

July 2021

# HOME

*matters*

**FREE  
INSIDE**

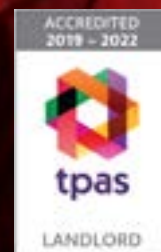
**The Great  
Big Rotherham  
To-Do List**

## **LET'S KEEP ROTHERHAM MOVING**

**Get your  
finances back  
on track**

**Make the  
digital switch**

**Neighbourhood  
Centres to re-open**



[www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing)

# HOME *matters*

## Welcome to the July 2021 edition of Home Matters



**Hello! I'm Councillor Amy Brookes and I'm honoured to assume the responsibilities of Cabinet Member for Housing at Rotherham Council.**

It is an absolute pleasure to welcome you to the July 2021 edition of Home Matters magazine.

I would like to begin my editorial debut by acknowledging the efforts of my predecessors in making the housing service a success, and I hope to maintain the momentum while keeping pace with the needs of all residents.

As I was growing up in Rotherham it was widely acknowledged that our social housing and service was second to none in the region and I feel so proud to be playing a part decades later in upkeeping that reputation and maintaining the continued successes now as lead elected member.

Let me tell you about some of the highlights in this edition. We have an update on the Rother Living launch and how you can now register interest in the exciting town centre homes for sale (page 10), there is the lowdown on the Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (page 8) with details on how this will raise standards.

Another highlight of this issue is the Great Big Rotherham To-Do List – a free pocket guide full of inspiration to find everyday moments of calm, kindness, health and fun, something we all need a bit of after the past year – I hope you enjoy it!

I really look forwards to having a close involvement with housing in Rotherham and doing my best for tenants, residents and the town as a whole.

Stay safe and well,

**Councillor Amy Brookes**







Cabinet Member for Housing  
Rotherham Council

## STAND BY YOUR FLOWER BEDS



Our annual garden competition is back, rewarding Rotherham residents who are making a real difference within their neighbourhoods.

This year we are searching for Rotherham's:

-  Best garden
-  Best pots, planters and hanging baskets
-  Best vegetable patch
-  Best wildlife garden
-  Best young gardener (under 18)
-  Tallest sunflower (under 18)

**Each winner will receive £100 worth of garden centre vouchers and runners-up will receive £50 vouchers.**

To enter the competition simply upload three photos of your garden along with a few words about what your garden means to you at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/gardencompetition](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/gardencompetition)

**Closing date for entries has been extended to Sunday 8 August 2021**





Winston Cook (centre) and members of the local Tenant Involvement Group outside Swinburne Place Neighbourhood Centre.

# WELCOMING BACK OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

**We're keeping our fingers crossed that our neighbourhood centres will soon be reopened, giving tenants the opportunity to reconnect with their communities.**

Due to the government's lockdown restrictions, all 45 of the borough's neighbourhood centres were forced to close their doors in April last year. However, following the government's roadmap announcement we're hoping to be able to reopen the centres once government restrictions are lifted. We know this will be welcome news to many of our tenants who have missed the social opportunities the centres give them.

The centres provide a place in the heart of the community to connect and socialise and are well used for a range of activities such as coffee mornings, luncheon clubs, bingo, craft and hobby clubs, ward member surgeries and parties.

Winston Cook is an active member of his local Tenant Involvement Group and, before the pandemic hit, used his Neighbourhood Centre in Herringthorpe every week. Winston told us: "Our centre is wonderful as it offers the chance for my group to meet up and discuss what is going on in the community, but it's not all business, it's also a great excuse to have a cuppa and a natter with neighbours.

"The centre is a multi-purpose hub that offers different things for different people. It also provides a vital place for people who have been isolated from those around them to meet and I'd recommend anyone go and find out what's going on at their local centre."

Rotherfed's Phil Hayes added: "It's been great to see how many tenants, new and old, have been involved virtually during this strange year. Our priority now is to understand the needs of our Tenants and Residents Associations and groups to help them get back up and running when restrictions allow."

