

Talkbac

Spring 2016

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Thirty five years on...

For this issue of Talkback we've been talking to Iris Dixon - one of first tenants. It was 1981 when Iris, her husband Jim and their daughter moved from Brixton to their new home in Isabella Drive, and several of the houses were still being built.

In those days the homes were owned by Utopian Housing Association and Iris says their attitudes to tenants was very different from Keniston's. "There were so many rules and regulations – it was quite regimental" she says. "They were very strict about pets and we didn't think they were going to let us bring our dog."

That would have been really difficult for Iris, who is a real animal lover. She has two lovely Jack Russels now, as well as rescue horses at a nearby field. Her love of animals extends to painting them in watercolours, and her paintings are so good that she used to earn a living as an animal watercolourist, including painting police dogs for the Metropolitan Police.

The housing association flat they had rented in Brixton was in considerable disrepair – subsidence had caused an enormous crack to appear in the bedroom wall, so big she could talk to her neighbour through it! The couple have a disabled daughter who needed a safe, secure home and, since Iris had family at Green Street Green, they decided to move out to Darrick Wood. It meant Iris's husband, who was a postman in Brixton, had to commute back to London every day, but they love the area and the estate so much they're really pleased they made the move.

"The people are really lovely" says Iris. "There's a real community here and several of us have been here since the start – we've seen the kids grow up and have families of their own." She says when they first arrived, the group of houses they were part of was known as 'Little Posh Square!'

The sense of community, coupled with her love of animals, has helped Iris through some difficult times in her life. The couple's daughter has cerebral palsy and needs a lot of help and care. It's been a struggle at times, but Iris is a strong woman who's not afraid to fight for the best for her daughter, who attends the Astley day centre. Iris worries about the future for Lisa when she and Jim are no longer around, as so many residential assisted living units have been closed down recently.

Iris loves her home in Isabella Drive, as do her husband and daughter. Jim is a really good gardener, but she also really appreciates the Keniston staff gardeners, such as Barry (pictured here with Iris and profiled later in this issue). When one of Iris's beloved dogs died a few years ago, one of the gardeners made a new bed in his memory. The dog was called Joe and Iris was incredibly moved when the gardener turned up with a rose he'd bought for the new bed. The rose was called 'My Joe.'

Iris says there are some really nice people on the estate, both young and old, and some wonderful people at Keniston too. She's so pleased she made the move those thirty five years ago!



Welcome to our new website!

You and your home



Your rent

Your home

Managing money

Frequently Asked Questions



Get involved



In your community

Gallery



Keniston
Housing Association

Find housing list

Pay your rent

Home You and your home Find a home Get involved About us Contact Us My account

Have your say

For a while now we've felt that our website has been looking a bit tired and out of date. Things have moved on a lot since we first launched it and websites are far more interactive these days. So we commissioned Reason Digital, a social enterprise which specialises in website design, to create a new one for us. But first of all, we asked you what you wanted from a website.

You told us that you wanted to be able to do lots of things online – such as requesting a repair, reporting anti-social behaviour, paying your rent and viewing your rent account and tenancy information. You also said you'd like to be able to find key contacts through our website, view our policies and procedures, get information about Keniston, the Board

and our history and find out how to get involved and how to give feedback. Finally you said you'd like to be able to look at previous newsletters and take part in on-line surveys.

So we gave Reason Digital your brief and told them we also wanted the navigation to be easier, for there to be lots of photos and for it to feel welcoming, engaging and colourful, whilst retaining a professional approach. We're really pleased with the result, which we think is very easy to use and full of useful information.

For example, in the section called You and Your Home, you won't just be able to view your account and pay your rent, you'll find lots of really valuable advice on managing your money, saving on energy and advice on benefits.

About us



Who we are



Our staff



Our board members



Our vision and impact



Publications



News

There's also a whole section on getting involved, including dates of upcoming residents' meetings, information about residents' groups and a great gallery of photos.

And in the 'About Us' section you'll be able to see who's who at Keniston, read our annual report and see past issues of Talkback.

A few people have asked if it's still OK to come in to the office, or give us a ring, to which we say 'yes of course, please do!' But the website is going to be so much handier for those of you who don't live in Darrick Wood, or who work office hours and can't contact us when we're open.



Nevil Osborne retires

It's a sad time for all of us at Keniston as we say thank you and farewell to Nevil Osborne who retires in August. Nevil has been our chief executive for over 30 years; he's seen the association through many changes and brought us safe and sound to the point we



A letter from Nevil

It will undoubtedly be a day of mixed emotions for me when I say goodbye to the many colleagues, tenants and friends I've worked with during 30 very happy years at the helm of Keniston. I've been extremely lucky to have worked with such committed, talented and creative people and to have been guided and supported by an excellent Board of Management.

