

APPENDIX 1

Barbican Estate Office Recovery planning COVID-19 – Comments from RCC representatives July 2020

1. One topic which has come up is parcel delivery. In the Towers it normally works like this: delivery-man arrives and porter calls up to say to expect a delivery. Doorbell rings and we accept the delivery. If the porter knows that we are not in then the package is kept at reception. This still happens with our regular porters but with some relief personnel, they do nothing and the first we know is when we open the door to the flat (often to put out the rubbish last thing at night) and find a package. This is a lapse in security as the next delivery-man they allow in could easily take what he sees lying outside the door. I can't think of any valid reason for this other than laziness or they haven't been told what to do.

Please note - this chimes with the agency CPA at Andrewes saying that 'Security' should be involved when we have no 'Security' personnel. A training matter.

2. Lambert Jones Mews.

Blocked roof drains remains an unresolved issue: no action taken over the lockdown period and I understand (informal oral communication from Senior Resident Engineer) that the tender for clearing the drains has not yet been published (though we have been debited for the estimated cost in our most recent quarterly service charge).

Otherwise I think the BEO has been reasonably constructive: a problem with failed mastic sealing on the external staircase has been addressed (this is a qualified positive: according to Senior Resident Engineer, all the external staircases will have pointing raked out and replaced; broken tiles replaced etc - this will almost certainly mean removing and replacing the mastic. The contractor has been asked for a price.

The pointing on the east facing (garden) wall of the block has failed in places leading to water penetration to the interiors – this has been inspected by the Senior Resident Engineer; he says scaffolding will be required for a proper inspection and for rectification. This is to happen in the indefinite future.

Otherwise, I have heard no complaints from neighbours and I think the BEO has done well to continue to provide rubbish collection, concierge service and a reasonable level of cleaning.

3. I left a message because there was a rough sleeper on the Podium outside the Wallside houses on Monday. Nobody has got back to me. Surely they should have had a way of picking up urgent calls, Covid or not .

The Andrewes CPA was helpful and said they had a rough sleeper number and the sleeper vanished.

4. The major problem at Willoughby House was the failure of the House Officer/Estate Office to silence the exceptionally noisy and dirty work that was

unaccountably taking place during the early phase of the lockdown in a flat on the 5th floor. Residents in the neighbouring flats beside, below and above were greatly distressed since they were either trying to work from home or simply living in lockdown.

There was an additional fear that there might be an infection risk from these workmen.

It was felt that the workmen were taking no notice of the restrictions - and the flat was empty not urgently waiting for the owners to return etc, as we were told.

5. I think concierges were excellent and cleaning was very good in the circumstances. Not at all clear what anyone else was doing.

6. Noise and disturbance during lockdown has been highlighted in the BEO Bulletin. For example, people in tower flats exercising by walking around the fire-escapes past others' flats! This is a great invasion of privacy and also gives folk a start. BEO flagged up that this should not be done. Good!

But!...Even if people stick to their own balcony they can still be disturbing because invariably quite a few of the slabs are loose and clunk loudly. If a person is on their balcony you hear it and if it's a couple of clunks then you ignore it. But if the clunks are every few seconds and go on for 10 or 15 minutes as the person exercises back and forwards along their balcony it drives you up the wall! However, this is something that the BEO can do something about - it is high time that they got contractors to fix slabs so they don't clunk.

We will very likely go into another lockdown and people will continue to exercise on their balcony. Having now found they can do it, they may continue to do so anyway, lockdown or not - better a balcony than a stinky CoL street?

7. As you will see there are a wide range of topics covered, but I note that where rubbish collections are mentioned, there is a preference for five days a week.

8. Reception opening hours

During our last meeting you asked about reception opening hours at the BEO and I confirmed that I have not had any feedback on that. On reflection, however, it occurs to me that many (the majority?) of the people visiting reception are tradespeople, carers and other third parties rather than residents. So that may explain the lack of feedback.

