



the almshouses Gazette

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Community, compassion and companionship at Members Day

The Almshouse Association Members Day took place on 15 June 2023 at One Great George Street in Westminster, London. It was a day dedicated to companionship, compassion and

ment and highlighted the importance of human interaction. We were pleased to welcome and hear from our new Chairman, Willie Hartley Russell and to be able to honour The



community - with a fourth 'C' added to its theme by our special guest speakers ... *care*. Paul Latham of the Charity Commission, research fellow Dr Helen Pooley, charity titan Sir Stephen Bubb and humanitarian and author Terry Waite CBE, all drawing from different perspectives, spoke of the caring nature of the almshouse move-

Terry Waite CBE inspires the delegates.

Almshouse Association Award winners for their impressive developments, beautiful garden projects, dedication and good old-fashioned hard work! They were presented with their certificates and award-winner pin badges by Chair of the Awards Committee, Simon Pott.

See page 7 for Members Day photographs and page 8/9 for award winners.



Living longer in almshouses

The Almshouse Association was delighted with the findings of our latest research project; released in May 2023 and picked up by many

media outlets, including The Guardian, BBC Ireland, Housing Industry Leader, Church Times, Newsweek, Rural Services Network and Yahoo News. The Almshouse Longevity Study states that living in an almshouse can boost the longevity of its residents by as much as two-and-a-half years compared to their counterparts in the

general population, according to the new Bayes Business School report. Analysing up to 100 years' worth of residents' records from various almshouses in England, the research suggests that living in these communities can reduce the negative impact on health and social wellbeing which is commonly experienced by the older population in lower socio-economic groups, particularly those individuals who are living in isolation.

The full report can be downloaded from our website at:

www.almshouses.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Almshouse-Longevity-Study-Report-FINAL-18.05.23_.pdf



New Chairman of The Almshouse Association

Following a board election at the end of 2022, Willie Hartley Russell was elected to be the next Chairman of the Board of The Almshouse Association with effect from the Annual General Meeting in June 2023.

A dedicated member of The Association's Board of Trustees for 20 years, where he has served as Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee and as Vice Chairman for the last six years.

Willie Hartley Russell has spent the majority of his career based in the City of London working for major international asset management companies, many of which have their roots in charity. He has been a driving force in the community, particularly in Berkshire, where he lives, holding posts including the High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire, Deputy Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire, Vice President of the Berkshire Community Foundation, and he is a Freeman of the City of London.

For an insight into our new chairman's background and his thoughts on almshouses for the future, turn to page 3.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S COMMENT

I would like to thank all those involved in making Members Day such a wonderful occasion. The theme was 'community, compassion and companionship'. These topics may seem on the face of it just cosy; we often think that life is about harsh realities, the measurable and financial, with little time for niceties but we really thought about what the almshouse movement is today and what makes it different. These factors, community, compassion and companionship, are not just fluffy ideas, they are behaviours, values and a way of thinking that have a significant impact on the lives of residents. If we need to question the importance of this aspect of almshouses, we could reflect on the research that the Association has commissioned over the last few years leading to the most recent 'Longevity Study'. This was reported on widely with a long article published in The Guardian as well as many other media outlets. These reports stated, in different ways, that the greatest impact on residents was companionship, compassion and their communities. Having had the privilege of meeting many trustees over the last few years I can say that trustee leadership extols these virtues in abundance. I am often asked if the almshouse model can be replicated, scaled up or delivered by housing associations and the council. Maybe it can, but not without these three central elements, which took centre stage at Members Day. Clearly not all members can attend Members Day and for fear of saying "look what you missed!" I am happy to

share some of the key points that were raised along with the informative and entertaining presentations. Terry Waite CBE, spoke movingly about his time as a captive in Beirut and the emotional impact that limited companionship made on his life. We also welcomed Paul Latham, Charity Commission Director of Policy, who answered questions about changes in the law relating to Permanent Endowment and the role of the Commission in protecting the oldest form of charity. We are grateful for his interest in almshouses and his candid responses that we hope members found helpful. We were also pleased to hear from Sir Stephen Bubb, who talked about how charities play such a vital part in community. We were delighted to welcome Willie Hartley Russell as our new Chairman and to celebrate the achievements and progress made under Elizabeth Fathi, the outgoing Chair. During Members Day we launched our 'Friends of Almshouses' club and surprised Elizabeth Fathi by announcing her as our first member (see page 4). We heralded the long-awaited Historic England Advice Note on managing change to almshouses (now available to download as a draft in the consultation phase). This may not sound significant but it is one of only two previous 'guides' produced by Historic England and underpins the great heritage value the nation places

on almshouse buildings. As you know we continue to work to intervene when we see government introducing policies, Bills, Acts and legislation that impact our members. This last quarter



Terry Waite CBE welcomed to Members Day by Association CEO, Nick Phillips.

we have written to over 20 MPs, engaged with The Secretary of State, Michael Gove and had questions raised in the House of Commons and the House of Lords by our APPG, championed the almshouse model and challenged what we feel is inappropriate legislation. Thanks go to all of you who instigated over 30 letters of support from MPs, to Clive Betts, MP (Chairman of the Social Housing Committee), Damian Green, MP and many others for their ongoing support. We will continue to fight to see almshouses recognised as affordable housing in the National Planning Framework. But ... there is still much to be done!

Nick Phillips, Chief Executive

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AGM 2023

The outgoing Chair of the Association, Elizabeth Fathi gave a reflection on 2022 which was followed by delegates accepting the Minutes of the 71st AGM held on 15 June 2022. Re-election of the following board members was approved: John Broughton, Elizabeth Fathi, Willie Hartley Russell, Tricia Scouller and confirmation of the new Chair, Willie Hartley Russell. Simon Ling, Honorary Treasurer presented the annual accounts. These were adopted and the Auditors, Buzzacott LLP were re-appointed.