Although we are hopeful we can open the centres, this can only happen when it can be done safely. The final decision depends on local infection rates and government guidance at the time.

Since the centres closed in April 2020, all residents who pay the communal facility charge have had the charge credited to their rent accounts.

To find out more about your nearest neighbourhood centre, please contact the housing team at [councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk)

# SAVE TIME... SWITCH TO ONLINE

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the Council has tried to make sure that people in Rotherham have the information they need as quickly and effectively as possible. One of the main ways we've done this is by using digital ways to communicate.

We've had a great response from residents who have embraced the digital switch and, as a result, we have continued to expand the number of services we offer digitally, making accessing our services quick, easy and convenient.

By increasing the number of people who regularly self-serve rather than choosing to phone or visit a Council office, we will have more time to speak to people who aren't able to go online and need to speak to a real person.

Over lockdown our customers visited the website 886,000 times and viewed over 7 million webpages. If you haven't yet made the switch it's worth considering. There are many benefits to using our online services including:

**Save time** – our online service is available 24/7 with none of the hassle of travel or parking

**Convenient** – report problems and make payments from the comfort of your own home

**Quick and easy** – our website is easy to use, just pop what you are looking for in the search box

**Safe and secure** – pay safely and securely using Direct Debit or PayPal



## NOT DIGITALLY SAVVY?

**Gillian and the Rotherham Libraries team can help...**

Libraries manager Gillian Moss and her team are looking forward to welcoming customers back later this summer and have extended the support services they offer to help those less confident going online.

Gillian tells us: "Our aim is to make sure that residents can continue to complete their day-to-day tasks, such as paying their rent online, easily."

Once our libraries fully reopen over the coming months will be able to support people getting online as well as offering I.T. sessions to help people become confident computer users.

"If you're not digitally savvy, or don't have access to a computer at home, don't worry, a member of the team will be more than happy to help."

If you are not able to get to a library there are other organisations who can help including:

**RotherFed – 01709 368515**

**Age UK Rotherham – 01709 835214**

## WHAT CAN YOU DO ONLINE?



### Your Account

Your Account is the easiest way to pay your council bills online. Simply sign up and pay your Council Tax or apply for benefits quickly and easily. Your account will also show any previous bills or reports you have raised.

[www.rotherham.gov.uk/youraccount](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/youraccount)



### Online Library

Sign-up to Rotherham Online Library to renew or reserve a book. You can also borrow online books, magazines, newspapers and online resources. There is also an online readers group to meet fellow bookworms from the comfort of your home.

[www.rotherham.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/libraries)



### Make a payment

You can make a payment for a range of Council services including rent, service charges and adult social care via the website.

[www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk)



### Report it!

You can report most issues to the Council using one of our online forms. From anti-social behaviour to potholes there is an online form for it, which is quick and easy to complete.

[www.rotherham.gov.uk/xfp/forms](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/xfp/forms)

## CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

RotherFed has supported over 300 Rotherham residents through the pandemic making calls to those who are isolated, lonely and in need of someone to talk to.

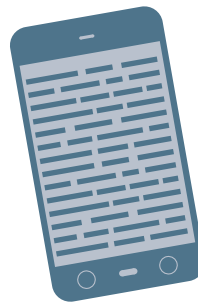
Jane Owen, volunteer coordinator at RotherFed tells us: "Despite lockdown beginning to ease we are continuing to receive requests from our residents wanting this support, especially as the past 12 months have had such an effect on people's mental health. As well as calls we will soon be introducing video chats so people can also put a face, and a smile, to the name."

For more information call Jane on 07399 888034.



**340,000**

digital payments  
made over lockdown



Nearly

**100,000**

digital books and  
magazines requested  
online last year

## COMING SOON...

**We are launching a new system to make your customer experience with our housing services simpler and more efficient.**

The new system will host all your information in one place so dealing with us will be quicker and easier.

We are also going to launch a self-service customer portal so you can do things like apply to go on the housing register or report a non-urgent repair 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The new system will be launching early next year – keep a look out for further information. It is anticipated there will be a few days during the switch over when our systems will be unavailable. We will keep you updated about any disruptions that may happen.

For more information about any of our services visit [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk)

# THE GREAT BIG ROTHERHAM TO-DO LIST

A strange thing happened during the Covid-19 restrictions: some of the changes people made to cope with Lockdown actually turned out to make them feel happier, healthier and stronger.

Lots of things people made a special effort to do during the pandemic are the very things experts have long known help us cope with stress – such as being physically active, learning something new, helping others or just pausing to reflect.

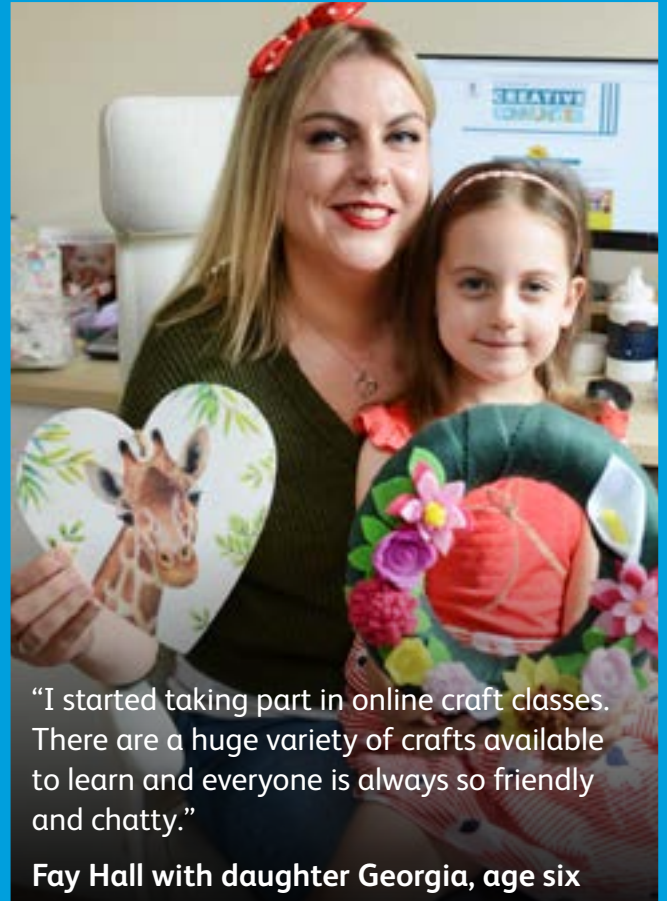
Looking after our wellbeing is going to be just as important as we recover from the effects of the pandemic. So, we asked Rotherham residents to tell us what they'd done and discovered to keep healthy in mind or body – or both!

We pooled everyone's suggestions to create The Great Big Rotherham To-Do List – a pocket guide to finding everyday moments of calm, kindness, fascination and fun on your doorstep.



“I’ve loved spending time in Canklow Woods with my son Stanley. It’s a beautiful hidden gem where you can get lost in thought and play – and actually lost if not careful as they are huge!”

**Kate Green with son Stanley, age six**



“I started taking part in online craft classes. There are a huge variety of crafts available to learn and everyone is always so friendly and chatty.”


**Fay Hall with daughter Georgia, age six**

We've included a copy of the guide in this issue of Home Matters.

So what are you waiting for? Stick the guide to your fridge or keep it in your bag so you'll always have inspiration to hand to try something new or do something you already love.



We'd love to see you trying some of these, or sharing your own suggestions.

 @RotherhamCouncil,  
 @RMBCpress  
#Rotherham #greattodo

Copies are also available free at libraries or to download from [www.rotherham.gov.uk/great-to-do](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/great-to-do)

# GETTING YOUR FINANCES BACK ON TRACK – WE CAN HELP!

The past year has seen many people affected by the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with jobs being lost and businesses struggling to recover. But there is help available and the sooner it's sought the better.

