



HELLO AND WELCOME: TO THE WINTER EDITION OF THE BULLETIN!

The evenings have drawn in and the days are getting shorter. The cold weather is coming and Christmas will be upon us very soon. This edition is packed full of information for you and includes a great 'Getting to know the Staff' section, which has revealed some interesting facts about two members of staff.

I would like to ask you all again to remember that this newsletter is produced for you. If you have any recipes, hints or tips, from gardening to DIY, then please email me on melanie.olymbios@englishrural.org.uk



CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

The Office will close at 1pm on Friday 22nd December 2017 and will reopen at 9am on Tuesday 2nd January 2018.

Should you have an emergency during that time, please call the out of hours telephone line on: **0808 168 6246**

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A FIRE AT HOME IS EVERYONE'S WORST NIGHTMARE:

BUT THERE ARE MANY THINGS WE CAN DO TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF IT EVER HAPPENING.



ALARMS

For all rented homes, English Rural will have fitted at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home and in any room where a fire could start. Remember to test all your alarms regularly and report any faults to the repairs team; tenants are responsible for replacing batteries but English Rural are responsible for fixing any other faults. If you live in a shared ownership home, you are strongly advised to follow the same approach but are responsible for repairing alarms.

SMOKING

It is safer not to smoke. Try to smoke outside and make sure cigarettes are put right out. Never smoke in bed, or anywhere else if you think you might fall asleep. Do not leave a lit cigarette or pipe unattended. Use proper ashtrays and never throw hot ash into the bin. Keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children.

CANDLES

Candles, tea lights and incense burners should only be placed in stable, heat-resistant holders. Keep candles well away from curtains, furniture and clothes.

HEATING AND ELECTRICS

Sit at least one metre away from heaters. Keep heaters well away from anything that can catch alight. Do not cover heaters with clothes to dry them. Don't overload electrical sockets. Never leave pans unattended when cooking and don't cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy.

BEFORE YOU GO TO BED OR LEAVE THE HOUSE

Switch off and unplug electrical items such as TVs and avoid charging devices like mobile phones when you sleep or when you are out. Only leave essential appliances switched on such as the fridge or freezer, turn all others off. Make sure candles are out before you go to bed. Check your cooker and heaters are turned off. Close all internal doors as these act as fire breaks should a fire start.

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE: Should the worst happen, you must have a plan of how to get everyone safely out of the house:

Make an escape plan and practise it regularly to make sure everyone knows how to get out safely.

The best route is the normal way in and out of your home. Plan a second route in case the first one is blocked. If you live in a block of flats, make sure all communal areas and fire escapes are kept clear. Items can block your escape route and be a fire risk. Always keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them.

KNOW WHAT TO DO IN A FIRE: If any of your smoke alarms go off when you are asleep, follow your escape plan, get out and call 999. Shout 'FIRE' to warn others and don't stop to pick up valuables. Check closed doors with the back of your hand. Do not open the door if it feels warm – the fire may be on the other side.

Smoke can kill, get down as low as possible where the air will be clearer. If your escape is blocked by fire consider if it may be safer to stay put until the fire brigade arrives. Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke. If you have a phone call 999, go to a window, shout "HELP, FIRE" and wait to be rescued.

It is also wise to ensure that you have adequate contents insurance. English Rural insure the building, but this does not cover all your personal possessions inside. Should anything happen and the contents of your home are stolen or destroyed, without your own contents insurance you would be unable to claim any money back for these items. If you shop around for contents insurance, a comprehensive policy can be purchased for under £20 a month.

>> If you wish to talk to someone about fire safety within your home, please contact Janette Spence, who is English Rural's Fire Safety Assessor. Alternatively contact your local fire brigade, as they offer free home fire assessments and will visit you at home to discuss your personal fire safety plan.

Rachel Smith, is a Board Member of the New Forest Villages Housing Association and has had experience of 2 house fires. She has written the following to share with you:

I have been in 2 house fires. The first, in 1978, was in a dilapidated property we were restoring:

It was started by a cigarette end discarded by a carpenter, made worse by the piles of wood shavings not removed and the flammable vapour of the dry rot treatment being applied - and a stiff wind. It went undiscovered for about 8 hours, by which time it was the middle of the night. We were lucky to escape with our 3 young children. Our dog was not so lucky.