Changing governing documents

At a recent meeting with the Charity Commission, CEO Nick Phillips was asked to consider a change in the governing documents of a charity wishing to add to their objectives and include additional methods of supporting those in need in their area. The almshouses in question were seeking to offer grants to other charities in their parish and this was obviously a good thing as there are many poor, elderly people in that community. So why would we be in any way concerned? Nick spoke to the trustee board in question and together they looked at the founder's wishes as recorded in the earliest documents (although the scheme was rewritten in the 1950s). It seemed that almshouses were the main ambition of the founder. The trustees said that the almshouses would always be catered for first and the additional funds distributed only after the almshouses were well maintained. The Association is interested to know what you think? Our view can be found on page 4/5.



New chairman: Willie Hartley Russell

continued from front page

We recently had the opportunity to spend time with our newly elected Chairman, Willie Hartley Russell discussing his vision and hopes for the future of the almshouse movement and the Association.

Willie runs his own farming enterprise and has shown huge personal commitment to the almshouse movement, chairing the family foundation, The Hartley Trust, which dates back to 1393. The Trust has been in the family for nearly 400 years and is the tenth-oldest almshouse foundation in the country. Willie comments: "As a child, my

sided, or sometimes four-sided design of almshouses allows for social cohesion while the individual units also offer privacy.

What does the new chairman want to achieve with his chairmanship?

"I am looking forward to my chairmanship. I really want to develop



stronger relationships with our members. We are here to serve our members. I am going to be out and about visiting them as much as I can. I am also focused on raising awareness of almshouses and Willie Hartley Russell makes a presentation to outgoing Chair, Elizabeth Fathi.

father took me along most weekends to visit the family almshouses. I was brought up around the almshouses and so developed my knowledge of the almshouse movement over many years of being part of the Trust." He added: "The key thing about almshouses is the people. It's the residents that occupy the almshouses and the volunteer trustees who run them. It's these people who provide the 'community spirit' that makes almshouse living so special and enduring. Almshouses provide a sense of community that allows people to develop close-knit friendships, if they wish, yet still live independently. It's unique." Willie also believes that architecture is a significant part of the historic value of almshouses. The three-

will be engaging with the media to help us promote the benefits of almshouse living for society as a whole. Our research has shown that almshouse living alleviates some of the loneliness that is so prevalent today and supports health and well-being. It's so important to get this message out there." He continued: "I want to help the movement remain pertinent and independent and will be supporting the Association to build a closer working relationship with government, advocating the movement. And last, but by no means least, I want to help with our fundraising efforts to encourage more philanthropic support of the Association and our members for the longevity of the movement." Nick Phillips, CEO of The Almshouse Association commented: "I am delighted. Willie brings formidable experience to our leadership. With his financial career in investment management in the City he brings sound business acumen, and with his long history of family commitment to almshouses, he has a depth of knowledge that can see the Association and the wider almshouse movement thrive and become robust for the next century."

Launching soon: New Friends of the Association

Preserving the historic value of the almshouse movement and securing its future

The Almshouse Association is establishing a new club for people who have a great interest and shared passion for almshouses and the almshouse movement.

We will be offering some wonderful benefits to our Friends with a unique calendar of activities and projects that you can all get involved in.

Benefits will include a twice-yearly newsletter that will offer an update on the Association's activities with some unique insights, an exclusive Friends networking event, and gatherings held across the UK.

Appropriately, the first member to be welcomed to the new Friends of club was our outgoing Chair of the Board of Trustees, Elizabeth Fathi who was presented with her Friend of pin badge and No. 1 certificate at Members Day.

Nick Phillips, CEO commented: "We are delighted to have Elizabeth as our first member of the Friends of club. She will be a great addition to this new club, having a clear passion for the almshouse movement and a great



Nick Phillips presents Elizabeth Fathi with a leaving present and announces her as the first Friend of the Association.

knowledge of its history. Welcome Elizabeth, member 001." For more information about The Almshouse Association Friends of club, please go to our website or contact David Burton or Gerry Harmon on 01344 452922.

Take the long view when planning charity finances

Almshouse Association CEO, Nick Phillips recently visited a charity which is preparing a significant fundraising strategy to refurbish two of their six almshouse cottages.

Nick writes: They are planning to work really hard for two years to raise the necessary funds. Over the years, the weekly maintenance contributions (WMC) had stagnated and the trustees will raise WMC to keep pace with costs. The Association will also add a loan. But life could have been a bit easier. The charity in question is happy for me to share their details but I am changing them a wee bit as I do not want to highlight one charity; but you will know a similar example.

Residential development

This charity was established in the 18th Century for "poor people over the age of 60 of the parish". The legacy was established with a fund to build and purchase land for the almshouses and included a dowry of a small area of allotments and two agricultural fields. The objective of providing the allotments was to allow the residents to grow their own food and the fields were possibly for further long-term planting of food, although that was not specified in the will.

At some point in the 1950s the allotments found themselves in the middle of a new development of residential houses, formed as part of the expand-

ing town. The allotments were no longer being used for growing vegetables and the residents had largely focused their interest on the gardens of the almshouses.

The trustees were offered £850 plus legal fees for the allotments by a developer. That is the equivalent of £52,000 in today's money. The fields, both being about one acre but further from the town, were sold 10 years later for £220 per acre (four times the then agricultural value of the day). All that is, of course, ancient history and of little value to the trustees of today when they were planning their fundraising strategy to raise the necessary £120,000.

Strategic decisions

I relay the story as a matter of interest and one that is told often in various forms. At a very rough guess the land they once held would now be worth at least £1.3m.

Another almshouse charity that is about to embark on a significant development of over 50 new almshouses at a cost of many millions, is able to do so because their predecessors held the 'rough ground' that was bequeathed to the charity and is now leased to three commercial businesses producing just

under £3million per year income. The trouble with land, of course, is that it is affected by the markets, planning permission and contamination, etc. But almshouse charities are one of the very few organisations that can, and do, take long-term strategic decisions over, say, 50 or 100 years. Do seek advice from a Chartered Surveyor and/or an independent advisor before making decisions about assets. The new Charities Act allows for greater flexibility with the permanent endowment.

