

Cedar Chase & Marsham Lodge

Jane Curry (Treasurer at Cedar Chase) and Averil McGarvie (Chair at Marsham Lodge) met on March 22nd, 2013 to share information.

Background

Cedar Chase in Taplow and Marsham Lodge in Gerrards Cross were both built by Span Estates, the brain child of the architect Eric Lyons. Still appearing as “very modern” developments today, the “Taplow Toilets” and “The Compound” in Gerrards Cross were built in the teeth of fierce opposition in 1966 and 1969 respectively.

Each estate has 25 houses; Marsham Lodge is built of a sandstone-coloured brick with dark brown wood cladding whereas Cedar Chase has the starker black wood cladding against white bricks, but both have the same identity and, as with all Span estates, they have a strong sense of community.

Community

One of the big differences between Cedar Chase (CC) and Marsham Lodge (ML) is the age of residents. CC has 2 houses with original occupants with about one third of the total residents in the retired bracket. 3 houses have young families, 4 houses include young adults and the rest are people of working age, many of whom run small businesses from home. The average age of Marsham Lodge residents is around 80.

One of the consequences of the age difference is that ML has a stalwart core of committee and find it very hard to recruit new volunteers. CC has a committee that is extremely well represented by the younger residents and it doesn't take too much arm-twisting to fill the committee and to get things done.

CC has perhaps been more fortunate in largely having owner residents, although several houses have been rented over the years. ML currently has 2 houses rented, one of which was purchased as a buy-to-rent. Interestingly, CC covenants have a clause that explicitly states that a house may only be rented for 3 years out of 4 and it must be occupied as a single-family unit; we ensure that this limitation is well known to anyone who does rent. ML has no such clause in their covenants.

Houses & Garages

The houses are Span type C31. Cedar Chase is laid out in 5 straight-line block whereas Marsham Lodge is arranged in a number of clusters.

The original plans for our houses show both 3 and 4 bedroom alternatives, with the master bedroom divided to provide the extra room. CC has a couple of houses that currently have this configuration.

On both estates there are examples where the wall between the kitchen and the dining room has been removed resulting in a large, open-plan area.

CC has managed to maintain a more rigorous adherence to the “no external changes to houses” rule in our covenants. Front doors are all still original or replaced with an identical pattern. Many have replaced the original windows with plastic, largely maintaining the appearance. Garage doors are all the same with one notable exception (that is currently under dispute). 2 residents currently have a project with a local company to replace their

original windows with identical hardwood frames to a modern specification.

ML residents have nearly all replaced their windows with plastic, maintaining the appearance at the front but with much more leeway at the back (the backs of ML are probably less accessible than CC backs). More obvious at ML is the variety of different front door replacements and the different garage doors.

CC has 2 houses that have had extensions (in the very early years of the estate). They are on the 2 end houses where residents had land that abutted the boundary and the extension is generally invisible to other residents. Permission was refused to a third house where land would have been annexed from communal space and the extension would have been visible. ML has refused permission to extend a house where the addition would have been very visible (after a rather fraught legal process).

CC still has about a third of houses with the original Lennox boiler, driving the hot air heating system. Those that have been replaced have a similar Johnson & Starley boiler, still driving hot air. Almost all the ML boilers have been replaced; interestingly some have swapped to a radiator system rather than hot air. Number 2 CC is currently developing a boiler replacement plan to drive hot air but also heat water (rather than using the ubiquitous electrical immersion heater) and also provide underfloor heating in the bathroom and a water-heated radiator in the "little loo" (which seems to be equally cold on both estates). One CC house has a wet room shower in the little loo (at the cost of slightly restricted access to the front door). Several ML houses have installed an en suite bathroom in the main bedroom (effectively where the built-in wardrobe is).

On CC, roofs are beginning to be a concern, including their insulation (or lack thereof). Our wood cladding is also showing its age and we expect over the next 2-3 years to develop a plan for new roofs meeting modern insulation standards, possibly considering solar alternatives, and also encompassing replacement and insulation of the cladding. Obviously this will be neither cheap nor compulsory but we feel it is better to plan for this on our terms rather than waiting for catastrophic leaks to dictate repair.

