

CUMBERLAND HOUSE

NEWSLETTER April 2014

Kingston Hill, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey



**It's 20 years late, but still very welcome -
YES, 'BETTER HOMES' IS FINALLY HERE
with new kitchens, bathrooms, double glazed windows and more ...**

**A 'good news' message from Gaynor Brown,
Chair, Cumberland House Residents' Association**

Some people thought it would never happen . . . but finally it is! The Council's £65 million 'Better Homes' improvement programme will be rolling up Kingston Hill within the next few months, destined to transform the living conditions for our 121 tenants and leaseholders.

Before the end of this year, Cumberland House tenants can look forward to their homes have been transformed by the installation of new kitchens and bathrooms, new double-glazed windows and, where necessary, new central heating boilers and electrical systems.

Meanwhile, leaseholders will benefit not only from the recently-completed installation of new lifts in each block, but also a range of external refurbishment works to the flat roofs, communal entrances, stairwells and walkways.

All residents should by now have had visits from the Council's surveyors and, before any works start on site, tenants will either be invited to one or more 'open days' or have further home visits when they can sit down with members of the Better Homes' team to agree the fine details of their 'new' home - including any special layout requirements, along with their choice of material finishes, trim and colours.

As this newsletter went to press, the best indication we could obtain is that the Better Homes' contractors, Mitie (???) will deliver materials and equipment to our estate from June onwards, with the aim of work starting by August at the latest.

Inevitably, we will all face some disruption while this extensive modernisation programme takes place over a three-month period, but the contractors are keen to minimise inconvenience and will maintain close dialogue with residents (through the RA) throughout their time on site. Please bear with them but, if you have any significant concerns, tell one of your RA officers or talk to the works' foreman on site.

Be VERY careful where you light up your summer BBQs

After a gloomy early Spring, there are signs that our weather may be about to improve – which means that some of us will be thinking about family barbecues and al fresco dining. BUT, before making your plans, please remember two key things:

1. Under NO circumstances should you have a BBQ on your own balcony, and nor must you keep any gas cylinders or gas heaters in your flat. Not only does this invalidate all building & contents insurance, but it is very dangerous and could result in serious injury - or worse – to you, family members or even neighbours.
2. Feel free to use the playing field for your BBQ – as long as you make sure you take ALL your rubbish away with you, and ensure any fire is properly extinguished.

With pic

Caretaking review on the back burner, but . . . LARRY PROVES A SHINING EXAMPLE

Meet Larry Lambert – our Estate’s recently appointed caretaker who, in just a few weeks has done more to improve its appearance than his predecessors managed in many months!

In fact, even if you haven’t yet come across Larry, you’ll have spotted the ‘evidence’ of his caretaking prowess all over the estate, from our much cleaner stairwells and entrance halls to the freshly painted white concrete posts around the perimeter roadway.

“In less than two months since he arrived, Larry has made a huge difference to the estate’s appearance,” said Residents’ Association Chair Gaynor Brown. “Unlike some caretaking staff we’ve had in the past, you can always tell when he’s around because everywhere is cleaner, tidier and smells fresher.

“Instead of our constantly having to ask for certain jobs to be done – like cleaning out the large paladin bins and the bin bays - he’s just got on with it and the results are there for us all to see. He is doing a fantastic job and the residents really appreciate it.”

She added: “I just hope we can keep him longer than our last good caretaker who was relieved of his duties for being too efficient and upsetting less considerate residents by asking them not to leave full refuse sacks outside their front doors but to dispose of them properly.”

Larry, a former technician at British Aerospace who has worked for Kingston Council for over 10 years, said: “My approach is simple and direct. I ask myself what would be my caretaking priorities if I was a resident here. Would I be happy to see cobwebs on the walls, lights not working, dirty stairwells or litter-strewn floors? Of course not, which is why I try to keep the place as I would want it kept if I lived here. So far, the residents seem to like it.”

Meanwhile, three years later than promised, Kingston Council is no closer to presenting its draft proposals for a new-look caretaking service on council estates, despite it having carried out three separate reviews since 2010.

With at least £5 of each household’s weekly rent going to pay for caretaking services on our estate, the Council had invited residents to say how they’d like to see the caretaking service improved – but despite receiving some worthy proposals (subsequently supported by RBK’s own expert consultant), the entire project appears to have been relegated to the back burner.

Fly-tippers beware! We intend to stop your dangerous behaviour

Regular readers will know that over the years we’ve tried various ways to persuade residents to take pride in the appearance of the Estate, and behave considerately. In the main it has worked, because the vast majority of Cumberland House residents do their best to respect our pleasant grounds, and don’t create mess in our lifts, stairwells and other communal areas.

But, *a tiny minority* still don’t seem to have any social conscience or sense of responsibility, and think it’s acceptable to dump their personal or domestic rubbish wherever they want. Indeed, this minority reserves their worst anti-social habits for the communal areas of our Estate, the lifts and stairwells, the walkways and the perimeter roadways and gardens – where all manner of personal rubbish and household waste is casually and thoughtlessly dumped.

Now this unpleasant habit has taken a further unhealthy twist, with local youngsters unwisely choosing to ‘play’ with certain dumped household goods, including soiled mattresses, half-empty cans of paint and broken furniture – with some items being dragged onto the playing field or left on the estate’s roadway.

RA Chair Gaynor Brown said: “It is bad enough for residents to dump their unwanted household goods wherever it suits them, but when children then start to use them as part of their play activities, it becomes positively dangerous. Much of this rubbish, like old mattresses, bottles of cleaning fluids or cans of paint is potentially harmful and we are determined to tackle the problem at its source, by exposing anti-social fly-tippers and halting this bad behaviour.”

