

December 2003  
Issue 47



# housing *news...*sing

FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

## *Christmas Special*

**Tenants' conference  
round up ◀ PAGE 4**

**Keep safe this Christmas ◀ PAGE 7**

## From concrete to colour at Bockhanger

An ambitious plan to turn what used to be a concrete drying area into a colourful and attractive garden is taking shape in Bockhanger.

Housing News reported back in March that tenant Pat Boorman had applied for funding to convert the old circular drying area between the first and second blocks of flats in Bybrook Road into a garden.

Ashford Weald Housing provided full backing for the scheme, and Pat and fellow tenant Diana Peswani succeeded in securing funding for their plans from the Scarman Trust.



November: ready for planting

Ashford Weald organised the hard landscaping, carried out by Deacon Landscapers to a design by local residents, and the Scarman Trust money provided plants and equipment as well as paying for training for local residents so that they can plant up the garden.



March: looking at plans

## In convenience

A blocked toilet is a major inconvenience to a household – and it could also turn out to be expensive.

Tenants with blocked toilets are some of the most frequent callers to the Ashford Weald repairs hotline (01233 330366), often because something has fallen into the pan.

Tenants are charged when our contractor has to clear a blocked toilet, and all too often it turns out to have been caused by an unhooked toilet freshener holder or an air freshener or toy that has fallen into the pan.

To avoid the double trouble of a blockage and a bill, make sure that toilet fresheners are securely fixed, or use the sort that goes inside the cistern and will not cause a blockage. Also make sure that there is nothing nearby that could be knocked into the toilet pan and cause a similar problem.

## Hats off to Hamstreet

### ALL CHANGE

*Don't forget – Ashford Weald's door-to-door rent collection service ends this month. Rent collectors will only be calling on those who still use this method until the end of December.*

*There are many other way of paying your rent, including by Direct Debit and over the counter at any Post Office. For help or advice about choosing an alternative way to pay please contact the Customer Services Team on 01233 330688.*

### HELP US HELP YOU

*Is your postcode correct? We want to ensure that when we write to you we use your correct name, address and postcode. Please tell us if they are wrong and we will correct them. Phone the Customer Services Team on 01233 330688 and give them the correct details.*



Ghouls and boys came out to play when residents at Cotton Hill House in Hamstreet celebrated Hallowe'en together. And as 69-years-young Doreen Webb explains,



residents don't need much of an excuse for a party:

"We go walking together, we have day trips and theatre trips, garden visits and meals with

friends. We enjoy summer fêtes and Christmas bazaars; we even have our very own visit from East Kent Morris Men each spring.

"Our evenings are busy as well. We don't need to worry if there is nothing on the television as we are usually too busy playing cards, snooker, darts or chess or just listening to music with friends in the lounge.

"Our manager Rita (Brockway) and her husband Lewis also get involved, joining in with us and doing things for us. I don't think it could get any better than this."

The Repairs Hotline is on  
01233 330366

# TIME TO RING THE CHANGES



**The sound of church bells is an important part of Christmas for many people. But do you know what goes on inside the church to make it happen? Ashford Weald's Linda King, a bellringer herself, explains...**

You may have seen clips of bellringing on the television where people cling onto a rope and swing up and down. Well that is not what usually happens! Bellringers normally keep their feet on the floor, which makes it a lot more boring as a spectator sport!

Put simply, a church bell is a large lump of metal, usually weighing anything from 112lbs to four tons, mounted on bearings in a wooden or metal frame with a wheel and rope attached. Bellringers, usually in a room somewhere below the bells and sometimes on the ground floor of the church, pull the ropes to ring the bells.

Three styles of bellringing are used to produce that glorious Sunday morning sound:

**Rounds** - where the bells are rung as a scale from the highest to the lowest note

**Call changes** - rounds which are varied by switching the bells using called commands

**Methods** - where the bell sequences are varied according to set patterns which the bellringers need to memorise. These methods have interesting names like Bob Major, Grandsire Triples, Cambridge Royal and Stedman Caters.

People ring bells for any number of different reasons. Primarily it is a service to the local church, ringing for services on a Sunday and practising on one evening in the week.

Some enjoy the social aspects. Bellringers tend to be a sociable bunch, often adjourning to the local pub after a practice. Others enjoy the physical challenge of ringing a heavy bell or the mental challenge of successfully completing a complicated method.

Some bellringers enjoy ringing peals that last for more than three hours without a break (and without a mistake!). Some like to visit other towers and keep a list of all the towers at which they have rung. For some of these, the attraction is the architecture of the different churches, while others like to go up the tower and see the bells themselves and some take notes or rubbings of the inscriptions on the bells.

Ringers do not have to be musical or mathematical, but good hand-eye co-ordination and a sense of rhythm helps. Although it is good physical and mental exercise, strength is not essential.

People can learn to ring at any age, from 11 to 12 upwards. Younger people learn more quickly but older people tend to be more determined! If you want to know more, ask at your local church.

## Forward thinking

“At the end of a fantastic year of progress for Ashford Weald and for our tenants, I am delighted to be able to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a very happy new year.

As well as being a time for celebration, Christmas is often a time of reflection, a time for us all to sit down and look back at successes and failures over the year and to consider what we might want to achieve during 2004.

Here at Ashford Weald we believe that this has been a year in which we really have improved our service to customers. We have: -

- Issued a three-year maintenance plan
- Improved the reporting and completion of day to day repairs
- Involved tenants in all the important decisions about the housing service
- Introduced a Choice-Based Lettings Service which has been welcomed by all of us here, as well as tenants
- Introduced more ways for tenants to pay their rent
- Started to roll out "Area Plans"



We are determined that 2004 will see even more improvements in service delivery and are hoping to introduce a way of 'tracking' customer enquiries so that we make sure we always respond to tenants.

We will continue to help and encourage tenants to play their part in housing decisions, particularly through our plans for a 'village voice' network, the sheltered housing panel and other tenants' groups.

Enjoy the festive holiday and take the time to relax, reflect and look forward to 2004.”

Tracey Kerly,  
Housing Manager

The Customer Services  
Team is on  
01233 330688



## Ashford hosts tenants' Conference

Tackling anti-social behaviour was high on the agenda when tenants and leaseholders joined forces at their annual conference in November.

Ashford once again hosted the "Joining Forces 2003" conference organised by the South East Kent Tenant Participation Forum, with a good turnout filling the Admiral Suite at the Ashford International Hotel.

Guest speakers outlined both the government's view on anti-social behaviour and the local police's



perspective on dealing with the problem. High-tech audio visual aids and a video presentation helped to bring this important issue to life for the large audience.

Presentations on problem solving and noisy neighbours and a chance to share information with others from around the south east also featured on the busy agenda, and delegates made the most of any free time to visit a variety of display stands.

The conference was chaired by Graeme Bosley, Acting Head of Housing at Coast and Countryside Housing Services, Shepway District Council, and tenant Wally Carter.



## Reporting back

"Moving forward together" was the theme picked up by Tenants' Forum representative Alpert Thomas when he attended a conference on black minority ethnic housing issues held in Manchester in September

The conference was addressed by Fiona Mactaggart MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Race Equality, Community Policy and Civil Renewal.

"She stressed the need for people to have mutual respect for each other and pointed out that housing officers needed to understand the issues facing tenants from minority ethnic groups," said Alpert.

The other keynote speaker was Leroy Phillips, chair of the Race and Housing Inquiry, a joint initiative between the Commission for Racial Equality, the National Housing Federation, the Federation of Black Housing Organisations and the Housing Corporation.

"He said minority ethnic tenants of all kinds needed to make their voices heard as part of the community and play their part in creating a warm and friendly atmosphere," Alpert said.

