

HousingTimes

New Year 2018

**IMPROVEMENT
AMNESTY**
Apply now to save yourself a £150 charge

Improvements to your home

Before you carry out improvements to your home, you must first get permission from the Housing Department.

We will need to see:

- A drawing of your proposed work
- Details of the builder who will carry out the work (if applicable)
- Details of the materials you will be using
- A method statement
- A health and safety risk assessment

This information is checked by one of our surveyors to assess whether you will need planning permission and/or building control approval. The surveyor may also carry out a home visit to check how the proposed work will affect your property.

Once you have the planning and building control permissions and we have decided that your proposals are acceptable, we will give conditional permission. This means you can go ahead and do the work – possibly under the supervision of the surveyor. Once the work is completed to a satisfactory standard you will be given formal Landlord Consent.

If you have already carried out work, you can ask us to check it to give

our approval. At the moment we do not charge for retrospective approval. However, after 1 April 2018 we will be charging a flat fee of £150 before we will consider retrospective approval.

If you do not have approval then you will not be able to transfer or exchange your home. Nor will you be able to carry out the Right to Buy. In some circumstances we may take legal action to require you to reverse the work done.

If you have made any improvements or repairs to your home please ensure you contact us before 1 April 2018 to discuss retrospective approval for work. After 1st April you will be charged for any landlord consent for changes you have made. If you are planning any work then please contact us first to get the go-ahead.

Remember – unauthorised improvements are a breach of your tenancy and may lead to legal action and costs.



Unauthorised loft works caused severe fire damage to this property.

Moving Home

Would £50 help?

For a trial period the council will give a £50 moving bonus to you at the end of your tenancy or when you move house.

Certain conditions apply.

If you think you may qualify then discuss it with your housing officer when you sign up your new tenancy or call her on 01727 819301.



St Albans
City & District Council

www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing

Universal Credit, and Budgeting Accounts at the Credit Union

Many people will know that Universal Credit has come to St Albans District.

Universal Credit is the new state benefit which replaces some of the benefits which are currently available.

The new rules apply to people of working age, making a new application. New applicants need to apply for Universal Credit instead of Housing Benefit, Tax Credits, Income Support and some types of Job Seekers Allowance, or Employment Support Allowance. You can claim Universal Credit whether you are in, or out of, work.

To claim Universal Credit, please see www.gov.uk/universalcredit. If you don't have access to the internet, we can help you to make a claim.

Universal Credit is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and is paid directly into your bank account each month.

Special budgeting bank accounts

For people who are used to having bank accounts and budgeting, rolling up all the benefits into one monthly payment can make a lot of sense.

But for others, the new scheme might be a bit daunting.

That's why the Credit Union is offering special budgeting accounts. You can have your Universal Credit paid into your budgeting account, and the Credit Union will help manage

your rent payments. They do this by putting your money into separate 'pots' to pay your rent and other bills.

The money that you have left after paying your rent can be taken from the Credit Union or you can use a debit card.

If you are interested in opening a budgeting account, please speak to your Housing Officer, or visit the Credit Union at 135 Hatfield Road, St Albans, for more information. They are not open every day, so it's best to check their website for opening times (www.stalbanscreditunion.co.uk).

The Council can also arrange budgeting and debt advice. And we can help if the money you receive doesn't cover your rent in full.

We operate a Discretionary Housing Payment scheme to help people who receive either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit but need more support.

We can help with rent arrears, or if you have unusual expenses or outgoings which means you sometimes struggle to pay your rent.

If you have questions about Universal Credit or Discretionary Housing Payments, or if you don't know what benefits you should be claiming, there is lots of useful information on our website (www.stalbans.gov.uk). Or you can contact the team at benefits@stalbands.gov.uk, 01727 819220.

Rough Sleeper Count 2017

Every year the Council has to do a count of the people sleeping rough in the District, for government. This winter, a team of 17 volunteers from the Council and other local housing organisations and charities came together to try and find people sleeping rough in the area.

