



QUEENSWOOD NEWS

Issue 10, April 2009

Entry Doors

We are well aware of the problems that there have been – and continue to be – with the new entry doors, and in particular their locking and closing mechanisms, which seem unsuited to day-to-day usage in a block of flats.

When we awarded the contract for their supply and fitting to the supplier, Crystal Windows, they appeared to be a reputable firm and offered a 10-year guarantee. Their after-sales service has, however, been abysmal – so bad, in fact, that directors have decided they will no longer accept them as suppliers of replacement windows for any property at Queenswood Gardens.

Hull & Company are continuing to chase Crystal Windows to come up with a solution that is fit for purpose. If they cannot do this within a reasonable time, we will be looking at other options, including completely replacing the doors with another manufacturer's products and claiming the costs from Crystal Windows – and suing them if necessary.

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Service Charges

In light of the uncertain economic outlook, service charges for 2009-2010 have been kept at the same level as for last year. This will result in a smaller contribution to the reserves, but this should not have any adverse effect on work at Queenswood Gardens.

We have decided that no major works should be carried out during the coming financial year unless it is unavoidable.

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Shareholder's Loan Repayments

As no lease extensions were granted during the 2008-2009 financial year, and thus no premium income was generated, no loan repayments will be made to Queenswood Gardens Ltd Founder shareholders this year.

Gardens

We continue to get plenty of positive comments from both residents and visitors about the gardens and how well they are looking.

The sharp-eyed will have noticed that we have added a few new flowerbeds to break up the angularity of some of the duller areas of lawn. We have also introduced a few pieces of small garden statuary in the form of birdbaths and a sundial.

Some of the larger trees have been pruned back – and just in time as they are already coming into bud and the first leaves are making their appearance.

The old fence round the drying area near the front of block C had to be taken down, as it had rotted badly and was a potential danger. It proved impossible to replace it with an identical fence, so instead a trellis has been erected around the drying area, and plans are already in place for a number of climbing plants to camouflage it.

QMA Board

Board members and their block responsibilities are:

- Block A – Mike Thompson (Flat 73)
- Block B – Pauline Thurman (Flat 137)
- Block C – Griff Griffith (Flat 105)
- Block D – Bob Haswell (Flat 19)
- Block F – Len Kerridge (Flat 135)

Glyn Murrill has stepped down as a director for personal reasons related to health – we wish him well and thank him for his service on the board.

We are actively following up a couple of options to co-opt at least one more director.

Drains

We've just completed a thorough video survey of all the drains within each block, including the vertical downpipes. We're not sure when the latter were last fully inspected, but from the results of the survey, it was certainly a long time ago. Following the survey, all of the drains and downpipes are being cleaned using a water-jetting system. Some of them were quite badly clogged and full of scale, but are now – or soon will be – in good condition.

A lot of the material that was clogging up the drains should never have been there in the first place. There was a great deal of solidified cooking fat that had obviously been poured down sinks. The contractors also found tea-towels, articles of clothing and other rubbish that should have been put into the communal waste bins. So please make sure that you dispose of your waste properly and don't pour cooking fat, or throw rubbish, down your drains.

(And, for the lady in block B – you know who you are – don't leave your bags of rubbish on the floor of the bin shed, either – put them in the bins.)

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Insurance

After the budget was set and the service charge agreed, we were notified that our insurance premium was going to rise by more than 50%, because of our "poor claims history". This represents an increase of over £4 per month per flat.

A number of claims have been made and paid out over the past few years relating to damage caused by poor workmanship in individual flats – most often this has been water damage caused by leaks after bathroom renovations when lessees' contractors have done a less than satisfactory job.

In future, when damage is the result of this sort of bad workmanship, we will have no choice but to claim the costs back from the lessee concerned, not from our insurers.

"We're a small community - let's be proud of it"

Anti-Social Behaviour

It was very clear from the strength of feeling expressed by the lessees who attended the Queenswood Management Association Ltd AGM that anti-social behaviour by a very small minority of residents is the biggest cause of concern at Queenswood Gardens. Major issues are noise and rowdy parties (especially late at night), vandalism (including deliberate damage to doors, locks and walls), dumping domestic waste on the floor of the bin sheds, and a general lack of respect for other residents who just want to enjoy a peaceable life. Some residents have expressed concern that they feel intimidated by some of those responsible for the bad behaviour, to the extent that they hesitate to make formal complaints

The problem is more prevalent in one or two blocks than across the rest of the development. And, not to put too fine a point on it, most of the "usual suspects" are tenants of lessees, rather than lessees themselves.

We want to assure you that we do take the problem seriously. We are investigating installation of more-comprehensive internal CCTV systems, focused specifically on the problem areas. We are also looking at establishing a confidential answerphone service for worried residents to report their concerns anonymously. We will also pursue all available legal avenues against the perpetrators where we have adequate evidence.

If you rent out your property at Queenswood Gardens, you should note that you are still responsible for the actions of your tenants, and for ensuring that they comply fully with the terms of your lease. We will not hesitate to take action against any lessee whose tenants cause a nuisance if they do not take prompt steps to redress the problem.

If a resident – be they a lessee or a tenant – has an anti-social behaviour order issued against them, or is guilty of a criminal offence that took place at the property (for example, dealing in drugs or stolen property), then that will serve as evidence of a breach of the lessee's covenants in the lease, and action will be taken for forfeiture of the lease.

Car Parking

If you change your car, you need to return your old parking permit and apply for a new one. If you simply amend your parking permit yourself, your new car will not be on the car-parking register. Cars that are not on the register, and which display an obviously altered permit, can be issued with a parking charge ticket without any notice.

Once again, we have to remind some residents that visitors' permits are only for visitors' use, not for residents' second cars. If it becomes obvious that a visitor's permit has been used on the same car for a period of more than two weeks, the permit will be cancelled and the car may be given a parking charge ticket if it is seen in Queenswood Gardens again.

There was a misprint in the last newsletter regarding the cost of replacing visitors' permits. It should have said that the fee is £10, not £1.

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Replacement Windows

Please remember that if you are intending to replace your windows, you must get written consent **before** the work is carried out. If you do not, you will be required to change the windows again to meet the minimum standards if they are not compliant, as some lessees have recently found out to their cost.

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We Value Your Comments

If you have any constructive ideas or comments about this newsletter, or what's going on at Queenswood Gardens generally, please don't hesitate to let one of us know.

All we ask is that you put your thoughts on paper; it will make it easier for your ideas to be distributed to board members for consideration at our meetings, and it will also ensure that we don't forget your comments – we're only human!

Watch Out For Fraud

In the current economic climate, it is no surprise that there appears to be a general increase in crime across the general population.

Some of us have personal experience of this, and have been victims – or attempted victims – of various frauds.

One worrying trend that we have seen at Queenswood Gardens involves mail. We believe that crooks – they could possibly even be local residents – have somehow intercepted letters so that they can use information in them to set up fraudulent activities, before redelivering the mail to the correct Queenswood Gardens address.

If you have any doubts about your mail having been tampered with, please report it without delay to the police and to Royal Mail.

Emergency Lighting

The internal emergency lighting systems have now been installed, as you will no doubt have noticed.

Each individual unit charges independently from the mains electricity supply. In the event of a failure of the power to any light, it will come on and provide illumination for approximately three hours.

This should be more than sufficient in the event of an emergency if the main lights fail due to a power cut or there are problems with the cabling to them (for example, if the insulation melts during a fire).

"We're a small community - let's be proud of it"