

Prize Wordsearch

A H B L A I R N N X I I
 T B M E A R L E Y N T C
 H E A T H T U B A A L H
 A D J A I R O H N U I U
 T E O A T B G U N G Z R
 C N R H E A W W E H G C
 H O H G L H O O R A W H
 E U W L N R L N D N O I
 R D A S B U L V G E R L
 V C V M A L I N O N T L
 I M A C M I L L A N H P
 C H P I A W I L S O N N

Can you find 10 prime ministers?

If so, send your completed entry, along with your name and address to:

Prize Wordsearch,
 Basted House,
 Harrison Road,
 Borough Green,
 Sevenoaks,
 Kent TN15 8PB

By Friday 19 February
 The winner, drawn from all correct entries, will win £50.

Name:

Address:

This competition is not open to Russet Homes or Circle Anglia employees, Board members or their relatives.

Last wordsearch answers:

ATHERTON, HUSSAIN, BOTHAM, GOWER, GATTING, GOOCH, WILLIS, VAUGHAN, ILLINGWORTH, BREARLEY.

Wordsearch Winner: Mr Griggs of Riding Park, Hildenborough won the £50 cheque as winner of our previous Wordsearch competition.

Feedback

Why not write to Feedback with any news and views you have that might interest our readers?

Surfing?

Why not visit our website at: www.russethomes.org for more information, news and articles of general interest.

Help with this newsletter

This newsletter is available in translation, Braille, large print and audio tape versions. Please ring: **01732 780999** to request a copy.

Published by:
 Russet Homes Limited, Basted House, Harrison Road, Borough Green, Kent, TN15 8PB

Contact your council

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
www.tmbc.gov.uk tel: 01732 844522

Maidstone Borough Council
www.maidstone.gov.uk tel: 01622 602 000

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk tel: 01892 526121

Dartford Borough Council
www.dartford.gov.uk tel: 01322 343 434



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Request for Translated Information

Name:

If English is not your first language and you need assistance, please tick the appropriate box and send to the address below with your name and address.

Address:

ইংরেজী যদি আপনার প্রথম ভাষা না হয় এবং আপনার সাহায্যের প্রয়োজন, তাহলে দয়াকরে সঠিক ঘরে টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং আপনার নাম ও ঠিকানা সহ নীচের ঠিকানায় পাঠিয়ে দিন।

BENGALI

اگر انگریزی آپ کی صدر زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو مدد حاصل کرنے کی ضرورت ہے تو براہ کرم موزوں خانے پر ٹیک لگائیے اور اپنے نام اور پتے کے ساتھ اسے منجے دے گئے پتے پر واپس بھیج دیجئے۔

URDU

假如英語並非你的第一語，而你需要別人幫助，請在適當的方格內作勾記，並在寫上你的姓名及地址後寄往下列地址。

CHINESE

Russet News

The news magazine for Russet Homes residents



So much more... online

Russet Homes unwrapped its brand new slicker, quicker and more interactive website in time for Christmas. Incorporating our striking corporate colours giving it a fresh look and feel, it has been designed to make navigation easy and fun to use.



Tenants, Portfolio Holders and staff were consulted to help shape the content and layout of the new site which forms part of the Circle Anglia group website.

Whether you're already a frequent user, or visiting the site for the first time, you'll find a wealth of useful features and information. You will be able to:

- get all the latest news
- get involved, with our resident panels and forums
- report anti-social behaviour, tell us what you think of our service, or just contact us online
- log in and view your rent statements or report a repair via

the Tenant Website as before (you will need your rent account reference number)

- find the answers to most of your tenancy questions
- pay your rent online via the Tenant Website
- find all our publications and policies
- view our home improvement schedules
- get financial advice, and job-hunting tips
- use our map and search to find events, training opportunities, community centres and local amenities.

Why not visit www.russethomes.org and find out for yourself?

We hope you find it interesting and easy to use but as with any new site going live for the first time we appreciate we may not have got it entirely right. So if you pick up any mistakes or have a suggestion on how we can improve it we would love to hear from you.

Happy browsing!

Don't forget our Freephone Repair Helpline on:
0800 197 2880



Russet Homes
 Part of Circle Anglia

Students help older residents surf the web and get online

Pupils at Tonbridge School are helping older residents from nearby Frome Court to get online, send emails and create newsletters.



