

Meeting of the members of Leicester House RTM Limited via Zoom videocall

Tuesday 23 September 2020

In attendance

Clayton Hudson (14)
Nick Pike (20)
James Rollingson (9) Directors

Guy Hudson NRM Limited –managing agents

Amir Asgari(1)
Jenny Corser (3)
Joe Sturdy (15)
Stuart Clifton (24)
Holly Andrews (26)
Brigid Everitt(32)

1. Lifts

Clayton reported that, after a period of unreliability, NRM had changed the lift maintenance contractor from Otis to Genesis, which had improved performance considerably. Conscious that the lifts were likely to require full refurbishments in the medium to long term, the directors had commissioned an independent report from lift consultants who had confirmed that both were likely to require major works in or around 2030. The report is available to review on the NRM Leicester House portal. There are two lifts in Leicester House; refurbishment was likely to cost £55,000 each at today's prices. The directors recommended that a separate lift refurbishment reserve be set up to which all apartment owners who contributed to lift maintenance (all other than those with ground floor apartments or whose properties have separate entrances) would be asked to contribute £365 per year. An electronic poll was organised for those impacted by this, all of whom voted in favour. This charge would be incorporated in service charge invoices from 1 January 2021.

A member reported that the lift doors in stairwell 5 continued to bang when closing. Guy agreed to ask the contractors to attend to fix this; this work has since been completed.

2. Budget

A draft budget for service charge in 2021 was circulated showing an increase of approximately 1.2% on last year's charges (not taking into account the lift refurbishments reserve increase noted above). There was a discussion as to whether there was any scope for savings in the charges generally and a suggestion that window cleaning might be reduced, although Guy pointed out that this save little as costs would increase if a less frequent clean took longer as a result. Concern was expressed over the additional service charges raised earlier this year following an overspend in 2019. Nick pointed out that there was very little "fat" in the service charge budget; whilst there were reserves for redecoration (and now the lift refurbishment) the fact was that if there was essential unexpected expenditure extra charges would arise. James said that the directors had to strike a balance between keeping the service charge as low as possible and ensuring all likely expenditure was anticipated. The alternative would be to increase the reserve charge to meet extra unexpected costs which may or may not arise. Last year's extra charge was the first for many years which tends to indicate the current policy is about right, although this would be kept under review as the building ages further. NRM accepted that the issue of extra charges had not been handled well this year and steps had been taken to ensure this was not repeated.

A member noted that insurers had refused to pay for a large part of the roof repairs last year and asked if NRM had considered changing insurers to one which might. Guy reported that the issue was that the roof repairs were necessitated by a combination of poor construction

and wear and tear, neither of which would be covered by a standard buildings insurance policy and so this unfortunately was not possible.

The directors would consider the budget further and would then report to members.

3. Freehold purchase

Clayton pointed out that the government was keen to provide further leasehold enfranchisement- in other words allowing leaseholders of flats and houses the opportunity to purchase the freehold of the buildings in which they live. At present if Persimmon- who own the freehold of Leicester House- wished to sell it they had to offer it to the apartment owners first, giving them three months in which to raise the funds to do so. Further changes to legislation might be forthcoming which would enable apartment owners in blocks to require the freeholders to sell the freehold to them, although that was not yet certain. The advantage of doing so would be that, if the freehold were to be purchased, apartment owners could be granted new leases of 999 years which would, in effect, eliminate depreciation of the lease value (and with it the value of the apartment which becomes significant once there are fewer than 80 years left to run). The collection of ground rent could also be abolished, It was not possible at this stage to say how much each apartment owner would need to contribute to a freehold purchase, although it was likely that finance would be available to assist. No further steps need be taken at the moment but the directors would monitor any legislation change and were ready to act if Persimmon decide to sell at any stage.

4. Any other business

A member pointed out that the Leicester House bin store was full to bursting and that it needed to be disinfected more regularly. The third recycling bin need to have its lid unlocked as the extra space was needed. This was passed to NRM to deal with.

There also seemed to be a large number of unused bikes in the bike store and it was requested that a further audit be carried out along the lines of that previously undertaken with a view to removing those which had been abandoned. This was again referred to NRM. It was pointed out that there was also a secure bike store in St Stephen's Pavilion car park in which a place could be reserved on payment of the £25 fee for a bike store key fob (this is separate from the main car park fob). This was not widely known and the directors are to consider how this can be better publicised.

There was a discussion about smart meters. As all Leicester House meters are situated in the utility room on the ground floor the distance between them and any household devices in apartments for measuring consumption means that the latter frequently do not work. This was unlikely to be resolved until the next model of smart meters- which work on a radio connection— are available.

Members reported repeated cases of loitering on the steps of the Stairwell 5 entrance (this is the entrance nearest to the Pavilion) by non-residents who frequently smoked and drank there. The directors are to consider signage, possibly including a CCTV notice, to try to alleviate this. NRM were asked to ensure that the steps were cleaned regularly.

The owner of Flat 1 had various issues to report including the fact that rainwater was soaking into render on his wall giving rise to damp. NRM are to investigate and obtain quotes for repair. He was also having problems with his front door and was advised that the door had been damaged by the occupants and that he should obtain a suitable quote for replacement. NRM are to submit a request and forward the quote to the freeholder for approval, after which the door can be replaced at Amir's cost. He also requested a new "Flat 1 " sign as the original was fading.

Members reported other problems with the staining of rendering on the ground floor which NRM would investigate.

There was also a report of water leak into Stairwell 5 from a sash window during heavy rain. This, too would be investigated.

Some members expressed the concern that the NRM portal was not intuitive or user friendly. The directors will review this to see what improvements might be made. Members asked that more information be distributed than was currently the case and there directors will consider a Leicester House website along those already in place for Fellows Plain and St Stephen's Pavilion.

Work to refurbish the pond, although not the remit of Leicester House RTM Ltd (it is the responsibility of the Fellowes Plain management company) has started and should be completed by the end of October. The work was bring paid for from Fellowes Plain reserves so no additional charges to its members (which include all Leicester House members) were likely.

James pointed out that each apartment had an annual allowance of £225 for water consumption, with any consumed over that being charged to the individual member. Consumption was likely to have increased considerably during lockdown when most people were working from home so members should be aware that they were likely to face increased bills as a result.

Members expressed the view that the meeting had been very useful and it was agreed we should aim to hold them approximately every six months.