

Housing News

TENANTS' NEWSLETTER FROM ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

December 2005 ISSUE 55



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ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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A quick word from the Editor

Season's greetings from the Housing News editorial team.

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who took the time to fill in our Housing News Readers' Survey. We had an excellent response and are now looking closely at your comments and suggestions, so expect some changes to this magazine in the New Year. Congratulations go to Mrs Parsons from Smeeth, who was the lucky winner of our survey prize draw and is looking forward to putting her £50 gift vouchers to good use this Christmas!

To ensure Housing News provides you with the information you want, two members of the Tenants' Forum, Pat Pearman and Ian Dimmock, are members of the editorial team. They monitor the magazine's content, making sure that the information we supply and the stories we cover are what you want, so please tell us if this is not the case! As always, we welcome your feedback, so if there is an issue in your neighbourhood or a local event that you would like to see in Housing News, please get in touch.

Thank you also to all the tenants who took the time to write in and share their memories of being an Ashford tenant over the years. As you will see on page 6, we have put together a collection of some of your stories. We hope you enjoy reading them.

Finally, on behalf of everyone at Ashford Borough Council, we'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy and peaceful new year.

Housing News Editorial Team



Philippa Dale



Pat Pearman



Ian Dimmock

New Homes for Biddenden

Much-needed affordable housing is on its way to Biddenden thanks to an exciting new project supported by Ashford Borough Council.



Cllr Neil Bell officially launches the new rural housing project in Biddenden.

The rural housing project will see twenty-two new homes built in Cheeslands, Biddenden, which will include a combination of two and three-bedroom flats and houses. Of the homes, fourteen will be for rent and eight will be for sale on shared ownership terms. This mixture of house type and tenure reflects a range of local housing needs, established through research and consultation carried out in the village.

The new homes, to be built by RJ Barwick & Son Ltd, are the result of a partnership between Ashford Borough Council, the Rural Housing Trust, Biddenden Parish Council, English Rural Housing Association and Southern Housing Group.

The project was officially launched in November when a sod turning ceremony took place. The first sod was turned by Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Neil Bell.

Before work could officially begin onsite, arrangements had to be made to re-house some equally important residents...the great crested newts! A new habitat had to be found for this highly protected species, a process which began in late Summer 2005 and will be monitored until June 2009.

Across Kent and the South East, villages like Biddenden are suffering from a lack of affordable housing. Rising house prices are often out of reach for local people on relatively modest incomes. As a result, many residents are forced to move away from the area, where they have strong connections, in order to secure an affordable home.

It is this problem that the Rural Housing Trust set out to tackle 25 years ago by providing affordable housing in small villages. A scheme of affordable housing in Biddenden was completed by the Trust in 1992. However, further research undertaken in 2004 revealed that 42 households from the parish were still in need of affordable accommodation.

Ashford Borough Council is proud to be working closely with the Trust once again to support this new housing project. The new homes are expected to be complete by early Summer 2006.

2006 Calendar



What do bellydancers, bunny rabbits and an inflatable shark have in common? They all feature in our 2006 Housing Services Calendar!

By now, you should all be clutching a copy of our brand new calendar, which has been designed to take us through the year, whilst promoting some of the many community groups that exist throughout the borough.

We hope you find the information useful. Who knows, it might even inspire you to take up a new hobby, sport or interest in the coming year!

To celebrate the New Year and the launch of our new calendar, we're giving away £25 to a lucky Housing News reader. Just answer this simple question to win! How many ice creams appear in our 2006 calendar?

Send your answers to: Philippa Dale, Housing News, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL.

Closing Date for entries is 27th January 2006. The first correct answer pulled out of the hat will win.

Coffee at the Gateway

Members of the Tenants' Forum were among the first residents to enjoy a mince pie and a guided tour, as part of a series of coffee mornings taking place at the Ashford Gateway throughout December.

The next coffee morning will take place on 21st December, so if you haven't visited yet...there's still time! Residents are invited to come along between 10-12pm, take a look round and discover the many facilities on offer.

The Ashford Gateway aims to make life easier for Ashford residents by bringing together a wide range of services under one roof. Conveniently located in Park Mall shopping centre, the Gateway really does offer something for everyone, from housing advice and health promotion to computer-enabled learning and access to voluntary organisations. There's even free Internet access with the latest touch screen equipment! So, what are you waiting for? Visit the Ashford Gateway and see what it can offer you.