Sherrie Macklin, scheme manager at Frome Court developed the unique idea for the residents to

receive weekly one-to-one tuition from students aged 15 and 16 to develop their computer skills and confidence – and the project has been a great success.

Sherrie said: “It’s fantastic to see the different generations coming together in such a positive way. The beauty of the web is anyone can learn how to go on line regardless of age or even physical ability.

“Surfing the web and sending emails is second nature to most young people but many of our older residents had never been on a computer, let alone tackled using the internet. So it seemed to be a golden opportunity for the students to help them to overcome any fears and show that computers can be fun and simple to use.

“It has proved to be an excellent two way learning curve for both the residents and the students; they all seem to really enjoy the experience and time spent together.”

One resident, Valmae Irving, aged 83 has been given a laptop by her son who lives in Australia and the students have helped her to set it up and taught her how to send emails so she can regularly communicate with him.

Valmae said: “I love being around young people as I miss my grandchildren and the boys have been fantastic. I was so excited the first time I received an email back from my son; I know I still have a lot to learn but I think its going to change my life.”

We hope to provide computers in other schemes in the future.

Residents learn what to do in an emergency

We helped residents discover what to do in an emergency, especially if it involved a child or infant, during a half day first aid training session at Hadlow College.

Funded and organised by Russet Homes in conjunction with St John Ambulance Kent the certified SJA course introduced local people to a range of life saving techniques including child and infant resuscitation, how to stem bleeding, treating an unconscious casualty and choking.

Marilyn Smith, our community investment manager, said: “Burns, choking, suffocation and drowning are the leading causes of unintentional injury or death at home among children. The worry is that many people simply would not know what to do without the



proper training and may panic or simply freeze if faced with a life threatening accident, especially if it was their own child.”

Fiona Bond, a Russet Homes tenant who attended the course said: “I was a bit nervous before the course started but it was far



easier than I expected. I now feel 100% that I could help someone if they needed help in an emergency. I know it was aimed at helping children and infants who need first aid, but I feel a lot of what I have learnt will be really useful to me if I need to help my Dad as he suffers from a range of health problems.”

Look out for details of more St John Ambulance and other interesting training courses available to Russet Homes residents on our new website (russethomes.org) under the Events section.

FUNDRAISING EFFORTS



World’s biggest coffee morning creates a huge stir

Coffee flowed freely at Marvillion Court as residents were encouraged to create a big stir by taking part in the Worlds Biggest Coffee Morning.

Residents invited friends and family to join in the fun and help raise as much money as possible for the Macmillan Cancer Support to help people living with cancer. Home made marmalade, cakes and sausages rolls were on offer as well as a ‘good as new’ stall and raffle.



Vivian Corke, scheme manager at Marvillion Court, said: “Everyone knows someone affected by cancer and though we are a small scheme we are pleased to help by fundraising like this and know that it makes a difference.”

Raising money for Pudsey bear

Children in Need has become our biggest and most popular fundraising event and staff go to extreme lengths to raise cash and this year was no exception.

We joined forces with group partner Invicta Telecare to hold a string of enjoyable and sometimes hilarious activities throughout the day.

Diets were forgotten as volunteers cooked sausage and bacon for breakfast, and burgers and hot dogs for lunch on a huge BBQ in the grounds outside and other tasty goodies were sold at the various offices.



The Naff Raff, now a favourite annual tradition, got into full swing as the reluctant winners were presented with unwanted and tacky prizes which had been collected throughout the year.

A nervous male volunteer had his chest shaved in front of a cheering crowd of ladies whilst others contributed through taking part in a coin trail, Guess Gary’s spot kick and a silent auction.



Together we managed to raise a grand total of over £1000.



Staff get ready for bed to raise money

Business suits were left at home as staff at our Larkfield office came to work dressed in their pyjamas during a week filled with whacky activities to raise vital cash for people suffering from Motor Neurone disease.

Other fundraising activities included providing lunches, guess the baby, guess the pet owner, a swear box – which filled with far too much money, guess the sweets in a jar, raffles and light-hearted spiritual readings by a team member. A fun auction was held raising cash by selling appealing prizes including two hours of filing, two hours of ironing, someone to do the weekly shopping and having a meal for two cooked.

Ivanna Roberts-Cillia, Head of Housing said: “We even sponsored one of the men in our office to go to the shops for us as we were all dressed in our pyjamas! Staff at our Larkfield and Tonbridge offices generously gave their time and talents and we managed to raise over £1000. which is a fantastic amount.”

