

Pullens TRA Special General Meeting
16 October 2023, 19 00 – 21 00
Pullens Centre, 184 Crampton Street
Minutes

The meeting involved three main parts

1. Report back from the Committee on activities and results over the past half year
2. Q&A session on the report back
3. Building a shared vision for the future: brainstorming in groups on what changes would make the biggest difference

Meeting was attended by 28 residents (headcount, 23 left their name and address), and was chaired by Michael Hammer, PTRA Chair. Vice Chair Tom Scutt provided the report back on activities, Vince Brown as Treasurer provided a quick view of the finances. Other Committee members helped with the discussion group in part 3.

1 Report back by the committee on the past half year of work

- AGM in April 2023 marked a new start after the challenges of the Covid period, strong and diverse committee
- Wide range of issues on the agenda that worry residents

1.1 *Waste management*

- Poor performance of Council and waste management contractors continues to be a big concern: not enough and damaged waste and recycling bins, fly tipping because of insufficient collection
- Immediate impact on environmental health with risk of vermin and rubbish in the Pullens Gardens including the playground

→ the Committee has joined the regular estate cleaning meetings with the Council together with the Alberta Estate reps

→ we are developing ideas and hope to apply for funding for screened and safe waste/recycling bin storage stations across the estate

→ we encourage everyone to systematically report broken bins / overflowing bins, fly-tipping to the Council including through the fix my street app

1.2 *Estate cleaning*

- Many residents rightly raise concerns about inconsistent and poor cleaning, especially in the upper part of stairwells, walls, ledges and railings get grimy and very unpleasant
- Different streets on the estate seem to be cleaned in different ways with some getting little attention

→ the Committee is in touch with the manager of cleaning operations raising the concerns
→ we now have information about the actual service level commitments and try to monitor their implementation

Twice per week: sweeping and mopping of stairwells and landings;

Monthly: Cleaning of internal fixtures and fittings;

Twice a year: Wall washing and window washing;

As required: Graffiti removal.

1.3 Maintenance of the Pullens Buildings

- The Pullens are a Conservation Area with particular needs due to their characteristics
- In some parts the fabric of the building is suffering: tiles and masonry cracking in some stairwells, some top of stairwell exits to the roofs are not fully weatherproof, many chimney stacks have cowls to prevent rain running down the flues, others do not
- Occasionally repairs are not done in line with Conservation Area regulations, i.e. PWCU windows instead of wood
- Some flats have problems with damp or water ingress
- Recently also concerns about bedbugs have been brought up

→ We have built up good relationships with the Residents Services and Communal Repairs Team, doing monthly walkabouts together and reviewing the reports to ensure follow up

→ we continue to struggle with the slow pace of implementing repair works even when promptly commissioned

→ we are reviewing and sharing information on website and the Pullens News about points of contacts with the Council for communal repair issues (Communal Repairs Officer team), individual needs of residents / specific flats issues (RSOs), as well as cleaning, security, and pest control

→ We are trying to better understand the breakdown of responsibilities within Southwark's internal teams, particularly with regard to maintenance of the street entrances ('Communal Repairs' or 'Major Works')

1.4 Safety, security and anti-social behaviour

- Residents report a tangible increase of anti-social behaviour incidents including drug use especially of the upper parts of some stairwells, with residents having to deal with drug users, often in a bad state
- Drug dealing in some flats in result of 'cookooing', i.e. drug dealers taking over flats of vulnerable residents
- Cases of destructive behaviour such as broken rooftop doors
- Need for consideration in neighbourly relationships: noise, light, mutual support

→ we held a session in July in which we really brought this to the fore in presence of Council staff, documented in the minutes

→ we are building relationships with the local police station and ward officers for Newington, esp. PC Michael Lulu

→ we encourage immediate reporting of any incident so that action can be taken to address the situation as it should not be residents' job to care for people seriously affected by drug consumption and / or clean up what is left behind (FixMyStreet > Report Flytipping > Drug related litter)

→ positively we see that there is awareness of the personal and communal complexities of drug use and anti-social behaviour and that an enforcement approach to policing alone is not the answer but drug-users need to be supported

→ we have repeated discussions about some principles about what it means to be a good neighbour: understanding issues of noise and access to light in a dense community, as well as how to encourage solidarity and community

1.5 Major Works / Gas works

- Continuing concerns about inconsistent and intransparent final charges for leaseholders for the last major works 2015/16
- Gas works in Crampton and Amelia Street completed, but the experience was not good as residents were often not notified about scaffolding and internal remedial works were often poorly scheduled and executed
- the current Southwark Plan was adopted in 2022 to run until 2036 and restates both the Pullens Conservation Status as well as the role of the Pullens Yards for small business development
- Any next major works will likely only be considered for planning by Council from 2024 onwards
- Main issues brought up include damp on ground floors, underground drainage and water supply issues, as well as punctured water proofing of some roofs, including over workshops, and water ingress along some walls / poor pointing / tanking

→ we are in direct touch with the Gas works contractors and relevant council officials. There is currently no plan to undertake works to the gas pipes on Penton Place, Iliffe Street or Peacock Street.

