



THE ELDER



Winter/Spring 2024

Picture Quiz

Soda Crystals

Birthday Milestone

The Risks of Hoarding

Susan's Stories - Catches of the Day

Back in October 2023, I walked home from a conservation task I had been on at Mousehold Heath where Volunteers had been raking up grass that had been mown on the meadow at the bottom of Gilman Road and followed the river back to Bracondale. In doing so, I saw a seal with a massive fish in its mouth, just a little bit downstream from the train station.

The other catch of the day I witnessed was on a walk round the broad at Whitlingham on December 31st. As I was walking along the side of the broad that is parallel to the river, I saw a man standing on a grassy patch with his binoculars and a long telephoto lens. He and I watched a young heron and as we photographed it, we saw it catch a vole.

Finally, in January, I saw this unusual bird with a bright rusty red head. It's a beautiful bird.



The Risks of Hoarding

Hoarding is the persistent difficulty with discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value. This behaviour usually has harmful effects on people emotionally, physically, socially and financially.

Hoarding can be related to compulsive buying, such as never passing up on a bargain, the compulsive acquisition of free items, such as collecting flyers, or the compulsive search for perfect or unique items.

People hoard because they believe that an item will be useful or valuable in the future, or they feel it has sentimental value, or is unique and irreplaceable, or too big a bargain to throw away. They may also consider an item as a reminder that will jog their memory, thinking that without it they won't remember an important person or event, or because they can't decide where something belongs, so it's better just to keep it.

The Society has a Hoarding Policy so that we can support tenants that are hoarding in our properties. We will work with other agencies to help develop strategies in responding to the needs of our tenants with hoarding tendencies.

Clutter and hoarding issues can cause health and safety issues like trips and falls. It is also a fire hazard. Responding fire fighters can be at risk due to obstructing exits, falling objects and excessive fire loading that can lead to collapse. We want all our tenants to be able to live safely in their homes that's why it's important to be aware of the dangers of hoarding.



You will soon, if not already have received your 2024 rent and service charge revision. Please remember to amend your standing order. If you are on Housing Benefit, please ensure you advise Norwich City Council of your rent revision. If you pay calendar monthly and are unsure how to work out the new figure to pay, you can work this out by calculating your weekly rent x 52 then / (divide) by 12. For example, £125.50 (new weekly rent) x 52 = £6,526.00 / 12 = £543.83.

Birthday Milestone

Doris Hammond, a tenant of Eleanor Road of almost 20 years has reached the incredible milestone birthday of 100 years!

Doris had a lovely day with her children. Some family visited from Sheringham to celebrate with her. She got lots of flowers, chocolates, and over 20 cards including a card from King Charles III. The cake of choice for the day was a nice Victoria sponge cake. We wish you a very happy birthday and we hope you liked your flowers.



Changes to the Laundry Facilities

The Society is changing the way it operates its laundry facilities. Wolf Laundry, a local contractor have been appointed to supply, install and maintain commercial washing machines and tumble dryers in the laundry rooms on each scheme. The machines will be more reliable and will run more effectively and efficiently. The cycles will run for shorter lengths of time meaning more washes in the course of the week. The new machines will be installed over the next coming months. The existing machines that are in good condition will be donated to charity.

Please may we remind you to remove your washing once the cycle has finished. Where possible, please ensure you place an adequate load per cycle. On some occasions we have noted a load of just one and two items in a machine.

Home Contents Insurance

The Society insures the structure and exterior of your home so you need not take out Buildings Insurance. We do not insure your personal belongings, furniture or internal decorations against theft, fire, vandalism or the effects of burst pipes. Home Contents Insurance will cover you for this. It can also cover you if you take items out of the home, on holiday, for example.

We strongly urge tenants to take out Home Contents Insurance to cover your possessions against fire, theft and other risks, such as accidental damage. If something happens to destroy or damage your possessions, it can cost a lot of money to replace these items.

Please may we remind you that we do not accept cash or cheques at the office. If you need to make a payment, please pay online or at your bank, or you could ask a family member or a friend to make an online payment. Please remember to quote the correct payment reference. This will be quoted on the letter/invoice sent to you.

Thank you.

Smoking at Home

We accept that tenants have every legal right to smoke in their own homes. We ask that tenants protect their safety and the safety of others by ensuring that cigarettes are always fully extinguished.

The Society's staff and contractors are not permitted to smoke while visiting tenants in the course of their duties. We recognise that staff and contractors are entitled to be protected from the potentially harmful effects of smoke while they are carrying out their jobs and we would therefore ask tenants not to smoke while staff and contractors are working in their properties. Thank you.



Picture Quiz

Can you work out the words from the pictures below? Enter by Sunday 26th May 2024, to be in with a chance to win a Marks & Spencer voucher. Good luck!





