



Interlink

Residents' Newsletter Issue No. 41 Spring 2010



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A lot of hot air!

You may remember in the last edition of Interlink we asked for volunteers to help with an energy monitoring exercise. We are pleased that a number of residents from a range of different properties are reporting their energy consumption on a monthly basis. We hope to report some of our findings to you in the near future.

Keeping tabs on their energy consumption include residents from the Society's recently developed Eco Scheme in Thetford. Saxon Bank, (pictured above) was officially opened in January by Chairman of Breckland Council, John Rogers.

Two of the main features of these homes include:

- large triple glazed windows on the south walls to maximise solar gain.
- exhaust air heat pumps, which control both the heating and ventilation within the home.

It's not only new build properties which are benefiting from renewable forms of energy! In December 2009 we completed the installation of air source heat pumps as an alternative to electrical storage heaters.

Twelve bungalows at Emily Frost Close, Wickhambrook, a scheme for older residents, now have a programmable radiator heating system incorporating a renewable power source.

It's still not too late, if you would like to volunteer to take part in the energy monitoring exercise. Contact the Customer Service Team on 01284 767224 or customerservices@suffolkhousing.org for further details.

Green Fingers

The annual competition to become Gardener of the Year for private gardens or window box/planters will again take place this year. Judging will start in July. Please contact the office or let your Housing Officer know if you would like to be considered, or if you wish to nominate another neighbour's property for the competition. Prizes will be a year's subscription to BBC Gardeners World magazine or an equivalent amount in garden vouchers.

Countrywide, the ground maintenance contractors will again be looking after the appropriate areas of communal grounds at housing sites during the year.

'Walking the Sites' will start again from May, where you can meet with contractors and your Housing Officer. We hope that there will be plenty of opportunity for you to be able to give us your views on the grounds maintenance service through the year.

Just a reminder that the contract allows for two trims of established hedges on site, the first in July and again in October. Climbing shrubs will be pruned/cut back according to their species at the appropriate time of the year. Visits to the housing schemes will be based on one of three levels of frequency;

- Category A- 31 visits per year
- Category B- 21 visits per year
- Category C-12 visits per year

If you would like further information about the grounds maintenance service contact us and we will send you our leaflet "About your grounds maintenance service"

Finally we would like to remind readers that you should discuss any proposed design alterations you have for your gardens with your Housing Officer before any changes to the garden design takes place.



Getting to know you

We recognise that everyone is different; we all have different needs and lifestyles. We feel that if we knew you better we could tailor our services such as home improvements, contacting you and providing advice, to meet those different needs.

Please take a few minutes to fill the short form we are issuing and return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided. The information on the form is covered by Data Protection legislation and is kept by us and will only be used to help us review our services.

The questions are all optional and you might find some a bit sensitive – you don't have to answer any that you aren't comfortable with but the more information we have about our residents the more opportunity we have to make sure our services meet everyone's needs.

Move about, dance, whatever...

The annual Forum for Older Tenants was held on 1st December in Stowmarket. It was attended by a number of us 'older residents'. If you were not one of them, you missed a very good day, run as usual with a lot of care and forethought.

We had talks by a variety of people. The Department of Works & Pensions, explained how they can help us to apply for various benefits. Even if you are not sure that you would qualify, it is worth ringing them. They will come to you and complete the forms. There was also a speaker from Age Concern. I must admit that I did not realise how much help is available from them, I had mostly thought in terms of their shops.



Winner of first prize draw - Mrs G Tillbrook

A talk on Healthy Eating and Nutrition – good recipes for us to take away too.

After an excellent lunch, a charming young lady demonstrated some Pilates exercises that can be done sitting down. She also encouraged us to 'move about, dance, whatever'. Everyone joined in and enjoyed the exercises.

Our final speaker was from The Royal British Legion making known the many ways that the legion can help.

Transport was arranged for us and the only effort we had to make was to be there.