The teams did a detailed search of the District, visiting areas identified as rough sleeping hotspots. They took backpacks of food and supplies provided by the local Emmaus charity. They also provided advice about local services and sources of help. On the night of the count, 5 people were found to be sleeping rough. We also found three unoccupied tents suggesting others were sleeping rough too. This is lower than we think is the case usually.

We would like to thank everyone who gave up their time to take part in the count, including all the volunteers who gave up a good night's sleep to try to identify and support people living rough locally.

New Online Services

In the coming weeks, the Council is launching a range of new online services to help local residents do their Council business more easily

As part of this, we are introducing a range of online services for housing tenants via our new 'MyStAlbans District Account'.

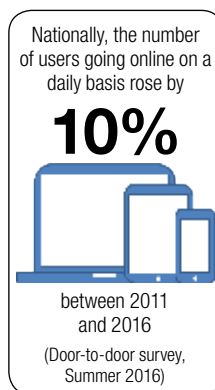
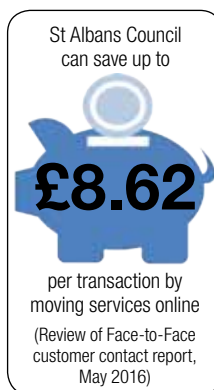
Once you've registered, you'll find lots of helpful information about you and your Council related business right at your fingertips from your smart phone, laptop, tablet or PC. There's personalised information about who your councillors are, your recycling collection days, and quick and easy automated ways to report things like repairs, graffiti or fly-tipping.

You'll find lots of information about all things related to your rent and Council Tax, including your billing history and easy-access ways to pay.

You will also be able to book an appointment with your Housing Officer at a time to suit you, so there's no more waiting in queues or on the telephone. Lots more services will be added over the coming months.

More information will be available in Community News and also with your Council Tax bills later in the Spring.

All you will then need to do is log on to www.stalbans.gov.uk and register for your own MyStAlbans District Account. It will be easy to register and use.



Assisted Garden Maintenance Scheme

If you are physically unable to maintain your own garden, you may be eligible to apply for the Assisted Garden Maintenance Scheme. Our contractors, John O'Connor, do the work, which consists of up to 16 grass cuts and 4 hedge trims per year between March and October. Maintenance of bushes, shrub beds or trees is not included.

If you have an age related condition or a disability and in receipt PIP (Personal Independence Payment) or Attendance Allowance you can apply.

Once accepted onto the scheme, our contractors will arrange a visit to assess the current condition of your garden. If necessary, they will arrange for a one off cut back to get your garden into a maintainable state.

To find out more, please email housingmanagement@stalbands.gov.uk, or call Caroline Osborn on **01727 819543**.



First new Council homes in decades

Over recent months we have been developing 25 affordable homes for rent on 3 former garage sites in the Batchwood area. The developments are now nearing completion.



These projects will see the delivery of much needed affordable housing and is the first large scale development by the Council for almost 30 years.

The mix of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom units will all be rented to families on the Housing Register. We expect the first families to start moving in to their new homes around Easter 2018.

The regeneration of garage sites for affordable housing is a corporate priority for the Council. Since 2013 we have worked with local Housing Associations to develop 27 affordable homes, available for rent and shared ownership on former garage sites.

The work does not stop when the Batchwood development is complete! We are currently working to develop 23 homes

The Batchwood development taking shape which were formerly 3 garage sites.

on two former garage sites in Sandridge. This development has just started and is due for completion in the winter of 2018/19.

If you have any questions regarding the Council's development projects you can email Rebecca Hillman, Principal Strategic Housing and Development Officer, at rebecca.hillman@stalbans.gov.uk.

New Affordable Sheltered Housing

St Albans City and District Council are working with local housing associations to redevelop former sheltered housing schemes in the District.

Betty Entwistle House (Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association)

This will be a new flexi care scheme in Holyrood Crescent consisting of 40 one bedroom flats for residents over the age of 40 with a care need as assessed by Herts County Council.

