

# Have you had your Aerial Socket changed yet?

**W**hitefriars are now over half way through our programme to update all our communal aerial equipment to receive digital broadcasts in 2010.

Have you seen the hi-Vision vans in your area? Have you made your appointment to have your socket changed in your living room?

We have now completed the conversion in most of the homes managed by our Torrington Office, and our St James Lane Office.

If you have received a letter saying that the work is going to be done, and have not yet made an appointment, please contact hi-Vision on **0845 077 22 32**



## Our Housing Offices

9 Little Park Street,  
City Centre, Coventry  
☎ 024 7676 7111

29-31 Riley Square,  
Bell Green, Coventry  
☎ 024 7670 8400

192 Torrington Avenue,  
Coventry  
☎ 024 7649 6700

St James Lane,  
Willenhall, Coventry  
☎ 024 7651 6700

**Repairs Line**  
(24hrs)  
**0845**  
**850 6090**

## Need help in your own language? ☎ 024 7676 7000

**French**  
Pour vous assister en votre  
propre langue

**Portuguese**  
Assistencia na sura  
propria lingua

**Somali**  
Luqadaadoo lugugu  
caawinaayo

**Farsi**  
برای کمک به زبانتان

**Arabic**  
لمساعدتكم في لغتكم

**Kurdish**  
بۆیارمه تیدان به زمانی خۆت

**VIEW**

Email View Magazine

**view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk**

Text View Magazine

**07781 489 833**

Write to View Magazine

**Freepost Whitefriars Communications Team**

(Nothing else needs writing on the envelope and no stamp is needed)

### Want this magazine in a different format?

If you, or a friend, would like a copy of View in **Audio Format** or in **Large Print** call the Communications Team on 024 7676 7029.

If you would like to receive **View** by **Email** please let us know and we will add you the distribution list.

You can find the **Whitefriars Housing Group's Website** at: **www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk**



WHITEFRIARS HOUSING GROUP CUSTOMER MAGAZINE

**VIEW**

ISSUE 2 SPRING 2009



In this issue... We've launched  
**Whitefriars**  
**Big Community**  
**Fund...**



...and we need you  
to tell us how to  
spend it! See Page 18

See inside for your chance to WIN... an Xbox 360,  
a WebBook and Family Tickets to Birmingham Sea Life

# WELCOME TO VIEW

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**H**ello and welcome to the second issue of View Magazine, the publication for Whitefriars customers. There are lots of things packed into this issue that we are sure you will find interesting and we really want to thank all those people who entered our competition and gave us feedback on the last issue. We really do appreciate it the time and trouble it takes to do this.

Your comments indicated that the new format has the thumbs up from you, our customers. People liked the design, layout and the new style of articles. We also received some good ideas for features in future issues, so keep an eye on the next few issues to see what appears.

If you want to send us any more ideas or comments then please do. You can contact us in any of the ways that are listed on the competition page, or make use of the reply card included with this issue of View.

To answer one question that cropped up, the overall cost of this new publication, View, is the same as the old one, Home. In simple terms, by producing three larger magazines a year as opposed to four smaller ones the total cost remains the same. Which is nice, and allows us to make a far more interesting publication.

There is another competition for you to enter, on page 25, with some excellent prizes. And this time it couldn't be easier. All we want to know are three simple things.

1) Where do you normally do your weekly shopping?  
For example: Asda

2) Which newspaper do you read most often?  
For example: The Telegraph

3) Which radio station do you listen to most often?  
For example: Mercia FM

And that's it. Incidentally the reason we want to know is simply so that we can look at new and different ways of communicating with you, our customers. So please take the time to take part and good luck.

Inside this packed edition we have everything from energy saving tips to an exciting new service offer for leaseholders. We are also announcing our new Community Fund through which we want to invest even more into communities to help continue to make them places where people want to live and work.

And there's more, we are also extending an invitation from the new regulator of organisations like ours, the Tenant Services Authority, (TSA), for you to join in the National Conversation. The TSA want to engage tenants in raising the standards of services for affordable housing tenants. It replaces the Housing Corporation, which monitored and regulated all registered social landlords.

The TSA want to get as much customer involvement in their services as they can and are holding a "National Conversation" with customers from up and down the country to "draw up a brand new set of standards for all social landlords."

So read on, there's lots inside and don't forget to enter the competition

Anyway that's all for now, so read on and enjoy and we look forward to receiving your comments soon.

*The View Editorial Team*



**If you would like to receive VIEW by email, then just email us at [view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk](mailto:view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk) and we will make sure you receive it**



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# DON'T MISS OUT...

**A**s recession becomes more and more of a reality, it is important that we all keep our finances in check by claiming the right benefits.

To make sure that you are getting all the right benefits its really important that you let people know when things change.

Because paying your rent and council tax is a priority, getting your Housing and Council Tax Benefit right is a must.

The stories on this page are real life examples of how reporting changes in your circumstances can have a big effect and how to go about keeping your claim on track!

## John's Story

John is 26, single and has lived in a Whitefriars flat for 18 months. He recently met with a jobs broker at his local community centre who helped him find a permanent job with a local company.

He also told John that he needed to go along to his nearest housing benefit surgery so that he could let them know he was going to start work. John was worried about this as he wasn't sure how he was going to manage dealing with his finances now, or what he would have to pay out on bills and rent.

At the benefit surgery Claire the Housing Benefit officer was able to work out that John would still be entitled to some help with his rent, as he was on a low income.

Claire helped John to fill in the forms for housing benefit and gave him another form for his new boss to fill in which was about his wages as he would not get any wage slips until he started work. This put John's mind at rest as he knew that his claim could be sorted out quickly now. One thing that John was still worried about was how he would be able to budget his wages to pay his rent and other bills now that he was working. Claire arranged an



appointment with Housing Benefits Money Management advisor, who would be able to work through some simple Household budget plans, that John could follow.

The following week, John had his appointment at Spire House with Anna the money management advisor and she helped him work out how to manage his money and stay out of debt. Whilst he was there John handed in the

form from his employer and his claim was reassessed that day, John was then getting the right benefit at the right time!

John has been working full time for 6 months now, he pays his rent and bills on time and shares his story with anyone who will listen! Because of what he had learnt he was able to

advise his sister Sarah that she may be entitled to more help with her rent, after her new baby is born.

John advised Sarah to call the Coventry Benefits Advice Line and they were able to tell her that she was entitled to a sure start maternity grant and also Tax credits after the baby was born. Sarah had a healthy bouncing baby boy (8lb 12oz)

and while she was busy settling him in, John called in at the Housing Benefit surgery with a signed statement from Sarah and the birth certificate. Sarah's claim was updated the following day and the extra Housing Benefit she was entitled to made sure that she could keep up to date paying her rent.

Don't delay, update us today!

## Pauline's Story

Pauline has been getting Housing and Council Tax Benefit for over a year now. She has a 21 year old son called Daniel who had been working in Derby for the last few years. Because Daniel was doing so well at work he was promoted to a new job in Coventry and so he moved back home to live with Mum.

A few months passed, Daniel was enjoying every minute of his new job. Pauline was really pleased and felt inspired to look for a job herself as her youngest child had just started school and Daniel told her that his employer was looking for some part time customer service staff

Daniel helped her complete the application form and prepare for the interview. Pauline was offered a temporary contract for 3 months in the call centre. Great news! Things were looking up!

As it was a short contract Pauline thought that it would be okay not to tell the benefits agency that she had started work for a few weeks until things were settled. Pauline was soon offered a permanent contract, so she decided that now she would tell the benefits agencies about her new job.

A few days later Pauline received two letters, one from the Job centre and one from Housing Benefits saying that her benefit claims had been suspended due to her starting work.

Pauline also received a call from Anne her rent officer at Whitefriars as they had received a letter about her housing benefit claim being suspended. Anne explained that she would now have to pay the full rent on her home

Anne advised Pauline to visit the Coventry Direct Express, which is a mobile council service to sort out her claim - it could be that Pauline could still get some Housing Benefit.

Pauline visited the service, where she went through all her new employment details, the advisor she saw already knew that she had been working for some time. Pauline was told that her claim would be reassessed back to when she started work, and that she had been paid too much Housing benefit and Income Support and that she would have to be pay this back.

Pauline knew then that thinking it would 'be ok' was wrong and she wished she had sorted it out when she first started work, so I've had a few months of extra cash, she thought, well that doesn't help me pay back this overpayment now!

