

# Tenant Topics

Newsletter for  
Two Rivers Housing  
Tenants



## MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME



Ben Taylor (left) and James Bartlett have more productive time with fewer wasted appointments.

Our repairs team can carry out five more carpentry or seven more plumbing jobs every single week, since the launch of our new appointments process.

This has cut the amount of time wasted, giving us back two extra days a week in which to fix tenants' issues and saving nearly £2,000 each month.

Earlier this year we faced, on average, 35 wasted visits to tenants' homes every week because no-one was at home to let us in. That's a total of 17½ hours when we couldn't get on with our repairs, which was

particularly frustrating given the huge demand for our operatives.

So in April, we started a project which means:

- we now take the number of someone who will be contactable on the day of the appointment.
- the operative will call this number when he is on his way to the appointment to introduce himself and give an estimated time of arrival.
- if there is no reply, office staff will also try.
- if contact is still not made, he will move on to the next appointment.

## Autumn 2014

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- the tenant will then need to contact us to make a new appointment.

By early August, wasted visits had reduced dramatically to six per week, totalling three hours. This massive improvement means we can spend more time fixing problems, rather than driving around and finding people are out when we call.

If you have to postpone any appointment with us, please let us know in advance.

**TRH Annual Review 2013/14 included  
inside this bumper issue**

Centre page pull-out



[www.tworivershousing.org.uk](http://www.tworivershousing.org.uk)

# WE'VE GOT THE POWER!



Kevin Alexander, our Head of Contract Services, tops up the charge on the electric car at Rivers Meet.

We've been putting an electric car through its paces recently to see if it will help us to cut travel expenses and reduce vehicle emissions.

Our office was fitted with electric car charging points, and colleagues have been able to use them to top up the Nissan Leaf on loan from Five Acres garage.

We have more than 25 vans and trucks, which are mainly used by our repairs and maintenance teams, plus other staff use their own cars for work trips. If the electric vehicle is a hit, it could help cut the cost and environmental impact of the

many short, local journeys we make.

Various initiatives have already been introduced to reduce the miles travelled by our staff. These include providing task information to the repairs team via hand-held computers to minimise the number of office visits, and supporting staff to work from home or an alternative base, and scheduling their visits to make best use of their journeys.

We also use local suppliers wherever possible to further cut the distances travelled in the course of delivering our business.

# 76 NEW HOMES FOR THE FUTURE

Two Rivers is investing £7.6 million into building 76 energy-efficient homes over the next three years.

This will be topped up with £2.1 million of Government money, helping to address the shortage of homes in this area that people can afford to live in.

Most will be one-bedroom flats and two-bedroom houses, to respond to demand for smaller homes, and the majority will be available for affordable rent. Some will be earmarked for Shared Ownership, giving a helping hand to those who want to take a first step towards owning their own home.

We will also fall into line with the Government's wishes and sell some of our inefficient and less popular properties, as we can



We look forward to celebrating the opening of many more homes over the next three years.

build two new homes for every one we sell.

"This is an excellent result for people looking for a home they can afford," said Matt Hunt, our Director of Development and Asset Management. "There is huge demand for smaller homes from families, young people who want to live independently and older people looking to down-size, partly due to changes to the benefits system."

"Now we have the funds in place, we can create homes people want to live in, built to modern standards and incorporating features to keep household bills low."

Our thanks to Forest of Dean District Council for supporting our proposals.

# OPENING UP THE FOREST



If you don't drive or have a car, living in a rural area like ours can be a challenge to getting out-and-about. Whether it's doing the shopping, going to the

doctor's or visiting friends, there are limits to what you can do.

That's where Forest Routes comes in. This Lottery-funded scheme brings four community transport providers together to provide a reasonably-priced local service across the whole district, for those who don't have access to their own transport. All four are not-for-profit organisations, so the fares go straight back into funding the service.

Transport comes in three forms: dial-a-ride, voluntary cars and buses that run to a set timetable. They are provided by Bream Voluntary Car Service, Lydcare, Lydney Dial-a-Ride and Newent Dial-a-Ride.

If you would like to know more, please look at the website [www.forestroutes.org](http://www.forestroutes.org), email [info@forestroutes.org](mailto:info@forestroutes.org) or call **01594 812613**.

## A SUMMER OF FUN

The circus came to towns throughout the Forest this summer and nearly recruited a handful of new performers from our tenants' families!

