

Chaos at Christmas!

PETRA News

Parkhill Estate Tenants and Residents Association

Number 142, January 2014

Major power cuts bring misery to Uphaving House and the sheltered blocks

Having a happy Christmas is not always easy at the best of times, but for some of our residents the passing of last year's 'season of good cheer' will have inspired a chorus of 'Good riddance!'

Uphaving House had the worst of it. When a huge power cut affected much of the area on the morning of Saturday 28 December, it was Uphaving residents who discovered they had lost not just electricity but water as well – the pumps that normally lift water to the top of the building had failed.

In midwinter, with no light, heat, water or bathroom extractor fan, residents – particularly the young and the old – were left highly vulnerable, as well as miserable. Even the emergency lights that illuminate the stairwell in these circumstances were beginning to run down.

Power was eventually restored around 6pm that evening. The next day,

Sunday 29 December, it happened all over again, with electricity down for most of the day. Then, in the early hours of Thursday 2 January, it happened for a third time.

This time the sheltered blocks were thrown into chaos alongside their long-suffering Uphaving neighbours. Electricity was soon restored to Uphaving, but the block remained without water until after lunch the next day. Residents in Sunrise, Solar and Serena courts were without power throughout the day and into the night.

Emergency response?

Throughout these difficulties, PETRA staff – and in particular PETRA Chair Mike Davis and his wife, committee member Jan – did all they could to help residents and alert the emergency services.

Those services were undoubtedly stretched over the holiday period, with staff absent and bad weather creating many problems. Still, PETRA believes the response from the Council was

poor, and could have been disastrous. The utility company at least alerted the Red Cross, who attended to help distribute torches and blankets. Havering's emergency planning officer only felt it necessary to attend after he'd been called by the Red Cross.

Must do better

The good news is that all residents came through these episodes unharmed. The bad news is that a huge number of calls for help made by residents and by PETRA did not prompt an 'emergency' response from the Council.

PETRA apologises to all residents affected by these power cuts, and we thank those who acted responsibly to offer help, including the Red Cross. We are now reviewing our own emergency response procedures, including specific contingency plans for situations like this. We urge the Council to do the same.

Blooming marvellous

Residents from the sheltered blocks bought Jan Davis a lovely bouquet of flowers as a thank you for her hard work and support during the recent power cuts.





PETRA

Devoted to you *shares*

Residents may be surprised to learn that I have had to resign as the Vice Chair of the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO). I held this prestigious position for just over two years and in that time accumulated many great memories from working with our sister TMOs across the country. Sadly, some friends have died, while others have struggled with hostile local authorities.

The reason for my resignation from the NFTMO is the amount of time I've needed to devote to this demanding role, coupled with distances I've needed to travel in order to represent the NFTMO as well as PETRA.

Some people may think that it is easy to represent residents at local and national level. I can assure you it is not. Meetings with senior government officers from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), for example, take some preparation! The last thing I would want to do is neglect my responsibilities to PETRA – representing and supporting you remains my priority.

There is one other reason for my decision. My mental capacity has become so flaky of late that I can no longer rely on my short-term memory.

So, there you have it: I'm becoming a dopey old git. That said, I hope to hang on to my sanity a little while longer, in order to carry on working on your behalf as PETRA Chairman ... Unless, that is, there's a resident out there ready and willing to take on the challenge of Chairmanship, releasing me into well-earned retirement?

**Regards,
Mike Davis**

They won't make you rich, but they do show you care

PETRA belongs to you: we are your tenant management organisation. Getting that message across to everyone on the estate is a challenge, but it remains important because without your interest and involvement PETRA will wither and die.

For that reason, in 2003, we introduced a PETRA shareholder system. For just 10p, residents can buy a share in PETRA. The value of each share stays the same, but of course its real value is in what it symbolizes – your support for PETRA.

We currently have 79 registered

Window worries

During the recent power cuts and bad weather, as if there wasn't enough to worry about, some residents began to see ingress of water, or leakages, around their new window frames and adjoining walls.

Fourteen such cases were reported to PETRA from around the estate. We immediately asked the Council's major works department to investigate. They have since visited two of the properties affected, and we await their conclusions regarding what is causing the

shareholders, but we want as many of you as possible to have this special bond with us. Shareholders are free to attend and speak at committee meetings, although formal voting rights are restricted to committee members.

