

TENOA Chairman's Annual Address 2018

Last year I told you a story of an old man caught between a rock and a hard place as he bit off nearly more than he could chew in the adventure of a life-time. It was to remind you that we're always *where we are* and not where we might like to be; and the only way to get *there* is to do something and not just complain.

I pointed to what was needed to improve life for everyone at **The Element**, including a stronger Constitution and the work of our Factors **TEF** to meet challenges ahead. Now I report success and look forward to even better things.

I'll use broad brush strokes for others to fill in the detail of an emerging picture. Later the paint-brush will be handed to you for some DIY in this meeting! Because *you* are **TENOA** and this is *your* AGM.

My underlying message is this: we either help improve things **or** we hinder progress: standing on the side-lines complaining that everything wrong is someone else's fault, and that by magic the bad things will go away so our life can be perfect, *frustrates progress*. The world doesn't work like that; nor does **TENOA**. We must pull together.

A few weeks ago the latest plans for Western Harbour were on display, re-jigged after grinding to a halt in the recession. It's easy to be cynical and point to defects; to moan about parked cars clogging roads, waste-land a magnet for rubbish, delays in schedules, noise and crime. Who would want to live in such a wretched place? Perhaps only those who couldn't care less about anyone else *and* those of us who are not so much head-in-the-cloud optimists but owners who've invested (9) in a super place to live and are determined to make it even better.

Later you'll hear how we're getting on with claims against NHBC for original building faults; and of improvements made recently. For example, we've got over a design fault and can now easily get in and out of our garden and down to the garage if a lift is out of action, whilst securing our privacy from outside. That improvement happened because we addressed the issue of noisy banging doors and damage we all have to pay for when, despite fire regulations, they're propped open out of frustration.

We've started putting planters on the surrounds to stop cars parking in the wrong place. Why not use the garage built for a purpose with marked spaces?

We've got together to clear up rubbish on the waste-land and asked the Council to provide more bins; and are teaching people how to dispose of rubbish in an environmentally friendly way: which is not in the corridor outside your front door.

We've followed Police and Fire Brigade advice, reaping the benefit of improved CCTV in the garage and two problems blocks, not least as a deterrent; and we're enforcing the title deeds to ensure emergency exit in corridors and staircases.

We're in the process of establishing a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (20) with two other Western Harbour complexes to show we won't accept behaviour that threatens our peaceful way of life.

In these and many other ways **TEF**, our factors for the past three years, have followed *our* instructions to improve life for everyone at **The Element**. But I must repeat my mantra that the Factor's role is neither that of nursemaid nor policeman. Each of us – property owners in **The Element** – is legally responsible not only for what's inside our four walls but a 278th part of everything we own in common: staircase, corridor, lift, roof, services, garage, garden and perimeter – all *ours jointly and with liability*.

TEF is under contract with **TENOA** to help maintain and improve **The Element**. The **Committee** you elect agrees with them a programme of repair and renewal: cleaning, painting, lighting, new carpets

and many technical things. But it all belongs to *us* – OUR JOINT PROPERTY as OWNERS: we're not tenants but hold the title deeds of each flat and all the common parts.

That brings a legal burden, of which we've had examples during the year. If your boiler bursts or your plumbing malfunctions, resulting in water damaging the flat below or part of the common area – **you** are responsible for the cost of repair. It's not **TEF's** fault nor that of a tenant or agent; the buck stops with the OWNER, whether living here or not.

The Factor can't just break in or turn the water off in the whole block. All **TEF** can do is notify the OWNER – whatever time of day or night. He or she must call a plumber out and be charged for any damage to the rest of the building – just as if your car causes damage to a third party. So you'd better check your insurance; and do regular checks in your flat.

But to help point you in the right direction, we've added information and links on a vastly improved **TENOA** website. And **TEF's** website also gives tips. We'll demonstrate later how it works and keep adding what you tell us will help.

For example it's the owner who must obtain **TEF's** permission for a dog or cat to be kept in a flat – read your title deeds – even if it's let to a tenant or holiday-maker. Then a complaint of unreasonable noise or fouling – can go back to the owner. We'll ensure the burden is properly borne. The owner must set terms in a tenancy agreement or holiday let through an agent which does not infringe title deeds.

I've illustrated some of the challenges in this shared complex of **The Element**. But there are also many advantages in living close together. Friendships grow as we get to know our near neighbours and often those in other blocks. Organised events – like the rubbish clear up, our second Garden Fest and impromptu activities in a particular block – show the benefit of being in a community where we help each other.

We want to enhance a sense of neighbourliness in each block, including long term reliable tenants and those just here briefly on holiday. So later I'll introduce some people who've agreed to be a focus or link in each block and we can discuss the possibilities this brings. It needs to be as informal and varied as possible but could produce lots of ideas – a signal for some DIY tonight!

Of course, many people want keep themselves to themselves, not to trouble anyone or be troubled by them. That's fine! But living where we do presents a particular challenge. When something goes wrong we **all** need to be part of the solution. We don't live in a detached house in the middle of a field without near neighbours but in a large modern complex with hundreds of others – and the best way for a good life here is to feel part of the varied family that showed its potential in the garden recently. Was this year's better than last with it's challenging treasure hunt? Will next year be even better? That's up to you.

TEF is going to report how the money you pay into Green and Red Funds has brought noticeable improvements, and what's in line next. But they've keep such a tight hold on the purse-strings they'll recommend (for us to vote on tonight because it's our money) reduced fees for the year ahead! Things are improving – let's give each other a pat on the back.

Now one more idea of how we can move on from where we are based on the aim of our Constitution "to foster a sense of wellbeing for everyone in **The Element**" – the community who live here. How about working towards **The Element Code**? What do you think it should include? – more DIY later.

And yes, I'm shortly on my way back to the Arctic Circle for another adventure, because overcoming the challenge of last year has whetted my appetite for more. But I'll come back and try to do what I can to make **The Element** the best place to live for miles around.

Rodney Matthews, TENOA Chairman 4th September 2018