Youngsters converged on the 'big top' in Newent, Sedbury, Cinderford and Coleford throughout July and August and practised a range of circus skills at our free workshops. We also laid on face painting and a barbeque.

*"We try to help parents entertain their children over the long school summer holidays and these workshops were a fun way to spend a couple of hours learning some new skills and perfecting their balance and co-ordination,"* said Emma Towler, our Community Involvement Co-ordinator.

We hope you enjoyed them.



Three-year-old Lila Abdul Rahman quickly masters the art of stilt-walking.



The Two Rivers BBQ is a popular refuelling stop!

# ALARMS START TO COME OUT

More than 250 emergency alarms have been removed from our HomePlus properties, after residents voted to take charge of their own future arrangements.

Jason Phillippidis of our Repairs team is dedicated to this project and has been removing equipment from inside tenants' homes and filling in the holes left behind. Once he has removed equipment from inside the majority of homes, we will tidy up outside by removing redundant wiring and metal boxes.

This project began when we consulted 1,100 tenants affected by funding changes at Gloucestershire County Council. The vast majority asked us to take the alarms out and Jason started work in July to remove them all.

People living in schemes with facilities such as a communal lounge and laundry will be visited between October and January, as we are linking this work with adjustments to the door entry systems, to keep disruption and costs to a minimum.

Meanwhile, our HomePlus team, which looks after those living in our sheltered schemes, is working with residents to make sure the process runs smoothly and helping them to find alternative alarm suppliers, if they need assistance.

All tenants affected by this work will be contacted directly with details of removal dates but, if you have any questions, please speak to your Neighbourhood Assistant or contact a member of the HomePlus team on **0800 316 0897**.



Jason Phillippidis is gradually removing alarms from our HomePlus schemes.

# WARDEN SCHEME A SUCCESS!



Year 5 and 6 students at St John's C of E Academy in Coleford have completed their year as the first ever Two Rivers Junior Wardens.

Certificates were presented at the end of the project to improve the neighbourhood around their school, which is also where many of them live in Two Rivers homes.

Initiatives included a street survey, litter-picking and monitoring motorists' speed, supported by the Forest of Dean District Council Street Wardens and Gloucestershire Police.

Jon Coe, our Director of Customer Services said: *"The enthusiasm of the children and everyone else involved has been infectious, creating a positive community vibe we hope they will build upon."*

We are now introducing the Junior Warden scheme to schools in Cinderford and Newent.

# NEW HOME IS “A DREAM COME TRUE”

A dream has come true for a family recently settled into one of our brand new homes.

Mary Burson and her three young daughters were badly in need of a boost after a string of tragic circumstances, and the move to Linton Wood Meadow has turned into just the tonic they needed.

The family moved to the three-bedroom home in July. They were fortunate to qualify as the new homes were earmarked for people with a proven local connection. With family living in and around the village, and two of the girls already at Gorsley Goffs School, they were in prime position to take up residence.

Mrs Burson previously lived in Newent, with her daughters, Ruby (eight), Chloe (five) and two-year-old Daisy.

*“It’s a dream come true,” she said. “We are so happy here. With Daisy starting playschool at Gorsley Goffs soon, it would have meant three trips to and from the school, but now I can easily walk there, rather than travelling from Newent.”*



Clive Wilce receives his poster from happy young artist Ruby and her family – mum Mary and sisters Daisy and Chloe.

Ruby was so delighted with her new home – and her new bedroom, in particular – that she made a thank you poster for our Neighbourhood Housing Advisor, Clive Wilce!

The Linton Wood Meadow scheme in Gorsley has provided six new homes for affordable rent and four for Shared Ownership for local families.

## FLYING THE FLAG



Edith Brooks and Roy Turley with the Parkside standard.

A new flag proudly flutters in the breeze above Parkside these days, making a statement about the residents and their connection with the Forest of Dean.

Designed by Roy Turley and painted by Parkside resident Edith Brooks, the flag had its first airing at the summer fete, which raised a whopping £1,007 for the social fund.

## DONATION

Weekly raffles at the Ryelands HomePlus scheme’s coffee mornings have raised a fantastic £250 for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

Anne Richards, a local volunteer, expressed her delight when she collected the cheque, which will go towards training the dogs and their handlers. She was joined by Geraldine Newman and her three-year-old dog Candy.

# THE SECRET OF LONGEVITY?

Could Coleford hold the answer to a long life? There must be something in the air as three of our residents have now achieved their 100th birthdays.