It should be said, PETRA delivers the same service to residents whether or not they are shareholders. However, if you would like your very own PETRA share, to hang on the wall or on the fridge, please visit the PETRA office today. And don't forget the 10p!



problems, and how they intend to fix them.

We trust these problems only affect a small minority of flats on the estate, but if in wet weather your new windows show signs of allowing water in around the frames, please report this to the PETRA office.

Wanted: Writers!

In brief

Fancy penning an article for PETRA's website? Here's your chance, says our editor Andrew



Hello. I look after PETRA's newsletter and website, and I'm looking for bloggers – residents who could write short articles about life here on the estate, which I could then publish on our website.

You might be a teenager, or a stay-at-home mum, a live-alone singleton, a family breadwinner or a pensioner. In fact, it doesn't matter who you are, just so long as you have a story to tell or a viewpoint you want to share.

Your article should be no more than 400 words long, but please don't worry if you haven't written blogs before. Spelling, grammar, all that stuff, is not a problem – I can always help knock articles into shape.

Interested? Then let Natasha or Mike in the office know today, and then I will be in touch.

Cheers, Andrew



What could you write about?

Well, the answer is just about anything, as long as it's clean, legal, not slanderous, and has something to do with life here on the estate. For example, you could write about:

- What the place means to you
- How you and your family came to live here
- Why you want to stay/leave
- The pleasures and pitfalls of living in a tower block
- How we could improve the place
- How it was in the old days
- Your favourite time of year
- The view from your window or balcony
- Some advice for new residents.

Whatever interests or inspires you - could interest and inspire us. So what are you waiting for? Tell us about it!

www.petratmo.weebly.com

Top garden - for kids

Spring will soon be here, which means there will be lots to do in the garden. Jim and resident gardeners Colin and Pete are looking for volunteers to help plant this year's crop, and in particular they're looking for parents with young children.

Think back to your own childhood. Remember the fun you had planting seeds, the excitement of watching them grow, the sense of achievement in what you'd done?

Now think of all the things children learn when gardening, about how nature works, where food comes from, and why it's important not to waste it.

If you and your kids fancy getting involved (and enjoying your own home-grown organic veg later in the year) – pop into the office for a chat.

Staff changes

The good news is that no one is leaving. However, Jim – believe it or not – is now past retirement age and has said he is happy to cut back his hours so as to allow Natasha to take on some more responsibilities.

Jim will now be working three instead of four days a week, and Natasha five instead of four. Natasha is taking on some management functions previously handled by Jim, and PETRA News wishes her well with the new work.

Quarterly News

We are cutting back on the number of editions of PETRA News produced each year from six to four. So expect quarterly editions from now on, every January, April, July and October, with, perhaps, the occasional 'special' edition when needed.



Fascinating facts: The other Petra

Petra (Arabic: عارتبلا, Ancient Greek Πέτρα), an ancient city in the Middle East, is Jordan's most visited tourist attraction, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site to boot! Established as early as 312 BC, it has been described as "a rose-red city half as old as time" and "one of the most precious cultural properties of man's cultural heritage". Which is all very well, but do they have new Combi boilers, or a refurbished communal kitchen in the concierge? I don't think so!



Walking group

Our estate is beautifully situated, with fantastic walks nearby. In the spring, we're thinking of starting a walking group to enjoy the great out-

doors (and occasional pub lunch) while keeping fit and agile. Interested in joining us? Then pop into the office for a chat with Natasha.

Kitchens programme

Those portacabins taking up all the parking spaces means that the kitchens programme has finally arrived. Between now and March, many of you will be having a brand new kitchen fitted.

In the meantime, we apologise for any inconvenience caused by those cabins. In a spirit of cooperation we agreed to play host to them while kitchens were being fitted on the estate and in the local neighbourhood. We hadn't anticipated there would be a dozen or more of the flaming things! The Council says they will be gone in March. We'll try to keep them to that.

Next PETRA

Committee meetings

Monday 27 January, 8pm

Monday 24 February, 8pm

Monday 31 March, 8pm

All in the office.

Contact us

PETRA

Mike Davis (Chair), Natasha Cruickshank (Special Projects Officer), Jim Brett (Estate Manager), and Bradley Pavey (Repairs and Ground Maintenance Officer) are based at the PETRA office.

Tel: 01708 475358

Fax: 01708 469530

Email: petratmo@aol.com

www.petratmo.weebly.com

Homes and Housing, Havering Council

Tel: 01708 434000

Email: homes@haverling.gov.uk

Website: www.haverling.gov.uk