

HousingNews

TENANTS' NEWSLETTER FROM

ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

March 2006 Issue 56



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEET OUR ESTATES TEAM!



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Contacting the council

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Ashford
Kent
TN23 1PL

Open 9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday
Open 9am - 4.30pm Friday

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Repairs Hotline: 01233 330366
Contact Centre: 01233 331111
Main fax: 01233 645654
Civic Centre out of hours:
01233 613720
Emergencies out of hours:
01233 629911
Fraud Hotline: 0800 0262456
Text Link: 01233 330744

If you know someone who is blind or partially sighted who would like to listen to Housing News on cassette, then please contact the Editor on 01233 330365.

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www.ashford.gov.uk

A quick word from the Editor

Welcome to the first Housing News of 2006. We're already a quarter of the way through the New Year and Tenants' Forum members are busier than ever! As well as working hard on developing the new Tenants' Handbook, they are also busy agreeing the tenant participation budget for the coming year and providing their own input into the Housing Services' Lettings Policy Review.

The forum have also played a key role in the analysis of our interim tenants' satisfaction survey. The survey received some very positive results and proved that Housing Services have made a number of improvements.

Although this is excellent news, we recognise the importance of now using this information to identify further areas for improvements. The Tenants' Forum have identified the following improvements which we will now work on:

We will measure the success of our Area Plans by looking closely at the communities before and after the plans have taken place. This will help us to see how the plans have affected the area and the tenants.

We will encourage the use of email and the Internet as a method of communication. We will do this by promoting the many benefits of our online services, such as the speed and ease of them.

We will also increase our tenants' awareness of the Tenants' Forum's work by using this newsletter.

I hope that we have at least made a start at tackling some of these issues in this edition of Housing News.

Please don't forget that Housing News is a magazine for you. The Housing News Editorial Panel will always make room for readers' stories and ideas, so do keep them coming. We know our competitions are very popular from the huge response we get each time. So why not try your luck again this time with our first ever Sudoku competition on page 11? Good Luck!

Philippa Dale

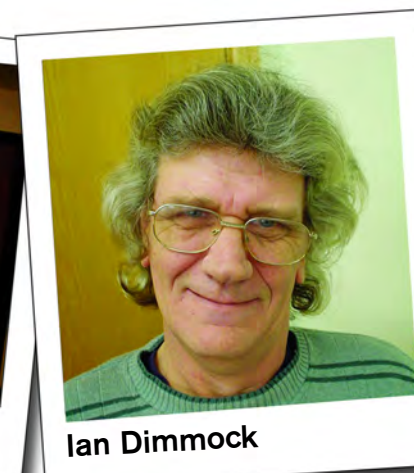
Housing News Editorial Team



Philippa Dale



Pat Pearman



Ian Dimmock





Little Hill tenants Raymond Smith and Phylis Staples with Scheme Manager Christine Anderson.

Changes to your rent

We recently contacted all our tenants to inform you of a rent increase that will shortly come into effect.

The increase affects all Housing Services tenants renting a house or garage and comes into effect on April 3rd 2006. Tenants are reminded that we will expect you to increase payments at this time. If you do not increase payments, your account will fall into arrears.

You should all have received our rent increase letter. Please check the contents of the letter and contact our Housing Services Team on 01233 330688 if you have any queries regarding the increase.

Sheltered Housing A new way of working

A pilot project aimed at improving the service we provide to tenants of our sheltered housing schemes is now underway...and tenants are already reaping the benefits!

We launched the six-month trial at the start of the year and introduced a whole new way of working to some of our Scheme Managers. The new service allows us to have staff on duty to support tenants 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As a result, we can respond much better when our clients need us.

The pilot project currently covers five of our thirteen schemes and is a move away from the more traditional way of supporting our older residents. In the

past we have had Scheme Managers linked almost exclusively to a single housing scheme, and although this has always been popular, it has meant we either couldn't help people so readily when the Scheme Manager was on holiday or unwell, or it meant the Scheme Manager being disturbed whilst off duty.

