



IN THIS ISSUE....

Find out all the latest activities at English Rural, see our latest developments and hear what we're planning for the future. Most importantly, read on to find out how planned legislation changes may affect current and future tenants.

Best NeighbourhoodPg. 1
New Home Funding & Offers.....Pg. 2
Welcome Test Valley.....Pg. 2
Water TreatmentPg. 2
Development Update...Pg. 3
Repairs & MaintenancePg. 4
Money MattersPg. 4
Your SayPg. 5
Policy WatchPg. 5
HQ News & Events.....Pg. 6
ContactsPg. 6

Summer Time...

It may officially be British Summer Time, but the weather's been a real mixed bag. If you and your neighbours have been making the most of light evenings to meet up, socialise and perhaps even get gardening and DIYing in those communal areas, do think about entering our competition left.

...and don't forget there's a 2nd chance to be a winner - keep your eyes peeled for our Satisfaction Survey landing on your doormat in the Autumn, one lucky respondent will win our prize draw.



Best Neighbourhood: *Is your development a winner?*

This summer we're launching a competition that communities of residents can enter. English Rural is proud of the developments that we build, which typically have been designed using sensitive styles, materials and landscaping. We're investing more than ever in maintaining and improving the homes we provide and are also aware of the pride that residents take in the appearance and community where they live. To help promote this we are inviting residents to join with their neighbours and submit the neighbourhood where they live as English Rural's 'Best Neighbourhood'.

To enter, residents should send in photos of where they live along with no more than 500 words detailing why their development should be considered the 'Best'. Entries should include details about how residents help to support each other and take part in the local community, as well as work residents do to make their home and development look good. The winners will receive a prize fund worth £250 to spend on a community event or benefit. All entries should be received by Monday 8th August 2011.

To find out more about the competition or how to enter contact your local Housing Manager or housing staff at the central office on 020 7820 7930.



Changes to the way We Fund and Offer New Homes

The social housing world is changing and English Rural continues to adapt to meet these changes. We are currently in negotiations with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which is the Government agency responsible for investing public funds in affordable housing. These negotiations are for funding for our development activity over the next four years, during which time we plan to build around 200 new homes.

Changes underway also include a new type of tenancy for future tenants. Up until now, like most housing associations, English Rural has used a tenancy which essentially offered a home for life, with rents regulated to make sure they remained at a certain level. Because of changes in funding and political direction we have had to revisit this approach and in the future are proposing to offer 'Generational Tenancies' which will be for a fixed period of 20 years and also charge higher rents. These changes reflect the reduced availability of public funds to support affordable housing, with housing associations having to generate more income to compensate for this. It won't affect our existing tenants, but you should be aware as most providers of affordable housing will be introducing similar changes. The decisions taken by English Rural relating to the new tenancy have been heavily influenced by existing residents, with over 50 of you taking part in a consultation exercise, the results of which were then discussed at length by the Residents Panel before a recommendation was made to the Board for approval. As this newsletter goes to print details about the exact changes to be made are still being discussed with the HCA and may be subject to change. We will be sure to keep you updated though when arrangements are finalised.

WELCOME!

Test Valley Rural Residents

English Rural would like to offer a very warm welcome to all of the Test Valley Rural Housing Association residents who we took on responsibility for as of 1st April 2011, following the transfer of Test Valley Rural to English Rural. Having managed Test Valley Rural's homes for the past two years, the transfer was fairly seamless and we look forward to continuing to offer residents our quality services.



Water Treatment Plants

Because of the rural locations where we build homes, which are often too far away from public sewage facilities to easily access them, it is often necessary for us to use private treatment plants or pumping stations to deal with waste water and sewage produced by residents. The cost of running these plants is covered by service charges, which are calculated on a development basis. Treatment plants and pumping stations are designed to have enough capacity to deal with the waste residents produce, but can go wrong or break down when certain items are flushed down the toilet. Residents using treatment plants and pumping stations should be aware of items that should not be disposed of and to help with this we've produced an information sheet which will be sent to households affected.

