

Lusher greens, higher standards promised by new gardens team

From a shortlist of three, grounds maintenance contractor **Groundscapes** was last month signed up to tend all your green spaces and shared gardens except the Highbury View garden

Tenants Diane, Janice and Franck helped us vet all three firms bidding for the contract. Groundscapes won with an appealing list of offers.

Good start

Top of the list was an undertaking to first bring your green spaces up to a higher standard, for free.

The flower bed opposite our Morland Mews office is one spot that will benefit. Now looking rather flat it will be plumped up and replanted.

A lovely if neglected pink marble fountain in the park, which long years ago quenched the thirst of passing cattle, will also be restored.

Groundscapes has also promised a plant giveaway early on, maybe with free compost too for those of you tending your own greenery.

They will be dipping into their pockets to help fund this year's funday on 31 August. Look out for free goodies from Groundscapes for those of you with green fingers.

Finally, if standards slip you can take it up with them by contacting Groundscapes' in-house customer service team on ☎ 07546 305 363 or ✉ Avni.Raci@scapes.co.uk

The lovely old marble cattle trough, below, looks set for a clean up



Looking up: Diane, Franck and Janice helped put Groundscapes through their paces

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HELP WITH YOUR RENT OR OTHER ESSENTIAL BILLS FROM OUR IN-HOUSE EXPERTS

If you are struggling with rent or household bills please get in touch with us to book a meeting or advice session (see story below right on our new drop-in advice sessions).

If you live at **Highbury View** get in touch with **Colette Lyons** who can visit you at home or meet you in her office.

To contact the housing and communities team:

☎ 020 7704 2324

✉ info@barnsbury.org

DIARY GOES PUBLIC!

Housing officer Nicky Anderson is now posting her weekly diary in the door window at 60 Morland Mews so you can check to see if she is in the office and available before calling in.



LOCAL EXPERT HELP AND ADVICE THAT YOU CAN CONTACT DIRECT

Help on your doorstep

Advice and help with budgeting and debt. Open Mon to Friday, 10am to 4pm. ✉ connect@helponyourdoorstep.com
☎ 020 3931 6080
☎ text 020 3931 6080

Citizens Advice Bureau

222 Upper Street,
London N1 1XR ☎0344 488 9626

For energy-saving advice give **SHINE** a call ☎ 020 7527 2001
✉ shine@islington.gov.uk.

For help and advice on money matters call the **Islington Money** advice team
☎ 020 7527 8600.

Housing team's expert advice is helping you get on top of the bills

We're hearing cheering news from those of you who have come to us recently asking for help with rent arrears or rising household bills

Rent arrears slowly coming down

There has been a much needed drop in rent arrears over the past 10 months, down to £135k since last October's high of £168k.

Doing the maths

Driving this is our expanded team of in-house expertise (**housing officer Nicky Anderson** and **independent living officer Colette Lyons**) and a growing willingness by many of you to ask for help with your arrears and bills.

With Nicky's help one of you was able to pay back arrears of £2000 in one lump sum.

At Highbury View, another tenant has told us: 'I've never been so well off in my life!'

Helped by Colette, some Highbury View tenants are now paying lower water rates or being paid an attendance allowance.

'The only income for a lot of our older tenants is the state pension,' says housing and communities manager Asif Mahmood. 'This has made a huge difference to them.'

Your rent keeps the roof over your head. If you are struggling with costs please talk to us.

New twice-weekly drop-in advice sessions: quick fix or book ahead

Starting this month Asif Mahmood and Nicky Anderson will hold our first new **twice-weekly drop-in sessions** where you can either get a quick fix solution to a problem or set a date for a longer discussion.

Mobile service

The sessions will be at different sites each week to help you pick one close to home for confidential help with the rent, your tenancy, a utility bill or a support need.

'They will work best if you book ahead,' Nicky warns. 'We don't want so many turning up that we end up unable to help you all.'

'The plan is to use a session to get an idea of what you need,' she says. 'We may be able to sort it out then. If it's complex we can book a longer meeting with you.'

The new sessions don't mean you can't drop into Morland Mews for help at other times but will give you a better chance of catching Asif or Nicky when they are free to help.