The advisor also told Pauline that she should have told Housing Benefit when Daniel moved back home as having a grown up son or daughter living at home makes a difference to how much you get. This meant that she was overpaid even

**“As it was a short contract Pauline thought that it would be okay not to tell the benefits agency...”**

more Housing Benefit.

It turned out that Pauline did still get Housing benefit as she was working part time but the amount she gets every week in reduced by £9 to pay back her overpayment. This means that she has to put an extra £9 per week out of her wages towards her rent



Pauline doesn't regret starting work, she has learnt many new skills and made new friends, but she wishes she had sorted out her benefits at the right time.

Pauline makes sure she does everything when she should now, she also makes sure her family and anyone else she knows in receipt of benefits is aware of the importance to keep everything updated!!

## Who Can I Tell?

**Coventry City Council Benefits Service**

Visit one of Housing Benefits Local Advice Surgeries

Indian Community Centre, Cross Road Foleshill

Every Monday 2:00 - 4:00pm

Tile Hill Library, Jardine Crescent, Tile Hill

Every Tuesday 1:30 - 3:30pm

Coventry Direct One Stop Shop, Barley Lea, Stoke Aldermoor

Every Wednesday 2:00 - 3:30pm

Stoke Heath Children's Centre, Heath Crescent, Stoke Heath

Every Thursday 9:00 - 10:30am

Bell Green Library, Riley Square, Bell Green

Every Thursday 11:00 -12:30pm

Willenhall Community Library, Remembrance Road, Willenhall

Every Friday 9:30 -11:30am

**By Post**

PO BOX 3899 Coventry CV1 5WW

**Telephone** 024 76 83 1800

**Email** benefits@coventry.gov.uk

**Visit our Advice Centre at**

Spire House, New Union Street, Coventry

**Coventry Benefits Advice Line**

**Telephone** 024 7683 2000

**Email** welfare.benefits@coventry.gov.uk

**Coventry Money Advice Service**

**Telephone** 02476 831238

**Email** money.advice@coventry.gov.uk

Or call into your **Whitefriars Housing Office** who will pass the information onto Housing Benefits for you

# Has someone made a difference to your life?



## Well, here's your chance to say thank you!



- **Is there a person you know who goes that extra mile to help you or someone else you know?**
- **Are they caring, helpful and friendly and deserve to be recognised for their good deeds?**

Coventry's community spirit is alive and kicking. We need your help to prove it. Whether it's your next door neighbour picking up your weekly shop, a community champion who volunteers their time to help others, or the person down the road who's always on the end of the phone if you need them – if they make a difference to you and your area, we want to know!

Nominate a winner and you'll be in with a chance of getting some credit-crunch busting prizes, as well as a boost to your community spirit. Telling us about your good neighbour could win you £100 and they'll get their good deeds repaid with free bills for a year (up to the value of £2,000).

Two finalists will also get £250 each and all three finalists and their nominators will be chauffeur-driven to a lunch and ceremony to recognise their contribution to Coventry. All prizes have been kindly donated by community regeneration company Lovell.

Judges from Whitefriars, Coventry organisations and the local community will make the final decision on the winners.

To nominate your neighbour, fill in the entry form on the right – you can also get a copy from Whitefriars offices, from our website or in upcoming issues of the Coventry Telegraph. You'll also need to write, on a separate piece of paper, why the person you're nominating should win the title – in around 150 to 200 words.

Once you've completed both bits of the application, return them to in an envelope to:

**FREPOST WHITEFRIARS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM.**  
Nothing else needs writing on the envelope and no stamp is required. You can also email entries to [goodneighbour@whitefriarshousing.co.uk](mailto:goodneighbour@whitefriarshousing.co.uk)

Entries will need to be received by 5 May 2009.



## Good Neighbour Awards 2009

### Terms and Conditions

- All nominated individuals must live within the city boundaries of Coventry and be over ten years old
- The nominated individual and nominee must be willing to be named and talk to the media and be photographed about their achievements
- The nominated individual should not be engaged in behaviour that caused, or was likely to cause, nuisance or annoyance to other residents, or to have engaged in such behaviour within the preceding two years
- Nominated individuals who are shortlisted must be willing to undergo a police check
- The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. No material can be returned
- Individuals who work for Whitefriars Housing Group, Trinity Mirror or the prize sponsors, are not eligible to enter the competition
- No responsibility can be accepted for entries that are lost, delayed or damaged
- No cash alternative or alternative prize is available, but in the event of the advertised prize being unavailable we reserve the right to offer an alternative prize of equal or greater value.

Your name: ..... Your tel no.: .....

Your address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

*I have read and agree to the terms and conditions* Signature: .....

Nominee's name: ..... Nominee's tel no.: .....

Nominee's address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

*I have read and agree to the terms and conditions* Signature: .....

Sponsored by



Coventry Telegraph



# SAVE YOUR ENERGY

**W**ith fuel bills on the rise and feeling the impact of the credit crunch – lots of us are looking at ways to make savings on our outgoings. You may be pleased to know there are many ways to cut your energy bills - one way is by using your heating system more efficiently. You may also be really pleased to know that these ideas actually work and really could save you money over a year.

Without realising you could be wasting precious energy and money because you are not using your heating controls properly. Try out the advice below and start make some savings

## Thermostat Radiator Valves (TRVs)

You may have TRVs on some radiators. These control the radiator they are attached to.

The normal setting is 3 (if scale 1-5) which should equal around 21°C. For background heating in a room, turn it down to one.

## Timer/Programmer to your heating

This turns your heating on/off at times to suit you. In a well-insulated home set the timer to come on an hour before you get up in the morning and go off an hour before you go to bed at night. It should not need re-setting except when clocks change.



## Room Thermostat

Controls your room temperature and is normally in the hall. Set it to a reasonable temperature for the room; say 16 °C for a hall and 21°C for a living room.

Turning it down by one degree you could save up to £65 off your heating bill.



## Tank Thermostat

If your hot water is stored in a tank, it should have a thermostat on it to control the temperature. Set to 60°C and it will require no further adjusting.

## Electric Immersion Heaters

Don't set the thermostat too high - 60°C is ideal. **As with everything –its cheaper and more efficient to switch things off if you don't need them. This applies to immersion heaters. Leaving it on permanently wastes a lot of energy and money**



## Other effective ways to cut your bills....

- If you use electricity to heat your water check you are using off-peak rates.
- Never cover radiators with curtains or furniture as this makes them less efficient
- Replace washers on dripping taps. Wasting hot water is an expensive business.
- Shower instead of bathing- baths use five times as much water as non-power showers.

**For free advice on saving energy call FREE on 0800 512 012**

# LEASEHOLDERS OFFER

If you are a leaseholder customer with Whitefriars, you may well be interested in this offer from SPI. Leaseholder customers have been telling us through their Service Improvement Group (see page 28), they would like to see what deal Whitefriars' gas servicing contractor, SPI, could offer them for looking after their central heating systems.

We set SPI the challenge of coming up with a quality cover package. It's responded with an attractive offer, exclusive to Whitefriars leaseholder customers. For as little as £12.50 a month, SPI can offer you the peace of mind of expert servicing and repair care for your central heating system. As Whitefriars' gas servicing contractor, SPI has a wealth of experience and expertise in servicing, repairing and sourcing parts for the gas heating systems likely to be found in your property. If you are interested in finding out more phone SPI on 0808 208 2411.

## Expert Care for your Central Heating 24/7

### 3 Star Gas Central Heating Cover

exclusively for Whitefriars Leaseholders.

Bringing you peace of mind 365 days of the year

Whitefriars Housing Group and SPI are delighted to offer this exclusive offer to Whitefriars Leaseholders. **Peace of mind for as little as £12.50 per month!**



Annual servicing of gas appliances not only saves money, but extends the lifespan of appliances and could save lives. **It's a small price to pay to make sure your central heating is safe and working at its best at all times.**

### 3 Star Cover includes:

- Annual gas safety checks of all gas appliances within your property
- Full service and repair of your entire gas central heating system including controls
- 24/7 Emergency/Repairs call out
- All labour charges
- All materials (subject to initial survey)
- Fully qualified Corgi registered engineers

**5% Discount** when payment is made in full within 14 days. (£142.50 with discount)

For further details call SPI on:

**0808 208 2411**



**SPI**

working together

for you

**Whitefriars**  
HOUSING GROUP

# ON THE FRONT LINE

**Every time you go into your Housing Office, it is the job of the Customer Service Team to help you with your query. In the latest edition of our 'On the front line' series we give you an insight into a day in the life of Sian, a Customer Service Assistant based at Little Park Street**

I have been working with the front line team at Little Park Street since August 2008 and before this I was a Modern Apprentice working within the Anti Social Behaviour Team. The Housing Office is a very busy but enjoyable place to work, every day is different from the last.

