

# Vote Mike O'Driscoll for Chair of CBWRA – for a new model of residents' association, not just a rebrand

Deliver Right to Manage for all of CBW \*Create a democratic and well-governed residents' association \*Prevent toxicity, online bullying, & arbitrary account closure on the CBW app \*Put residents at the heart of decision-making \*Reduce energy consumption

Feel free to ask questions: [residents@chelseabridgewharf.org.uk](mailto:residents@chelseabridgewharf.org.uk)

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**About me:** I am an academic researcher in an NHS related role, with interests in photography, hiking and travel. I am a co-founder and trustee of a charity relating to the international development sector. I have been a leaseholder at CBW since 2004 and led many successful campaigns benefitting residents, including getting traffic control on Sopwith Way and a campaign to raise awareness about

lease extensions in Warwick which saved residents large sums and protected property values. I also organised a refund on management fees averaging around £700 per Warwick leaseholder. **In 2020 with other residents I worked to reactivate the residents' association which had been dormant for around 6 years. I was the first resident (in September 2020) to identify that BH were charging waking watch fees inappropriately** and worked with other residents to put pressure on BH, leading eventually to a full refund of around £400K. While on the CBWRA committee, I worked with Rendall and Rittner to improve the clarity of service charge billing and negotiated monthly billing for Warwick residents. I fought continuously (and continue to) for Right to Manage, resident consultation and better governance in the CBWRA. I have helped many residents in individual casework around service charges, arrears and general advice. I have built a network of several hundred residents from Rendall and Rittner managed developments across England which is a valuable source of knowledge exchange and support. **My Priorities as Chair would be to:**

- 1. Urgently present residents with options for Right to Manage process/choosing our own managing agent**, in line with residents' wishes as expressed the 2021 residents' survey, before a final decision on how to proceed, within 2 months of election. [The expert advice which I obtained in June 2022](#) (from Canonbury Estate Management) shows that *we can proceed with Right to Manage for the whole development now, with a high chance of success - we could have started the process 2 years ago!*

**'Retendering the management contract' has in my view been a waste of up to £15,000 of residents' money** and a lot of time. It could only have succeeded if Berkeley Homes had voluntarily agreed to participate which was never likely. Even if it had been successful it would not have put the residents in charge – any new managing agent appointed would still be answering to the freeholder. It was therefore a very bad decision to pursue this and it was done without any resident consultation, a few days before the Chair elections in Jan 2022 which locked in that decision, regardless of who was elected. **The excuses for not doing Right to Manage must end – we need to move on and deliver Right to Manage.** I do not believe that will happen under the current leadership of the CBWRA who spent 2021 telling us RTM was not possible until the law changed and most of 2022 telling us we could get the same results as RTM through 'retendering the management contract'. **It turns out neither of those claims is correct, as I pointed out at the time 😊.**

- 2. Keep service charges down:**

- a. Carry out a full management audit on service charge accounts for last 5 years**, to identify and recoup any unjustified service charge using a 'no win no fee' consultant. **I argued for such an audit throughout all of 2021** while on the CBWRA committee and this was blocked on the basis that it might damage our "collegiate" relationship with Rendall and Rittner. Only now at the start of 2023 has any work been done on this and CBWRA have refused to share

even a summary of the initial audit. **However it is now common knowledge that the initial findings on the audit were not good news for Rendall and Rittner**, and this work needs to be taken forward as soon as possible to recover service charges via a first tier tribunal and to prevent unjustifiable charges, going forward.

**b. Continue to challenge Rendall and Rittner's (allegedly) inflated quotes for major capital works.**

**c. Make CBW a more sustainable development - Environmental audit of CBW to identify means of reducing energy consumption, carbon footprint, support investment in renewables such as solar panels and improve recycling**

### **3. Restore proper governance in the CBWRA**

**a. Detoxify the CBW app.** Sadly, the mismanagement of the CBW app has been the source of much conflict in this development. The CBWRA leadership, in trying to silence debate, criticism, scrutiny has had a 'chilling effect' **with residents scared to ask questions or say what they think. I will ensure clearer rules of use and introduce resident-led (rather than CBWRA-led) moderation of the CBW app**, so that it is a safe environment where all voices can be heard, without fear of arbitrary censorship, personal attacks, account closure, dogpiling etc. **Less drama, more meaningful conversations, more quality content. These standards will apply to ALL including the Chair and the committee** and therefore we must have an element of independent oversight of the process, outside of the committee. **I have spoken to many residents who are genuinely afraid to ask even the most basic questions for fear of being attacked and this must stop.** The behaviours regularly seen on the app from those supposedly 'leading' are disgraceful and would never be tolerated in any workplace or on most social media. It is the behaviour of those who are unaccountable.

**b. CBW Account closures:** Will only happen with due process and after appropriate warnings. **If we want to have a democratic residents' association we cannot have a situation where one person can simply decide that someone is 'misinforming' residents and close their account without any evidence being presented or any due process or chance to respond or appeal.** This is totalitarianism.

**c. Put residents at the heart of decision-making.** There have been no consultations with residents during the two years of the current leadership apart from the residents' survey which I carried out in summer 2021. **Decisions made without residents are often bad decisions.** E.g. the decision to retender management contract and not pursue RTM at the start of 2022. We need to use all the talent and experience we have at CBW to inform decisions. I would ensure quarterly meetings between CBWRA and residents (currently there are no such meetings – leaseholders may attend committee meeting as mute observers and non leaseholders may not attend at all). **We cannot get 50% leaseholder support for Right to Manage unless there is a big push on resident engagement, which at the moment is extremely minimal.**

**d. Non-leaseholders will have the same right to attend meetings as do leaseholders and will be welcome as associate committee members** (but will not have voting rights on the committee which would prevent CBWRA recognition)

**e. Elections –** I would ensure that the election process for Chair and committee is published 2 months before elections, and be overseen by a panel of committee and residents to ensure transparency and fair play. **The current election process is hastily improvised, not described in the constitution and in my view, unfair and lacking in transparency.**

**f. CBWRA would consult on the constitution with residents and freeholder and then ratify it at a quorate AGM (this should have been done at least 18 months ago).**

**g. CBWRA would market test the value of advertising on the CBW app to ensure we are getting the best deal for residents. In my view we are losing tens of thousands of pounds a year by underselling advertising especially the estate agency slot.**