The drop-in sessions will be on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10am to 12 noon, with the first on 24 and 26 July. Lookout for our flyers to find out where the next sessions will be held.

Warmer homes work now well underway!

Energy efficiency works to the coldest homes on the Morland Mews estate are set to start in early August, just a little later than planned. Project manager **Avis Venning** reports



Homes in Lofting Road, left, are among those lined up for energy efficiency works by Purdy, pictured above with project manager Avis

© CHARLIE ROUND-TURNER

There'll be more energy saving ideas for you at our funday next month

Within just a few weeks work will start on the first of 76 homes lined up for 'retrofitting'. That's a big jump on our earlier target of 63 homes.

The project will be done in two stages and we expect the work to take about six months. Typical works we'll be doing indoors will include:

- * insulating lofts
- * upgrading heating control
- * installing mechanical ventilation
- * fitting low energy lighting
- * pending approval from Islington's planners, air source heat pumps for Pugin Court.

Some works will be done outside including cavity wall insulation and, again at Pugin Court and waiting on the planners, photovoltaic panels.

By the time *Barnsbury News* lands on your doormat we will have signed the contract with specialist builders Purdy, part of the Kinovo group.

Some of you may already have met Purdy staff at an open day held in our Morland Mews office in May. They discussed the proposed works but also shared energy-saving tips for lower bills and warmer homes.

Purdy's resident liaison officer will be stationed at our Morland Mews office throughout the works to sort out any problems or concerns.

We will be in touch with you directly very soon to agree a date for works if your home is one of the 76 ear-marked for energy efficiency works.

NEWS IN BRIEF

More Staying Connected visits are underway

If you haven't yet heard from us about your annual **Staying Connected** visit you should very soon get a letter. **Since January we have visited 72 of you in your own home.**

We started our Staying Connected visits late last year, at first calling on older tenants.

We found worrying levels of unreported need: 'Problems I didn't want to trouble you with'.

Almost all were matters we could easily sort out, like getting you better personal care, help with finances and free travel.

We know not all of you want or need our support or advice. But the visits give us a chance to chat and hear your views on your home and our services.

Court action for tenants blocking vital new electrical safety checks

Tenants who refused to let our electrician in for the now five-yearly safety inspection are being taken to court for breaching their tenancy agreement.

They now face forced entry to their home, backed by a court injunction.

Tougher new regulation

A new government regulation means we now have to check all your homes every five years. It makes redundant certificates given after the old 10-year check.

After a testing start, assistant repairs manager Lorraine Sindrey says most of you are being very helpful. So a huge thank you from us to those of you helping us to get these inspections done.

DIY disasters are draining our repairs budget

A small number of badly bodged DIY home improvements have this year left a deep hole in our repairs and maintenance budget.

All were done by tenants ignoring the tenancy rule that demands you first get our permission, in writing, for most home improvements.

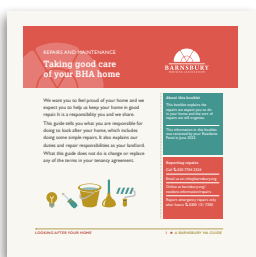
In one case extensive works have been needed to remedy a tenant's dangerously unsafe electrical wiring.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS: YOUR TENANCY RULES

You don't need our consent to put up shelves or hooks or make other modest changes. It's also your job to decorate your home and do small repairs.

If you want to do any more ambitious works you will need our consent in writing before you start. We will need to check your plans and do pre-work and post-work inspections.

If you want to **fit your own kitchen and bathroom** you will have to pay for and organise all future repairs to them. You will also have to replace any tiles or other surface coverings damaged by our contractors during any works we have to organise.



For more on DIY, see page 7 of *Repairs and maintenance: taking good care of your BHA home.*

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Bright future beckons after working abroad

Morland Mews tenant **Serene Anderson** is now job hunting after three months helping teach young people as a volunteer mentor in the Caribbean, with a little help from our bursary fund



After graduating with honours from Nottingham University last year, Serene was keen to broaden her horizons and put to good use her language and theatre skills

We're delighted to have paid a tiny part, with a grant from our bursary fund helping pay for Serena's flight and housing costs in St Vincent.

First class honours degree

Serene, now aged 23, graduated last year with a first class honours degree in economics and Hispanic studies, from Nottingham University.

