

Dron House Estate

August 2023

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Assistant Director Barbican Estate & Property Services  
Department of Community and Children's Services  
City of London Barbican Estate Office  
3 Lauderdale Place  
London EC2Y 8EN

Dear Mr Murtagh

**Petition to (1) reinstate the role of Estate Officer at Dron House; and (2) to reappoint [REDACTED] as Estate Officer**

We submit this letter as background to the petition which respectfully requests the role of Estate Officer at Dron House be reinstated, and that [REDACTED] be restored to his previous full-time post as Estate Officer at Dron House.

#### *Background*

Historically Dron House ('the Estate') has been an exceptionally friendly, cohesive and well-run estate. The vast majority of residents have respected the conventions of good neighbourliness as well as the rules and terms set out by the City as a condition of their right to live on the Estate.

Under the stewardship of previous Estate Officers, the Estate has benefitted from a high standard of cleanliness, tidiness and order. This level of service will no doubt be reflected in the positive scoring the City has received over the years from residents in response to their customer satisfaction feedback surveys.

Unfortunately, and following a restructuring of staff roles which saw the position of Estate Officer removed earlier this year, there has been a noticeable and concerning decline in the standard of services on the Estate. This has led to an appreciable level of ongoing distress for many residents, particularly with regard to the cleaning and portering services, and the huge increase in unauthorised parking in the courtyard.

#### *Cleaning & Portering*

A number of residents have expressed concern that since the departure of the Estate Officer, the Estate is no longer being cleaned to a proper and acceptable standard.

This is particularly concerning given the fact that somebody is now employed on a full-time basis to fulfil what was only ever part of the full-time duties carried out by the Estate Officer.

Furthermore, the estimated charges in relation to the cleaning/portering service have increased disproportionately since the removal of the Estate Officer role (please see further below). So while there has been an increase in costs, there has also been a corresponding drop in the standard of cleaning on the estate.

### *Parking in the courtyard*

Residents are well aware that parking in the courtyard is prohibited. This is not only visible from the signage around the Estate itself, but also from what has been an observable and respected custom over the years. On occasions extenuating circumstances arise when residents, or visitors on their behalf such as workmen, may need to park in the courtyard. When the Estate Officer was in post it was always possible for residents to arrange a temporary and discretionary permission to park. This was a fair and flexible system that worked in real time and could deal with unforeseen as well as planned events.

However, since the departure of the Estate Officer, many residents have decided to repeatedly ignore the rules regarding parking in the courtyard. We understand that the only City of London worker now present on site each day is limited in what he can do to prevent this happening because (a) his role is confined to that of a cleaner; and (b) he is not directly employed by the City.

Cars have been parking in the courtyard without permission throughout the day and night, during the weekend and the week, and both inside and outside of office hours. Many of these cars belong to residents, or relatives of residents, but others have simply been opportunist motorists with no connection to the Estate whatsoever. For example, there have been Uber drivers and delivery drivers who have spotted the open gate and have driven in to park and sit with their engine idling while they wait for their next job. Often the courtyard is full of cars, spoiling the quiet and peace of the space and its safe use as a traffic-free area.

This behaviour has been partly facilitated by residents obtaining copies of the key[s] to the padlock[s] securing the gate which bars access to vehicles. They let themselves in, often leaving the gate open or unlocked behind them. These keys have been available for purchase for many years and yet this type of illicit parking was not happening before the departure of the Estate Officer.

The presence of the Estate Officer on a daily basis meant that this kind of behaviour was monitored in real time and not tolerated. Although the gates were always left open for working access during office hours, residents did not regularly drive in and leave their cars. Anyone disobeying the parking rules would be spoken to immediately on an informal basis and reminded of the rules. If the behaviour continued and repeated warnings needed to be given, they were warned that the matter would be escalated to a more formal level. If anyone flouted this understanding over the weekend or out of hours, knowledge of it would soon reach the Estate Officer on his return and the matter would be taken up. Therefore, the presence of an Estate Officer served as a very effective deterrent, and a flexible, practical, inexpensive way of managing the courtyard and the Estate generally.