This is an annual event and well worth a visit. The venue has good facilities for disabled access, so nobody should feel that they would not be able to attend.

by Mrs P Bone, resident

And our survey says...

Last year we reported some of the results from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey we carried out in April 2009. We are still working on this information to improve the services that you receive.

We were really pleased to see that we had improved in a number of areas, which confirmed to us that the changes we made to our Customer Service Team in April 2008 have been successful.

Question	2009	2007
Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance	84%	82%
That we take account of your view	67%	64%
Getting hold of the right person	82%	79%
Ability to deal with the problem	83%	78%
Satisfaction with your home	90%	89%
Satisfaction with your neighbourhood	88%	86%
Thinking the rent is good value for money	88%	86%

We didn't do as well in the area of keeping you, the tenant, informed. 89% thought we were good at keeping you informed in 2007, but by 2009 this had dropped to 87%.

We are unable to tell from the survey where you think we are failing in this area.

- is it the amount of general information that we send out?(usually in Interlink)
- is it around keeping you informed about personal matter such as progress of repairs?
- dealing with anti-social behaviour reports?
- We have provided all residents with information on the grounds maintenance contract and cleaning services but is there more you would like on these issues?

The survey told us that 37% like to be kept informed by letter. We now have nearly 2000 residents, so you can imagine that sending information by creating a letter on headed paper, putting it into an envelope and sorting out the postage is an expensive and time consuming task. Can you help us find a more cost effective way of keeping you informed?

Do you remember completing your form and telling us that we were not very good at keeping you informed – if so, could you give us a bit more information about why you felt that way?

We will be working with Tenants Voice to improve our services so make your views known to them direct if you'd prefer, even if you didn't complete the survey last year – contact numbers can be found in this newsletter – or speak to your local Tenants Friend, Housing Officer or Customer Service Team.

We can visit you, you can ring us on 01284 767224; you can email us at office@suffolkhousing.org or customerservices@suffolkhousing.org or write to us at the address on the back of this newsletter.

And finally, overall the number of surveys returned was less in 2009 than in previous years. What would persuade you to complete this type of survey in future? Please let us know. The more responses we get, the more we can be sure that the answers fully reflect the views of our residents.

Lights

If you live in a property that is less than 5 years old it is likely that your light fittings will only take energy saving 3 pin light bulbs. These were installed to ensure the property complied with Building Regulations and Environmental standards but will also save you money as they use 80% less electricity than a traditional light bulb.

These bulbs can be difficult to buy when they require replacing as they are not generally available in local supermarkets and the prices do vary. The following stockists all sell 3 pin bulbs either individually or in multiples.



Edmundson Electrical

11 Arkwright Road, Hadleigh Road,
Ipswich Tel: 01473 250044
Unit E, Woodhall Business
Park, Sudbury, Tel: 01787 881949
Dettingen Way, Blenheim Industrial
Park, Bury St Edmunds
Tel: 01284 760393

The Paddocks Estate, 347A Cherry
Hinton Road, Cambridge
Tel: 01223 243221

www.edmundson-electrical.co.uk

Denmans Electrical Wholesalers Ltd

Unit 8 Hillfort Close, Fison Way
Industrial Estate, Thetford
Tel 01842 755927

Unit 17 Bunting Road, Moreton Hall
Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds
Tel 01284 752481

www.denmans.co.uk

Newey & Eyre

5 Cavendish Street, Ipswich
Tel 01473 230404

Eastern Way, Bury St Edmunds
Tel 01284 767231

www.neweyandeyre.co.uk

Tenants Handbook

We need to re-order a new supply of the Tenants Handbook and will be taking the opportunity to update the information. If you have any comments about how the handbook can be improved please let us know. Speak to your Housing Officer or contact Hazel on 01284 773446 or email me on hazel@suffolkhousing.org



