



WEALD
LIVING

BY SAXON WEALD

Spotlight

The Newsletter for Weald Living Customers | Winter 2022



Winter wellbeing roadshow

Highlights from our recent tour of villages and towns



Helping hand guide

Some helpful ways to cut costs and boost income as we tackle the cost of living crisis



Great gardens

We're delighted to announce the winners of our recent garden competition

www.wealdliving.com

A note from our Chair

The cost-of-living crisis, made worse by recent economic and political instability, was the primary focus of the day our Board recently spent together. We know that times are tough for our customers and staff and that things are likely to get worse over the winter. Sadly, we can't stop inflation or fix the cost-of-living crisis. We are, however, here to help as much as we can. If you are concerned about your finances and need some support, please contact our Money Matters team.

Saxon Weald itself faces financial challenges, as our costs increase much faster than our income. We therefore need to ensure the organisation remains strong and resilient.

Fortunately, we raised a new loan in the financial markets before interest rates began to spike upwards. This will allow us to continue building new homes, as well as investing in existing ones. The Board agreed we must continue to make our customer services – particularly our repairs

service – as good as possible. We also decided that our investment in your homes must continue, with a focus on improving energy efficiency to try to help reduce your fuel bills.



Alongside these priorities, we are committed to listening to you, our customers, to help us make good decisions. We have a range of new initiatives to add to our regular surveys. These include our recent winter well-being roadshow, and the establishment of customer focus groups to provide feedback directly to our Board. Do please let our Customer Experience team know if you are interested in getting involved:

CX@saxonweald.com.

Simon Hardwick,

Saxon Weald's Chair of the Board

Being customer led

We're committed to hearing the voice of our customers at Board level. So, we're delighted to share with you some positive changes to the Saxon Weald Board.

Jo Boswell joined us earlier this year as a Non-Executive Director. Jo is an independent consultant who has used her knowledge and coaching services to help businesses improve the customer experience.



Jo Boswell



Susan Morris



Hannah Eaton

We also recently welcomed Susan Morris as our newest tenant Board member. Susan has been a Saxon Weald resident for over a decade, so we're excited to hear her views on what we could be doing better.

Finally, we'd like to congratulate our shared ownership resident board member, Hannah Eaton, on her recent promotion to Vice Chair.

Communal utility service charges

We've received a number of enquiries about how we're securing our energy contracts for communal utilities. To answer some of these queries, here are a few Q&As:

Q What are our existing service charge estimates based on?

The service charges you pay for communal electricity and gas are estimated at the beginning of the year. The current costs you are paying are based on our electricity and gas contracts which were secured on a fixed rate for twelve months on 1 October 2021. A new six month contract was entered on 1 October 2022 and will run until 31 March 2023, when it will be revised again.

Q What if the actual cost differs from the amount estimated?

Any difference in cost from the amount estimated will be calculated at the end of the financial year in April 2023. You will be advised of this when your actual service charge is issued in September 2023.

Q Will I see an increase in my service charges?

Unfortunately, there is likely to be an increase to your communal service charges from 1 April next year. This is because we have seen an increase in costs for communal gas and electricity, just as you will likely have seen with your own utility bills.

Q I'm worried I won't be able to afford my service charges. What support is available to me?

We understand this is a difficult time for many people. For information on the financial support you may be eligible for, please head over to page 5.

Complaints performance



Each year we publish a self-assessment of how we are performing against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code. You can find a copy of this assessment on our website or email hello@saxonweald.com and we will send you a copy.

Key points

- We have a simple two-stage complaints process and customers can use the communication channel that suits them best.
- 96% of complaints are resolved at stage one of our complaints process.
- One of our Board members, Susie Morris, became our Board link on complaints in July. Susie ensures that our Board receive the right information to hold staff to account.

Area for improvement

In some cases, it has taken us too long to resolve a complaint and we've not met our target time of 10 days. We have made some changes to improve this, including giving staff additional training.

Learning from complaints

We see complaints as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Most recently, we have looked at complaints where it took us several appointments to complete a heating repair. We have now increased the amount of time we allocate for a gas appointment to give our engineers a better chance to fix the problem on their first visit.