Ashford Gateway Christmas Opening

Friday 23 December 2005 9am to 4pm

Saturday 24 December 2005 9am to 1pm

Sunday 25 December 2005 Closed

Monday 26 December 2005 Closed

Tuesday 27 December 2005 Closed

Wednesday 28 December 2005 Closed

Thursday 29 December 2005 9am to 4pm

Friday 30 December 2005 9am to 4pm

Saturday 31 December 2005 9am to 1pm

Sunday 1 January 2006 Closed

Monday 2 January 2006 Closed

Tuesday 3 January 2006 9am to 4pm

The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366





Cleaner, Safer and Greener

This year's tenants' conference was a 'Cleaner, Safer and Greener' event, as tenants from across South East Kent joined forces to discuss ways of improving the environment of their homes and neighbourhoods.

Ashford tenants council and housing association tenants for the 6th annual Tenants' Conference, which took place at the Leas Cliff Hall in Folkestone.

Throughout the day, tenants listened to guest speakers and received expert advice and information on tackling crime, recycling and saving energy. One of the keynote speakers was Superintendent Joanna Young, who heads the National Neighbourhood Policing Programme currently being piloted in Canterbury. Tenants were then able to put questions to PC Kevin O'Rourke about the project.

Tenants' Forum Member Rowan McAllister was full of praise for the presentation: "I think it was extremely useful and that the police should do



more events and public speaking. If tenants heard more talks like this one, then I think it would dispel some of the myths surrounding the police and residents would feel more reassured."

An interactive workshop on recycling followed and was enthusiastically presented by Dover tenant Sue Jones and Marianne Hall from the Thanet-based project, Global



Action. Forum member Teri Witcher, was one of the many tenants taking notes: "I found the information on recycling and composting particularly useful and I was really surprised at just how much you can compost!"

The Kent Energy Centre were also on hand to give tenants a lesson in energy saving. Rowan McAllister was so inspired, she couldn't wait to get home and start putting her new knowledge in to action: "I think the energy saving information definitely made you think about what you could be saving and what you're missing out on."

For those of you who didn't make it to this year's conference, here are some top energy saving tips that will also save you money.

Energy Saving Tips

Central Heating

If you are too warm, turn down your thermostat by 1oC. This can cut up to 10% off your fuel bills!

Hot Water

Water should not be heated to a scalding temperature. Normally, adjusting the cylinder thermostat to 60oC will be adequate for household use.

Curtains

Remember to draw your curtains when it gets dark, to prevent heat escaping through your windows.

Lights

Always remember to turn off the lights when you leave a room. Adjust your curtains or blinds to allow in as much light as possible.

Televisions, Videos & Stereos

Don't waste energy by leaving appliances on standby unnecessarily, switch them off!

Fridges

Don't leave the fridge door open any longer than necessary, as cold air will escape. Avoid putting hot or warm food straight into the fridge; allow it to cool down first. Try not to position your fridge next to the cooker or boiler, but if unavoidable, leave a sufficient gap between them.

Washing machines and tumble dryers

Wait until you have a full load before using your washing machine or use the half-load or economy programme. Don't put really wet clothes into the tumble dryer; wring them out first. It's much faster and will save energy and money. Better still dry them outdoors if you can.

Dishwashers

When possible use the low-temperature programme, unless you have very dirty dishes.

Pots and Pans

Choose the right size pan for cooking and use the lid. The base of the pan should just cover an electric cooking ring. With gas, make sure the flames only heat the bottom of the pan. If flames are coming up the side of the pan, you are wasting heat!

Kettles

Don't overfill your kettle, only heat the amount of water you really need.

A sad farewell to Alpert



There was more sad news for the Tenants' Forum in October, as they said farewell to another much-loved member and friend.

Alpert Thomas, who served as a member of the Tenants' Forum for over six years, died following a long battle with cancer. The sad news comes just

6 months after the Forum lost fellow member Berni Cray.

Alpert held the position of Forum Treasurer for the past 3 years and was also an active member of the Kennington Community Forum. He regularly attended training and conference events and was always willing to pass on the skills and knowledge he learned to others.

