

THE Bulletin



Residents' Newsletter from English Rural Housing Association

Summer 2007



The sun shines on Westonfields, Albury, Surrey

Getting involved Which option have you chosen?

Our last newsletter highlighted that ERHA was embarking on a comprehensive involvement exercise, with the aim of working with all households in assessing ways in which residents can become part of the Association's decision making and governance process.

Those of you who completed last year's satisfaction survey may recall that a number of additional questions had been added to help us understand more about what type of involvement was wanted. As the homes that we manage are small scale rural developments spread across a

large area, traditional methods of involvement have not been easy to adopt. In response, the Association has sought to use your feedback to create a bespoke involvement structure.

As a result, the past 6 months have seen a flurry of activity. Residents will have now received our updated Involvement and Consultation Policy, along with details on the different ways that you can have input into ERHA and how we operate.

Involvement options are detailed on page 2;

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Board Membership

We're looking for a at least one resident to join the ERHA management board. Details on how to express an interest in becoming a board member and the responsibilities involved were included in the involvement and consultation papers circulated in May. Resident board members will meet with the rest of the management board to make sure that we are properly run, financially sound and meet legal requirements. As a resident, you'll have a unique perspective into the association and offer valuable input. We'll be in contact with all those who've expressed and interest with a view to holding elections in August.

Regional Residents' Fora

These events are now underway with two already held (Shiplake nr Reading and Smarden nr Ashford), the third event is planned in Essex on 17 July. These regional events will be held on a 6 monthly basis and venues will be circulated. Details of the next 3 dates and venues will be confirmed later in the year.

Virtual Consultation Group

An online group which can be consulted on policies and ideas. To join submit your email address to info@erha.org.uk.

Residents Scrutiny Panel

A group that will meet with staff and management on a regular basis to discuss a variety of procedures, policies and have input into the operational activities of ERHA.

The options available are designed to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to participate in the organisation. We recognise that for many it is difficult to commit time in the long-term, but the flexible approach we have taken is designed to accommodate the varying levels of involvement that residents are able to offer. In addition, the Annual Satisfaction Survey will still continue to provide the opportunity for everyone to put their views forward.

Contact Martin on tel no. 020 7840 0540 or email martin@erha.org.uk to find out more on any of the above.

We're moving!!

ERHA's successful expansion has seen the number of staff operating from its Head Office treble over the last few years. To accommodate the growing needs of the Association and its continued success the decision has been taken to relocate the Head Office to larger premises in Graphite Square (where we are already based). The move is planned in a few months time and details of the new address will be circulated. Contact numbers and email addresses will remain the same.

Got something to say?

Do you have something to share? An experience which other residents would learn from or a handy tip that has made your life easier? Why not drop us a line and let us have your ideas for the newsletter by calling 020 7840 0540 or emailing info@erha.org.uk

Case study Saints Field Residents Association

Residents at Church Field in Ashdon, Essex, have recently formed their own local residents association with the aim of tackling the issues affecting their development and contributing to the local community. The Saints Field Residents Association meets on a monthly basis and is open to residents from both Church Field and the adjacent development. All Saints Close (owned and managed by Cambridge Housing Society).

Staff from ERHA have been working with the residents to tackle issues about grounds maintenance, street lighting,

neighbourhood watch/security issues, and signage. We've also worked with members of the group to progress plans for a children's play area in the village. A great deal has already been achieved since the group formed earlier this year. Anyone from Church Field who is interested in finding out more should contact Lisa Swan (contact details available from ERHA on request).

Local resident associations are an ideal way to tackle issues in your area. Support and advice is available from ERHA to anyone interested in finding out more. Talk to your local Housing Manager or contact Martin Collett on tel no. 020 7840 0540 or email martin@erha.org.uk for further information.



ABOVE: Homes at Church Field, Ashdon, where residents have joined together to help manage their development and contribute to the local community.



ERHA Board Members Lesley Childs and Jane Jennings



Oak Close, Ewhurst



Nugents Close, Dunsfold



Crandall resident, Mrs Bryant surveys Lefroy's Field with Board Members and staff

Rechargeable repairs

Not all repairs reported by tenants are the responsibility of ERHA. Any repairs or maintenance that needs to be carried out through neglect or damage on the tenants part is rechargeable to them. The Tenants Handbook will help clarify where this applies.

Are you paying the correct rent?

Rent increases took effect from April 1 2007 and the new system will now see all rents reviewed annually on the 1st April. Details of new rents were mailed to all tenants in March with advice that payments should be amended accordingly.