Recommendation:

Maintaining the WMC at a level that keeps pace with guidance helps with long-term financial stability.

Charity fraud: what can be done to reduce the risk?

Article contributed by Shoosmiths law firm

Board demands on trustees can be extensive and it's difficult to be an expert in all areas. Possibly your board members have key roles they undertake (it is good practice to use expertise and interests when assigning roles) - the treasurer looks after the money, the surveyor concentrates on the building and someone else leads on resident issues. All good so far but when does expertise and interest become unaccountable?

There will be strong and forthright characters on any board; they can dominate proceedings. Strong characters get things done but all trustees must operate with the consent of the board. The support team at The Almshouse Association have had to unpick many issues where a charity board member (or clerk) has left the charity and only then have the rest of the trustees found out that what they thought was happening was not! We have come across examples of funds being badly managed by a single trustee when the rest of the board were oblivious. In some cases the issues have come close to bringing the charity to its knees. So, when considering the issue of fraud and reading the article which follows, please think not just of fraud (which is very rare in our sector) but think of incompetence, inexperience or embarrassment that leads one trustee or clerk to hide their actions. The trustees have a joint responsibility. If a trustee or clerk is acting in your name you will want to check the numbers, check the balance sheet and minute the actions. It is not checking up, it is taking appropriate personal responsibility and may save embarrassment or worse later. As a team you will be able to work out most issues amongst yourselves but, if not, please talk to us, we are here to help.

In the latest report published in December 2022 by the Fraud Advisory Panel in conjunction with BDO LLP (Accountancy and Business Advice), 100 UK based charities were surveyed. 69% said that they had experienced financial loss due to fraud and 58% said they believed that the risk of fraud will increase over the next 12

months. But why is the risk of charities becoming the victims of fraud increasing?

most exposed to the risk of fraud. Through the implementation of a fraud risk assessment your charity will be able to agree a clear and strategic approach to managing the risk of fraud.

Staff and volunteers are a charity's first defence against fraud. It is essential that they can recognise suspicious activity which could leave you at risk of fraud and where they can report suspicions discreetly and with confidence.



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A recipe for risk

Fraud increases in times of economic uncertainty and with a potential recession on the way, inflation, the cost-of-living crisis, political and economic unrest, and the wounds of a global pandemic to heal, the advice to charities is simple - invest in your fraud prevention.

How to protect against fraud

At this time of economic uncertainty, charities are stretched like never before. Investment in a charity's fraud prevention reduces the risk of vital funds being diverted into the fraud-

they can recognise suspicious activity which could leave you at risk of fraud and where they can report suspicions discreetly and with confidence.

3. Implement or refresh policies and procedures in relation to fraud prevention.

Make sure your charity's message is clear - that fraud is not tolerated, either internally by staff or volunteers, or externally.

4. Sometimes described as 'tone from the top'.

Encourage your charity's senior management team to lead on fraud risk management and proactively discuss the risks and how to reduce them.

5. Put in place a fraud response plan. Once staff and volunteers know how to report suspicions of fraud, there needs to be a clear plan of action. This includes possibly reporting to the Charity Commission, law enforcement, other regulatory bodies if necessary and if there is a suspicion of money laundering, submitting a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR) to the National Crime Agency.

Action when fraud is discovered

Carry out the charity's fraud response plan. Advice can be sought where appropriate, including how to secure evidence and protect assets. Speed will be of the essence.

Consider with care

Following a meeting with the Charity Commission where CEO Nick Phillips was asked to consider a change in governing documents (see page 3), we were interested to hear other members' opinions. Our view: While we appreciate the trustees' good intentions to share the monetary success of the almshouse charity, our foremost priority lies in ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the charity, both presently and 50, 100, 150 ... years from now. We have seen many examples of almshouse buildings falling

if planning to change governing documents

into disrepair because the maintenance costs have risen beyond the available funds. In some cases the funds have been spread across other areas of support, including schools, churches and in one case a village hall. Our fear is that your successors may find it easier to gift grants to the poor than to maintain almshouses and over the years the buildings may decline. Some almshouse charities have original objectives covering other obligations and the trustees

will need to make best decisions at the time. After the trustees of the charity referred to in our page 3 article reviewed the benefactors' original wishes, they decided their scheme would remain focused on the almshouses and if reserves were built up they would look to add to their stock. It is always a trustee decision and easy for us to comment from afar but because we have seen a few failed charities we make a good 'devil's advocate' if you need one!

Educational visit to demonstrate viability of almshouses

Roger Musson, Chair of Trustees at Caleb Lovejoy's Almshouse in Guildford, Surrey was pleased to welcome Nick Phillips, CEO of The Almshouse Association and Paul Latham, Director of Communications and Policy at the Charity Commission.



photo (from left): Paul Latham, Nick Phillips, a Caleb Lovejoy's resident, and Roger Musson, Chair of Trustees.

The visit was arranged to show Paul the value of the almshouse charity model and to help ensure its continued viability against a background of increased regulatory requirements. Caleb Lovejoy's Almshouse was one of two visited (the other being Abbots Hospital in Guildford) as representative of the majority of almshouses in the country with 10 or fewer residents. "Paul and Nick met with two of our residents and were kindly shown their cottages. We discussed the long history and impact of the almshouse movement and afterwards reviewed the history of our charity in the Loseley Chapel at St Nicolas Church. This was the perfect setting to discuss the historic links between our charity, the church and the More-Molyneux family. Caleb Lovejoy, our founder, attended St Nicolas and the More-Molyneux family have long been involved in the charity. Michael More-Molyneux is our patron and previously served as a trustee."