'I was keen to volunteer abroad before entering the workforce,' Serene says. Fluent in Spanish and Portuguese, she also hoped to put these skills to good use and draw on skills picked up as a teacher's assistant at a London theatre school.

Serene found a placement at a non-profit teaching project in St Vincent where she organised group activities and gave extra support

to pupils in the classroom.

'It was extremely rewarding playing a part in building students' confidence and encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone, embrace a different culture and learn new skills,' she says

The entirely different environment made her more open-minded, Serene adds, but also gave her a confidence now proving useful as she starts work. In September she will be joining a business graduate scheme.

Serene's St Vincent placement was organised by The Daneford Trust which arranges work exchanges between young people in UK inner cities and in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia.

Apply to our bursary fund

Our bursary fund helps pay for educational activities that will improve your chance of getting a job. Any of you living in one of our homes can apply to the fund. The usual terms and conditions apply, including an up-to-date rent account and no history of antisocial behaviour. To find out more go to our website. www.barnsbury.org

SAVE THE DATE: SATURDAY 31 AUGUST, 12 NOON - 5PM

Annual funday plans shaping up nicely

Handyman Steve is in the stocks, staff look set to lose horribly in a tug of war against your strongest men and women and it's looking like ice cream and chips for lunch. **It has to be funday!**

Funday is just five weeks away and plans for the day are looking good. Kick off is at 12 noon and there'll be fun, games and music non-stop until 5pm with DJ Calvin Francis from MySoul Radio.

Sporting triumphs

If you have raw memories of past sporting failures this is your chance to put wrongs right: in the beanbag, sack and egg and spoon races, the three-legged wobble and the hula hoop sprint.

If you'd rather keep your dignity then over in the games corner we'll have Giant Jenga, mega Draughts and whopping Connect4.

If you've got a beef with us, Steve Woodgates has bravely volunteered to go in the stocks. Wet sponge and bucket of water supplied. But will anyone else be brave enough to take his place when he urgently needs to inspect the bouncy castle?

For arty youngsters we'll have plenty of drawing materials and a table for you to explore your creative side. If all goes to plan we'd love to use pictures of the artwork to make a collage for our website.

There'll be plenty of stalls to browse. Old favourites will be back: face-painting, a spot of pampering massage or hair and nails and, for the more practical, bike repairs.

With their own stalls at the funday this year we'll also have Islington's fire crew and many other local services giving out sound advice and useful tips.

Fish, chips and ice cream

Last but not least, the food. The ever-popular fish and chips stall will be back, with halloumi for those who prefer. The ice cream and crêpes stall also returns, as does the sweets cart, and (non-alcoholic) drinks are on us.



BOOK A TABLE AT THE FUNDAY TO SELL YOUR OWN

If you want to take over a table to sell your own goods (new, secondhand or edible) or share a handy skill do get in touch. The table (and a chair or two) is free and you get to keep any money you raise from sales.

Contact Chelsey Simner to book a trestle table and a chair or two for your stall or to make an enquiry.

☎ 020 7704 2324

✉ info@barnsbury.org

HOME SAFETY

Fire safety in your home: check those fire, smoke and CO alarms every month

Please remember to **check once a month** all the alarms in your home, using the manufacturer's instructions.

If you have any questions about your alarms or an alarm is faulty or missing please tell us and we will replace it or fit a new one for free.

Goods left in indoor spaces shared with neighbours could now be seized

Tenants using space shared with neighbours to store or dump household goods, buggies, bikes or more can expect an official tort notice if they ignore a letter from us telling them to clear it away.

Please take this letter seriously. A tort notice gives us the right to seize and sell your goods. But nothing gives you the right to risk other people's lives.

Fire safety experts say anything can turn into a deadly obstacle if a fire breaks out in the building. Items in shared areas could catch fire or slow down escape from the building through thick, choking smoke.

DON'T PUT UP WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE

SOLACE IN ISLINGTON

☎ 0808 802 5565

If you need free, confidential support because of domestic abuse call Solace in Islington. **Solace helps women and men.**

advocacy@solacewomensaid.org

Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW CALL THE POLICE ☎ 999

Up to standard? Service promises leave us with no room for second best

Whether it's repairs, an antisocial neighbour, damp and mould or helping you with the sticky problem of rent arrears, we've now put in writing the **standard of service** you can expect from us

If we let you down, you can rightly pull us up. And yes, we've drawn up a set of standards for customer services too and another one for your complaints and, if you feel we deserve it, your compliments.

