Walterton and Elgin Community Homes

Residents Newsletter
SPRING 2022

30 year Anniversary of Resident control in action

In this issue

p2 • Welcome note
p4 • Maintenance & Asset Management Team
p6 • Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum
p8 • Rent + Service Charges
p9 • How to pay your rent and service charges
p15• Welcome to our new student!

welcome

Dear Resident,

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of our newsletter.

We have experienced a lot of change at WECH over the last few months and we are getting ready for more change to come as we celebrate 30 years since the transfer of your homes from the local council following the successful campaign, but also as we prepare for the fresh challenges we are going to face in the next 30 years.

We have welcomed Shamsul to our team as our Head of Maintenance and Asset Management. This is a new role which we have created as we are putting an increased priority on improving our maintenance service and ensuring our safety and complying with new legislation. This includes the need to make our homes comply with government zero carbon targets and also to reduce risks of future flooding.

Also, Anita has joined our team working for Shamsul along with Barbara and Yinka in our Maintenance and Asset Management Team. You can read more about this team inside this newsletter.

For the next year, improving our maintenance and the standard of our properties is our main aim, within our financial limits.

We have also welcomed a new student from the Hanze Institute in the Netherlands. Ali will be working with us for the next few months to look at some long term ideas for our maintenance service.

This year we have had to increase rents (and service charge management fee for leaseholders) by 3.6%. We know this is not ideal as households are facing many other increases to costs but this was essential for us to continue to afford to provide our services. Many other housing organisations have increased by 4.1% and we tried our best to keep the increase below this.

Sadly we have said goodbye to George and Rob from the Maintenance team, and Elaine from the Community team. We thank them for all they have done for WECH over the years and wish them the best for the future.

And finally, Anthony has recently retired after 27 years of service at WECH. Anthony has been instrumental in the efforts to take WECH from being a successful campaign to being a fully functioning housing organisation over the last three decades and we are very grateful to him for his hard work.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and some spring sunshine.

—Front Cover Image
Walterton & Elgin residents outside the West Drayton HQ of project management consultants PMI in February 1987 after confronting the directors inside their offices for taking money from the Council to sell off our homes. Photograph by Philip Wolmuth

Matt Townsend
Chief Executive
Walterton and Elgin Community Homes

30 Years of Community Ownership at WECH

In April 1992, the residents of the Walterton and Elgin Estates took over the ownership and control of 921 homes from Westminster Council. It was a defining moment in a long and arduous battle to preserve an established local community.

It was back in 1985, when Westminster City Council announced its intention to partner with a housebuilder to redevelop twelve hundred homes on the Walterton and Elgin council estates. They said they wanted to create a new community, though they never thought to ask the people who lived there.

I ran round all the Victorian houses and asbestos-ridden tower blocks to collect signatures from my neighbours for a petition, and to persuade them to attend the Housing Committee meeting. We only had five days. A hundred residents met in the open air on a street corner.

Most people either didn't believe it was happening or, as one exclaimed: what makes you think we could possibly stop the richest and most powerful council in the country from having its wicked way?

200 residents descended on the Council's meeting. Tension mounted as we presented our petition demanding that the council should withdraw and abandon its demolition sell-off proposal.

When Walterton Road tenant, Topper Brown, announced to the Council's Housing Committee that he had fought in the war as a Desert Rat, and there was no way he was going to be thrown out of his home, there was uproar. The Police were called, the meeting was abandoned, and the decision was not made. By the time it was re-ran a month later, both sides had settled in for a protracted campaign.

Topper Brown and his wife Mae lived in a one-bedroom flat on the ground floor of a four-storey house. It wasn't self-contained and, like everyone else on Walterton, they had no heating except for the gas fire in the living room. There was a Butler sink in the kitchen with a gas water

heater. They shared a toilet upstairs with the flat above, but they had no bathroom. Mae, who'd had a colostomy operation, used to change her bag in the cupboard under the stairs.

After three years of besieging housing committee meetings and singing to developers, we decided to become a private landlord so we could use a new Thatcher Government law that granted private landlords the right to acquire council estates.

An investigator hired by Westminster City Council later concluded that the Council conducted what he said was war on us to try and thwart our bid for community ownership, most gravely of all by moving homeless families with new-born children into the worst asbestos blocks in the UK.

To stop us getting the money it owed us, the Council's Barrister even argued that the Council should pay less for disrepair because the properties were occupied by lower, rather than upper class people. It didn't work. In 1991 we won the ballot, and in 1992 we took 921 homes and £22 million off the Council and into our community-based housing association.

Now, 30 years on, WECH is one of the largest community owners in the UK with 680 homes and an annual turnover of £4million. Thanks to our struggles in the 1980s, this community lives in decent homes. Through WECH, we have democratic control. Our future is in our hands. It up to us to make the next 30 years even better.

Jonathan Rosenberg

WECH Founder and Former Chair

Maintenance and Asset Management Team

Dear Residents,

Since joining in November 2021 it has been great to meet with so many welcoming WECH residents and I hope to meet with many more of you over the coming months.

We have had some major changes in our team. Anita has joined us as our new Contracts Officer and we have said goodbye to George and Rob.

When reporting a repair, it would be highly appreciated if you could email your concern to us with photos. This will allow us to diagnose the issue quicker and ensure it is rectified 1st time round.

Our contract with K&T for gas servicing came to an end at the end of March and we are bringing in new contractors. We will be introducing two new businesses to WECH and welcome any feedback on their performance.

If you are experiencing damp and mould issues in your homes, please get in touch with us immediately. We understand how distressing this can be and want the opportunity to put it right.

We are currently reviewing our cyclical works programme and are in discussions with the management and Board Members about when we will be scheduling the works.

The government's new building regulations in helping the country reach net zero by 2030 means that we will be making some significant changes to the fabric of our buildings. This will be planned in conjunction with our cyclical works programmes for the future.

Lots more changes are still to come. We are currently implementing a new IT system which will improve our efficiency.

Kind regards,
Shamsul

HOW TO REQUEST A REPAIR

During office hours:
To report a repair, please email maintenance@wech.org.uk or telephone our office on **0207 266 3347**

Your call will be taken by a member of our team and we will get as much detail as we need about the repair. Please provide pictures where possible.

Out of Hours
For emergencies call JUST 24/7 Ltd on **0208 979 2220**
For an emergency gas leak or carbon monoxide leak call **0800 111 999**

Meet the Team

Shamsul
Head of Maintenance & Asset Management

Yinka
Surveyor

Barbara
Maintenance Administrator

Anita
Contracts Officer

Elgin Estate Gardening

We are looking for feedback about the current WECH estate gardening service. If you have any suggestions, good or bad, please contact Phyllis who will be collating the information for a report to the WECH Board.
phyllis@wech.org.uk

AGM & Summer Festival

This year we are aiming to hold our AGM and Summer Festival together on 14th August. Please hold this date in your diary. More information will be sent nearer the time.