Under the new way of working, we have two members of staff on duty during the day, when much of the need for the service occurs and staff covering an evening shift until midnight and a night shift right through to 8am the next morning. All the staff involved in the pilot are mobile and so can attend

any of the five schemes if required when on duty.

A number of residents have already seen the benefits of the new way of working, with night-time visits that might not otherwise have been possible. We have also been able to extend our normal visiting hours to include visits up to 7pm and some weekend calls for our more vulnerable residents.

The trial will run for six months, after which time a report will be presented to Councillors for them to decide if they would like the service rolled out across all our sheltered housing schemes. We will keep you updated on the progress of the pilot project in future editions of Housing News.

Jubilant Joan

Many congratulations to lucky Housing News reader Joan Sharp of Speldhurst Close, Stanhope who won our reader competition. Area Manager Barry Moss recently dropped by to present Joan with her prize, a \$25 gift voucher.





Council services at the **CLICK** of a button



More and more of our tenants are choosing to access council services in the comfort of their own homes and at the click of a button. From paying your housing or garage rent to reporting an abandoned car, our online services couldn't be easier. So, if you have Internet access and haven't yet visited our website, log on today at www.ashford.gov.uk and discover the convenience of accessing our services online.

My Ashford Portal

● The My Ashford Portal is your online, one-stop-shop for council services. By registering at MyAshford you can view your rent account balance and make online payments 24 hours a day. You can also view your Council Tax statement and make payments for Business Rates and Parking Fines.

Easy access to housing information

● Download our comprehensive housing guides. They offer advice and information on a range of topics, from assisted moves and pre-transfer inspections to tenants' participation and renting a garage.

● Find out about our Choice Based Lettings Scheme and access the very latest Choice Based Lettings Property Newsletter. Each fortnight we publish a list of available properties. Applicants on our waiting list can then register their choices for the property they'd like to be considered for. See the latest newsletter online!

● Report any repairs needed to your home, quickly and efficiently, via our online form.

● Download a range of Ashford Borough Council forms and publications.

Online Services

● Help us ensure our borough remains a clean, safe and attractive place by reporting problems online. Abandoned vehicles, faulty street lamps, potholes, graffiti, fly tipping, road spillages, street litter and vandalism can all be reported via our website.

● Need to order a Bulk Refuse Collection? Use our online Bulk Collection Cost Calculator to calculate the charge based on your items.

● Want to calculate your benefit entitlement?

Use our Online Benefits Calculator to find out what you're entitled to

● Our online Geographical Information Service (GIS) offers a range of local facilities and borough historic maps.

● Do you know who represents you? Access the latest information on our Councillors, Wards, Parish Clerks and Committee meetings.

● View planning applications, decisions and appeals online.

Improving our online services... with your help!

● We will shortly undertake a review of our website, to ensure that it continues to provide you with easy access to the information that you want and need. That's why we want to hear from you! Do you regularly use our website to access information? Is there any information that you think is missing? If you would like to be involved in the redevelopment of our website,

**please contact
Fiona Skene on
01233 330409 or email
fiona.skene@ashford.gov.uk.**



Open Up!

It Could Save Your Life

Keeping tenants safe is a top priority for Housing Services, as well as a being a legal requirement.

One way in which we protect out tenants is by making sure that all council properties throughout the borough have an annual gas service, to ensure that all heating systems are operating safely. Faulty gas appliances can produce deadly carbon monoxide, putting the lives of our tenants and their families at risk.

To avoid such a risk, Swale Heating carries out this vital servicing work on our behalf, by contacting our tenants direct and arranging appointments. It is essential that you cooperate with them.

If you fail to provide access to your home, after

more than four attempts, we will be forced to take court action and serve you with a possession notice. This action is severe, but necessary in order to ensure we fulfil our legal requirement and prevent any unnecessary harm to our tenants. You must comply with our procedures or face the consequences of potentially losing your home and paying expensive legal costs.

If you have received a letter from Swale Heating, please ensure you call them on 0800 7830668 to book an appointment and if you already have an appointment booked, make sure you're home for it!



