



Work progressing on new Darlington homes

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Resolving complaints

In 2016/17 residents reported 22 complaints of anti-social behaviour or disputes with their neighbours

The most commonly reported problem was noise nuisance. Other problems included verbal abuse, disagreements and pets.

How we compare to other landlords	Railway Housing Association	Other similar landlords
Percentage of neighbour complaints that were about noise	38%	35%
Percentage of neighbour complaints resolved by visits, interviews and warnings	87%	74%
Percentage of complainants satisfied with the handling of their complaint	93%	85%
Percentage of complainants satisfied with the outcome of their complaint	73%	80.9%
Cost of managing neighbour complaints, per property	£16.38	£35.60

The Resident's Scrutiny Panel has recently examined the Association's response to dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour and neighbour disputes. The Panel were satisfied that the association deals well with these problems but recommended some minor amendments to the policy and procedure. Their recommendations were accepted and have been made.

The Scrutiny Panel is now looking at the management of the association's estates, including the services that are provided for garden maintenance and cleaning of communal areas.

Annual report

We recently produced our annual report detailing our performance for the year 2016/17.

Once again it is a calendar, this year using British wildlife as the theme, so we hope you like the pictures we chose and will put it up in your home from January 2018.

We have sent a copy of the calendar to all residents except those who have opted not to receive one or chose to receive it by email. We do have a few spares left if you would like one, or you can view it in the publications section of our website.



“She is the backbone of our little community, always organising days out and entertainment.”

Inspirational Thelma wins award

Thelma Robinson receives her award from Anne Rowlands and Peter Elliott, with two of the people who nominated her, June Lord (left of Thelma) and Gloria Bromley (right of her)

A woman described as “the backbone of our community” is Railway Housing Association’s good neighbour of the year for 2017

Having received more than double the number of nominations than anyone else, Thelma Robinson was the overwhelming winner of this year’s award.

The 88-year-old, who lives in Sayers Close, Leeds, was nominated by many of her neighbours.

They included Gloria Bromley, who said: “Whether it’s card games, flower arrangements, meals or management

of the guest room, Thelma is an inspiration in everything she does and her positive engagement with life rubs off on everyone else.”

Fellow neighbour Valerie Almond said: “She is the backbone of our little community, always organising days out and entertainment. If anybody needs help she is always there. She makes cakes and scones for our card game afternoons. You don’t have to wait to be invited to her home for a chat and a cuppa; she will welcome all.”

And June Lord added: “She is a lovely person who will give any help she can if needed. She keeps our small

community going, working hard and giving her time to arrange bingo, talks, music, everything. She also books day trips out and looks after the key to the guest room for which she organises the bookings making sure everything is in order for the visitor. She deserves to be recognised for the things she does and the effort she makes.”

This year’s good neighbour was once again chosen by our residents, through our Residents’ Forum and Focus Groups.

Mrs Robinson said: “I was speechless when I discovered I was this year’s winner; it is such a great honour.

“I don’t think what I do is anything special; I just do the best I can to help my friends and neighbours.”

Mrs Robinson received a trophy and a cheque for £50. This year’s good neighbour of the year competition was sponsored by Tolent Construction, the company currently building homes on our behalf in Darlington (see page 4).

Peter Elliott, from Tolent Construction, said: “We were very pleased to be asked to sponsor this award for the first time this year and we would like to congratulate Thelma on her magnificent achievement.”



Development news

Work is continuing to build 73 new homes in Darlington.

The houses, bungalows and apartments are being built just off Haughton Road, near to Darlington College, and will be let by August 2018 to applicants from Darlington Borough Council's and our own waiting lists.

The homes are being built close to the historic 1825 Darlington to Stockton Railway Line and we are incorporating an engine shed built in 1844 into the development. The shed, which has Listed building status, is being converted into mews-type houses.



The whole development, including the engine shed, will have an industrial feel in keeping with the site's historic past but at the same time providing modern, energy efficient homes.

During the build, our contractor, Tolent, has been working closely with Darlington College to give opportunities to their students. To date, 63 students have visited the site.

Tolent are also supporting a building research project; they plan to offer work experience on site for students, and are supporting continued professional development for lecturers from the College.

“During the build, our contractor, Tolent, has been working closely with Darlington College to give opportunities to their students”



Centenary year

On the 19th July 1919, The North Eastern Railway Cottages Homes and Benefit Fund was officially formed.

Funding, including a very generous £10,000 (equivalent to around £360,000 in today's money) donated by Lady Ellen Granger in memory of her brother Doctor Tempest Anderson, was secured and land at Gosforth, Darlington and York was purchased from the North Eastern Railway to build homes.

The first homes were built on the 28th May 1921 and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 2019, Railway Housing Association (as we were renamed in 1982) will mark its 100th anniversary and we would like to invite you, our residents, to be part of our centenary celebrations.

