

SPRING 2017



BARNSBURY
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

NEWS OF THE MEWS



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Welcome to this Spring 2017 edition of our newsletter.



Hopefully by the time you're reading this it might have gotten a bit warmer!

Could you join our Board?

In common with all other housing associations and to comply with our Code of Governance, we are now expected to appoint Board members on the basis of their skills. That means we

will no longer be holding elections to identify resident Board members. Instead, we will invite residents to put themselves forward along with other applicants, on the basis of their skills and experience, when we are looking to fill vacancies on the Board.

We need to make sure that our Board has a good balance of skills and experience. These could include skills such as working with residents or the local community as well as more technical or professional skills such as surveying or accounting. At the moment, we are short of financial skills and so we are looking to recruit a new Board member who is a qualified accountant. We would welcome applications from suitably qualified residents.

If you're interested you can find out more at <http://barnsbury.org/about-us/board>. Or you can give Susan a call at the office.

Susan French, Chief Executive Officer



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New Homes for BHA

At long last, we have started building work on our first new build scheme in many years, a small scheme of four flats in Eden Grove, N7.

The derelict school caretaker's house has now been demolished and the contractors, Stelwood, have started building the new block. Partly funded by the Greater London Authority, partly by Islington Council and partly by Barnsbury HA, the new homes should be ready in Spring 2018. We will have three 2-bed flats and one 3-bed, with Islington Council providing the tenants.

Relaxation Classes & Coffee Morning

Our residents have just begun a keep fit class with a twist! These classes help improve movement, mobility and balance and also deliver breathing exercises to help you relax afterwards. These movements can be done standing up or sitting down, so anyone can take part.

The mixture of movement and music along with the instructor's enthusiasm has been well-received by those that have attended so far. The most recent class took place before the residents' coffee morning, and those who participated enjoyed some tea and cake following their class.

Classes are held fortnightly at the office at 60 Morland Mews – the next class will be held Wednesday 17th May at 10:30am followed by a session Wednesday 31st May at 10:30am.

All are welcome, so please feel free to come along and join in on the fun!



The next residents' coffee morning will be held at 60 Morland Mews on Wednesday 28th June 2017 at 10:30am.

Coffee mornings offer a chance for our residents from each scheme to meet up, chat and get to know one another over some hot drinks and cakes. This event is free and open to all of our residents.

Help us shape our new Community Development Service



BHA is very committed to providing community development services alongside our role as a landlord. This includes activities such as the Funday, coffee morning and panto trip as well as the welfare advice service provided by St Mungo's and our Resident Bursary Fund.

We are reviewing our approach to community development and want to make sure that, in the future, we are providing the sort of services that are needed and valued by all of our residents. To help us shape our approach, we are working with **Help On Your Doorstep (HOYD)**, a charity working to improve the health and wellbeing of communities in Islington.

HOYD are carrying out research on our behalf to help us find out what services and activities you would like us to provide alongside our landlord services. They will be sending out surveys over the coming weeks and door knocking across our estates to help people complete the questionnaire. They will also be hosting focus groups and are keen to hear from a wide variety of voices so they can get a clear view on what you've valued about our

community activities in the past as well as what you've not liked. Most importantly, they want to know what you would like to see in the future – whether it's football coaching, a parent and toddler group or exercise classes. They also want to hear from residents who might like to run classes or have skills that would benefit the community.

Surveys can be returned via post by the addressed envelope provided or by dropping them off at 60 Morland Mews. The deadline for surveys to be returned is 26th May. Once HOYD have heard from everyone, they will be putting together a report for us which we will share with residents.

We really need your feedback to help us shape the new approach so please make sure you have your say.



Sekai Makoni - Community Development Coordinator, Help on Your Doorstep

Sekai, will be holding focus groups on the following dates:

Tues	23rd	May	14:00 – 15:30	Older residents
Thurs	25th	May	16:00 – 17:00	Children aged under 10 (with parents)
Fri	26th	May	16:00 – 17:00	Children aged 11+
Wed	31st	May	13:00 – 14:30	Unemployed residents

Please come along and share your views!



Improving our homes

Kitchen and bathroom programme

Every year, our works programme sees us put new kitchens and bathrooms into our homes: in 2016/17, we installed 14 new kitchens and 21 new bathrooms. We also replaced 20 boilers that had reached the end of their life.