Stanhope's Quiz Invasion

As Stanhope residents puzzled over a series of brainteasers and general knowledge questions last month, there was really only one question on their mind...how much would they raise for Stanhope's new youth club?

The special fundraising quiz night was organised by local community group React and proved a big hit with residents. Over 35 people took part in the quiz, held at the Stanhope Parish Rooms. Taking the role of quizmaster for the evening was Housing Services' very own Barry Moss, who is Area Manager for Stanhope.

"We hope this will be the first of many fundraising events for the Invasion Youth Club," explained Stacey Smith, React Youth Coordinator. "We're really pleased with the turnout, particularly at such short notice."

All the money raised from the evening will now be spent on equipment and paint for Stanhope's new youth club, 'Invasion.'

React are always looking for new members to join them, so if you would like to get involved please call Stacey Smith on 01233 643322.

Are you happy with our repairs service?

Have any improvements recently been carried out to your home? Were you satisfied with the standard of work you received? Was the work carried out in a clean and efficient manner?

These are some of the questions considered by the Repairs Monitoring Group. This group, made up entirely of tenants, meet with council staff and contractors every three months to raise tenants' concerns about our repairs service.

We are always looking for



new participants for this informal group, so if you would like the opportunity to influence how improvements are carried out to your home, or to comment on the general and heating repairs contracts,

please get in touch with us!

Meetings take place at the Civic Centre on weekday afternoons between 2pm and 4pm and we will even pay you an attendance fee of £8! The next meeting takes

place on 23rd May 2006 and we'd love to see you there!

For more information please complete the slip below or contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365.

I would like to know more about the Repairs Monitoring Group.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Phone Number.....

Please complete and return to Philippa Dale, Housing Services, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent. TN23 1PL.



Estate Inspections – Get Involved

Our continuous programme of estate inspections is still going strong and we want you to join us!

At Housing Services, we regularly visit our tenants to listen to your concerns and suggestions and discuss any tenancy problems. However, aside from our usual visits we also undertake specific estate inspections of all our housing stock.

These inspections focus on external areas such as footpaths, garage blocks and grassed sites. We also inspect the communal areas of flats, looking at the lifts, stairwells, landings and storage areas.

Any damage or defects found during the inspection is logged, photographed and reported to our Housing Repairs section. Any problems that relate to bulk refuse or grounds maintenance however will be dealt with by our Environmental Health department.

Because our housing stock covers a very large region, we have divided it into 30 areas, 15 urban and 15 rural. Each week one of our Area Managers inspects an area on a continuing programme. We have included the inspection timetable here and will continue to publish this in future issues of Housing News as we hope you will join us.

We want to ensure that your homes and communities are pleasant and attractive places to live and as always your input is vital. These inspections are an opportunity for you to highlight any concerns you have about the exterior of your estates. There is no set start time, date or location for the inspections, so if you would like to take the

opportunity to accompany an Area Manager when your area is inspected, please contact Barry Moss on 01233 330376, Paul Hills 01233 330373 or Natalie Foster 01233 330378 to arrange a suitable time and meeting point.

A date for your diary – Our Estate Inspection Timetable

Week Beginning	Location
27/03/06	Woolreeds
03/04/06	Godfrey Walk
10/04/06	Woodchurch / Bethersden
17/04/06	Brookfield A
24/04/06	Brookfield B
01/05/06	Aldington / Bilsington Ruckinge / Hamstreet
08/05/06	Brookfield C
	15/05/06
	Rothbrook (Kennington)
22/05/06	Warehorne / Kennardington Appledore / Stone / Ebony
29/05/06	Newtown Green South Willesborough
05/06/06	Twelve Acres
12/06/06	Rolvenden / Newenden
19/06/06	Repton Manor Poet's Corner



The repairs hotline is on 01233 330366 www.ashford.gov.uk

Protecting your homes inside and out

As well as looking after the outside of your homes and neighbourhoods, our Estates Team is also tasked with inspecting the inside of your homes too! The team regularly undertake pre-transfer inspections to ensure our properties are kept in good condition.