→ we follow the issue of major works at every meeting to make sure we stay on top of developments

→ our current understanding is that Southwark will prioritise much larger estates (1000 units upwards) earlier before looking at places with smaller numbers such as the Pullens

1.6 Re-starting the Pullens Centre as a community hub

- During the pandemic the Pullens Centre was essentially closed
- We now are back to a good level of usage by all kinds of groups that need a space for meetings, workshops etc.
- We are still have less take up from people at the Pullens themselves for community activities

→ Gabri is working with some investment from the TRA to get community focused events and initiatives up and running again, some are shown in the newsletter

→ Funds to refurbish the Pullens Centre have been allocated from the PTRA budget, including replacement of some of the A/V equipment

→ plans include reviving the film club as well as local music and other creative groups to use the centre for rehearsals and performances

→ all income from the centre helps to pay the recurring costs (energy, maintenance, etc.) but also goes back to the TRA to help with other things

1.7 Relationships with the workshop tenants and Yard Associations

- The Pullens Open Studio weekend in June was a busy weekend with lots of people coming through, helped by good weather
- Earlier in the year there were some issues arising from workshop tenants occasionally reporting too much noise by some Centre users etc.

→ the TRA supported the Open Studios weekend with some small funding for music and advertising and we also organised a small exhibition on the history of the Pullens as well as a closing party on Sunday evening

→ we have good communication lines and relationships with the Yards Association so that any tensions around noise etc. are being addressed in a good way and quickly

1.8 Finances

The treasurer reported a current balance (September) of £9,062, of which £600 is the restricted Coronation Grant, leaving available unrestricted funds of £8,462.

2 Q&A session to reflect on the past half year

During the Q&A session residents brought up a range of issues that showed their concerns

2.1 Maintenance

- Pillasters around the estate but in particular on all streets except Amelia Street are in poor condition. This detracts from the appearance of the buildings and shows that Council is not maintaining the buildings as it should as the freeholder. This is not a major works issue but one of ongoing maintenance.
- Big concern that the last major works contractors (Elkins) left work unfinished because as they said 'they ran out of money' and the Council did not hold them to account to finish agreed work.
- Some flats were never refurbished as promised during the major works, again contractors citing that there was no more money left to do this
- Consequence is that residents are left with the problems without remedy
- Some discussions about what the Conservation Status actually means: in reality the Conservation Status does not impose many obligations on the Council except that it protects the area from re-development, and prevents certain changes, such as modifying windows etc.
- Historic England has re-started to consider Listed Status for the Pullens, but slow progress and the many modifications to the Pullens especially inside flats and away from the street face may reduce chances for Listed Status

→ Suggestion to work with our MP Neil Coyle to increase pressure on Council to fulfil their obligations (Neil Coyle MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark)

<https://members.parliament.uk/member/4368/contact>), but also need to be aware that at the next election West Walworth is likely that we will be in a different constituency (called Vauxhall and Camberwell Green), based on proposed changed boundaries across Southwark (see <https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/interactive-map/>)

- Local Councillors are also key: John Batteson, Natasha Ennin, and Youcef Hassaine. The Committee is in touch with these

→ Suggestion to convene a special general meeting focused entirely on the question of maintenance, and also invite Southwark Residents Housing Manager Keith Wilson

2.2 Waste management

- Many comments on the poor state of waste management, involving fire hazards and attracting vermin, and leading to a very poor appearance of some of the streets.
- Largest concern about Crampton Street, Iliffe Street and Peacock Street
- Crampton Street currently has a big roosting population of pigeons which settle on unspiked ledges and leave their droppings on the pavement and waste bins, which are then not touched / removed by Veolia workers as they 'contaminated'.
- Overall residents complain about poor collection discipline, and whenever there is an obstruction on the north corner of Iliffe Street (from badly parked vehicles and / or delivery vehicles) the bin lorries do not go down that road and rubbish does not get collected

→ Expressed need to find solutions that improve the streetscape and provide a clean and health environment

2.3 Drug use and anti-social behaviour

- Continued concern about drug use and related anti-social behaviour and dirt, including people relieving themselves in stairwells
- Issue significant on top floors, people sometimes loiter for up to 2 hours
- Residents reporting that they do not feel safe to open their front doors anymore
- Police reporting process through telephone and website is frustrating and police turn up only days after the actual incidents and reported safety concern
- Desire to tackle the root cause of drug users / dealers using the Pullens. A clean and well kept environment at the Pullens will make a big difference.
- Different views on how much the open stairwell access contributes to people using the stairwells. Some lively discussions about pros and cons of entry doors / gates, need a sound information basis to make any decisions

→ Suggestion: approach Southwark to commission a scoping study on the issue of entry doors / gates to the stairwells

3 Developing a shared vision for the future of the Pullens

The meeting divided into several groups to discuss big priorities, what changes would make the biggest difference to lives of residents.

At the meeting the following notes were collected across the groups after lively discussions.

- Living together well: needs for a 'code of conduct' or guidance on how to be good neighbours with a focus on noise (quiet stairwells, noise etiquette in flats (music, loud talking, naked floorboards transmitting sound), talking to your neighbours, respect for each other, common courtesy
- Address the drug use issue
- Work proactively with the police (PC Lulu)
- Addressing the waste and recycling problem, guidance for residents on recycling and where to put waste
- Revive the idea of a 'Pullens Festival', linked to the Open Studios
- A community postbox to manage frequently misplaced / misdirected post
- Manage the major works in a good way
- Consider the setting up of a tenants management organisation (TMO)
<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/resident-groups-forums-and-training/tenant-management-organisations-tmos>
- A green estate with space for nature
- Solar panels on the roofs
- Community roof gardens, and gardening workshops
- Beautiful and pleasant streets

These points are in no particular order and just the start of a conversation. We will continue this brainstorming at future meetings and through other channels, such as the newsletter to involve as many residents as we can in thinking about what we would like the Pullens to be in the future.

Chair thanked all who came and closed the meeting at 21 15.