

# Tenant Topics

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## New homes will help village thrive



Work begins to build seven new homes at Churcham, led by (front row) John Francis, Chairman of the Parish Council, Christopher Hillidge, Tenant Board member at Two Rivers and Garry King, Chief Executive of Two Rivers.

Churcham parish councillors are delighted that work has started to build seven new affordable homes in their village.

The mix of flats, houses and a bungalow will be offered to people with a local connection to Churcham in the first instance, and are generating a lot of interest, even though the ground has only just been prepared.

The council identified a need for low-cost homes to rent in their village, researched the options and then worked with us to plan the site.

The type of properties and the mixture of one, two and three-bedroom homes means the scheme should appeal to all ages and needs. Five of the homes will be affordable rent, while the two three-bedroom houses will be Shared Ownership – the part-rent, part-buy option which helps people towards ultimately owning their home outright.

Kirsty Powell, our Head of Development (pictured second left), said: "Churcham is a very popular village and, thanks to the work carried out by the Parish Council, we are confident of the demand for these new homes which will suit single people, couples and families."

"It has been rewarding to work with a group of councillors who are so positive about the obvious need for new affordable homes in their area, and hope they will give a valuable boost to the community and its amenities."

The scheme is due to complete by the end of this year.





# Watch your inbox

April is the start of our new programme of home improvements and we will be getting in touch if you are on the schedule for next year.

This includes kitchen, bathroom, window and door replacement, heating improvements, electrical rewiring and other external work.

If your home is due for one or more of these, we will soon be writing to let you know, and to give you details of the

contractors. If we hold an email address for you, we will be sending your letter by email so, if you think you are in the programme, please keep an eye on your inbox to make sure you don't miss this important information.

If you have changed your email address and think we may not know it, please contact our Customer Service team or update your details through the 'My account' area of our website.

If we don't hold an email address for you, we will put the letter in the post.

Using email is a quicker, more reliable and efficient way of contacting people and it saves money on paper and postage which can be better invested in providing services. We will be using this more and more, where possible.

## SPRING FORWARD

Don't forget to change your clocks and properly welcome the spring into your life!

The important date is **Sunday 26 March** when the clocks go **forward** at 2am by one hour and give us more daylight.



## Combat fear of crime

We are proud to be an ambassador for Crimestoppers UK, helping to spread the word that everyone has the right to live without the fear of crime.

Crimestoppers is a UK-wide charity that enables people to report crimes anonymously, either on the phone or online. You will not be asked for your name and no personal details are recorded. You are not required to make a statement to the police or appear in court.

The service is often used by people who are unsure about what they might know, whether it is important

enough or don't want to 'waste police time'. It is also there for those who may be involved in a crime themselves and talking to the police isn't an option.

Please make a note of the number and help to spread the word amongst your neighbours, friends and family.

We all want to live in safer communities and, together, we can make a difference



# Follow Timmy's adventures

Our estate agency TwoCan has been joined by a new – feathered – member of the team!

Timmy the toucan flew in to Rivers Meet last month to be the new 'face' of TwoCan, and he's been busy making a name for himself already.

He wooed our staff on Valentine's Day, joined in the fun at the Holiday Club, made pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and gate-crashed our Top 100 celebrations. We think he's going to be trouble!!

You can follow the adventures of #TimmyToucan on **Twitter (@TwoCanEA)** and **Facebook (/twocan.estate/)**. He'll also be making regular appearances on our own Two Rivers social media pages



Timmy is welcomed to the office by Helen Freeman and Annabelle Price



Timmy shows off his culinary skills on Shrove Tuesday

## Updating our records

Our Neighbourhood Housing Advisors are currently visiting all tenants to update our records and check we are providing the right kind of services.

This might mean providing more aids and adaptations to help you around the home, offering extra support, changing the way we contact you and checking you have all the services you need.

