ConTACT

A NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY TENANTS OF WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

ISSUE NO.18 JUNE 2003

# LIFT OFF FOR COLDEN COMMON & TWYFORD

Eight tenants - three from Twyford and five from Colden Common - were recruited to form a Steering Group for Colden Common & Twyford through TACT's tenant recruitment campaign last May. They first met last autumn and agreed to establish a Tenants Association. They drafted a door-to-door survey to raise tenants awareness that they were trying to set up a TA and to gauge local interest, as well as identify local concerns.

The survey was carried out in January, with Steering group members and their Area Housing Manager knocking on doors and dropping in surveys. They delivered 242 survey forms and had 92 (38%) returned. 56 (51%) said they thought it would be a good idea to set up a TA and their concerns included lack of parking, poor facilities for young people, poor grass cutting and vandalism (in Colden Common).

Based on these results, they have agreed to hold a public meeting in June, at the Colden Common Community Centre to try and set up the TA. They will be joined by their Area Housing Manager and Area Property Surveyor, as well as TACT representatives and their local Beat Bobbie.

# GREAT NEWS

After our bitter disappointment at not being consulted on a major policy issue, the City Council's Cabinet (the main decision-making committee) has agreed not to discuss any housing-related matters at future meetings unless TACT has been consulted first and had an opportunity to add its comments on any relevant reports.

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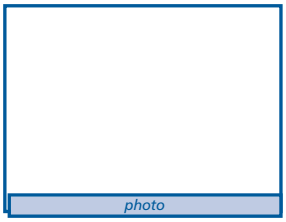
# A BIT OF ADVICE

Each year TACT asks the City's Tenant Participation Manager to pay our affiliation fee to renew our membership of TPAS, the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.




No matter how well the working relationship between landlord and tenant, we believe that there will be times when tenants might need expert independent advice. Should TACT require such advice, we can consult TPAS as our Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA), a move approved by the Housing Minister, Lord Rooker, agreeing the principle of tenants directly employing an ITA.

A national organisation dedicated to tenant involvement, TPAS are not central Government, they are not the landlord and they are not tenants. They have wide expertise in tenant matters and are proud of their independence and integrity - important, no matter who pays for their advice.

Advice from TPAS is freely available to affiliated organisations and we hope that this explains a little more about the organisation. We were delighted to welcome Steve Martin from TPAS to our recent AGM, where he addressed members on Housing Options.

# ZOOLOGICAL WORDSEARCH

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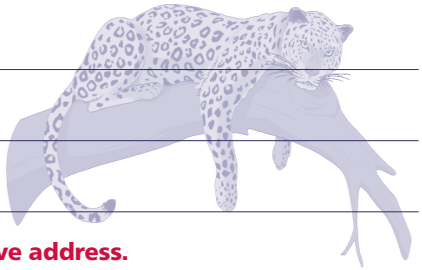
| Baboon | Elephant | Leopard | Orangutan | Seal |
| Camel | Gazelle | Lion | Oryx | Tapir |
| Cheetah | Giraffe | Llama | Ostrich | Tiger |
| Chimpanzee | Hippopotamus | Meerkat | Penguin | Walrus |
| Cougar | Kangaroo | Mongoose | Polar Bear | Wildebeest |

**Let's all go to the zoo in this edition's Wordsearch - in fact many of these exotic creatures can be found on Winchester's own doorstep at Marwell. A £15 voucher will be on its way to you, provided that you are the first correct entry drawn out of the hat. Entries should be returned by Friday 18th July, 2003.**

**Send your entries to: ConTACT c/o Housing Services, Winchester City Council, FREEPOST, Licence Number SO6048, Winchester, Hampshire, SO23 9BR.**



**Name:**

**Address:**

**Daytime Phone No:**

**For competition rules send an SAE to the above address.**

### WORDSEARCH WINNER

Congratulations to Mrs. Joyce Robinson from Twyford, whose correct entry was drawn in our knotty Woodland Wordsearch. £15 worth of vouchers are winging their way to you.

