



The opening of our new homes at Forge Meadow, Stone-in-Oxney, Kent

Read all about our openings on Pg. 4

Getting involved:

it's free, but the rewards are priceless

Villages are known for their community spirit, whether it's helping out at the annual fete or fundraising for the village hall, the success of the overall community relies on the collective efforts of all those who live there. Volunteering time and making a contribution towards communities can be rewarding: ultimately everyone benefits from working together to make villages vibrant places to live. The need to get involved is even more important as rural services like pubs, shops and post offices continue to close at an alarming rate. As one of our objectives is to help maintain rural communities by providing homes for local people, we continue to encourage those living in our homes to get involved in the communities around them, from buying a hot drink at a coffee morning to being involved in the Parish Council, every action you take helps.

Getting involved costs nothing but time and the rewards can be great, meeting people, making friends, contributing towards improving the area where you live are only a few of the benefits. With developments in over 100 villages we're not always able to know how our residents are getting involved, but we know that some of you do it on an individual basis and others have set-up residents' groups to make a joint contribution. We're interested in finding out more though - one of the claims we make is that our developments help to sustain local communities. We believe that the local people whom we house want to remain in the village because they are proud of where they live. To help us back-up this claim we need evidence, so please let us know how you're getting involved in your community. We'll try and promote as much as we can in the newsletters and it will help to show and inspire others about what can be achieved!

See over for more about how residents are getting involved and find out how to apply to join our new Residents' Panel.

In this Issue...

Christmas is traditionally a time for giving, and giving is certainly the recurring theme in this issue of the Bulletin. Along with our regular features the following pages are packed with ideas for giving time and getting involved in your community - all of them are free and some could even save you money, so please do keep on reading...

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Christmas Opening



This year our offices will close from 12pm on Thursday 24th December 2009 through to 9am on Monday 4th January 2010.

The out of hours service will still be available for tenants wishing to report an emergency repair during this period.

Neighbourhood and COMMUNITY

Below are a few examples of some local projects that we've been involved in with residents which show you a snapshot of the type of work already underway.

Awareness brewing: English Rural residents from Ablitts Meadow, Grundisburgh, Suffolk took part in a coffee morning held to promote the Flagship Environmental Roadshow. The event was hosted by Suffolk Heritage Housing Association who have also provided homes in the village.

Dig In: Residents from The Copse, Tatsfield, Surrey along with English Rural's Operations Director, Martin Collett and Members of the Parish Council and Horticultural Society renewed a hedge. The new plants were provided by English Rural and will help to improve landscaping arrangements at The Copse. The volunteers helped to reduce the need to use a contractor, cutting £100s from the annual service charge costs. The planting will also help to contribute towards this year's village entry into the Village in Bloom competition and, with Tatsfield having already won the village category of South East in Bloom three times, I wouldn't bet against them!

A similar event is planned in Ashdon, Essex later in December, where English Rural residents have managed to secure some 1,200 plants free from an initiative led by Essex Rural Community Council and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

Showing the way: Residents from Crawshaw Close, Long Whatton, Leicestershire were involved again in organising the annual Long Whatton Show which raises money for local charities, including the air ambulance which is a vital service in rural communities. English Rural was pleased to contribute towards this year's show by sponsoring the PA system.

People Power: Residents at Nettleditch, Littlebury in Essex are the latest to get together to discuss the potential of establishing a localised resident group, English Rural is able to offer both financial and practical support to these emerging groups which are an ideal way to tackle neighbourhood problems, meet neighbours and make a real difference to where you live. For more information about setting up a residents' group please contact your Housing Manager.

One of the first visitors to the Littlebury meeting was Police Constable Support Officer Phil Workman, who plays a vital role in working with the local community to tackle crime. *(Read more about his work on page 3)*

MONEY Matters

Rent & Service Charges 2010/11

Keep an eye out for the rent review notices that will be dispatched in February 2010. Most tenants will see their rent stay the same or fall slightly this year. We'd like to assure the small number of households for whom a modest increase has been unavoidable that this has been kept to the absolute minimum and naturally our charges remain below the required threshold.



Shared owners should also note that ground rent payments will not increase next year. This decision has been taken in light of the difficult economic situation facing many households. We have also managed to negotiate a freeze on insurance premiums, which means your annual buildings insurance contribution is still just £35.

Where Service Charges are also collected for communal management and maintenance, statements will be included with the annual rent review package. We continue to look for ways to keep the service charge contributions down - one of the best ways is for residents to take an active role in maintaining the communal areas around where they live. If you think this sounds like a good idea then why not talk to your neighbours and contact your Housing Manager with any ideas.

Finance Update

English Rural has now finalised arrangements with the ethical bank Tridios for a new £5 million loan facility. The money will help fund our continued development activity and is in addition to the £9 million secured in 2008 from Barclays Bank. Consideration is now being given to securing a further loan in 2011 to help fund our growing pipeline of affordable village housing projects.

Mortgage Availability

Despite the difficult economic climate of the past 18 months, English Rural has managed to continue a successful shared ownership sales programme. Because we don't charge rent on the unsold percentage, our product is uniquely affordable and tailored towards the rural areas in which

The Work of a Village Bobby...



