

WORD-ON-THE-STREET

All Change at Cirencester Housing as we say “goodbye’ to our Chief Executive Lynne Barber after 25 years with us



At a leaving presentation for Lynne, attended by colleagues, current and former Board Members and former staff, The Earl Bathurst praised Lynne for her work over her time with the organisation:

“Lynne, under your guidance the Society has much to thank you for in obtaining many of the objectives that we set but primarily for keeping that goal to remain a small independent housing association providing homes that people want to live in.

It was only right and appropriate that your retirement should coincide with a visit by H.R.H. The Princess Royal at the official opening of the Society's new development at Bibury, at which she recognised the hard work and dedication that you have given to the Society and that small associations can deliver.

I am sure that I can speak on behalf of all past and present members of the Society, work colleagues and residents who will miss you and your dedication and wish you a very happy retirement.’

Plumbing and Heating out of hours emergency number is changing

From 16th May our out of hours number is changing, the new number is 0845 3017444

The service will be provided by A1 Maintenance.

Please remember that this service is for emergency issues only. For example if you have no heating and hot water and you are elderly, disabled or have very young children, or if you there was a water leak that could not be contained in a bowl or bucket; these would be classified as emergency call-outs. These are not the only incidents but think twice before you make the call. Emergency calls are expensive for the organisation and ultimately this cost impacts on the service we provide overall.

Landscaping and cleaning services

Our Landscaping and Cleaning services will continue to be supplied by our existing contractors for at least another twelve months.

Due to the unusually rainy winter this year, the grounds have been waterlogged and it has been difficult to cut the grass. The programme of grass cutting has now commenced and will be back on track for the remainder of the year.

If you have any comments or questions regarding these services, please contact the Maintenance Manager.

Fire Plans for Flats

Over the course of the next couple of months we will be carrying out fire risk assessments for all our flats.

We will be checking that the fire extinguishers are up-to-date, that escape routes are clearly marked and that all landings and corridors are clear of any goods, including bin bags, re-cycling boxes and food waste bins.

If you have any items stored in the communal areas (including any communal cupboards) please make sure these are removed and these areas are kept clear.

We will carry out regular inspections of the flats and the cleaners will also be reporting back to us if they notice items in communal areas.

We may, without notice to you, remove and dispose of any goods which are in the corridors, communal areas, or store or electric cupboards.

Residents Survey

Winners!!

Thank you to all who completed the survey this year! The two lucky winners were picked out of a draw by our new Chief Executive, one from Shepherds Way and the other from Vyners Close!

Welcome to our new Chief Executive

Maureen Margrie

HELLO to all Cirencester Housing Residents
After 25 years of dedicated service, Lynne Barber is retiring and I will be succeeding her as your Chief Executive. She will be a difficult act to follow and I will be doing my utmost to rapidly learn the operations and connect with the people who make Cirencester Housing so special.

Over my career I have gained extensive experience in both the charity and private sectors, with specific expertise in strategic planning, and operational, financial and project management.

In 2002 I moved to the UK from the USA to lead a multi-national programme for an automotive company. During that assignment I met my now husband, Andrew, who enticed me to stay in this great country. I have since become a naturalised citizen and am proud to be able to say that I am both British and American.

During my time in the UK I've worked for Delphi Diesel Systems and then went on to become the Chief Executive of Emmaus Gloucestershire. Emmaus is a charity that works with homeless people and during my time there I gained valuable experience which included partnerships to respond to and prevent homelessness. Many of the partnerships were with housing associations where we sought innovative ways to engage with tenants and provide homes for homeless people.

In my spare time I volunteer as trustee at three charities: Emmaus Oxford, Furniture Reuse Network and the Society for Assistance of Ladies in Reduced Circumstances. I also am a supporter of Gloucester Rugby and enjoy yoga, golf, cycling and cooking.

I am confident that Cirencester Housing can meet the challenges and changing operating environment facing social housing associations. As a small, independent housing association with a strong local heritage, we are recognised as providing excellent and personable customer service. Over the coming years it is my aspiration to strategically grow the number of homes we offer while delivering excellent customer service and sustainable communities.

As such when I meet you I will take the opportunity to learn from your experiences of Cirencester Housing to ensure that I am well informed and have your interests at heart as we move forward.



Farewell from Lynne

After 25 years working for Cirencester Housing I have decided it is the right time for me to step down and hand over the reins. I have thoroughly enjoyed my career here and have some really lovely tales to tell, and some to keep 'under my hat'. I feel very privileged to have had the vast array of experiences this job has offered me from participating in a summer art workshop for the children, participating in races at a street party, riding on a double decker bus, as part of resident involvement to developing new homes.

Some of you had been residents already for a long time when I first started in the offices at 23a Castle Street above Cirencester Benefit Society. I was reminded the other day how residents would either have to climb the steep stairs or I would have to run down in response to the sound of the buzzer. Ron West was the Company Secretary then and Norman Whereat looked after the maintenance.

The same year I started Ron retired so I was left to continue his standard of good work.



At that time we maintained our own housing list and when a vacancy occurred it was either a Cotswold District Council nomination or we could house someone from our own list. We would then hold interviews to find the person who we considered had the most housing need. The then Housing Corporation decided that it would be more efficient and fairer for everyone if there was a 'one stop shop' and introduced Choice Based Lettings.

The new properties at Vyners Close had just been completed when I started and the organisation looked to building more houses at Lavender Lane. I can remember the committee meetings were held in the Brewers Arms in Cricklade Street and sitting there would wonder what my mum would say about being in a pub in the day time.

