



St. David's Square Residents' Association (SDSRA)

SDSRA Chairman's Report 2020

First I would like to thank the Committee for its hard work. The Committee is made up of volunteers who donate their time to help represent the interests of the residents of St. David's Square. These past months have been very trying for everyone, so I am particularly grateful for their work. I also want to mention how lovely it has been to hear the stories of neighbours and FirstPort staff helping each other during the past year. St. David's Square really is a lovely community and we are fortunate to be surrounded by such a kind group of people.

Please find below a macro summary of what the Committee has been working on over this past year.

- **Electrical charging points**

The SDSRA has been speaking with various firms about installing electrical charging points for cars. After consulting with FirstPort, it has been agreed that two "V" spaces will be used, signs will go up and markers will be placed on the ground. Charging will only be able to residents of SDS and it will be on a pay-as-you-go basis. The installation company has already been on site and has sent a detailed quote to FirstPort. FirstPort will ask the Freeholder for planning permission, and if agreed, installation should happen in Q1 2021.

- **Parking permits on cars in the garage and outside spaces**

Parking permits or fines are being considered, as some residents park their car in random spaces in the garage and some move their car to a new space every few days. Please note that spaces can be rented if you have more than one car but only one parking space.

- **The Fountain**

Many residents would like the fountain to be made into a garden with a smaller water feature. Research is ongoing on this. The primary issue is cost, as it would require the demolition of the existing fountain, the construction of a garden and the installation of a new water feature. A consultation with all residents will definitely be needed before any work is undertaken.

- **Cladding**

The SDSRA has been working hard on the cladding issue and we hope the information we have been sending through has been helpful. We will keep you updated as and when we have more information.

- **Countryside Communications contracts**

Finding alternatives to, or improving the services offered under, these very expensive contracts will take time, and lockdown has inhibited the investigation of any options. First Port will extend the door entry and associated contracts for one year and push Countryside for upgrades to the TV system, including availability of Sky Q. In the meantime we will investigate new ways of operation of the door entry systems in the hope of securing substantial cost savings.

- **Sky Q**

See above on the Countryside Communications contracts.

- **Attracting new members**

This is always in our agenda... how can we get more residents to join?

- **Logo mats in entrance lobbies**

Residents like the mats with the building names on them, but the light colour has not been suitable for the heavy traffic. The mats will be replaced in Q1 2021 with a darker base-colour.

- **Use of the residents' lounge**

Many have asked if the lounge can be used for children's parties, Pilates classes, extending the gym, swapping the room with the 'snooker room' etc.

Unfortunately, the lease states that no commercial business can operate on the premises. In addition, residents living above the lounge have complained previously to FirstPort about the noise from parties; the room is not sound-proofed and it is not suitable for the gym to be extended.

- **The gardens**

Our previous gardeners are returning. They had to certify some areas of their business to keep the contract. That is now done and they should be back in December/January.

- **Antisocial behaviour**

This has been an issue during the summer and the lockdown. There have been many instances of children being left unsupervised playing around the gardens and sadly causing damage which has had to be repaired. We have also seen many non-residents using our lookouts and gardens. When this has been observed, Marksmen Security have been on-site to have them removed.

- **Right to Manage (RTM)**

The SDSRA are aware of a group seeking to create an RTM. For more information, please speak to this group directly – the SDSRA does not have information pertaining to this group's activities.

- **Service charges**

The service charges are a source of concern for many residents. There are a few potential causes for the increases, but the SDSRA would like to have more information to review these charges in depth. One cause of the increase is that as of 2015, building insurance became included in the service charges. In addition, some blocks have had more repair costs than others, particularly water leaks. Unfortunately, this significantly impacts not only the repair costs, but also the insurance costs. Another factor is the number of flats per building – large fixed costs (such as elevator maintenance) are decreased substantially when they can be spread amongst many flats.

The Committee has looked at a couple of properties and when just the insurance charge differential has been factored in, it appears that the service charges have risen by roughly 28% over five years (2014-2019). However, we are aware that this is a very small sample size.

It would be very helpful if members could share their service charge information with the Committee. We would also be grateful for a volunteer with accountancy expertise to help the Committee review the charges. Generally, FirstPort has been able to secure contractors at significantly below market level (we suspect this is because they are a large firm), so it's important for us to understand what the causes are for any rise.

- **FirstPort**

We continue to maintain a good working relationship with FirstPort. We have asked them to give us regular presentations as to the service charges, future work on SDS, etc. Any subject can be requested for discussion.

- **Promoting the Facebook page**

SDSRA Facebook page and Cladding page have been included in all of our correspondence.

- **Increase in membership fee**

As of 1st November the Residents' Association membership fee was increased to £20/year. This is primarily due to the expectation of significant costs in order to obtain the necessary legal advice on the ongoing cladding issue. Please change your recurring payment in your PayPal account.

- **SDSRA accounts**

See below.

Questions and Answers

Can the AGM happen using Zoom?

Yes, but it will not be possible to have the same type of conversational flow as our in-person AGMs and sadly, it may exclude members who are not able to access Zoom. However, given the continued pandemic-related restrictions, the Committee has not been able to find any other options that can accommodate everyone. January 26th is suggested for the AGM via Zoom. The AGM will be on an invitation-only basis, so registration will be needed in advance to be sent the link.