So far, I have spent a month working in each area of the office, including customer care, housing benefit, voids and some time at our Radford office, completing various tasks. This opportunity has given me the chance to learn a great deal about the Customer Service Team's role within the business. I have had a great deal of support and training and everyone has been so kind and welcoming.

I believe we work well as a team and a I'm very proud of myself that to have gained this full time position and to have been given the chance to work here, with our customers.

## 7.00am

Up, get ready and off to work.

## 8.20am

I arrive at work. I like to be in early so I can log onto my computer and make a cup of tea for everybody and get set for the day, before we open the doors to the public at 9.00am.

## 9.00am

The doors are open and the day starts. At the moment I am usually I manning the phones in the morning. We get calls about all sorts of things, some we can deal with and some we pass onto the appropriate departments. It can be a very mixed bag of enquiries, some over in 30 seconds and some can take half an hour to deal with.

And when I say calls I mean a lot of calls. On an average day we get around XXX calls into the office here at Little Park Street.

But that's just the half of it. In between the phone calls it's my job to collect the days post, log everything that comes in and distribute it to the appropriate departments. Some of the post we get needs to be sent over to Coventry Home Finder and it's my job to log all that too.

## 12.30pm

This will take half a day, which takes me to lunch time and I head out to get a sandwich and have a breather. If I have time I pop into town for a quick bit of shopping.

## 1.15pm

After lunch I can be doing a number of different things. Some days I will be manning the phone again all afternoon, and that can pretty exhausting. If not the there are plenty of administration jobs that need organising.

Sometimes I have lots of 'Choice Based Lettings' queries to sort through and make sure they are up to date. Other times we have 'Accompanied View' packs to get together, for people who are being shown around properties that they may be renting from us soon and then there are always lots of Rent Accounts to sort out. No two days are ever the same but the important thing to me is that I thoroughly enjoy my job and providing a service where I am able to meet customers needs.

Today however, I am not doing any of those things. Today I am helping out on the Customer Reception. Again, we have lots of customers who come in to see us face to face. On average we have 90 visits a day at this housing office and just like answering the phones, it can be a very varied experience.

Here is an example of a typical enquiry. This afternoon an elderly lady came into the office with a question. She was confused about her rent statement and wanted someone to explain it to her. We always make the relevant security checks when someone comes in with a confidential query, and so once I had confirmed her identity, we printed off a copy of her latest statement.

Then I took the lady into our interview room where we could talk about the statement in private and soon cleared up the misunderstanding. The lady then asked to make a payment and left a happy customer. It is good to have the interview room as it gives our customers somewhere they can discuss issues with us privately and helps them feel more relaxed.

## 5.00pm

The end of the day, well nearly. The last customer leaves and we lock the front doors but very often there are one or two 'last' phone calls to be made to people who are not in during the daytime. This is not often just a 9 to 5 job, but I enjoy it all the same.



## and finally

I hope to work my way up through the business and progress my career but hopefully whilst I am doing that I will be able to remain in contact with the customers, as this is the part of my job I enjoy most of all.



## Did you know?

- At Whitefriars we receive over 260,000 phone calls each year.
- Our staff make over 170,000 face to face contacts a year.
- We carry out 58,000 repairs and 32,000 gas appointments every single year.
- Our Estates Team remove over 700 tonnes of fly tipped rubbish each year.
- We let over 2000 properties to new tenants every year.

# Quit Smoking with Coventry Smoking Service



**N**HS Coventry has launched a major advertising campaign across the city in an effort to attract and raise awareness about Coventry's Stop Smoking Service freephone number.

The service is based at the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital and can be reached through a freephone number 0800 051 1310. The service offers one to one support; drop-in and weekly clinics including the supply of nicotine patches.

NHS Coventry has identified quit smoking as one of its major initiatives over the next 5 years for tackling health problems in the city. The aim is to reduce the number of premature deaths in the lifetime of the current population by 2,800.

Smoking is a major preventable cause of death and disease. The evidence to support this fact is overwhelming. Smoking kills approximately 90,000 people in the UK each year. In addition thousands more including children and spouses are exposed on a daily basis to the damaging effects of second hand smoke, and two thirds of smokers admit to having developed the habit before their eighteenth birthday. Smoking causes lung and mouth cancer, heart disease, bad teeth, wrinkled skin, bad breath and discoloured fingers.

If you are a smoker and one of your resolutions this year is to quit; call the Stop Smoking Service. Within weeks of giving up you will begin to see the benefits health wise, socially and financially.

It is never too late to stop smoking, call Coventry Stop Smoking Service freephone 0800 051 1310 for advice and support you can also visit [www.coventrystopsmoking.nhs.uk](http://www.coventrystopsmoking.nhs.uk) for information about clinics in the community. Your local pharmacist can also offer you advice about stopping smoking and offer Nicotine Replacement Therapy.

## STOP SMOKING START LIVING

Make the break. Live life without smoking.



# LIFE'S A GAS...

## CO The Silent Killer!

**W**hy do we need to check your heating system? Because last year in the UK, over 20 people died from the effects of Carbon Monoxide poisoning (CO).

CO can be produced in any fuel burning appliance that is not properly maintained. The danger signs are yellow or orange flames where there normally should be a blue flame. Sooty stains around fires, water heaters or eye level gas grills are another common sign.

Symptoms include headaches, dizziness and feeling sick, these systems can be mistaken for flu or food poisoning. If someone in your household suffers from these systems while at home but feels fine elsewhere, they could be suffering from CO poisoning.

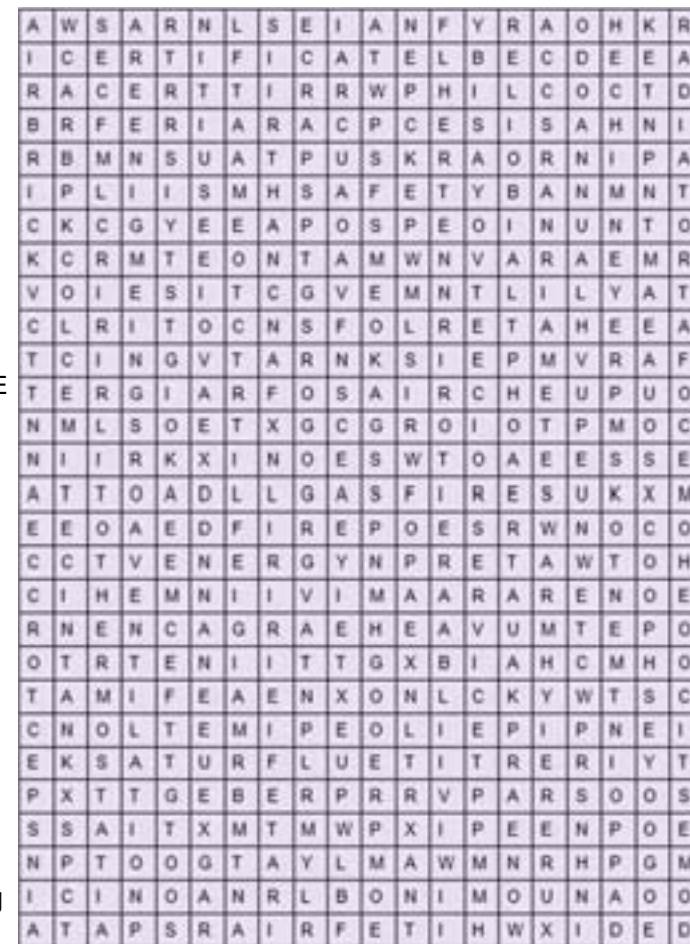
If you are concerned or suspect that their might be a problem please contact the **Whitefriars Gas Section on 024 7651 6750**. If the symptoms are serious, go straight to your doctor or to a casualty department.

**Help us to keep you and your home safe, get your heating system serviced!**

## Life's a Gas Wordsearch Contest

**W**hitefriars has got together with our gas contractor, SPI, to offer you a chance to £100 in our 'Life's a Gas' Wordsearch.