We are starting to plan for 2019 and have set up a centenary working group, which includes one of our residents, Brenda Flynn, to look at what we can do to celebrate our anniversary.

So far, ideas that have been put forward include producing a book on our history, hiring an old train for an afternoon tea themed celebration, producing some anniversary beer, holding parties at our sheltered housing schemes and recognising residents born in 1919.

All of these ideas are dependent on how much funding we can attract through sponsorship.

We are approaching a number of companies/organisations to see if they would be willing to sponsor any of these ideas and during 2018 we will begin fine-tuning the programme of events that will take place throughout 2019.

We would like to involve as many of our residents as possible so we would welcome any ideas you may have for how we could mark our centenary.

We would also like to know if you have any old pictures, stories or anecdotes that we could use in a book, an exhibition or on our website in 2019. We would also like to involve young people so perhaps your child, grandchild or great-grandchild would like to write a poem about Railway Housing Association or draw a picture of their home.

We are literally starting with a blank canvas, so please get in touch if you have any ideas, would like to submit information or get involved in the planning and delivery of our centenary year celebrations. You can do this by contacting Karen West by telephoning **0800 028 7428** or emailing **kwest@railwayha.co.uk** or writing to our address shown on the back page.



Residents conference 2017

There were lots of new faces, but also a new venue, as we got together for our 2017 Grand Day Out.

This year we moved from the Royal York Hotel in York to the Marriott Hotel, opposite the racecourse, and what a fine venue it turned out to be.

The Association's Director of Customer Services, Andrea Abbott, opened the event by outlining the £11 million investment in our existing properties over the next five years, as well as speaking about our plans to build more than 100 new homes

Jackie Grannell, from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), then facilitated the main session about residents' choices during maintenance/improvement work, and drawing up a customer code of conduct.

As always, the day ended with a fun quiz and raffle with prizes including an overnight stay for two at the Marriot. This was won by Mr and Mrs Patterson, from South Shields.

As everyone left, they received a goodie bag containing a drink and some lovely savoury and sweet snacks.



What residents said about the day

Every resident who attended the conference said they thought the event was excellent or very good, with comments including:

“ A good mix of tenants with lots of different views. ”

“ It was really enjoyable and useful. ”



“ A really wonderful informative day. ”

“ Empowered the individual and gave us a voice. ”



We asked	Residents said	What we will do
What arrangements should be made for meeting with residents and offering choices of fittings and colours when major works such as replacement of kitchens and bathrooms are carried out?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 weeks' notice should be given for meetings • Anyone who can't attend the meeting should be allowed 2 weeks to fill in and return a form with their choice of fittings and colours • If a resident does not choose the fittings and colours at the meeting or by returning the form then the choices should be made for them by the association. 	These arrangements will be implemented with immediate effect.
What would you like to be included in a customer code of conduct?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give staff the respect that you expect • Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself • Take people aside and speak to them separately • Be reasonable about timescales • Be calm • Keep to the agenda of any meetings and speak to a member of staff before or after the meeting about any other matters • The following behaviours should not be tolerated – bad language, patronising, lack of respect, aggression, harassment, shouting, abuse, rudeness, smoking or vaping. 	A customer code of conduct that includes residents' suggestions will be published and given to all residents and applicants.

News from Great Western Court

Garden club

Members of our Growing Point Garden Club enjoyed a lovely summer trip and BBQ to Bosbury House.

They spent a lovely afternoon looking around the grounds and enjoyed some fine food.



30 years young

Our Great Western Court sheltered housing scheme in Hereford celebrated its 30th anniversary this year.

To mark the occasion residents and guests gathered for a celebration cream tea.

We were delighted to be able to present a bouquet of flowers to Mary Garbett (pictured 3rd from the left), who has been with us since Great Western Court opened.

She said: "It's a nice place to live and has got beautiful gardens.

"I have met a lot of people over the years and it's definitely communal. It's out of the way so you don't get a lot of noise."

Fundraising

For 2017 we decided to try something different to support our local St Michaels Hospice and rather than have one single event, we did several smaller ones over a few weeks.

We started with a cream tea and entertainment with a local duo The Poppy Sisters inviting friends to come along and enjoy a very pleasant afternoon. We then went on to do a nearly new sale and coffee morning which was very successful with items still available for sale over the following week.

We had so many beautiful things given to us to sell as we all sorted out items for sale and encouraged friends and family to do the same. We were very grateful to friends who wanted to support us and went out collecting in their cars, or who made cakes for the refreshments or helped run the stalls on the day. We were really grateful to the St Michaels Holmer Road store for lending us some large clothes rails as these were a huge help to display the fantastic selection of clothes that had been donated. All of the items that were not sold were collected by hospice drivers and distributed to hospice shops to continue to raise money that way.

