

BARTON HILL COTTONS ON TO QUALITY HOMES

Barton Hill residents enjoyed a street party recently to celebrate swapping high-rise living for spacious family homes.



Residents of 26 new affordable homes at Cotton Mill Lane - formerly the site of two 1960s tower blocks - were joined by neighbours, community police, and politicians for a burger, penalty shoot-out, face-painting and bouncy castle.

The homes are the first to be built as part of the New Deal for Communities regeneration project involving Solon, Sovereign Housing and Community@Heart. Solon and Sovereign are each managing 13 houses and flats, and the local residents were involved in the design of their new homes. For many of the families, it's the first time they have had access to a garden.



Solon Chief Executive Paul Ville said: "We are delighted to be helping to regenerate Barton Hill by developing good quality affordable homes. The success of the street party demonstrates that Cotton Mill Lane already has the making of a thriving local community, and we hope all the residents continue to enjoy living here. We will certainly do our best to encourage this."



IMPORTANT REPAIRS UPDATE

Many of you may recall that just over a year ago, Solon entered into a partnering arrangement with the contractor Ian Williams Ltd. so that we could improve our repairs and maintenance service.

We were optimistic that partnering would improve our service. Unfortunately, this has not happened. We are sorry that partnering has been unsuccessful and that this inconvenienced our residents.



Having monitored the service carefully over the year, we have decided to end the arrangement and find another contractor to carry out repairs.

Over the last two to three months we have spoken to several contractors and carried out a selection process involving interviews and site visits.

We are pleased to announce that we have now entered into a one-year contract with EmmDee Building Services to carry out all our day-to-day maintenance and works to our empty properties. EmmDee have worked for Solon in the past and we have always been very pleased with the service they have provided.

The new contract started on 31st July, although EmmDee had already started to take on a large percentage of our work in order to provide a smooth transition between contractors. Initial reports indicate that they are managing the work well and providing a good service.

It is really important to us to make sure we get your feedback about the maintenance service. **Please help us by returning the slip at the bottom of your works order each time we complete a job.** This enables us to measure the performance of our contractors and tells us if there are problems we need to address.



We hope that over the next few months you will see an improvement in our service as a result of this new contract.

WHY DO YOU NEED TO TALK TO YOUR HOUSING OFFICER?

Well you might not want to!

However, there are certain circumstances when this needs to happen, and it is not always to do with rent arrears. A large number of our residents claim Housing Benefit.

You may be aware by now that Solon are Verification Partners with Bristol City Council for Housing Benefit Claims. This means that we deal with all the paperwork that Housing Benefits need to process a claim. It also means that we are able to track, much more easily, what has happened, what Housing Benefit has been sent and what they have not. This in turn means a faster and more efficient service for everyone.

- You need to tell us of ANY change in your circumstances
- You need to tell us of ANY change in your Income Support/JSA/Incapacity - in fact, any of your welfare benefits.
- You need to inform us, IMMEDIATELY, if you start or stop working
- You should NOT rely on the Job Centre Plus to complete forms for housing benefit on your behalf. This process takes too long and this in turn delays your benefit claim, sometimes for periods of up to 12 weeks or more.

PLEASE come to us. We are happy to help.

On behalf of your Housing Team

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

For some time, we have felt that we need to spend more time and resources on consulting our residents and involving them in some of the decisions that we make about the services we provide.

When we reviewed our Resident Participation Strategy last year, one of the main recommendations was for Solon to put more resources into this area of our work.

Therefore, we have created a new part-time post of Resident Involvement and Communications Officer and the new post holder, Julia Sneddon-Greaves, will be starting in mid-September. Responsibilities of the post include finding different ways of seeking your views; making sure that your opinions and comments are taken on board; and ensuring that you can actually influence the decisions we make.

We look forward to welcoming Julie to Solon.

WHO'S WHO AT SOLON

The Supported Housing Team

Did you know that Solon has over 200 homes that are classified as 'Supported Housing'?

Most of these are managed on our behalf by agents who also provide specialist help and support for people with different needs. These needs are diverse and include single homelessness, people with learning difficulties and women escaping domestic violence. The residents usually have a support worker who will try to help them with their issues until the time when they are ready to move into independent accommodation.