What I learned from that is that fires in a big building are dark, noisy and smokey. And very disorientating. You need a torch because the trip switch will have disabled the electrics. You need to have a plan and know where any fire blankets, extinguishers and escape routes are. You need to think where the nearest scarf or handkerchief and source of water to wet them is so that you can wrap it around your nose and mouth. You need to shut any door you go through or look through.

The second one, in 2010, was entirely our own fault:

I had left a gas ring on low by mistake as we took our lunch into the garden on a hot sunny day. My husband cleared the meal and put a plastic chopping

board onto the hob and came back to the garden. We thought at first that the smoke detector alarm was coming from another house in our street. When I decided to investigate, the plastic tray had melted and the flames were reaching the cooker hood. I put on an oven glove and turned off the gas. No fire blanket, so I grabbed a travel rug from another room, wetted it and put it on top. Except for a new hob, a new rug and a spring clean of all the paintwork, no big harm done. But another lesson learned. The fire blanket is now between the sink and the hob in an obvious place.

So please, for the cost of a torch by your bed and a fire blanket (under £10) in your kitchen, you and your family could be a whole lot safer. Plus, of course, a functioning smoke detector!



UNIVERSAL CREDIT

With the countrywide rollout of Universal Credit about to take place, many people that will receive this benefit are very concerned.

The average waiting time for Universal Credit to start is about 6 weeks. During this time, no benefits are paid and many people are getting into financial difficulties and are also unable to pay their rent. Should you find yourself in this position then there are things you can do. If the waiting time will mean that you cannot pay your rent, don't ignore the problem, talk to your Housing Manager, they are there to help you. There is also a little known short term advance of the universal credit payment that could help whilst you wait:

A universal credit advance could help you during the six week wait for your first universal credit payment.

A universal credit short term advance is an interest-free loan to help while you wait for your first universal credit payment. You can ask for an advance if you will face financial hardship while you wait for your claim to be processed. This includes if you can't afford to pay your rent or buy food. You repay an advance through deductions from your future monthly universal credit payments.

How to apply for universal credit advance: You can ask for a universal credit short term advance when you make your claim for universal credit or while you are waiting for your first payment.

The number to call depends on whether you are claiming in a:

- **'live service' area**
(you manage your claim by phone)
Call the UC helpline on 0345 600 0723 if you're in a 'live service' area
- **'full service' area**
(you manage your claim online)
Call the UC helpline on 0345 600 4272 if you're in a 'full service' area

Ask the helpline to call you back if you can't afford the call or use a free phone at Jobcentre Plus. The call could take around 30 minutes.

The maximum advance you can get is 50% of your estimated universal credit monthly payment. You repay a short term advance from future universal credit payments so only ask for what you need.

For further information see:
https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/universal_credit_housing_costs/short-term_advances_of_universal_credit



Quarry View Mersham



Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover officially opening the new development

On 18th October, the development at Quarry View in Mersham was officially opened.

The Bishop of Dover formally opened English Rural's latest new development. The scheme comprises four flats and four houses and was the result of partnership between English Rural, Mersham with Sevington Parish Council and Ashford Borough Council. The land was made available by the Church Commissioners and the eight homes are now all occupied by local people with a strong connection to the Parish.



AGM UPDATE:
The AGM was held on Tuesday 19th September at the Bath Racecourse.

There were two speakers this year. Martin Collett, Operations Director English Rural, made a presentation on the Rural Housing 5 Star Plan. Catherine Le Grice Mack of the Campaign to Protect Rural England was the Guest speaker.

From left to right: Ferdie Lachica, Finance Manager; Ray Green, Finance Director; Chyna Edwards-Bryce, Finance Apprentice and Lorna Murdoch, Accounts Officer.