How to make a complaint

Get in touch telling us what the problem is, giving as much detail as possible. If you are not confident about communicating your complaint, you can ask a friend or family member to act on your behalf. We will try and resolve your complaint within 10 working days.

You can contact the Ombudsman at any time about a complaint, but they won't formally investigate until you have been through our complaints process. Find out more on their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or call 0300 111 3000.



Winter well-being roadshow

Back in October half term, we pulled together our best advice and energy saving tips and hit the road with our very first winter well-being roadshow.

Throughout the week, we visited eight of our communities within the Horsham district to provide support with the current cost of living. This included free refreshments, prize draws, income advice, as well as Halloween treats for the kids and giveaways.

MONDAY

NORFOLK AND
MEDWAY COURTS,
HORSHAM



TUESDAY

STANE STREET,
PULBOROUGH
& BEECH GROVE,
STORRINGTON



FRIDAY

TILLETTS LANE,
WARNHAM



THURSDAY

STANDINGS
COURT, HORSHAM
& LAUREL WALK,
HORSHAM



WEDNESDAY

NORTHCROFT,
HENFIELD & ST
CUTHMANS,
STEYNING



Thank you to everyone who came along to one of the sessions. We really enjoyed visiting your neighbourhoods and hearing your feedback. We'd love to hit the road again in the new year, so keep your eyes peeled for future events near you...

We understand that times are tough at the moment, so please remember our support doesn't stop there. We have lots of information and advice regarding the current cost of living and energy crisis which you can find on the next page.

Helping hand guide

We understand that many people are feeling the effects of the rising cost of living. We want our customers to know that we understand and are here to help where we can.

To try and help you make your income stretch a bit further, we've put together a handy guide full of tips, advice and support. This is available to download from our website: www.wealdliving.com/storage/downloads/helping_hand_guide-1668069962.pdf. Alternatively, please contact us and we'll send you a copy.

Inside the guide, you'll find 20 pages of useful information. From the energy usage of your heating systems and appliances, to financial advice and support available, to foodbanks. We've also pulled together our hot tips on how to help keep your bills down and stay warm over winter. Below is a snippet of what's inside:



Help with energy costs

There are a number of government financial schemes to help support households through the winter months. Check that you are getting what you are eligible for:

- All domestic users will receive a £400 Energy Bill Discount.
- Households on certain benefits, including Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Tax Credits, will receive an extra payment of £650 this year. This will be paid automatically in two parts, one in summer and another in the autumn. More information can be found here: www.helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/help-with-your-bills.
- You may be eligible for a cheaper energy tariff or grant depending on your income/health conditions. Check your eligibility here: www.ofgem.gov.uk.
- You might be eligible for £140 credit towards your energy bills through the Warm Home Discount Scheme. www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme.
- If you're getting certain benefits and the temperature in your area is 0°C or below for over seven days in a row, you could be eligible for a cold weather payment. This is a £25 credit on your account for each seven-day period (between 1 November and 31 March).



Difficulty paying rent or service charges

Have you checked if you are entitled to more income / benefits?

You can check using an online benefit calculator. We recommend Policy in Practice, where they have a handy budget and benefit calculator. Go to: www.betteroffcalculator.co.uk.

If you have any queries regarding your calculation, our Money Matters team can check you're claiming all the help and support you are entitled to. For advice or to request an appointment, please email moneymatters@saxonweald.com.

Other support if you're struggling financially

Sometimes an extra helping hand can support other costs after your bills have been paid. Foodbanks are seeing an increasing number of people turn to them and can really help put a meal on the table when you need it most.

Trussell Trust has a list of foodbanks in your area. Get in touch and you will be given any vouchers or codes you may need to use them. Go to: www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/ or call: 01722 580 180



Meet Bryn, our Executive Director – Investment & Growth



We're delighted to introduce Bryn Shorey, who recently joined Saxon Weald as our new Executive Director – Investment and Growth.

We asked Bryn to share a bit about himself and his plans...