Jessica Greenhall, Manager & Clerk to the Trustees at Caleb Lovejoy's Almshouse

CAF Bank Commitment and dedication

Commitment and dedication are at the heart of the almshouse movement, with many member charities having served their communities for hundreds of years. Whilst CAF Bank is, by comparison, relatively youthful at just 37 years old, next year our parent organisation, the Charities Aid Foundation, celebrates its centenary. Throughout that time, CAF Bank has understood the challenges of the sector and that stems from being part of the charitable landscape. Our research, and work with charities and donors, inform our thought process and product design.

Cost of Living Resource Hub

For example, when inflationary pressures, energy costs, wage demands, and a tightening of disposable income all started to form what we now know as the 'Cost of Living' crisis, we responded by creating a Cost of Living Resource Hub (www.cafonline.org/charities/resource-hub) as well as engaging with all of our borrowers to see what help they might need, based on their circumstances.

We know that there are further challenges to come. Decarbonisation, affordability for residents and housing quality, are areas that continue to be priorities. Members that are Registered Providers will already have these challenges on their agendas but they are all the more difficult for those members whose almshouses are historic. Green loans are very much in our plans for future product development.

That said, almshouses do move with the times. No longer are they solely the

Contributed by Scott Newman, Regional Director CAF Bank

preserve of widowed or retired people. Housing challenges are ever present in modern day society and almshouses are well-placed to respond to this. A good example is The Poland Trust which recently completed a once-in-a-generation expansion of their stock.

A real highlight of the project was the average age of the first four new residents - around 30 years old. Those four individuals would have likely had to move out of the area they grew up in if it wasn't for the commitment and hard work of the trustees of The Poland Trust.

Our lending function reached its 10th anniversary in 2022 and we have come a long way from that initial blank piece of paper and now stand with a loan book of £224m of drawn and committed balances. It's perhaps no surprise that our second-ever loan was to an almshouse and our support of the movement remains.

When The Almshouse Association reached its 75th anniversary in 2021 we celebrated by committing a budget of £20m of loans to almshouses with a reduced arrangement fee of 0.75%. We have created a dedicated almshouse page www.cafonline.org/caf-bank/secured-loans/flexible-finance-for-almshouses on our website where you can find out more information and read case studies.

We aim to build long-term relationships with our customers as we believe this helps them to continue long-term relationships with their beneficiaries.

YOUR LETTERS

Press coverage for your charity

After encountering difficulty over the years getting press releases published, I wanted to share our experience and recent success. After another failed attempt, discussions took place with the Community Content Editor who explained that they were unable to cope with long reports and didn't have the capacity to precis them. She said that 'outside text' (text received from external sources) was limited to usually 300-400 words and, unfortunately, they can't feature set bullet points or lists in the paper. Photographs were welcome and she also told us that doing this would usually also make sure that what we wanted to see would usually be included in the paper too. With so much to report it seemed that either we did a separate report for each donation or event or project, or split them up into 'Relief in Need' and 'Education' which we decided to try. Two press releases, with a month's gap in between, were submitted, with considerable use of poetic licence to make it all seem current, and two very good articles were published.

The next one will be the Coronation celebrations at Berkeley's.

Paul Griffith, Worcester Municipal Charity

Members Day 2023

We were delighted to see so many members at our annual Almshouse Association Members Day on June 15. It was a day dedicated to COMPANIONSHIP, COMPASSION, COMMUNITY and CARE - themes that our guest speakers were able to expand with their vision and insight.

It was a full day bursting with special guests, inspirational speeches, Q&A sessions with experts in their field and lots of member participation and networking. We thank everyone for making the day so special.

We were also pleased to welcome our new Chairman of the Board, Willie Hartley Russell (see page 3) and give our appreciation to outgoing Chair, Elizabeth Fathi. And last, but not least, a special thanks to our sponsors and exhibitors and to everyone who helped make the day such a special occasion.

The photographs on this page give an insight into the day. More can be found on the Association's website: www.almshouses.org/news/the-almshouse-association-members-day-2023



photos above (from left): Terry Waite CBE, Dr Alison Pooley, Sir Stephen Bubb JP FRSA, Paul Latham, Q&A panel of experts.



photos (above): Elizabeth Fathi, Terry Waite CBE, Simon Pott at lunch and (below) Nick Phillips with Board Trustee, David Healey and Sean Stafford, Almshouse Consortium Ltd.



Among the award winners were: Excellence and Inspiration Award for Wygggestons and Trinity Hospital Charities, Leicester (below, left) and The Poland Trust, Brockham, Surrey (centre). A Gardens and People Award was presented to Zeals Almshouse Charity, Wiltshire (right).



Almshouse Association award winners

A Members Day 2023 had a buzz of excitement in the room when the Awards for 2021 and 2022 were announced by our Awards Committee Chair, Simon Pott. Members received warm applause as they took to their feet and collected their well-earned recognition and award certificates. The Awards are a significant part of not only Members Day but also the almshouse movement. They highlight the dedication and hard work of our members in almshouse development and community spirit, epitomising the excellence that all our members are working towards. All our members are to be commended for their commitment, enthusiasm and devotion to their almshouses and their residents.



The Inspirational Homes Awards 2021/2022

Wyggestons and Trinity Almshouses Charity, Leicester

A new three-storey extension providing a community 'hub'. Eight self-contained one and two-bedroom flats on the first and second floor together with six single-storey dwellings, the provision of additional parking and a new bin store. A truly inspiring development.



Hallaton & Isabella Stenning Trust, Hallaton, Market Harborough

A beautifully built two-bedroom bungalow sits comfortably within its setting in a quiet lane in Hallaton. Trustees used a conscientious and sensitive approach to the design, ensuring no adverse impact on the heritage of adjacent properties and wider village.



Tibberton Almshouses, Gloucester

Exceptional improvements to four semi-detached almshouses carried out in stages over the past 10 years.



Peter Birtwistle Trust, Peter Birtwistle House, Colne, Lancashire

An outstanding new build property of twelve supported one and two-bedroom flats. Local shops and amenities are close by and easily accessible enabling residents to continue to live independently in their local community.