Hi there! I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Jan Lister, a tenant in Bury St Edmunds and I have recently joined Tenants Voice to promote the views of tenants. I have also volunteered to write articles for Interlink on behalf of Tenants Voice. I often wonder how many tenants actually read the Interlink magazine; I find it full of interesting articles – why don't you let me know. It would be helpful if some of you could forward ideas for future topics that you would like see included in the magazine. I can be contacted on 01284 702414 or 07971862591 and for those of you with computer availability, my e-mail address is tenantsvoice@suffolkhousing.org

You will shortly be receiving a request from the office asking for information to get to know you better, could you please spend a few minutes filling in the form and sending it back. The information being collected will then help the Society to improve and modify the services they give us. If you need any help completing it let the office know so that they can make the necessary arrangements.

Our scheme was included in a heating upgrade last autumn, which has made a big difference to our homes. I understand that many of you have had or will be having, similar changes in your homes and trust you are as pleased as we are.

I don't know about other areas, but where I live people have been so kind to our birds and wild life in general, especially over the very cold winter weeks. It is interesting to hear RSPB say that not many birds were around this winter, as my neighbours and I have seen over 13 varieties of animal and birds including, hedgehogs, squirrels and even a baby roe deer. With all the brilliant wildlife foodstuffs available now, it is pleasing to know that we have helped them through and in return, hope they will continue to give us much pleasure in the future.

I know it's only Spring, but it won't be long before summer is here. Does anyone have any ideas for get togethers perhaps a barbeque or similar? Why not get in touch with your neighbours and come up with something then get in touch with me and let's see if we can make it happen!



I look forward to hearing from you all soon.

Jan

And the winner is...

How many snowmen did you find hidden in the last Interlink?... a number of you correctly counted 18 but the lucky winner was Sam Trench from Ipswich.

We had five logo designs and the members of Tenants Voice selected the design by Sam Trench – Well done Sam



Reviewing our standards

Over the last year we have published details of our service standards in this newsletter, but we would like your help to review these standards and perhaps to develop some local standards to meet specific needs. The Tenant Service Authority who monitors our work is encouraging all social housing landlords to find out from their tenants what they want in terms of services. So what do you want from us in your area? Some things for you to consider...

- We visit all our sites at least once every six weeks – do you think that is enough or should we come more often/less often?
- Should we be working with other agencies and groups in your neighbourhood and who are they (schools/youth groups/community groups)?
- Have you used our complaints procedure – was it easy to use, did it work or should we have done things differently?

Your comments can be directed to:

- tenantsvoice@suffolkhousing.org
- customerservices@suffolkhousing.org
- or phone 01284 767224
- hazel@suffolkhousing.org
- or phone 01284 773446

Planned Maintenance

The following is a list of works scheduled to be carried out in 2010. All residents at these addresses will be contacted and given more specific information as soon as it becomes available.

Heating

Nunnery Green
Field View
Lewis Close
50,51,52,53 Jubilee Court
St Michaels Lodge



Kitchens

Nunnery Green
Field View
Lewis Close
The Chase



Windows and Doors

The Chase
Apsley Court
Field View
Oakes Close
Cullum Road



Starter Tenancies are here

Since February we have been giving Starter Tenancies to all new tenants who did not hold a tenancy with another housing association or local authority immediately before they became tenants of ours.

These new tenancies work like a probationary period and will allow us to work with new tenants during their first year with us to make sure that they can manage their tenancy properly. If the first year is successful, the Starter Tenancy will automatically convert to a normal one but if it isn't a success and we can't work things out with the new tenant then we can end the tenancy.

The vast majority of our new tenants have no problems at all but sometimes people just need a bit of extra support when they take on a tenancy for the first time or need reminding what their obligations are if they start to cause a nuisance to their neighbours – having a Starter or probationary type of tenancy means that if things do go badly wrong other residents have the comfort in knowing that we can do something about it quite quickly.



10 things you didn't know about...

Angela Yaxley – Customer Service Advisor and our Employee of the year 2009!

What is your favourite song?