## JENNY HOPKINS Employment Solutions Officer

“People come to us for many reasons, some have been made redundant and are looking to get back into work, others have been affected by Covid-19 and are unsure what benefits they are entitled to. Whatever the circumstance, my role is to really get to know the person, understand why they have arrived at their current situation and help to identify what could help them to be in a better place to move forward.

“My team can carry out financial assessments to help with budgeting and look at any benefits which the person may be entitled to. For those affected by Covid-19 the maze of financial support packages can be confusing and we can help people navigate through it and assist people with any claims.

“Even before the challenges of the last year, some residents were struggling with financial troubles – mortgages, rents and bills for essential services can reach crisis point very quickly when your income stops. Concerns about increasing debt or losing your home can lead to mental health issues as well. We can help get you on track before things get out of hand.”



## HEATHER LEWIN Rotherham Resident

“I was made redundant from my job as an Assistant Shop Manager in 2019. Not long after, Covid-19 hit making it really difficult to look for other jobs. Like a lot of people in my situation, I started to feel a bit down, cooped up in my flat. When the restrictions began to lift I was keen to get back into work. Not only for the financial aspect but to bring some structure and purpose back to my days.

“I was told about the Pathways team at the Council and contacted them to see if they could help. I was put in touch with Jenny who encouraged me to enrol on some training courses. Soon I'd completed courses in digital skills, business admin, conflict management and customer service. Doing the courses not only has added to my CV, but they have also boosted my confidence, and given me a reason to put my lippy on in a morning.”



## HELP AVAILABLE

- Finance and budgeting advice
- Employment advice
- Help with online job search and applications
- Help applying for benefits
- Sourcing training opportunities

If you are unemployed and would like help, contact Jenny and the Pathways team on **01709 249600** or email [employmentsolutionsteam@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:employmentsolutionsteam@rotherham.gov.uk)

# RAISING OUR STANDARDS

The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper was published in November 2020. The paper sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes and are able to take action if things go wrong.

We caught up with the Council's Acting Assistant Director of Housing Services, Paul Walsh to find out what effects the paper will have on Rotherham tenants.



Paul Walsh

“A home should provide you with safety and security in a place you want to put down roots and contribute to your community. You should be able to feel that your landlord will treat you fairly and with respect. And if things go wrong, there should be a swift and effective response to put things right.

“Everyone has these expectations, but for some social housing residents they have not always been met. The White Paper seeks to change that and here in Rotherham we are absolutely committed to all that is included in the paper and making sure we achieve everything that is expected from us.

“Thank you to everyone who attended workshops and fed into the consultation process back in 2018. Your contributions have helped shape the paper and in turn, the steps we take in the future. The paper highlights seven themes which will inform our key priorities over the next 12 months.

## KEY THEME ONE: TO BE SAFE IN YOUR OWN HOME

- We will continue to ensure we have robust arrangements in place to help customers sustain their tenancies and support vulnerable residents
- We will explore thermal improvements and green technologies which will reduce the carbon footprint of our housing as well as reducing tenant's energy bills
- We will consult with tenants on electrical safety to build on fire safety work which has already been carried out

## KEY THEME TWO: TO KNOW HOW YOUR LANDLORD IS PERFORMING

- Our new Housing Management System will help improve the way you can manage your bills and report repairs (see page 5)
- There will be a greater emphasis on customer satisfaction including benchmarking ourselves against other social housing landlords

## KEY THEME THREE: TO HAVE YOUR COMPLAINTS DEALT WITH PROMPTLY AND FAIRLY

- The Council's complaints team will continue to have a strong focus on any housing complaints raised by our tenants
- We will report on all complaints to show tenants how they are dealt with and the outcome

## KEY THEME FOUR: TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT, BACKED BY A STRONG CONSUMER REGULATOR

- We will continue to reach out to the underrepresented to make sure their needs are heard and understood
- Our new housing developments will include bungalows, apartments and specially adapted properties to ensure a wide range of needs are met
- We will be inspected by the national Social Housing Regulator to make sure we continue to meet the standards set