Our Chief Executive Garry King joined the latest birthday celebrations, and helped Barbara Jefferies to mark the occasion at a special party with her daughter Jill and around 50 friends and family at Parkside HomePlus scheme.

The party went on all afternoon, with cake, drinks and a



Garry King joins the birthday celebrations for Barbara Jefferies.

rendition of 'Bring me Sunshine' sung by Mrs Jefferies herself.

Mrs Jefferies has kept active over the years and is often found playing whist and sharing jokes with the other residents.

Mrs Jefferies is the third resident (we know of) to notch up this magnificent milestone. Her neighbour David Braby recently notched up 101 years, and Mary

Smith, who lives at Eastbourne Crescent, is just weeks away from joining him.

*"Mrs Smith is wonderful for her age, she is still quite spritely, and continues to enjoy her life,"* said Julie Shingles, our Neighbourhood Assistant. *"I am very proud to have her on my scheme and I enjoy our little chats."*



Mary Smith proudly shows her birthday card from the Queen.

## CITY FLATS ENJOY TLC

A Gloucester block of flats has enjoyed a helping of TLC after residents worked with us to create a better home for them and their families.

Feedback from the people living at Park End Road told us action was needed to improve security, the bin storage area and the general condition of the communal areas, and they agreed to work with us to achieve it.

The first task was to address problems with the bin storage

area, overflowing with rubbish from the 14 flats. We installed a padlock and a net cover to ensure the area was only accessible to the residents.

Then Gloucester City Council provided recycling advice to the residents, which reduced the amount of rubbish being thrown away.

After this, there was no stopping our Housing and Maintenance teams. They have improved the building security by installing new door and shed locks and



they have plans in the pipeline to make further enhancements to the building.

# YOUR RIGHT TO BUY

If you were a tenant of Forest of Dean District Council you may be entitled to buy the home you live in, and the Right to Buy scheme gives you up to 70% off the market value.

The Government has just increased the discount – up to a maximum of £77,000 – helping even more people to become home-owners. This will increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) each April.

Find out more by contacting our Home Ownership team on **0800 316 0897** or look at the website **www.communities.gov.uk/righttobuy**.

## THEY'RE ALL WINNERS!

Tenant Topics brings you three more tenants who have won cash from Two Rivers, and they all agree on one thing – it's so easy to pay your rent by Direct Debit.



Top prize-winner Tracy Edwardson will spend her £250 prize on home decorating.

Tracy Edwardson, who lives with her husband Billy and daughter Beth in Joys Green, said: "I was in arrears some years ago and, when I got myself straight, I decided to pay by Direct Debit. It's so much easier. The money

*goes out on the same day every month and I don't even have to think about it."*

That wise decision secured her a £250 windfall she will invest on decorating her living room.

Sharing her sentiments are Beryl Thomas of Coleford, and Susan Pillinger, who lives at Bream.

*"I've always paid by Direct Debit," said Susan. "It's easier and you can just forget about it."*

Both ladies promise to spoil their grandchildren with their respective winnings of £150 and £100.



Beryl Thomas' family will enjoy her £150 windfall.



Susan Pillinger says she'll spoil her grandchildren with her £100 winnings.

## £30 IF YOU SIGN-UP

If you'd like the chance to win a prize next year, you just have to pay your rent by Direct Debit continuously for 12 months or more. You'll be entered into a national draw where the top prize is to have your bills paid for a year, up to the value of £12,000.

There's also £30 waiting for every tenant who signs up for the first time, so what are you waiting for? Call us on **0800 316 0897** or email **incomecollectionteam@2rh.org.uk**.

# THE SHOW WENT ON!

We had a fantastic day welcoming you through the doors of our office in July and, although the weather wasn't on our side, it didn't stop us from having fun!

Many of you came to our Rivers Meet Open Day and took the chance to look around our bright, energy-efficient, eco office and enjoy a host of activities we laid on.

Along with tours of the office to find out more about what we do, we also had a circus skills workshop, demonstrations of how to grow your own vegetables and arrange flowers, information stands from a variety



*Brenton Holland takes on a different guise at the hands of our Home Ownership Manager Jasmine.*

of organisations, a relaxation and meditation workshop and face painting! And if that wasn't enough, we also had a BBQ and a free gift for everyone!

Luckily we had prepared for all eventualities so the torrential rain which continued for most of the event, didn't scupper our plans.

With marquees and gazebos in place, everyone could stay dry!

We received some fantastic feedback about our new office and were very proud to show you around, particularly to point out the range of eco-features that are really helping to keep our running costs to a minimum.