We keep detailed records of when kitchens and bathrooms were last installed and replace them when they reach the end of their life (usually 20 years for a kitchen and 25 years for a bathroom). When we come to inspect we sometimes find that tenants have fitted their own kitchen in the meantime. It's great that tenants look after their home in this way but please ask us before you do any works. This particularly applies to electrical works which need to be checked first.

We are putting together the programme for 2017/18 and will be in touch with residents due for a refit in due course.

Keeping you safe in your home

As part of our commitment to keeping residents safe in their home, we are installing **carbon monoxide detectors** in properties. These are being installed by Boilercare as part of the annual gas safety checks. We have currently fitted 50% of our properties with CO detectors. We aim for every tenant with gas in their property to have a detector fitted by the end of March 2018.

We will provide **replacement batteries** for both CO monitors and smoke detectors: just give us a call if you hear them beeping and the caretakers will replace them at no charge.

We would like to remind residents with **fire doors** in their home not to remove them. Fire doors are essential to ensuring that, if a fire breaks out, it is contained, giving you time to get to safety. Please don't remove or dispose of fire doors - if you do we will have to replace them and recharge you.

Keep it clean!

We've had a few reports of people not picking up their dog's mess on our estates. As well as being unhygienic, this is antisocial behaviour as other residents or children could step in it! Where our CCTV picks up dog fouling we will take action. If you see any one not picking up after their mutt, please politely remind them to "scoop the poop"! We would also like to remind tenants not to use the top site for the exercising of dogs.

If you have got bulky items of rubbish, Islington Council offers a service for residents where they will collect furniture and other large items. This costs £30 for up to 3 items. You could always ask around your neighbours to see if they've got anything they need to get rid of and share the cost. **You can contact the council on 020 7527 2000.**

If you see people fly tipping, please report it to us on 020 7704 2324 and help us tackle this problem.

And tidy!

It's coming up to the time when our blocks get a deep clean, so please make sure the area outside your flat is clean and tidy. We regularly check communal areas to make sure that they are clean and kept free of personal belongings and if we find items which are causing a health and safety hazard or nuisance, we will take action to remove them.

Do you have contents insurance?

If not then you may be liable to pay for damages to furniture, belongings & decorations in the event of fire, theft, vandalism or water damage. Unfortunately some customers only realise this after the damage has been done.

We recommend to all of our customers that they ensure they have household contents insurance. We have a scheme available only to Barnsbury Housing Association customers arranged with Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance. This scheme offers a very good value for money to our residents and also has no excess. They offer "Simple" cover or "Simple+" cover, which includes accidental damage cover.

For information on the types of cover available and how to apply, please contact 0345 671 8172 or visit their website: <https://www.rsagroup.com/>.

Leaflets telling you more about the scheme are available at the office.



50th Anniversary Celebrations

This year marks Barnsbury Housing Association's 50th anniversary, and we want to celebrate this important milestone in our history!

This year we aim to host a number of events and produce a lasting legacy for our tenants. We'd like as many people as possible to get involved to make this a truly memorable year for the association.

If you have any interesting stories, photographs or memorabilia of Barnsbury's history, please get in touch – these can be from any era/decade, as we want to produce a rich and detailed account of our history.

Also, if any of our residents or their families have experience in film, music, art, photography, etc. and would like to help us celebrate our 50th anniversary then please let us know.

If you have any ideas how we can celebrate this landmark year then please contact info@barnsbury.org or 020 7704 2324. Alternatively, you can contact a member of the Tenants' Association.

Rents go down again

Our rents went down again by 1% on April 1 in line with the government's aim of cutting the overall benefit bill. While this is good news for tenants, it does mean that money is tighter for us and we are having to be more careful with our money.

Paying your rent

We rely on tenants paying their rent on time - rents go towards running our service and the upkeep of the estate, so everyone suffers if we don't collect what we need to. Your Tenancy Agreement stipulates that rent is due in advance.

We are taking a tougher line on rent arrears and, where tenants are persistently not paying their rent or breaking agreements they have made, we will take legal action. This could result in tenants losing their home and it might impact on their credit rating and ability to get a loan in future. Where tenants owe significant amounts, we will take back any garage or shed rented from us.