Affordable rented and shared ownership properties will be available. If you are interested in being considered for one of the rented flexi care flats you will need to be registered on the Council's Housing Register.

You can register at www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk.

If you are interested in purchasing a share in one of the shared ownership flats further information can be found at www.bphaoptions.org.uk.

Please contact housingoptions@stalbans.gov.uk or telephone them on **01727 819355** for advice.

Wavell House

A planning application has been submitted for St Albans City and District Council to develop 24 new flats on the site of the former sheltered housing scheme at Wavell House in Cell Barnes Lane.

Subject to planning approval the scheme will consist of a mix of 24 one and two bedroom flats for residents of 55 and over. These will all be rented to applicants from the Council's housing register and will be suitable for residents downsizing from larger family homes.

Linley Court (Aldwyck Housing Association)

The former housing scheme at Linley Court in Valley Road will be redeveloped into a mix of one and two bed flats to be let at affordable rents to applicants from the Council's Housing Register.

The housing association is in the process of selecting a contractor to build the new scheme.

For further information please contact Rebecca Hillman Principal Strategic Housing and Development Officer by emailing rebecca.hillman@stalbans.gov.uk or on **01727 819586**.



Artist's impression of the new development at St Leonard's, Sandridge.

Top tips for dealing with damp and mould

Condensation is the most common cause of mould and can be very simple to sort out.

Here are our 10 top tips:

1. Don't dry wet washing on radiators.
2. Make sure your tumble dryer is vented outside.
3. Air vents are installed to help air circulate through your home. Don't cover or block them.
4. If you have ventilation slots in your windows, keep them open.
5. Keep furniture away from the walls so that air can circulate.
6. When cooking, keep lids on saucepans and use the minimum amount of water.
7. Where possible, hang washing outside to dry – or in the bathroom with the door closed, a window open or an extractor fan on.
8. Don't use bottled gas heaters. It is a serious fire risk (and breach of tenancy) to use paraffin heaters.
9. When cooking or washing, open a window so that the steam can escape and use an extractor fan if you have one.
10. In colder weather, keep your home at an all-round constant temperature of at least 19 Degrees C.



If you already have an issue with mould, we can supply a Mould Eradication Kit. This is a treatment with everything required to deal with small outbreaks of black mould. The kit contains RLT Bactdet 05, RLT Halophen, MGC Fungicidal Additives, a mixing bucket, a sponge, gloves and a brush.

It is simple to use and, if used correctly, can remove and prevent any further mould growth.

If you require more information you can contact the Repairs Team at h.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk or by phone **01727 819256**.

Safety at home for the vulnerable in Hertfordshire

Herts Careline provide pendant alarm services locally, supporting around 800 people in St Albans District. Across the county, the service takes a staggering 1,000 calls a day. At least one third of these are life critical emergencies.

Careline also offers many types of assistive technology to help you maintain your independence if you have a disability.

The Hertfordshire based Control Centre is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The assistive technology equipment

triggers when a pendant is pressed or if a sensor detects a risk, such as fire, fall or flood – depending upon the type of equipment installed.

When the Control Centre receives an alert, the highly trained call operators will speak to the resident and if necessary send help. This could be from a family member or friend, a mobile response warden, or the emergency services, depending on what's happened. This provides reassurance for users and their friends, families, and carers, as they know help is always on hand.

To find out more see: www.care-line.co.uk or call **0300 999 2 999**.



Focus on.....

Eva Radkowska, PA to Head of Housing

I would say that my role is quite varied as it covers all aspects of the office and the Housing Department.



One of the first things I do when I have logged in to the computer and the telephone is to scan my emails as that will give me an idea of priorities and tasks. I also look after the Head of Housing's emails and other senior managers when they are on leave.

Some of these emails or phone calls may be from Councillors and MPs which may be the result of an approach by Council residents, applicants or queries from private owners, or regarding housing land. It is my responsibility to look into the issues raised, ensure that these concerns are investigated and responded to by me or by relevant staff.

