

# THE Bulletin



Residents' Newsletter from English Rural Housing Association

Winter 2006



Winter berries at Celak Close, Aldington

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## Residents' Forum

### How can you get more involved in ERHA?

ERHA HAS ALWAYS RECOGNISED THAT RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT. The views and comments received via the annual satisfaction survey help us to improve designs and services. Due to the scattered nature of ERHA homes, ongoing dialogue between residents and staff has also benefited management and helped us work together to make your development a success.

However, up until now there has been no formal arena for Residents' to present their views on a regular basis. Following comments received in the 2005/06 Survey the decision was taken to try and address this issue, and ensure that you have the opportunity to be more involved in the decision making process.

We've been piloting an initiative in Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire with the aim of setting up area Residents' Forums. Over the next few months we'll be canvassing remaining homes with details about what the plans is for your area and how you can take part.

The first meeting for the pilot project will be early in 2007. If you live in Essex, Herts or Suffolk and didn't reply to the invitation to participate, please contact Kathryn Watson or Martin Collett on tel no. 020 7840 0540 to find out more.

This is an exciting opportunity to make a real difference to the organisation and your involvement is essential to its success.

## Christmas message

**To save on postage, time and resources we've decided that this year we'll include our Seasons Greetings in the Newsletter.**

**All the Board Members and staff at ERHA would like to wish residents and supporters a very happy Christmas and every success and happiness in 2007.**

## Mutual Exchanges for tenants

MOST ERHA TENANTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE HOME THROUGH A MUTUAL EXCHANGE. This process allows tenants to swap their property with another Housing Association or Council tenant without having to go through a waiting list system. It can be a quick and easy way of finding a home more suited to your needs. Permission must be sought from both Landlords before going ahead with an exchange and the following points should be considered:

- *Due to planning agreements on your property the person you wish to exchange with must have local links to the village*

- *Neither tenant is under a Notice of Seeking Possession or Court Order*
- *The incoming tenant will not overcrowd the property*
- *The incoming tenant meets any other special requirements that may apply to the property*

Please contact your Housing Manager or Kathryn Watson at ERHA on 020 7840 0540 if you want to find out more about Mutual Exchanges. Details can also be found in your Tenancy Agreement and Tenants Handbook. We will do all we can to advise and help, but it is important to remember that your properties are designed to help local people from your community and can only be allocated on this basis.



*ABOVE LEFT: Residents and guests on The Cliff of Oak at Wye College.*

*CENTRE: ERHA Chief Executive, Barry Humphreys, presenting the 100 developments we've built so far.*

*BOTTOM: Staff and Board Members visiting developments and meeting residents.*

## Are you energy efficient?

ERHA ARE COMMITTED to building all of our new homes to achieve an eco-homes rating of 'Very Good', but what about existing properties?

We've always been proud of our record of achieving or exceeding energy efficiency targets, but as energy efficiency and alternative sources of production increasingly come to the forefront, we all recognise that we could and should be doing more.

Our new developments currently under construction or in the design and planning stages incorporate energy saving devices and technology. In addition, we are aware that energy efficiency should also feature in our cyclical maintenance programme of rented homes.

Those of you who are keen to pursue and install renewable energy products in your home, may be interested to know that there are Government funded grants available to help bear the cost!

You can apply to the DTI's Low Carbon Building Programme for a grant to help with the cost of installing technologies such as solar photovoltaics or small scale wind turbines. Details on the DTI and further information on energy efficiency and renewable energy grants can be found at The Energy Saving Trust - [www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk) or tel no. 0800 512 012 or Grown Up Green - [www.grownupgreen.org.uk](http://www.grownupgreen.org.uk)

If you decide you want to go ahead with any adaptations to make your property more energy efficient, please seek prior permission from ERHA before completing the works or applying for grants.

## 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](mailto:info@erha.org.uk)**



## AGM and Tour

THIS SEPTEMBER STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS descended on the Ashford area of Kent for the Annual General Meeting and Tour.

Guests at the event included ERHA residents, local authority staff and other partners from the area. All were welcomed to a very sunny Wye College where the meeting took place in the old lecture theatre known as 'The Cliff of Oak'.