It is important that Solon ensures that these tenancies are managed well and so we monitor the management by other organisations quite closely.

We also directly manage a 20 bed-space hostel for single homeless people, at Rackfield House in Bath.



Maria Clarke is our Supported Housing Co-ordinator and it is her job to liaise with all our partner agents as well as managing and supporting the staff who look after our hostel in Bath. Maria also manages Solon's Tenancy Support Officer.



Maria Clarke

Rackfield House has a Hostel Manager, **Chris Ashmore**, and two full-time Support Workers, **Gill Hall** and **Amber Burns**. They help the hostel residents to access permanent housing when they are ready to move on. They also help with finding work or training, and generally provide support for the residents through their stay at the hostel.



Chris Ashmore



Gill Hall



Amber Burns

Solon also employs a Tenancy Support Officer, **Sarah Louise Gregory**. Sarah Louise provides support for Solon residents who need practical or emotional support or advice and assistance in an area relating to their tenancy. On average, Sarah Louise provides an hour of support per person, per week, although this differs depending on each individual's needs.



Sarah Louise Gregory

A leaflet providing further details about the tenancy support service is available from Solon's offices.

MORE MESSAGES FROM RESIDENT FORUM MEMBERS



MIKE

Hi, my name is Mike Thornton and I am 72 years of age. I have been a Solon tenant since 1978, a total of 28 years. Over the past years I have seen vast changes. For example, when I paid my first rent in those days it was only £12.50 per week, including Council Tax!

I have always got on very well with the Solon staff who have always been extremely helpful to me in many ways. Right from the start, when Solon was set up, I was invited to attend the Forum meetings as a member.

I am extremely happy and look forward to attending these meetings as it is a good atmosphere with friendly company and I have made lots of new friends. I would also like to add that I am very well looked after as transport, refreshments and also, if required, a child minding service is provided. So don't hesitate. Do come along to our Forum meetings. Details are available from the Solon office. We hope you will join us at future meetings to share views and new ideas.

The dates and venues for the next meetings are:

Monday 11th September
Southville Centre,
Beauley Road,
Southville, Bristol.
(This is a change of venue to that notified in the Spring Newsletter.)

Monday 13th November
Great Western Railway Staff
Association,
Station Approach,
Bristol Temple Meads

All meetings start at 6.30pm and refreshments are provided. Reasonable transport and childcare costs will be covered and transport can be arranged if needed.

If you would like to get involved in Solon's Residents' Forum, ask your Housing Officer for more information or contact Sarah Wilde, Customer Services Director (contact details on page 6.)

RICHARD

Why do I go to Forum meetings?

As Solon is a housing association and has (quite rightly) set up the Forum for residents to participate, I feel that getting involved in this way is the least I can do. The meetings are usually 2 hours during the evening every 2-3 months, with other occasional seminars that we can attend if we are interested.

It is an opportunity to meet other residents and exchange ideas with senior Solon staff, for residents to be consulted and have a say on issues that affect them in general connected with being a Solon resident. It gives me a better understanding of how Solon works and I feel that the association is more aware of residents' concerns through our involvement in the Forum.

All the best.



Home contents insurance - are you covered?

Have you ever considered what you would do if the unthinkable happened?

What if you were burgled, suffered a burst water pipe or even a fire? You may not realise, but Solon is not responsible for your personal belongings. If the contents of your home need replacing, it would be down to you to pay for them.

Solon has a Home Contents Insurance Plan, run by Farr plc. which was selected by residents at the Residents' Forum. Taking out home contents insurance could save you a lot of money, not to mention heartache, if you were unfortunate enough to suffer a major loss. How many times have you heard of people who have been flooded out or burgled realising that they had let their insurance lapse, or just forgotten to organise it in the first place?

If you would like details of Solon's scheme then please contact us (0117 924 4071) and we can send you an information leaflet.

INVITATION TO STAND FOR ELECTION AS A RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

We have a vacancy for a resident Board Member and are inviting applications from Solon residents.

What is the Board?

Solon is governed by a voluntary Board of Management, which controls the Association and carries out a number of key roles. These include agreeing important policies and objectives, monitoring performance in relation to plans and budgets, and also in the light of customer feedback, and generally setting and upholding Solon's values and objectives.

What skills and experience do you need to be a Board Member?