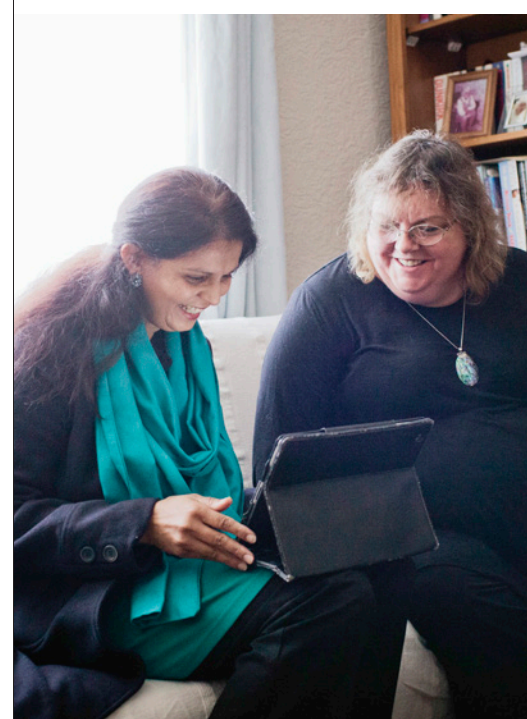
We will also be verifying the information we hold about you is correct, and we will ask to see identification for everyone living in your home.

This information will be stored safely, in accordance with strict data protection guidelines.

Many of these visits will be made without an appointment, when staff happen to be in your area. However, if someone calls at your home and says they are from Two Rivers Housing, please ask to see proof of their identity before you let them in. If in any doubt, ask them to wait outside while you ring our office to check they are who they say they are. We promise they won't be offended!

If you are out when we call, we will leave a card to let you know, and perhaps suggest a new date and time.

Thank you for helping with our tenancy audit.





# We're 'outstanding'!



It's official. We're an 'outstanding' organisation and one of the top companies to work for in the UK!

We've climbed 23 places in the 'Best Companies to Work For' list of not-for-profit organisations in the last 12 months, to reach number 23, putting us firmly in the group of 'outstanding' performers.

Garry King, Chief Executive, said: "This is amazing news. We are competing

against some large businesses, and only those with the highest level of overall staff engagement make it onto the list. We have improved every year, but this is better than I ever dared to hope we could achieve.

"It shows that we're doing something really positive in the way we treat our staff and create a great working environment. If people feel well-supported, listened to and involved,

they will give their best – and that means our tenants, customers, suppliers and partners will receive a quality service."

The results of last year's survey will be shared with managers, helping them to learn from the feedback and make the organisation an even better place to work.

## Watch this space!

A brand new feature is being added to our website this spring, allowing you to book a repair appointment online.

This exciting development puts you in the driving seat of identifying the fault, reporting it and booking an appointment for our operative to call – at a time that suits you.

You will be able to choose a morning or afternoon slot and, if you need to, you'll be able to amend or cancel it online, too.

We hope to launch this new feature in the summer but you'll need to register with 'My account' on our website to be able to use it.

## Emergency repairs?



Or call us, so that we can contact the engineer and avoid wasted journeys

You can do this at any time so, why not register now so that you're ready as soon as it goes live? And in the meantime, you'll be able to see your current rent statement, a schedule of

home improvement assessments and the date your boiler service is due, as well as update the personal details we hold for you.

## Join our forum

Our brand new Tenants' Forum has just been launched, bringing residents together who want to change things for the better.

This new group will identify issues with our service or their community, then work with us to improve them for the benefit of everyone who lives in their neighbourhood.

The Tenants' Forum is in its infancy, and is already represented by a good mix of men and women of all ages which will ensure a cross-section of topics and opinions.

"Our first meeting was a good start, and gives us something useful to build on," said Francois Jensen, our Community Engagement Advisor. "I think those who attended welcomed the opportunity to share their issues with others, and to realise others had similar experiences.