Before you can move from one council property to another, the Estates Team inspect the condition of your current home. In the past, our pre-transfer inspections have tended to focus on the decorative condition of the property. However, the cost of undertaking repairs on

empty properties has recently risen sharply, forcing us to introduce a more robust pre-transfer inspection programme. We now concentrate more on the state of repair of the bricks and mortar, as well as fixtures and fittings. This includes doors and door furniture, kitchen worktops

and drawers, electrical fittings and bathroom fittings, as well as internal decoration.

Keeping the condition of your home to the highest standard is essential if you are to pass the inspection. If we find any examples of damage, neglect or unauthorised improvements, we will insist that you repair them before giving the go ahead for your transfer to another council property.

Before a mutual exchange can go ahead, each home will also be inspected, but both parties must take responsibility for any damage or neglect to their properties.

If we are responsible for any repairs needed to your home, you must report them to our repairs team as soon as possible on 01233 330366. If you are unsure whether a repair is your responsibility or not, please also contact our repairs team and we will be happy to arrange an inspection.

To check whether your property would pass an inspection, you can now obtain a copy of our new pre-transfer inspection form. This is available from our website www.ashford.gov.uk or by contacting the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688.



Our Estates Team - Out and about in your neighbourhood

Visiting tenants, undertaking estate inspections and tackling anti-social behaviour...the work never stops for our Estates Team!

This busy Housing Services team look after everything relating to your tenancy, excluding rent and maintenance. Working on Area Plans, promoting tenant participation and resolving neighbourhood disputes are just some of the work they undertake. However, by far the most important role of the Estates Team is to work with you to improve your communities. We want to ensure our estates are happy, vibrant areas that you take pride in, so please join us for the estates inspections and help us to improve your neighbourhood.



Members of the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum voluntarily work with us on your behalf to ensure your voice is heard. They attend regular training courses and develop new skills to ensure they can confidently challenge and question the management of their homes. As you can see, from creative writing to involving BME communities, the forum members have developed lots of new skills in recent months...

Creative funding for Creative writing

Tenants' Forum members are hoping a creative writing course will give them the knowledge and confidence to promote their work in more creative ways.

Armed with dictionaries and plenty of enthusiasm, the forum members recently joined a small group of local residents for the 16-week course at the Ray Allen Centre. As well as improving their overall creative writing skills, the course also aims to strengthen their computer skills.



Funding for the course was secured through Kent County Council's Adult Education Service, as part of their National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme. In order to qualify for the funding, forum members were required to complete a short assessment prior to the training. This was something they were more than happy to do, as it has allowed them to stretch their training budget even further. We will let you know how they get on.

Would you be interested in doing a creative writing course? The course is being repeated from 27th March for 16 weeks, 5.30pm to 7.30pm at the Ray Allen Centre, Stanhope. If you are interested, please contact Jude Farrell on 07941141649.

Reaching Out

Involving more people and actively engaging with them is a constant challenge faced by many community groups including the Tenants' Forum.

So when the Priority Estates Project (PEP) announced they were holding a conference on 'Reaching Out,' the Tenants' Forum members were quick to sign up.

The conference included a series of workshops, which looked at ways of engaging and supporting residents, reaching people within the community and breaking down the barriers to involvement.

The event proved a great opportunity for forum

members to share their own ideas and experiences with tenants from other councils and housing associations across Kent.

Stella Cowland, Chair of the Tenants' Forum, attended the 'Reaching Parts' workshop and found it really useful. "It was really encouraging to see lots of different ideas being put into practice and to be given the chance to discuss which ideas worked and which didn't," explained Stella. "In one area,



residents gave a hut to the young people for their own use, but it was turned into a community facility and as a result the young people lost interest, as they felt

they had lost ownership of the project."

Overall the conference provided the forum members with plenty of food for thought.





Estate Agreement Training

Tenants' Forum members recently got together with tenants from Canterbury, Dover and Shepway for a training session devoted to Estate Agreements.