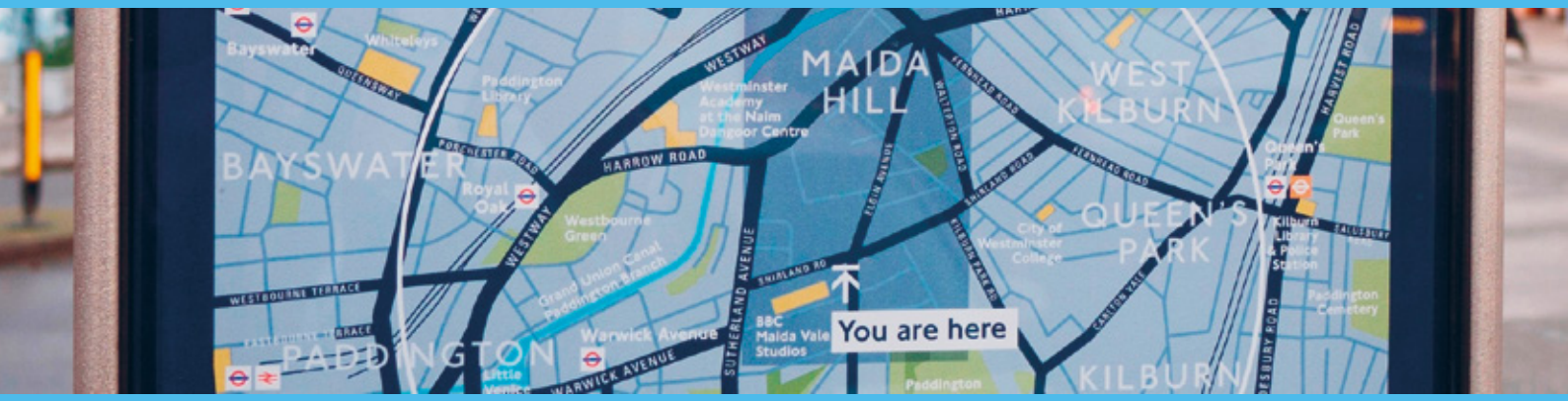
Gardening Club

Would you like to help us set up a WECH gardening club? We will be arranging an initial meeting soon to talk through ideas. If you are interested please contact Eleanor to put your name down on the list to be contacted.
eleanor@wech.org.uk

We are seeking volunteers to help us with the running of Watson Gardens and our Community Centre.

If you are interested, please contact **eleanor@wech.org.uk** who will take your details and provide further information.

Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum



MH NF

Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum is a group of volunteers who live or work in the area.

We're one of the main groups that organisations such as the council and the police will listen to when they need to know what people really think about new proposals and what needs to change. There aren't that many ways to get a real say on what happens in the neighbourhood, but this is definitely one of them.

I'm Vonley Joseph, Chair of the Forum, and I live and work in the area. I joined the Forum soon after it was started, several years ago. I was already a member of the WECH social committee, involved in organising events such as the Summer Festival, but wanted to do more to support the community. Joining the Forum was a natural progression.

While I've been Forum Chair, we've had our say on bringing green issues more into the Council's City Plan, we've campaigned hard to have The Squirrel pub saved for at least some community facilities, and we're having our say about improving the plans for the market space area between Harrow Road and Fernhead Road. We're also going beyond influencing plans to actively setting up youth sports projects and community parklets.
I know that these are tricky times for people, and unfortunately, there's no lack of signs of impoverishment. But with the history and heritage and energy of those around I'm absolutely certain that there's huge potential.

If you have skills or knowledge that might benefit the area, or just want to find out more, I'd love to hear from you (email the Forum at info@maidahillforum.org.uk). There are loads of ways you can help, whether joining the Forum Committee, volunteering on projects, supporting events, assisting with our website, or responding to planning consultations.

You don't need to have any experience. If you've ever thought about making Maida Hill a better place to be then now's the time to get on board!

www.maidahillforum.org.uk

CHAMPIONS' COMMUNITY MONDAYS

Come and meet the Champions

Come along to our **Community Mondays at the WECH community centre** for a coffee and a chat - young children welcome. We will be running a range of workshops and programmes over the year.

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner - workshops and tasters of signature dishes from across our many diverse cultural groups on north Westminster. Workshops and taster sessions with trained nutritionists - see right column.

Board games drop in - cards, dominoes and a variety of different games in a friendly community setting.

International food event - coming your way in May - see the Wech website for updates.

A celebration of community cuisine

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

Our communities come from across the globe. **Come and help select, taste and learn about our fantastic culinary history.**

We will cook and learn about those signature dishes aided by a trained nutritionist. These dishes will then be shared at community events throughout the year.

Each **Monday** we will prepare a new dish from a community cuisine and learn how to reproduce that meal at home:
11am – 1pm

TO BOOK:
Please call Marilyn at Maida Hill Place on:
020 8964 2549 or
email: vonleychampions@maidahillplace.co.uk

WECH Community Hall
36A Selbourne House Elgin Avenue

COMMUNITY Champions Harrow Road

maida hill place
food & enterprise hub

MATERNITY Champions WESTMINSTER

Rent

Dear Residents,

My name is Serene Wringer-Burnett, and I am the new Income Officer at WECH who will be dealing with all tenanted accounts that are in rent arrears.

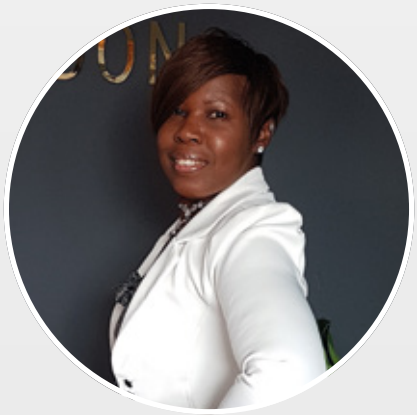
I have settled in well since I joined the organization in January and have been able to get to know many of the residents. My role is to reduce the level of rent arrears owing to WECH as best as I can as we very much rely on the income of rent from our residents in order to get many repairs done.