Please feel free to send any questions for the Zoom AGM in advance via email to: stdavidssquare@gmail.com.

The SDSRA Committee

Brittis, Sally, Mark, Jonathan, Lucy, Simon, Grace, Anupam, David, Charles

St David's Square Residents' Association

Accounts for the year to 31 March 2020

Income and Expenditure Account

	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018
Income			
Membership fees	682.31	764.38	663.21
	<u>682.31</u>	<u>764.38</u>	<u>663.21</u>
Expenditure			
Website costs	70.80	0.00	124.00
Subscriptions paid	0.00	0.00	0.00
Meeting costs	239.80	45.80	0.00
Gratuities (First Port staff)	230.40	240.00	267.00
New member evenings	0.00	0.00	0.00
Legal expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00
	<u>541.00</u>	<u>285.80</u>	<u>391.00</u>
Surplus	<u>141.31</u>	<u>478.58</u>	<u>272.21</u>

Balance Sheet

Assets			
Cash at Bank	2145.76	2004.45	1525.87
	<u>2145.76</u>	<u>2004.45</u>	<u>1525.87</u>
Liabilities			
Creditors			
	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Net Assets	<u>2145.76</u>	<u>2004.45</u>	<u>1525.87</u>

Dear neighbours,

We hope this update finds you all well as we are all adapting to our changing circumstances. With the postponement of the 2020 AGM, we the residents' association committee would like to update you on our activities to-date and our focus for the year ahead.

The issue of cladding has been on many residents' minds for some time. Due in no small part to the tireless efforts of SDSRA committee members in chasing up FirstPort and the freeholder as well as obtaining professional advice from lawyers, Tower Hamlets planning department and local councillors, the EWS1 forms certifying the SDS cladding as of very minor fire risk, and required by many lenders in order to secure a (re-)mortgage, have now been received for all blocks. Residents desiring a copy of these forms should contact the development manager. Whilst no remedial works are necessary, the freeholder has also confirmed that St David's Square is registered for the government's Building Safety Fund.

The upcoming renegotiation of the various contracts with Countryside Communications is another important area of focus. The current contracts (imposed upon us by the builder 20 years ago) represent a disproportionate fraction of the annual service charge. Most significant of all are those for the TV distribution system and, particularly, the door entry system which together account for approximately 10% of our service charge. We are therefore working with the development manager to determine the best way to reduce this substantial cost and/or upgrade the existing system.

A small number of residents have expressed an interest in upgrading to Sky Q. Unfortunately, this upgrade cannot be performed by Sky themselves as the system and cabling that distributes the satellite signal to apartments is owned and maintained by Countryside Communications. However, according to the development manager, residents can contact Countryside Communications directly (01245 471717) to order a connection upgrade. There are no current plans to upgrade connections to all apartments due to the prohibitive cost and relatively limited interest, but the situation will be reassessed if conditions change.

We are also actively working with the development management on the possibility of installing electric car-charging points. Whilst there are various difficulties at present with installing these in the car park, there is the potential for a number of shared charging points to be installed, provided various issues (e.g. ensuring they can only be used by residents) can be overcome. It is this approach which is being looked at right now and we are keen to progress this, especially in light of the government's desire to phase-out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035.

The issue of antisocial behaviour by unsupervised children in the gardens and common areas has also been raised a number of times by various residents in recent weeks. Whilst we realise the need for understanding on all sides in the current environment, we would like to call attention to the clear signage in the gardens, and the emails from the development manager to remind parents that children must be appropriately supervised *at all times* when playing in the gardens for their own safety as well as consideration for other residents. The cost of repairing any damage caused is passed on to residents, so it is unacceptable for a small minority to cause entirely avoidable damage at everyone's expense.

With regards antisocial behaviour more broadly, Marksmen Security are now providing 24-hour security to the development on a permanent basis following a successful initial trial. We encourage all residents to be vigilant and contact the concierge if you observe antisocial behaviour in any form and at any time of day or night. They will then be able to record incidents and call security to attend if required.

The look-and-feel of the garden areas are of interest to everyone, and the committee continues to work towards their improvement. A dedicated group of SDSRA gardening assistants nurture and maintain the attractive planted gabions between Consort and Falcon houses, and we are investigating if improvements can be made to the water feature between Dominion and Enterprise, both to address the unsightly algae problem during the summer months and reduce maintenance costs. We also liaise where possible to get specific jobs done by the gardeners and will remind them of reseeding the grass between Falcon and Goldsborough now that children are back at school – the area will therefore be out of bounds while the grass becomes established.

Finally, whilst the unprecedented situation we currently find ourselves in has necessarily slowed progress in some areas, the committee are still in constant communication and have regular discussions with the development management in order to address important issues as they arise. We look forward to being able to welcome you to a re-scheduled AGM as soon as conditions permit, but in the meantime please do support your fellow residents, and feel free to contact us if you have any questions or ideas, or just want a chat.

The SDSRA Committee.

Brittis, Sally, Mark, Jonathan, Lucy, Simon, Grace, Anupam, David, Charles

(Posted 21 September 2020)