As PA to the Head of Housing I take all her phone calls and will either direct the call to the most appropriate person or deal with it myself. Sometimes the caller may be upset and extra sensitivity will be required.

Being a PA also involves a number of more traditional tasks, such as arranging and juggling meetings around and taking notes and minutes. This can include attending evening meetings with Councillors which can make for a long day.

I also undertake other admin tasks such as completing annual returns, assisting with interviews and testing of candidates.

Having worked at the Council for over five and a half years I have seen lots of new people arrive. As a central cog in the wheel I tend to get asked many and varied questions. I often get asked IT related questions and try to help people out if I can. Other roles are that of Fire Warden and First Aider, where I have been called upon to assist on several occasions, providing reassurance and a calming influence.

So, this is certainly a multi-tasking role. But, it's all in a day's work!

Paying your rent

All the services provided by the Housing Department are funded from the rent you pay. The service does not receive any income from Council Tax or from Government grants.

Without your rent we would not be able to pay for the repairs service, improvements to your home, and all the other things we do to run the service.

It is a condition of your tenancy that you pay your rent as it falls due every Monday, and that there are no rent arrears.

If you do miss a payment it is your responsibility to contact your Housing Income Officer to discuss the matter and make an arrangement to clear the arrears. While you have rent arrears you are in breach of the terms and conditions of your tenancy and this will affect some of the services you receive. It could also put your tenancy at risk.

If you fall behind with your rent, your Housing Income Officer can advise you on what to do, and what help is available. They will also agree a repayment schedule with you.

If you need help completing forms, e.g. for a Discretionary Housing Payment, just ask. Your Housing Income Officer will be happy to help so that you have the best chance of making a successful application.

None of us working in housing want to evict tenants from their homes. It is our last resort when all efforts to help you pay your rent have failed. A Notice of Seeking Possession is the first step in the eviction process, enabling us to take court action to repossess the property. If you are struggling to pay your rent, please let us help you by working with us to make your tenancy a success.

You can contact the Income Management Team by email housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk or by phone: 01727 819301.



Your Housing Team

Following a recent restructure, we have made some changes in the Housing Management Team.

We have a vacant post and although we have recruited to this we are waiting for the new staff member to start with us. We will give more details in the next issue of Housing Times.

Area	Housing Income Team Manager Lina Clifford lina.clifford@stalbans.gov.uk	Neighbourhood Management Team Manager Sue Carroll susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk
Batford, Harpenden, Southdown, Pimlico, Redbourn, Sandridge, Newgate Close, Hatfield Road, Thirlestane	Jenetta Barker jenetta.barker@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819498	Macie McCormack macie.mccormack@stalbans.gov.uk (from 1/2/18) 01727 810387
Batchwood, New Greens, Camp area, Tudor Road, Valley Road area	Julia Thacker julia.thacker@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819383	Rosie Alphonse rosie.alphonse@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819497
Sopwell, City Centre area, Telford Court, Wheathampstead	Samantha Sandiford samantha.sandiford@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819404	Jackie Beaney jackie.beaney@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819554
Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, Colney Heath, London Colney, Marshalswick, Park Street, Smallford	Vacant – Recruitment underway	Claire Tobutt claire.tobutt@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819415

Useful contacts

Reporting Repairs – daytime

h.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819256

Emergency Repairs – out of hours

01727 811155

Property Improvements

housing.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819489

Housing Transfers

edward.kelly@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 814652

Housing Options

housingoptions@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819355

Lettings

matthew.barnes@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819480

Housing Management – tenancy and rent enquiries

housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819534

Housing Benefits

benefits@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819220

Garages

housing.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819483 or 819481 or 819485

Mutual Exchanges

housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819534

Citizens Advice Bureau

03444 111444

Leasehold management

leaseholders@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819578

Housing Support/Temporary Accommodation Team

temp.team@stalbans.gov.uk

01727 819397

Disability Adaptations/Facilities Grants

01727 814667 & 01727 819446



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