"Members have taken away issues to investigate themselves, and I've brought back a couple of things to discuss with colleagues in the office."

The Tenants' Forum will meet four times a year and anyone interested in joining should contact our Community Engagement team.



Owen Chandler from our Welfare, Benefit and Debt team hands over the latest collection of food from Two Rivers staff to volunteers at Lord's Larder – Adrian, Gee and Colette.

## Food parcels are a lifeline

Foodbanks have, sadly, become a common feature and the number of people relying on them goes up every year.

More and more local families are struggling to make ends meet and, last year, we issued over 170 food parcels – that's more than twice as many as in 2015.

Our staff have now set up a permanent collection box at the office, where we can regularly donate food and other household items to pass on to the Newent foodbank, The Lord's Larder.

Food parcels can be a lifeline and they are available to low income households at times of crisis.

"Parents will skip meals to make sure their children can eat and the foodbank helps to relieve the stress – and hunger – for a few days," explained Owen Chandler, of our Welfare, Benefit and Debt team.

"It can also be a particular problem during school holidays when children don't have access to the free school meals served during term-time, and this was the inspiration behind our very popular Holiday Club."

If you are struggling to manage financially, and would like some confidential advice, you can speak to our specialist Welfare, Benefit and Debt team. Call us on **0800 316 0897**.



## NEW MONEY – NEW HOMES

We have secured just over £1.1 million from the Homes and Communities Agency to build 35 more homes in the county.

We put in our bid for this additional money last year and have been granted the funds to build 10 Rent to Buy and 25 Shared Ownership homes.

We already plan to build at least 300 new homes by March 2020, and this new funding is extra. We will now start looking for suitable sites.



# Homes preserve history



BEFORE



...AND AFTER

The site of the former British School in Gloucester is being given a new lease of life as we support the regeneration of the area through a new 22-home development.

The scheme will significantly improve the derelict Wellington Street scene, and we are preserving the school's history by incorporating the old flagstone and memorial stones in the finished project.

The site lies within a conservation area, and we have worked closely with planners and conservation experts to safeguard its heritage and neighbouring listed buildings.

These new one and two-bedroom affordable flats will have energy-efficiency features built into them, and will provide excellent affordable city centre accommodation when they are complete next spring.

Stephen Ingram and Matt Cavill of our Development team put up the banners at our first Tandem Living site in Newent



## The earth moves!

Our first development through Tandem Living is in full swing.

Seven two-bedroom bungalows will be for affordable rent while the remaining 10 will be offered for sale. These homes are aimed at people aged 50 or over and we expect

building work to be complete by the end of this year.

All profit achieved through selling these homes – through our estate agency TwoCan – will be invested in building more affordable homes to help meet demand.

## Thanks for the memories



A memory box is helping some of our residents to stir their thoughts and trigger discussion about events from their past, and combat the effects of dementia.

Dementia is a growing problem in this county and 800,000 people have been diagnosed with the disease in the UK. Two-thirds of those still live in their own home and we have trained our staff as Dementia Friends to raise awareness and offer support.

A couple of coffee mornings have been held at our centres recently where a memory box has been used to help our tenants to recall people and past events. A typical discussion begins with "I remember when..." and encourages others to share their recollections.

Marion enjoyed reflecting on the past at our Worcester Road event

**"We are very keen to support our tenants who have been diagnosed with dementia and these memory boxes can be used as reminiscence therapy,"** said Ann Pugh, Neighbourhood Assistant.

**"Sitting down together and exploring a collection of items from the past can help to open the lines of communication which people with dementia can find particularly difficult."**

**"Through events like these, we can help to create more dementia-friendly communities and signpost people to the various support networks available."**

## Bursary awards duo

Our awarding panel has met and two lucky tenants will benefit from this year's bursary to help them with their training and study.

The TRH David Garnett Bursary was set up in 2015 to recognise the contribution of our former Chair, and support tenants looking to learn new

skills or develop their knowledge to help them in their work.