Tell us a bit about yourself and your role

My wife and I live in Hampshire with our dog who we love to walk in the surrounding areas. I have been working for housing associations and local authorities in the south and southwest for the last 30 years and have a great deal of experience managing all types of properties. I have been involved in day-to-day repairs, planned maintenance and improvements works to customers' homes, as well as health and safety.

In my brand-new role at Saxon Weald, I will be responsible for supporting the development of new homes, as well as using my knowledge and experience to improve the maintenance of our existing homes.

What is your ambition for Saxon Weald?

My aim is to provide an excellent asset management and property service for our customers. This means ensuring our existing homes are weather tight and as warm as possible

in the winters, and as cool as possible in the summers.

We're also working hard to achieve the Net Carbon Zero standard within the communal areas of our apartment blocks and schemes by 2050 or earlier.

Over the next 18 months, my focus is on ensuring we have good property information. This will help us plan all our major improvement programmes and cyclical projects for the next five years and keep our customers informed. I also want to develop more new homes in the Sussex and Hampshire areas, to support the needs of the local authorities, and provide homes for those most in need.

What is coming up for the asset team?

We have been working hard to put together a new asset team to help us invest in our existing homes. This includes:

- Additional Project Surveyors
- A new Property Investment Manager – responsible for ensuring our properties have a programme of works for the future.
- A new Property Compliance Manager – responsible for ensuring all of our properties with gas and electrical systems are safety checked, all our schemes with communal water systems are safe, and that we maintain our homes to a high level of fire safety.

I'm also pleased to share that we will have a new Assistant Director of Asset & Sustainability joining us in January. They will be responsible for organising our plans and involving our customers in present and future works.

Advice for leaseholders

The Leasehold Advisory Service provides free advice for leaseholders. They are an independent government funded body and all of their advisers are legally qualified.

If you need advice, their website contains lots of information, from service charges to extending your lease, as well as guides and frequently asked questions.

You can also book a telephone appointment, where they will provide as much advice as they can within your 15-minute call. Find out more on their website: www.lease-advice.org



Making changes to your home

As a homeowner, we understand that over time you may want to make certain alterations to your home. It's fine to make simple improvements such as painting and shelving, however, larger changes require our written permission, as specified in the terms of your lease. This includes (but isn't limited to) your windows, bathroom and kitchen, internal walls, as well as building extensions or conservatories.

Please remember, as well as our consent, you may also need to get planning permission and/or building notice from your local authority. Find out more: www.wealdliving.com/home-owner-services/making-changes-to-your-home.



Improved support for domestic abuse survivors



We're very pleased to share that we have successfully passed the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. This accreditation will help us provide better support to residents experiencing domestic abuse.

As part of the accreditation process, we spent time:

- training staff how to handle domestic abuse disclosures
- developing a procedure
- partnering with specialist agencies

To find out more, including our commitment and the support available to you, visit our website: www.saxonweald.com/da.



Sharing your information

Saxon Weald is required by law to protect the public funds we manage. As a housing provider, we also have a responsibility to help detect and prevent instances of fraud.

The Cabinet Office requires us to take part in its National Fraud Initiative. To do this, we must provide them with tenancy information, which is compared with data from other public bodies, such as the Department for Work & Pensions. The initiative helps to ensure that benefits are only being paid to those who are entitled. Information is collected every two years and we have recently submitted our data for the latest exercise.

Sometimes people can receive wrong payments due to a genuine error. In previous years the initiative has helped identify residents receiving less support than they were due and occasionally those who were receiving too much. The scheme also helps ensure the best use of public funds.

To find out more, visit: www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-fraud-initiative.



Supporting our community

Back in September, we welcomed members of Horsham Matters to Saxon Weald House. The group were competing in a fundraiser, visiting different businesses around Horsham and completing challenges to raise money for charity.

It was a lovely opportunity to meet with the team and discuss the brilliant work Horsham Matters do. We were also pleased to give them a cheque for £200, which helped contribute towards the fantastic £2,400 they raised in total!

This money will really help Horsham Matters to support local people this winter, as well as those using the foodbank.