Hero by Enrique Inglesias

What is your earliest childhood memory?

Being told not to help creosote the fence with my Dad, doing so and then being stood on the kitchen table by my mum and scrubbed with a nail brush to get the creosote off my skin – boy did that hurt!

What was the last book you read?

Old sins by Penny Vincenzi

What is your favourite film?

Meet Joe Black

Where is your favourite place in the world?

I can't decide between Whistler in Canada or Boston in the USA – both are stunningly beautiful

If you did not do your current job what would you like to be?

Definitely a nurse

What is your most cherished possession?

I have two, Albert, my very gorgeous rabbit, which the team at Suffolk Housing bought me for my birthday in 2009 and a brass lamp I bought several years ago

If you could meet one person, alive or dead, who would that be?

Edward Smith, Captain of the Titanic, so he could show me round his ship before it set sail. I would love to have seen it.

Tell me something that will surprise your colleagues?

I have a phobia of moths, they are crazy disgusting creatures, the world would be a better place without them!

Supporting People

Some of our residents in sheltered housing will have recently received a letter from the Suffolk Supporting People Team. They wrote to tell you that they are consulting with all landlords like us, who provide support in the form of an alarm call system and on-site scheme co-ordinators, about some proposals they have for changing the service.

The Society is currently looking at those proposals and will be arranging to meet with residents before making any changes. Please be re-assured that there will be no changes to funding until April 2011.

I-Spy...

You will probably be aware that Housing Officers visit all sites at least once every six weeks to check on the grounds maintenance, cleaning and communal areas and also to talk with residents about any issues they have.

Officers will also be carrying out an annual fire risk inspection of all internal communal areas. They will be checking doors, lighting, fire alarms or extinguishers, safety signs, electrical installations, storage and access. This may mean that if you are using the communal hall, landing or stairs for storage you will be asked to remove the items. We need to make sure that there is clear access and no trip hazards from the property which would hinder your escape if there was a fire so please keep these areas clear.

24/7

Did you know you can pay your rent online by debit or credit card?

As many of you know, last July we introduced the option to pay your rent to Suffolk Housing Society via our website. This enables you to pay us whenever it is convenient to you, including evenings and at weekends – in fact 24/7.

For your peace of mind, the service is provided by a company called PayPoint.net and is totally secure. In fact, PayPoint.net provides secure online credit and debit card payments for over 5,000 web merchants.

At Suffolk Housing, the number of payments made by residents via our website has steadily increased since July 2009, but we'd always welcome more of you paying online!

If you're not sure what to do, don't worry. Just follow the step-by-step guide (right).

Of course, if you're not online you can still pay us over the telephone, in person, by cheque and by cash.

You can also find out lots of other information on our website, report non urgent repairs, complaints or just send us your request from the contacts page. Why not pay us a visit when you are next online!

Beep....Beep....Beep

Could we take the opportunity to remind all residents to test their smoke alarms at least monthly to make sure they are still working, and to report any problems with the smoke alarm to the customer services team (customerservices@suffolkhousing.org or ring 01284 767224). It is also advisable to replace the battery in the alarm every year.

The alarm is there to give you advance warning of a problem and could save your life so please don't just remove the battery to stop the alarm sounding. If you would like an information leaflet about care of your smoke alarm please let us know.

- Go to www.suffolkhousing.org
- On left of screen click "pay your rent"
- To right of screen click "online payment"
- Now you will be asked for information about the tenant, property and how much you wish to pay.
- Complete this screen
- Click the "pay now" button at the bottom of the screen
- You will be automatically taken to a secure payment website operated by Paypoint.
- Fill in all the boxes on this screen
- Click "secure payment" button at the bottom of the screen
- You must enter an email address so PayPOINT can send a payment receipt to you. If you don't have an email address you may use customerservices@suffolkhousing.org and we will send the receipt on to you
- You will then be directed to the online receipt screen which you may print if you wish
- Click "continue" to return to our website