- ACCESS
- AIRBRICK
- ANNUAL
- APPLIANCE
- APPOINTMENT
- BOILER
- CARBON
- MONOXIDE
- CERTIFICATE
- CHIMNEY
- COOKER
- CORGI
- DOMESTIC
- ENERGY
- ENGINEER
- FLAME
- FLUE
- FUMES
- GAS
- GAS FIRE
- HEATING
- HOME
- HOT WATER
- INSPECTOR
- METER
- PILOT
- PIPE
- RADIATOR
- SAFETY
- SERVICE
- SOOT
- SPI
- SUPPLY
- TANK
- TAPS
- TEMPERATURE
- THERMOSTAT
- TIME CLOCK
- TIMER
- TRANSCO
- VALVE
- VENTILATION
- VISIT
- WARM
- WHITEFRIARS



Find the words listed above and send your Completed Search along with your Name and Contact details to:

**FREEPOST WHITEFRIARS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM**

(You do not need to write anything else on the envelope and no stamp is required.)

## Keeping You Safe, plus the chance to win £50

**W**e have a legal responsibility to carry out a safety check to your gas heating system once every year. This service is free and is undertaken to ensure your safety, but we need your help to get into your home.

If you allow us access for the first appointment we make with you or you call to rearrange and keep new appointment, we will enter you into a £50 prize draw. The draw happens once every 3 months and recent winners have been Mrs Ratley of Radford, Mr Hayes of Henley Green, and Mrs Austwick of Stoke Aldemoor.

Whitefriars Housing must take all reasonable steps to make sure that we get into your home and check your gas system, because of this we are having to implement legal proceedings against tenants who fail to allow us access on or before the 12 month anniversary date.



## Corgi is Changing!

**F**rom the 1st April 2009, the approved scheme for company's and workers in the gas industry will be "Gas Safe Register".

Whitefriars and their contractors will be registered with the new scheme and all operatives working in your homes will be carrying the new identification from the 1st April 2009.

# DAYS OUT



**T**he centre of Birmingham is almost as far away from the coast as it is possible to be in the UK and yet it is home to the National SEA LIFE Centre, one of the most interesting and entertaining attractions in the country.

Despite the fact it is in the heart of a busy city centre, or maybe because of this fact, the SEA LIFE Birmingham is probably one of the best designed, interesting and attractive of the dozen or so centres around the country.

It is an ideal and educational day out for all the family and so, in the second of our series of family days out, we sent dad Michael, mum Cathy and daughter Emma from Stoke Aldermoor, to look around and share their thoughts with us.



## How easy was it to get there?

"We took the train from Coventry and walked from New Street Station. The Sea Life was not very well sign posted from the station but was quite close and easy to find. We took a taxi but walked back when we realised how close it was. Going back to New Street was well sign posted. If we had driven there are lots of signs on the roads directing you to the car parks next door to the centre."

## Was it busy?

"When we went it didn't seem that crowded. It is a big place and even when it's busy I imagine that there is plenty of room to see the exhibits."

## So what did you do there?

"Lots! Basically, there are well over 60 themed displays. They are arranged in themed areas such as the seashore, rivers, tropical seas, and an otter habitat. We saw all sorts of exotic sea life from seahorses to sharks and rays."

Our favourite bit was the ocean tunnel where we saw the giant sea turtles and the sharks. Our little girl loved it and we would definitely go again."

There are lots of demonstrations you can watch throughout the day and times are displayed so you can see the different creatures being fed."

## How suitable was it for different age groups?

"We think it would suit all ages. From very young kids who to the very old. It has good disabled access, so people in wheelchairs could easily enjoy it too"

## What were the facilities like?

"The toilets and baby changing facilities were excellent when we visited. Nice and modern and very clean. The café was nice too. A fairly decent choice and not too expensive considering."



## SEALIFE Birmingham can be found near the canals right next to the National Indoor Arena in Brindley Place.

It is a family attraction that includes over 60 displays allowing you to come face to face with over 4500 sorts of marine creatures and fish from sea horses to turtles, sharks and stingrays. The centre also houses the spectacular one million litre tank housing giant green turtles and black tip reef sharks and another area is home to the, not to be missed, short-clawed otters. Young and old alike will love the 'touch pool' area. The centre also holds talks and feeding sessions through the day, providing a great family day out that educates as well as entertains.

There is also a handy café, a gift shop and play area. You can also book birthday packages, including a guided tour of the exhibits, goodie bags, a meal and birthday cake. Contact the centre for details.

## Opening Times & Details

- SEA LIFE is open every day from 10am (Excluding Christmas Day)
- Last Admission: (Mon-Fri) 4pm (Weekends and holidays) 5pm
- Regular talks and feeding demonstrations provide an even deeper insight into the magical mysteries of the seas. Look for notices on the day detailing times

## Standard Door Prices

- Adult £15.95
- Child £10.95
- Concessions £14.50

## Money Saving Tip!

Book in advance or online to get a discount

## Contact Details

National SEA LIFE Centre  
The Waters Edge  
Brindley Place  
Birmingham, B1 2HL  
Schools & Groups:  
0871 222 6932  
Tickets: 0871 423 2110  
Web [www.sealife.co.uk](http://www.sealife.co.uk)  
Email [slcbirmingham@merlinentertainments.biz](mailto:slcbirmingham@merlinentertainments.biz)



## What were your first impressions?

"It's a very modern and impressive building, right in by the canal basin. Clean and well organised with lots of staff on duty, which made us feel comfortable."



## Would you go again and would you recommend it to other families?

"Definitely. It was just such a good day, so much to see and do, we didn't want it to end. We hope to go back this year"

## WIN TICKETS!

Thanks to the nice people at the SEA LIFE Centre we can offer your family a chance to go for free!

See page 25 for your chance to win family tickets

# CONVERSATION TIME

**J**oin the conversation and get heard, that's the message of the new regulator for housing associations like us, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Many of you will remember that we used to be regulated by the Housing Corporation. But they have now been replaced with two agencies the TSA and, the Homes and Communities Agency.

The TSA are holding the first ever national conversation. This is so they can understand directly from tenants what is important to them and what standards they should set for associations for the management of homes, and provision of services. Featured here is the letter the TSA have asked all associations to pass on to their tenants.



**Want to get involved in the local conversation? Then telephone the Whitefriars Customer Involvement Team for details of events on 024 7666 4423**



## the national conversation

### Can You Help?

**Your chance to have your say about standards in social housing**

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the new regulator for homes owned by housing associations and co-ops.

The first thing the TSA needs to do is draw up a brand new set of standards for all social landlords. These standards are very important, as the TSA will be monitoring how landlords do in achieving them – and taking action against any who don't.

The Tenant Services Authority is going to listen to tenants across England to help them understand what you want to see in the new standards. It is calling this the National Conversation, and it started on 19 January 2009.

This is your opportunity to help set the standards for all social landlords and make sure that services for tenants continue to improve. So do get involved.

There are lots of ways tenants can take part in the National Conversation. We will be holding a series of regional events for a number of tenants and other events for landlords. We are asking landlords to nominate tenants

to the regional events and they will have details of how you can get involved.

We'd also like tenants to get involved in Local Conversations. To find out about events in your area, contact your landlord. Local Conversations don't have to be formal – they could be a group of tenants getting together over a cup of tea in somebody's home or in a community centre.

If you'd like to organise your own event, from 12 January onwards, you can order a resource pack from the TSA on 0845 230 7000 (Option 1) and get more information on the website: [www.nationalconversation.co.uk](http://www.nationalconversation.co.uk)

# WRITING ON THE WALL



**T**he writing was on the wall for one anti-social resident, after his Whitefriars used a handwriting expert to secure his eviction.

Following reports of ongoing anti-social behaviour by his neighbours, Jason Jacobs, of Williams Malcolm House, Attoxhall Road, was evicted recently following action taken by Whitefriars Housing Group's asb4 Team.

### What can I do if I am suffering from Anti-Social Behaviour?

- Try and note down the time and date the incident occurred. The more information you have, the more that can be done. If it's an ongoing problem, you may be asked to keep an incident diary to help any court case
- If it's a problem with a neighbour, firstly see if talking to them helps. If it's not working out between you, Whitefriars has a free mediation service which may be able to help.
- Find out if it's affecting others in your area by contacting your local residents association or neighbourhood watch. It may be that work is already underway to investigate it.

