

# Ashworth Mansions Ltd

## Annual General Meeting 2007

Held on 24 April 2007, at the Amadeus Centre, London W9

### Note of annual general meeting

John Sutcliffe, Chairman, opened the meeting and referred to the annual report that had been circulated to flat owners. He was pleased that the AGM was being held six months after the service charge year end and that, in future, he hoped that it would occur at this time every year.

John Sutcliffe thanked Daron Tyas, the porter, and Philip King, managing agent for their hard work over the course of the year.

No apologies were received and there was one proxy from Terry Yason appointing Jeff Shapiro as proxy.

Michael Elliot, company secretary, reminded flat owners that the formal AGM referred to the accounts of Ashworth Mansions Ltd only and not to the service charge account. This would be discussed during the Residents' Meeting to follow the AGM. He presented the Directors' report and the audited accounts.

The accounts were approved (proposed by Michael Elliot and seconded by John Sutcliffe) and the auditors reappointed (proposed by John Sutcliffe and seconded by Michael Elliot). There were no dissenting votes.

John Sutcliffe said that there had been four owners who had expressed an interest to join the board. This was a very welcome development as there are four vacancies and much work to be done. The notices were received too late for consideration at the AGM but would be discussed at the next board meeting, as Directors could appoint additional directors.

John said that the board always welcomed nominations and that interested flat owners should get in touch via email [board@ashworthmansions.com](mailto:board@ashworthmansions.com).

One flat owner asked what qualifications were required. John replied that no formal qualifications were necessary, but potential directors needed to be willing to commit time to the job – one evening a month plus rather a lot of emails. They also needed to be amenable to working collaboratively with the other directors rather than pursuing a narrow agenda. Nominations from women and from flat owners on the communal hot water system would be particularly welcome.

The board was asked what would happen if there were more nominations than places available and whether flat owners would be able to have a say in who was appointed. John said that this was an unprecedented situation but that one option would be to circulate details of nominations to the flat owners for consultation. Another would be to call an extraordinary meeting.

The AGM then closed and the Residents' Meeting opened.

## Summary of residents' meeting

### Porter

Ashworth Mansions benefits from a resident porter. The porter's flat is rented from the former freeholder, Freshwater, as it was not purchased at the time the freehold was acquired. The lease has expired and Freshwater is proposing a new lease be signed at a higher rent, in line with current market values. A higher rent has not yet been agreed although a provision has been made in the accounts for an increase. Negotiations will commence shortly.

One long-term option is for Ashworth Mansions Ltd to borrow money to buy the flat and for the service charge to cover interest on the loan instead of rent payments to Freshwater. One flat owner pointed out that this had been looked at in the past but that a mortgage could not be secured on the porter's flat as it did not conform to current building regulations. The board undertook to evaluate this and to consult with flat owners before taking any action.

Discussion moved on to the merits of having a resident porter. Philip King, managing agent, estimated that the cost of having a non-resident porter at Ashworth Mansions would be approximately £10K per annum less than that of a resident porter. However, he said that it was common practice to have a resident porter where a block benefited from communal services such as heating and hot water, although not essential. One flat owner asked whether the lease specified that a resident porter be provided. Philip King stated that it did not.

The general feeling of the meeting was that flat owners valued the amenity of a resident porter. Two flat owners said that they had bought flats specifically because Ashworth Mansions had a resident porter who could keep an eye on things when they were away. A number of residents who supported the concept were equally keen to ensure that they were getting value for money. In particular, a number of residents asked whether Daron could pick up messages and receive parcels out of hours. The board agreed to address the points raised by residents and will circulate a list of the porter's duties alongside clarification of what service residents could reasonably expect him to provide outside working hours.

### Service charge accounts

One flat owner asked for a more detailed breakdown of the spending on repairs and building works. The board agreed to circulate this.

There was some discussion on the reserve fund. Keith Williams reminded flat owners that the reserve fund had been reintroduced in September 2006 to provide for the likely future major works outlined in the draft long term maintenance plan. This regular income should allow the board to undertake necessary maintenance proactively without needing to issue flat owners with large one-off demands. Having spent £3m in total to bring the estate into shape, we need to ensure things did not slide back. He pointed out that scaffolding the two blocks alone would cost £300K.

The board agreed to re-circulate the plan and to post it on the website. Keith Williams said that the plan was an indicative one and represented the opinion of the surveyor that drew it up. Flat owners should not regard it as an agreed timetable of works.

One flat owner suggested that should a fund of money build up, it would be very tempting to spend it, wisely or not. John Sutcliffe replied that the directors also paid into the reserve fund and had no interest in spending it frivolously, nor could they by law. He pointed out that no expenditure greater than £20K could be made without consultation with flat owners. Martin Clements said that old blocks could always present expensive surprises and that flat owners needed to recognise this.

Another asked whether the contributions would increase over the years. Keith Williams said that building inflation normally ran ahead of the consumer price index. The reserve fund contributions would probably rise slightly each year but that no decision had been taken. John Sutcliffe said that the board undertook an annual budgeting exercise in September and would communicate, in advance, what spending, if any, would take place from the reserve fund in any given financial year. Philip King said service charges were legally required to be reasonable and fair. They could only be spent for the purposes for which they were raised and subject to formal consultation for costs in excess of the thresholds laid down by the Landlord & Tenant Acts.

Geoffrey Barraclough reminded flat owners that the total service charge contribution would be lower in 2006/7 than 2005/6 as the earlier year included £200K to fund the interior parts redecoration. He pointed out that it had been hard to get flat owners to pay one-off demands in the timescales provided for and that the redecorations would have been completed faster had a reserve fund been in place at the time.

### **Interior redecorations**

Philip King said that he was putting pressure on the consultant surveyors to finish the snagging. The defects liability period expires on 20 May and the contractors will return to site after this point to make necessary repairs. A small additional fee had been agreed to cover damage caused by residents since the work was completed.

The board was divided on whether to put the notice boards back in the entrance halls. A straw poll at the meeting showed equal division.

Keith Williams said that the final account showed that the project had been completed within budget.

### **Hot water and central heating**

A number of residents expressed dissatisfaction with the central heating system. One said that her flat was insufferably hot. Another said that she had been without heating for part of the Winter. Some had experienced rust-coloured hot water on, at least, an intermittent basis. All were unhappy with the engineers.

The board agreed that the current situation was unacceptable.

Philip King said that he was about to terminate the contract of the existing contractor and would shortly appoint a new one. He said that a new pressurisation unit had been installed recently and that this had improved the hot water pressure. He also said that the gas supply contract was being re-tendered and that bills should fall in line with lower energy prices generally.

One flat owner asked whether the flats could move to independent central heating as was the case with half of Ashworth Mansions already. The directors pointed out that the flats in question were not obliged to use the communal system but were obliged, under the lease, to pay a share of the costs. It was thought that no fundamental change could be effected without the agreement of all the flat owners concerned but legal advice might be necessary.

It was agreed to set up a sub-committee to review the central heating system. Devika Malik, one of the flat owners concerned, volunteered to lead the exercise.

### **Mains water**

Mains water infrastructure was installed to each flat during the major works of 2002/3 but is not yet connected to Thames Water. This project is to provide a break-tank and associated pumps in the boiler room to ensure that adequate pressure is maintained in the system. Keith Williams said that the project was behind where he had wanted it to be.

Delays had been caused by two issues. Firstly, the surveyor had been slow and secondly, the design had needed to be modified following consultation with residents to minimise possible noise nuisance from the pumps. Tenders had now been sent to a number of potential contractors and flat owners would receive formal notification of these in due course. The project should be completed this summer and there was no current reason to suppose that the cost should differ significantly from the indicative figure of £85K quoted at the last general residents meeting.