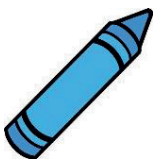














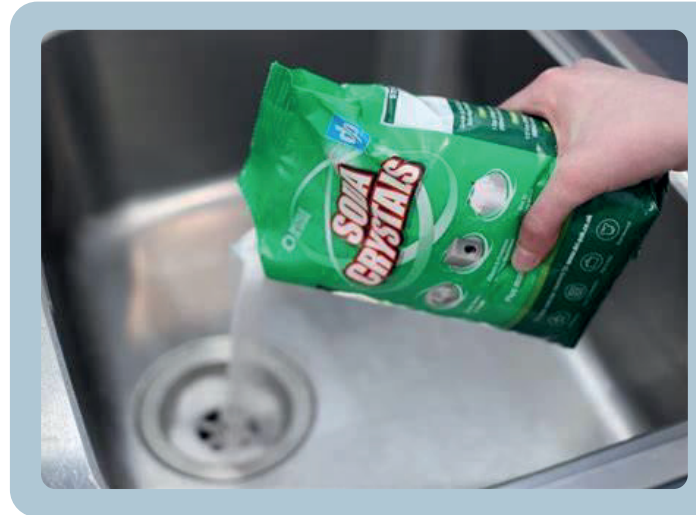
Using Soda Crystals

If you own your own washing machine, it is advisable that you routinely flush your machine on a hot wash with soda crystals, to not only flush through the machines, but also through the discharge hose and the spigot connection under your sink.

Too many 30-degree washes makes for "gunged up" connections and loss of flow capacity. If your machine is struggling to discharge, then there's more than likely to be a slight blockage at the point where the washing machine connects to the waste under your sink.

We advise that you carry out at least one 60–90 degree wash with soda crystals at least once a month to keep your pipes clear.

Not only are soda crystals useful for keeping your washing machine "tip top", using soda crystals in your plughole regularly will prevent it



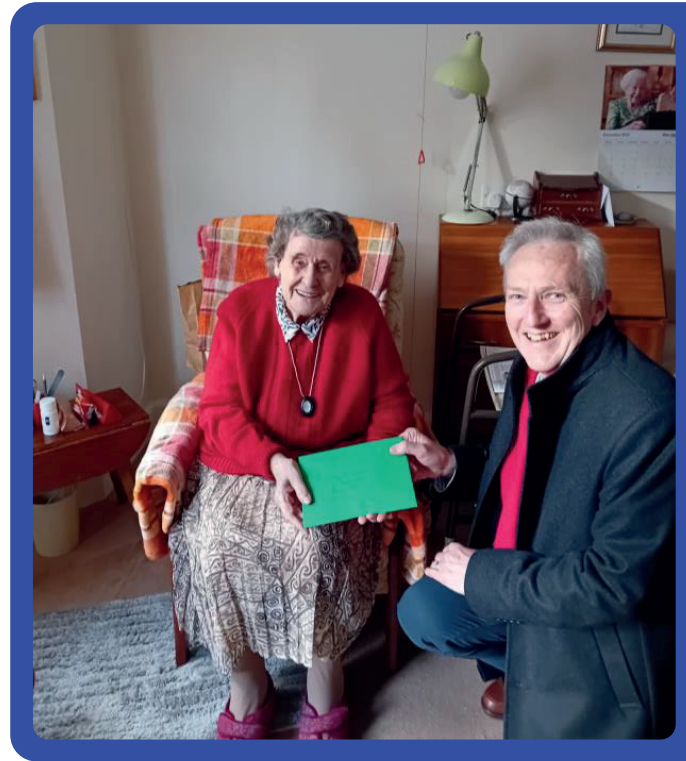
from becoming blocked or slow draining. Simply put a cup of soda crystals down the plughole and then pour a kettle filled with boiling water after it. It is very important to run through hot water afterwards if not, they solidify and can lead to blocked pipes.

You can use soda crystals to clear a slow draining sink that's been blocked up by congealed grease and trapped food debris. Start by pouring a kettle of boiling water down the sink. Wait for this to drain away and then add a cup of soda crystals. Now add another half kettle full of boiling water. This should get your slow draining sink moving again.

The best thing about them is they are non-toxic and made from a naturally occurring mineral that means they have a sustainable environmental footprint.



Stuart Court is a member of the Almshouse Association and eligible tenants are gifted with a Marks and Spencer voucher every Christmas. Here is David Driscoll, Charman of the Board, handing over Elizabeths' voucher. We hope you enjoyed spending your voucher!



Tenants' Meetings

Tenants' meetings are now being held twice a year and the latest round took place in February 2024.

Attendance was up on the last meetings and there were some tenants who attended for the first time.

There were Board members at each meeting which gave tenants an opportunity to get to know some representatives of the Board and understand their roles and responsibilities.

The provision of a defibrillator at schemes was discussed at the meetings which generated good ideas for fundraising. It was agreed that the Society would cover the cost of the maintenance of the defibrillators and would provide training in the use of the equipment.

The next round of tenant surveys in early March 2024 was covered which will be carried out on the Society's behalf by Viewpoint who will be contacting tenants randomly by telephone to run through a series of questions regarding satisfaction levels with our services.

The Society's new damp and mould prevention guide was launched at the tenants' meetings which provides tips on how to prevent damp and mould in properties and explains how persistent problems will be investigated and resolved. All tenants will receive a copy of this document.