It's been a fascinating and inspiring time, albeit with many challenges along the way. When I first joined the association many of the homes were not in a good state and my first challenge as director was to try and bring them up to standard. I'm particularly proud that we managed to repair all the defective properties without having to knock them down and displace people and I was delighted that, with all the repairs finished, we were able to build our first new homes at Darrick Wood six years ago.

I'm even prouder of the sense of community that there is within Keniston – amongst tenants and staff alike – and the open nature of our dealings with each other. I truly hope that tenants will always feel able to talk to us, to tell us when we get things wrong so we can improve, and to let us know what you want from us in terms of service and other improvements. I really hope too, that tenants will feel able to get involved on a more formal basis – either by becoming Board members or by joining our Residents Panel.

I leave Keniston knowing the association is in the capable hands of a strong, diverse team who will develop the positive culture and values we've built up together over the years. I know they will continue to put the needs of the residents first, to deliver the best possible service and excellent quality homes and to respect and support each other in their work. I really couldn't ask for more.

Surfing for free!



Residents at Tarling Close are already making the most of the new website.

We recently installed wifi throughout the communal rooms which makes it far easier for them to get online – as well as being free for all residents of the sheltered scheme.

Audrey Clarke uses her new iPad to access the internet and keep up with the goings on of her family through social media, as do many of the other residents.



Right to Buy update

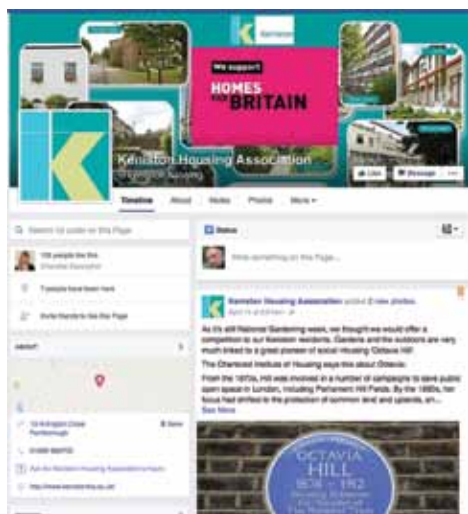
We promised to keep you up to date on the situation regarding the proposed legislation giving housing association tenants the Right to Buy their homes. Things are still up in the air at the moment, so we don't have much to tell you, but the issue is currently being debated in the House of Lords. Housing associations are working with the Government on the finer details of the proposal and five associations are running a pilot to find out the best ways of implementing the scheme.

There is a government website for more information at **www.righttobuy.communities.gov.uk** but we will also publish updates on our Facebook page as soon as we know about them, so make sure you join our Facebook group to keep up to date!

News, info and pics galore!

Our Facebook page is the place to go for loads of up to the minute information on Keniston, but there's so much more great stuff on there too. You'll find hundreds of wonderful pictures of our various events and fun days over the past few years, as well as reminders of upcoming events, competitions and management walkabouts.

And there's more! Almost every week there will be a new post full of interesting and/or useful information about the sort of things that affect all of us. Typical recent posts include a useful link to a government website page where you can check your tax credit payment details online; and another to a mythbuster page on the new state pension arrangements.



There's lots of fun things to engage with too – such as an invitation to send your best doodles to us on National Doodle Day! If you haven't already done so, make sure you visit our page and 'like' it so you see us in your Facebook feed. Just search for Keniston Housing Association in your Facebook search bar.

Congratulations Barry!



We're delighted to announce that Barry Spragg has been promoted to Head Gardener after nine years at Keniston. Barry is already a well known face around the estate on Darrick Wood, having been a gardener with us for six years already.

Barry is really looking forward to the extra responsibilities involved with his promotion – he'll be doing more planning in his new role, as well as managing another gardener. But he's particularly looking forward to trying out some new ideas. "I'd love to do some theme plantings" says Barry. "For example, it would be lovely to create an Armistice Day garden in the sheltered scheme at Tarling Close."

The older residents on the estate are particularly interested in the gardens and often give Barry feedback and ideas. It's so satisfying to get positive comments and interesting suggestions and he does his best to try and

accommodate them, even if it's not always possible.

Barry is embracing the opportunity of using his creativity to come up with solutions to gardening challenges too. He gives us an example: "there's little doubt that the climate seems to be changing, and watering is a real problem in the summers, so I'm looking into planting more drought resistant plants".

Being promoted to Head Gardener has made Barry realise he's more creative than he had realised and he relishes that aspect of his new role. There's so much of the job he enjoys though – working out of doors, the satisfaction of standing back and seeing something he's worked hard on looking good, and the opportunity to engage with people living on the estate.

He says the only problem is that his own garden at home gets a bit neglected!



We're on Twitter too!
As well as our Facebook page, we have a Facebook chat group called Keniston Gossip and we're active on Twitter too. Come and join in the conversation!



Keniston Housing Association Limited
13 Artington Close • Farnborough • Kent • BR6 7UL
t. 01689 889 700 • f. 01689 889 701
www.kenistonha.co.uk