Friends and family recently gathered at the Jubilee Garden in Bybrook Road to plant a rose bush in Alpert's memory. His enthusiasm for life and his desire to help with all aspects of his community will be sorely missed.



The Racial Incident hotline is on 0800 138 1624

Stanhope regeneration moves a step closer

The regeneration of Stanhope moved another step closer in November, when outline planning permission was approved.

The permission allows in principle for the redevelopment of ten sites in Stanhope as part of a multi-million pound regeneration project undertaken using the Government's Private Finance Initiative. The borough council's Planning Committee heard that a total of 410 flats, including the 108 already demolished, will be replaced by 446 houses and flats. These new homes will be a mix of rented, shared ownership and privately owned properties and at least 25% of each of the development sites will be made up of two, three and four-bedroom houses.

As well as providing new and improved homes, the application also allows for the creation of a new 'local



centre' close to Stanhope Road and including the site of the Nelson Public House and the adjoining vacant land, formerly the site of a petrol station. The new centre may include a library, police station, post office, convenience store, takeaway, hairdressers, dry cleaners and other local shops as well as a replacement public house.

Speaking immediately after the meeting, Councillor Neil Bell, the Executive Member responsible for Housing said, 'Once again we have

demonstrated the progress we are making towards the regeneration of Stanhope. Throughout the summer we have worked closely with residents and listened to their views, which the outline planning permission clearly shows. I said earlier this year that we would seek outline planning permission in November and I am delighted we have achieved that goal. With the announcement of three short-listed developers last week, we are still well on course for announcing our

preferred bidder in June next year with a contract being signed in November 2006 and work starting shortly thereafter.'

The three short-listed developers are Gleeson Capital Solutions, Balfour Beatty Capital Projects and Affinity Homes Group. Each has a proven track record of successfully delivering regeneration projects and were chosen following a rigorous selection process.

Concluding Cllr Neil Bell said: 'Delivering a better Stanhope is a significant step closer today, there remain a number of issues to resolve around exactly how many storeys there are in some blocks of flats as I heard for myself tonight. I am, though, confident that we will work through these with the people of Stanhope so that together we can all see a fantastic transformation of Stanhope.'

Connecting our communities

A member of the Tenants' Forum has been speaking with great enthusiasm about an enlightening training course recently attended by tenants and Housing services staff.

The course looked at ways of strengthening communities by involving black and ethnic minority groups.

Tenants' Forum member Valerie Anne Cassar gained a greater understanding of the discrimination many people face and now appreciates the importance of removing barriers between communities.

"Since attending the course, I am more aware that people from diverse cultures need an improved support system, particularly in terms of language, cultural understanding and social embracement," said Valerie. "After hearing one person's account of the psychological scarring they encountered during childhood, at the hands of prejudicial, racist insults, I am more eager to engage with my fellow people to empower respect within the community. The course bred a heightened awareness with regard to this sometimes overlooked and structural issue, urging me to reach out and value other human beings through their eyes. In short, I learnt that being British doesn't mean being white!"

The PLACES for PEOPLE Group

Working in partnership with



ATTENTION!
First time buyers and key workers

Brand new Properties in Singleton Hill, Ashford

2 bed houses and apartments available for 50% part rent /part buy 2 bed houses at 70% of open market value with no rental charge

PRICES START FROM £65,000...
or £100,000 for a 70% share plus service charge

Coming Soon...

a range of 1 bed apartments to be sold at 75% of Open Market Value with no rental charge.
Prices start from £90,000 plus service charge.
Subject to contract, properties should be available from December 2005.

Applicants must be approved by Ashford Borough Council



For further details please contact:
Lynne Digby @ North British Housing
Tel 01233 500799

The housing services team is on 01233 330688





Our veteran tenants

In the last issue of Housing News we told you the story of Rosemary Weller, a Hamstreet resident who has been a tenant of Ashford Borough Council for 51 years. Surely a record breaker? Or so we thought!

Since then, many of you have got in touch to share your memories of being an Ashford tenant through the years, and to reminisce about just how much your communities and homes have changed.