MORE HELP WITH HOUSING COSTS

From 9 November 2009 new rules on Housing and Council Tax Benefits came into force, potentially making working families on average £20 a week better off.

Child Benefit is no longer taken into account when calculating entitlement to these benefits. This could mean more income for families already getting these

benefits and other low income families becoming eligible for the first time.

If you are already in receipt of Housing or Council Tax Benefit, your benefit will have been reassessed automatically. If you think you may now be entitled to these benefits, please contact your local council for more information.



RASP RASP is the Resident and Service users Panel

Michael Levings



I have been a tenant in social housing for over thirty years, the last five with Russet Homes. I have a keen interest in

tenant affairs and spent some years as Chair of the West Wiltshire Tenants Federation when we were negotiating the transfer of our homes from Council to Housing Association. As well as being a tenant representative with RASP, I am happy to advise on our local newsletter and I am active in my local community as a Charity Trustee of our local Community Centre.

Sue Curtis



I have been a tenant elected Board Member of Russet Homes for nearly seven years and was invited by the board to become a member of RASP at its inception in 2008. I have recently also been appointed joint

vice chair of RASP. It is important to have tenant representation in as many areas as possible, as the current mood in both the housing sector and government is that tenants should be more "empowered"!

RASP was set up by the group managers of Circle Anglia to address the issues of "Resident and Service Users" involvement in the policy making of the group. The Tenant Services Authority and the government are very keen to have more resident input into decision making for Registered Providers (RP's) and RASP is one way of addressing that issue.

All RPs in the group plus leaseholders and service users from Invicta and Epic, meet in London every three months and have the opportunity to discuss and have training on various issues and policies that affect the residents of the group. We can influence policy but cannot make it!

Ours is a voice that is gradually getting louder, and with the appointment of a Chair-person from within the ranks, RASP will acquire more influence still.

Sue and Michael are very keen to:

- Be able to represent Russet tenants' views and problems to the panel
- Filter down to Russet residents what is discussed at RASP and how it affects them.

To do this we need to hear from you and in return we will report back in Russet News on the meetings we attend and how it affects Russet tenants and the Circle Anglia group as a whole.

To help us to get your views heard, contact us by email info@russethomes.org marking it for our attention or telephone 01732 780999 or write to us c/o Russet Homes, Basted House Borough Green, TN15 8BP

Mystery Shopping Explained...

It's not such a mystery, or is it?

Mystery shopping has been used in the banking and the retail trades for over 50 years. Outlets such as GAP, ASDA and Café Rouge use mystery shoppers to test the service that customers get. The mystery shoppers act as normal customers and report back to the company on the service they received. The company can then use the results to improve how they do things.

Now housing organisations are using mystery shoppers to test the services they provide for their residents and use the results to improve those services and to highlight areas of weakness or the need for staff training.

Obviously residents make the best mystery shoppers as they are the ones that receive the services

being tested. As part of the Circle Anglia group we are now carrying out mystery shopping exercises three times a year and give residents informal training so they can 'shop' for us.

Would you like to be a mystery shopper?

Doing a mystery shop can involve visiting our offices, telephoning, writing to us, e-mailing or visiting our website. All we ask from you is that you attend a short training session, complete the forms in full after you have carried out the shop and then attend a short debriefing session. Of course you need to keep it a mystery from the housing staff!!

The sessions are very informal and give you the opportunity to swap experiences and meet the other 'shoppers'.

We offer to pay travel and 'phone expenses and give vouchers for High Street stores as a thank you.



If you are interested please call Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716

Funding for Community Projects

We have some funding available for projects within the community.

In the past we have helped with school trips, story tellers, youth clubs, breakfast clubs, football teams, majorettes and many other projects. We like to support projects that match the categories in our life chances agenda:

- Children and young people
- Safer and stronger communities

- Economic development and the environment
- Healthier communities and older people.

If you know of an organisation that could do with some funding for a project or to buy equipment please contact Marilyn Smith on 01732 781952 for an application form.

COMMUNITY COMMUNITY FUNDING

Application Form



Please complete this form as fully as possible, incomplete forms may cause delays in the decision on whether or not to sponsor a project.