Current scams that are "doing the rounds" were highlighted and tenants discussed their own experiences of being scammed. Ideas were shared on the best way to repel scammers and who to contact if tenants were worried about a possible scam.

Tenant Advisory Group (TAG)

The TAG was established to give tenants a voice in shaping the Society's services and to influence the organisation's plans and policies. The TAG will enable the Tenant Representatives and the Society's officers to work together to continuously improve services.

There are currently 13 members who are representative of all our schemes. TAG members have been appointed for a term of three years.

Members of the TAG have participated in an induction and training programme to help them fulfil their role. The TAG will meet 4 times a year at the social rooms across our sites.

The key roles and responsibilities of the TAG will be as follows:

- Scrutinise the Society's services and identify areas for improvement.
- Actively contribute to the review of the Society's policies and procedures.
- Consider and make recommendations relating to the Society's publications and tenant wide communications.
- Participate in the review of service contracts.
- Actively contribute to the setting of the agendas for the scheme wide Tenants Meetings twice a year.

The nature of the TAG means it is likely that tenants will approach members and ask them to get involved in individual concerns. However, it is crucial that tenants recognise that TAG members need to behave impartially and not get involved in detailed operational matters on individual schemes.

Therefore, in dealing with matters raised by individual tenants, TAG members will operate as follows:

- Encourage the tenant to approach the relevant officer. In the first instance tenants should contact their Scheme Manager.
- Do not get involved in any lobbying on behalf of their scheme.
- If the tenant has already contacted the Society and is not happy with the response, then encourage the tenant to raise the matter through the Society's complaints procedure.
- If the tenant raises issues about the Society's policies, suggest they contact their Scheme Manager for advice.

Office Staff Celebrate Big Birthdays

We've not just had one special birthday so far this year, but two! John Newstead turned 60 years old in January, and Lee Watkins turned 40 years old last month. Both were celebrated with many gifts, lunch take out and of course cake. We do like to spoil our colleagues and we love any excuse to indulge in delicious food.



When you've reported a repair and the contractor contacts you to book an appointment, please arrange a convenient time for you to be home for them to carry out the repair. If you are not going to be home, please leave a spare key with a neighbour. Access can sometimes be arranged through your Scheme Manager. Please do not advise contractors to collect a key from the office as we do not hold a spare key for every flat and we will also not provide contractors with key safe numbers. Similarly, if you have a prearranged appointment with a contractor, please ensure you are at home at the agreed day and time.

Thank you



Eyes down for a full house! This is the Rotary Court social club playing bingo at Christmas.

Annual Rent and Service Charge Review 2024/2025

The Society has completed the Annual Rent and Service Charge Review for all our schemes which will take effect from 6th May 2024 for our Norwich Housing Society sheltered housing tenants. 1st May 2024 for Stuart Court Memorial Charity residents and Norwich Housing Society general needs.

The total rent and Monthly Maintenance Contribution (Stuart Court) charge is made up of the basic rent (charged for the occupation of your property and covers repairs, maintenance, insurance, and housing management) plus the service charge (actual costs for services provided to you).

When setting the basic rent, we are guided by the Government's Rent Standard, where rents are increased annually by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate for the preceding September, plus 1%. As CPI was running at 6.7% in September 2023, the recommended rise allowed for our organisation's properties for this coming year would be 7.7% in accordance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Rent Standard.

After careful consideration, our Board has decided to apply a basic rent increase of 7.7% (in line with the Rent Standard). We believe this increase should have no effect upon the services we provide to you.

There will be no change in the way that your service charge is calculated. Unlike the basic rent, these figures are based on a calculation of the actual costs for services provided to you, split between those that are communal and those for your flat. As you benefit from a fixed annual service charge there is no carry forward of any surplus or deficit into this year's charges.

We will be sending the Annual Rent Review letter to all tenants at the beginning of April 2024 which will set out your basic rent, service charge and total rent for the coming year effective from 6th May 2024 for our Norwich Housing Society sheltered housing tenants. 1st May 2024 for Stuart Court Memorial Charity residents and Norwich Housing Society general needs. If you have any queries regarding your rent review, you may contact the Bracondale office or alternatively, you can seek advice from Norwich Citizens Advice (telephone number 0800 144 8848).



Christmas Quiz Answers

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|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. North Pole | 6. Decorations |
| 2. Mince Pies | 7. Mulled Wine |
| 3. Christmas Tree | 8. Mistletoe |
| 4. Pigs in Blankets | 9. Season's Greetings |
| 5. Nativity | 10. Stocking |

Well done to everyone that entered. It was a tricky one! Congratulations to Jenny of Lanchester Court, we hope you enjoyed spending your voucher.

Your rent account statements are posted to you every three months. If we need you to action anything, we will accompany the statement with a letter advising you what to do. If you do not receive a letter, then there's nothing for you to do.

What would you like to see in the next newsletter? If you have any stories, poems, jokes, interesting hobbies, recipes, holiday stories or if you would like to see anything else in the newsletter; we would love to hear from you, please get in touch on: 01603 625078 or email: information@norwichhousingociety.co.uk