Great Shelford Parochial Charities, Cambridge



A stunning new development of 21 modern almshouses for individuals, couples and families on a green belt exception site. Triple-glazed throughout with air supply heat pumps and heat recovery systems.

The Poland Trust, Brockham, Surrey

A stunning new almshouse development which supports the local younger generation and is partly funded by the sale of five self-build plots that are capped at 80% of market value.



The Honeywood & Douglas Charity, Grafty Green, Kent

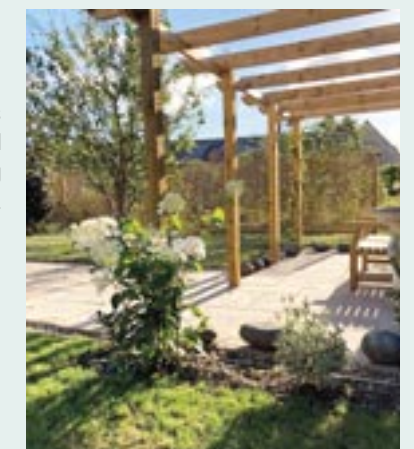
A beautiful extension of an existing bungalow forming two one-bedroom homes, with the conversion of an existing historic outbuilding, creating a further one-bedroom property. Communal gardens and close to important village amenities.



The Gardens and People Awards 2021/2022

Penrose Gardens, Barnstaple Almshouses, Barnstaple, Devon

This award-winning garden design includes areas for vegetables, herbs and flowers, raised beds, allotment plots and sheds, ensuring something for everyone who lives at Penrose.



Frances Darlington Charity, Charnock near Chorley, Lancashire

In lockdown, a group of ladies from the community wanted to form a craft group. With no cost involved, the group meets up once a month in the chapel to enjoy each others company and share their skills and expertise.



Zeals Almshouse Charity, Chafyn Grove, Zeals, Wiltshire

Beautifully manicured and well-loved, low-cost gardens that welcome the whole community in for local events and to see their floral displays year-round.



The awards are for everyone to participate in and celebrate their achievements. They belong to all of you who are working on a daily basis to provide the best service you can for your residents. Help us celebrate your achievements by submitting an application for your 2023 projects and developments.

Dovehouse Court welcomes old and new residents

The Almshouse Association has been following the progress of the Girton Town Passivhaus new almshouse development for quite some time, so we were thrilled to receive this photo marking a significant milestone in the building programme.

New almshouses and office facilities at Dovehouse Court for Girton Town Charity, Cambridgeshire were officially opened on April 29 by Dr Robin Hiley, trustee and former Chair. It was a great opportunity to welcome back old residents and warmly embrace new ones.

Jenny Knights, who was a Girton Town Charity trustee for 24 years, attended the opening. She said: "It is wonderful to see the fulfilment of all the many years of hard work and I am so impressed to see the totally inspirational ideas that have finally gone into this project.

"One resident invited me into her apartment and I saw how thrilled she is with her spacious accommodation, including such carefully designed details as the height of the kitchen cupboards and how easy it is for her to enter and sit down to take her shoes off. She loves having a raised bed in a garden of her own to plant out, a safe place to put her bicycle and the washing area complete with an orchard and sitting area."

photo: Topping out at Dovehouse Court are (left to right): Ian Bramwell, senior associate, Mole Architects; Jamie Saunders, director, Northmores; Mark Hart, joint managing director, Barnes Construction; and Marc Bermann, trustee, Girton Town Charity.



Loan assists modernisation scheme

Substantial refurbishment work to almshouses at Staunton on Wye, Herefordshire, has included damp proofing, refitting with new kitchens, new flooring and decorating, and transforming the bathrooms into wet rooms.



The 12 almshouses were built in 1858/9 with money left by George Jarvis (1704-1793) and are managed by the Jarvis Eleemosynary* Charity. The cost of the project was funded by drawing from the charity's investments together with a £50,000 loan from The Almshouse Association. Residents are delighted with their modernised homes and one commented: "Thank you very much for the refurbishment work. It has improved my life and it's a completely different world having a new kitchen and bathroom."

(*Eleemosynary = dependent on alms or charity)

Water saving 'fixes' cut residents' bills

Partis College almshouses in Bath have significantly reduced water usage following a visit from Wessex Water. The College is now saving around 1,700 litres of water a day after leaks were repaired and water-saving devices such as eco showerheads and tap aerators were installed in each property as part of the water company's free Home Check service.

Making the homes more water-efficient has improved the College's environmental footprint and sustainability, while helping residents save money on water and energy bills.

Tony Davies, Chair of the Partis College trustees, said: "It wasn't until 1887 that mains water arrived at Partis College. Before then 30 or so residents drew water from a well in the grounds and I'm sure those early occupants were well aware of the need to conserve water, if only to save the effort of hauling it up from underground. We're very grateful to Wessex Water for helping us to do our bit for the environment and saving money at the same time."

Other almshouse charities may want to get in touch with their local water authority to see if any reduction in water use can be made.

Five year £4.4m development completed at Great Shelford

Five years in the planning, Great Shelford's £4.4m almshouse development is now complete and the first residents have moved into their new homes.

The 21 properties consist of one, two and three-bedroom homes grouped in three curved terraces surrounding a central green. They are equipped with air source heat pumps, mechanically ventilated heat recovery systems, triple glazing and high levels of insulation, designed to minimise energy consumption and keep residents' running costs low.

Sarah Rann, Chair of the Parochial Charities trustees, explained: "Since our initial public meeting in July 2018 at which we outlined the need for further affordable housing in Great Shelford, we have been working closely with villagers and both parish and district councillors to bring this project to fruition. I would particularly like to thank the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for their generous grant of just over £1m towards the development cost."

Alongside the new development the charity has planted 250 native trees and laid out allotments, a community garden, footpaths and benches, providing enhanced public access to the eight acres of land it owns on the northern edge of the Cambridgeshire village.