By Hilary Lewis, Scheme Manager.

We continued to raise yet more funds with a soup & strudel supper, a prize bingo and bacon bap afternoon and the guess the calories in the cake game to win afternoon tea served in the lucky winners flat.

We are so happy to say that these events not only raised a whopping total of £830 but also brought about a great sense of camaraderie from everyone who so generously took part.

*If you live in one of our other sheltered housing schemes, we would love to hear from you if you are holding events so we can feature them in future editions of RHA News. Please let your Housing Officer or Tenancy Services Manager know and if we can't come to take pictures ourselves, please take your own and send them to us.



Meet Hilary

In the first in a new series looking at the people who make Railway Housing Association tick, we speak to Hilary Lewis, Scheme Manger at our Great Western Court sheltered housing scheme in Hereford.

Hilary is responsible for managing our most southerly outpost. Her job is the only one of its type within the association due to the distance of the scheme from our other offices.

Situated close to the border with Wales, Hereford is 230 miles from our head office in Darlington, but with Hilary in charge, the distance is not a problem.

“The health and wellbeing of our residents is my number one priority”

Hilary has spent most of her life living and working in Herefordshire and that means there's hardly anyone that she doesn't know in the area. Having a bulging contacts book has proven very handy as she has supported Great Western Court to continue to be a lovely place for the residents, but also a real community destination.

She explains: "Whilst always respecting that Great Western Court is home for people living in the 30 apartments, we have also encouraged the community to use it as a local resource.

"Age UK have a day centre here; our local police and community support officers use it as a drop-in to write up their notes and have a break and we have organisations like The Royal Voluntary Service who hold events here.

"Sheltered housing schemes can traditionally be very insular but this is not the case at Great Western Court and our residents enjoy, and benefit from, interaction with others."

Hilary has also ensured there is a varied activity programme for residents.

She adds: "The health and wellbeing of our residents is my number one priority so I wanted to do something more than just having the occasional coffee morning.

"We have a full and varied programme at Great Western Court, as well as our weekly lunch club, groups like our gardening club and Tai Chi Movement For Well Being, we try to link with programmes run by the local health authority such as the Expert Patients Programme and get talks by the Falls Team and any other organisations as they become available. It's all aimed at keeping our residents active, in both body and mind."

There is no typical day in Hilary's life. One minute she can be carrying out

health and safety checks or doing an estate walkabout with residents to identify any problems and the next she can be helping a new resident to settle in to their home or helping support the Residents' Committee by getting contact details for them to keep the entertainments programme varied.

She also deals with tenancy matters, visits applicants who want to move to the scheme, helps residents to access other services, inspects empty apartments before re-letting, monitors the cleaning and garden maintenance services, and carries out customer satisfaction surveys by telephone with residents in other areas who have used our repairs service.

Hilary adds: "I have a great belief that there are many ways to help older people enjoy their later years and a big one is encouraging them to become involved in the running of the Scheme and helping others to do likewise and I am lucky enough to work for an organisation which shares this passion, so it's a job I love."



Hilary is pictured in the green jumper



May 10th 1945, Belfast

A medal fit for a hero

It was one of the most difficult campaigns of the Second World War, with Winston Churchill describing it as “the worst journey in the world”.

From 1939 to 1945, thousands of British sailors and merchant seamen were engaged in a bitter struggle to provide material to support the Soviet war effort.

This involved escorting ships in waters patrolled by German ships and U-boats.

These Arctic convoys cost the lives of around 3,000 sailors and merchant seamen, with over 100 civilian and military ships being lost.

One of the men who served on these convoys was Michael Laheney.

His daughter, Margaret Bolton, who lives in one of our bungalows in Plevna Mews, Shildon, read about a new medal being given to veterans who served on the convoys and applied on behalf of her late father, who died of cancer aged only 46.

The Arctic Star medal was instituted in 2012 after a campaign by surviving veterans.

Margaret says: “I was thrilled when I received the medal and a letter from the Ministry of Defence; it gives me something else to remember my father by.”

Margaret was a child when Michael joined the Royal Navy in 1940, answering the call of King and Country.

She remembers: “We were living in Hartlepool at the time and that was bombed quite badly. My father was away when his brother, his wife and their two children were killed in a bombing raid.

“My dad said he was told on the ship that there was bad news and that his family had been killed and he immediately thought it was us. He came back for the funeral and it was very sad, especially as the two boys were aged just three and five.”

Margaret says Michael didn't talk much about his experience on the Arctic Convoy, although he did have a habit of using Royal Navy speak when he was at home.

She recalls: “He would always refer to things hitting the deck when we dropped something and once I heard him talk to my mother about tinned fish. I thought he was referring to sardines, but that was the name they gave to torpedos that were fired at the ships.”

Margaret says that as well as the Arctic convoys, Michael travelled all over the world with the Royal Navy during the War.