Estate Agreements are written agreements negotiated between tenants and landlords of a particular area. They bring tenants and landlords together to provide an agreed way of dealing with problems and as such have been widely praised in many areas for tackling anti-social behaviour, parking issues and estate cleanliness.

During the training, the forum members heard how such agreements can be extremely rewarding for tenants, as they allow you to get involved in the management of your estates.

Aside from the many benefits of Estate Agreements, the training session also examined the

problems that can hamper them, such as the difficulty of getting initial involvement from different residents on an estate.

Overall, the forum members found the training extremely useful, "we picked up lots of tips from other residents' groups and it was really interesting to hear about their own experiences," enthused forum member Ian Dimmock. In fact, forum members Rowan McAllister and Pat Boorman were so encouraged by the training, they are now looking at introducing Estate Agreements into the Area Plan process currently underway throughout the borough. We will let you know how they get on!

Money Matters

The Tenants' Forum's finances are now in even safer hands following the appointment of a newly formed Budget Group.

The new group recently held their first meeting led by the forum's very own treasurer Valerie Cassar. Valerie will now work alongside other forum members, within the

Budget Group, to monitor the forum's finances and to discuss budget planning and tenant participation expenditure.



Working together to improve services

Working together and sharing ideas, knowledge and opinions is what the Ashford Borough Tenants' Forum is all about. Our vocal forum members were therefore only too pleased to join Housing Services staff recently for a series of interactive discussion workshops.

The workshops were part of the review process for the Housing Inspectorate's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE). The process includes a series of questions used to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of housing services and to identify any improvements needed within housing organisations.

The workshops focused on the topics of Access and Customer Care, and Diversity. The aim was to discuss these topics with staff and forum members, who represent our clients, and to gather collectively the comments and opinions that come out of the session.

The ideas and thoughts produced from these interesting and interactive workshops will now be used to create an Action Plan, designed to help us meet the needs of our customers who require access to our services regardless of their personal circumstances.



Are you worried about a vulnerable adult?

Abuse of vulnerable adults can take many forms, such as physical, sexual, psychological, discriminatory or even neglect. It could be a single incident or part of a pattern of behaviour, and it could be the result of deliberate actions by someone or simply through a poor understanding of an

individual's needs. In any form, such abuse is a breach of someone's rights.

We all have a duty to help if we become aware of such abuse but what can or should we do?

If you are worried about a friend or a neighbour, Kent County Council have produced a leaflet offering advice and information on what to do if you feel a vulnerable adult is being abused. For a copy, please contact the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688 or Kent County Council's Adult Policy Unit on 08458 247100.



Fire Safety Advice



Almost all fires in the home can be prevented. Here are some fire safety tips which could prevent a fire from starting in your home:

PREVENTION

Kitchen safety

Cooking with oil and fat is one of the most common causes of fire in the home.

To keep your kitchen safe, remember:

NEVER fill a chip pan more than one-third full with oil or fat
NEVER leave hot oil or fat unattended
NEVER put the food in the pan if the oil begins to give off smoke. Turn off the heat and leave the oil to cool
ALWAYS clean up after using oil and fat and **NEVER** allow it to build up in grill pans

If the pan does catch fire: don't take risks. There is no such thing as a safe fire. It is better for you to prevent fire than to fight it. Tackling fire is a job best left to professional firefighters.
NEVER put water on to the fire!

Electrical fires

Hundreds of people die and are injured each year as a

result of electrical fires.

Danger signs to look out for include:

Hot plugs and sockets
Fuses that blow for no obvious reason
Lights flickering
Brown scorch marks on sockets and plugs
REMEMBER - "one appliance, one socket" is safest
Do not place portable heaters too near to furniture or curtains
NEVER place anything on top of heaters, never place dry clothes on or too near them
ALWAYS use suitable guards in front of open fires

Candles

Do not leave burning candles unattended, especially with young children or pets in the house
Do not place burning candles close to curtains, bedding or clothing which may catch fire

Smoking Materials

Smoking materials are responsible for 10% of fires in the home.