9. Breton House

BEO have done a very good job in continuing to provide all essential services and should be congratulated for doing so. Obviously the need for reduced staffing has made things difficult for all staff, whether working on the Estate or from home.

However, those staff members who have had to work on the Estate have had the added risks of having to travel as well.

Our CPAs became even more essential - and overworked - and have done a fantastic job, especially at the outset when numbers were reduced and deliveries increased. Hopefully the changed arrangements for food deliveries took some of the pressure off the CPAs.

Our real area of concern is around the lifts and common parts where the supplied PPE wasn't worn all the time. I appreciate it must be difficult doing physical work wearing masks, which meant that the cleaners in particular had a tough time. This made the two-way risk of infection worse, especially as several residents appear to have had the virus and could well have used the common parts and lifts, without PPE, whilst being infectious.

I know more residents have taken to using stairs rather than lifts and a lot more have been taking their rubbish to the bin areas. As a result, three collections a week should be feasible, giving cleaners more time for cleaning. However, there are drawbacks, as can be seen from the attached photo of what looks like a car boot sale in the Breton bin area this morning.

Also, as you will be aware, a whole consignment of recycling couldn't be recycled because someone had dumped a paint can in a recycling bin. Perhaps not a problem had the tin been empty! However, the fact that there were no restrictions on people coming into the Estate after the construction industry guidelines were relaxed not only caused more health and safety risks but meant a lot more "rubbish" was dumped in the bin areas. More people also led to more dirt and dust in the common parts and lifts, so more work for the cleaners at the wrong time.

Finally, I think we should also acknowledge City Corporation's role in all of this. Not only has it protected its staff but it immediately recognised the potential reduced ability of both residents and tenants to meet rent, service charge and council tax/rates liabilities as a result of the virus.

Additional comment from Breton House:

"It has been a difficult period for all concerned. The cleaners have done their best as staffing levels have been reduced during the lockdown. But on occasions it has been necessary for me to sweep the bin area because it got so dirty. I am not sure why, but other blocks use the Breton House/Ben Johnson waste disposal area e.g. those who live in Frobisher and Defoe House.

Fairly large items have been dumped in this area including fridges, microwaves, large tyres and furniture. There were a few occasions when the entrance door leading to the lower ground 2 lift was half blocked so it was necessary for me to move the offending, and heavy, item from the doorway. The fire riser inlet is always blocked."

10. Gilbert House:

They clearly were under enormous pressure during this time and were very obviously struggling with reduced staffing levels both within the office and across the estate be it CPAs or cleaners. So it is easy to identify a feeling of being abandoned during a very difficult time but I am sympathetic to their challenges.

So far as I know the City did not furlough staff so I wonder if redeployment could have been considered to provide the right levels of support and cover during a very difficult time.

Standards have clearly fallen and I hope this is acknowledged and there is a plan to reset the dial.

The CPAs were great but clearly under pressure with the right levels of staffing.

Overall the communications to residents were weak at the outset of lockdown. They got a bit better but something more proactive perhaps with the BA or house group chairs may have been beneficial.

11. One immediate thought is that the weekly email from the BEO has had nothing for some time now about the cleaning routines that were, and presumably still are, in place having been instigated by the arrival of the coronavirus. It would be helpful to be kept up-to-date on this.

12. Gratitude to our CPAs particularly. At the outset, especially when not enough was understood about Covid-19, they remained present and helpful. They will also have dealt with a phenomenal volume of deliveries.

Echo comments about the paucity of information. I would have liked to have received precise information about the cleaning and infection mitigation protocols (this is true on an everyday basis by the way, not only during lockdown).

They may have been using this already, but if they have not, would the Estate Office use longer-lasting disinfectant on all 'touch' surfaces - all stair handrails, doors/door handles, lift buttons and lift-rail. There are plenty of products out there - some lasting up to 30 days or more, and a number simply applied by misting. If the BEO is already using this, then I would point to the comment above.