## KEY THEME FIVE: TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD BY YOUR LANDLORD

- We will continue to consult with all our tenants to help improve our services
- We will make sure our staff are equipped with the right skills and training to provide effective support
- We will continue to build on the flexible engagement methods we have developed over the pandemic to give more tenants the opportunity to have their say

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*“This Charter sets out to raise the standard of social housing and meet the aspirations of residents throughout the country, today and in the future.”*

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## KEY THEME SIX: TO HAVE A GOOD QUALITY HOME AND NEIGHBOURHOOD TO LIVE IN

- We will bring empty private properties back into use for the people of Rotherham
- We will continue to help more homeless people into housing

## KEY THEME SEVEN: TO BE SUPPORTED TO TAKE YOUR FIRST STEP TO OWNERSHIP

- We will continue to build good quality, affordable housing in places people want to live
- We will build on the popularity of the Shared Ownership schemes allowing people to buy a small share of their home, to help them to get onto the property ladder

# CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

One of the highlights of the year for our Tenant Involvement Team is the annual Tenant’s Open Day. Well we weren’t going to let the pandemic get in the way, so we went digital and held a virtual open day instead!

We had a fantastic turnout with tenants, community leaders, partners and Council staff logging in to the event, which was held in partnership with RotherFed. There were presentations on the Charter For Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper, the Council’s Covid-19 response and a look back at some key achievements of 2020. The event included the RotherFed recognition ceremony, celebrating the community groups who have all gone the extra mile during this particularly tough year.

We also showed two uplifting videos focusing on our wonderful tenants. One highlighted those who went above and beyond during the pandemic to lift the spirits of their communities. The other looked at the great work of the Ward Housing Hubs and the differences they have made to their communities.

**It was a great event, but we hope to be back to usual next year and seeing you all in person.**



**If you weren't able to join us don't worry! You can see both videos, plus a recording of the event at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/tenant-involvement](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/tenant-involvement)**



View of Westgate Riverside development

# BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO THE TOWN CENTRE



**Rother Living is set to launch the first wave of new town centre homes giving local people the chance to experience town centre living.**

There are 171 new homes currently being built, transforming three disused former industrial sites and breathing new life into the town centre.

The sites are all in prime, central locations and include a mixture of council homes for rent and shared ownership, as well as private properties for sale. This means there are property types to suit people of all ages including first-time buyers, families and older people who are considering downsizing.

The Council's Acting Assistant Director of Housing Services, Paul Walsh told us: "There are many benefits to living in the heart of the town, including excellent transport links, restaurants,

cafes and bars on your doorstep, attractive open spaces, and easy access to shopping and amenities.

"The town centre is being revitalised as a place where people can socialise, live and work; where people bring their families, to grow and to be part of a vibrant, diverse, and thriving community. There really is no better time to consider town centre living."

You can register your interest in the homes for sale by visiting [www.RotherLiving.co.uk](http://www.RotherLiving.co.uk) or following [@RotherLiving](https://www.facebook.com/RotherLiving) on Facebook. The homes for Council rent will be available via KeyChoices in the new year.

## BUILDING HOUSES, GIVING BACK

**Building new homes is important to meet local housing needs and it brings other benefits too.**

The Council's Social Value Policy ensures every housing development gives back to the community. Not just by improving the overall feel of an area, or much-needed new homes, but through the creation of new jobs, training opportunities, engagement with schools and support for local community projects.

Building new homes at Maltby, East Herringthorpe and Canklow meant 18 local people benefitted from employment and training initiatives created as a result of the works.

# HOME IMPROVEMENTS A GUIDE TO YOUR HOME

Spending so much time at home over the past year has meant many of us have wanted to make home improvements.

Whilst we want you to make your home the best it can be, as a council tenant you must get written permission before starting any work.