Landlords under scrutiny

Our service standards, as they are called, have been drawn up in response to a directive from the Regulator for Social Housing.

They demand we not only make clear the standards of service you can expect from us but that we also regularly ask how satisfied you are with our standards, explain

how we use them to improve our services, compare our ratings with others and share them with you.

All of the team helped draw up the service standards. We've run them past the resident panel and this month they go to our board of management for approval.

Now comes the big test. You will get your own set of our service standards in the post this month. We think they set the bar high but you'll be the best judge of that.

Look out for your copy of the new service standards, coming through your letterbox soon.

You're on camera! Troublemakers and flytippers warned

Flytippers and anyone taking part in antisocial behaviour may find their antics have been filmed by new high quality CCTV cameras going up across Morland Mews hotspots.

Another site popular with some local trouble-makers is also set to get cameras for the first time.

Footage is automatically uploaded and stored very securely for use in any prosecutions that follow.

There are legal controls on how CCTV footage can be used. We use it as proof of criminal activity like flytipping. We have the right to film and securely retain this footage in line with the Data Protection Act (GDPR) 2018 and ICO guidelines. www.ico.org.uk

Call to make better use of extractor fans and window vents

Recent investigations have found problems with mould made worse or caused by closed window trickle vents or not using extractor fans.

Mould can build up after moisture in the air hits a cool surface where it forms tiny drops. So it really does help to get moisture-laden air out of your home before it settles.

Extractor fans and trickle vents do this very well. In some homes we have fitted better ventilation.

Closing the door when cooking or bathing and opening a window, during or afterwards will also help.

Also helpful is insulation and, in colder weather keeping your home heated to at least 15°C.

Please call us if you have mould or want advice. ☎ 020 7704 2324.

What our service standards cover

- * customer services
- * managing your tenancy
- * independent living service for older people
- * our rent service
- * complaints and compliments
- * antisocial behaviour or hate crime
- * dealing with domestic abuse
- * the repairs service
- * fixing damp and mould.



Feedback on new cleaning service points to welcome jump in standards

Since Doves took over the cleaning earlier this year we have been getting much better feedback from you about the cleaning in spaces you share with your neighbours.

Seen for ourselves

We've also seen for ourselves the huge improvement. Estates officer Marius is monitoring the work closely and taking up any issues directly with the contractors.

If you'd like to give feedback on the cleaning please email us at keepingitclean@barnsbury.org

Clean up or you'll lose our permission to keep a pet, dog owners warned

Morland Mews dog owners who don't clean up after their pet can expect tough action, warns housing manager Asif Mahmood. The move follows a revolting rise in dog excrement left across the estate, posing a serious health risk to toddlers in particular.

Every year more than 100 UK children are partially blinded by a parasitic roundworm found in some dog faeces. Even more common are several very nasty bacteria.

We are big fans of dogs. But we are not fans of irresponsible dog owners. Clean up after your dog or we will withdraw the permission we gave you to keep a pet.

Serious steps will follow if this carries on. If you see a dog owner failing to pick up after their pet, please report them.

RENT ARREARS & UNPAID BILLS

We've got your back

With bare essentials now costing more than ever, here's how we were able to help some of you between April and June this year.

- * a £595 grant from our hardship fund for a tenant left penniless after sickness and hospitalisation, and with a huge utility bill to pay
- * three of you given £250 each by Islington Council for living costs
- * grants from the council for four of you on low incomes and/or benefits to pay for essential white goods or furniture
- * a blue badge so an older tenant can use disabled parking

- * four of you paid back rent owed totalling £11k after we helped with a bid to Islington Council's hardship support fund
- * another two have an application with the council now for a discretionary housing payment
- * weekly food parcels for two tenants referred to a food bank
- * three older tenants now getting monthly attendance allowance
- * another older tenant now being paid pension credit
- * two tenants referred to Islington's money advice team.