Another successful year was recorded in which ERHA had completed 83 new rented and shared ownership homes, changed our housing management service provider, welcomed 2 new members of staff and said goodbye to another, opened

a development office in Dartford, and received £6million funding over the next 2 years.

Chief Executive, Barry Humphreys, also took the opportunity to mark the completion of our 100th development with a presentation and some anecdotes detailing the ERHA journey to date.

In traditional style Board Members and staff jumped into a minibus and took to the road the following day, visiting local developments and meeting with residents. Thank you to those of you who took the opportunity to say hello and discuss your home and experiences with us.

## New website

We're now live! The old holding page has been replaced with a new look interactive site which will act as a resource for all our partners and residents. Finishing touches and updates are being added to the site by our webmaster Catherine Camuyag. Why not pay us a virtual visit by logging onto [www.erha.org.uk](http://www.erha.org.uk) and let us have your comments? If you have any ideas of how you would like to see the website expand and develop please contact Catherine at [catherine@erha.org.uk](mailto:catherine@erha.org.uk).

## Satisfaction survey

The annual Residents Survey' is currently underway with forms posted to you earlier in the month. To be in with a chance of winning one of six £50 M&S vouchers make sure you post yours back using the pre-paid envelope provided by Friday 15 December.

Your feedback is essential in monitoring performance and the annual survey represents one of the opportunities you have to get views across and let us know your experiences. Even if you don't manage to complete it by the 15 December, please take some time out in between the mince pies and mulled wine to fill it in and let us know what you think.

## Rent increases

Don't forget that under our new rent system all rents will now be reviewed on April 1. We'll be in touch with you before then to let you know what the changes will be so that you have plenty of time to change your Standing Order or advise your local authority for housing benefit purposes.

## Breaking the bank at Christmas

Christmas can be an expensive time and with debt in the UK reaching new highs more and more of us are feeling the financial strain of the festive season. Credit cards and personal loans can be tempting but will often lead to debts spiraling out of control.

To help avoid debts at Christmas you should try to set a realistic budget and stick to it and don't be tempted by buy now pay later deals as these can often have high interest rates.

If you do find yourself in debt don't bury your head in the sand and hope the problem will go away. Start by prioritising your responsibilities, mortgage repayments or rent and high interest credit cards should take the highest priority. Where possible switch credit card and store card balances to an interest free or low interest credit card and avoid high interest debt consolidation loans. And remember there is help available and the best place to start is by contacting the National Debt Helpline on freephone: 0808 808 4000 or at [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

## Satellite dishes - some do's and don'ts

LIKE MANY HOUSEHOLDS across the UK, ERHA residents have subscribed to Sky and other media providers to make the most of home entertainment or because the location of their home means they can't access an decent T.V signal via a traditional aerial.

However, it is important to remember that because of the location and type of housing ERHA provides, you may well need to gain planning permission or erect a satellite dish or aerial in a certain way to avoid breaking the law and being asked to take them down.

Please contact us before erecting a satellite dish, the terms of your lease and tenancy require you to, and we can offer advice on what actions you need to take before going ahead with installation.



A good example where the dish has been discreetly placed on the side of the home.

- ✔ Do contact ERHA to discuss your request
- ✔ Do check with your local authority to see if you need formal permission
- ✔ Do employ a qualified contractor to install equipment
- ✔ Do use equipment that compliments your home and fits discreetly
- ✘ Do not erect a dish without permission
- ✘ Do not lead wiring over roof tops
- ✘ Do not leave any faulty or unusable equipment on your property when you move



A not so good example, where an obvious white lead has been trailed across the roofline.

## Need to change your Standing Order?

Anyone wanting to order 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.

## A bright idea!

All of our new homes are designed with a proportion of energy saving light fittings (normally 3 or 4). These fittings are designed to help reduce energy consumption by using specially designed bulbs. Although the initial cost of replacement bulbs is higher than those generally used for standard traditional fittings, they last a lot longer, and over their life span are more efficient and work out cheaper.