13. A good point about the sterling efforts of the CPAs who certainly deserve acknowledgement in any feedback.

Talking to one of them the other day they recognise that lockdown will have resulted in a 'permanent' step-change in the volume of ongoing internet shopping and the BEO might need to consider this in planning staffing and cover. This might also be impacted by any changes made to delivery processes and timing introduced by the City Corporation to manage traffic levels better (although so far not much of a problem!).

The general preference within the (Gilbert) House Group is for daily collections Monday-Friday, as before lockdown. The reasoning is that savings would be minuscule, and that it is very helpful indeed to have someone walking through the hall building every day.

It's a form of daily check which is useful because not only is Gilbert House a corridor block, it is a block that is used as a shortcut by non-Gilbert residents.

Also, as discussed previously, in the absence of granular accounts, any saving will quickly 'disappear' - it won't be ring-fenced.

We can certainly do a residents' survey later on if the idea gains more traction, and if we can demonstrate clear advantages such as tangible cost savings. I can put that again to the House Group in due course.

14. Seddon House: Feedback from one resident follows.

I entirely understand why the cleaning teams, inspections, the regular care that takes place on our state is not happening at the moment. But it is clear that this is causing a range of issues. For example, in the many years I've lived here, I have never seen so much litter and detritus across the estate. It is also clear at the moment that there are people urinating everywhere, There are endless people on bikes, and an increasing number of people, mostly delivery people, on motorbikes riding across the estate. There are groups endlessly tramping through all of the planting, and it feels like a place increasingly out of control.

I wonder what steps the Barbican estate office in the city will take to re-establish a sense of calm and order that so many of us appreciate but the Barbican. I do not think it will be enough simply to reinstate the service levels. I suspect something additional will be required. For example, is it possible to introduce some form of light touch but fairly clear patrolling. This will begin to eradicate some of the behaviours that have grown up over the last few months. And hopefully restore the estate to its previous condition. If all of that can take place sooner rather than later it will save the city money in terms of preventing escalation in some of the issues that are already becoming increasingly prevalent.

Having worked for various London boroughs for very many years now, I know how easy it is to lose control of an environment. And how extraordinarily it is to pull it all back. I'm not for one second suggesting that the Barbican looks like some of the estates for which I have been responsible in some of the London boroughs. But I do see a serious deterioration in standards and general behaviour.

I would very much welcome your thoughts and any ideas you may have. And just to say again, I entirely understand why full-service is not in place at the moment. And also understand the pressures that the BEO face. I remain resolutely supportive of their work. So this is sent in a spirit of positivity rather than a complaint.

15. Shakespeare Tower:

At Shakespeare Tower's HG zoom meeting on Wednesday we discussed the 3 times per week rubbish collection idea and on balance the view was "keep it as it was" at 5 days per week for us, when normal working is resumed.

The members thought that the collection had been good during the lock-down but noted that the number of residents had been less and consequently that performance was not necessarily indicative of a normal in-residence level.

16. John Trundle Court:

First the positives:

- A resident was very grateful to their House Officer for help and commitment in response to questions.
- I am also grateful to the Officer for keeping an eye on the more elderly residents and for keeping me informed. Also the CPI's - when there was reason for concern.
- The 3 day rubbish collections appear to have worked.
- A resident reported that the cleaning of lift 58 was good.

The Negatives:

- Lack of cleaning on stair 56 - litter left on the stairs.
- Lift 55 was not cleaned to it's usual standard and the protection padding left until I reported that it was swinging on one hook and presented a H&S problem
- The cleaning is now up to its usual standard.
- Builders in a flat, finishing tiling early on in Lockdown, hadn't informed the residents: The drilling caused distress as some people were working from home: One university student, that day, was taking one of her final papers. The problem was solved by the student's parent locating the flat owner - who fortunately lives in the block.

