



How much?!

PETRA questions the rent increase

Following the Council's decision to raise rents by £7-82 a week, Chairman Mike Davis says PETRA is committed to challenging the decision, to test its fairness.

Speaking earlier this month, Mike said: "This rent increase, which came into force in April and affects all tenants on the estate, comes at a time of real hardship for many. The economy is struggling and communities like ours are often the hardest hit.

"I am especially concerned for those tenants in work but struggling on modest pay – after all, the Government says it wants to help low-paid workers, and so too should the Council."

Mike has met with the Council's Chair of Housing, Cllr Leslie Kelly, to express his concerns and to ask for details of the rents being paid elsewhere in the borough.

"There are several very similar tower blocks in the borough. I want to compare our new rents with those being paid elsewhere. If – as I suspect – it turns out we are paying more than other council tenants in comparable properties, we will want to know why."

Mike's on the case. More on this story in the next issue.



Progress reports

Windows

The Council has agreed to install new double-glazed windows and wall insulation in all three towers. The work will take place between now and next April – with luck, this side of winter. We are pushing to ensure that the windows chosen are of a high quality, and will let you know the timetable for installation as soon as we have it.

CCTV

In December, we asked you to tell us how we should spend some of our surplus money. Of those who voted the majority wanted outside CCTV cameras. PETRA is now seeking permission from the Council to proceed with this. There are difficulties to overcome, but we hope it won't be too long before these cameras are in place and operational.

Fresh veg!

A charming old garden stands neglected on the far side of Sunrise Lodge, so PETRA is to approach the Sunrise Estate with a request that we make this the home of our new garden project. We want to grow raised beds of vegetables there, for the benefit of residents. The plan is to bring youngsters together with residents from Sunrise to cultivate food and friendship. The residents will provide the know-how, the youngsters will provide the energy. Want to be involved? Come in for a chat.

Chairman Mike's SOAPBOX

These are surprising times for tenant management organisations (TMOs) like ours. The Government wants to see more of them set up, and under the banner of 'localism', is prepared to devolve more power down from local authorities to the likes of us.



Perhaps we should ballot you, our residents, to see if you want PETRA to take on more of the things the Council currently does. After all, look at some of things we've achieved recently:

- renewed the waste pipes in 65 flats
- introduced recycling and composting throughout the estate
- quick and consistent response to day-to-day repairs
- kept leaseholder charges below other borough estates
- efficiently removed graffiti and litter
- provided new residents with our welcome pack

And things we're about to achieve:

- take over the communal lighting provision
- after consultation, take on the day-to-day repairs in the sheltered blocks
- install new windows and wall insulation
- grow food on the estate

Among other things, we are well on the way to becoming a 'Beacon Estate' for energy saving and awareness of energy wastage.

It strikes me that with your active support we can achieve anything. The 'big society' will be *what we make of it*.

Regards, Mike

Our survey said...

By **Natasha Cruickshank**

The residents' survey was posted to every property on the estate last November. We had just 42 responses, so that means 29 per cent of you gave us your views. Thank you to everyone who bothered – your views will help the PETRA committee make important decisions affecting all residents.

Key findings included:

Positive

- 64% have noticed improvements around the estate recently
- 75% are satisfied overall with their flat
- 80% are satisfied with new flooring recently provided by PETRA
- 100% of leaseholders felt PETRA improved the estate and was value for money

Action needed

- 25% think graffiti, fly-tipping and poor parenting are serious problems on the estate
- 62% are dissatisfied with the insulation of their flat (see page 1)
- 82% are dissatisfied with the condition of the windows (see page 1)

Please note: We asked how often you checked your fire alarm. The response was worrying. Please make sure you check your smoke alarm regularly, as recommended by the manufacturer. Remember - living in a tower block, we all share responsibility for safety.

The survey results in full are available from the PETRA office.

Congratulations

Jack H from Parkview who won our Survey Prize Draw. Jack's prize was a £100 shopping voucher from PETRA.

*You are cordially invited
to
A Bloomin' Bar-B-Que!*

*Hosted by PETRA's
sustainable development
partners (no less!)*

'Cocreate'

*Saturday 12 May,
from 11 o'clock*

On the green outside

Parkview and

Overstrand

See you there!



Join the team

We are looking for a few extra committee members – both for our main committee and our two sub-committees (Staffing and Finance, and Entertainments).