## Christmas Services IN THE BOROUGH OF ASHFORD

### St Mary's, Ashford

Sun 21st, 6.30 pm. Carol Service  
Wed 24th, 6 pm Christingle and Crib Service  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Family Communion

### St Mildred's, Tenterden

Weds 17th, 7.30 pm - Town Carol Service  
Sun 21st, 9.30 pm - Parish Communion and Sunday School Nativity Play  
Wed 24th, 5 pm - Children's Crib Service  
Wed 24th, 11.15 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 9.30 am - Family Communion

### St John's Smallhythe

Sun 21st, 3 pm - Carols by Candlelight  
Thurs 25th 11.15 am - Holy Communion

### St Francis, South Ashford

Sun 21st, 6 pm - Carols by Candlelight  
Wed 24th, 5pm - Christingle  
Wed 24th, 11.30pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10am - Eucharist with carols

### St. Mary the Virgin, Willesborough

Sun 21st, 10 am - Lessons and Carols  
Wed 24th, 4 pm - Candlelight Service  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Holy Communion

### St. Michael's, Smarden

Sun 21st, 6.30 pm Lessons & Carols  
Wed 24th, 4 pm - Crib Service  
Wed 24th, 11.45 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Family Communion

### All Saints', Biddenden

Wed 17th, 7.30 pm - Christmas Celebration  
Wed 24th, 10.15 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Family Communion

### Kingsnorth Church

Sat 20th, 3 pm - Christingle  
Sat 20th, 5 pm - Carols at Park Farm Tesco  
Sun 21st, 6.30 pm - Christmas Carol Service  
Wed 24th, 3 pm - Blessing of the Crib  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Family Communion

### Great Chart and Singleton

Sun 21st, 11 am - Nativity Service St Mary's in Singleton (Village Hall)  
Sun 21st, 5 pm - Candlelight Service, St Mary's, Great Chart  
Wed 24th, 5 pm - Crib Service, St Mary's, Great Chart  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass, St Mary's, Great Chart  
Thurs 25th, 9.30 am - Family Communion, St Mary's, Great Chart  
Thurs 25th, 11 am - Family Communion, St Mary's in Singleton

### Bethersden

Sun 21st, 6 pm - Carols by Candlelight  
Wed 24th, 4 pm - Christingle  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 9.30 am - Family Communion

### High Halden

Sun 21st, 3 pm - Christingle  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 11 am - Family Communion

*This is not intended to be a comprehensive listing. Other services are also available. You are advised to check with the church in question before setting out.*



## Campaign cash

A successful bid for funding by tenants from Ashford and across South East Kent will allow a major campaign against discrimination to be mounted next year.

With a budget of almost £20,000, the campaign to promote 'diversity' will include the production of an information pack which will then be used as a 'pilot' for future work.

The funding, from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Institute of Housing, will also be used to provide a number of training days. The aim is to help tenant and community groups raise awareness of diversity issues and to help group members challenge discriminatory views and comments.

## Housing in focus

*Tenants with an interest in housing issues and in helping to improve the service on offer are being invited to 'get involved'.*

*Ashford Weald is hoping to create a new service delivery focus group to check that progress is being made, challenge existing policies and the way the service works and generally help to inspire service improvements.*

Contact Tenant Participation Officer  
Phillipa Dale on 01233 330365

## First impressions



**"As a new member of the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum, I am impressed by what has been achieved over the past year.**

"The AGM was very interesting, with a lot of questions being put about the development of Ashford and information about how people can get involved both in the future and in preserving the best of Ashford's heritage.

"New members were made welcome at the first meeting of the tenants' forum, and I am looking forward to playing my part over the coming year."

Teri Witcher, Tenterden

## Country life

A fair deal for rural tenants was the number one item on the agenda when Ashford Weald Housing officers met some of those living in the countryside.

The meeting was set up as part of a push to make sure that tenants living in rural areas have the same opportunities as those living in the towns to comment on and influence housing issues.