When a problem occurs at home and we have no hot water or heating for example, we feel that it is a dire emergency and should be treated as such. If the problem occurs outside of office hours then this compounds the issue further. *But what exactly is considered to be an emergency in terms of maintenance?*

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Within 24 hours:

- Gas leaks
- Uncontainable water leaks / severe burst water pipes
- Total loss of water or total loss of heating during the winter months (Oct 31st to 1st May)*
- Insecure properties
- Hazardous premises
- Total loss of light or power
- Sole toilet is not working
- Loss of hot water if there is a vulnerable tenant who ordinarily resides at the property.

ROUTINE REPAIRS

Within 30 days:

- Replacement door/window frame
- Rendering work to gates, paths and fencing
- Replacement sanitary fittings
- Lighting failure to only one room
- Minor leaks
- Loss of hot water
- WC not working
- Glazing broken
- General repairs

MINOR MAINTENANCE

Resident Responsibility:

- Toilet seat repairs/ replacement
- Changing fuses and light bulbs
- Replacing smoke alarm batteries
- Not blocking flues or ventilation
- Fixing bathroom cabinets
- Renewing sealant around the bath
- Drains and sink blockages
- Gardens
- Frost damage to outside taps and pipework
- Internal decor
- Fixing any appliances or furniture you own
- The connection and disconnection of your own gas or electrical appliances
- Own floor covering or carpets
- Hat and coat rails/hooks
- Bathroom/basin plugs and chains

OUT OF HOURS NOTE:

If you are calling the out of hours service, they will in some circumstances make the property safe and leave the main repair to contractors during office hours.

When a job is raised as an emergency, you **must be available to provide access within the following 24 hours**. If no one is going to be available, the job cannot be raised as an emergency.

In the event of a no access visit, English Rural have the right to charge the cost of the call to the resident, which is something we want to try and avoid wherever possible.

ROUTINE: Although jobs may be raised as a routine appointment, the repairs team will ask the residents questions regarding the repair.

This is not to be intrusive but so that the repairs team can identify the exact repair and cause and prioritise the work appropriately. Once they have enough information the repairs team will alert the contractor if a job needs to be escalated to more urgent. Our repairs staff are trained to ask questions, and understand that it is not always easy to describe a fault so will do their best to guide tenants through the reporting process.

FENCING: English Rural are responsible for the two privacy panels (directly adjacent to the property) and in some cases the boundary fencing.

Fence panels/posts erected by residents or previous residents of your property, are the responsibility of the current occupier to maintain and repair. If these get damaged we will replace a boundary fence, but this may be with a more durable chain-link alternative.

* The minimum heating standard is at least 18°C in sleeping rooms, and 21°C in living rooms, when the temperature outside is minus 1°C. Some repairs might take more than the reasonable time, or parts may be required, in which case our contractors are instructed to provide temporary equipment for heating.



DON'T LEAF IT!

HOW TO AVOID AUTUMN LEAVES BLOCKING YOUR DRAIN:

Ah, autumn- the season of beautiful colours and crisp, refreshing air. As soon as the leaves begin to turn that familiar collaboration of burnt oranges and reds, you can be sure that the time for them to fall isn't far behind.

You can imagine that we get quite busy during the autumn season; running around unblocking drains that those delicate leaves have fallen into and blocked. This can cause localised flooding to your drive paths and garden.

Here are our top tips on how to avoid your drain becoming blocked during this notorious leaf-falling season.

WHAT CAN I DO? If you have noticed leaves starting to pile up in your garden, it's highly recommended that you rake the leaves away and recycle them in an appropriate manner they're great for the composter. This will ensure that they can't get blown back into your drainage system.

Not only does this protect your drains, but it protects the drains of other people who live in your area too.

If you have noticed some leaves already collecting in your drains, try scooping as many as you can out before they start clogging the pipes up. As long as you get the majority out of the way, some of the harder to reach leaves may dry and blow away or be washed away as the drain ...drains!

Thanks for your help.

WINTER PREPAREDNESS:

With the imminent arrival of winter, there are many considerations that are necessary to keep our homes in tip top condition during this harsh season.

