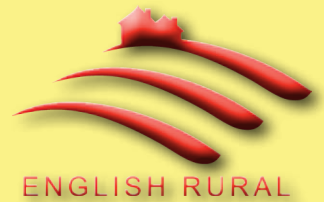


THE Bulletin



Residents' Newsletter from English Rural Housing Association

Summer 2010



Above: New Homes at Glebe Field, Rolvenden, Kent

In this Issue...

We're introducing "Your Say" the Bulletin's new home for your news & views. Read on to discover the fascinating things our residents get up to in their spare time and find out how you too can have Your Say on our activities.

New Homes Update.....Pg. 2
Money Matters.....Pg. 2
Repairs & Maintenance.....Pg. 3
Your Say:.....Pg. 3
Your Voice.....Pg. 3
Your Views.....Pg. 3
Your Actions....Pg. 4
What a Waste!.....Pg. 5
Influencing & Lobbying.....Pg. 5
News & Events.....Pg. 6
Contacts.....Pg. 6

Summer's Here!

We're enjoying the hottest Summer for years, but hot days and hosepipe bans have left many a garden looking worse for the wear.

Due to the environmental impact of their misuse many English Rural properties don't have outside taps - so why not start collecting rain water instead?

With a plastic water butt you can conserve water, dodge the hosepipe ban and still keep the garden gorgeous!

Top Tip:

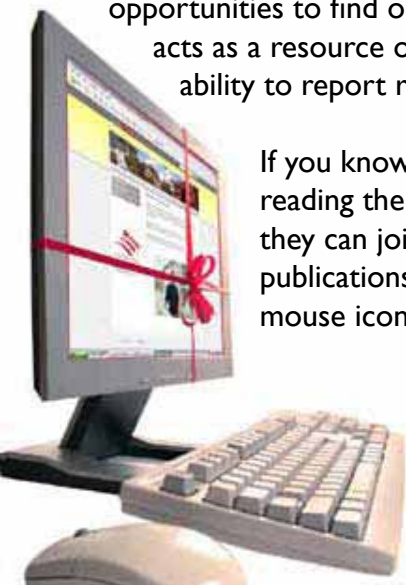
Choose plants that don't drink much water like African Daisies or Carthusian Pinks and save money on your water bill.

Rural Homes: *World Wide Web*

English Rural's new website is now live and offers our residents and partners more opportunities to find out about what we are doing. The residents' section also acts as a resource of some useful information and advice, as well as the ability to report repairs, get in touch or look at where we have homes.

If you know someone who might be interested in English Rural, or reading the Bulletin, please point them to the website; from there they can join our mailing list and read back issues of all our publications. Throughout the newsletter whenever you see the mouse icon, it means there's supporting information on the web.

Next time you're browsing the web, please do visit the website at www.englishrural.org.uk and tell us what you think.



UPDATE: *New Homes*

It's Official: Last year was our busiest year ever!

We completed an amazing 88 new homes - which takes the total number that we own and manage to almost 1,000.

This year will be equally busy getting new developments on site, although the total number of homes we plan to complete will be slightly less at 50, with over 400 more in the pipeline for future years. To help us achieve this ambitious target we will be looking to raise up to a further £10 million more private finance in 2011.

A few examples of our most recent developments are shown here.



There's a full list of all our properties online...



Left and Below:

Rt. Rev Bishop of Dover officially opens the new homes at Glebe Field, Rovenen and welcomes guests to look around the new homes.



Left:

Cllr Adrian Crowther Mayor of Swale, opens new homes at Cherry Fields, Lynsted



Above & Left:

Street scene showing the new homes at Cherry Field, Lynsted



MONEY Matters

New Shared Ownership Model

The new model applies to new shared ownership homes being sold from April 2010 onwards and will not affect existing properties completed before this time.

Since it was established in 1992 English Rural has used a unique model of shared ownership, which unlike most other examples does not charge rent on the unsold portion. However, because of

increasing build costs, and a fall in sales receipt due to market conditions, it has been necessary to review and update this model in line with changing circumstances.