We will always work with tenants who are having genuine financial difficulties and make an arrangement to pay off money owed. If you're getting behind on your rent or are having trouble paying, please get in touch with Felicity, our

Housing Manager, who can help. We can also arrange free confidential money advice through our partner St Mungo's.

If you are renting a shed, garage or parking space from us please make sure you keep your rent account in order. There's high demand for sheds and garages and we are taking a tough line on people who run up arrears – we've taken back a number of garages this year where large arrears had built up.

If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit, please be aware that it is your responsibility to inform the Housing Benefit department of any changes, including income, working hours, household members and especially when children reach the age of over 16.

HOW MUCH?? Residents might be interested to note that the average rent for a 2-bed flat in Barnsbury on the private market is over £500/week! BHA's average rent is around £140/week.

Anti-social behaviour: Help us to help you

If you're experiencing or witness any kind of anti-social behaviour, please phone the noise patrol on 020 7527 7272 there and then. By calling them out at the time, the Noise Patrol can collect evidence of the noise and, if appropriate, serve a Statutory Notice. You should also complete and return an incident form to our office.

This will help us take action to stop the problem happening again. If you contact us after the event, there is very little we can do.

If anyone enters your block at any time who causes you concern, please do not hesitate to phone the Police on 999 or the Metropolitan Police on 101.

Morland Mews garages

I want to let residents know the latest position on the possible conversion of garages in Morland Mews and the reasons why the Board is actively pursuing this as an option to provide new affordable homes.



Housing associations are under increasing pressure to develop new homes to help the housing crisis in London. Small organisations like BHA are being specifically targeted by the government to 'use it or lose it': that means we either use our financial resources to provide more homes or we are likely to come under pressure to merge with larger organisations who will then be expected to use our assets to build new homes.

Living where we do, in one of the most expensive areas of London, it is very difficult to find suitable and affordable sites for new housing. That's why we are also looking at our own estates to see what opportunities there might be there. One of the options we are considering is to converting more of the garages in Morland Mews, which could provide up to 14 new homes.

Things are still at an early stage: we are currently having surveys carried out to see if this would be possible. We have successfully converted a number of garages already, so we believe further conversions will prove feasible. If this is the case we would still need to apply for planning permission before we could go ahead.

We intend to provide two opportunities for consultation with residents before we submit any planning application. The first will be in the late Spring, when we expect to invite residents'

views about any proposed development and how the likely adverse impacts might be lessened (for example, by providing alternative storage on site, which I know will be a concern to those of you who currently rent a garage). If we decide to go ahead, we would also first give residents a chance to comment on the plans for the conversions before they are finalised. If a development is eventually approved, the work is unlikely to begin for at least a year from now.

We realise that further garage conversions won't be popular with some residents, particularly people who currently rent garages on the estate or those living closest who will obviously be concerned about the potential noise and disruption if works are carried out. The Board is committed to listening to the genuine concerns of residents and trying to find sensible ways of addressing these wherever we can. Your Tenants' Association is organising meetings about the proposed development, so please get in touch with them to let them know your views.

We have emphasised to Susan and her team the importance of keeping residents fully informed. They will keep the Tenants' Association up to date as things progress, as well as putting up notices in the window of 60 Morland Mews.

Martyn Waring, Chair of Barnsbury Housing Association Board

EMAIL PLEASE!

We know that many of our residents prefer to be contacted by email and would be happy to receive flyers and newsletters electronically, rather than in paper form. As well as being more cost effective, it means we can send things out and get your feedback more quickly.

We now have email addresses for the majority of our residents and will be contacting you shortly to confirm your details and to check how you'd like to receive communications from us in the future.

We'll still be producing some paper copies of the newsletter for those who like things in print!

HAVE YOUR SAY!

We are keen at BHA to get more residents involved in working with us to make sure that our service is the best it can be and that it is meeting the standards we've set. We're particularly keen to involve some younger residents who might not have been involved with us in the past.

We're looking at the different ways residents can get involved. We know that lots of residents don't have time to come along to meetings but that they might be happy to comment by email or do quick online surveys, for example looking at the draft newsletter or commenting on a new policy. Others might be happy to come along to occasional joint estate walkabouts with us.

If you'd like to get involved and influence how we do things and, please email Dean at dean@barnsbury.org and we'll get in touch.

