

CASE STUDY



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Courtlands Estate, Richmond. High res jpeg available.

238 thermostats can't be wrong: A decade of heating maintenance support for Courtlands Estate, Richmond

Managing the varying heating requirements of an average family can be hard enough, but imagine the headache involved when the heating for 238 properties is supplied via a communal, gas-fired, heating system. This is the scenario facing the management team of Courtlands Estate in Richmond, Surrey. This is a large, private estate comprising 11 residential buildings. Of these, half were built in the 1930s and retain much of their distinctive style, with the remainder being constructed in the 1960s. The majority of the flats are in private ownership on long-term leases whilst a few are retained and managed by the Courtlands Estate company.

Ken Hassan, Company Secretary, and latterly Estate Manager, explained more; “The estate has a communal, gas-fired, heating system which is housed in four boiler rooms and which serves all of the buildings, via a 6" district heating main. There are 15 commercial-size boilers, more than two dozen pumps of various sizes, and miles of over ground and underground pipework. The responsibility of the estate team is to maintain reliable communal services for heating and hot water, whilst dealing with the concomitant issues of repairs and maintenance that arise with plant of our complexity and size.”

In 2009, the maintenance contract for the heating system was put out to tender and the successful provider was Southern Maintenance Solutions (UK) Ltd, (SMS). Over the intervening years, SMS has provided comprehensive maintenance and servicing which can be split into three categories:

- a) the provision of reliable regular servicing of the major items of heating plant e.g. boilers, pumps and burners.
- b) periodic major contract work including the replacement of ten old boilers.
- c) dealing with service issues, both minor issues and those that are more urgent – e.g. a plant outage, where a prompt service response, seven days a week, is imperative.

Martyn Neves, Operations Manager at SMS, explained more about some of the specific issues the company has faced in the last decade. "A site like Courtlands Estate has two main requirements. The first is when there is a problem with the heating and our main challenge then is often finding the source of the problem. The solution is often relatively straightforward but locating and repairing a fault, say in the pipework, can be difficult, especially if we require access to several separate flats in order to deal with it. Secondly, as plant and equipment ages, regular and thorough servicing is important to make sure that it is kept in good condition throughout its working life."

Work on a site of this size and nature is required throughout the year, with the core element being a programme of scheduled quarterly maintenance. "We don't anticipate refurbishing any of the other boiler houses in the next few years, but this year we have a programme of replacing several old, belt driven pumps with new inverter driven pumps, which are more efficient and should be more economical to run. We will also be replacing the gas booster sets in the main boiler plant room together with upgrading one of the two burners, again increasing efficiency and saving costs," explained Martyn Neves. "Otherwise we will be carrying out our routine maintenance of all plant rooms, together with water treatment and servicing of the BMS. We'll also be continuously renewing radiator valves as and when required."

Ken Hassan said: "Over the years of working with SMS, they have established a good understanding of our heating system. Their regime of regular and thorough maintenance has helped us to provide a reliable service to residents, with downtime kept to a minimum, which is very important. We also value their advice and guidance when it comes to considering future works; we consider pro-active maintenance very

important, and their recommendations about this and plant replacement are always given careful consideration."

Each of the leaseholders on the estate holds a share in the freehold company that owns and manages the site. The elected Board of Directors appoint the staff who run the affairs of the estate from the on-site office. "The shareholders want the most cost-effective servicing of the estate's heating plant while having the confidence that when the weather turns cold, each and every one of the residents will be as comfortable as possible in their own homes. SMS has been able to help the estate meet these objectives and our satisfaction with the service they have provided remains very high," concluded Ken Hassan.

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Background

Southern Maintenance Solutions UK Ltd was founded 30 years ago and since then has established itself as one of the leading providers of commercial heating, cooling and air handling installation and maintenance services in South East England. It has had particular success in both the private and state education sectors, but also has long standing maintenance agreements with a range of commercial property managers for premises including various places of worship, modern gym facilities and office/manufacturing buildings.

In addition to its core activities, engineers at the company are also qualified to handle the installation and maintenance of a range of complimentary systems including electrical systems, water treatment, commercial kitchens and commercial pipework installation. The company recognises the need to invest in its staff and currently has three apprentices working towards industry recognised qualifications.

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