The main point to come out of the meeting was that tenants all over the borough want much the same thing. They want:

- repairs to be done on time and properly
- to feel safe in their homes and in their communities
- to live in an environment that looks and feels comfortable, with safe roads, no litter and tidy hedges, trees and verges.
- regular contact with housing management staff and opportunities to put forward their ideas, perhaps through such things as surgeries, walkabouts or village visits by the Ashford Weald promotional trailer.

Some problems, such as the lack of local shops and limited public transport, affect rural areas more than those living in the towns, but tenants felt generally that the benefits of rural life outweighed the difficulties.

What did affect some tenants was a fear that the town was 'marching into the country', and the meeting discussed the importance of sensitive planning.

The meeting with rural tenants felt that it might help to have a regular rural slot in 'Housing News' (this newsletter). What do you think? If you live in a village and would like to represent the area in which you live, either by writing the occasional item for the newsletter or by being a 'village voice' for your neighbourhood, then contact Tenant Participation Officer Philippa Dale on 01233 330365.

### St Mary's, Kennington

Sun 21st, 4pm - Christingle  
Wed 24th, 4 pm - Crib Service, St. Mary's Church Centre (Rylands Road)  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Family Communion

### Ashford Town Centre

Sat 20th, noon - Carol singing with Churches Together in Ashford

### Centrepiece, Bank Street

Sun 21st, 6.30 pm - Carol Service

### Ashford Baptist Church

Sat 20th, 6.30 pm - Christmas Celebration  
Sun 21st, 6.30 pm - Carols by Candlelight

### St. Teresa's Catholic Church

Sun 21st, 5 pm - Carol Service  
Wed 24th, 8 pm - Christmas Mass

### Cade Road Church, South Ashford

Sun 21st, 11 am - Nativity Service  
Sun 21st, 6.30 pm - Carols by Candlelight

### South Ashford Baptist Church

Sun 21st, 4 pm - Carol Service  
Thurs 25th, 10.15 am - Family Service

### St. Simon's Catholic Church, Brookfield Rd

Wed 24th, 11.45 pm - Midnight Mass  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Christmas Mass

### Kennington United Church, Faversham Rd

Sun 21st, 10 am - Family Worship  
Thurs 25th, 10 am - Christmas Celebration

### South Willesborough Methodist Church, Cudworth Road

Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Holy Communion

### Willesborough Baptist Church, Hythe Rd

Sun 21st, 6.30 pm - Carols by Candlelight  
Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Holy Communion

### Charing Methodist Church

Sun 21st, 10.30 am - Family Service  
Thurs 25th, 10.30 am - Family Service

### Tenterden Methodist Church

Sun 21st, 4.30 pm - Carol Service  
Thurs 25th, 10.30 am - Family Service

### Shadoxhurst Methodist Church

Wed 24th, 11.30 pm - Carol Service



The Customer Services  
Team is on  
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# Is there more to Christmas than food and presents?

*Lloyd Symes believes there is...*

Ashford Weald housing inspector Lloyd Symes, who has completed his training for ministry in the Church of England and is looking to be ordained in the near future, gives his personal view...

I remember seeing a cartoon in the Sun one Christmas which depicted the lotto hand pointing to the Nativity scene with the caption: "Let's not forget the true meaning of Christmas". It was one of the few times I have caught the media being sympathetic to the Christian cause, with the editor clearly dismayed by the *Lottery Mania* of the time. *House Buying Mania* is probably today's equivalent.

So what is the true meaning of Christmas? Why do Christians - and billions of other people - still celebrate Jesus' birthday?

It may surprise many to discover that

Christians do *not* really celebrate the birth of the Son of God but an event, perhaps something like the wartime D-Day.

Picture a scene from a typical wartime film; sin and evil have occupied the earth and an invasion is about to take place. Now use your imagination further. God stands by a table, with symbols depicting armies on it. He gives the order, and the first stage of the battle that still rages today begins...