If you need any help with the form please contact Marilyn Smith 01732 780999



Dates for your diary

Russet resident meeting dates for 2010

Tuesday 26 January 2010 at Penruddocke House, The Ridgeway, Tonbridge

Tuesday 27 April 2010 at Aylesford Community Centre, Forstal Road, Aylesford

Monday 19 July 2010 at Rectory Close, Rocfort Road, Snodland

Monday 18 October 2010 at Hildenborough Village Hall, Riding Lane, Hildenborough

All meetings start at 7pm and everyone is welcome to come along for a coffee and a chat. Ring Melanie McAdam on 01732 780999 ext 2716 for more details.

FORUM, is currently undergoing a revamp. In the next issue we hope to be able to launch the new look organisation. In the meantime, here are some dates for your diary.

Training courses that really make a difference

With funding from Russet Homes, the YWCA in Tonbridge are running courses to help young people with their basic skills, cooking and to learn more about the responsibilities of being a tenant.

Laura (22) who was living independently and had just become a Russet Homes tenant said "I have learned more in the last six weeks about being a tenant than I have in the last three years" and Sam (19) commented



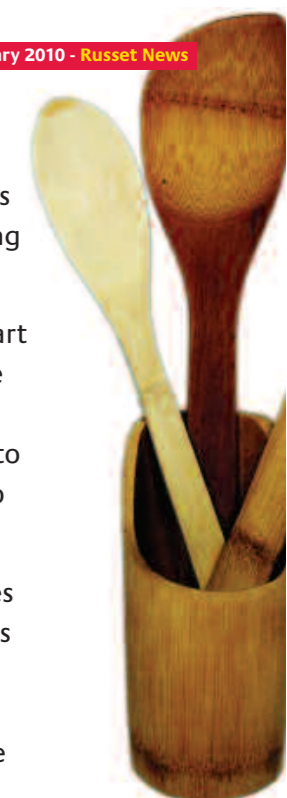
"It has been the help and information from the YWCA and the course that has given me confidence to sort out my housing problems".

The Basic Skills Programme has enabled one resident, with no previous qualifications, to gain a qualification in literacy and numeracy equivalent to a GCSE Grade B. Her confidence has grown, she feels her life is on track and she now works as a volunteer

on a parenting programme and has started a counselling course at college.

January sees the start of a cooking course 'Y's Choice' where you can learn how to cook alternatives to takeaways.

There are still places available on courses at the YWCA so for more information and to book a place contact them on 01732 365831.



Keeping your home free from dampness

During the winter months in particular, dampness can be a problem which, if left alone, can affect people's health and may also damage decorations, clothes and furniture through mould growth.

The most common cause of dampness is condensation. A typical family will generate two gallons (nearly 10 litres) of air-borne moisture a day from washing, cooking and even breathing! If the air is warm, this moisture stays as a vapour but if it meets a cold surface, it will condense as water droplets.



In most cases this will harmlessly evaporate. Sometimes though this moisture collects where it meets a 'cold spot' on the corners of outside walls or around windows and if the air isn't allowed to freely circulate (such as behind furniture), the result can be dampness and mould patches. Because they are coldest, north facing walls are particularly prone to condensation.

There are some simple steps you can take to make this less of a problem:

Reduce the amount of moisture in the air

- ◆ Cover pans of boiling water.
- ◆ Avoid using portable paraffin or gas heaters.

- ◆ If practical to do so, dry washing outdoors. If you use a clothes drier, make sure it is ventilated to the outside unless it is of the self-condensing type.

Improve ventilation

- ◆ Keep windows on ventilator settings.
- ◆ If you have switchable ventilator fans, use them; most fans we install now come on automatically if the moisture level reaches a certain level
- ◆ Close kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use
- ◆ Help the air to circulate within wardrobes and cupboards by adding ventilation holes or grilles and using slatted shelving. Avoid placing large items of furniture hard against exterior walls.

Heating your home a little more

- ◆ Try to keep all rooms heated. Even in rooms you are not using, a low radiator thermostat setting will provide sufficient background heat to help reduce condensation.

Home insulation

- ◆ In addition to helping to reduce fuel bills, many of the measures we have taken to improve the insulation of your home (such as double glazed windows and doors and loft insulation) also help to reduce condensation by retaining heat in your home.
- ◆ We have an active programme of cavity wall insulation to reduce the 'cold bridge' effect of outside walls that can give rise to condensation. If you have not had cavity wall insulation already, please contact us and we may be able to arrange this for you free of

charge. It means you can save money on energy costs as well.