Competition winner

Congratulations to Mr Edward Clarke from Oak Tree Cottages, Mapledurwell, who was the lucky winner of the sudoku competition in our Winter '06 newsletter..

Service charges

All developments where a service charge is payable will have received their annual statement and new payment figure in March 2007. Any issues arising from these statements should be addressed to Kathryn Watson.

2007 AGM

This year the AGM will take place on the Surrey/Sussex borders on Tuesday 18 September. A venue has yet to be confirmed (any suggestions gratefully received). The meeting will commence at 11am and a buffet lunch will be provided afterwards. All residents are welcome and anyone wishing to attend should contact Martin Collett at ERHA Head Office.

HM PANEL TAKES TO THE ROAD

The annual housing management tour took place on the 22 and 23 May. Board Members and staff involved in the Panel visited a number of developments in Surrey and Hampshire. These annual events offer the opportunity for residents to represent their views first hand and show us some highlights and downsides to developments.

Thankfully, this year, the sun was shining as we meandered around the country lanes and toured the developments. Thank you to all residents who took the opportunity to come out and chat with us, an action plan has been prepared to resolve any of the issues that you raised.

Noisy neighbour?

One of the most frequent complaints received from residents is the issue of noisy neighbours. These are usually connected to loud music, barking dogs, banging doors and shouting. We all expect some noise from our neighbours, but excessive noise can cause annoyance and distress. It's

antisocial behaviour and breaks the conditions of your tenancy or lease.

The majority of us want to get along with those that live around us and respect them as we hope they will in turn respect us. Most noise cases can be resolved by letting neighbours know that they're causing a disturbance, often they don't realise that they are! Persistent and severe problems should be reported to your Housing Manager who will advise on what actions can be taken.

How does ERHA maintain rented properties?

Management of rented homes includes the ongoing upkeep and maintenance. ERHA are committed to ensuring that your property is a pleasant and well maintained environment, that offers a secure and efficient home for you and your family.

In addition to the responsive repairs and maintenance service offered to tenants, rented properties are also included in our cyclical works programme, which means they are regularly inspected and external decorations are carried out at least every 5 years.

Due to contractual difficulties some works are now overdue and

we've been working hard to ensure that this year everything will finish on schedule.

Those of you affected will be contacted with regard to arranging access if necessary. You'll also be asked to report on the contractor's and the standard of workmanship via an anonymous feedback form.

Major repairs, such as upgrading and replacement are also ERHA's responsibility on rented homes. ERHA is committed to ensuring that the property you live in continues to provide a decent place to live for future generations in need of an affordable house.

Our major repairs programme is currently under review, and a stock condition survey (designed to help us plan and budget) is due to be carried out later this year.

Gas servicing

By law, ERHA must arrange for all gas appliances that we have fitted in rented homes to be serviced annually. Your co-operation in making and keeping appointments is crucial. If you don't respond when we contact you or refuse contractors access then legal action can be taken to give us the right to gain entry, with the legal costs payable by the tenant.

Shared owners will need to arrange their own servicing, advice on how to do this is available from your Housing Manager if needed.

Maintaining and servicing gas appliances on a regular basis is essential for safety reasons. Not doing so can put you and the rest of your household at risk. Faulty appliances can give off poisonous fumes or cause dangerous situations that can kill.



Energy efficiency

In response to the growing number of requests from residents regarding the installation of energy efficiency equipment, ERHA has now formalised its Renewable Energy Policy. The policy clarifies what residents are permitted to install at their homes and the process to go through in order to ensure permission is given. Guidance is also available on who to contact for specialist help and details on what grants are available to help towards costs. To find out more contact the Housing Services Co-ordinator, Kathryn Watson.

Housing Management Service Contract

All residents will have now received details on the Management Service Contract held by Hastoe Housing Association. As part of the tender process and contract review, we're looking for your comments on the service you received and areas you feel we should be addressing. Make sure you return the questionnaire to have your say.

Need to change your Standing Order?

Anyone needing a new Standing Order should contact Kathryn Watson or your Housing Manager direct. Standing Orders are controlled by you and you should liaise with your bank when adjusting payments.

Out and about



Re-mortgaging?

Shared owners looking to re-mortgage their home should contact ERHA for advice. As the Association maintains an interest in the property we are required to consent to any new arrangements that you put in place.

Our consent will only be given if the lender you have approached has recognised that your lease does not permit the property to be sold outright (you can never own more than 80%) and the value of the mortgage does not exceed the value of your share in the property.

A list detailing banks and building societies that ERHA is currently working with is available on request. To find out more contact Martin tel no. 020 7840 0540 or email info@erha.org.uk.