You must get permission to carry out the following, or other similar work:

- Decorating the outside of your home
- Changing or adding to the fixtures and fittings of your home
- Structural alterations, improvements or addition to the building

If you do not get written permission before you start work, then you may have to return the property to how it was before, costing you time and money. You can let us know about planned works by completing an online form on the Council website or you can request a tenant's alteration pack by calling 01709 336009.

More information can be found in 'A Guide to Your Home' which is available to download from [www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing)

## GIVING HOPE TO THOSE AFFECTED BY COVID-19

Engie joined forces with the Council and volunteers to help create a living memorial at Thrybergh Country Park to honour both the victims of Covid-19 and those who fought the virus.

Hope Fields, which was unveiled in March, has been created in consultation with communities from across the borough as a tribute not only to people who lost their lives, but also to those who were part of the emergency response and recovery effort, from key workers to volunteers and communities.

Engie helped prepare the site by clearing waste, preparing the ground and planting trees to help create the calm and contemplative space.



Engie Admin Apprentice, Jake Turner

## HELP KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE

Even though restrictions have been lifted, it is important that we continue to take steps to keep everyone safe, even if you have had your Covid-19 vaccine.

When we are working inside your home please continue to:

Socially distance from our employees



Open a window or door to ventilate the room where work is taking place, 10 minutes before we arrive

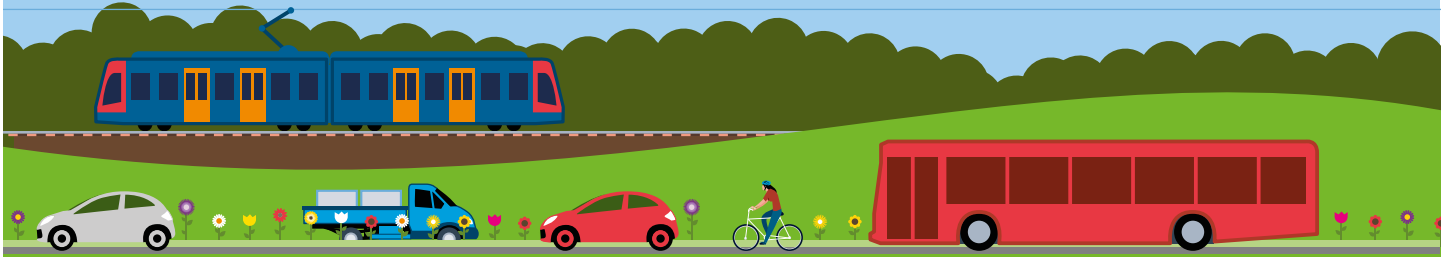


# FUTURE TRAVEL - HAVE YOUR SAY

Travelling by public transport, on foot or by bike helps us save money, stay healthy, reduce pollution and relieve traffic congestion.

This year the Council and South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive will be sharing proposals for new bus lanes, road layouts and traffic flows, cycle routes and park and ride services.

We're currently asking people who live, work and travel in Rotherham to give us their input on the design of these schemes. More information coming soon!



Further information can be found at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/travel](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/travel)

## DO YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT ABOUT A COUNCIL SERVICE?

If you have a complaint there are a number of ways you can get in touch to tell us.



### COMPLETE A WEB FORM

[www.rotherham.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/complaints)



### EMAIL

[complaints@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@rotherham.gov.uk)



### TEXT

07860 021 447



### CALL

01709 382121



### POST

The Complaints Manager  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
(FREEPOST RTCT-XKLS-ZHAZ)  
Riverside House  
Main Street  
Rotherham  
S60 1AE

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint the team will advise you on how to escalate your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

If the matter relates to your landlord you can seek the advice of the Housing Ombudsman at any time on 0300 111 3000.

Further information can be found at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/complaints)

## CONNECT TO OUR SERVICES

### ONLINE

All of our services are available 24/7 online [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk)

For housing information visit [www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing)

or email [councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk)

### TELEPHONE

For housing enquiries and repairs call **01709 336009**

