

Deputation Referred from Council 8 May 2014

(a) Deputation from Tenants leasing council owned properties in Stanmer Village. (Spokesperson) – Mr. J. Knight

Supported by:

Kathy Biggle and Neil Harding

Rosie Harrison

Daren and Adi Howarth,

Jason and Karen Knight,

Nicky and Ben Scroggins,

Karen Smithson, and

Jake and Astra Thompson.

Deputation from Tenants leasing council owned properties in Stanmer Village. (Spokesperson) – Mr. J. Knight

I'm here on behalf of a number of Stanmer Villagers who are tenants in the council owned properties leased to the Brighton & Hove Estates Conservation Trust on September 28th 2005 for 20 years, the board of which includes two elected council members. One of the many requirements of the lease agreement is that the Trust keeps the properties in good repair and condition, and we do not believe that the trust is fulfilling this obligation. As the council granted this lease we feel this is a matter for which the Authority has a responsibility, and are asking for it to investigate our claims.

We also maintain the trust is not fulfilling its own stated objectives to pursue a policy of:

- conservation and improvement of cottages in Stanmer Village, and
- letting to local people whom it is hoped will contribute to the Village community

We have compiled a report which includes photographs, statements, letters and emails, consisting of some 50 pages, which illustrates issues of concern:

1. **Very poor condition of properties at the start of tenancies, and consistently substandard repairs.** A newly let cottage was in such poor state of repair that as a last resort, the new tenant called an officer from the council's Environmental Health. The damp and cold in these properties has, we feel, been a contributing factor in the ill health of at least three children in the village. We have raised the issue of non-sustainability, energy inefficiency and need for insulation on numerous occasions.
2. **Rental Increases in breach of Tenancy Agreements.** A clause in some of the Tenancy Agreements clearly states rental increases must be in line with the Retail Price Index. When a tenant recently queried a proposed rental increase of 15% in a new 12-month lease, they were issued, with a Notice of Eviction. This still stands, despite a petition of support signed by the entire Stanmer Village community.
3. **Insecurity.** Constant references are made to the higher rental at which our homes would be advertised should we not accept the Trust's new terms. When questioning a 20% rental increase, a tenant who'd lived in the village for 30 years was told the increase was non-negotiable and if she did not wish to pay it, they would serve notice.
4. **Dubious regard to the listed nature of the buildings.** In the farmhouse, the Trust stated an unsafe fireplace was a listed feature which couldn't be removed unless a higher rental be paid. Complaints regarding the replacement of classic iron-work

guttering with cheap ill-fitting plastic guttering, which continued to leak, prompted the Trust to write to all tenants to say maintenance of guttering was our responsibility.

Despite many direct requests, or indirect cc'ing on email correspondence, the Trustees have consistently refused to engage with tenants on any specific complaints we have made. We are also very concerned that the Council's representatives on the Trust can support rental increases of 15-20% on these Council properties, given their backing to the recent motion put forward by Green Councillor Bill Randall, supported by Labour's housing spokesman Chaun Wilson, which calls for a cap on private rental increases.

The Trust claims that as a charity, all the income it receives from tenants' rents, aside from a small amount spent on administration, is spent on maintaining the properties and making rental payments to the council. However the most recent accounts available from the Charity Commission show that actually less than 50% of their income is spent on maintenance and rent, and the amount spent on repairs in 2013 was 50% lower than the previous year, despite a year-end surplus of some £30,000.

In conclusion, this deputation appeals to this council that it ensure our community's concerns are investigated to the extent that they fall within the remit of the Council and that it examines whether the Trust is fulfilling the role for which it was formed when it was set up by the Council. Poor property management and threats to evict tenants who do indeed contribute to the community, has resulted in extreme anger amongst village tenants and a real sense of injustice. We have a good community here, despite an increasingly high turn around of tenants. We also have competent skill-sets, which we already apply at our own expense to improve our homes. This has then been used to justify higher "market" rents. We suggest far greater involvement of the people who live in the village will be the way forward, particularly in the light of the recent huge public consultation on the future of Stanmer Park.

Brighton & Hove Estates Conservation Trust – Deputation on Tenant Grievances Supporting Information

Supporting Documentation – Extracts from BHECT Financial Report, March 2013.

**BRIGHTON & HOVE ESTATES
CONSERVATION TRUST
(LIMITED BY GUARENTEE)**

**REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2013**

The Trustees have pleasure in presenting their report and financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2013.

Brighton & Hove Estates Conservation Trust is a company limited by guarantee (Company registration number 5554194) and is registered as a charity (Charity registration number 1111811). It is governed by its Memorandum and Articles dated 5th September 2005.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the Memorandum and Articles of Association and Statement of Recommended Practice "Accounting and Reporting by Charities 2005".

Objectives and activities

The Company was established in 2005 "to improve the conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of the South Downs within the area of Brighton & Hove and more particularly that of Stanmer Park".

The trustees have recently reviewed their strategy for pursuing the objectives of the Charity and have agreed their vision statement as follows:

"To help conserve Stanmer Village and Park in partnership with the community, other interested organisations and the City Council through an informed holistic approach and to promote greater understanding of the Village and Park for the benefit of the public, recognising its importance as a gateway to the South Downs National Park and operating on sound financial principles to be sustainable".

The Charity has overseen the substantial refurbishment of several properties now in its leasehold ownership in Stanmer Village and has pursued its policy of conservation and improvement of cottages in Stanmer Village as those have become vacant. The Charity pursues a policy of letting to local people whom it is hoped will contribute to the Village community.

The Trustees look forward to developing relationships with the newly formed South Downs National Park.

Relationship with Brighton & Hove City Council

On 28th September 2005 Brighton & Hove City Council granted the company a 20 year lease over certain properties at Stanmer Village, Stanmer, Brighton.

The Trustees value the ongoing working relationship with Brighton & Hove City Council to the mutual benefit of both.

Achievements and performance

Overseeing the commencement of the refurbishment and conservation of the Farmhouse and cottages in Stanmer Village was the main activity of the period; made possible by the support of Brighton & Hove City Council.

Brighton & Hove Estates Conservation Trust – Deputation on Tenant Grievances
Supporting Information

**BRIGHTON & HOVE ESTATES
CONSERVATION TRUST
(LIMITED BY GUARANTEE)**

**DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2013**

	2013	2012
	£	£
INCOME:		
Rents receivable	106,246	100,365
Interest receivable	<u>23</u>	<u>28</u>
	106,269	100,393
EXPENDITURE:		
Rent	31,874	22,310
Repairs	15,558	33,821
Insurance	6,414	6,250
Light and heat	-	1,218
Security costs	-	1,840
Management fees	13,166	11,640
Depreciation	984	984
Interest on Council loan	1,764	1,672
Interest on legal fees	(327)	865
Legal and Counsel's fees	2,400	5,845
Audit and accountancy fees	<u>4,305</u>	<u>4,260</u>
	<u>76,138</u>	<u>90,705</u>
SURPLUS for the year	<u>30,131</u>	<u>9,688</u>