



Residents left without heat and hot water

By John Lawrence

People living on the Strawberry Vale estate in East Finchley have been left without heating and hot water repeatedly over the coldest months of the winter. In the first two weeks of February alone, their communal gas-powered boiler system broke down five times.

One resident told The Archer: "Strawberry Vale Estate is home to many elderly residents and individuals with health conditions or mobility difficulties. During the winter months, reliable heating and hot water are not luxuries, they are essential.

"Many residents require a warm environment for health reasons. Others must be able to wash and prepare for work each morning. The repeated failures and delayed responses are causing significant distress and disruption to daily life."

Another said the boiler problems were part of a systemic breakdown on the estate, with many ageing facilities like the lifts and sewage network also needing repair.



In the cold: The heating system on Strawberry Vale has repeatedly failed. Photo Mike Coles

Frustrated residents claim that the Peabody housing association, which runs the estate, does not communicate with them about the status of repairs and too often employs contractors who are unable to cope with

the scale of the fixes required. They told us that some of them had been asked to contribute £3,000 each towards the installation of the new boiler system, which made the frequent losses of heating and hot water even harder to take.

Strawberry Vale was built in the 1980s with 268 flats and houses. Some residents moved there when the estate was new and are now in their 80s. Some families live in severely overcrowded conditions.

A Peabody spokesperson told The Archer that this winter's issues had been caused by leaks from ageing pipework, which were repaired as quickly as possible.

"We're sorry that some residents have had problems with their heating and hot water and know how disruptive this has been," said the spokesperson. "We've already replaced the pipes on Old Farm Road and are planning to replace more across the estate. Given the scale of the network, this work will need to be done in phases to minimise disruption.

"We've also installed a new boiler system, improving the overall reliability of heating and hot water for residents.

"We know clear communication is important. Residents can contact us on the phone, online or in person, and we hold monthly drop-ins. We've also started a newsletter."



Paved over: One of the High Road plant beds is removed. Photo Mike Coles

Watch this space as Town Square starts

By Diana Cormack

East Finchley Town Team's plans for the creation of a town square in the High Road, N2, began in a necessarily small way on Tuesday 17 March with the removal of one of the flower beds in front of Amy's hardware store.

Kate Brown, chair of the group, told The Archer that the Town Team would have loved to see the entire area of the wide pavement between Caffè Nero and East End Road redeveloped with all the features that local people requested when surveyed.

The reality is that this will be done bit by bit, as and when funding is available. The removal of one of the flower beds will make a more open area for events, which was one element people requested. The Town Team plans to organise a first

event in the space on Saturday 2 May and will continue to fund raise for the other elements such as seating and further planting. Some of the plants from the removed bed have been relocated to other beds in the space.

Vinyl club

Age UK Barnet is starting a new Vinyl Club for over-55s giving music lovers a chance to share records and discover new sounds.

"From Elvis Presley to Elvis Costello, from The Ronettes to The Ramones, we're up for whatever you want to hear," says Age UK Barnet volunteer and journalist Phil Hilton, who will be hosting the group. "There will be short, informative talks, shared passions, memories and actual vinyl records!" Sessions will take place at 5pm on Tuesdays at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane N2 8LT and the first meet up is on Tuesday 21 April. There'll be a charge of £3 which includes all refreshments.

Get in touch if you are interested and Age UK Barnet will send you a short survey to ask about your music tastes to kick off with the right tunes. Contact activities@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call 07379 331807.

Calling all plant lovers

The third annual charity plant sale at Tony's Continental in the High Road, N2, will take place on Sunday 3 May at 10am. A huge collection of home-grown plants will be available to help raise funds for the Haematology Cancer Care unit at University College London Hospital.

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