

# Talkback

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Summer 2022

## Jubilee summer

It's been a jam-packed summer, full of celebrations, for the Queen's platinum Jubilee.



Street parties were held all over the country and, here at Keniston, we had parties at Burnhill House, Nethewode Court, Sunningdale Court and Perryfield House.

Thanks to everyone who came and joined in. Some lucky winners went away with prizes, including a homemade Victoria sponge.

In the spring, we asked you to bid for a tree at your scheme. After reviewing the bids, we are pleased to announce that we will plant two trees to commemorate the Jubilee year – one at Perryfield House in Crawley and the other at Silver and Byers Court in Islington. More details will follow in the winter edition of Talkback.

*Celebrating at Perryfield House (above and bottom far left) and Nethewode Court (left). Bottom row right to left: Prizewinners at Nethewode Court and Burnhill House.*



# Office update

Keniston's office has been closed to visitors since the Covid pandemic hit in 2020.

We want to have visitors by appointment again, but we are aware of a surge of new Covid infections. Government figures estimate that currently 2.3 million people have Covid, an increase of a third in a single week.

We will continue to keep things under review, but we don't think now is the right time to change arrangements that have worked well, so far, to protect everyone's health.



## Staff awards

In the spring issue of Talkback, we introduced a new award for staff, as voted for by residents.

We have now received your nominations, but we need some more time to review them. We will announce the results in the winter edition.

Thank you for taking the time to tell us about a staff member you felt deserved recognition.



## New homes at Darrick Wood

We are expecting, in September, to hear the outcome of our planning application to build 26 new flats on the site at the top of Isabella Drive.

We expect to get a planning decision this summer.

We first submitted the application back in late 2021, but it did not go live until February, when the public consultation took place.

We have since been working with the council to resolve some loose ends, including around the parking area (which will need access for fire engines and facilities for electric vehicle charging).

We know our proposals are not welcome to everyone, especially to those living closest to the site. We have been open about our plans, and have carefully listened to all the comments made. We have made several changes to the design, as a result of feedback.

However, we believe that the pressing need for more affordable



homes for local people outweighs any disruption.

During the consultation, some people asked if existing Darrick Wood residents might be able to move to the new flats. While the funding rules mean that all the flats have to be available to people nominated by the council, if existing residents express an interest, we will talk to the council to try to make this work. We agree that ideally it would be good if the new flats were occupied by a mixture of new and existing Darrick Wood tenants.

# Photoshoots



This summer we started to update our stock of photos with the help of Helen Rigby photography.

We use images in many of our publications, as well as on our website and social media pages.

Some of our schemes had not been photographed for many years, so we chose a few of these to begin with.

We always love to feature our residents in the images, so a very big thank-you to those who agreed to take part.

We aim to continue updating scheme photos, so if you are willing to be featured in future photoshoots, please let us know.

Call Lynn Russ, Engagement and Communications Officer on 01689 889700, or by email [lynnruss@kenistonha.co.uk](mailto:lynnruss@kenistonha.co.uk)





## Healthy eating course

Bromley Adult Education Service kindly funded another successful and enjoyable healthy eating course at the Darrick Wood sheltered scheme.

Let us know if you would like a course like this in your area by phoning Lynn Russ, Engagement and Communications Officer on 01689 889700 or by emailing [lynnruss@kenistonha.co.uk](mailto:lynnruss@kenistonha.co.uk)

## Online benefits checker

The Government has launched a new online tool to help people check the benefits and financial support they might be able to apply for. Go to: [www.gov.uk/check-benefits-financial-support](http://www.gov.uk/check-benefits-financial-support)

When using the tool, you answer up to 10 questions to find out what support is available. The results page lists possibilities, with links to more information.

This first version of the checker includes a selection of benefits and other options. In the coming months, a wider range of support from across central government, local government and the NHS will be added.

## Government help update

**In April the Government added to their package of support.**

There will now be four extra grants during 2022-23 – paying some households up to £1,500 in total. These amounts will not count towards the benefits cap and they will not be taxed.

### Support for everyone

If you have your own electricity meter (your supply is not communal), you will get a £400 grant this winter. This does not have to be repaid. The money will come off your electricity bills between October 2022 and March 2023, or it will be added to your pre-payment meter (you may get vouchers instead).