Grounds maintenance – consulting with you on a new contractor

We know the grounds maintenance service provided by idverde has not been to the standard our customers deserve. So, in October, we gave idverde six months' notice that we will be ending our contract with them.

Before entering into a long-term service agreement, we are required to consult with residents who contribute to the costs as part of their services charges. This is called a section 20 consultation. If you are affected, you will have received a letter in November inviting you to share your views on the way we are changing this service.

Our plan is to separate grounds maintenance and tree maintenance into two separate contracts. This is to encourage local contractors to bid for work in their areas, which we hope will lead to a better quality of service for you.

Due to its value, we are legally required to advertise the proposed contract by public notice. This process ensures fair and competitive tendering, but it does mean that on this occasion you have not been able to nominate a contractor directly for the work.

To answer some of the questions you may have around the changes to this service, we've put together an FAQ sheet. To read this and find out more about the Section 20 consultation process, head over to:

www.wealdliving.com/consultations.



Active Worthing Community Hub

We've partnered with Active Worthing to host an Active Life Skills Club at our Highdown Court extra care scheme in Worthing.

The club is a wonderful opportunity for the community and residents to come together and socialise, whilst also providing coaching for memory, speech, reading, writing and IT skills.

The work of the club really goes a long way towards combatting isolation and maintaining independence. The sessions have been really appreciated by the members and feedback has already helped to shape future sessions and activities.



Coffee, cake and new friends

Residents and members of the Rustington community have been enjoying the weekly community café taking place at our Abbotswood extra care scheme.

The café was Mandie's idea, a dementia patient's nurse with the NHS. It was setup to help those living with dementia and their carer to socialise. So far, the initiative has been a great benefit to the community, and has even received support from Waitrose, who are providing the tea, coffee, and cakes for the events.

The pandemic resulted in a great deal of social isolation, particularly for those most vulnerable. So, we're delighted to hear the café is helping to bring the community together once more and tackle isolation.



Introducing Seniors United!

At the beginning of December we're launching our first Seniors United group, bringing together residents from Highwood Mill, Hordern House and Eyles Close in Horsham. The group offers an opportunity for our residents to socialise while to sharing ideas and experiences over a hot drink and cake.

Members of staff from our customer experience team will be there to chat with residents and take note of any thoughts and ideas from the group that could help improve our services going forward.

We're hoping to roll Seniors United out to other schemes in the future too, so keep an eye on your noticeboards and newsletters for when it is coming to an area near you!





'Tis the season to celebrate safely!

Christmas trees, decorations, and lights are all hallmarks of the Christmas period. But did you know that they open our homes up to more fire hazards than usual?

Here are a few tips to keep you, your loved ones, and your home safe this festive season:

1. Fire alarms

Although it's a busy time of year, it's important to take time to test your fire alarms regularly. It's also important to ensure family and friends staying with you know how to escape in the event of an emergency.

2. Christmas lights

Ensure that your Christmas lights are in good working order. This includes checking for any sections that are dimmer than others and making sure the plug is in a safe condition. Remember not to overload your plug sockets and always switch them off before going out or going to bed.

3. Decorations

While they look great, Christmas decorations can be a big fire hazard. To keep the risk of fire at a minimum, avoid attaching decorations to lights or other heat sources, and never leave candles burning unattended.

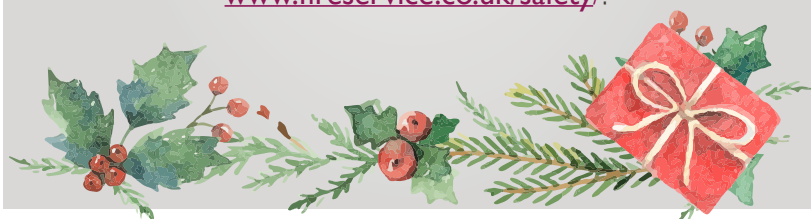
4. Cooking

Did you know most fires start in the kitchen? When cooking up your Christmas feasts, avoid leaving pots and pans unattended on the heat, or handles hanging over the edge that could easily be knocked.