Condensation can be a big problem in well insulated and well heated homes. There are many things that we can do to prevent the problem. Try to produce less moisture by keeping lids on pans, not drying wet clothes on airers and by using the extractor fans in the bathroom and kitchen. Homes need to be ventilated to allow moisture to escape. Simple measures such as leaving the trickle vents on the windows open, or closing the bathroom or kitchen door when you are having a bath/shower or are cooking can make the world of difference. Should you get condensation, make sure you wipe it away quickly to prevent the formation of any mould. If any mould is present, use a good quality anti mould product and follow the instructions carefully.

There are many things that can be done to ensure that your property is ready for winter. Frozen and burst pipes are a big issue in the winter months and can be easily avoided. Ensure that you heat your home appropriately for the weather, as this can reduce the risk of pipes freezing and bursting. Even if you are going away, ensure that the heating is left on at a low level.

If you have fitted an outside tap, ensure that you either drain it and turn off its water supply, or make sure that the pipes are well lagged. This will stop the pipe from freezing or bursting.

Check guttering is in good order and that over flow pipes are not leaking. Report to the maintenance team if repairs are needed. If high winds are forecast, ensure that everything in the garden is secure.

CCTV: CCTV is gaining in popularity as an effective deterrent against burglary. Please contact your local Housing Manager if you are thinking about installing CCTV as there are laws, especially the Data Protection Act that must be adhered to. The following links provide valuable information on the rules and regulations surrounding the installation of any CCTV:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-cctv-using-cctv-systems-on-your-property/domestic-cctv-using-cctv-systems-on-your-property>

<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/cctv>

GETTING TO KNOW...

In this edition, I would like to introduce

two members of English Rural Staff. Each have again been asked the same ten questions to enable you to get to know them a bit more.



Steven Bland
Housing Manager



Dawn Cridland
Maintenance Officer

1. In 10 words sum up your role at English Rural

Steven: Helping residents to manage their tenancies and to live happily.

Dawn: Fulfilling, busy, interesting, fun, varied, exciting, structured, challenging, pressurised and rewarding.

2. What part of the job do you like best?

Steven: I enjoy getting out to visit people, you can make a face to face connection that you don't get otherwise which is why it's so important, and I (mostly) enjoy the traveling.

Dawn: I like that we are the first point of contact for our residents and that I can offer advice regarding repairs in order to help residents.

3. What part of the job do you dislike?

Steven: A lot of the time, problems between residents could be solved by them communicating with one other and it's a shame that we have to get involved sometimes.

Dawn: I find it difficult when a problem can't be resolved within a reasonable

timescale at no fault of the contractor, English Rural or the resident. For example when a resident is without heating or hot water and a specialist part is required to fix it. Also on a void inspection finding a property which has been un-kept and is very unhygienic.

4. If you had an extra day at work each week, what would you do?

Steven: More arrears work... and the little admin bits that I never quite seem to get to. That list that everyone has.

Dawn: I would assist my colleagues in helping them out in any way I could.

5. Tell us something interesting about you that people won't know.

Steven: I was in a few bands as a younger man, and got to play at cult Chelmsford music venue the Army and Navy pub, which hosted gigs by bands like Oasis, Stereophonics, Feeder, Super Furry

Animals, the Mission, Bad Manners, the Specials...

Dawn: I used to play ice hockey for a ladies ice hockey team.

6. What did you do before you came to English Rural?

Steven: I worked in conveyancing, shared ownership, commercial and residential, which has all come in very useful at times working for English Rural.

Dawn: I worked in a maintenance department for a central heating company.

7. Do you have any hobbies?

Steven: I enjoy playing football as much as I can, and gaming, but music is still my biggest passion – playing and listening, and trying to get out to as many gigs as I can and see as many of the bands I love before it's too late.

Dawn: I enjoy all sport related activities and I regularly horse ride and partake in cross country jumping.

8. What does your perfect day look like?

Steven: Seeing a band with friends, something to eat and a couple of drinks beforehand, then a stadium or outdoor show in the sun.

Dawn: Down by the seaside on a beautiful hot sunny day, playing on the beach and in the sea with my husband and my 6 year old daughter. Also consuming a large quantity of ice creams and maybe a few cocktails.