This review is not something that has been undertaken lightly but has become a necessity if we are to continue to provide shared ownership homes in rural areas.

The new model has seen the introduction of a small rent payment on the value of the difference between the percentage sold and 70% of the overall value. This model still offers a unique and affordable product that will work in rural areas.

Rent and Service Charge Review

The annual rent and service charge review was undertaken in April with most rents remaining unchanged and some even falling. Residents who pay a service charge will have also received their annual statement showing what's been spent and how much needed to be collected to cover costs this year.



Repairs *and* MAINTENANCE

Both English Rural and Test Valley Rural Housing Associations are currently finalising their maintenance programmes for the current financial year, with a combined expenditure of around £1 million on property services over the period. Both organisations continue to look for efficiencies to ensure value for money, as well as looking to introduce choice and improve the quality of service provided.

Over a quarter of the total investment in this area relates to two specific planned maintenance contracts, which will see the renewal of property elements like kitchens, windows and doors, as well as the external decoration programme. Like all organisations it is critical that this long term programme is carried out in a way which is both achievable and affordable.

As well as the investment of money, English Rural is also investing time in planning how homes will be maintained into the future, updating our approach to asset management to make sure we're putting enough money aside to cover future costs, listening to residents' priorities and offering a quality service.

Repairs and maintenance are always highlighted as priorities by residents and this importance is recognised by the Association. However we are often faced with making difficult decisions, having to prioritise work based on what resources are available over the year, it is also fair to say that experience has shown us that residents have varying expectations. Our approach, as with all that we do, is to be open and honest about what we can and can't achieve and work with residents to meet their immediate and longer term priorities.

“YOUR Say”

The more we get out and about and meet with residents, the more we learn about the exciting, challenging, and sometimes slightly unusual things that residents get up to. We wanted to use this space of the newsletter for residents who are happy to share a hobby, achievement or local project that they're involved in. So whether it's boosting membership for a local club, increasing numbers at a village fete, or showing a before and after makeover of the garden, get in touch and let us know what you want to say. To kick us off we asked Richard Ridler Clerk of Hatfield Broad Oak Parish Council - but more importantly Chairman of the Essex Beekeeper's Association - to share his passion for bees with us and perhaps inspire others to find out more >>

As well as your news, we want to hear about your views and experiences. Our satisfaction survey and resident's panel are both great ways to have your say, and you can also feedback online, or join us at our AGM (see pg. 6)

RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY:

Share your experiences and help us improve

It's now three years since we last carried out a comprehensive assessment of resident satisfaction via the detailed resident survey and to see how we've been doing since then a new survey is scheduled to take place during 2010. The survey will include all the homes we manage with the addition of Test Valley Rural Housing Association.

Feedback to this survey is essential in helping us to identify strengths and weaknesses, and the results will be used to help us improve the services and homes that we provide. Please take a few moments to complete the survey when it arrives, you may even be lucky enough to be one of the winning entrants in a prize draw if you get it back to us in time.

RESIDENTS' PANEL:

Representing your views

The Residents' Panel continues to meet on a regular basis helping to inform policies, scrutinise performance and put your views forward. You will recall from previous newsletters that the Panel has been established to improve resident involvement within the organisation, so that you can have a real input into tailoring the services that we deliver.

The Panel consists of four English Rural Board Members (including the two resident Board Members) Jane Jennings, Lesley Childs, Pauline Rose and Christine Knight and four other residents, Tom Wratten, Lisa Swan, Tony MacArthur and Martyn Clements. If you want to contact the Panel, make a suggestion or find out more about what they do, then please email info@englishrural.org.uk or call 020 7820 7930 for more information.

Minutes from the Panel meetings will be published on the website, can be sent to you by email or requested by phone.



BEE HAPPY



“ ***So why do people take to beekeeping?*** For pleasure, honey, the environment, the challenge... Perhaps perversely the much publicised threat to our honey bees has led to a growth in the number of beekeepers.