Between them, Board Members need to have the range of skills needed to run a social housing business. However, individuals are not expected to know everything, and we will provide training and support for all new Members, to complement existing skills.

The range of skills required by our business includes first-hand knowledge of the communities we serve, with representation from residents of local communities.

(Other skills required include an understanding of housing needs, finance, housing management, maintenance, human resources, community development and general business experience).

One of the most important skills we need is the direct experience of living in a home managed by Solon - of having a Solon tenancy. This is because residents are customers and members of communities and, having experience of our services, are often best qualified to tell us how well we are doing things, what we are doing right or wrong and how we could do things better. As members of communities, residents also often know best what the community needs to improve the local environment and quality of life for all.

Who is eligible to stand as a resident Board Member?

To be eligible to stand as a resident Board Member, you need to hold a Solon tenancy. Board membership is not permitted if:

- ◆ an applicant has been disqualified from acting as a director of a company for any reason; or
- ◆ an applicant has been convicted of an indictable offence within the last five years; or
- ◆ Solon has notified (or started) any proceedings to end the applicant's tenancy or lease or to make them keep to the terms of their tenancy/lease.

What should you do next?

If you are interested in becoming a Board Member, the first step is to contact Paul Ville - Solon's Chief Executive - to discuss how to take an application forward and obtain an application pack and further details. **Please contact him no later than Wednesday 6 September if you are interested in applying.**

We welcome applications to join the Board. For further information, please contact:

**Paul Ville
Chief Executive
Solon South West Housing Association
1 Newfoundland Court
Newfoundland Street
Bristol BS2 9AP**

Tel : 0117 924 4071

Fax : 0117 924 8816

e-mail : paul_ville@solonswha.co.uk



Have your say on health in your area

Health care and services are hot topics and it seems everybody has a view. You can't pick up a paper or turn on the news without hearing about the latest health story and how it could affect those around you - MRSA, hospital cleanliness, NHS dentists, GP out-of-hours services and patient choice are all subjects that have hit the national and local headlines recently.

By joining a Patient and Public Involvement Forum in your area, set up by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, and offering some time each month, you will be able to put forward concerns and suggestions directly to local health Trusts about the healthcare you, your family and the people in your local area receive. Your local forum has statutory powers to influence change locally and, by law, the Trust will need to respond to the forum within 20 days.

It's not just medical issues where your help is needed. Forums need to take a wider look at how the health of local people is affected - rubbish tips, bus routes and mobile phone masts for example can all affect the health of you and your family.

We are looking for new forum members across the South West. You can join independently or represent a particular group in your local area. We ask you for around ten to twelve hours a month - some members offer more. Travel expenses, child care and carers' costs are paid.

If you want more power to influence changes in health locally join your local Patient and Public Involvement Forum.

For further information:

Telephone: 01392 332100

Email: enquiriessw@cpih.org

visit our website at: www.cpih.org

**or write to Recruitment and Membership Officer,
Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in
Health,
South West Regional Centre,
Lynx House,
Pynes Hill Office Campus,
Rydon Lane,
Exeter,
Devon.
EX2 5JL**

SAVE YOUR ENERGY

Get a FREE energy price check

Energy prices are continuing to rise so it's important to consider shopping around to make sure you are getting the right deal.

Solon has teamed up with SimplySwitch, a leading comparison service, to find out if residents can get a better deal, in one quick call.

A trained energy advisor will compare all the major suppliers for you, discuss the options and complete the paperwork if you decide to switch. The service is free and impartial, so what have you got to lose?



We are sorry but the service is **not** available to households who have a pre-payment meter.

Households who are currently in debit with their energy supplier should note that any amount owing would need to be repaid when switching to another supplier.

For your FREE energy price check call 0800 011 1352

**IF YOU NEED A LARGE PRINT
VERSION OF THIS
NEWSLETTER, OR A
TRANSLATION, RING SARAH
WILDE ON 0117 924 4071**

Please send comments on any articles in this newsletter to:

Sarah Wilde, Customer Services Director,
Solon South West Housing Association Ltd, 1
Newfoundland Court,
St Paul Street
Off Newfoundland Street,
Bristol BS2 9AP.

Tel: 0117 924 4071

Fax: 0117 924 8816

Email: Sarah_Wilde@solonswha.co.uk