5. Bedtime checklist

To ensure you have a silent night, check everything is off and safe before you go to bed. This includes making sure cigarettes and candles are put out properly, and items that use electricity, such as Christmas lights, are unplugged.

For more information, head over to
www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/.



Committed to communication

At Saxon Weald, we understand the importance of communication, and that when it comes to communicating with our customers, it's not a case of one size fits all.

That's why a group of our Extra Care Services Managers recently spent some time learning British Sign Language. The new skills they learnt are invaluable and will help them to better communicate with some of our most vulnerable customers.



Locking down on fire safety

We've recently received a number of enquiries about locks on electrical cupboards and loft hatches.

Please be aware, these locks are in place for your safety, as it's essential these spaces are kept clear and free from fire hazards. This includes personal belongings. It's also important these areas remain secured in case a fire starts from within a cupboard or loft hatch.

If you need to access a cupboard, to read the meter for example, you can get a standard FB key from most local hardware shops, or on Amazon for just a few pounds.



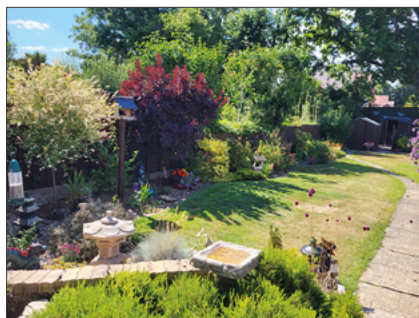
Top of the crop!

A huge thank you to everyone who took part in our garden competition this year; we received a record number of nominations!

We are delighted to announce that Saxon Weald Residents, Mr and Mrs Sullivan, were the winners of the “best individual garden” award. We loved the blend of natural shrubs and colourful plants in their garden.

We would also like to congratulate the residents of Downlands Court in Peacehaven, who won the “best communal garden” category. They impressed us with their fantastic colour combinations which brought their plant pots and beds to life and helped bring a vibrant feel to the scheme.

Mr and Mrs Sullivan,
Best Individual Garden



Downlands Court, Peacehaven.
Best Communal Garden



Customer support – we’re here to help!

Did you know that our customer support team receive an average of 3450 phone calls every month? In addition to this, the team respond to a monthly average of 3490 digital enquiries, including emails, social media, and web media messages.

The team can provide help and advice on a range of tenancy and property related issues. However, occasionally, we do receive enquiries that we are unable to answer. If this is the case, we may need to refer you to organisations such as the local council or Citizens Advice.



We understand it can be frustrating sitting in a call queue or being referred. Please be assured, our customer support team are doing their best, and working hard to respond to your calls and queries as quickly as possible. The average call waiting time is between three and four minutes, but this does increase at peak times such as after a weekend, bank holiday or after extreme weather such as storms or flooding.

If you want to avoid the phone queues, don’t forget, our online services are available to you 24/7, and can be used on most smart devices.

Not yet signed up? Head over to: www.wealdliving.com.



My
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Christmas closure

Saxon Weald will be closed for Christmas from 1pm on Friday 23 December and reopens on Tuesday 3 January.

If you need emergency help during this time, please call 01403 226000 and you will be redirected to our out-of-hours service.

Remember, you can access your account anytime at mywealdliving.com.

If you haven't yet signed up, please register before Friday 23 December so we can send you a verification code. Please also be aware that any payments made, or repairs booked during our Christmas shutdown, will not be processed until the new year.

We would like to wish all our customers a very merry Christmas and a happy, healthy new year.

HM Government

Help for Households

Could you, or someone you know, be missing out on Pension Credit?

Pension Credit tops up pension income and can help with day to day living costs.

Check your eligibility at gov.uk/pension-credit or by calling 0800 99 1234

Scan to find out more:



Please check your eligibility for Pension Credit before 18 December 2022. If you qualify and meet the three month backdated award, you may also be eligible for a second cost of living payment of £324. This is on top of any other pensioner cost of living payments.

Make life easier, get ☺ online!

Our easy-to-use, online self-service portals provide secure access to your information and services. They're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from a desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile. Discover the benefits and how to register for your account here:

www.wealdliving.com/getonline



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