TOP LEFT and RIGHT: 3 new affordable homes at Beacon View Road, Elstead and a street scene at St Paul's Court, Lynsted, where 3 shared ownership homes have been provided. Both developments have been built by private developers (Martin Grant Homes and Millwood Homes respectively) who have been required to provide a quota of affordable housing as part of planning conditions for developing a larger site.

BOTTOM LEFT to RIGHT: Garden scene at Duncombs Cottages, Hambledon, some of the 13 homes at Cowbridge Meadow, Pirbright and the famous pugon chimneys at Albury with one of the 15 new ERHA homes at Westonfields in the foreground.

Over the next few months ERHA will be on site building around 50 homes in the following villages:

Thorpe le Soken (Essex)
8 rented and 4 shared ownership

Chiddingfold (Surrey)
3 rented and 1 shared ownership

Dunsfold (Surrey)
4 rented and 4 shared ownership

Brabourne (Kent)
8 rented and 3 shared ownership

Tatsfield (Kent)
7 rented and 6 shared ownership

Development update

One of the common problems experienced by ERHA in the villages where we work is the misconception by some members of the local community that the homes we build will de-value local properties and blight the village with troublesome residents.

We know that's not true. Residents living in the homes we build have strong connections to the local community and are often the ones who support vital local services and organisations.

If we're working in your village then your support is essential. Contact us to find out what you can do to help.

**DURING
THE FIRST
12 MONTHS
DEFECTS IN
NEW HOMES
SHOULD BE
REPORTED ON
TEL NO.**

0845 601 5506

(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

ERHA CHIEF EXECUTIVE RETIRES

Longstanding Chief Executive of ERHA, Barry Humphreys, has announced his intention to retire during 2007. Barry has been responsible for the Association since 1993 and has played an invaluable part in building the successful organisation that exists today. The recruitment process for his successor is underway.

Having spent the last 30 years working in the housing sector, Barry has decided that the time is right to retire from the world of work, and spend more time enjoying life with his family.



Residents Survey 2006/07

Thank you to all residents who took part in the 2006/07 Residents Satisfaction Survey. Response rates were slightly down on previous years with 33% of households completing and returning the questionnaire. Of these households, 67% were tenants and 37% were shared owners.

Our particular congratulations go to the following residents who won the £50 worth of Marks and Spencers vouchers in the prize draw for returned forms; Mr & Mrs Olymbious, Hardens View, Warehorne, Mr Baker and Mr Witcomb, The Warings, Beenham, Mr and Mrs Prestney, Rose Green, Chappel, Mr and Mrs Brunt, Bridge Close, Warehorne, Mr and Mrs Adams, Celak Close, Aldington, Mr Steele, Oak Close, Ewhurst.

Results from the survey have now been analysed and a summary of some of the findings is detailed below. A full copy of the Report produced is available on request.

- > 86% of residents are very or fairly satisfied on the service provided
- > 68% of those who responded had contacted ERHA over the past 12 months, of these, 82% had recorded that the staff member was able to resolve their enquiry, 85% found the staff member helpful and 70% were satisfied with the outcome of their contact.

- > 84% of those who responded felt that ERHA offers very or fairly good value for money.
- > 90% were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation.
- > 87% felt that ERHA was good at keeping them informed about issues affecting them, and 91% always or sometimes got useful information from the newsletter.
- > 40 (18%) responses came from applicants who had applied for housing during the past 12 months, of these 98% felt the Application Form was easy to complete and 100% felt the supporting literature explained their rights and responsibilities.
- > 106 (48%) households had contacted ERHA requesting a repair over the past 12 months, of these 73% felt that the length of time before work started was good or very good, 76% that the speed with work was completed was good or very good, and 74% that the overall quality of the repair was good or very good.
- > Where scheme specific problems have been identified the dedicated Housing Manager has been alerted and asked to investigate.
- > Technical and development feedback has been passed to the ERHA Development Team. An assessment of these comments will help to ensure your first hand experiences influence future design and construction.

CONTACTS NUMBERS

Repairs Line

(Tenants should report repairs and maintenance required to their property on the numbers below. The out of hours service should be used for emergencies only)

0845 601 5506
(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

0845 757 3842
(out of hours)

Head Office

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

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2 Graphite Square
Vauxhall Walk
London SE11 5EE**

Tel: 020 7840 0540
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Email: info@erha.org.uk
www.erha.org.uk

Housing Managers

(Your dedicated housing managers)

Chris Graves
Tel: 02392 383993

Jo Passmore
Tel: 01304 841666