# TACT MEETING DATES

TACT meetings are open to all City Council tenants and leaseholders and new members are always welcome. Meetings of the Afternoon Group are held on Wednesdays at Makins Court, Alresford (from 2-4 pm), and of the Evening Group Wednesdays at The Guildhall, The Broadway, Winchester, (from 7.30 - 9.30 pm), unless held jointly - see dates below:

**16 July, 2pm & 7.30pm**

**20 August, 2pm & 7.30pm**

**17 September - Joint meeting, 7.30 p.m.**

**15 October, 2pm & 7.30pm**

**19 November, 2pm & 7.30pm**

## GET IT TAPED

**If you are visually impaired or have a friend or neighbour who would like ConTACT delivered to their home on an audio cassette, please call Glynis Cole on Freephone 0800 716987 for your copy today. These publications are recorded by the Winchester & District Talking Newspaper Association. Larger printed versions of ConTACT can also be made available, call the above Freephone number to obtain your copy.**

# THE CHAIRMEN REPORT BACK

**At this year's AGM, Cyril Gilbert-Wood and Bryan Whitfield our TACT Chairmen, made this report to TACT members.**

This year not all papers on Housing matters considered by Cabinet, included a TACT response, which was regrettable. The TACT response, followed by our Co-optees verbally making our views known at Council Committees, is of real importance. Your Chairs are encouraging all elected members to understand the importance of a TACT view, both written and verbal, for all housing matters.

This year TACT was well briefed on **rent setting** and the formation of the Rent & Business Planning Forum meant that TACT was able to give a meaningful input on the rent setting process and we submit the rent that emerged from this was fair. TACT is in correspondence with a number of agencies regarding the rent formula, which controls the rents for all social housing tenants, Council and Housing Associations. A major element in the formula is based upon local property valuations and just how these affect the rents we all pay. We will continue to put our case to Government in order to protect the interests of local tenants.

We are concerned about **allocations and lettings** and we believe that these disciplines must be transparent and Winchester must be prepared to change. Winchester has **empty dwellings and garages** and unused Scheme Managers' flats and we must be prepared for consultation and show a real willingness to support reasonable change.

From work in the Best Value panel by TACT members it is clear that there are inconsistencies in our **leases**. TACT must be prepared to support any review and we remind our members that this process could have an affect on all tenants, not only those dwelling in flats.

**The Tenant Participation (TP) Compact**, our agreement for the delivery of housing services, is now being reviewed and rewritten by our Compact Monitoring Working Party. **Tenancy Conditions and the Tenants Handbook** record our agreement with the landlord and services available for tenants. TACT will proactively support regular reviews, as it is important that these documents do not become dated.

**ConTACT** is TACT's newsletter and we would like to thank all those who help with its publication. The working group has endeavoured to produce an interesting read and the new livery designed for the recruitment campaign has been incorporated into ConTACT and also into our new TACT letterhead.

Looking into the future, it would be naïve for your Chairs to permit tenants/members to believe that there can be no change in the way we manage our homes. Central Government, not local government is more likely to be the driving force. TACT must be willing consultants in proposals for change. Both Chairs wish to convince all tenants of the importance of being informed and consultation will not be meaningful without a sound knowledge of your options.

The backbone of TACT is drawn from Tenants Association (TAs). Their work makes a reality of local tenant participation and we congratulate all those who were instrumental in last year's recruitment drive. We welcome the new associations and wish them every success.

A continuing message from TA's to TACT is a plea for help with the universal problems of footpaths with poor surfaces or obstructions, irresponsible parking, litter and dog fouling. There may be no simple solutions but we must all be proactive in seeking answers and TACT will press the landlord for improvements.

We would particularly like to thank the members of the Property & Contracts Forum, the Rent & Business Planning Forum, the SERCO Project Group, the Compact Monitoring Group, the Tenants Handbook Review Group and the Best Value Review panels. Each of these groups keeps TACT in enabling us to participate fully and consult tenants, however we would very much like to recruit more members who are willing and able to serve with these forums.

This year whenever the Cabinet considered a housing paper, your co-optees Honor Dewdney and Brian Whitfield attended and made response on TACT's behalf and the creation of the Housing Performance Improvement Committee has made even further demands on their time and we appreciate their hard work.

We would like to acknowledge our thanks to Dominic Hiscock, Portfolio Holder for Housing as throughout the year we have enjoyed regular meetings and dialogue, which has been most successful. We would also like to thank all those officers and elected members for their support during the year

Where are the younger TACT members? It is reassuring to note that this year's attendance has indicated a change for the better and we welcome the younger members, and wish them all success. Having recorded this fact we must note how much we owe and also admire our older members. TACT has been reliant upon them and as we encourage others we acknowledge that debt. TACT wishes to improve the lives of all tenants. **Without all of your active support and involvement, young and old, we can achieve nothing! For your continued help we sincerely say - Thank You Indeed.**

**Cyril Gilbert-Wood BEM**
Chair Afternoon Group

**Bryan Whitfield**
Chair Evening Group

# MORE TENANT GROUPS CREATED

Following the success of the TACT coffee morning at Danemark Court to share information, the residents at Richard Moss House have asked if they can get involved too. The Area Housing Manager and Tenant Participation Manager, Glynis Cole will be organising a meeting in the summer and TACT Chair Cyril Gilbert-Wood will also be attending.