Gail Cooper, business development manager at Whitefriars' asb4 team, said: "We are delighted to have secured this result on behalf of local residents. Mr Jacob's was given ample opportunity and warning to change his behaviour and it is only as a last resort that we were forced to head to court to ensure his neighbours were free to enjoy their homes in peace. "It is not acceptable that a resident's anti-social behaviour causes misery for others and I'd like to thank those people within William Malcolm House who helped us secure this result.

By reporting the problem, and helping us gather evidence, hopefully the residents can enjoy a quieter start to 2009. "As an organisation we are keen to respond to customers priorities and through the specialist asb4 team we will take appropriate action against anti-social behaviour where we have the power to do so.

To convince the court of his guilt, Whitefriars employed the services of a graphologist to analyse threatening and abusive graffiti which had been posted in the area. The expert's view that the handwriting matched the sample provided by Mr Jacobs, aged 37, was taken into consideration by Coventry County Court, when it chose to authorise the eviction on December 4 2008.

In addition to abusive graffiti, Mr Jacob's neighbours also suffered noise nuisance and threatening behaviour. Experts from Whitefriars' specialist anti-social behaviour team, asb4, also secured (at the same hearing) an injunction forbidding Mr Jacobs from entering the area for one year once his eviction has been achieved.

# The Big Community Fund

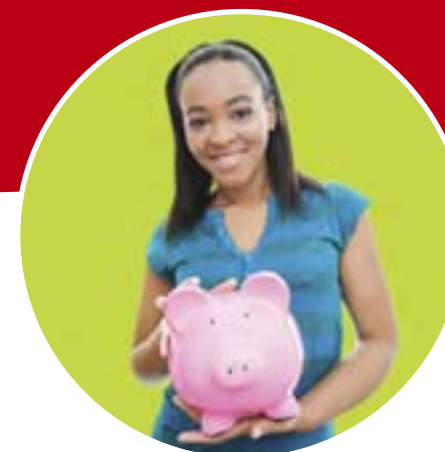
**A** few weeks ago we launched our new Community Fund, in our special edition of View. This is important news for communities and will mean an extra £600,000 of investment over the next five years.

Because it is so important we have repeated it here and given you a second chance for you to let us know what you think.



To ensure the cash is put to best use, we need your ideas. Please help us by completing the below opposit. And then simply pop it in the post to **FREEPOST WHITEFRIARS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM.** (Nothing else needs writing on the envelope and no stamp is required.)

You can also give your views by calling **024 7666 4430** or emailing [view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk](mailto:view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk)



## Tell us your ideas...

To contribute your ideas, simply fill in the form, or email us telling us what you think the priorities of the fund should be. Please remember these should benefit an area and a number of residents not just one individual.



**Q1: Which of these ideas do you think is the most important in creating a place where you want to live and work? (Please choose your top two).**

- Keeping crime low
- Enhancing community spirit
- Helping our young people
- Keeping the environment, free from litter and graffiti
- Small environmental improvements

Other .....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Q2: Would you like to be involved in any of the following to help us decide how to spend the money? (Please tick any you'd like to take part in).**

- Local meetings
- Giving views via telephone conference
- Website or email feedback forms
- Other .....

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**Q3: Please tell us anything else you think we could spend the community fund on.**

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**We will complete formal consultation later this year.**

Name ..... Address .....

Age .....

Telephone .....

In December the government reduced VAT by 2.5% and we are passing on some of the savings we make on purchases to boost the community fund.

The £100,000 bonus from the decision, will now be added to a £500,000 community fund announced last year as part of savings gained by our move to join West Mercia Housing Group.

Work is still needed to decide exactly how the money will be spent and what on. The fund will be available for schemes which will help communities become more active, safer, cleaner and maybe greener and generally better places to live.

What we won't be doing, though, is using the money to carry out improvements inside individual homes.



# ARE YOU COVERED?

**H**ave you thought about what you would do if the worse came to the worse and something happened to your belongings? Or if something happened to damage the way, you have decorated your home?

If you don't have insurance, your own home contents insurance then a bad situation could be made much worse. Two of our customers have recently told us about how not having your own insurance can do just that

## Jim's Story

Jim lives in the fifth floor of one of our multi-story blocks. One day Jim came home to find that there had been a leak from the flat upstairs that had come through his ceiling.

The plaster on the ceiling fell down and the water had run down the walls and onto to Jim's leather sofa. The wallpaper was hanging off and the sofa was ruined.

Jim reported the damage and very soon, a Whitefriars workman came along and fixed the damage to the ceiling. It turns out that the leak came from the washing machine of Jims neighbour upstairs.

Jim then asked at the housing office about the damage to his sofa and his decorating. He was told that because we do not insure either personal possessions or decorations that unfortunately there was nothing that



we could do to help – Jim would have to claim off his own insurance.

But because Jim did not have his own policy, he had to save up to pay for a new sofa himself. It took Jim weeks to save up and it meant that he had to economise of lots of other things to get the money together

## Ravi's Story

Ravi lives with her husband Sahid and three children. It was a Wednesday night and as it was Ravi's sister Bal's

birthday the whole family went to Bal's for a party.

When they got home, they went into the living room and found to their horror that they had been burgled while they were out.

The thieves had taken their television, DVD player and some jewellery and had made a real mess of the house as they were searching for things to take.

They called the police who came and took statements but as there were no fingerprints, they told Ravi and Sahid that it was unlikely that they would get their things back.

The thieves had broken in through the back door so the next day Ravi went to the housing office to arrange for the door to be fixed. Because she had a crime number Matt at the housing office was able to arrange for the door to be fixed that day.

Because Ravi and Sahid were not insured they had to borrow an old TV from relatives until they were able to afford a new one – until then the children had to do without their DVD's.

The jewellery of course had sentimental value that can't be replaced but Ravi would have liked to have been able to look for something similar but she couldn't afford it.

Both Jim and Ravi and Sahid now have their own contents insurance cover through the Whitefriars My Home Scheme



Because Jim lives in a bedsit his insurance only cost's him £0.92 per week which he pays at the post office every week at the same time as he pays his rent.

Ravi and Sahid have chosen to pay their insurance payments every month by direct debit and she pays £7.97 every month, which gives them £14,000 of cover

They both choose to use My Home because it was good value for money, has no excess and gives new for old cover.

## For more info

**The My Home scheme is open to all our residents and leaseholders and payments are the same wherever you live in the city.**

You can pay weekly, fortnightly, monthly or yearly and you can pay by cash, debit card or direct debit.

You can get help and an application form by calling 0845 3372463 or contact your housing office. You can find the numbers on the back of this magazine.

A special service for tenants and leaseholders

## My Home Contents Insurance



**My Home**  
Contents Insurance

# Protect your valued possessions

Insure your **furniture, belongings and decorations** against **theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes** and other household risks.

Now, you can take out **My Home Contents Insurance** designed exclusively for you. It's so simple and affordable to insure your possessions.

Please contact us on **0845 337 2463** for further information



**IN** business for neighbourhoods

  
**JARDINE LLOYD THOMPSON**  
Tenant Risks

# THE RAILWAYS CAME

**T**he railway is part of our landscape: the little ones amongst us might get excited as a train hurtles by, some of us remember the smell and noise of the steam trains, but on the whole the roar and rumble is just a background noise to our everyday lives, something we take for granted. 170 or so years ago, things were very different.

Railways were a force for change, slashing and burning a broad swathe through the countryside, creating social upheaval and ushering in a new age of speed mania.

The railway line cutting the country in two would not have taken the route it does today, if the plans by the London & Birmingham Railway Co Ltd had been allowed to materialise. Coventry would have been by-passed by a southerly route through Oxford and Banbury and the city may not have grown as it did, and most of land owners and city leaders at the time did not believe that 'Steam' was here to stay.

However, they did not count on the recommendations of George Stephenson's in the Houses of Parliament and his successful act of parliament, on 6th May 1831, which placed the line in the position it holds today.

Now imagine the tranquil backwater of Willenhall or any of the many other villages along the route, which were just farming community's in the 1830s, suddenly being colonised by a shanty-town of itinerant workers or 'navvies', so-called because they originally excavated Britain's network of canals. These 'navvies' were rough, hardworking men who cleared the ground for the railway tracks with picks and shovels; at night they worked with lanterns, such was the urgency of the London to Birmingham main line project, overseen by the chief engineer Robert Stephenson.

