

The independent body of the National Trust Tenants England, Northern Ireland & Wales
 PO Box 200, Sheffield S11 7TL. Telephone: 0845 224 2986
www.nationaltrusttenantsassociation.co.uk

The Chairman's Letter to Tenants

"N'er cast a clout 'til May be out" is sound advice for National Trust tenants (May is the Mayflower, not the month). I hope that the worst of the cold weather is now past. From the number of cases of shivering tenants we have been dealing with, much needs to be done to improve the way properties are insulated. They should be kept in a state of repair that takes the tenant's comfort and wellbeing into account as *well as* conservation. Primary sources of heating are now considered to include solid fuel installations, particularly wood, which is relatively cheap and carbon neutral. Tell us about *your* experiences this last winter.



Thanks for the votes; TANT had to get the law changed to enable me to stand as the first tenant candidate ever for the Trust's Council. Well, surprise; surprise, I didn't get the all-important candidate recommendation by the National Trust; but 5,410 votes were a very respectable show for a first-timer. We will put forward candidates for as many times as it takes; and we are asking some searching questions about selection procedures.

Last year's AGM was an absolute cracker, with lots of tenant-members (NT tenants are optionally a TANT member, free of charge) and the formation of no less than two new Associations. We are really looking forward to meeting lots of you at our next **AGM at Dudmaston in April**.

The main theme this time is the new Tenants Handbook. I have been telling you about it for some time, but at last we can launch this important document with actual copies to look at and ask questions about. When you get a new car or a domestic appliance etc you read and keep the manual. The National Trust Tenants Handbook is no different. It applies to one of the most important parts of our lives. It clearly sets out what to expect from the Trust, and *vice versa*. But that's not all; there is general advice; guidance on specific features in certain areas; special tenancy conditions and the ability to create a bespoke document with local inserts and updates. We are enthusiastic tenant custodians of our beloved properties. For the first time this *vade mecum* recognises us as such. We applaud this, and will encourage the development of this vital goodwill principle.

But, perhaps most important of all is The Complaints Procedure. At last there is something set down for us to follow and for The Trust to stick to. We will monitor its progress very carefully. The pace of progress and reform in Trust-tenant affairs, particularly when dealing with sometimes desperate tenant situations concerns us. But the need for real, major change is now being recognised by our landlord. The handbook is a tangible sign that this is happening. We will continue to work with them at policy making level, to promote the tenants interests. There is some way to go yet, and we keep our powder dry.

Andrew Turner-Cross, Chairman.

AGM Details

The TANT Annual General Meeting will be held on the:

Dudmaston Estate in Shropshire
Sunday 26 April 2009
Arrival at 11.30am for a 12 noon start
Lunch will be provided

The AGM will be held in Quatt Village Hall which is located in the village of Quatt on the A442 between Kidderminster and Bridgnorth. The post code is WV15 6QW. Further details of the Village Hall can be found at www.quatt.info.

Why not make a weekend of it and enjoy the beautiful Shropshire countryside including visits to the Dudmaston estate, the Severn Valley Railway and the market towns of Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury or Ludlow. For local accommodation contact the local Tourist Information office on 01746-763257 or visit www.visitbridgnorth.co.uk

Tenants Associations

It can be very difficult dealing with a problem on your own and often it is easier and more effective when you are part of a group. We are a group of some 10,000 people - tenants and their families who live in National Trust houses and cottages, so there are a lot of us.

Local Tenant Associations are an excellent way for groups of people to deal with local and individual issues and to work in conjunction with TANT - the national representative body - on major initiatives such as the Tenants Handbook. We all work on a voluntary basis which is rewarding in itself.

Many areas now have local tenant associations, and if you need help to set one up, please do not hesitate to contact TANT. It is a straightforward exercise and will be welcomed by the Trust. Whilst often dealing with problems for tenants, we would also be keen to promote community activity, social events and perhaps something across adjoining areas or nationally.

We have looked at things like a national cottage garden competition and will welcome all ideas to help develop and maintain community for Trust tenants. We hope that you are all enjoying your National Trust home and garden.

Credit Crunch?

Income not stretching so far, rent & property tax rises – how many of us are facing this in these "Credit stretch Times", even, unfortunately, unemployment. Are you sure you are receiving all the help you are entitled to?

Government benefits are there to help provide practical help and financial support for those who are unemployed and looking for work. It also provides those with additional income if your earnings are low, if you are bringing up children, are retired, care for someone, are ill or have a disability.

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Please see our new Members Forum on our website—Drop by and Say Hello!

For those of you who are caring for someone, are you entitled to Direct Care? This is a payment that can be given direct to pay for care etc to help you in your task. It is to allow you maybe to have a part-time or even full-time job. In other words it is to relieve the strain and get some of your life back, while caring for the loved one. **Ask your social worker.**

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

Have you rung/visited your council & told them of your changed/strained circumstances? It is possible that you are entitled to housing benefits to help with the rents and/or help with your property tax. You will not know if you don't ask & if you have problems getting to the offices ring they will help.

For those of you who may have got to the point where maybe eviction is imminent and you owe money, please contact Payplan on **0800 716 239**. They are handling cases all the time and know what can be done and will negotiate for you with your debtors.

Are any of you members of a group – such as a union? I know that UNISON for example has both a National Welfare section, regional & branch Welfare officers. So if you are a UNISON member visit their website or ring **02075 511 620**. Check if you are a member of a union, church, synagogue, mosque, temple, mason, round table etc or any other collective group as many of them run welfare/help sections or you can contact the Citizens Advice Bureau for further information and assistance www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Rent Rises!

All tenants should challenge large rent rises. If your dwelling does not meet the decent home standards and current legislation on heating, insulation, quality of water etc, then this should be factored into any proposed increase. Free help and guidance is available from TANT.

National Trust Communities

The 1977 Fair Rent Act and the more recent Maximum Fair Rents Order authorises rent increases of 5% or 7.5% per year over the inflation rate. Especially at a time of recession, it is worth noting that the NT are allowed to increase

rent by the maximum permitted by law.

This and the practice of converting vacant village family homes to holiday accommodation is indirectly a cause of community breakdown. Transient tenancies are on the increase, tenants' moving on because rents become unaffordable, local housing stock is depleted, and when it does become available it too is unaffordable to families whose forebears built the houses in the first place.

On top of this, National Trust tenants, including pensioners, who fail to qualify for assistance under the means tested housing or council tax benefit system are further penalised by the excessive council tax valuation bands allocated to their homes.

This is how things really are for lifelong native private rent payers, including many National Trust tenants, who can envisage no foreseeable improvement in the future without a change in the law or in the landlords' hearts.

Further reading can be found on a recent article by George Monbiot www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/24/monbiot-civil-liberties

National Trust Issues

Tenants will be interested to see the current BBC series which explores various issues at Sissinghurst. The series is currently being broadcast and is still available on BBC iplayer. The National Trust has recently committed to creating 1,000 new allotments over the next 3 years as part of its campaign to encourage the production and consumption of locally produced food. Local communities will be given space to grow their own fruit and vegetables. More information can be found on the National Trust website.

Contact Information

TANT would like to keep all NT tenants informed. If you would like to be kept informed of current news and events, please complete the form below and return to TANT. We will not pass your details onto any 3rd parties or we will only contact you regarding TANT/NT matters. The more tenants TANT have on their database, the more TANT are able to get the NT to make policy changes that are in the best interest of all tenants.

Complete the form and return to the address above or email your details to info@nationaltrusttenantsassociation.co.uk

Name:

Tel:

Email:

Address:

P/Code: