ASHWORTH MANSIONS

Notes from an informal discussion with Residents, held on 3rd June 2010, immediately after the Annual General Meeting of the Company.

1. SERVICE CHARGE EXPENDITURE

Geoff Barraclough, Chairman of the Board of Directors, gave an explanation of the expenditure items in the accounts, and explained that the surplus shown on the accounts would be rebated to owners in September, at the same time as the service charge and major works demands were issued.

One Member raised concerns about the Porters expenditure, and raised queries about the "out of hours" service from the Porter and queried justification of the expense. Other Members present disagreed.

The same Member queried the amount of services paid in comparison with other blocks in the area. GB explained that the service charges are higher than other blocks for various reasons, eg a previous subsidence issue with the block means the insurance premium is higher, and Ashworth Mansions does not own the Porter's flat, which has a cost of £18,000 per annum.

The same Member asked whether the caretaker's duties could be clarified to residents.

2. MAJOR WORKS

A Member of the Board, Martin Clements, spoke to Members about the Elgin Avenue refurbishment that is due to start later this month. He explained that Styles Harold Williams and DBR the appointed contractors will write to residents prior to the works starting outlining the communication procedure.

i) The work will start on the 21st June and is expected to last for 16 weeks.

ii) Scaffolding will be put up starting with block 1 (flats 1-9). This will be up for all of the 16 weeks, and there will be green mesh on the outside of the scaffolding.

iii) There will be some storage on the grass areas on the Elgin Road side, but this will be reinstated to the same condition as now, once the contractors have left site.

iv) Daron, the caretaker, will be responsible for day to day liaison, although as previously mentioned, the communication process will be sent out in a letter by Styles Harold Williams (SHW)

v) Contractors will let the residents know when their windows will be painted so that they can be left open.

vi) The contractors will use the WC outside the boiler room, and will use the boiler room itself as a site office.

One Member asked about the brickwork cleaning. MC explained that part of this will take place as a trial and then the Board will decide whether or not to go ahead. MC then explained that a decision has not yet been reached on the detail of the window preparation. The contact price allows to strip back the paintwork completely on the window frames to bare wood, but that a decision may be made to prepare and rub down prior to painting.

Residents will be told if there are any major changes to the specification.

GD then explained that at the Board of Directors budget meeting in August, the next stage of the major works will be discussed, and it is envisaged that a similar amount to last year will be demanded for the next stage, less the under spend of the service charge.

3. CENTRAL HEATING

Several Members present have communal central heating. Board Member Devika Malik explained that the current contractors have let us down this year. She explained that the system is coming to the end of its working life, and that the compensator is not effective. It is very expensive to replace the compensator with the system that is there at the moment. She explained that to convert to individual systems would be complicated, as the heating pipes are all linked between the flats, and this would mean that all flats would need to change over at the same time.

It was proposed to set up a Committee to look at a system upgrade, to include the heating and not water.

Two Members present, Susie Burbridge and Jane Henderson, offered to sit on the Committee.

DM suggested that owners should fit thermostatic valves on their radiators so that residents are able to control their own heat.

4. GARDENS

The current gardeners have asked for an increase in their fees, and a Section 20 Consultation process is underway. Board Member John Sutcliffe said that the Board was disappointed with quotations received so far, and that meetings with the contractors would take place within the next couple of weeks.

One Member complained about the state of the lawn, and said that she had previously obtained a cheaper quote to maintain the gardens. JS explained that this was due to bad winter conditions, and that the lawn had recently been fertilised and re-seeded. JS has been watering the garden.

SB indicated that she would like to join the Garden Committee, and said that the present gardeners were not doing a good job.

JH suggested that maybe the shaded grassed areas should be paved. One other Member present suggested that the Beech tree should be cut back more, and JS explained that there were restraints on this due to a tree preservation order.
Members of the garden committee are John Sutcliffe, Susie Burbridge, Vanessa Shrimpton and Pamela Knudsen.

5. WATER MAINS

Linda Foss from KFH explained progress to date.

i) Contractors have partially filled and pressure tested the external water pipes.

ii) There are a few flats where entry has still not been gained, and this is holding up the process.

iii) Contractors are returning next week to change the drain cocks at the bottom of the risers.

iv) Once the complete system is pressure tested, then owners will be able to connect to the new system.

v) JS reported that the Water Board have said there will be no change to the billing system to residents.

One Member said that there was a problem with squirrels climbing the pipes and damaging the insulation to the pipework. LF from KFH has approached the pest control company about this, but there is very little that can be done due to the close proximity to the park.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Sky +

GB explained that the building is currently cabled for Sky and Virgin Media, but that not all residents could receive Sky + as this needed additional ports on the dish and additional cabling.

The Company that supplies and maintains the dishes have quoted an additional £1,217 per annum to re-cable half of the flats, with a similar amount to cable the other half, at a cost of approximately £27 per flat per annum. Opinion will be sought from owners about this. It was thought that Sky + would add value to the flats and make them more saleable.

One resident mentioned that the garden gates are sometimes left open, which represents a security problem. It may be possible to spring-load the gates so that they shut automatically.

Another Member present suggested that the fob entry system could be refreshed, and new fobs re-issued, due to ex-residents having access to the common parts with existing fobs.

GB made a request for more Directors to come onto the Board, and a request for someone to help organise the Garden Party this year.

The meeting then closed at 8.50pm.