The new scheme brings to 53 the total number of almshouse homes managed by Great Shelford Parochial Charities, providing affordable accommodation for villagers on low incomes and in housing need.



Building project award for Wygggestons in Leicester



Client: Wygggestons Hospital. Agent: Andrew Granger & Co. Architect: Corporate Architecture. Main contractor: S&S Contracting. Structural and civil engineer: BSP Consulting. Quantity surveyor: ADM Surveyors. Interior design: Renray. Landscape architect: Keary Design Associates.

Lancaster House is the imposing new three-storey extension to the established facilities, adding additional high quality accommodation of six bungalows and eight one and two-bedroom flats, as well as a new administration hub, conference room and community lounge.

Sustainable development

Originally founded as an almshouse charity in 1513, Wygggestons has now improved its facilities for residents and staff, bringing them in line with modern day requirements, whilst providing much needed housing, through a sustainable development, to increase the number of older people the charity can assist.

The project has enabled Wygggestons to accommodate more residents in its almshouses and residential care facilities, which are set within five acres of private grounds in the West-cotes suburb of Leicester, within easy reach of the city centre facilities and transport links.

Chris Jones, CEO of Wygggestons, said: "The ProCon award really was the icing on the cake last year. We're so proud of our new facilities and the difference they are making to our residents and visitors; and not to forget the staff too. It's just wonderful that the project has been recognised in this way."

Wygggestons worked with agents Andrew Granger and Co., who managed all the elements of the project and liaised with key stakeholders to bring the project to fruition, whilst working alongside local architect, Corporate Architecture.

More news from almshouse charities

For more news of almshouse charity activities, projects and developments, go to: www.almshouses.org/member-stories-news-and-events

Overview

Government/Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are driving through significant changes to housing regulations. Most do NOT affect our members, although some affect members who are Regulated Housing Providers and some we will challenge on your behalf. Almshouses are regulated by the Charity Commission and operate under the Standards of Almshouse Management. We are working hard to demonstrate to government that the charity status and the existing legislation is adequate for the almshouse movement, however, it is important we keep a close eye on the direction of government legislation.

Renters Reform Bill

Long Title: 'A Bill to make provision changing the law about rented homes, including provision abolishing fixed term assured tenancies and assured shorthold tenancies; imposing obligations on landlords and others in relation to rented homes and temporary and supported accommodation; and for connected purposes.'

The bill includes:

- scrapping section 21 'no fault' evictions
- making it illegal for landlords and agents to refuse to rent properties to people who receive benefits or have children
- creating a national landlord register through the new property portal which will give renters all the information they need to make an informed choice before entering into a tenancy agreement
- introducing new grounds for eviction for landlords who genuinely want to sell their properties or move back in
- ensuring landlords do not unreasonably withhold consent when a tenant requests to have a pet in their home, with the tenant able to challenge unfair decisions.

Why should this be of interest to our members when almshouses are not included in this reform? The 'pet' aspect may be covered in other Acts so it would be useful if all charities have a clear policy on pets as we believe this area will be challenged in the future. Residents and other stakeholders may not realise that it does not affect almshouses and we need to be mindful of the 'direction' of government in terms of regulation. You need to have a clear policy concerning pets and any requests to have pets at the property need to be fully considered with clear reasons as to whether they are or are not permitted.

Social Housing Bil

The Social Housing Bill 2022 continues to move forward through the Commons, collecting additions on the way. **The latest are:**

- an amendment introducing Awaab's Law which requires social landlords to investigate and fix reported hazards in their homes within a specified time frame, or rehouse tenants where a home cannot be made safe
- an amendment providing new powers for the Housing Ombudsman to help social landlords improve performance by instructing them to self-assess against guidance during a complaint investigation
- an amendment enabling the Social Housing Regulator to set a standard relating to information and transparency requiring social landlords to provide residents with information on how they can make a complaint against them
- an amendment that will require all social housing managers to have a professional qualification.

The Association has raised issues with the Social Housing Bill where it challenges the charity status of those regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Support in Houses of Parliament

The Rt Hon Damian Green MP stepped in to raise a question of the Secretary of State in Parliament in May. He asked him to confirm to the House of Commons that almshouses would be recognised in the new drafting of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Almshouse Association regularly publishes Policy and Governance updates on its website. Blue text (below) denotes a web link specific to the document or report - see: www.almshouses.org/latest-news/

Charity Commission

The Association meets with the Charity Commission on a regular basis. Along with issues that are brought to us by member charities to present to the Commission, recently Nick Phillips CEO also discussed the interpretation of many aspects of the new Social Housing Bill and the Renters Reform Bill. The Charity Commission is a statutory consultee on many of the incoming laws and by discussing the impact of the issues embedded in these Acts, we can prevent almshouses being swept up with general Landlord and Tenant reforms. It has been agreed that the policy team will visit almshouses and Nick met with the senior Commission staff in May (see page 6) at a number of almshouses in Surrey. Future engagement visits are being planned in the Liverpool area for later in the year. The Almshouse Association is grateful for the direct relationship with the Charity Commission and know the team at the Commission work hard to resolve our members' issues. If you have any particularly sticky Charity Commission issues that you would like us to help with, please let us know.

Charities Act 2022

In May 2023, The Charity Commission updated the changes introduced by the Charities Act 2022 (the Act), which amends the Charities Act 2011.

The first set of changes came into force on 31 October 2022, followed by changes in June 2023. The final set of changes are due to come into effect by the end of 2023. An overview of the full changes can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/charities-act-2022-guidance-for-charities

Changes introduced in June 2023 include the following:

- Selling, leasing or otherwise disposing of charity land
- Using permanent endowment
- Charity names

Changes that came into force on 31 October 2022:

- Paying trustees for providing services or goods
- Fundraising appeals that do not raise enough or raise too much
- Power to amend Royal Charters.