Police Constable Support Officer Phil Workman is based at Woodstock Police Station where he covers Bladon, Woodstock, Tackley, Wootton, Glympton and Kiddington as part of the Woodstock Neighbourhood Team in Oxfordshire. In September 2009 more than 200 people in the area were consulted about their priorities for the local area. Residents identified their top three issues as, Speeding, Lack of Youth Facilities and Parking. These issues are now being tackled by Phil and his colleagues as part of the Neighbourhood Action Group which is made up of residents, and partnership organisations.

The Neighbourhood Team also hold surgeries across the neighbourhood and wish to encourage more people to visit them to discuss any issues they have.

Alongside the work he undertakes in the community to develop services identified by residents, in his role as a PCSO Phil has the powers to enforce Fixed Penalty Notices for Unnecessary Obstruction by Vehicles or Parking a Vehicle Incorrectly and implementation to enforce Section 5 of the Public Order Act, where a person or persons are causing either alarm, harassment or distress in a public place.

Phil has lived in this part of Oxfordshire for around 45 years. He was previously a Town and District Councillor and has now been a Police Community Support Officer for nearly 5 years.

Progress on the work undertaken by the team and advice on the issues identified by residents can be found at <http://www.whosmybobby.co.uk> where you can search for this or any other neighbourhood police team.

we work, where house prices are generally higher than average. However, in common with the current economic trend, the biggest problem affecting the sale of our shared ownership homes has been the availability of loans. To help counter this we have been working with other housing associations to share the latest information on who is providing mortgages and the current lending criteria. We regularly review the information available to shared owners looking to secure a mortgage and this is available on request.

Changes to Housing Benefit

As from Monday 2nd November new rules mean that Child Benefit will no longer be taken into account when calculating Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. As a result

some 200,000 families are on average £20 a week better off. If you are currently entitled to Child Benefit and also claiming Housing and Council Tax Benefit then make sure the local authority has taken these new rules into consideration and adjusted your claim accordingly.

Freeconomy Community

Residents might want to check out the Freeconomy Community's website www.justforthebenefit.org. The Community's aim is to connect people in their local community through the act of sharing - you can trade tools, knowledge and skills with others for something that you need in return. The site has been recommended to us by one of our residents and it looks like a positive approach to working together.

(Please note that English Rural can not take any responsibility for the content of third party sites)

Save the Planet and Money Too

We all know that saving energy is good for our wallets, simple steps like setting heating and hot water at lower temperatures, not leaving electrical equipment on standby, only boiling the water you need, using energy efficient bulbs and keeping heat in our homes all make a difference. As energy prices look set to continue to rise these little steps can really add up. Why not contact the Energy Saving Trust at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk or by calling 0800 512 012 and take part in a home energy check, you'll get a report, which is free and impartial, and it could save you up to £300 a year on your energy bills.



Promotional Work *and* EVENTS

One of the best ways to promote the benefits of affordable rural housing developments is to actually show-off what we've built to funders, planners and those involved in bringing other projects forward, either at ground level or via policy making. To help with this over the past few months we have organised a number of opening events to showcase our work, and some of our highlights are shown below.

We've also been getting more involved in advocacy work, working with other housing bodies like the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and National Housing Federation (NHF) to show them what we've been doing, the quality of the product that we are providing and how our homes are making a real difference to village communities. Over the past couple of months this has included sponsoring a seminar organised by the CIH, which included a tour around our newly built homes in Dunsfold, Surrey. We've also promoted our work with Ashford Borough Council to the NHF, who recently met with representatives from Ashford and English Rural to find out why the approach taken in the district is so successful.

“ We would like to thank residents for the role they play in helping to promote the work that English Rural does. ”

In many villages we come up against opposition to affordable homes. Often a vocal minority living in villages will lobby against our work, with claims that what we are doing is damaging the village, that there is no need for more homes and that people who can't afford to live in the village should move to local towns where accommodation is easily available and affordable.

Our residents can help us tackle this problem by demonstrating the important role that you play in the community, where in many cases you have grown up along with generations of your family who have worked hard to make the village the desirable place to live that it is today. If you hear that we're working in your area, then why not come along and support us and help to reassure those who are concerned about what we are trying to achieve.

RESIDENTS' PANEL:

Representing your views

To ensure that residents' views are at the very heart of the service we provide, in September this year English Rural's Board gave the go ahead for the new Residents Panel to be established. We are currently asking anyone interested in getting involved in the Panel to get in touch to find out more. It will meet around four times a year and will help us to establish and monitor service standards as well as playing a crucial role in informing Board decisions. Residents will find a separate letter enclosed with this newsletter from Pauline Rose and Christine Knight who you elected as your Board representatives back in 2008, both Pauline and Christine will be taking part in the Panel along with two additional Board Members Lesley Childs and Jane Jennings.