Among the many letters we received was one from Sarah Beale of Hamstreet, who has been an Ashford Borough Council tenant for 66 years! Sarah, moved into Fairfield Terrace in April 1939 with her husband Bernard and their three year old daughter Sheila. The properties were brand new when they moved in and their weekly rent was seven shillings and four pence. Unfortunately, the Beale family had less than 5 months to settle into their new home, before the outbreak of the Second World War. At 94 years of age, Sarah has lots of happy memories from her time at Hamstreet, although life was somewhat different back then!

"We had a toilet and a bath, but no taps!" recalls Sarah.

92-year-old Florence Wright of Deans Walk also has a similar tale to tell. In a letter to Housing News, Florence remembers a very different Ashford to the place we see today! "There were no cars, lorries or motorcycles," recalls Florence, "all deliveries were made with a horse and cart and shops employed errand boys to deliver the groceries by bicycle. It may have been a hard time, but there was also a very friendly and happy side to it. It was a fairly self-sufficient time, with many people having allotments and keeping pigs, chickens and rabbits." Florence also has fond memories of a shop called Penny Bargains where toys could be bought for Christmas. "We had a few pennies and with all our friends would choose from some of the tiny toys, dolls and colouring books. This was the exciting part, somewhat different



Sarah Beale has been an Ashford Borough Council tenant for 66 years!

compared with today's toys. No-one had a lot, but it was a very happy time."

Greta Wenbourne of Jemmett Road has been a tenant for 58 years and recalls the nissan hut in Hothfield where she lived with her husband in 1947, before they were allocated a house in 1949. Their hospitality was pushed to the limit when the weather was wet, as they would often find themselves sharing their home with frogs!

A big thank you to all our long serving tenants who got in touch to share their memories with us.



Open Day at Tenants' Charity

A charity committed to supporting Ashford tenants has been busier than ever after hosting a successful open day attended by Kent MP Damian Green.

East Kent Cyrenians is an independent, registered charity that provides tenancy support, known also as 'floating support,' to people who are vulnerable to homelessness. They also provide supported accommodation for single homeless people, operating

Floating Support office at Highpoint Business Village and was organised to raise the charity's profile. The event proved a great opportunity for networking, as Vanessa Powney of East Kent Cyrenians explains: "It was a great day and gave representatives from many

the Simon Mead House, a hostel that caters for 11 people.

Their recent open day was held at the

other local agencies and organisations, the opportunity to meet the Floating Support workers, as well as the team from Simon Mead House."

The Floating support team offers individuals one-to-one support in their own homes for up to two years, giving advice on a range of issues from budgeting and education to health care and drug abuse. The team also assist by preventing evictions

through effective advocacy in court and by ensuring tenants receive the benefits they are entitled to.

If you would like more information about East Kent Cyrenians' Floating Support Scheme please call 01233 643201. The Floating Support Office and Simon Mead House will be open until Friday 23rd December and will reopen after Christmas on Wednesday 28th December.



The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366

Christmas Opening Times at the Civic Centre

Friday	23rd December 2005	Open	9am to 4.30 pm
Saturday	24th December 2005	Closed	
Sunday	25th December 2005	Closed	
Monday	26th December 2005	Closed	
Tuesday	27th December 2005	Closed	
Wednesday	28th December 2005	Closed	
Thursday	29th December 2005	Open	9am to 5pm
Friday	30th December 2005	Open	9am to 4.30pm
Saturday	31st December 2005	Closed	
Sunday	1st January 2006	Closed	
Monday	2nd January 2006	Closed	
Tuesday	3rd January 2006	Open	9am to 5pm

Rent Free Weeks Over Christmas

For all our tenants who have a clear rent account or are in credit, there are two rent free weeks over the Christmas period. These are the week commencing Monday 19 December 2005, and Monday 26 December 2005. However, if you are in rent arrears you must continue paying your weekly rent and any additional sums. Failure to continue payments during this period may affect your tenancy. Please contact the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688 if you have any queries regarding your rent account and appropriate payments during the Christmas period.

Bybrook's Community Wish List

It's been an extremely busy time for Bybrook tenants, as work begins on a new project that will transform the physical environment of the community.

The Bybrook Road Area Plan was recently launched following suggestions put forward by tenants in our Stock Appraisal Survey. Many of you were keen for us to focus on improving the physical appearance of your communities, making your neighbourhoods more pleasant and attractive places to live.

So, as well as continuing with our ongoing internal repair programme - providing you with new bathrooms and kitchens - we have also launched two new Area Plans, one in Bybrook Road and the other in Heathside, Appledore.

