

Strawberry Vale Residents Association – Chair’s report January 2019

- Apologies for 15 month gap since last AGM caused by lack of free weekends and planning.
- 2018 a very good year for SVRA with quite a lot accomplished for the benefit of residents.
- January. After 2 year battle with Peabody over the attempted gas switch off, they finally conceded defeat and settled out of court. We weren’t there as SVRA but as 5 claimants, with over 50 waiting in the wings. Peabody took a big hit, possibly losing up to £1 million in total. The benefits to us, apart from cooking gas, are that they will be more likely to listen to their residents and respect them. We also now have a gas supply system that is not dangerous and is properly safety checked – which it wasn’t before.
- March. We raised concerns about fire safety in Old Farm Road resulting from the loss of self closers to front doors. We met with Fire brigade and a Peabody officer. The result is unlocked balcony doors in order to ensure easy escape. This has required some chasing but has now been done.
- April. Many residents were complaining about drug dealing on the estate. We held a meeting with local police and David Azouelos. The police suggested logging car number plates and passing these on. We raised concerns with Peabody about cctv quality. There were good cameras but poor recordings. New recording equipment was installed in the summer.
- April. The football pen was resurfaced and renovated with new goals. We had campaigned for this for 6 months trying to raise funds from outside sources. Eventually Peabody ‘found’ money they had previously told us was unavailable. We can thank our NM David Azouelos for his help here. I met Brendan Sarsfield in the summer at a Forum meeting and he knew of the resurfacing – so it had filtered up to the CEO!
- July. Our Mad bid application from 2017 produced two new picnic tables. An estate map will appear shortly after a year’s wait. Incredibly the most up to date map available in Peabody dates from 1996 so there have been several months drafting and redrafting which I was involved in.
- August. The biggest win of the year was Peabody finally accepting that the way they had been charging tenants for heating and hot water was incorrect and probably illegal. Tenants had their heating and hot water charges halved and a refund applied to their accounts. This followed ten months of gathering information from residents and comparing tenants’ charges with leaseholders and freeholders. Without working together and sharing this information it wouldn’t have been possible. It probably surprised Peabody that we could do it and hopefully it will be an important lesson to

them as they turn into one of London's biggest housebuilders of mixed developments of private homes and social housing.

- September. We made a successful planning application to Barnet to extend the possible opening hours of the Octavia Hill garden. These had been limited by the objections of just one man living in Chambers Gardens whose house backs on to the gardens. Again, this was several months work and was funded by the GMMC. We can look forward to weekend opening on warm summer days. Volunteers to manage are needed.
- September. A resident raised concerns about the misleading and dangerous new junction markings at the top of Strawberry Vale. We took it up with Barnet via our local councillor Arjun and they were repainted within weeks.
- September. Two new large recycling bins were delivered and two more are on the way. This was as a result of campaigning by us for more bins on the estate to avoid overflows. Overflowing bins lead to the problem of rats in 2016. At that time the estate was underprovided with waste bins, a fact unrecognised by Peabody who called them mice, claimed they were inevitable and blamed residents.
- October. Shona and I had a meeting with Richard Kitchener and his boss Sunny Vadher about the standard of caretaking on the estate. This followed my observation that Ginkgo gardeners were doing caretakers work. This matters because the Ginkgo bill is the second largest on our service charge after gas. A Ginkgo op is £280 per man day against £110 per man day for a caretaker. We are charged for three full time caretakers on the estate but in effect have only two for 6 months a year. Also they appear to not work full days. Richard checks to see if they are at work by phoning their mobiles! This is an ongoing issue trying to improve the quality of service on the estate and reduce its cost to us if possible.
- November. As part of a general cost cutting exercise in the borough, Barnet Council decided to halve the general waste collections to the estate, to have only one collection a week for general waste. Our bin numbers are based on there being two collections a week, not one. Peabody's first response was to tell us that we would have to pay £24,000 a year or £90 per household for a second collection. We objected very quickly and very strongly pointing out that our Council tax is to pay for waste collection, we shouldn't be charged extra and that a cheaper solution would be to buy extra bins. Peabody agreed and their Head of Estate Services was very good at communicating what they were doing. An initial ten extra bins have been bought and at no charge to us. We continue to keep an eye on how things are going. Please feedback.