To avoid fires of this type:

NEVER leave a lit cigarette, cigar or other smoking material unattended
NEVER smoke in bed
ALWAYS keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children

DETECTION

Smoke alarms

You are much more likely to die in a fire in your own home if you do not have a working smoke alarm. A smoke alarm can give you those precious few minutes of warning which could help you and your family to get out safely. Smoke alarms are a safety device. Every home should have one, preferably one on each floor.

Smoke alarms should be properly maintained
Test once a week
Vacuum the smoke alarm twice a year
Change the battery every year (unless fitted with a 10-year battery)

ESCAPE PLANS

How would you escape? If a fire occurs in your home you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions.

Escaping from a fire will be a lot easier if you have already planned your escape route and know what to do:

Make your fire escape plan with other members of your household

ALWAYS keep keys to locked doors and windows safe and available. They may be needed in an emergency. Identify alternative ways out in case the main exit becomes blocked and keep all routes clear of anything that could hinder your escape

Night-time routine

Many fires start at night. Make sure you have a night-time fire safety routine to help keep you and your family safe.

Here are a few simple things you should do every night:
Unplug electrical appliances not designed to stay on
Switch off portable heaters
Make sure no cigarettes, cigars or other smoking materials are still burning
ALWAYS close doors to all rooms

Remember, in the event of a fire in your home:

Get out,
call the Fire Service out, and stay out!

To arrange a free Home Fire Safety Check, please call 01622 698360



Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Don't lose your garage!

Garage tenants who repeatedly fail to pay their rent on time could lose their garage for good!

That's the warning from Housing Services who are launching a crackdown on persistent rent dodgers. So, if you're behind with your garage rent, now's the time to pay up!

We will shortly be contacting all garage tenants that are in arrears of £15 or more, asking them to clear their rent balance or face the consequence of losing their garage through the repossession process.

We will give each tenant a minimum of one week's notice, prior to a repossession being carried out. After the garage is repossessed, you will then

have one month's notice to remove any contents left inside. If the contents are not removed after one month, it becomes the property of Housing Services, for us to dispose of as we see fit.

Retaining a repossessed garage is a lengthy process and you will need to comply with a number of conditions. You must clear the outstanding balance, clear the full cost of the lock change, pay four weeks' rent in advance and agree to future payments being made by Direct Debit.

To avoid the unnecessary distress and cost of a garage repossession,



please keep your garage rent account up-to-date and inform us of any changes in circumstances which could affect your ability to continue renting a garage.

If you have any queries about your garage rent, please contact the Housing Services Team on 01233 330688.

Kent BME Network

A new countywide network that aims to empower BME (Black Minority Ethnic) community groups is officially launched this month and you're invited!

The Kent BME Network will give BME groups and communities across Kent a voice to articulate their views on local, countywide and regional matters. The network also promises to be a great way for BME groups to communicate and consult with each other.

To celebrate their official launch, the Kent BME Network is holding a special conference in March. The day will include a series of presentations on the BME voluntary and community sector, looking at it from both a local and regional perspective. There will also be advice workshops on how to secure funding and discussions on the results of the Kent BME Community Group Survey.

The Kent BME Network Conference takes place on 30th March at the Civic Centre, Windmill Street, Gravesend from 10am to 2pm. If you are interested in attending or finding out more about the Network, please contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365.

				3	1	2		4
				5		1		9
			7		8	3		5
			8			6		
5	6			7				
4	9	7	6	1			2	
		3	4		9			
7	8	1			3	4	9	2
		6		2		5		8

Housing News Prize Sudoku

Fill in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each smaller 3 x 3 block contains all the numbers 1 to 9.

Name:.....
 Address:.....

 Postcode:.....

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:
 Please complete and return this entry form along with your completed Sudoku puzzle to: Housing News Sudoku Competition, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL.

Only original forms accepted. No photocopies. All completed correct entries will be entered into the prize draw for a £25 gift voucher. The decision of the editor is final. Closing date for entries is 28th April, 2006. The winner will be notified by post and published in Housing News.