Essentially, the equipment is designed to deal with sewage, degradable toilet tissue and waste water only, all other items, including cooking fats, should be disposed of separately.



Update on DEVELOPMENT

We're currently on site building 33 more new affordable homes and once completed these will take us over the 1,000 home milestone.

Our objectives are to both build quality affordable homes and provide excellent services to those living in them; we aim to do this by working in partnership with local communities to meet local needs.

Because of our commitment to achieving this we are currently in negotiations with the Homes and Communities Agency for funding over the next four years to build over 200 more homes.

NewHomes: EdwardsDRIVE



Above right:
Edwards Drive, Thorrington, Essex, in the line up left to right is David and John Edwards, Jenny Cant, Chair of Thorrington Parish Council, Mike Haslam, Chairman, English Rural,

NewHomes: Chantlers MEADOW



Above and Right:
Chantlers Meadow, Egerton was opened by the Rt Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover. In the line up photo above are, left to right: Alison Thompson, Regional Development Manager, English Rural, Bishop Trevor, Mike Haslam, Chairman, English Rural, Adrian Maunders, Chief Executive, English Rural.

Repairs *and* MAINTENANCE



MONEY *Matters*

Investing in your home

This year will see our biggest ever investment in repairing and maintaining your home, with around £1 million being spent over the next 12 months. Our programme of planned works, replacing windows, doors, kitchens, heating and carrying out external decorations is due to start in June. Although some residents have already received letters indicating that you may be included in this programme, all those who are to be included in this year's programme will receive a further letter in due course notifying them of the works to be carried out, likely timescale and the contractor responsible.

Fire Safety

We will check any fire/smoke alarms which have been supplied by English Rural in rented homes from time-to-time; these checks will normally take place on a cyclical basis along with electrical safety checks. If we discover that your fire/smoke alarm is faulty or not adequate we will replace it.

Residents of rented homes should report any faults they identify with smoke/fire alarms via the repairs line, we won't replace batteries as this is your responsibility, but we will fix or replace any alarms which are faulty or not working.

All residents should check fire/smoke alarms on a regular basis, at least weekly, by using the test mechanisms on them. The same applies to Carbon Monoxide detectors which we have supplied. We will carry out checks on those in rented homes, but tenants are responsible for letting us know if they are faulty or not working so that we can arrange to get them fixed.

Stay Insured:

- new penalties for motor vehicles without insurance

The new vehicle insurance law means that the registered keeper of a vehicle must keep it insured unless they've made a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN). If you're not insured and haven't made a SORN, you could face a penalty.



To find out more about what the change in law means for you, visit www.direct.gov.uk or call 0300 1234321



New Funding

English Rural has just finalised a new loan arrangement with Triodos Bank for £13 million. Triodos is an ethical bank primarily lending to organisations with charitable aims like English Rural. The money will help to support English Rural's programme of developing new homes and investment in improving existing ones.

Rent and Service Charge Review

All residents will have received notification of new payment details in April and amended payment amounts and instructions accordingly. Anyone who is unsure about the level of payments should check with the local Housing Manager to make sure their account remains free of any arrears. Don't forget, if you have a payment arrangements in place to clear arrears then this will need to be in addition to the new rent level which you have been notified about.

To make paying your rent easier English Rural is also currently looking to implement a new system enabling residents to make payments over the phone or internet using debit cards. Expect to receive more details on this shortly.

“YOUR Say”

Residents Panel: *Shape our future*

The Residents Panel continues to develop an important role within English Rural helping to inform and influence the work that we undertake and the way in which services are provided. Detailed notes are taken at the meetings and published with agendas under the resident involvement section on our website. If you feel the Panel should be discussing a certain issue then get in contact with the Resident Board Members, Christine Knight and Pauline Rose with suggestions (contact details on the website or call 020 7820 7930 and we'll put you in touch).