Keith went on to remind residents that each flat is equipped with an inlet valve for the mains water. Once this is live, flat owners will need to make the necessary plumbing adjustments within their own flats at their own expense. The board agreed to circulate detailed briefing material for flat owners before the new water system goes live and to approach reputable plumbers to arrange group discounts. The amount of work required depends on the layout of the flat and the existing pipe work. In most cases, this should not be too onerous but, in some cases, floor boards may need to be raised. A professional project manager will be engaged to manage the change over.

The existing system takes water from old tanks in the roofs situated above the stairwells. A recent consultant's report confirms that although this system is currently supplying good quality water, money will shortly need to be spent if the tanks are to continue in operation.

Residents questioned how long it would be after the new water system goes live that the old one can be turned off. Philip King said that it was usual practice to offer flat owners a reasonably long period within which to make the necessary adaptations. Keith Williams said that Ashworth Mansions would take advice and behave lawfully.

One resident asked whether two water rates would be payable during the time when both systems were live. John Sutcliffe said that this would not be the case. Another asked how much water pressure would be available. Keith Williams confirmed that the pressure would be the same throughout the estate whether at ground or top floor level. He did not know how much pressure there would be and promised to consult with the specialists and let flat owners know in advance what they could expect.

### **Asbestos removal programme**

Philip King explained that an asbestos survey had been carried out prior to the redecoration of the common parts. Two areas had been identified for removal work. These were the boiler house and a store room beneath block 3 that had been used for storing bicycles.

The work was carried out by an accredited contractor under the supervision of a specialist consultant. All work was notified to the Health and Safety Executive and carried out under negative pressure in a sealed environment. The work in the boiler house was carried out with no problems at a cost of £6.5K. During the final stages of the work in block 3, one resident reported some dust in her kitchen. Tests showed this dust contained a small quantity of asbestos. The specialist consultants cleaned the room and asbestos has not subsequently been found in this room or in neighbouring flats.

The work to the store room needs to be completed. The consultants have advised that, during the works, residents should vacate the adjacent flats and that the kitchens should be fitted with plastic sheeting. A meeting will be held with residents of block 3 to agree the best way forward.

The cost of the work to the store room was £6.2K. Philip King confirmed that this invoice had not been paid pending satisfactory resolution of the whole asbestos removal. However, additional costs could possibly push the total bill for all the asbestos removal work above £20K which is why flat owners had received a consultation on the subject.

One resident asked whether there was any other asbestos on the estate. Philip King replied that there was some under one of the water tanks but that the specialists advised leaving this in place for the time being.

Another asked where the asbestos had come from to end up in one of the kitchens. Philip King said that it was uncertain but that the experts advised that it could have been from the surrounding pipe works in the flat concerned and had been shaken free by the vibrations emanating from the store room. Since the work was under negative pressure, any dust shaken loose in the store itself would have remained in that area.

## **Anti-social behaviour**

A number of residents reported problems with youths hanging about on the corner of Grantully Road and Ashworth Road. One resident recounted a series of conversations with the police on the subject. They were advised to call the Safer Neighbourhood team whenever the youths were present. The board agreed to circulate this to residents and to write to the local councillors making residents' views clear. It also agreed to investigate whether anti-climb paint or the installation of railings could make the area less attractive to the youths.

## **Pigeons**

A number of residents reported increasing nuisance from pigeons. Philip King said that he was aware of the problem and contractors were under contract to put spikes on the drain covers in block 5 and to replace the netting in block 10. This should be completed within two weeks. The next step was to investigate whether a falconer could assist. Block 1 at high level was also to be checked.

## **Party**

It was agreed to hold a summer garden party. Natasha Keats volunteered to organise. Anyone interested in helping should contact Natasha directly at [n\\_keats@hotmail.com](mailto:n_keats@hotmail.com).

## **Wooden floors**

One resident brought up the subject of wooden floors and the nuisance caused to people in flats underneath them. John Sutcliffe reminded flat owners that the leases required all areas (except kitchen and bathroom) be substantially carpeted. Martin Clements said that the board had considered this issue at a number of recent meetings and routinely refused all requests to install new hardwood flooring. It was agreed that the board would circulate residents to remind them to have consideration to those living below.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.