your charges will be allocated in 2023-24 to the nearest percent (those shown as 0% are less than 0.5%). Annual expenditure is shown on the left, reserves on the right.

### Freehold houses / Wandle Housing Association breakdown



### Leasehold flats breakdown