All Party Parliamentary Group on Almshouses AGM

Held on the 15 May 2023 in Portcullis House, Westminster, although the AGM itself was brief, the discussions were invaluable and the APPG will be writing to Michael Gove to outline the significant asks that the APPG has on behalf of the almshouse movement. These will include:

- changes to the National Planning Policy Framework in order to allow almshouses to be recognised as 'affordable housing' under the definition.
- confirmation of terms of the new Community Infrastructure Levy definition to include almshouses.
- exemption from parts of the Social Housing Bill that add significant bureaucracy to members and challenge the nature of the charity as well as how charities are run.

Responding to letters from Members of Parliament

Question time in Parliament is bringing to the fore the increased government focus on the Social Housing, Affordable Housing and the Private Rented Sector and MPs are seeing a rise in complaints from tenants about housing conditions that they must act on. Almshouse charities could find themselves in the position of receiving a letter of complaint from their local MP on behalf of a resident, to which they must respond.

We are in no doubt that members will always respond in their usual positive and courteous way, however, we have been asked to give a quick bullet point checklist that some may find useful.

If you receive a letter from your MP acting on behalf of a complainant:

- Respond quickly – A speedy response often takes the frustration out of a situation and allows the MP to see that you are treating it as a priority.
- If you need time, respond positively but say you will investigate thoroughly and respond by a certain date. Give a date you are confident you can meet.
- Investigate the complaint or ask further questions of the MP.

- Once investigated, if the complaint is already resolved, check with all parties concerned and be brief but clear in your response, thanking the MP for their interest.
- If the complaint is fair and as yet unaddressed, try to resolve the situation, then, once you have done so, inform the MP that it is either being resolved or that it has been, giving a brief outline of the situation if needed.
- Remember, when you receive a letter from an MP they are doing their job, taking up cases on behalf of their constituency and they may not be aware of the detail or fully understand the situation relating to almshouses. Your response may reassure and impress them and this may actually be a good opportunity to engage with your MP. At the time it may not feel like a positive situation but inviting the MP to the almshouse to meet you and meet your residents may have a beneficial long-term outcome.
- If you are concerned whether the complaint is genuine and you don't have an answer, please call us and we will work with you on a solution.

Letters to Local Authorities: support for members

On occasions The Almshouse Association is asked by member charities to provide letters of support to their local authorities, which we are happy to supply. It is often found that councils do not fully understand almshouses and need to be informed about the unique nature of almshouse charities and the way in which they operate. These often entail matters such as requests for funding, planning applications or issues concerning residents' claims for benefits. To this end a letter from the Association has proved to be beneficial, so please do not hesitate to contact us should you have need. A sample letter is available on the Association's website at www.almshouses.org/news/letters-of-support-to-las We will, of course, be happy to adapt and expand on this to allow for specific circumstances.

Residents' satisfaction - what almshouse charities need to do

The Regulator of Social Housing has created a new system for assessing how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

The data is being collected through 22 different Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) that are intended to make a landlords' performance more visible:

Twelve are called Tenant Perception Measures and consist of a set of questions (TP01 – TP12) from the Regulator, carried out by the landlords and collected via a survey. Ten of the measures are Management Information, direct from the landlord, collected through information held by the charity under four different categories.

1 - Keeping properties in good repair (RP01 – RP02). **2** - Maintaining building safety (BS01 – BS05). **3** - Effective handling of complaints (CH01 – CH02). **4** - Responsible neighbourhood management (NM01).

Only charities that are Registered Providers need to carry out Tenant Satisfaction Measures and if you are a Registered Provider, your obligations

will vary depending on if you have more or less than 1,000 dwellings.

Q How should data be collected for the perception measures?

The survey can be carried out through any channel, eg. telephone, online, or face to face. You should ensure the sample is representative of your almshouse community. The data does not need to be collected by an external agency, as long as the reporting requirements have been met which are:

- The Tenant Perception Measures must be collected via a perception survey, not a transactional survey.
- The question wording and response scales must be set out like-for-like with the TSM requirements (see template on The Almshouse Association website In Model Policies and Templates).
- The overall satisfaction question (TP01) must be the first survey question.
- The introduction to the survey should provide a clear explanation to residents as to the purpose of the survey and what will happen with the results.

Q What are the requirements for reporting and publishing the TSMs?

Providers with less than 1,000 dwellings:

- do not need to submit results to the Regulator but must have the data avail-

able if the Regulator calls on the charity for the results.

- should make 'best efforts' to achieve a representative sample. In practice this is likely to mean a census-style approach, where all residents have the opportunity to take part.

Providers with over 1,000 dwellings:

- must submit their results to the Regulator annually - their annual year will run from April 1 to March 31
- supply information that is transparent, reliable, accurate and a valid reflection of their performance against the TSMs and they must include the methodology used to collect the data
- must share the results with their customers.
- landlords can only survey each household once per year for the TPMs.

Q How to submit TSMs to the Regulator?

The Regulator will be providing more information about the timing and format for submitting TSM data and you will be able to download a template from The Almshouse Association website www.almshouses.org/model-policies-and-templates/ Please contact almshousesupport@almshouses.org for any further questions on Tenant Satisfaction Measures.



The ceremonial Mayor of Hartlepool, Councillor Brian Cowie (front centre) with The Right Reverend Mark Wroe, Bishop of Berwick and acting Bishop of Newcastle (left) and Reverend Philip Bullock (right), together with guests, in the Chapel at the Hospital of God. photo: Frank Reid for Hartlepool Mail.

Still flourishing after 750 years of care

Hartlepool's The Hospital of God charity is celebrating its 750th anniversary with events planned throughout the year. Originally founded in 1273 by the then Bishop of Durham to care for poor and needy men, 750 years on it is still providing for the community in the form of residential care, almshouses, dementia support and grant giving. Lawrence McAnelly, Director of the Hospital of God, said: "This is a phenomenal achievement and is testament to the charity's resilience. With a medieval foundation, the charity has flourished into a modern organisation."