The workers frequently brought along women to cook for them, sometimes even wives and families. (The wedding ceremony involved jumping over a broomstick but that's another story.) Railway navvies wore distinctive clothing: stout hobnailed boots, moleskin trousers, canvas shirts, velveteen square-tailed coats, handkerchiefs, felt hats and coloured waistcoats. It must have been a hard life: in a typical day, a navvy would lift 20 tons of earth on a shovel over his head and into a wagon. The pay was good in

comparison with other labourers, but the risks were great, and there were many casualties.

Every month the navvies were paid and given a few days off, which frequently led to them going on a rampage. National rivalries erupted, due to the fact that the workforce came from all four corners of Britain. There are reports that some landlords would haul barrels of ale to the shanty towns on pay night: maybe the Crown Inn, situated on St James Lane in the 1830s, provided such refreshment. 'Platelayers' who laid the tracks followed these. My own family were involved in the laying of many of the Warwickshire lines and children baptised at different churches along these routes as they were constructed. It took nearly five years to build the London to Birmingham railway, and the first passenger train made its inaugural journey on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1838, for the grand opening of the line.

This was followed by the Coventry to Milverton link 1844, and the connection to the huge colliery railway system at Wyken in 1848. A branch line to Nuneaton opened in 1850 with stations at Coundon Road, Longford, and Hawkesbury.

The RED and WHITE line is in use today. The BLUE and White lines are ones which have been closed. The old stations are shown thus ●

Not all lines are shown as miles of tracks were used within factories such as the Courtauls and Red lane sites to name just two of many.

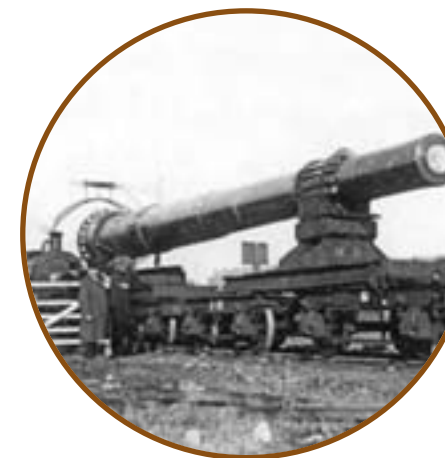


Today you can still see part of one of the old lines as you go up Wheelwrights Lane you cross the single track that served Coventry Colliery

*My thanks go to Iris Weir of Willenhall Local History Group, for permission to adapt her story of 'Railway Shanty Towns'*

**John Russell**

A busy branch line ran from the London line along the Humber road and linked to the Nuneaton line, part of this line is today the route of the new Phoenix Way by-pass. Factories like Humber and many others had direct links to the main line. The big guns made at Red Lane Munitions works in WW1 were railed straight from the factory.



## Willenhall Local History Group



The Willenhall Local History Group Committee. L to R - Kath Barrie, John Russell, and Iris Weir.

**F**or over five years, the group have been active in the Willenhall area, collecting and collating information and photographs of all kinds. These have been scanned, collated and placed on the group's web site, along with some 10,000 other pictures. These include a whole section of photographs taken at Chase School during the period 1980 to 1992, including the local carnivals and events.

Along with the work on local history, the group are the only people world wide trying to research the story of the World War 2 hostels and the many millions of people from every country in the world, who at some time passed through the hostel system. Many thousands were moved from their homes to other places and so into hostel accommodation to do war work. These included people such as the 'Bevin Boys' and the many, many others who one day were house wives and the next had become factory workers.

The experiences of these people are some of the few remaining untold stories of the war and we are seeking any information on Coventry, or other hostels and the people who lived there, during WW2 and the following years.

Please visit our web site [www.virtualmuseum.co.uk](http://www.virtualmuseum.co.uk)

or come along to a meeting at the Willenhall Library on the first Monday of each month.

Coventry City Council and Whitefriars are working together to support tenants who are claiming benefits and looking for work, to progress into a number of training and employment-based initiatives.



## How Can We Help You Get Into Work?

If you are currently unemployed or on benefits there is a range of free flexible advice and support available to help you find a job. Various organisations across Coventry have come together to deliver a programme of activity which supports unemployed people move into employment.

The projects will work with long term unemployed people to develop basic skills linked to local job vacancies. It will also provide personal support to prepare the individual for employment and additional training and support to enable them to sustain and progress in employment.

To help you reach your next step a Jobs Broker is on hand to support you. A Jobs Broker can support you with:

- Jobs Skills Action Planning-to help you move forward
- Identify training needs
- Prepare your CV and application form
- Match your skills with job vacancies
- Interview preparation
- Identify individual barriers to work

To be eligible for these programmes individuals must be:

- Aged 19 and over
- Have been unemployed for 12 months or longer
- Are in receipt of a working age benefits, including Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support or Incapacity Benefit.

However, we will try to find appropriate help for anyone who is not in the above category.

To find your local organisation or to find out more please contact our Employment Officer on: 024 7683 1284



## 'Make quality your first choice'

Your child deserves the best start in life – research shows that high quality childcare and early education significantly improves your child's future life chances.

So what does quality childcare look like?

- The staff are warm, friendly and welcoming to both you and your child
- They are engaged with the children, showing they care
- Children are treated as individuals
- All the children are actively involved
- Children's achievements are celebrated and displayed
- The environment is secure, stimulating and nurturing
- The staff are suitably experienced, committed and qualified
- OFSTED Registration Certificate and most recent report are displayed for parents to read

Children can really benefit from what is available through safe, high quality childcare. They will be supported by professionals who know how young children learn and can help them develop.

There will be no distinction between early years education (sometimes referred to as nursery or pre-school education) and childcare.

So what are my childcare choices?

- Childminders
- Day Nurseries
- Pre-school Playgroups
- Nursery classes
- Before and after school clubs and holiday clubs

If the provision is open for 2 hours or more and offers care for children under 8 years then it must be registered and inspected by OFSTED. For more information on the different types of childcare available in your area please contact **Coventry Family Information Service (FIS)** on 024 7683 4373 or look on the website link [www.coventry.gov.uk/cis](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/cis) Central Library, Smithford Way, Coventry CV1 1FX

Many families already receive support in the crucial early years of children's lives through existing Children's Centres, and Extended Schools, which can provide early education integrated with health and family support services, and childcare from 8am-6pm.

Coventry Early Years and Childcare Service provide advice, guidance and training to support all early years settings in providing high quality care.

If you need any more information about the Nursery Education Funding Grant please contact **Coventry Early Years and Childcare Service** on 024 7683 3615

# COMPETITION TIME

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

Is this the easiest competition ever or what? All you have to do is tell us 3 easy things...

- 1) Where do you normally do your weekly shopping?  
For example: Asda
- 2) Which newspaper do you read most often?  
For example: The Telegraph
- 3) Which radio station do you listen to most often?  
For example: Mercia FM

And that's all you have to do to be with a chance to win one these great prizes...

## Acer XP Netbook

Surf the web with this ultraportable Ebook



## XBox 360

Get into the world of gaming with this hugely popular games console



### by text

Text your choice of prize

followed by your answers and your name and a contact number to

**07781 489 833**

(Texts are charged at your normal network rates)

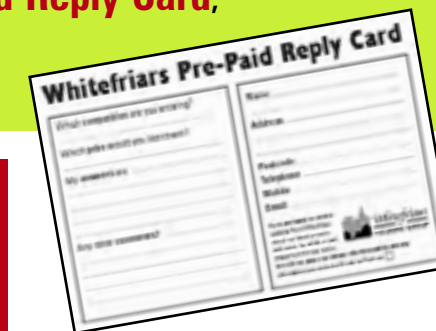
### by email

Email your choice of prize, followed by your answers and your name and contact details to: [view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk](mailto:view@whitefriarshousing.co.uk)

### by post

Write to us telling us your choice of prize, followed by your answers and name and contact details using the **Prepaid Reply Card**,

included with this magazine. (No stamp is required)



## Bonus Competition!

Thanks to those nice people at The Sea Life Centre we have 2 Family Passes to give away. Just tell us your idea for a place we could review in future issues and enter in the same way as above.



We have one WebBook, one Xbox360 and two Family Passes to Sea Life up for grabs. One winner for each prize will be chosen at random from all of the entries. All methods of entry have an equal chance of winning.

**All entries must be received by 1st April 2009.**

# WASTED YOUTH..?

**Y**oung people today, eh! Huh! Don't talk to me about young people, no respect, poor standards, not like in my day, and so on and so on and so on... There probably comes a point in all our lives when we start thinking this way, at least to some degree, it seems unavoidable. It must be something about getting older and starting to wear rose tinted glasses about our own past.



