

Herbert Collins Estates Limited – Report for Annual General Meeting (October 2024)

Herbert Collins Estates Limited (HCEL) is the freehold owner of land within the Ethelburt Avenue (Bassett Green Estate) Conservation Area. This land includes the properties subject to long leases and the private roads, greens and the tennis courts within the Conservation Area, as well as 18 Herbert Collins properties in the Thornhill area of Southampton.

Living in a conservation area brings certain benefits. In particular, the Estate's distinctiveness, visual appeal and historic character mean that its houses command a premium when they are sold. They also tend to appreciate in value more quickly than houses outside the boundaries of the conservation area. However, changes to an individual property may have an impact on the overall character of the Estate. Therefore, our properties are subject to extra planning controls to protect the historic and architectural features that make them special. Guidance on what is, and is not, permissible are given in the [Appraisal and Management Plan for Ethelburt Avenue \(Bassett Green Estate\) Conservation Area](#).

HCEL is a 'not for profit' company that was created with the aim of managing the land 'in a manner that preserves or enhances the amenity of the Conservation Area and supports the activities of the Herbert Collins Estates Residents' Association'. To this end, plans for alterations or additions to the exteriors of properties in the Estate must generally be approved by HCEL before any work is started. This is in addition to any planning permission granted by Southampton City Council and applies equally to leaseholders and owners of freehold properties. The only exceptions to this requirement are routine maintenance and 'like-for-like' repairs.

Since the last AGM, HCEL has dealt with cases involving more than 10% of the properties in the conservation area. Some general points emerge from a review of these cases:

1. **'Like-for-like' repairs.** A few property owners are stretching the definition of what constitutes a 'like-for-like' repair to near-breaking point. If there is uncertainty about what falls into this category, it's best to ask the Company before commencing work.
2. **Choice of building materials (including windows and doors).** Some properties on the Estate are now approaching their centenary, which makes it increasingly challenging to source original building materials for the purpose of repair and replacement. There is also concern that the economic downturn may tempt some property owners to use inappropriate but cheaper building materials. HCEL and Southampton City Council are aware of these problems and have access to experts who can advise on suitable, cost-effective solutions.
3. **Trees.** It's pertinent to remind people that work on trees over a certain size – including felling – requires permission from Southampton City Council.

When Jon Willetts, the Historic Environment Officer at Southampton City Council, visited last year he said that our estate is one of the best kept in the city. Clearly, we wish to maintain the Estate's good reputation, not least because it preserves the price premium associated with our properties.

In other developments since the last AGM, the government's Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 received royal assent on 24 May 2024. Among other features, this will strengthen leaseholders' rights by making it cheaper and easier for them to extend their lease and buy the freehold. It will also improve the transparency of service and administration charges made by the freeholder. The Act should have minimal impact on our Estate as we already have a standard lease extension term of 990 years and charge peppercorn rents. However, it does raise the important issue of the long-term

financial viability of HCEL. For example, the company's income for the last year was £1,412 and a significant portion of this was needed to cover the cost of the insurance needed to run the Company.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank John Dixon, who served as a Director of HCEL up until 27 October 2023, and also John Green, who will step down shortly. Their time, energy and unwavering commitment to improving the Estate are truly appreciated.

David O'Connor