BHA hardship fund

A small pot of cash for emergencies. You will need to complete a form and be able to show us proof of genuine hardship.

Islington Council resident support scheme

We can help you apply. Terms are strict but you might get help to pay for energy, food, furniture or white goods or, if you qualify, a payment towards your rent.

Free internet by mobile

Apply to us for a mobile phone sim card, supplied by charity Good Foundations, if you have no other way to use the internet.

<https://tinyurl.com/5e3rsskk>

Energy voucher

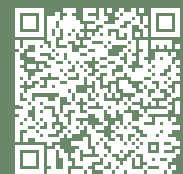
If you can't pay a power bill or your meter is empty, we may be able to give you a voucher supplied to us by a national housing charity.

If you need a helping hand call our housing and communities team on ☎ 020 7704 2324 or ✉ info@barnsbury.org * www.barnsbury.org

TELL US HOW OUR LAST REPAIR WENT AND YOU COULD WIN £50!

If we arranged a repair for you recently tell us how it went and you could win £50 in our next prize draw. Your reply will also help us spot and fix flaws in our service.

<https://tinyurl.com/k7uhc3w3>



Use your phone's camera to scan the QR code

SUSPECT A GAS LEAK?

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!

Call the National Gas Emergency Service **NOW** on ☎ 0800 111 999.

If they think it necessary they will send out a Cadent engineer.

BOOK CLUB



There's been a quite a slow start to our request in the last newsletter for recipes for *The Bumper Book of Barnsbury HA recipes* so here's a second call out for favourite (or easiest or laziest) recipes.

If you have a trusted recipe or want to help us put the book together get in touch with Chelsey at info@barnsbury.org

Making a complaint or making a service request: our policy gets an update

You should find a copy of our new complaints leaflet with this issue of *Barnsbury News*. We have updated the leaflet to reflect changes asked for by the Housing Ombudsman.

You can go to the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice at any stage of a complaint - before, during or after. You can also ask the ombudsman to decide if we were right to turn down a complaint you wanted to make. It can overrule us.

Change of address

The ombudsman service also has a new office, now on your new leaflet. You can contact them at: Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 1484, Preston PR2 0ET
 ☎ 0300 111 3000
 ✉ info@ombudsman.org.uk
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

SMOKE, HEAT AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS SAVE LIVES

Please test your alarms once a month. If you do not have a working smoke, heat or CO alarm tell us. ☎ 020 7704 2324 or email info@barnsbury.org

BARNSBURY HA HOMES ON OFFER FOR A SWAP

| Where it is | Size/style of home | Tenant wants... |
|---|--|--|
| Lofting Road (in three-storey blocks with shared main entrance) | one bed, first floor flat in block 13-23, own balcony | one bed ground floor home for health reasons |
| | one bed flat on first floor | two-bed home |
| Morland Mews (in three-storey blocks with shared main entrance) | one bed flat in block 9-21, on first floor with own balcony | one bed ground floor property |
| | one bed flat on first floor | one bed flat on ground floor for medical reasons |
| Gissing Walk | three bed maisonette with two double bedrooms and one single bedroom | larger three bed property |
| | two bedroom house with two double bedrooms, front door to walkway | three bedrooms needed for growing family |
| | spacious studio flat with separate kitchen and bathroom, front door opening to walkway | one bed property |
| Barnsbury Street | very spacious five bed home on third floor of block with shared main entrance, Nos 60-62 | two bed property, ideally on the ground floor |
| | three bed house with two double bedrooms and one single bedroom, shared use of courtyard | one bedroom flat with a courtyard garden |
| Claringbull Court | two bedroom adapted property with stairlift. Spacious bedrooms and living area | one bedroom ground-floor property |

We keep a list of tenants wanting a home swap, with another of our tenants or elsewhere in the UK so get in touch if you want a swap. If you want a smaller home we have a package of incentives and more ways to help. Email Asif info@barnsbury.org or call ☎ 020 7704 2324.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY, PICTURE OR LETTER FOR US?

If you have a story, letter, picture or idea for *Barnsbury News* please email editor Lisa Thompson at Lisa@barnsbury.org or call ☎ 020 7704 2324. We do edit contributions, usually for space or confidentiality. We will not publish personal attacks on anyone.