But it is rather odd, when you think about it. There are no other group of people you could mention, that you could single out in any way or by any definition and not be considered bigoted or biased or unfair. But lumping 'youth' together as a collective waste of space, hell bent on bringing our country to its knees with their wanton behaviour, is fair game. It's true that, especially if you believe everything in the papers, young people currently face some of the most complex and demanding issues ever to hit a generation.

From growing violence in the streets to an epidemic of childhood obesity, with the added issues of growing up way too fast and being treated as potential targets for marketing and advertising from pretty much the moment they could talk, the youth of today are rarely out of the headlines. But research shows many positive things about this 'post millennial' generation too. They are the most globally aware, optimistic, civic minded, self confident, technological aware and ethically minded generation in decades.



At Whitefriars we recognise the problems that face young people today and the issues that surround them but we refuse to write them off. We work hard to encourage the young people on our estates to take an active and positive role within their communities and have instigated a number of projects to this end.

In the rest of this feature gives voice to one of our staff who has worked closely with youth projects and to one of the kids themselves, to get an insight into the lives of some young people living in the city today.

**Terry, is a Senior Customer Involvement Officer, who has spent a lot of time working with youth related projects in the last few years.**

"One of Whitefriars aims is to 'let homes and keep them let'. This is in many ways one of the motivations for working with younger people to ensure that they understand what Whitefriars can and cannot do for them and to ensure that informed decisions are made about their housing options.

Last year we worked with four of the secondary schools in Coventry to deliver sessions as part of their personal health and social education agenda. These sessions are aimed at increasing young peoples knowledge about Whitefriars, what it offers and the implications of taking on a Whitefriars tenancy. "

"We have been successful in engaging the young people outside of the school day as well. We have established a group of 'young auditors' in the Spon End area and pupils from Caludon Castle are involved in a 'community interest group' that is currently working on a presentation to Ward Councillors about the environment. "

"We will be delivering these sessions to four different secondary schools in the coming year as well as working with the Youth Service in local youth clubs. The reward of this initiative will be that young people, when they need to access the services of Whitefriars, will have a greater knowledge of the organisation, what it does and how to make a success of the first tenancy and therefore be able to cope better with their tenancies."

**Gemma is a year 8 pupil at Caludon Castle and is part of the 'Making a Positive Contribution' community interest group.**



"I like being a young person living in Coventry because there are lots of fun things to do. There are lots of parks but the down side of them is that they can get covered in graffiti too often. Sometimes we like to just walk around our area and chat. Personally, I really enjoy going into the City Centre to the shops with my friends and buying lots of cool new stuff. That's when I can afford it of course! I also like going to Coombe Abbey with my friends too but my favourite thing to do is playing out in my own area because there is a lake and some fields but we can only do that in the summer and spring. Around my area there isn't really much vandalism but I have seen in other areas where there can be quite a bit of graffiti and things being smashed up. Overall I like living in Coventry it's a nice environment and most people are very friendly."

**"Overall I like living in Coventry it's a nice environment and most people are very friendly.."**

The Making a Positive Contribution Group is all about helping them to maintain our environment and making positive changes to the community around us. There are currently eleven members of the group. We try to meet at least once a month and in the meetings we talk about what needs to be done and how we are going to do it. We have joined forces with Whitefriars Housing Group and we have met twice with Terry, their Senior Customer Involvement Officer to look at ways that we can all work together to make our local community and the rest of Coventry a nicer and safer place to be

We had talks with Whitefriars about where we think there should be new litter bins around our School. Whitefriars then spoke to Coventry City Council. The Council are going to provide all the bins we

suggested and they will have plaques on saying they were designed by Caludon Castle pupils.

Recently we also helped Miss Grisedale co-ordinate the Samaritans shoe box appeal. We managed to get 83 boxes which were sent to Syria and the Ukraine.

Over the last term we are working on a local project to improve our community. Whitefriars have provided us with disposable cameras; we will be taking photos both of the things we like in our area and the things we don't, like graffiti, rubbish and busy roads with no crossings etc. We will then be presenting a Power Point presentation with our photos and suggestions to Whitefriars and Coventry City Council.

In the future we hope to make our area litter free and make walks to school so much safer."



## Working with Youth

In 2008 we worked with four Secondary schools and we hope to work with at least five more in 2009.

Whitefriars are also talking to the Youth Service about delivering some sessions from the Excel Centre, in Canley.

Whitefriars have established a group of young auditors in Spon End

We are currently supporting a Community Interest Group in Caludon Castle School and we are helping them to prepare a presentation to the Ward Forum

Birmingham University are also helping us to understand the implications on service delivery for young people.

# YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



**C**ustomer Service Improvement Groups, or CSIG's started to be developed about 3 years ago, when work with the then Voice of Whitefriars Residents group agreed that this approach would increase the opportunities for customers involvement and influence on services.

Their work includes setting and monitoring service standards, considering customer satisfaction with services and suggesting service improvements. Some groups actively work with our contractors to monitor and improve performance.

The Better Estates Services Team or BEG featured here was the first of the groups and has gone from strength to strength as this article explains...

What does the Better Estates Group of volunteers mean to you? Nothing? Well read on.

The B.E.G. was formed in 2004 and came about following complaints from residents when Whitefriars started using a new Grounds Maintenance contractor.

Everyone who contacted Whitefriars was invited to a meeting and The BEG was formed from those who attended. To start, 40 people came. From there 12 people stayed on to create The BEG as it stands today, helping Whitefriars to monitor the Grounds Maintenance service and make sure the residents get value for money.

Throughout next year, The B.E.G. will carry out the following activities.

- Inspections of local areas.
- Random joint site inspections with Whitefriars and Glendale (grounds contractor)
- Attend some contract meetings.

- Be involved in contractor selection and appointment.
- Support Whitefriars Road Shows.
- Be involved in Judging Whitefriars Garden & Schools Competitions.

The B.E.G. have decided to focus on the following areas to make sure the appearance of your estates are as you would like them.

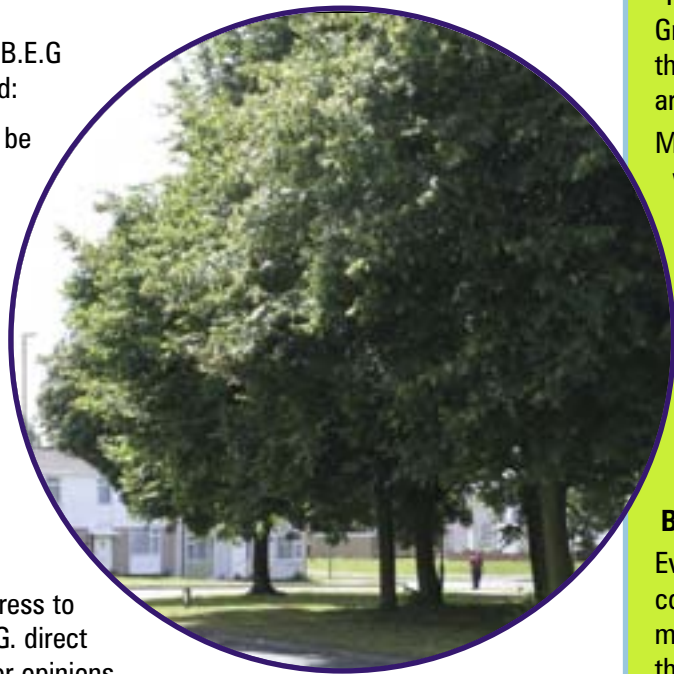
- Grass is cut level all over, with no ruts or missed strips.
- Shrub beds look good.
- Hedges are of suitable appearance for the area, are away from pavements and weed free.
- Keep footpaths clear and neatly edged.
- Try to keep everyone informed of how they think Whitefriars are doing.

The group has successfully worked with Whitefriars and made it easier for residents to let Whitefriars know if there are problems or whether things need changing on the estates.



To help all residents B.E.G. has already produced:

- Contact Cards to be carried by all grounds contract workers for your comments. This is so you will be able to get in touch with the right people the first time. Please just ask.
- A new email address to contact The B.E.G. direct with comments or opinions about grounds maintenance [landscape@whitefriarshousing.co.uk](mailto:landscape@whitefriarshousing.co.uk)
- Questionnaires, which are sent out to Tenants & Leaseholders, to collect their thoughts on how well Whitefriars are doing with Grounds Maintenance. (Please try to fill these in if you get one because your views are important and you may win a cash prize)
- A 'Frequently Asked Questions' booklet based on the services provided.

