

Royale Dunton Court Park Residents Association

Committee Meeting

Thursday 3 August 2023
8pm in the hall of the clubhouse

Present.

Chair: Gary Peckham

Secretary: Pat Stapleton

Treasurer: Sheila Hobman

Helping hands coordinator: Lynda Gould

Entertainment coordinators: Mick Hilton and Julie Raby

Communications: James Hailes

+ three members observing.

Apologies

Pat Moore & Denise

Minutes from last meeting 26th May (James)

1. James recapped minutes from the last meeting and raised the following issues from that meeting which remained outstanding.
2. Due to the success of the coronation street party, Julie has been looking at running an annual outside event on Dunton. We had hoped to start this year but with such limited time and a busy period for the committee in general, it was decided to put this on hold until next year.
3. Lynda reported issues with carers not being able to find homes due to poor signage. This was followed up with the office and new signage has been ordered for some bits of the park (although the sign Lynda referred to at back Orchard had been turned down as unnecessary by the office).

Gas tanks being replaced by bottles (Gary)

4. The chairman (Gary) explained that Royale's announcement about gas changeover hadn't undergone the statutory consultation with the association. A site owner must consult the association by giving at least 28 days notice about all matters which relate to operating or managing the site or about improvements to it if it affects the occupiers either directly or indirectly. It was noted that this wasn't the first time Royale had failed to consult with us and we'd need to look at how best to deal with this. There is an option to go to a tribunal but the association would first seek a less formal remedy.

5. On the changeover itself, the chair outlined what was going to happen and why.

Calor had written to Royale to say they would no longer serve the site because of concerns about safety and also outdated infrastructure. All residents would be moved to bottles.

6. Bottles cheaper than tank gas (per litre) and no rental cost like there is for tanks.

7. A lot of residents are angry about the changeover so we agreed to ask Royale to have a meeting in the hall as a Q&A for residents.

Streamlining RA business (Gary)

8. The chair said that as things are getting busy and there is an increasing amount for the residents association to do, we should look to streamline things more, making sure we all share tasks. It was agreed we'd look at how best to streamline and revisit this at the next meeting.

Communications Report (James)

9. James reported that a number of the Royale entities had fallen into administration. Although Royale were downplaying this, the fact remains Royale owe lenders money and those lenders also have 'charges' registered against Dunton so it was felt that it was only a matter of time before we were affected ourselves.

10. James confirmed that himself and Chair (Gary) had been to the office to discuss a few matters to bring to tonight's meeting.

a) We expressed our concerns to Toni (Site Supervisor) and Gail (Royale area manager) that we felt security had been de-emphasised in recent weeks. Committee members had done regular site inspections at different times of the day and it's clear that the level of security personnel has been reduced in recent weeks. Gail said she didn't know why security had been removed, especially bearing in mind there had been four break-ins in recent months, but she'd endeavour to find out from Emma (Ops Manager at Royale) and report back.

NOTE: another example of Royale not consulting with the RA over changes.

b) We asked Toni (Site Supervisor) and Gail (Royale area manager) for more information on the gas changeover so we could discuss this with the wider committee. They confirmed that contractors would be visiting all homes in the coming days to discuss residents' concerns. We suggested Royale hold a meeting in the hall for residents' to ask Royale questions but this was refused.

Note: Some days later, all residents received a letter confirming a meeting had been arranged.

Note: Gas changeover was yet another example of Royale not carrying out a statutory consultation with the RA

c) We discussed club opening hours. It was felt that our once-monthly event nights were rushed even though these are the busiest nights of the month. We discussed extending hours on event nights and perhaps taking those hours off less busy times in the week. However, Gail (Royale area manager) confirmed this would mean changing staff contracts which wasn't an option. Gail also clarified that the club didn't need to make a profit - it's just an amenity for all residents - so the number of people using the club isn't a factor.

d) We asked Toni (Site Supervisor) and Gail (Royale area manager) for an update as to when the field at the top of Sycamore/Orchard and the old touring storage site would be tidied. We'd previously reported health and safety concerns with both of these fields. They confirmed that their main focus is gas changeover for the coming months but they will revisit this when the changeover is complete.

11. James confirmed that since that meeting with the office on 2/8/23, all security had left the park which was a major concern - especially bearing in mind the reported break-ins. To follow up.

12. James reported that, following safety concerns about wildfires on the front meadows, he'd tracked down the owners of both fields. However, they weren't responding to requests to cut-back the meadows to make them safe. So, James reported all his findings to Essex Fire. Garry Owles from South West Area Command had written back to say there's little the Fire service can do to force a cut back although he'd write to the land owner and support our concerns. Soon after this was done, the field was cut back (although it appears they were unable to get access into the meadow overlooked by Chestnut View).

13. James reported pink sacks used to be distributed by the site. Last time the council tried to bulk deliver, the site refused. Seems Royale did away with that service as per newsletter Aug 2022. James spoke to the council about all this and the council have said they're happy to do bulk deliveries again but someone has to accept them. Spoke to Toni and she will look into why they were stopped and possibly re-start deliveries direct to the site.

Note: Pink sacks stopped with no consultation with RA

14. James reported he obtained copies of electricity bills sent to Royale which showed just short of £5000 energy grant from the gov scheme which should be passed on to residents. Royale say they won't pass it on because they have been paying 39p for electricity but only charging us 34p. The fact they've chosen to discount our rate shouldn't disqualify us from the gov discount. However, we're only talking about £26 per home - do we bother to fight it? The committee decided that it would need a huge amount of resources to take this up with the authorities/watchdog at a time when we're already up to our eyes so it wasn't a battle we can take on at this time.

Secretary Report (Pat S)

15. Nothing to report

Treasurer Report (Sheila)

16. Nothing to report

Equalities Report (Denise)

17. The committee sent thanks to Denise who managed to get us a new urn for tea/coffee in the club

Helping Hands Report (Lynda)

18. Lynda reported that Helping Hands continues to be a success.

Entertainment report (Mick and Julie)

19. Mick spoke about a planned coach trip at Christmas and quotes he'd been gathering. The cost was going to be about £1300 to the Christmas Rochester tour. The committee gave the go-ahead for Mick to book and the association would subsidise the cost to residents. Finer details to be worked out at a later date.

20. Entertainment team will trial allocated tables at events to stop the stress of people bundling in at 7.30pm to get a table.

21. Mick reported events now being booked for early 2024

22. Discussed altering the prize draw prize because £50 was quite a chunk of the pot at each event. It was decided to change the prize to a lower cash prize or another option. Committee agreed to look at other options and the entertainment team would decide what's best.

23. Discussed introducing a free mini platter at music events and the committee agreed we'd give this a trial run. It was thought that cutting down the half-time prize draw spending could pay for the free platters without increasing overall costs.

Any other business (Gary)

24. Gary took the opportunity to say there had been no update on the tribunal process for those not paying the increase in pitch fee other than the fact the tribunal did receive the papers from Royale and the tribunal is running several months behind in processing. Gary said that he had already begun making up an extensive evidence bundle ready for our case.

25. Gary also explained that the site licence is currently being refreshed by the council because it hadn't been done since 1981 and new legislation had come into play since then.

No public questions.

Meeting ended at 10:40pm