Applications were invited at the end of last year and interviews held in January. As a result, we have agreed to help two tenants with very different aspirations, and we will introduce you to them in future issues of Tenant Topics.



Our bursary gives tenants the chance to learn new skills and perhaps start their own business

## Be a bright spark!

Firefighters were called to a number of our properties last year to tackle fires caused by electrical appliances.

Most of these were preventable so it's worth remembering a few key points to try to avoid this happening to you.

- Check electrical leads and plugs for wear and tear, frayed leads, exposed wires and faulty wiring. Replace them if you find damage – never try to mend them.
- Never run cables under mats or carpets.
- Never cut off sealed plugs to re-use them.
- Don't overload sockets. Try and keep to one plug per socket.
- Always use the right fuse to prevent overheating.
- Keep electrical appliances clean, in good working order and regularly serviced, particularly washing machines and tumble dryers that may be left on overnight.
- New appliances should display the British or European safety mark. If the appliance is second-hand, always have it checked by a qualified electrician before using it.

Look out for the danger signs:

- Plugs or sockets that are hot to touch.
- Plugs or sockets with scorch marks.
- Fuses that blow for no reason.
- Flickering lights.

Just because there's no flame doesn't mean there isn't a risk, and electric wires don't even need to touch anything for a spark to jump and start a fire.

And finally, test your smoke alarms regularly. Their early warning could save your life.





The arrival of spring means the garden is coming to life again, and there's probably a lot to do to keep it in check. Perhaps you think the house could do with freshening up?

If you would like some help with painting or gardening - on a regular or one-off basis - our Handyperson Plus service is ready to come to your aid.

Handyperson Plus has traditionally offered help with decorating, gardening and plumbing tasks – for a fee. Now, following discussion with tenants, the list of services has been extended to include fitting internal doors and putting up garden fences and gates.

Please give us a call on **0800 316 0897** or email **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** for a quote.

This service is in addition to the free Handyperson service, which is still available if you need help putting up curtain rails, blinds, shelves or pictures or assembling flat-pack furniture, adjusting doors or cupboard doors and drawers.

Do get in touch if you need to book our Handyperson.

# That's handy!

Our Handyperson Plus service can help with a range of jobs around your home and garden



## A route through the Forest

Good transport is vital for people living in a rural area, and even more so if they are older or have a disability.

This is where Forest Routes comes in – a Lottery-funded partnership that offers community transport across the Forest of Dean for people of all ages.

We recognise the importance of Forest Routes for our tenants, so we teamed up with the group to host a series of

events at our schemes to promote its service.

Francois Jensen, our Community Engagement Advisor explained: *"It is important all our tenants feel as if they can get to where they need to be, regardless of where they live. Forest Routes can offer a lifeline to our tenants, helping them to feel less isolated and more able to get out and about in their community."*

Forest Routes has several car and minibus services:

- Bream Voluntary Car Service: **01594 560257**
- Lydcare: **01594 860143**
- Lydney Dial-a-Ride: **01594 843809**
- Newent Dial-a-Ride: **01531 821227**

If you would like to find out more about Forest Routes, call **01594 812613** or go to **www.forestroutes.org**.

Lyndon Biddle and Celia Wear of Forest Routes, at a recent information event at St Barts in Newent