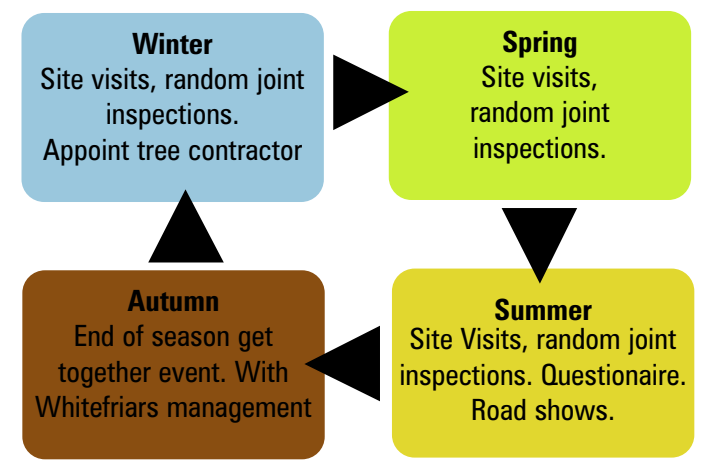


These are available from your Housing Office if you need further information.

The B.E.G. is well established, but still needs voices from the following estates •Stoke Aldermoor • Wood End • Henley Green • Hillfields • Holbrooks • Stoke Heath • Whoberly

Even if you're not from one of these areas, we would still like to hear from you. Please contact either The B.E.G. or Whitefriars if you would like to know more.

### A typical year for the Better Estates Group



## What are Customer Service Improvement Groups?

There are now 7 Customer Service Improvement Groups or CSIG's. They have been developed over the past three years starting with the group who are featured in the article, the B.E.G.

Membership of these groups is one of the main ways that customers can get involved with Whitefriars.

Some groups have chosen names that they feel reflect what they are trying to do. The current groups are:

### Better Estates Groups, BEG

See article on this and previous page for what they do.

### Building Better Behaviours

Everything from sign up of new tenants, conditions of tenancy and rent income management. This group will have a big role in the new community support fund that they have helped to develop

### Building Better Communities

Everything to do with empty homes and their offer to new tenants. The group are particularly involved in setting and monitoring standards of vacant homes.

### High Rise

Development and monitoring of standards in high rise blocks including cleaning standards.

### Leaseholders

Developing and monitoring services to leaseholder customers

### Repairs and Maintenance

Setting standards and monitoring the performance of Homeworks and other contractors involved in delivery repair and maintenance services.

### Sheltered

Looking at services offered to our sheltered residents and considering how these can be improved.

Some groups are recruiting now so if you are interested in joining in and making a real difference to service provided to all customers phone the involvement team on 024 7666 4421. You can be sure of a warm welcome and support, including with you costs to attend meetings.

**D**o you enjoy gardening? Is there a little patch of green somewhere on your property that you have lovingly tended? Whether it is a huge back garden, a tiny front garden, a collection of tubs on your balcony, or even a patch of land you share with your neighbours, we want to hear from you.

This garden competition is open to all of our residents and we want as many as possible to get involved. Whether you enter every year or if you have never

entered a competition before, we would love to get your entry. To see the difference that the effort you put into your gardens, balconies and plantings makes to the neighbourhoods around the city is fantastic. This competition is about celebrating that and sharing it with others.

You don't have to be the greatest gardener in the world, it's about getting involved and making your little piece of the world something to enjoy. This year we have made it even easier to enter. All you have to do is fill in the **Entry Form that came with this issue of View Magazine** and we will do the rest. We will sort out which categories you are eligible to enter and arrange for the judge to come out and see you. Alternatively just call us **024 7676 7029** and you can enter over the phone.

Everyone who enters is invited to a special Awards Presentation evening in the autumn. This takes place at the Britannia Hotel in Coventry and includes a interesting talk by a local gardening/nature expert, a free buffet and of course the presentation of prizes by Coventry's Lord Mayor.

## The Presentation Evening 2008

**L**ast years competition saw an increase in entries and the Awards Evening, held at the Britannia Hotel, was a great success. The Lord Mayor presented prizes to tenants in recognition of their hard work - improving their gardens, balconies and communal areas for the benefit of themselves and others, and having fun doing it.

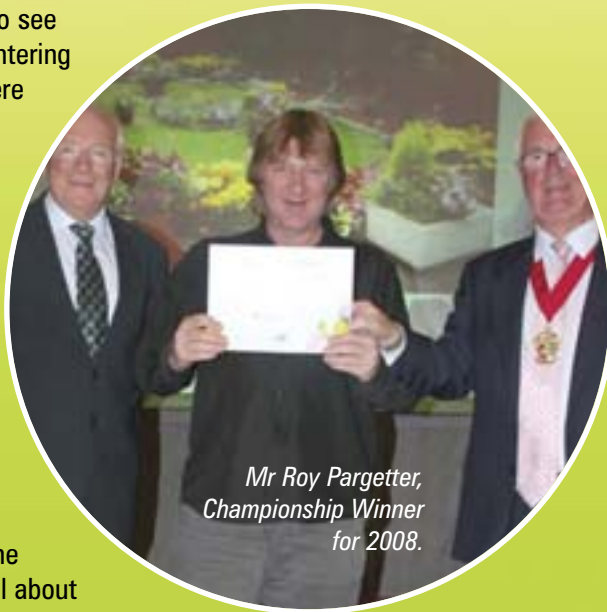
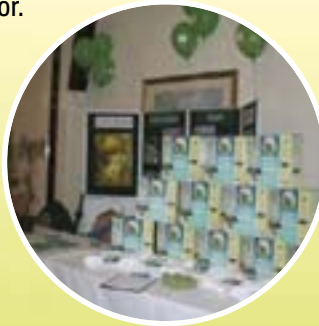
The judges were pleased to see some new faces entering this year and were also delighted at how well some of the regular

entrants had developed their gardens over the last year. Thank you to everyone who helped make the event a success

Guests at the event were also treated to an interesting presentation by Alan King from the RSPB and there was a display all about the 'How Does Your Garden Grow Project' (see opposite) for people to look at. Prize winners also received free saplings and bulbs courtesy of Glendales.

It is always an interesting and enjoyable event, and it really brings communities together, and recognises people who make their neighbourhoods better places to live in. We hope that next year even more green-fingered residents will get involved and look forward to receiving your entries in 2009!

## Whitefriars' Garden Competition



Mr Roy Pargetter, Championship Winner for 2008.



## How Does Your Garden Grow? Primary School Project

**B**ack in October, Alderman's Green Community Primary was given a beautiful Cherry Tree in honour of its pupils' outstanding effort in the how Does Your Garden Grow Project, a new initiative from Whitefriars.

10 primary schools across the city took part in the project, designed to encourage children to take an active interest in gardening, nature and all things green. By doing this we hope to encourage more children to take pride in the appearance of their estates and environments.

Each school was given a free gardening kit, containing seeds, plants, bulbs, books, gardening tools and curriculum notes and set the challenge to produce their own greenery.

All those who completed the project were invited to a special celebration ceremony at the Britannia Hotel to recognise their achievements. Each school was presented with a certificate, trophy and a hanging bird

table for their class outdoor area as well as taking away more plants and bulbs.

Rachel Hobbs, assistant director – housing operations at Whitefriars, said: "All of the schools and children who took part in the scheme really impressed us with their hard work but we thought that the children at Alderman's Green went above and beyond what we asked for with the amount of time and effort they put into their project."

Jean Deaville, the nursery teacher at Alderman's Green, said the school is delighted the children's hard work has been recognised.

She said: "The children were only aged three and four when they took part and after they had planted their seeds and bulbs they really

took the time to nurture their plants.

"They grew some really beautiful flowers and when the vegetables were ready we threw a salad party, which taught them that it is possible to grow your own food and helped them learn a lot more about the environment.

"We are really pleased that we've been given this beautiful cherry tree and the school is delighted it has been recognised in this way."



The school garden scheme was sponsored by Glendale, Whitefriars' landscaping contractor and Whitefriars will be running the scheme again this year.

Keep an eye out in View for more stories soon.

Left: Collecting their trophies on the presentation day. Below: 'Helping' to plant the cherry tree.

**ENTER TODAY!**