We hope everyone who came to the event enjoyed their day!



*Roger Dyer of Newent Allotment Association gives some tasty tips for growing vegetables at home.*

## FANCY A CHANGE?

Has your situation changed since you moved into your Two Rivers home? Do you want to live in a different area to be closer to work or your children's school? Maybe you just fancy a change?

Well, if you have been our tenant for at least one year, you are eligible to apply for an exchange.

HomeSwapper is the UK's largest service helping people to swap their house or flat. Simply register online and you will be matched to potential swaps. Whether you would like another Two Rivers property close to where you live now or a home somewhere else in the country with another social landlord, this site could find it for you.

However, you will need our permission before any exchange takes place so, if you would like more information about a property on **www.homeswapper.co.uk** or you think you have found someone else you would like to exchange with, please speak to your Neighbourhood Housing Advisor.

# BLAKENEY SWINGS INTO ACTION



Nancy Miller, Rose Peaty, Jane Cordier, Gillian Higgins and Anthea Greenaway put the 'bird's nest' swing through its paces.

Blakeney Community Green has swung into action again, adding a new feature to the children's play area.

We have been working with the group to secure funding for a new swing for the recreation ground. The large 'bird's nest' swing had been specially chosen as it can be enjoyed

by everyone in the community, including those with disabilities. The size and shape of the seat allows non-disabled friends or carers to join in the fun.

Our Community Projects Co-ordinator Jane Cordier managed to secure a £1,000 grant from Forest of Dean District Council, which was matched by the Forest of Deans Lions club. The

## UPCYCLE

If you're looking for household furniture or white goods – or you've got some you don't need any more – have you thought about upcycling?

The Forest Upcycling Project at Cinderford accepts donations that are then sold on at two different prices: one price for people on lower incomes, and the other for general buyers.

If you have items to donate or you're looking to furnish your home, why not visit [www.forestupcyclingproject.com](http://www.forestupcyclingproject.com) or call **01594 368240** to find out more?

rest of the money was raised through raffles at Blakeney's Senior Citizens' lunch club, which was organised by Rose Peaty, a member of the Blakeney Community Green group.

Rose said: *"The other day there was a young lady lying on it with her baby, quietly swinging back and forth. She looked so peaceful; it was beautiful to see."*

## IT'S SHOW TIME!

Christmas doesn't really start until our popular annual trip to the cinema, so this year's festivities officially begin on Saturday 6 December.

We're keeping the title of the family movie under wraps for a bit longer, but write the date and location (The Studio in

Coleford) on your calendar and look out for further details of our festive offer.

You'll need to take part in a survey about Tenant Topics to qualify for the draw for free tickets, so read this issue from cover-to-cover and prepare to tell us what you think!



Anyone for popcorn? Young cinema-goers queue up to watch *Frozen* – last year's Christmas family film.

# WINDFALL TO BEAT LONELINESS

Residents of Buttington Road in Sedbury are celebrating after receiving a Lottery grant of just over £8,000 to fight loneliness and bring together elderly or more vulnerable people within the area.

The grant gives residents of the HomePlus scheme the chance to start a number of clubs and classes, as well as going on day trips. They already have activities planned for the year, which include a trip to the theatre, travelling on the Forest railway and visiting a Victorian tea room. But first on the to-do list is to launch a knitting and art class.



*Jubilant scenes at Buttington Road as news comes through of their successful bid.*

Jane Cordier, our Community Projects Co-ordinator, who worked with residents to apply for the grant said: *"It's all about fighting loneliness and bringing*

*people together. The scheme has so much going on already and we want to encourage other people in Sedbury to join in!"*

## "IT'S LIKE WINNING THE LOTTERY!"



*Steve Parry-Hearn (centre right) at the King's Lodge site in Cinderford, finding out about Two Rivers' plans to provide more low-cost housing.*

Homes have been known to transform people's lives and one of our tenants said he "felt like I'd died and gone to heaven" when he heard he could move to a brand new Two Rivers house in the village where he was born.

David James and Carly Jones moved to Alvington in April. *"Never in my wildest dreams did we expect to get a brand new*

*place,"* said David. *"Now our whole quality of life has lifted. I wouldn't swap it for anything."*

Carly was equally impressed, and likened it to winning the Lottery, when she met our Chief Executive Garry King and Steve Parry-Hearn, the Labour Party's prospective parliamentary candidate on a recent visit.