Share your views with us

An important survey could be dropping through your letterbox this summer and we want as many of you to fill it in as possible!

We carry out our tenants' satisfaction survey every three years to find out exactly what you think of the housing service we provide. Your thoughts, concerns and suggestions are vital in helping us continue to improve our services.

We will send the survey to a wide-ranging and representative sample of people later this summer. If you receive a copy, please take the time to complete it and let us know how you think we're doing.

Improving your communities

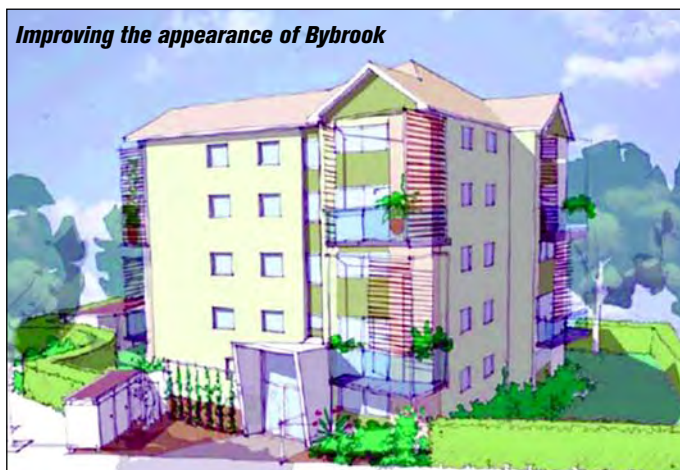
Work continues on exciting plans to transform local communities into more attractive places to live...and your involvement is vital!

We currently have two Area Plans underway in Bybrook Road, Kennington and Heathside, Appledore and both are making excellent progress. The plans focus entirely on improving the physical environment of our communities and are dependant on the views of local tenants.

We held a workshop in Bybrook last autumn, which gave local tenants the opportunity to compile a wish list and identify all the improvements they wanted to see in their community. We were keen to involve as many people as possible and so were thrilled with the massive response this received.

Heathside residents have been equally enthusiastic and were very keen to share their thoughts and suggestions with us at a public meeting. We will shortly be sending out a questionnaire to all Heathside residents to find out exactly what they would like to change about their neighborhood. As always, your involvement is vital so please take the time to fill in the survey and let us know your views and suggestions.

If you would like any more information on the Area Plan process, please contact Philippa Dale on 01233 330365.



Improving the appearance of Bybrook



See the future proposals for Stanhope

The three short-listed bidders for the redevelopment of Stanhope have now submitted their bids, which means it's full steam ahead for the Stanhope PFI project.

We are now in the process of checking and verifying the bids, to ensure that everything we asked for has been supplied. For your chance to see them, don't miss our public exhibitions taking place in April!

Please put these dates in your diary and take the time to come along and find out what the bidders propose for Stanhope's multi-million pound redevelopment.

Friday 7th April 10am - 4pm at the Civic Centre, Council Chamber

Friday 7th April 6pm - 9pm at the Ray Allen Centre

Saturday 8th April 10am - 4pm at the Ray Allen Centre

Want to know more about your Right to Buy?

A new booklet explaining the Right to Buy Scheme will shortly be landing on your doorstep and it's important you read it!

The Government made a number of changes to the Right to Buy Scheme last year and we want to ensure that all our tenants are fully aware of the changes and understand how they could be affected by them.

The main change to the scheme relates to the qualifying period. If your tenancy began after 18 January 2005, you will now need to be a secure tenant for 5 years in order to qualify for the Right to Buy Scheme. Repaying the discount, if you resell the property, has also been extended from three to five years.

Our booklet will fully explain the circumstances in which the Right to Buy can and cannot be exercised, as well as looking at any costs that may be incurred whilst purchasing the property.

If you would like more information in the meantime, please visit our website www.ashford.gov.uk, contact Sue Major on 01233 330531 or e-mail sue.major@ashford.gov.uk.