## EVENTS CALENDAR

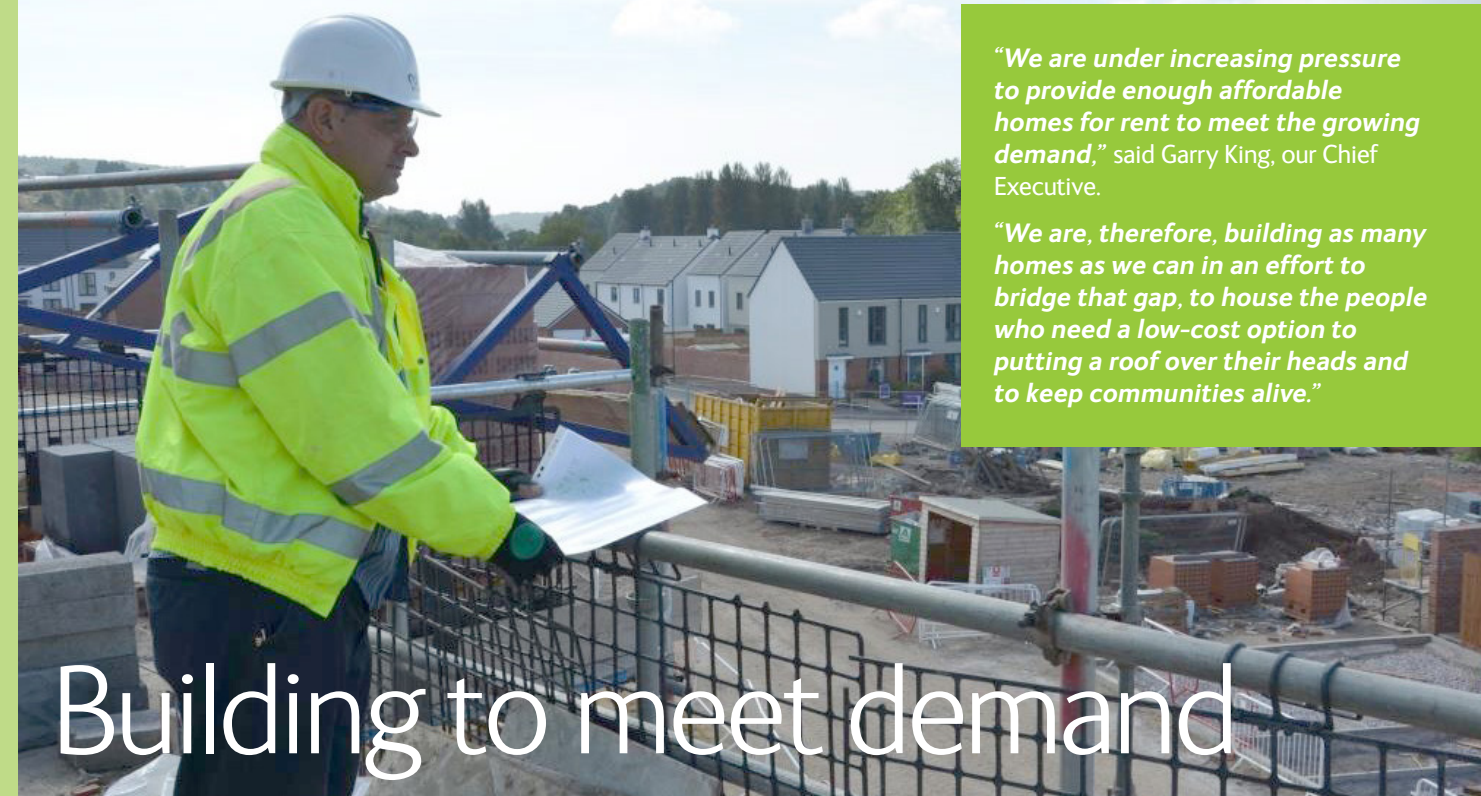
Two Rivers Housing regularly holds activities, information and social events in your area and you can find these in our website events calendar.

Some of these events are organised by us and others are led by organisations you may be interested in, such as health, transport and energy.

The calendar is easy to use and we're updating it all the time, so take a look (it's under the 'News and library' tab on the top menu) and do come along!



We need to build more affordable homes to keep pace with demand



## Building to meet demand

The average price of a home in Gloucestershire is nearly £261,000 – almost 10 times the average salary.

Those renting privately spend an average £700 a month – almost one-third of their average income – or join the long waiting list for a housing association property to become available.