I am fully aware of the hardship that is affecting many of our residents. So, as well as collecting outstanding arrears I am also here to help, listen, give advice or to signpost you to various external agencies that may be able to assist you with any debt issues, such as our independent Solicitor Robinson Wilson.

Going forward my aim is to contact residents who are in rent arrears either by telephone, letter, visit, e/mail or text messaging and come up with solutions on how you can reduce/clear your arrears in a consistent and manageable manner.

Please feel free to contact me on **020 7266 3347** should you wish to discuss any rent arrears you may have. Please also see several ways in which you can pay your rent on the next page..

Kind regards,
Serene



Service Charges

Dear Residents,

Many of you will know me from my previous role as a WECH Housing Officer.

Since January 2022 however, my role has changed. I am now the Leasehold and Service Charge Officer.

In that capacity I am the first point of contact for all service charge and leasehold queries. Please do get in touch if you have any leasehold or service charge matters that you wish to discuss.

My email address is: peta@wech.org.uk
Alternatively, you can contact me via the WECH office number.

Speaking of emails, I would be grateful if all leaseholders who choose to receive service charge statement sonline could ensure that their email address is up to date.

If the email address you originally supplied to WECH is no longer in use, please provide me with an active address, to ensure that you receive your service charge statements online.

Kind regards,
Peta

Ways to pay

How to pay your rent and service charges

Direct Debit

Direct Debit is the easiest and most convenient way to pay, for tenants and leaseholders who have a bank or building society account.
To set up a Direct Debit please contact WECH.

Pay online using Allpay

You can pay online at **www.allpayments.net**
or you can download the Allpay app:

GET IT ON Google Play Download on the App Store

Telephone

You can call WECH's automated payment service with your debit/credit card details on **0330 041 6497**
This service is available 24 hours per day, seven days a week. This service is provided by Allpay. Please ensure you quote the reference number on your WECH card

Shops

With your WECH card, you can pay at any shop displaying the PayPoint, Post Office or allpay.net signs:

To pay online, by telephone or in shops you will need a WECH card
Please contact WECH if you require a card.

Free Welfare Benefit and Debt Advice

WITH CORAL FROM ROBINSON WILSON SOLICITORS.
CALL WECH 0207 266 3347 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

Coral Williams LL.B. (Hons)
ROBINSON WILSON SOLICITORS
Selbourne House, 36A Elgin Avenue,
LONDON, W9 3AZ

Dear Readers,

Universal Credit

I have noted an increase in universal credit applications, for assistance please make an appointment through WECH and I will be delighted to help you. You will need the following information to progress your claim:

- ID
- Mobile Phone
- Email address
- Bank Account Details
- Council Tax reference number
- National Insurance number

Universal Credit Facts

- Universal Credit is paid monthly.
- Universal Credit applications are based online.
- Claimants will have to log on to an online web based journal for updates about their claim and payment notices.

Universal Credit replaces:

- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Employment Support Allowance income based
- Job Seekers Allowance income based
- Working Tax Credit

Please come and see me if you are having trouble meeting the shortfall between your rent and Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

I will assist you with an application for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). DHP is assistance with rent payments and is made at the discretion of the local authority.

Thank you,

Coral

In association with Everyone Active

We're back!

Join Harrow Road Community Champions

walking football team

Improve your health and fitness - new players and all abilities are welcome. Great fun!

Every Tuesday at 6pm

at **Lydford Estate Pitch London W9**

Just turn up and try it!

(subject to fitness assessment)

KEEP FIT!

Walking football offers a multitude of health benefits to older people such as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke while improving blood pressure. Walking football is an excellent way of staying fit and healthy.

www.thewfa.co.uk

For more information contact:
vonleychampions@maidahillplace.co.uk
07950847520

maida hill place
food & enterprise hub

everyone ACTIVE

WECA resident control in action

COMMUNITY Champions Harrow Road

MATERNITY Champions WESTMINSTER

ACTIVE WESTMINSTER

City of Westminster

THE ELDERLY RESIDENTS BINGO

CLUB

EVERY WEDNESDAY

DOORS OPEN:18.30PM

THE WECH

COMMUNITY CENTRE

36a Selbourne House

Elgin Avenue. W9

Healthy food and free entertainment!