Local Offers Update: *We're acting on your feedback*

Last September English Rural published its first ever Annual Report for Residents, covering how we we're performing in the key areas of our business and services. Following consultation with residents, we also developed and included in the publication a series of 'Local Offers' which were a direct response to how you wanted to see us change. We've been busy implementing these offers since then and progress is regularly reviewed by the Residents Panel. Later this year we'll be publishing information about how well we have performed this year, including what we have done to deliver the 'Offers' and what we are planning to do in the future.



Satisfaction Survey: *Share your experiences*

The last full Resident Satisfaction Survey we undertook was around four years ago and since then a lot has changed. We're planning on undertaking a new survey around September time, which is likely to be shorter and more targeted than previous versions. The information we gain from these surveys helps us to identify improvements and develop services we offer to you, so please take a few moments to take part and you may even be one of the lucky prize draw winners!



Policy Watch: *Proposed Benefit Reforms*

As you may have seen on the news, the Government is planning to make substantial changes to housing benefit. If the changes go ahead, they would mean that some tenants may find themselves receiving less money to help with their housing costs. We will keep you updated on how this progresses.

If these plans do go ahead it will be important to work out at an early stage whether you are likely to be affected, and if so, think carefully about how you might be able to manage your budgets to cover your costs. English Rural can offer advice and support to help you manage your money in the event that you face a reduction in your benefit payment.

One of the proposals is to cut housing benefit by 10 per cent for those people who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for more than 12 months. If you are currently unemployed and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, your housing benefit would be reduced to only 90 per cent of the current amount, after a year of JSA claims.

Another proposal is that housing benefit for working age tenants will be reduced to reflect the number of people living in the property, rather than the property size itself. This means that if you have a spare bedroom or bedrooms you may find yourself receiving a reduced benefit.

These proposals are not yet law and are subject to change. They form part of a wider reform of the benefits structure, which is designed to simplify support payments by rolling all benefit and tax credits into one 'Universal Payment'.

This reform is likely to incorporate benefit caps for families of £500 per week and single households of £350 per week. We will keep you fully up-to-date with the proposals, and will be providing further information if these changes become law. If you think these changes might impact you then make sure you keep in contact with agencies from who you receive benefit.

What's NEW@HQ

ORGANISATIONAL *Changes*

New Recruits

We have two new Board Members who have joined us from Test Valley Rural Housing Association as part of the transfer arrangements. Norman Arnell and Ivor Evans have a long-standing interest in rural housing in the Test Valley area. Norman was formerly Leader of Test Valley Borough Council and Ivor worked as Head of Housing for Testway Housing. We're also in the process of recruiting a new part time Repairs Assistant to help out with the repairs and maintenance service.

AWARD-WINNING *New Homes*



The new affordable housing development provided by English Rural Housing Association at Wilkinson Close, Charing, Kent has won Best Social Housing Category in the South East's Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Housing Excellence Awards. The development, finished in October 2010, will now be entered into the finals to compete for the title of overall national winner. The awards are intended to recognise high standards of design, construction and workmanship.



Events: *Diary Dates 2011*

AGM & Board Tour

This year we'll be holding our AGM at Sparsholt College near Winchester on Tuesday 20th September. At about 12.30pm, Alan Fox, Director of Cornwall Community Land Trust will appear as our guest speaker. Residents are invited to attend the AGM and those who are interested in doing so are asked to get in touch with Karen Eagles on tel no. 020 7820 7930 or email: karen.eagles@englishrural.org.uk

The day after the AGM some Board Members and staff will take the opportunity to visit developments in the Test Valley area, meeting with residents and seeing developments for themselves.

SPARSHOLT
COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE



Contact Us

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

Repairs Line

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

0800 121 4422

(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

In case of emergencies:

01772 757 874

(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 126686

Jo Passmore

Tel: 01304 841666

Mobile: 07552 126679

Katie Maclean

Tel: 01223 242622

Mobile: 07552 126678