New or refurbished homes

- ◆ If you live in a property less than six months old or have had a lot of plastering or concreting work done, there may be dampness because the water in the materials used is still drying out. Normally a combination of adequate heating and ventilation solves the problem but if you are concerned please contact us.

Other causes of dampness

- ◆ Dampness can also be caused by structural defects such as leaking pipes, wastes and overflows, rain seeping through roofs or broken or blocked gutters. Rising damp can occur where ground water enters the property as a result of a defective damp barrier in walls and floors. Often there is a

noticeable 'tidemark' stain associated with this sort of dampness and sometimes the presence of salty deposits.

- ◆ If you suspect dampness is caused for any of these reasons, please contact us straight away and we can visit you to establish the cause and take the necessary action.

Need help?

If you want general advice on dampness problems, contact our surveying team on 01732 780999 and ask for Owen Goymer or Peter Winch.

If you are interested in free cavity wall insulation, contact Michelle Turner on 01732 780999.

To report a repair, contact our Contact Russet freephone helpline on 0800 197 2880.

Service excellence

The Service Excellence Awards Scheme continues to go from strength to strength, recognising outstanding service from members of staff of Russet Homes.

We are pleased to announce the following monthly award winners:



August
Stacey Cooper
Building Services Officer, Basted



September
Laura Knight
Housing Advisor, Tonbridge



October
Claire West,
Housing Manager



Each monthly award winner is put forward for the Employee of the Year Award which is judged by the Russet Homes' tenant Board members.

We are delighted to announce that **Lee Spring**, Welfare

Benefits Officer, was voted Employee of the Year for Russet Homes 2009.

Lee was presented with a certificate and an award of gift vouchers by our Honorary President, Marion Cole, at the Annual Review meeting.

Many congratulations Lee!

Evictions

Evictions are a last resort but sometimes it can't be avoided. If you have problems paying your rent, contact your Income Recovery Officer straight away as we can usually help. You might be entitled to some benefits and your Income Recovery Officer, or the Council can help with this. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council can be contacted on 01732 844522 and Maidstone Borough Council on 01622 602000. We also have a Welfare Benefits Officer who can give you advice and support and help you maximise your income. If you or your family are causing nuisance or antisocial behaviour then you need to stop so that we don't have to take court action against you.

EVICTION DATE	WHO	WHY
August 2009	Single Woman and 1 child, Tonbridge	Rent Arrears
September 2009	None	
October 2009	Single woman with 2 children, Tonbridge	Rent Arrears

If you are evicted for arrears or anti-social behaviour, we won't rehouse you and it is very unlikely that the Council will either, even if you have got children.

Performance update

July to September 2009

In each issue we give you information on our performance.

We use Key Performance Indicators - a set of industry standard measures to monitor how well a range of services are doing.

Collecting rent

For every pound in rent due to us, we collected 97 pence.



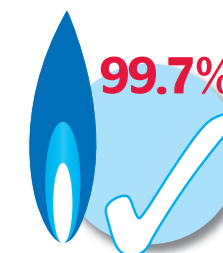
Empty homes

Our target is to relet empty homes within 30 days. During this period, the average time to relet empty homes was **30 days**. Ensuring empty homes are let speedily reduces rent loss and allows people to move more quickly.



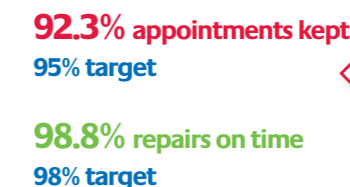
Gas servicing

We aim to have a valid Gas Safety Certificate for every home. We have them for 99.7% of our homes. Your safety is of primary importance to us. Our aim is to ensure all our properties that require annual servicing visits have this done. We rely on your co-operation to be able to do so but will take action including legal proceedings and measures to recoup our costs where access is unreasonably denied.



Home repairs

In 92.3% of cases, you told us that the appointment made for home repairs was kept. Our target is 95%. We aim to complete 98% of emergency repairs on time. During this period you told us 98.8% were on time.



Customer contact

Our target is to answer all correspondence within 7 working days. We managed to achieve this 99.7 times out 100.