Community Fusion Cookout

Saturday 14 May, 12pm - 3pm

Watson Gardens, WECH Community Centre, W9 3AZ

Health information, music, games, workshops

COMMUNITY Champions

maida hill place food hub

walterton & elgin community homes A Community Land Trust

WESTMINSTER PROTECTS

City of Westminster

We would like to pass on our condolences to the families of our residents who have recently passed away

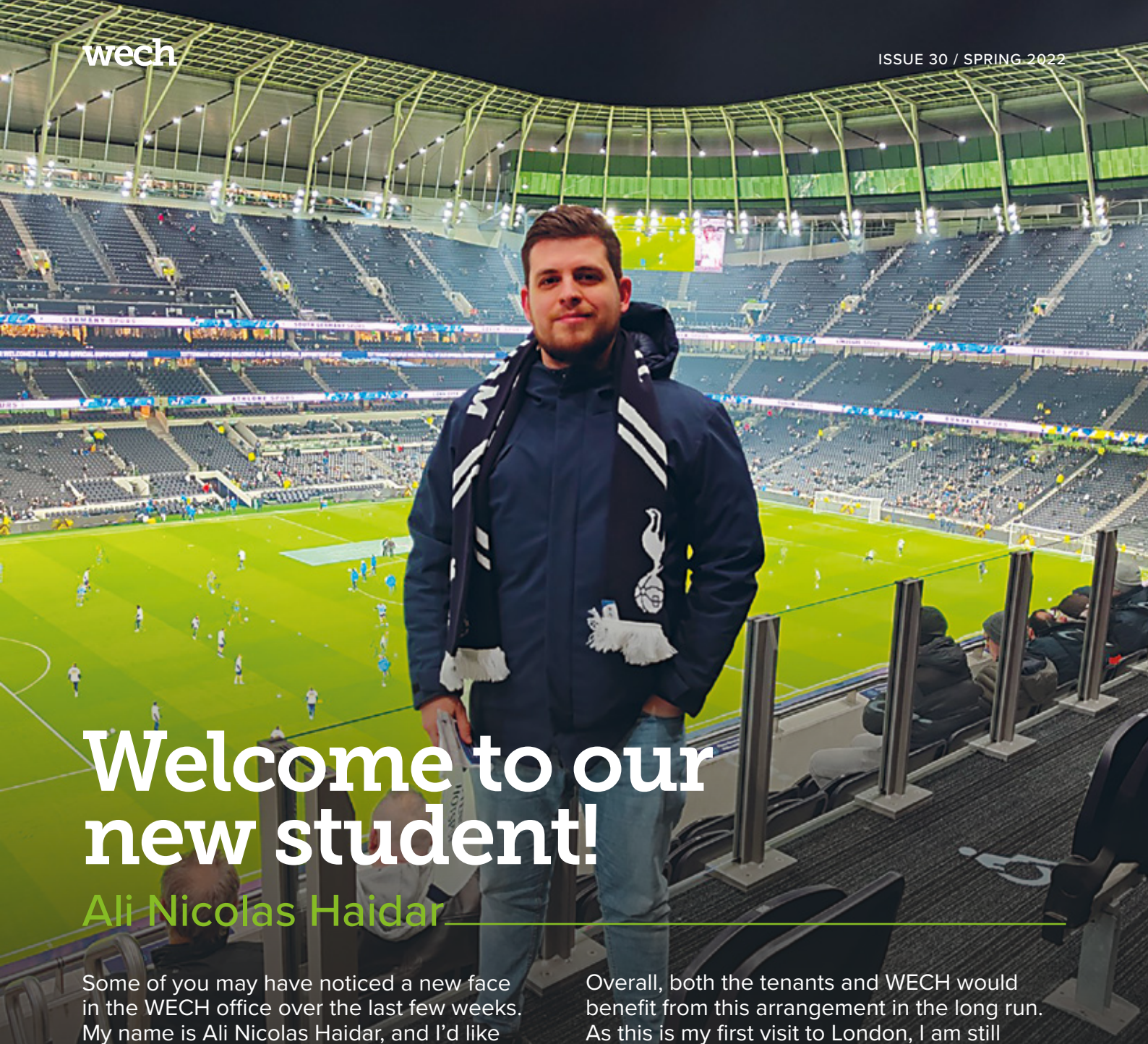
MR VICTOR BUDD
28TH FEBRUARY 2022

MRS MAY BINNING
26TH MARCH 2022

MR JOHN SHARP
10TH DECEMBER 2021

MRS LEONIE OSBOURNE
23RD DECEMBER 2021

Our thoughts are with you...