Whichever way people choose to put a roof over their heads, there is still an overall shortage of homes.

Research has revealed the crisis in our county, and we need an extra 50,000 homes by 2030 to be able to keep pace with demand. This includes homes to buy, to rent privately, to rent at low cost and to part-rent, part-buy – suitable for people of all ages and incomes.

*"We are under increasing pressure to provide enough affordable homes for rent to meet the growing demand,"* said Garry King, our Chief Executive.

*"We are, therefore, building as many homes as we can in an effort to bridge that gap, to house the people who need a low-cost option to putting a roof over their heads and to keep communities alive."*

We are involved in a county-wide debate to find creative and lasting solutions for current and future generations, whilst continuing to build more homes. We will build at least 300 extra properties by 2020.

## Thank you Gill

Gill Robins, one of our long-standing Tenant Board members, has recently stepped down after more than a decade of supporting Two Rivers Housing.



The December meeting was her last, when she handed the reins over to Rita Jones, who has been a 'shadow' Board member since last summer.

We have all appreciated Gill's challenge and contribution over the years, not only to the Board but also to other groups such as our Resident Scrutiny Group and Disability and Carers Forum.

We all send our very best wishes to Gill for the future.

## Follow us on Facebook and Twitter

Stay up-to-date with the latest news and information from Two Rivers Housing - follow us on Facebook and Twitter.







Please come and visit – but don't forget to book first!

## Book a visit

We like to welcome tenants to our office however, if you are planning to visit and you want to see a specific person, please do call ahead and make an appointment.

Many of our staff are out-and-about and there's no guarantee they will be here if you call in unannounced.

So, a quick call or email before you set out could save you time and a possible wasted journey.

## CHASING THE DEBT

Most of our tenants keep up-to-date with paying their rent but a few fall into arrears and then move on, perhaps hoping they will leave the debt behind them.

The majority of our income comes from rent and it is important for all our tenants who do pay regularly that we chase those who leave us owing money. We will, therefore, take steps to recover the money, which could include Small Claims action through the courts.

Sometimes this means we have to track them down to other parts of the country. Recently we took a former tenant to court in Liverpool where she is now living, and the judge ordered her to repay the £1,800 she owed, plus our legal costs.

*"It is not fair on the rest of our tenants if we let people get away with owing us money," explained Rachel Smith, Head of Housing. "Whether it's non-payment of rent or money due to us because their home has been damaged, we will do all we can to recover the costs."*

## Holiday Club is a 'sell-out'

The importance of a healthy breakfast cannot be underestimated, and families attending our half-term Holiday Club couldn't agree more!

Word has clearly spread that there's a great morning of entertainment on offer, as our latest event attracted a record number of 140 people, and we even had to turn people away.

Children tucked into porridge, toast, fruit and yogurt, made new friends and enjoyed a range of arts and crafts, face-painting, board games and toys. The new toddler area was also popular.

We were supported by our TwoCan estate agency team, and everyone got involved with sticker books, glitter and helping children with their reading. We were also joined by adult education and NHS representatives who gave advice on immunisation.

Michelle Gardener brought along her children Lily (10) and Todd (five). *"This is the third Holiday Club we have come to and they just get busier. We have had a great time again and really recommend the Club. It is especially good at this time of the year when the weather's not good and offers a great opportunity for the children to have fun and play."*

Julie Burlow, Community Engagement Team Leader said: *"These clubs provide*



Todd, Michelle and Lily Gardener enjoy some Holiday Club fun with Julie Burlow

*important opportunities for children and parents to have something nutritious to eat, to socialise, have fun and gain advice and support if wanted."*

We hope to hold more events throughout the year, so keep an eye out for adverts on social media and our website.

## Watch out – wardens about!

Litter and dog mess around their homes and school have been frustrating pupils at Severnbanks Primary in Lydney.

The children taking part in our Junior Wardens scheme asked *"Don't people*

*have any respect?"* after counting more than 75 dog messes in Harrison Way alone, when they surveyed the area.