One of the projects that I had to deal with was the



refurbishment of 71 – 93 Shepherds Way. I had to find 12 homes and organise the decanting of the residents for 12 months and then organise the moving of them back into their new homes. On the initial moving day all the residents were out and then Mr Earl couldn't find his watch which was on the side of the bed so there was a wee bit of panic stations.

We continued to develop in Cirencester and then recognised our strengths in creating communities and extended this to Southrop and Bibury.

It was a great honour as my career drew to an end that Her Royal Highness Princess Anne agreed to the official opening of the development at Bibury.

I would not have achieved what I have done if it was not for my colleagues and associates that I have met during my career. There is one particular person I would like to mention here and that is Ann Simpkins she was such an inspiration to me not just work wise either but as a mother dealing with teenage children.

Mention should also be made of the Board Members I have worked with and it has been said to me I am like the queen. She has had various Prime Ministers to deal with whereas I have had different Chairmen to deal with. The Board meetings have sometimes been held in very austere places such as the Board room of the Benefit Society and the Council Chambers at Bingham House. It was a real luxury to have our own Board room.

I have lovely memories of the different residents that I have met and have tried to say a personal farewell to some of the older residents (the ones that have been with us the longest- not age!) If I have accidentally missed you I apologise and hopefully I will bump into you in town.

My good wishes go to Maureen Margrie in taking the reins over from me.

Lynne



And from our residents....

"I will be very sad to see her leave. She is the best and a lot of people will agree with me. Lynne knows most residents very well as Cirencester Housing is a small organisation and its residents have benefitted from this"

"Lynne had been very supportive of me when I lost my mother years ago - she was very kind and was someone I could talk to. I owe a lot to Lynne personally."

"Lynne has always been very fair and friendly. She knows many of the residents personally and has helped me a number of times. She is very approachable and will be missed. It will not be the same in the office without her"

Rent Change

This year all our rents have decreased by 1% which works out for most people at about £1.00 per week.

For some this has led to an actual reduction in their charges for the year, but for many the decrease has been offset by the change in their service charge.

Unfortunately the decrease in the rents does have an impact on the income we collect. We will continue to review all our costs to ensure value for money.

Repairs Obligations

As part of our value for money efforts we have identified we have been spending money on repairs that are not the responsibility of Cirencester Housing. This means that we will take more care in reviewing repair requests to identify if it is a repair that Cirencester Housing is responsible for.

Please be assured we are committed to carrying out all the repairs that we are obligated to, but we will be unable to do some of the 'extra's' which we may have done in the past. Your tenancy agreement identifies the repairs we are responsible for. The tenancy agreement is available on the website.

Rent Collection

All our Tenancy Agreements state that rent is payable 'in advance'. In the past we have been able to be flexible in our approach with residents tolerating, for example, monthly payments to be made on a specific date during the month, or even at the end of the month. This means that some accounts are always showing arrears until the end of the month.

In the future this will not be allowed, and all payments will have to be made in accordance with the Tenancy Agreement.

New residents will be required to pay rent in advance in accordance with the tenancy agreement.

Existing residents who have been paying on a monthly or irregular schedule that puts their account into temporary arrears should contact us to make arrangements to resolve this situation. Arrangements can be made to gradually bring your account into credit. If you do not contact us, we will contact you.

If you have problems paying your rent you should contact us immediately.

Universal Credit

Universal credit has finally arrived in our area. The aim of Universal Credit is to make it easier to claim any benefits you may be entitled to in one go, rather than dealing with a number of different departments.

Remember that if you do go onto Universal Credit, unlike the current Housing Benefit system, **you will be responsible for paying your own rent!** Contact us if you have any further enquiries or need any help.

Statutory Repairs

Every year we have to carry out certain inspections of your homes. These inspections are for your own safety and it is a requirement of your Tenancy Agreement that you allow us access to carry out these works.

Recently we have had difficulty in gaining access to a small number of properties. When we have to arrange further appointments, write letters or take legal action it incurs a cost to the organisation.

In the future, if you do and unless there is a valid reason for not doing, we will be charging you for the additional expenses.

Royal Visit to Arlington Fields, Bibury

February 29th was a special day for us at Cirencester Housing, when we were honoured to welcome HRH Princess Anne to our development of affordable homes in Bibury.

Princess Anne was accompanied by her husband Sir Tim Laurence for the visit where they were greeted by the children from the village school, residents of Arlington Fields, civic dignitaries, and staff and partners who had all made such a valuable contribution to building the development.



The day started as the Princess, accompanied by Lynne, had a tour of two of the houses. The residents were delighted by the interest she showed in their homes (even extending to asking if she could look inside the airing cupboard!) and the knowledge she had of the development, saying that she had driven past it many times as it was being built and that she was pleased that it was for social housing and not executive homes.



Following on from her visit to the homes, the Princess was then presented to the Staff from Cirencester Housing, the Residents of Arlington Fields, Cirencester Housing Board, Architects, Development Officers and staff from Cotswold District Council, and finally Bibury and Barnsley WI who prepared a magnificent buffet!



Both the Princess and her husband spent a considerable amount of time with each group and their knowledge of the issues surrounding rural housing and the prohibitive costs for young families impressed everyone!



The highlight of the day was the Princess unveiling a plaque to go onto the bench in what has become known as the 'meadow', a strip of land around the houses which can be used by residents. The Chair of our Board Sandy Price gave a short speech thanking the Princess and Sir Tim for their time and support.