### *Community Involvement*

Residents were not consulted at any stage of the staff restructuring process. They were simply informed after the decision to remove the post of Estate Officer had been made.

This lack of consultation has in itself caused much ongoing upset and consternation amongst residents, the vast majority of whom have never known there not to be an Estate Officer in place. It is hard to understand why feedback was not sought from the residents as to whether or not they wished to retain an Estate Officer. The people who form part of the community here at Dron House are arguably best placed to testify to the benefits of having such personnel on site daily from their lived experience, and can give concrete examples of how this positively impacts on the efficient running of the Estate.

Please note that historically, the City reviewed the Estate Officer's role which was at the time residential and questioned whether this should become a non-residential position. As part of this review process, residents were consulted by letter and invited to vote on the issue in advance of any decision being taken by the City. The vote favoured a non-residential Estate Officer. The change in this role took account of everyone's opinion and helped to enable a smooth transition with no adverse effects on the running of the Estate. It is therefore difficult to understand why residents were not consulted on the recent issue of retention of the Estate Officer post.

### *Cost-effectiveness*

We realise that the City must consider how its resources are best spent when reviewing estate management across its housing stock. However, the present restructuring appears to have led to a paradoxical and incomprehensible increase in costs rather than a saving.

Leaseholders' charge sheets indicate that cleaning/portering charges have increased per annum by around 33% (rising by approximately £10,000 p.a. from an estimated £30,536 for the period 1/4/22 to 31/3/23 to an estimated £40,392 for the period 1/4/23 to 31/3/24).

Gardens and ground maintenance charges have increased by around 80% (rising by nearly £6,000 p.a. from an estimated £7,296 for the period 1/4/22 to 31/3/23 to an estimated £13,118 for the period 1/4/23 to 31/3/24).

Please note there has been no additional work involved in performing either of these duties which were previously undertaken as part and parcel of the Estate Officer's role.

In summary we would be grateful if the City would revisit its decision to abolish the post of Estate Officer. We believe the post was not only more cost-effective than the current arrangements, but also offered innumerable benefits to both the City and

residents in terms of the smooth running and social cohesiveness of the Estate, which is ordinarily a well-functioning diverse community.

In particular, the Estate Officer:

- provides continuity of contact and holds the trust and confidence of the residents. This proved to be exceptionally useful and reassuring during the trials and lockdowns of the recent pandemic;
- is readily recognisable as a City employee, and therefore an obvious point of first contact for both residents and visitors to the estate (e.g. refuse services, deliveries, workmen, care workers);
- bridges communications effectively between residents and the City, facilitating instantaneous and trusted feedback to the City on how its Estate is functioning at any particular given time;
- is in a unique position to understand their particular estate's characteristics in terms of the building structures, utility supplies and general layout. This is particularly important when facilitating any works/events happening on the Estate, particularly major works or emergencies;
- is in a unique position to understand their particular estate's characteristics in terms of the people who ordinarily reside there. This in turn enables them to readily spot and deal promptly with any likely misuse of premises (including any illegal subletting which may otherwise go unreported to the City).

Dron House has always been fortunate in the choice of personnel appointed to the post of Estate Officer. The most recent of these was [REDACTED] who executes his duties efficiently, is well-known and trusted by residents, and who, while remaining friendly and approachable at all times, commands authority and respect on the Estate.

Should the City be willing to reinstate the post of Estate Officer, and assuming he is willing to return to this post, we respectfully request that you reappoint [REDACTED] as Estate Officer at Dron House. This would save both on further costs in terms of recruitment fees, training and the hiring of additional staff, and would also restore the confidence of the residents alongside the efficient and cost-effective running of the Estate.

Please provide a response to this letter and petition to all the residents of Dron House.

Yours sincerely

**Dron House Residents**

cc John Fletcher (Allocated City of London Elected Member)  
Marianne Fredericks (Chairman of the Housing Sub-Committee)