The current publicity about threats started in the USA when commercial beekeepers lost up to 90% of their colonies during the winter of 2006. This became known as colony collapse disorder or CCD; a key symptom being that there were no dead bees left in the hive leaving nothing to analyse for the cause of death. American commercial beekeepers truck many thousands of bee hives back and forth across the states to pollinate crops such as almonds, cherries, apples and blueberries, a very different kind of beekeeping to ours. Here we are not suffering the same high levels of losses but until the reasons for CCD are fully understood we naturally worry we may. The causes of losses are variously attributed to viruses, GM crops, agricultural sprays and the radiation from mobile 'phone masts. Maybe they all play their part but well cared for healthy bees are undoubtedly less susceptible than those that are moved thousands of miles between monocultures.

The media attention given to CCD and the plight of the honey bee has brought beekeeping into the foreground. Beekeeping as a hobby hits many of the current right buttons; it's self funding, the honey pays the bills, can be done anywhere by anyone, is ecological and sustainable. These are the reasons the number of beekeepers in the UK has about doubled in the last three years. But don't think it's easy, in fact it's pretty complex. The best way to start is to go on a beginners' course run by your local beekeeping association the details of which can be found on the internet. A single hive should produce 40 to 80lbs or more of honey a year. Many beekeepers have their hives at the bottom of the garden but farmers are delighted to host hives in the corner of a field because it improves their crop yields. Most hobby beekeepers have three to five hives but for others it becomes an addiction and the numbers grow.

Honey is one of the only two things (along with milk) that we get from animals without killing them. Honey is antiseptic and antibacterial, it never ever goes mouldy, it contains proteins, minerals, and anti oxidants and is used as a cure for hay fever. A hive will also provide wax to make candles which was the original reason humans kept bees. It can provide pollen and royal jelly to improve health as well as propolis, a close relative of frankincense and myrrh, which also has medicinal uses; the bees use it as an antiseptic cleaner and gap filler. Bee venom is used as a cure for arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

I could write endlessly, but let me give you a few tips about bees that trouble humans. People feel threatened by swarms; they need not. Swarming is nature's way of increasing the number of bee colonies. After the swarm leaves the hive, making two colonies out of one, it will rest temporarily typically in the branches of a tree or bush whilst scout bees search out a new home. The bees form a tight cluster and this is what most people recognise as the swarm. Most local beekeeping associations will arrange to remove and re-house swarms if they are accessible. More people experience bumble bees than honey bees. These typically set up their nests under patios or floorboards and in compost heaps. Bumble bee colonies do not overwinter and will disperse in the late summer leaving queens to set up new colonies in the following spring in a different location. Bumble bees do not thrive if moved and are best left; they have no interest in threatening humans and are also very important pollinators.

I hope that has given you a little insight into the fascinating world of bees and maybe even tempted you to think about beekeeping yourself.”

What a Waste!

TREATMENT PLANTS AND PUMPING STATIONS

- What you need to know...

Because of the rural location of many of the developments that we manage it is often necessary to include either a pumping station or treatment plant when the homes are being built. Both of these systems are designed to deal with waste water from properties in their own way, either by helping to move to the closest treatment facility or removing contaminants from waste water and then discharging the treated water.

If you have either of these facilities on your development you will pay for the costs of running and maintaining them via your service charges, usually a service agreement will exist which will include regular maintenance, emptying and cleaning. Extra costs are incurred when plants become blocked or damaged due to misuse and these costs are recharged directly to the household responsible or collectively to all households on the development. Items that should not be disposed of include disposable nappies or sanitary towels; items made from cloth, plastic or rubber, including disposable wipes used for cleaning or personal hygiene.

Faults can also be caused by the build up of fatty deposits, fats like cooking oils from chip pans that is disposed of down the drainage system congeals into a solid lump as soon as it comes into contact with cold water, causing blockages and equipment failure.

Treatment plants rely on common bacteria to literally eat and digest sewage and waste, turning solids into liquid and gas, they are designed to assist this natural process and when working correctly will discharge relatively clean waste water directly into the watercourse. This natural process is affected by the chemicals that we use to clean our homes and bodies, essentially the more chemicals in the waste water the fewer natural bacteria there are to break down waste and the more regularly treatment plants need residual waste removing; and of course each time this is necessary it costs money.