An angel appears to some shepherds and tells them: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all people. For today in the city of David there has been born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

"Do not be afraid!" That must have been an understatement! Think about

it. It's pitch dark, then suddenly there is a bright light in the sky and some bloke appears from nowhere. Then the angel went on to unfold the "good news of great joy which shall be for all people".

And that is the true meaning of Christmas - "Great joy which shall be for all people". In layman's terms this means: "Don't worry mate, God is for you, not against you". Look up the word joy in any dictionary and you will see words like delight, happiness and pleasure.

If you are looking for your share of that joy, then listen this year to the words of all those ancient popular carols. The Christian message is there. We were *all* lost and without hope until Jesus Christ came to earth at that first Christmas and later died to give us the chance of eternal life.



## Turkey treats



There is more to Boxing Day than turkey sandwiches. With a little advance preparation there are lots of quick and tasty meals that can be conjured up from the remains of the turkey and other cold meats. Follow these quick and easy recipes and you can save time and effort as well as serving up an appetising post-Christmas meal.

### Turkey Curry - the easy way

Make sure your Christmas food shopping includes a jar or two of the many prepared sauces that are available and then simply add diced cold turkey or other meat, follow the instructions and serve with rice.

If your family is not keen on strong curries then try this alternative; cook some rice and then add a little curry powder, some well-rinsed, dried sultanas and a knob of butter. Mix well, check the flavour and then add the cold, diced cooked meat, mix thoroughly and serve. This dish can be varied in a number of ways by adding peas, sliced cooked mushrooms or peppers or finely-chopped spring onions.

### Hot Turkey and Bacon Sandwich

Cut rashers of bacon into strips, fry gently and when almost cooked add sliced strips of cooked turkey. Continue to stir-fry until bacon is cooked and turkey is heated through. Season to taste and add to sandwich or baguette which has been buttered and spread with mayonnaise. You can also serve with a salad - blue cheese or Caesar dressing will

add different flavours.

### Turkey Pancakes - adapted from a wartime recipe!

Make a batter with one egg, 125 grammes (4 oz) plain flour and a scant half pint of milk, seasoned with salt and pepper.

Mince about 8oz (250 grammes) cold cooked turkey, or a mixture of turkey and ham, and add minced meat to batter. Leave to stand for a few minutes while you heat a little oil in a frying pan and then fry the pancakes in small circles for two to three minutes a side. Serve hot with pickle or chutney or with a salad. You can also serve pancakes with chips or sauté potatoes and salad.

### Cold Meat and Pasta

Take some cold, cooked pasta, mix with cooked meat, salad dressing or mayonnaise and add any suitable vegetables such as finely-chopped celery, apple, peppers or spring onions to make a tasty salad. Alternatively, the pasta and cooked meat can be turned into a hot dish by adding a pasta sauce, topping it with grated cheese and baking in an ovenproof dish.



The Repairs Hotline is on  
01233 330366



## Keep your children safe



Christmas is a time for family and friends, but especially for children, who will probably be up and unwrapping their presents well before dawn - but how do you make sure that your children's new toys all meet the necessary safety standards?

*Big, safe, educational - this passes all the tests*

Most toys imported into the UK do meet stringent safety requirements, but to put your mind at ease, here are some helpful hints and tips you can check out for yourself:-

- Look for the CE mark – all toys must have this by law. 
- Make sure that any small parts, such as eyes and hair, are securely fixed.
- Check that there are no sharp edges or points.
- Look for other safety marks such as The British Lion mark, which is a logo of the British Toy & Hobby Association.
- Remember to take all the packaging (including any plastic bags) away once the toy has been opened. 
- Remember that little children can easily choke on small objects, particularly the under-threes, who tend to put most things into their mouths to explore the shape and texture. It is impossible to watch a child all the time.
- Don't be tempted to think that your child has understood your warnings and is not at risk. A small toy can still

prove tempting, so make sure that you take safety messages such as 'not suitable for children under 36 months because of small parts' seriously.