On a positive note, they agreed they like where they live because the people are

friendly and they are close to friends and shops.

The Junior Wardens project encourages children to take pride in their neighbourhood. Aside from assessing the cleanliness of the area, the children have been picking litter, monitoring the speed of motorists and designing safety posters.

The scheme benefits from strong support from Forest of Dean District Council Street Wardens and Gloucestershire Police. It has run successfully in schools for more than three years and we'd like to extend it to youth clubs or groups of neighbours.

If you think this would help to make the area where you live a better place, please contact our Community Engagement team for a chat.

*Students at Severnbanks Primary School keep an eye on the speed of motorists in Lydney*



## Smarter energy

If you've seen adverts featuring Gaz and Leccy promoting the national rollout of smart meters, you may have wondered if this was something for you.

Well, it is!

A smart meter is a modern gas and electricity meter that tells you about your energy use and, by the end of 2020, you will have been offered one – free of charge – by your supplier.

The meter collects your usage data and sends it directly to your energy supplier so your bills will always be based on actual – rather than estimated – readings, and there are pay-as-you-go versions for those with pre-payment meters.

You will also have an 'in-home display unit' that gives you real-time information on how much you are using and spending so you can see what's expensive to run and look for ways to cut your bills.

If you'd like to know more about the benefits of smart meters you can read our 'Smart meter fact sheet'. This is in the 'Library' on our website.

Alternatively, visit [www.smartenergygb.org](http://www.smartenergygb.org).

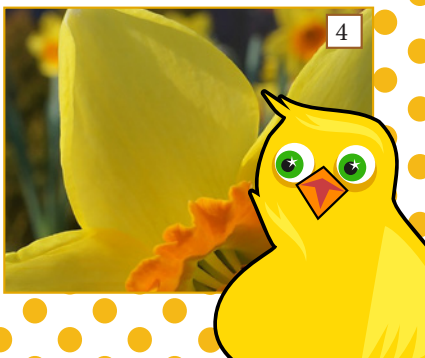
Then, if you decide you would like a smart meter you can contact your energy supplier. You'll find their details on your bill or their website.







# Festive tea break



Our Christmas spot-the-difference competition was a bit tougher than usual, which means everyone who managed to find all 10 differences deserves our congratulations.

However, there can only be one winner and this time the prize goes to Faith Cowling of Gorsley. Well done Faith.

If you would like the chance to win a £15 gift card, try our photograph competition. The pictures are all close-ups of familiar objects with an Easter theme. Simply identify them all and send your completed entry to:

Communications team  
Two Rivers Housing  
Cleeve Mill Lane  
Newent  
Gloucestershire  
GL18 1DS

Before **24 April 2017**.

**Correctly identify all four items and you will be entered into our prize draw to win a £15 gift voucher.**

**Best of luck!**

**Object 1**

**Object 2**

**Object 3**

**Object 4**

Name:

Address:

Tel number/email:

## Centigen's birthday awards

Centigen celebrated its third birthday at the start of this year with news of two national awards.

Our subsidiary company, that generates money to gift to Two Rivers, was named 'Best Grounds Maintenance and Commercial Cleaning Business – Bristol' and winner of the 'Customer Services Excellence Award' – both awarded by Build Magazine.

The magazine says its "prestigious awards are dedicated to recognising those hidden heroes within the facilities management role for their excellence and dedication to their profession."

Centigen has been steadily growing its business since it launched in January 2014, focusing mainly on grounds maintenance and commercial cleaning.

Over the last 18 months, it has secured an increasing number of clients in the Bristol area, and this has been recognised in one of the awards.

Centigen is now expanding into property repairs and maintenance and is working with several local construction companies to look after their new developments.



## Contact us:

Please tell us if you would like this in large print or on audio CD.

Freephone

**0800 316 0897**

Email

**customerservices@2rh.org.uk**

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