If you have a treatment or pumping facility on your development make sure you look after it by thinking about what and how you are disposing of waste. The less damage to these plants the less regularly they require intervention from an engineer and the cheaper the charges to residents.

Disposing of Cooking Oil, Fats & Grease

Allow the left over fat or oil to cool completely before disposing of it.

If it's **liquid**, carefully pour it into a strong sealable container, such as an old plastic jar with a lid and place the filled, sealed jar in the rubbish. Large amounts of cooking oil should be taken to your local Waste Recycling Centre.

If the fat has **solidified**, scrape it off of your pan/pot straight into your rubbish bin.

Want the feel-good factor?

Small quantities of cooking fat that's solid at room temperature can be reused to make bird feeders for the garden. Just mix it with wild bird seed, put a string through and let it set - The birds will love it!

The following should never be flushed down the toilet, sink or outside grate:

- Cooking fat, oil & grease
- Disposable nappies
- Sanitary towels
- 'J' cloths
- Condoms
- Cotton buds
- Disposable face/body wipes



Influencing and LOBBYING

As one of the largest specialist rural housing associations English Rural looks to take a leading role in raising the profile of rural housing, which over the past year has included working with the National Association of Young Farmers Clubs, the Rural Services Network, Chartered Institute of Housing and taking part with peers in the National Housing Federation 'Rural Alliance', which has included sponsoring and helping to draft a guide to delivering affordable housing for Parish Councils - If you want a copy then let us know!

What's NEW@HQ

There have been a number staffing changes since the last newsletter, but as these are non resident-facing finance and development team roles, they won't affect the contact we have with residents on a day-to-day basis. Our 'Front of House' staff are listed right, or you can see the whole team (mug shots included!) on the Contact Us section of the website.



New Approach to Regulation of English Rural



As from April 1st this year housing associations like English Rural and Test Valley Rural Housing Association became subject to a new regulatory regime. Residents may recall receiving information about the new regulator, the Tenant Services Authority and the

approach they were looking to take which puts more emphasis involving residents in governing and directing landlords.

With a change of political direction following the recent election, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) already looks set for more changes and the current situation remains fluid and unclear. In the meantime English Rural are working to achieve the regulatory requirements of the TSA because the principles of the framework that they have put in place also meet our objectives of putting residents at the heart of what we do whilst placing greater emphasis on landlord accountability.

Part of this regulatory approach requires housing associations to demonstrate how we achieve a number of national standards or expectations and also produce an annual report for residents to highlight this. In addition we are expected to tailor our services by making local offers which have been developed to meet the specific needs of those who benefit from what we do, in other words, you, the residents.

To help us achieve this English Rural residents will find enclosed with this newsletter some further details on the local offers we are developing along with details of how you can help to shape these.

EVENTS: *a date for your diary...*

Annual General Meeting

English Rural will be holding this year's Annual General Meeting on the afternoon of Tuesday 21st September in Buckinghamshire (venue to be confirmed). All residents are invited to join us at the event, which normally includes light refreshments and a guest speaker. Please let us know if you want more information or would like to attend by contacting Karen Eagles at our Head Office.



Contact Us

info@englishrural.org.uk
www.englishrural.org.uk

Repairs Line

Tenants should report repairs and required property maintenance online or on the number below:

0800 121 4422

(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

In case of emergencies:

01722 757874

(out of hours)

Head Office

Accounts, lettings, sales, rents, standing orders, permissions and other general enquiries

English Rural
Housing Association
Hall House
9 Graphite Square
Vauxhall Walk
London SE11 5EE

Tel: 020 7820 7930

Fax: 020 7820 7931

Development Office

RCCE House
Threshelfords Business Park
Inworth Road
Feering
Essex CO5 9SE

Tel: 01376 571714

Housing Managers

Chris Graves

Tel: 02392 383993

Mobile: 07752 383993

Jo Passmore

Tel: 01304 841666

Mobile: 07552 126679

Katie Maclean

Tel: 01223 242622

Mobile: 07552 126678