This whole process is entirely dependent on the views of local tenants and we recognise that it is extremely important that you feel involved in the project. To ensure every section of the community has their say, we have employed the consultancy firm Urban Fox and have



held a series of consultation events.

The workshops achieved a good response, with many tenants turning up to have their say. Even Bybrook's youngest residents shared their future aspirations for the area and were treated to a Halloween Party. This left many parents free to discuss their ideas with council officers and community architects.

A community wish list has now been compiled, which identifies what the people of Bybrook want. The next step will include presenting a sketch proposal to the community

for their comments.

Don't forget, this process has only just begun! We are still in the consultation period and welcome your input and opinions. So, please take any opportunity to get in touch and share your views with us.

The Area Plan process in Heathside is also well underway, following a public meeting. The enthusiastic Appledore residents raised lots of possible concerns and improvements for their area. We will of course keep you up-to-date on the latest developments of both projects.



THE COLD CAN KILL

With forecasters predicting a big chill this winter, Ashford tenants are being reminded to wrap up warm.

For many of us, the cold weather can often seem little more than an unpleasant inconvenience. However, it can have much more serious consequences, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society.

Last winter, 28,700 older people in England and Wales died of preventable, cold-related illnesses. That's why British Gas and Help the Aged are working together to raise awareness of the dangers of the cold, to campaign

for better care for vulnerable members of society and to reduce excess winter deaths.

The British Gas Help the Aged Partnership has produced a winter advice pack, 'The Cold Can Kill,' which contains practical advice and helpful suggestions to keep you and your home warm this winter. For a copy of this information pack, please call 01255 473999. In the meantime, follow these simple measures to ensure you enjoy a warm and safe winter.



Hothfield's Merry & Bright Club: Take a leaf out of their book and wrap up warm this winter.

Top 10 tips for keeping warm this winter

HELPTHEAGED WE WILL

British Gas

Working together to stop the cold killing older people

Eat for Warmth

Regular hot meals and hot drinks provide warmth and energy.

Keep Moving

Any activity, even vacuuming gets circulation going, & makes you feel warmer

Dress Appropriately

Wrap up warmly, indoors and out. Ideally several layers of thin clothing

Keep Your Home at the Right Temperature

Hang thermometers in the living room and bedroom and keep temperatures between 21 and 24

degrees Centigrade (70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit)

Keep Warm at Night

Wearing the right clothing to bed is as important as wrapping up outdoors

Insulate Your Home

Double Glazing, loft and cavity wall insulation are all good means of trapping warmth in the home. You could also hang a thick curtain on front and back doors and use draught-proofing strips

Get a Flu Jab

The Flu virus changes every year so get your jab EVERY YEAR

Sleep With Your Windows Closed

Cold air on the head at night has been shown to increase blood pressure

Claim Your Rightful Benefits and Grants

Everyone over 60 should claim the Winter Fuel Payment and there are many other benefits and grants to which you may be entitled. Call SeniorLine to find out more:

0808 800 6565

Apply for Grants and Programmes

There are many free products and services designed specifically for older people, such as British Gas's 'here to HELP' programme. Contact major energy suppliers to find out what they offer.

Harry's winning views

One lucky South Ashford tenant has scooped a £50 prize, simply by sharing his views on Housing Services!



Harry Filmer of Clockhouse, South Ashford, was one of hundreds of you who recently took the time to complete our Tenants' Satisfaction Questionnaire.

The questionnaire was sent to 1000 tenants picked at random and aimed to find out exactly what you think of the service we provide.

Of the hundreds of responses we received, Harry Filmer's was the lucky name picked out of the hat for the £50 prize draw. Harry was recently presented with his £50 Marks & Spencer vouchers and is looking forward to treating himself to some new shirts!

It is only by listening to your thoughts, concerns and suggestions that we can continue to improve the services we provide, so a big thank you to everyone who completed the questionnaire.

We are now looking closely at the results, which will be published in a future issue of Housing News.

Problems with your Gas Heating System?

Don't forget there's no need to ring the repairs hotline, you can call Swale Heating direct.

Simply call this freephone number, **0800 7311 886** and they will make an appointment for you.



The housing services team is on 01233 330688