Welcome to our new student!

Ali Nicolas Haidar

Some of you may have noticed a new face in the WECH office over the last few weeks. My name is Ali Nicolas Haidar, and I'd like to introduce myself. I was born in 1995 and, therefore, I am 26 years old. I am studying in the Netherlands, specifically in the northern Dutch city of Groningen. I am half-Lebanese and half-Dutch, and I was born in Switzerland.

This is my final year of my Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Facility Management, which I started in 2017. I will be at WECH for the next three and a half months, conducting research. The focus of my research will be on the gas service provided to tenants in residential apartments. It is anticipated that my research will lead to WECH insourcing its gas service in the long-term.

Overall, both the tenants and WECH would benefit from this arrangement in the long run. As this is my first visit to London, I am still amazed and stunned by the sheer scale of the city. My goal is to see as much of London as possible by the end of June, when I will be leaving again. On the weekends, I try to explore different parts of the city. I also read and heard that WECH hosts a variety of social events throughout the year, which I found to be interesting. If any events are scheduled during my stay here, I will make every effort to attend them in the hopes of meeting as many of you as possible.

To make up for the fact that COVID-19 did not allow me to enjoy the practical aspects of my studies, I intend to make the best out of my time here. You are welcome to take part in that experience as well. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to know and understand more or if you have any additional questions.

Walterton and Elgin Community Homes

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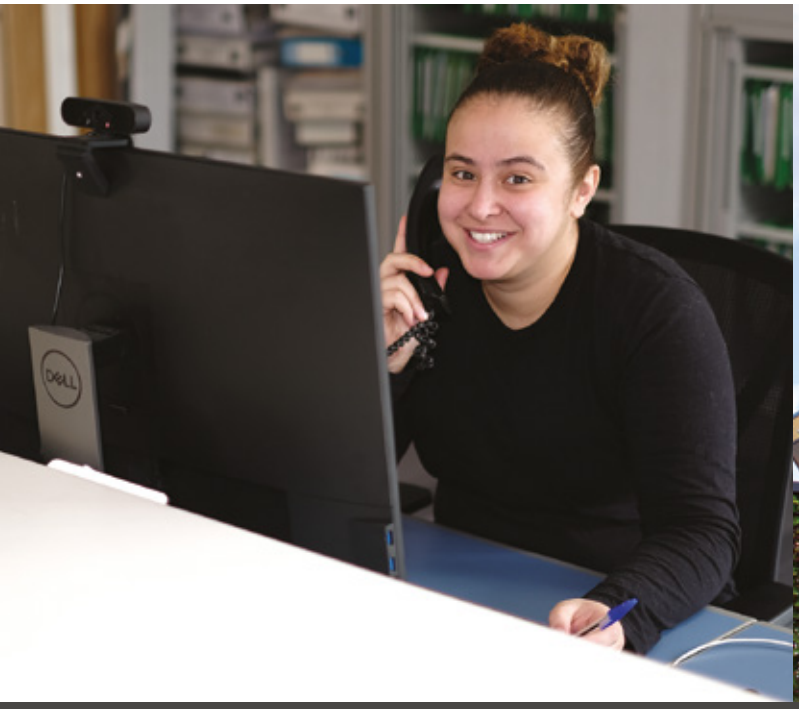

How to Contact WECH

Opening Hours
Monday to Friday: 9:30am - 5.30pm

Address
Selbourne House, 36A Elgin Avenue
London W9 3AZ

Telephone:
020 7266 3347

Out of Hours Emergencies
020 8979 2220 (Just 24/7)

The Warden can be contacted on
020 7266 6165

Rent Payments
0844 557 8321
www.allpayments.net

Useful Telephone Numbers

Emergency Gas Leaks Cadent
0800 111 999

National Grid Electricity
0800 316 3105

Thames Water (no water or low pressure)
0800 316 9800

Disposal of large items
020 7641 2000

Crime Stoppers
0800 0555 111

Police Non Urgent Crime and ASB
0300 1231212

Police Emergency
999