Our committees meet once a month, for an hour, on a weekday evening, to drink tea, eat biscuits, gossip and – last but not least – make important decisions about the future of our estate.

You don't need special skills. You just need to care about our estate, and be a good team player. Tempted? Then pop into the office for a chat with Mike or Natasha.

Thanks mate



Brian Laws, PETRA committee member and Sunrise Lodge resident, writes:

"It was only a small thing, but sometimes they make all the difference. I was out and about in my mobility chair recently when some fallen branches blocked my way. A youngster from the estate was passing and, without being asked to, he stopped to help remove the obstacles in my way. Made me feel proud of our estate, he did. Thank you, young man."

Go green and save £s

As you know, PETRA is busy researching, developing, and, yes, delivering (see page 1) a wide range of environmental and energy saving projects.

In the process, we are making links with organisations keen to help us. These include the charity Carbon Leapfrog and the company Cocreate, both of whom advise organisations on sustainable development.

But what's in it for us? How exactly can an estate like ours benefit from these ideas?

For a start, these projects can attract valuable funding, such as our recent LEAF Programme grant which will pay for energy consultants fees.

Mike Davis says: "Naturally, we want to 'do the right thing'. But we also want to make savings. With each project or proposal, the bottom line for us is this – will it save residents money?"

PETRA's plans include installing low energy light bulbs, heat-reflecting panels behind radiators, and showers in all flats, as well as the new windows, cavity wall insulation and draft proofing. **The result will be savings on your energy bills.**

We also want to install solar panels on the roofs of the three towers, to generate the electricity used to light the communal areas. **The result will be savings on your service charge.**

We're even looking at the possibility of becoming energy providers! That is, providing for all your energy needs. If this were to happen, **the result would be yet more savings on your bills**, because we wouldn't look to make a profit.

We'll keep you posted on the progress we make. If you would like to know more about any of these projects, or think you can help, please call into the office.

Anyone for "STUBBERS"?

Committee member Zena Russell writes:

"Hiya! During the summer holidays, I'm hoping to organise separate trips for children (7-11) and youngsters (10-15) to the activity centre STUBBERS or to LAZERQUEST. Parents and kids – if you're interested in going on one of these trips, please get in contact with me through the PETRA office. First come first served!"



The view from here

Parkview residents Andy and Marilyn Shepherd

What brought you to the estate?

I'd left the Police Force and we were looking for a new home. We went on the Council's waiting list and a year later, in 1999, moved in here.

How has the estate changed in your time?

Oh, when we first arrived it was mayhem, with kids running wild, rubbish everywhere. It was a pigs' sty. Then PETRA came along (2003) and now it's clean and well organised. These days we're proud to say we live here.

What do you like best about living here?

We feel safe. It's quiet, and PETRA provides a good service. And you can have your privacy in a block of flats like this, which we like.

What's the biggest drag?

Apart from the state of the windows?! Sometimes you can feel a little cut off up here – not seeing your neighbours for months. It's important to get out and about.

Bright ideas?

If you have a suggestion for PETRA or our new-look newsletter, please put it in writing and pop it in your nearby Suggestion Box.



Most memorable occasion?

The night of the Millennium – there was a wonderful atmosphere. From the top floor, we could see the fireworks along the Thames. And across the estate, people were on their balconies calling out to wish everyone a happy new year.

How do you rate PETRA, and what could we do better?

You're doing a good job. But I (Andy) used to be on the committee, and it was sometimes frustrating that we couldn't get the permission we needed to do more, and to do it quickly.

One wish?

New signage around the estate, especially inside the towers, on the stairwells and the landings.

Like to be featured here? Pop into the office to arrange an interview with our roving reporter.

Bit short this month?

In hard times, it can be tempting to go to loan sharks. Don't. As the name suggests, these people will rip you off big time.

Credit unions, on the other hand, are a much better bet, and PETRA is happy to recommend the Romford-based Liberty Credit Union Ltd.

With Liberty you can save regularly (from £1), earning interest on your savings, and then, when you're caught short, borrow money with interest on your loan as low as 1% per month.



Pick up a Liberty leaflet at the office, or talk to Mike for more details.

Dates for your diary

Next committee meetings – Tuesday

24 April, Tuesday 29 May

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Estate

Celebration – Sunday 3 June

Contacts

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