### Pensioners

In November or December, you will get an extra £300 on top of your normal Winter Fuel Payment of £100-300.

### People on benefits

You will get £650 if you claim any of the following:

- Universal Credit
- Child Tax, Working Tax or Pension Credits
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support allowance, or
- Income Support.

The money will be paid in two



amounts – one this July and one in the autumn – into the account you get your benefits paid into.

### People with disabilities

You will get an additional £150 in September if you get:

- Attendance, Constant Attendance, or Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement, or
- Scottish disability benefits.

# Keniston warmly welcomes

## Three new Board members

We warmly welcome Antonia, Samantha and Stephen to the Keniston Board.

Our newest members have a wealth of skills and experience to support Keniston's aims. Here is a little information about who they are. We will feature more about each member in upcoming editions of Talkback.

### Samantha Herelle

Director of Operations, Homes for Lambeth

Samantha has over 20 years of operational and strategic leadership expertise in the housing sector. Having worked in large G15 and smaller G320 organisations, Samantha is skilled in housing and performance management, governance, risk, strategy development and people leadership. Samantha is currently Director of Operations for a local authority subsidiary and has previously been a Board member at Optivo Housing Association. In 2018, Samantha was awarded the Women in Housing, Professional of the Year award.



### Antonia Bance

Head of Campaigns & Communications, TUC

Antonia has been Head of Campaigns, Communications and Digital at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) since 2015. She was previously Policy and Communications Director for a domestic abuse charity and Head of Campaigns at Shelter. She is a trustee of the Nationwide Foundation and is a former councillor and parliamentary candidate.



### Stephen Hoad

Property Director, Diocese of Rochester

Stephen is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and works for the Diocese of Rochester as Property Director, with responsibility for the operational management of their property portfolio, development and strategic projects. Prior to working for the Diocese, Stephen worked in both consultancy and housing roles for over 20 years. Stephen has a particular focus on planned maintenance and development of residential property portfolios and has a passion for delivering excellent customer engagement, value for money and statutory compliance.



*Below: The Board oversees our work and sets our strategic direction.*



## Starters and leavers



### Meet Cheryl

Cheryl is the newest member of our Customer Services Team, having been with us now for three months.

Cheryl joined us from another housing provider and has lots of housing experience. She's had a varied and interesting working life, but chose Keniston so she could now be closer to home. When not working, she likes to spend time with her Cockapoo Nellie.

Cheryl says, "I have found everyone here to be very friendly. It can be a challenging but very enjoyable role".

## The Right to Buy your home

In May, the Government announced that housing association tenants would be able to buy their homes at a discount under an extended Right to Buy scheme.

They promised to reform Universal Credit to allow working tenants to save towards buying a home without losing benefit – and to allow any housing element to go towards paying a mortgage instead of rent.

### Does this mean I can buy my Keniston home?

The Government's promises have not yet been put into law and the details have not been worked out or agreed with the housing sector. This means that you cannot use this scheme to buy your home at the moment. We will let you know if and when this changes.



However, a small number of our residents may instead be able to purchase their Keniston home, under the Right to Acquire, if:

- there home was built more recently (we can tell you if your home qualifies), and
- you have been a social housing tenant for at least three years, and
- you can get a mortgage from a bank or building society (you will need a good credit rating), and
- you have not broken your tenancy by failing to pay your rent.

Be aware that the Voluntary Right to Buy, first announced in 2016, was restricted to two limited pilot schemes and has not been rolled out nationally.

## End of an era for Sharon

After 30 years with Keniston, Housing Officer Sharon Hobbs is retiring.

Sharon told us: "I could not imagine that when I first joined Keniston, as a temporary



maternity leave repairs secretary, that the journey would last 30 years. I can honestly say that, if I was not retiring, there would not be another reason for me to leave and I would probably be there for the duration!

"When I first started, I was the youngest member of staff. Now I am one of the oldest. I have enjoyed working in social housing for the last 30 years. It was not

something I aspired to do, but it seemed to bring out the best in me and, although there have been challenges along the way, I have also had experience dealing with some very funny, interesting, kind people."

Sharon will be around until November. We will be very sad to see her go, but know she will be enjoying a spot of gardening and plenty of time with grandchildren. Enjoy your retirement!



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