We aim to answer all telephone calls within 5 rings (or 10 seconds). We achieved this 79 times out of 100 although 97% were answered within 30 seconds. While the great majority are answered quickly, we want all callers to be confident that their call is important to us and will be handled without any delay.



Community Clean Up

'You said, We did' is an initiative by Kent Police and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to keep you informed about what is happening in your area based on the priorities that you have raised.

In October, PSCO Linda Baker attended Woodlands Infant School with the Mayor of Tonbridge & Malling, Councillor Sue Murray and representatives from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council after pupils were concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour in the Higham Ward.

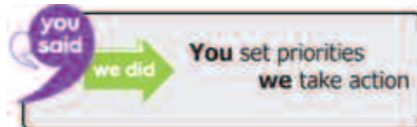
The visit was arranged after pupils from the school had sent a letter to the local MP - Sir John Stanley raising their concerns about littering, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling, graffiti and road

safety. This gave an opportunity for the school children to speak to the police and council staff about their concerns so that something could be done about it.

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has been looking to arrange litter enforcement days across the district and in November a clean-up event at St Philips Church, Salisbury Road in Tonbridge took place. Representatives of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, the neighbourhood police teams, residents and members of the church attended, after the success of a similar event in January where 30 people joined in. As well as the littering, local police teams have been working to reduce graffiti in the area by increasing patrols in hotspot areas and gathering evidence of graffiti to catch repeat

offenders. The Council and police have also been liaising with Kent County Council to deal with road safety issues in the area.

For more information about



'You said, We did', visit www.kent.police.uk/yousaidwedid

To report non-urgent crime 24 hours a day, call Kent Police on 01622 690690. In an emergency, dial 999. To report issues such as fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling and parking, please contact Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council on 01732 844522.



Maintenance and improvement programme

With your copy of Russet News we have sent an insert giving details of our five year maintenance and improvement programme. If you did not get your copy, please ring 01732 780999 and we will send you one.



Receipt winners

By sending back their repair and gas service feedback forms the following have won our monthly draw...

Repairs Winners

July

Mr PA Stocks
Hunt Road

August

Mrs Moon
Oakmead

September

Mrs Pickersgill
Saltings Road

Gas Winners

July

Mr & Mrs Penfold
Lysander Road

August

Ms Williams
Elm Crescent

September

Mrs Mancktelow
West Street

HOMEOWNER NEWS

for shared owners and leaseholders.

We want you to make a fuss!

This year will see many changes to the way we deliver services to leaseholders and shared owners. Legislative changes are being introduced which could mean an increase in costs to homeowners, our IT systems are under review and structural changes as a result of integration into the Circle Anglia group will all bring new challenges.

In order to give you the opportunity to directly influence how the services are provided to homeowners by Russet Homes and Circle Anglia, we are setting up a new Leaseholder and shared owner Focused User Service Standards group (Homeowner FUSS).

The purpose of the FUSS will be to review existing processes, consider proposed changes and how best to implement them, and make suggestions for future service delivery improvements.

In recognition of the fact that many people work and the diverse location of many shared owners (Rochester, Dartford, Maidstone as well as Tonbridge & Malling) we have decided that it will not be appropriate to hold regular meetings at Basted House but to

make more use of modern technology such as e-mail.

A letter was sent to all leaseholders and shared owners in November inviting them to become a member of the Homeowner FUSS but if anyone would like to join and hasn't yet returned their form, can they please contact Sarah Chatfield on 01732 781943 or sarah.chatfield@russethomes.org.

We will be holding a meeting at Basted House in January for members of the FUSS so that the aims and objectives of the Homeowner FUSS can be more fully explained in person. If you cannot attend the meeting then this will not prevent you from becoming a member of the Homeowner FUSS.

Shared ownership homes available

Mount Nod, Greenhithe

One and two bedroom apartments. Excellent location with views over the Thames estuary and five minutes from Bluewater. For more info visit www.mountnod.org.

Greenfields, Maidstone

Two and three bedroom houses close to Mote Park in Maidstone available now. Properties have modern fitted kitchen, en-suites to master bedroom, and allocated parking.

Hugh Christie, Tonbridge

Two bedroom houses and two bedroom apartments available from Feb 2010.

Anchor Road, Rochester

One and two bedroom apartments available from Feb 2010.

For more information visit www.circleanglia-yourhome.org or ring 0845 304 1007 and speak to Alex Rivers, Sales and Marketing Officer.