"These informal get-togethers are a great idea for sheltered schemes," says Cyril, "but did you know that there are already Tenants Associations established in Stanmore, Highcliffe, Denmead, The Worthys and Compton, with more in the pipeline in Weeke, Colden Common and Twyford? Call Glynis Cole on Freephone 0800 716987 if you would like to know more about these local groups or how to set up one of your own."I

# NEW TEAM

At the recent TACT AGM, the following TACT members were elected:

**AFTERNOON GROUP**

| | |
|---|---|
| Chairman | Cyril Gilbert-Wood BEM |
| Vice Chairman | Brian Hayes |
| Secretary | Ruth Clifton |
| Co-optee | Honor Dewdney |
| Deputy | - |

**EVENING GROUP**

| | |
|---|---|
| Chairman | Bryan Whitfield |
| Vice Chairman | Alan Rickman |
| Secretary | David Chafe |
| Co-optee | Alan Rickman |
| Deputy | Bryan Whitfield |

# WHAT YOU TOLD US

Thank you for taking part in our Questionnaire in the last edition of ConTACT. 80 households replied and Mrs Polly Robson from Weeke, won £25 worth of gift vouchers in our free draw.

98% said they found ConTACT easy to read and we found three volunteers who would like to write an article or help us with editing. In general most people found all the articles interesting.

You told us that you would like more information on repairs, property maintenance and improvements (see this month's edition of HOUSEPROUD), more information on local planning and building plans, rents and benefits, services for disabled people and events. Everybody liked ConTACT, saying that it was up to date, informative, interesting, friendly, clearly designed and written - and not too wordy.

You didn't seem to want to change ConTACT either, although some people did suggest that it could be made bigger or be published more often with more photos - but we would need more volunteers on our editorial team to make that happen!

# GEORGE BROWN

George Brown

Former TACT Chairman George Brown has died suddenly. He was not only the Chairman of the Evening Group for three years but was also a founder member of Winnall High Rise Tenants Association.

Very much community-minded, George was involved with TACT from its inception in 1995 and was also heavily involved in a number of working parties and groups such as the Property & Contracts Forum, the Tenants Participation Compact Monitoring Group and Best Value committees. He was co-ordinator of the local Neighbourhood Watch group and was involved with Winnall Community Centre, as well as serving as Chair of the Winnall Community Association for some years. He also produced the local community newsletter, the Winnall Manor Banner. George was honoured by Power FM in 1999, winning a Local Heroes award for his service to the community.

The funeral was held at St Mary's Chapel, Chesil Street, and was attended by representatives of TACT, local councillors and City officers.

# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

We want to recruit more tenants to make our voice even stronger right across the district. Call Cyril Gilbert-Wood or Bryan Whitfield if you want to find out more about what TACT gets up to. Their details are below:

**Cyril Gilbert-Wood BEM**
**22 Mountbatten Place**
**Kings Worthy**
**Winchester SO23 7PL**
**Tel. 01962 884505**

**Bryan Whitfield**
**20 Hilly Close**
**Owslebury Close**
**Winchester SO2 1LW**
**Tel. 01962 777597**

ConTACT

**This edition of ConTACT has been produced by a Tenant team including George Brown, Cyril Gilbert-Wood BEM, Brian Hayes and Bryan Whitfield. TACT is Tenants and Council Together, the Council's district-wide Consultative Group.**

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# HOUSING SURVEY 2003

By the time this edition of ConTACT hits your mat, you will also have received details of the City Council's Stock Condition Housing Survey. The consultants carrying out the work outside, and also inside, some of our homes are called David Adamson & Partners Ltd.

Their objective is to produce a meaningful investment plan over a 30 year planning period. This will enable our landlord to inform central government annually and also plan local improvements to the Council's housing stock - our homes.

Two surveys will be completed. The first began in May and covered the outside of our homes and the estate environment. The second begins in June and is a more detailed survey of the inside and outside of one in three homes.

We do appeal to all tenants for their help - the information gathered will provide details of the condition of housing provided for us now, and will also give priorities for improving our homes in the future.

While it may be true that all tenants do not have to take part, all tenants will benefit from the information collected and our co-operation is vital to the success of this project.

TACT wishes to thank Clive Broomfield and his team for the opportunity to be consulted on the planning of this very important survey.