With ample disposal facilities, including large bin bays, recycling bins and a council service offering to collect and dispose of large household items, there is no excuse for fly-tipping, and the residents’ association is now stepping up observations to identify those responsible, aiming to capture their actions on camera, to be used as evidence against offenders in court.

Gaynor added: “The small minority must be made to see the damage they are causing. From now on, anyone seen dropping litter or fly-tipping their rubbish, WILL be reported to the police and the Council and, where there is adequate evidence, they will be prosecuted, risking a fine of up to £1,000. These few offenders need to act more responsibly and dispose of their rubbish properly.”

PARKING CHARGES TO BE RE-FUNDED FOLLOWING 'FED' PRESSURE

“A victory for common sense & fairness”

Cumberland House residents who have paid more than £400 to Kingston Council for the 'privilege' of having designated car parking spaces which are frequently occupied by other vehicles, can expect to have their charges reimbursed in full within the next few weeks.

This follows pressure on senior housing managers from the Kingston Federation of Residents, after renewed complaints from some residents who were recently advised of an increase in their parking charges – even though the Council admits it cannot control unlawful parking on the estate in the wake of the Government's ban on clamping by parking management companies some 18 months ago.

As a result of the clamping ban, RBK's former parking management firm, National Clamps withdrew its services, but the Council continued to charge residents over £20 a month for a designated parking bay, even though it no longer had any powers to stop unauthorised parking or take action against offending motorists. And, to add insult to injury, the Council recently notified residents it was increasing the charges.

One affected resident Gillian Rattray who lives in South Block said: “I don't know how the Council has the cheek to charge us for a service it stopped providing in 2012. And, to increase the charge just adds insult to injury. They should have written to all residents who were paying for a parking space to tell us that they could not enforce any parking management scheme and we should therefore stop paying.”

The same parking charges have been maintained on other council estates in the borough but now, the good news is that all residents who have paid for allocated parking since the end of September 2012 will be offered full refunds. Evonne Hudson, RBK's Group Manager for Housing Operations said: “I agree that charging for a service we don't provide is wrong and morally indefensible. I will be recommending that the residents concerned are refunded the charges they have paid since we ceased to manage allocated parking on specific estates.”

PLEASE KEEP YOUR WASH-DAY BLOOMERS TO YOURSELVES!!

Another polite request to those residents who still think it's OK to hang their smalls – and the rest of their household washing – out to dry on their balconies, in full view of the rest of the world. It isn't nice, and it seriously damages the estate's appearance. If you need to dry clothes on your balcony, please keep them out of sight, below the balcony wall 'sight line'. The rest of us really don't want to see the colour of your pants, bras and knickers!

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SAGA OF WATERLOGGED FIELD CONTINUES . . .

For as long as most Cumberland House residents can remember, part of our playing field has been almost permanently waterlogged, making it un-usable for most ball games.

The cause is not excessive rainfall nor even poor drainage, but the presence of a natural spring in the area and, your RA believes, a broken underground water pipe.

Yet the matter continues to outwit the combined expertise of both Thames Water and our council landlord who have batted responsibility for the problem between each other for the past five years. Last year, we were told water sampling tests and site investigations were being carried out and yet, nearly 12 months later there is

Bloomin' luvverly . . . but do you even notice ?

Sharp-eyed residents might have noticed the latest improvements to our estate's grounds – with the recent transformation of the flower and shrub beds adjacent to North and Centre Blocks.

The £7,000 cost of the works has been met by a council grant, won by your Residents' Association as part of its continuing efforts to 'beautify' the estate, and it brings the total funding attracted by the RA on behalf of Cumberland House residents to a staggering £75,000 over the past six years. That's more than any other RA has won for its residents over the same period of time.

Among the numerous improvements funded through your RA in recent years are:

- New children's play equipment

- A BBQ and picnic area including new bench tables
- Widespread landscaping and re-planting of shrubs and flowers
- The clearance of our overgrown boundaries along Kingston Hill and Crescent Road, replaced by smart new fencing
- More litter bins and new signage

Without a Residents' Association, none of these things would have happened and, during the next 12 months, we hope to win further funding to complete environmental schemes for the estate. RA Vice Chair Angela Byrne, who has devoted hours of her own time to planting schemes on the estate said: "It is starting to look good, but I do sometimes wonder if most Cumberland House residents even notice the improvements. I just hope some people appreciate everything that has been done."

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TIME TO GET UP AND AND GET INVOLVED . . .

IF you've read this far, I hope you'll agree that your Residents' Association deserves more support from local residents, including YOUR support, to help us continue the good work.

Our next Open Residents' Meeting will take place at 7.00pm on Tuesday, 13th May at Kingsnympton Community Centre (just across Crescent Road) – and we really do hope you will make a special effort to attend. You'll learn about the RA's programme for the coming year – and get the latest news on the Better Homes improvement programme whose arrival is just weeks away!

We also need more residents to join the RA's management committee, giving up just a few hours a month to help progress our activities. Interested? Then please contact us by email or phone – or just come to our next residents' meeting on the 13th May. With your help, we can do even more!

GETTING IN TOUCH:

You can contact your Cumberland House Residents Association by:

Emailing us at: cumberlandhouse@yahoo.com - or calling or writing to:

Chair: Gaynor Brown (45A Cumberland House) Tel: 020 8541 3139

Vice Chair: Angela Byrne (52 Cumberland House) Tel: 020 8296 9135

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