This is an important opportunity for you to have a real input into the way we deliver our services to you. Depending on the interest we receive we'll be looking to hold elections in January 2010, so anyone who wants to put themselves forward should do so no later than Friday 8th January. If you're interested in finding out more about what's involved, please contact Martin Collett:

020 7820 7930
martin.collett@englishrural.org.uk



< New homes at Arnold Close, Dunsfold, Surrey are officially opened by Cllr Mrs Pat Frost, Mayor of Waverley. The event was followed by a seminar jointly organised by English Rural and Waverley Borough Council aimed at promoting affordable rural developments to Parish Councillors.

Canon John Brown, a former Board Member > of English Rural and longstanding rural advocate, officially opens the 12 new homes at Byng Crescent, Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex.

< New residents are welcomed to their new homes by Cllr Margaret Stevens, Chairman of the Parish Council at Egret Court, Lower Halstow, Kent.

English Rural's former Chairman, Viscountess Knollys > braves the rain to welcome guests to the opening of the 12 new homes at Turnpike Close, Churchill, Somerset

< Representatives from the National Farmers Union, National Association of Young Farmers Clubs and English Rural jointly launching a survey this year's Royal Show. The survey is aimed at helping to understand both the housing needs affecting the farming community and also what incentives would encourage them to make land available for affordable housing projects.



You can see from all the opening activity that we continue to be busy building and have provided **88 new homes** this financial year with a similar number scheduled for completion next year

NO SPACE FOR PARKING

Owning a car is seen as fundamental for most householders to maintain their daily lives - wherever they may live



If you've ever found yourself searching for that needle-in-a-haystack parking space and thinking that someone out there is deliberately making your life difficult (and cursing them whilst you manoeuvre like an acrobat to get into the hallowed space), it turns out you're not alone...

As those living in rural areas know only too well, isolation and social exclusion are serious problems, often exacerbated by poor transport links which can deprive people of access to work, their GP, schools, shops and other crucial services.

Residents in many rural areas have no choice except the car to access the services they need. However, the Government expects Planning Authorities to use restraint with parking supply in order to promote alternatives to the car, helping reduce vehicle emissions and slow global warming.

Demands on road space, traffic congestion or land for parking are probably the last thing on most people's minds when taking the

children to school on a Monday morning, heading off to work or both - but if we can't park easily at our given destination, we tend to question "Why don't They ensure there's enough parking?" Or "Who designed the parking this way?"

Local authorities will have a policy on how many parking spaces are permitted for each property according to the size of the property. This can vary in different regions depending on the needs of the area.

Providing provision for parking is a tool for managing travel demand and traffic

congestion. The Government gives guidance on transport strategies, Regional Government feed the guidance down through transport development plans and Local Government develop the plans to ensure the guidance is put into practice. Strategies are needed to solve problems of congestion, safety, access and climate change. Traffic congestion has an impact on

communities and individuals' lives and economic performance.

Local authorities have a duty to keep traffic moving and are obligated to improve the highway network and protect it from delays, including delays caused by new development. They are also required to manage roadworks, parking policies, incident management and public transport. Their duties are laid out in the Traffic Management Act 2004.

“ If your family or friends in another county have two spaces and you have only one it will have been determined by national and regional planning policy. ”

Using Planning Conditions and Obligations is a part of transport strategy and impacts upon how much parking is permitted at new

developments. Reducing the impact of countryside land lost as Brownfield sites are developed and land becomes scarce, influences how much land is designated for parking. Improving transport links and asking all communities, including our rural ones, to think about their travel habits is part of the overall strategy which dictates how much parking is allocated to a new home when it is built.

What's NEW@HQ

ORGANISATIONAL *Changes*

This year's AGM was sadly the last for two of English Rural's longest standing Board Members. We have now said goodbye to our former Chairman, Viscountess Knollys and also Canon John Brown. Both of whom were instrumental in establishing us in our early years and helping to guide English Rural to become the successful organisation it is today. The Board has elected Mike Haslam OBE as our new Chairman. Mike was formerly our Lead Board Member For Development and is a Chartered Town Planner. He was elected President of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 2002 and is currently a member of the Institute's Assembly and Executive Board and chairs its Membership and Ethics Committee. He was awarded an OBE in 2003 for services to the planning industry. Amongst his varied roles as a planning and development consultant, he trains members of Planning Committees, lectures at conferences, publishes technical articles and is the resident planning expert for the Sunday Times Home Section.



English Rural has also secured the support of two high profile housing and rural advocates over the past 12 months: our new President, former Housing Corporation Chair, Sir Peter Dixon and our latest shareholder, Matthew Taylor MP, who was responsible for the influential Taylor Report examining rural housing and economy. Matthew has also recently been announced as the new Chairman of the National Housing Federation.

UPDATE: *Website*



Our new look website is just about ready to go live at www.englishrural.org.uk so as from early 2010 you'll be able to pay your rent, report a repair or use our interactive search map to find our available homes.

UPDATE: *Maintenance*

This year English Rural has undertaken the biggest maintenance programme to date to ensure that our properties continue to offer residents secure and high quality homes. We've commissioned around £750,000 of work upgrading kitchens and heating as well as renewing windows, doors and paint work. Most of this work is now complete and we're currently preparing the programme for next year.

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:

01722 757874

(out of hours)

Head Office

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

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