

TOM TUGENDHAT MBE MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Chris Tompkins
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Dear Chris,

I hope you are keeping well during this difficult period. I know many residents in Leybourne Chase were surprised to have received their Bill for the 2020 service charge period a couple of weeks ago from Trinity Estates. Coming during the Coronavirus pandemic and giving only 14 days for payment in some cases, when so some residents have significant economic uncertainty, meant many were extremely unhappy with the level of increases to certain aspects being proposed. It won't surprise you to learn that I have received a significant amount of correspondence on this issue from many residents on the development. I understand why, and trust Trinity Estates appreciate that the timing of this has not been acceptable to many.

As you know Leybourne Chase is a wonderful community. We have seen neighbours come together over the past few weeks during these difficult times and provide the help and support to those most vulnerable. Residents expect the very best services that make it a community where so many want to live. However, this needs to come at a fair price.

Last July we held a very productive meeting, alongside Taylor Wimpey, to discuss various matters on the development. I was pleased to receive assurances from yourself along with Taylor Wimpey that you would address many issues on the development as soon as possible. As you know my office has kept in touch frequently during this period about various matters, and will continue to do so.

It was therefore to some disappointment that I have had many residents approach me disappointed with both the level of the increase in various lines of the accounts, relative to the works that have taken place on the development, in this years' service charge. I will cover some of these in this letter, but I should emphasise that there are many more very specific areas which residents have queried.

Firstly, I appreciate that as Trinity Estates takes on responsibility for facilities such as the Community Centre, Sports Pitches and Pavilion these will incur additional costs. I, and I'm sure all residents, understand this. However it is disappointing that the increased costs from all of these areas have come at the same time, so are all included within the same Budget for the first time. I would therefore appreciate it if you could let me know of any further large scale infrastructure serving the development that you expect to take responsibility for in the future? This will help understand whether such an increase is likely again.

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Despite taking on these facilities, I trust from Taylor Wimpey, relatively recently I am disappointed that ongoing maintenance costs are high. For example, I gather that £22,000 has been allocated towards general repairs and maintenance to the community centre, and £1,500 towards a redecoration fund. This is a very concerning figure considering the age of the building. Has Trinity Estates approached Taylor Wimpey, as the developer, regarding the costs of some of these repairs? It should not be for residents to pay for this if the building is needing such significant repairs just a few years after being built.

In addition to this there are other charges which seem to have raised above and beyond what is expected. For example, gas and especially electricity charges for the development have increased by significant percentages, 20% in some cases. While this will no doubt cover many areas, if a significant increase was levied on an individual house the owner would likely look to change suppliers. Has Trinity thought of taking this step as an alternative, to keep costs down?

I know from when my office approached you in the past couple of weeks that you mentioned that the charges for rent and hire of some of the areas newly taken on, such as the Sports Pitches, are built into the Budget. If these estimates exceed the Budget required then residents will be reimbursed, which is welcome. However, to give residents an expectation about how much this is likely to be I would be grateful if you could identify how much you expect this to be, based on Trinity Estates experience of managing other developments. This is essential as it would give reassurances to residents about how much is likely to be reimbursed as a result of an increase in booking fees specifically.

One other aspect which I know has disappointed so many are the fees apportioned to Trinity Estates, and the amount that these have increased since the Budget was determined. As you know from our meeting last year many residents are extremely disappointed in the quality of estate management they receive, and I understand why. It is therefore essential that they have full understanding of why any additional charge is proposed and the additional services they will receive as a result of this.

In some cases, the fee for Trinity services has doubled. The Estate Management fee has increased by £18,000 in total. You mentioned that this was due to increase by 3% each year but I would be keen to know further why these fees are increasing to the level which they are, and the extra resources which Trinity Estates themselves are putting forward to help manage the development.

There is no doubt that the Leybourne Chase Community Interest Company will be an essential part of ensuring that Leybourne Chase continues to be a fantastic place to live. I know you have informed my office that staffing costs have increased here as the estate which Trinity runs has increased in size. While I recognise this, I would be interested to know whether this has happened in line with expectations, and crucially what residents were informed about ahead of receiving this year's Budget? I am sure that the staff will play an essential role in both managing the financial expenditure on the development and ensuring front line services are maintained and enhanced, but with Residents paying the costs it is essential that they are able to have some way of directing what services are considered a

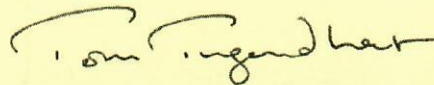
priority. Therefore I would be keen for you to set out in detail your plans and timeline to ensure that Leybourne Chase residents will have the ultimate authority over how funds raised through the service charge will be spent.

Finally, I am very keen to ensure that these issues are resolved for good and do not reoccur again in the future. To that extent it is essential that residents are fully informed of any changes which Trinity Estates are planning on making on Leybourne Chase, whether to the amount sought through the service charges or to the physical appearance of the development. One of the reasons why the level of increase may have come as such a surprise is on the basis that the Budget forecasts have been proven to be inaccurate. I would be keen to know what consultation you had with residents ahead of the Budget being set, and how often you make clear to them where items will exceed what is agreed, ahead of the service charge being sought? I know from working with Trinity Estates elsewhere how your organisation can communicate effectively with Residents Associations over investment in estates and I would be keen to ensure that this happens more often on Leybourne Chase. Indeed, I would be very happy to help facilitate any meetings myself so that Trinity Estates can be fully aware of residents concerns and be able to act on it appropriately and swiftly.

I appreciate this letter goes into some detail on specific expenditure items, but as I said it does not cover all of the issues raised with me and many others have also been raised. Leybourne Chase has all the characteristics of a wonderful community with an enormous community spirit, and I keen this remains. I trust that Trinity Estates can do what it can too to ensure this is the case.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Best wishes,



TOM TUGENDHAT