Mr Parry-Hearn asked to meet us to discuss the shortage of affordable homes in rural areas, and to see some of our properties. Last year we finished 81 new homes, but more are needed to keep pace with demand.

*"I am very grateful to Two Rivers for providing quality homes, innovation, social responsibility and supporting the Forest of Dean economy,"* he said. *"Hearing a resident say that moving to their new Two*

*Rivers house was "like winning the Lottery" is a resounding testament to their superb work."*

## CALENDAR

We hope you take a little time to read the centre-page section of this issue of Tenant Topics, to get a flavour of some of the work we've been involved with over the last year.

It's designed to be easier to pick out the information but if you want to know more, please just get in touch.

And don't forget your 2015 calendar will be coming through the post at Christmas with your winter edition of Tenant Topics.

# STAY SAFE AND WARM THIS WINTER

The nights are drawing in and the heating will soon be needed so, if you have an open fire or solid fuel appliance, make sure you burn the right materials, to keep you safe this winter.

Smokeless coal and seasoned wood are the only fuel you should use. House coal is full of soot and sticks to the flue when it burns, causing serious damage – and you will be responsible for repairing and replacing anything damaged in this way.

Occasionally, we find tenants dicing with danger by sleeping in a room with an open fire, gas fire or solid fuel appliance, and we have to take urgent action

to protect them. This could mean capping off the fire. If you – or someone you know – is in this situation, please contact us to see how we might be able to help.

Our staff are trained to recognise issues that could compromise tenant safety, particularly those relating to gas and carbon monoxide. They recognise problems with appliances, fuel leaks and are familiar with emergency gas procedures and good practice.

If you have any questions relating to the use and safety of your heating system, please contact us for advice. Email [customerservices@2rh.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@2rh.org.uk) or call **0800 316 0897**.

# SAFETY RECALL

Do you use an old Beko, Flavel or Leisure gas cooker with a separate oven and grill?

If so, check the serial number as it could be emitting potentially fatal levels of carbon monoxide if used incorrectly.

The serial number is on a label in the bottom right hand rim of the lower oven.

If it starts with 03, 04, 05, 06, 07 or 08 you should call **0800 917 2018** or visit **www.beko.co.uk** urgently, for more information.

# TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO RELAX

A rare moment of peace and quiet away for Olivia Price in the garden of her Coleford primary school.

The garden was created following successful local fundraising, topped up with a £9,800 Big Lottery Fund grant secured by our Community Projects Co-ordinator, Jane Cordier. In return, the students, families and staff at St John's C of E Academy have a tranquil woodland garden and pond area to enjoy away from the hubbub of the playground.



# CENTIGEN IS CUTTING IT!

You may have noticed new vehicles parked on your road this summer and a new team arriving to cut the grass.

Our subsidiary company, Centigen Facilities Management, has taken on the grounds maintenance work and is managing our estates across the district.

We have received some very positive feedback about this new service and hope you have noticed a change. There are, however, still some improvements we would like to make by working with Centigen.

Reduced cuts, where there are four cuts in a year, take place in areas where there are a higher number of home owners, as there is no contribution towards the service.



With the new team in place, we are trying to gradually improve the service with a more efficient approach to the programme, which may include looking at ways to improve the look of some of these areas.

The team has also found an eco-efficient method of disposing of the waste, with 50% of the grass cuttings being turned into biogas or compost.

Centigen's team includes two apprentices working towards a level 2 certificate in work-based Horticulture.

Jason Bennett, a Two Rivers tenant who joined the 18-month apprenticeship scheme said: *"I have always wanted to go into landscaping and Centigen offered me this great opportunity. I'm really enjoying the work and getting out across the estates."*

## SUPPORTING YOUNG CARERS

Tenants who committed to pay their rent by Direct Debit this year have not only made their lives easier, but have helped to support local young carers without even knowing it!

This is because we made a donation to Gloucestershire Young Carers for every new signing in the first six months.

The charity supports more than 1,000 people under 24 who carry out significant caring tasks and are responsible for a family member, providing advice and a supportive network of other people in similar situations.

Ann Christian, who is one of our Board members, and our Income Collection Co-ordinator Karen Beard, met some of the



Board member Ann Christian (left) and Karen Beard (right) meet Hannah from the Gloucestershire Young Carers.

young carers recently when they went to present the £150 cheque.

### Contact us:

If you want this in large print, on audio CD or in another language.

Freephone **0800 316 0897** for landline Or lower cost **0300 100 0896** for mobile users.

Join the Two Rivers community on  @TRHousing and 



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