Both estates have a significant number of houses that have had cavity wall insulation installed over the last 5 years.

ML garages are all together around a central area whereas CC has 2 garage blocks for about half the residents and the rest of the houses have their garages incorporated into the back of their gardens. ML undertook a project to provide power to all garages and many residents have now installed electrically-operated garage doors. Electrification of garages at CC is patchy.

Grounds

Both estates have communal land, CC having a large communal area beyond the houses whereas ML has integrated paved and grassy areas.

ML appears to have a successful policy for their communal compost heaps; they are clearly labelled and do not apparently suffer from the CC problem of large woody contributions.

Both estates have a communal bonfire.

CC has a communal Ox Roast event each summer in the lower grounds.

Infrastructure

ML have completed an estate-wide replacement of their pitch-fibre drains, coordinated by

a single contractor who negotiated with all residents' insurance companies. CC has done a similar, partial job (houses 1 - 8), we suspect by the same contractor. The rest of the CC estate still has occasional issues with these problematic drains but we understand that both estates should now be in the happier position whereby the water company has responsibility for shared sewers, rather than residents.

Estate paths and parking areas are similar concerns (and major special-project expenditure items) to CC and ML. ML is largely paved after a large, expensive project several years ago. CC has tarmac paths and parking areas and is currently looking at refurbishing both.

Both estates are struggling with how to hide the growing / changing number of dustbins and recycling boxes. CC is looking at reviewing the original estate planting plans and refreshing it; it is hoped that this may encompass a solution for hiding bins.

Both estates had the iconic "mushroom" lights but have had to replace them (each with bollard-style lights). CC does still have a couple of examples of mushroom lights in back gardens. A concern to both is the state of the wiring and the unknown route of that wiring.

ML has abandoned the communal TV aerial (though it still exists). As with CC, there is a policy in place that mandates any external dish / aerial be discreet. CC still has many residents that rely on the communal aerial which managed to embrace the digital switchover successfully. Ultimately we probably will need to abandon this, more because of the state of the underground cabling than the aerial itself.

Both estates employ gardeners to maintain the communal areas for a very similar length of time per week, for a very similar amount of money (and we suspect we both have very good deals!). Both estates also provide monthly window cleaning.

The external painting regime is similar on both estates with a 4-year cycle. ML has experimented with a more phased approach having a white-paint phase, green-paint phase, timber-paint phase. ML do timber every paint cycle whereas CC only do it every other paint. About half of the CC houses are north facing and the front row is overhung by trees so they suffer badly from spiderweb and algae on the cladding. We are going to try a communal workparty to scrub these houses after a successful test pilot by one of the committee.

The maintenance fee is very similar on both estates; CC pays £90 / month; ML pays £100. CC has managed to build a respectable sinking fund, in addition to the painting provision, as we felt we needed to be able to rapidly respond if the digital switchover on our TV aerial resulted in lack of signal. Happily, this was unnecessary so we are now looking at a number of special project options. Residents proposed projects for our AGM, alongside the option of a maintenance fee "holiday"; there was close to unanimous feeling that the money should be spent to improve Cedar Chase rather than paying less maintenance.

At one stage, ML needed to raise a large amount of capital. They succeeded in this by asking residents to pay 3 years maintenance fee up-front. Many felt able to do so and sufficient funds were raised.

Both estates have their own website. ML provides far more public information (<http://www.marshamlodge.co.uk/>), including contact details for committee members, and have received a number of interesting / useful contacts (such as enquiries as to whether any houses were available). CC (<http://www.cedar-chase.org.uk/>) has a single page, public website but much more extensive pages for restricted resident-only access. This includes telephone details, recommendations for local tradesmen & services, committee details, the Cedar Chase Handbook, newsletters, accounts and various other useful

information.

Summary

Cedar Chase and Marsham Lodge clearly share the same historical origins as Span estate houses of excellent architectural pedigree built in areas that initially resented them bitterly, and have now become much sought-after assets to their villages.

Both estates have a strong sense of community and any resident would instantly recognise their relationship with the other estate.

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