Outside of housekeeping:

- I have been asked to point up the concern over the uncertainty regarding the increases in service charges - namely re decoration. This following increased car park and storage charges'
- These increases come just at a time when there is so much uncertainty in the country; when even the Government is asking landlords to hold back on rent demands.
- During this Lockdown period we have had more people enjoying the space - which is Beech Gardens:
- Some concern about skateboarding and cycles (although I noticed mostly young children).
- One resident wonders why there is no longer a visible police presence.

- I have noticed that we no longer have a 'no cycling / skateboarding' notice anywhere on the BG walk.

17. Lauderdale Tower

Lifts

One or two Lauderdale Tower residents have raised the issue of whether there should be guidance for the use of the lifts during the pandemic. I think this is particularly an issue for the tower blocks where the lifts are busy all day not just with residents but with delivery men, contractors and so on, and where the stairs are not an easy alternative.

We have been getting along quite well using common sense and courtesy but delivery men and contractors do not necessarily observe the niceties, nor do they tend to wear masks. Many of our more vulnerable residents moved away during the worst of the crisis but they are now coming back and may be nervous about sharing lifts.

Our house group's view is that we are not virologists and are not qualified to say whether or not there's a risk. So we are neutral on this and regard it as entirely a matter for the City of London or the UK government to issue any rules or guidance. Any residents asking for guidance are being asked to write to the estate office and at the end of this email I'm pasting the comments of one resident who did just that.

I emailed the other two tower blocks and both have been doing the same as us so far – getting along quite well using common sense and courtesy.

In short we are not pressing for guidance since we are not qualified to say whether it is needed, and it must be said that very few people have raised this with us – two or three at most. But we think perhaps the City might look into this and determine whether or not it's necessary, not just for the Barbican Estate but for all its housing estates and indeed its office blocks.

Rubbish collections

I believe there was a suggestion that we might stick with the reduced service. We haven't discussed this yet but my feeling is that this would be very unpopular with residents even if accompanied by a small reduction in the service charge. I don't know how other blocks function but in Lauderdale Tower we have our own dedicated cleaner who normally carries out a rubbish collection each morning and it is not clear what he would do with his time on the mornings when he had no rubbish collection to carry out.

My question would be to turn this around and ask how much longer we have to wait for a resumption of normal service. I find it unpleasant having food waste waiting two days for collection and three days at weekends.

Service charge

This is probably beyond the scope of Monday's discussion but sooner or later the service charge will come up. The question is, who will pay the extra costs arising from the pandemic – the landlord or the leaseholders? For example:

1) The City decided that lobby porters with health conditions should stay at home and that their duties would be covered by agency staff. Assuming that the lobby porters at home remained on full pay, who should pay for the extra cost of taking on agency staff?

2) Many services were cut – for example, cleaning, repairs and estate office opening times. But in some cases staff costs may remain the same whether or not services were provided. Should leaseholders be expected to pay the same cost for a reduced service?

3) Normally, estate office staff spend some of their time working for other departments and on other projects (eg the girls' school expansion or the Beech Street scheme) and this is billed out to those other projects using time sheets. If all this has come to a halt, and no time is being billed out to other departments and projects, leaseholders will face a big increase in costs even though they are not receiving any increase in service. This could explain why the BEO's central costs are budgeted to increase by 20 per cent this year.

Stairwell lock

At a micro level, one thing that went well in Lauderdale Tower was a request that the lock should be changed on the stairwell door at podium level so that residents could use their key to open it and thereby use the stairs instead of the lifts. This was done promptly and has worked very well – people used to leave the door ajar on their way out so they could get back in again on their return, but this no longer happens so there has been an increase in security.

18. Mountjoy House

- The feedback is generally very positive for how the Estate has been managed during the lockdown period.
- The only consistent negative theme was on the issue of parcels/packages. I know our car park attendants have been overwhelmed with parcels for a while now but when the pink slip system was suspended it led to even more confusion over when parcels had been delivered and when. A couple of Mountjoy Committee members are keen to have pink slips reinstated and another two were keen to modernise the process via email/alert system. Either way, the reintroduction of a logging and alert system for parcel/packages would be an improvement as lockdown continues to ease.