If you think that any goods you have purchased are unsafe, or you simply want advice on your consumer rights, you should contact Trading Standards on their advice line, 08457 585497, or log onto the website at [www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/kent](http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/kent)

Unwanted gifts are more difficult – you have no right to take presents back to the shop just because you don't like what the buyer chose for you. Money will only be refunded if the goods are faulty or don't match their description.

There should not be a problem with returning goods if you go back to the shop as soon as you realise there is a fault, but remember - it has to be the person who paid for the goods who takes them back.

If a shop does offer you a credit note, an exchange or a refund when you return an unwanted gift after Christmas, remember that it is a goodwill gesture, not a legal right.

## Turkey Cooking



*A careless young girl and her fella  
At Christmastime caught salmonella  
'Twas the turkey, that's clear  
(Not too much beer)*



*She'd forgotten what we tried to tell her*

*When defrosting your turkey be good  
Forget all about Christmas pud  
Allow a whole day  
(It won't fly away)  
And then it will cook like it should*



*You must cook 'til the juices run clear  
That's true any time of the year  
Twenty minutes per pound  
Plus twenty is sound  
To really enjoy Christmas cheer*



*While cooking prick the bird with a knife  
It's just so you have a nice life  
Some juice will appear  
AND IT MUST BE CLEAR  
To make sure salmonella's not rife*

*So follow our rules to the letter  
Christmas dinner won't get any better  
Even mother-in-law  
Will certainly thaw  
If she knows that it won't upset her*



Mike Carey

## Get a faster response- CALL HOUSING DIRECT



There are enough queues around, particularly at Christmas. You don't need to go through the switchboard if you want to discuss a housing issue.

Just ring

**01233 330366**

for the repairs hotline or

**01233 330688**

for Customer services



## Edited highlights from Santa's diary

### DECEMBER 24TH

23.45

Checked the Ashford Weald calendar to make sure I had the right days, didn't want another embarrassing mistake like the time back in 1826 when I nearly set off a day early. Reminder - must enter some of my photographs of the Northern Lights for next year's calendar.

23.55

Walked down to the paddock, avoiding the icy patch where the reindeers' water supply burst in the sharp frost a couple of nights ago. It was lucky that I had the housing repairs hotline - 01233 330366 - to hand. The repair team was very quick - I thought I might have had to wait until after Christmas to get it repaired.

### DECEMBER 25TH

00.01

Airborne and on my way - Europe first and then across the Channel.

04.30

Took a good look at Stanhope. There are some really exciting plans to upgrade and improve the whole area - it may look completely different by this time next year.

04.40

Had to really concentrate in Ashford this year. So many people have moved to new places since they introduced Choice-based Lettings that I had to double check several addresses.

04.45

Swung in low over the Civic Centre so that I could check the Christmas opening times - I need to pop in and talk about how to pay my rent now that the rent collectors have finished. Found that they closed at 4pm on Christmas Eve but will be open again from Monday 29th right through to Wednesday 31st., closed on the Thursday and Friday and open again on Monday January 5th.

05.15

Whoops! Nearly spotted by one of the sheltered scheme managers. I know they are always on hand in case of emergencies, but I didn't expect anyone to be up and about at that time of the morning

05.30

Nearly made the first mistake of the night by delivering the Johnsons' presents to that big old four-bedroomed house they used to live in. I almost forgot they had arranged an assisted move to a nice tidy bungalow. The three children living in that house now wouldn't have been happy with a pair of bedsocks and a warm cardy!

05.45

Spotted the new Jubilee Garden in Bybrook Road, Bockhanger, where the old drying area used to be. They have made a lovely job of it - it shows what tenants can do when they get together and work with the council.

06.10

Followed the new high speed line out of Ashford towards London. Good job the trains weren't running - Rudolph can't resist a challenge!

If you require Housing News in a different language or format, or on cassette tape, contact Jan Smith on 01233 330488.

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**HAPPY  
XMAS**