Commitment to improving services

A 28-year commitment to almshouses came to a close when Paul Martin retired as CEO of St John & St Anne Almshouse Charity, Oakham at the end of February, having transformed the charity's staff team and finances. His first experience with almshouses was at the Eleanor Palmer Trust in north London in 1993, after working in the housing and social care sectors.



Paul Martin (right) with his leaving cake, and Chair of Governors, David Pattinson.

When he moved to Rutland in 2015 after managing Whiteley Village in Surrey, he joined a staff team of three and took over an annual budget of £400,000. The charity now has six staff including a full-time support worker and a budget of nearly £1,000,000. Chair of Governors, David Pattinson said Paul had been the obvious candidate for the job. One of his early actions had been to initiate a professional review of how the charity was being run and this had resulted in being able to increase staff and resources in order to deliver

an even better service to residents. Secure finances had enabled St John & St Anne to initiate a programme of improvements across its five sites in Rutland which provide homes to 120 people in 103 units. This included, where appropriate, the introduction of wet rooms and easier to use kitchens. Paul admits his time at the charity has at times been challenging, not least during the pandemic when he and his staff team provided extra support to residents. He said: "I will not miss the 3.00am call outs but getting to know individual residents and making a difference to their lives is incredibly rewarding. Also, working with a board of governors focused on improving the quality of life of our residents has been unique."



Celebrating 100 years

Pauline Gregory, a long-term resident of St Mary's House in Ealing, West London, celebrated her 100th birthday on January 24. Pauline marked the special occasion with a party at the social centre linked to the parish church of St Mary's, together with friends and family, almshouse residents, trustees and local parishioners.

Roger Jarman, Clerk, St Mary's Church Homes Trust

Tree planting marks 400 year anniversary ...

The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux (far right) with Jacob and Phoebe Keffler (foreground) are

joined by the Mayor and Mayoress of Guildford, Dennis and Mary Booth, Chair of Governors, Colin Mullis and



... and the jubilee

Ian Bowler, master of Abbot's Hospital, Guildford, Surrey. Celebrations for the charity's 400th anniversary year concluded with the planting in the hospital's garden of trees donated by the governors. One marked the platinum jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II and a second marked the anniversary of the arrival of the first residents. The Lord-Lieutenant was joined by two grandchildren of current residents, Jacob and Phoebe, to remind us of the community at the heart of Abbot's across its history and into its future.



The Chair of the Willie Seager Memorial Trust, Captain Hywel Jones (left) with relatives of George Lockie handing the compass to relatives of Willie Seager.

Reunited with family heirloom

After his 23-year-old son was killed in action in France during WWI, Sir William Seager, a global shipping magnate, established the Willie Seager Memorial Trust in his honour, providing homes for retired seafarers and their wives in Cardiff.

After Lt Seager's death, his compass came into the hands of his Regimental Sargent Major, George Lockie who served with him on the front. Over 100 years later the compass was inherited by descendants of George Lockie who

saw that it was engraved and set out to find out more about the soldier it had belonged to. In March of this year, their search came to wonderful end when the two families met and the descendants of George Lockie were finally able to return the compass to the descendants of Sir William Seager. Today, the Trust is an almshouse managed by Aelwyd Housing and continues to provide homes for seafarers and dockworkers.

Join our Regional Peer Representatives

Regional meetings are a valuable forum for members to discuss any challenges and talk about their almshouses with their peers in an informal and open setting. We have received excellent feedback about the meetings and members say they find them informative and helpful. Our Regional Peer Representatives (RPRs) support our members locally within their regions and we are thankful to them for supporting these valuable meetings and to all our members who participate. RPRs are experts in their field and have a wealth of experience in running and managing almshouses, offering guidance and support and a listening ear.



They are proving to be such invaluable assets and we need more! If you are interested in this voluntary role, we would really like to talk with you. Please contact Gerry Harmon on 01344 452922 or gerryharmon@almshouses.org to learn more about this role in your region.

2023 CALENDAR

Sept 6	Wardens and Scheme Managers Seminar	St Albans
6	Surrey Regional Meeting	Walton-on-Thames
20	West Midlands Regional Meeting	Sutton Coldfield
Nov 8	East Midlands Regional Meeting	Leicester
16	Wessex Regional Meeting	Salisbury
Oct 19	Trustees and Clerks Seminar	Guildford
Dec 13	West Midlands Regional Meeting	Solihull

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HM King Charles III Coronation Tea Parties

The Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla gave us all a wonderful opportunity to hang out the bunting and enjoy picnics and parties with friends, families and neighbours. The Almshouse Association's retiring Chair, Elizabeth Fathi received a special invitation to the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace which she attended with Board trustee, Tricia Scouller and their husbands. Member charities joined in the celebrations and sent us some fabulous photos.



above: Residents, trustees, family and guests were joined by the Mayor of Newbury, Councillor Gary Norman as well as the Garston Gallopers Morris Dancers at Donnington Hospital Trust's Coronation Tea, Newbury, Berkshire.

below: Residents enjoyed a Coronation Tea at Thomas Watson Cottage Homes in Barnet, Hertfordshire, before Jenny Harrold, Chairman of Trustees and Yvonne Kelly, one of the almshouse's longest-serving residents, planted two commemorative trees.



above and right: Residents and staff of Wyggestons and Trinity Almshouses Charity celebrated with a day of events at Lancaster House, Leicester. The charity provided a hog roast to over 100 residents of the almshouses and the care home, along with specially commissioned cupcakes and refreshments. Despite the poor weather, residents enjoyed the music from a local jazz band and watched the Coronation in the new Lancaster House facilities, including the impressive Duchy Lounge, named to honour the charity's unique relationship with the Crown through the Duchy of Lancaster.



At Winnocks and Kendalls Almshouse Charity, Colchester, the Coronation was celebrated with a lunch for residents. photo left: Trustees Anna Daniell and Wendy Allen serve home-made cream scones to resident, Mrs Edith Lee - aged 102.