Replacement bulbs can normally be found at good electrical or home improvements stores, or via Ethical Products Direct ([www.ethicalproductsdirect.com](http://www.ethicalproductsdirect.com) - tel no. 01740 629940). Anyone who experiences problems in sourcing replacements should contact their Housing Manager for advice.

## Parking arrangements

Residents frequently contact us with parking related concerns. Rural living means that the majority of you rely on a car as your main source of transport, and because of this your home has its own dedicated parking. Please be sure to use them and respect your neighbours right to use and access theirs and discuss with them any temporary parking you may need for family and friends

# Out and about



*TOP LEFT AND RIGHT: Eight shared ownership homes under construction at Sandeman Way, Biddenden, Kent, and raising the roof for the 12 new homes at Bucklebury, Berkshire.*

*BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT: Some of the 8 new homes (5 rented and 3 shared ownership) recently completed at Ivans Field, Chart Sutton, Kent and some one of the finished homes at Bucklebury. Partners on the above developments include the Rural Housing Trust and David Wilson Homes.*

ERHA is currently on site building around 50 homes in the following villages:

Biddenden (Kent)

*8 shared ownership*

Bucklebury (Berkshire)

*8 rented and 4 shared ownership*

Elstead (Surrey)

*1 rented and 2 shared ownership*

Leigh (Kent)

*3 shared ownership*

Lynsted (Kent)

*3 shared ownership*

South Holmwood (Surrey)

*2 rented and 2 shared ownership*

Tatsfield (Kent)

*7 rented and 6 shared ownership*

## Development update

As our development activities continue to expand we've opened a new office in Dartford, which has provided a base and some much needed storage space for our regionally based team.

We continue to work hard on getting new developments on site, with almost 60 homes currently submitted for planning approval.

Despite the badgers, bats, slow worms, newts, archeological remains and the occasional troublesome builder, we continue to meet targets and deliver a successful programme of new homes where they're needed most.

**DURING  
THE FIRST  
12 MONTHS  
DEFECTS IN  
NEW HOMES  
SHOULD BE  
REPORTED ON  
TEL NO.  
0845 601 5506  
(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)**

## New Faces

ERHA IS PLEASED TO WELCOME Kathryn Watson to our team.

Kathryn will take up a newly created post of Housing Services Co-ordinator and will be ERHA's first point of contact with tenants. Her role will also involve liaising with our housing management provider, Hastoe Housing Association, and monitoring the services offered.

As many of you will be aware, since the change of service provider in April this year, we have continued to expand our in-house team in order to cater for the needs of both new and existing residents. Kathryn's post is key to this expansion and will help to

ensure we continue to offer an efficient and effective service.

Before joining ERHA Kathryn spent 3 years as a Housing Officer at Southwark and London Diocesan Housing Association, her experiences there will help to ensure that she is well placed to meet the new challenges facing ERHA as we continue to adapt and progress.

Kathryn can be contacted at our Head Office address on tel no. 020 7840 0540 or via email at [kathryn@erha.org.uk](mailto:kathryn@erha.org.uk)



## Christmas opening times

Our offices will be closed from Friday 22 December 2006 through to January 2 2007. The Repairs Line will be operating as normal apart from 22 December from 12.30pm, 25 and 26 December 2006 and 1 January 2007. Tenants should contact the out of hours service for emergencies on these dates.

# REPAIRS LINE

0845 601 5506

(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

0845 757 3842

(out of hours)

## Competition Corner

TEST YOUR NUMBER SKILLS WITH THIS SUDOKU PUZZLE.

If you manage to complete the puzzle, cut it out and send it back to us with your name and address to be entered into a prize draw for £20 worth of WH Smith vouchers.

Return to: ERHA, 2 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5EE

Competition open to ERHA residents only. Closing date is Wednesday 31 January 2007.



CONGRATULATIONS to Mr Rymer from Great Kimble for winning the summer photo competition.

The before and after photos taken of his back garden were selected as the winning entry by our panel of judges and secured the £50 top prize (*photos left*).

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Surname:.....

First name:.....

Address:.....

.....

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