9. Do you have any pets?

Steven: I have a stuffed duck named George who went to University with me nearly 20 years ago. I think he must be Swedish, because I bought him in Ikea.

Dawn: I have 2 cats both brother and sister from the same litter named Pickle and Lily. One is mainly ginger with a

white tummy and paws, he looks a bit like a tiger, the other is mainly white with dark ginger patches, both are moggies. A little story about them, their mother was Janette's cat Topsy and I was luckily enough to meet them when they were only a day old, they were so very tiny.

10. What has been your biggest accomplishment to date?

Steven: I think it has to be completing a Masters in Housing while working at the same time. It was long and difficult, but it's had a real impact on my day to day work and taught me a lot more about the theoretical side of housing, and I think it's improved the quality of my work.

Dawn: Bringing my gorgeous daughter into the world and walking 26 miles across London overnight to raise money for cancer research and in honour of my late father who lost his battle with cancer.



THE HEADLINES FROM HEAD OFFICE:



Exciting new location for English Rural's Head Office: With the lease coming to an end at our Head Office in Vauxhall, new premises in Westminster have been found. The new office is in an interesting location, within walking distance of the Houses of Parliament, St James' Park and Victoria. We hope that work on the new offices will start soon and be ready for staff to move into by the end of January 2018.

Rent will go down by 1% again this April, as part of a four year rent reduction. You will receive a letter in February 2018 with next year's new amounts payable.

Julie Hodges has joined English Rural in October 2017 working part time as our Services Assistant. Joining English Rural from a varied secretarial/admin background in legal, sales, education and most recently retail property. Her role is primarily to assist the housing and maintenance teams by supporting the effective delivery of housing and property services to the Association's residents.

Value for Money Statement: English Rural is a social business registered as a Community Benefit Society and an organisation that is committed to using all available resources to deliver a simple stated purpose, to deliver affordable homes with and for rural communities. As an organisation, English Rural is looking to improve the ways that their assets and resources are deployed, in order to provide the very best of services whilst maintaining control of the costs. English Rural has produced a 'Value for Money Statement' which illustrates the link between its organisational objectives and its outcomes. This statement can be viewed in full in the news and events section of the website.

Just a quick reminder... If you change any of your contact details for example, telephone numbers, email address, please let your Housing Manager know so that they can update your records.



Improving rural lives together

The Plunkett Foundation has identified a need to help those that are socially isolated within rural communities and therefore suffer from extreme loneliness. English Rural has helped fund a new initiative alongside the Plunkett Foundation to highlight what is fast becoming a serious issue within these communities. Rural life isn't always easy, with the geographical isolation, cuts to vital services, poor availability of jobs, adequate public transport and poor broadband connections, people can very quickly become isolated. On 6th December the Plunkett Foundation will launch its campaign to highlight loneliness within rural communities. More information can be found at:

<https://www.plunkett.co.uk/>

There are many things that can be done by individuals and communities to try and combat loneliness and isolation. Firstly, if you have vulnerable or elderly neighbours, try popping in and having a cup of tea and a chat. Introduce yourself to any new neighbours that may have moved into the area. However, it's not only the elderly and vulnerable that suffer from isolation and loneliness, people of all ages are at risk. Try to see if there are any local clubs or meetings that you could join. Many rural communities have village halls that run all sorts of activities. Even popping along to the local Parish Council meeting can be an opportunity to meet new people in your area. There are many organisations that can be found to help people finding themselves in this position. The following article provides a wealth of links to organisations that can help start to tackle the issue: <http://www.countryliving.co.uk/wellbeing/advice/a935/lonliness/>

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:

0808 168 6246

(out of hours)

OFFICE

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

English Rural Housing Association

Astolat
Coniers Way
New Inn Lane
Burpham
Guildford
Surrey
GU4 7HL

Tel: 020 7820 7930

Fax: 020 7820 7931

HOUSING MANAGERS

Regional Housing Manager

Jade Clark

Mobile: 07752 126686

Housing Manager

Steven Bland

Mobile: 07552 126678

Housing Manager

Luke Versteeg

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