She adds: “They once stopped at New York and the film stars of the day like Barbara Stanwyck and Deborah Kerr served them food as they were helping out with the war effort. He enjoyed that.”

Margaret also applied to Russia to see if Michael would qualify for the Makarov Medal, which the country was presenting to those who came to its aid during the War. Unfortunately, Russian law prevents the medal from being issued posthumously, but Margaret still received a letter from the Government explaining this.

The letter concludes by saying: “Let me assure you the Russian people do remember and greatly value the role of all British allies who fought together against the common enemy during World War Two. Mr Laheney's contribution to our joint victory is highly appreciated.”

ARTIC CONVOYS – FACT-FILE

- The Arctic convoys of World War II were oceangoing convoys which sailed from the United Kingdom, Iceland, and North America to northern ports in the Soviet Union – primarily Arkhangelsk (Archangel) and Murmansk, both in modern-day Russia.
- There were 78 convoys between August 1941 and May 1945 sailing via several seas of the Atlantic and Arctic oceans.
- About 1,400 merchant ships delivered essential supplies to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease program, escorted by ships of the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, and the U.S. Navy.
- Eighty-five merchant vessels and 16 Royal Navy warships (two cruisers, six destroyers, eight other escort ships) were lost.
- In July 1942, convoy PQ 17 suffered the worst losses of any convoy in the Second World War. Under attack from German aircraft and U-boats, the convoy was ordered to scatter, following reports that a battle group, which included the battleship Tirpitz, had sailed to intercept the convoy. Only 11 of the 35 merchant ships in the convoy succeeded in running the gauntlet of U-boats and German bombers.
- The convoys demonstrated the Allies' commitment to helping the Soviet Union, prior to the opening of a second front, and tied up a substantial part of Germany's naval and air forces.

Share a story

If you, a family member, or anyone else you know, has a story you would like to share via RHA News, please get in touch with Karen West by telephoning 0800 028 7428 or emailing kwest@railwayha.co.uk or writing to our address shown on the back page.

Picture courtesy of BMX Widow Photography Club



Elaine's on track

There's not many people who can say they became a BMX champion only six years after taking up the sport, and even fewer will achieve this at the age of 48.

But that's exactly what Elaine Williams, who lives in one of our homes in West Auckland Road, Darlington, has done.

The mother-of-three and grandmother-of-three only got onto a BMX for the first time in 2011. She was with her son Jake, who used to compete in races, and asked if she could go around a track at Barnard Castle

She did well, soon got the bug, bought her own bike and in 2012 she took part in her first novice race, finishing second. She knew it wasn't a fluke when she again finished second in a further race.

Elaine says: "I started off as a BMX mum taking Jake to his races but once I started riding I knew it was the sport for me."

"I had always been handy on a bike and when I was young I didn't play with the other girls as I preferred going off to ride with the boys, so on reflection it has always been with me – it just took a bit longer before I started doing it seriously."

In 2013, Elaine left the novice racing behind and started competing properly in the female 30-plus cruiser category. In her first series of races in this category she came second in the Northern BMX Championships and then came 13th in the British BMX Championships.

Elaine did so well, she secured sponsorship from the BMX Widow Photography Team. She had to take a year out in 2014 so started competing again in 2015, finishing 3rd in the Northern Championships.

Unfortunately, she suffered injuries which hampered her chances in the British Championships and even though she continued to have injuries in the 2016 season she fought through the pain to finish 4th in the Northern Championships and 20th in the British.

But, this year, free from injury, Elaine won the Northern Championships at the age of 48. She believes she would have been very competitive in the British Championships but in the first race she became boxed in and despite her best efforts to move up the field, she couldn't secure the 4th place that would have taken her to the next round.

Elaine says: "A BMX race can be over in less than a minute so you can't afford to make mistakes but whilst I was disappointed, I am delighted to have won the Northern Championships, especially after suffering so many injuries the previous years."

"In my category I am generally up against women who are much younger than me, but I am very competitive and put everything into my races."

When she is not on a BMX, Elaine works for EE in Darlington and she enjoys spending time with her children, grandchildren and dog Rufus.

Elaine adds: "I would recommend BMX to anyone, it's great for health and fitness and when you compete in events everyone stays in the same camps and socialises with each other; there's a real sense of community."

Elaine is a member of the North-East BMX Club in Hartlepool. The club, which is situated at the Summerhill Centre in Summerhill Lane, is on every Saturday and is open to everyone. Coaching is free and gates are £2. For more details visit www.northeastbmx.co.uk or search North East BMX on Facebook.

Our Performance

We constantly monitor and measure our performance to make sure that we are keeping to our promise to offer high quality services to our customers.

How we performed from 1st October 2016 to 30th December 2016

Income Management

Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.94% (target is 1.90%)



Complaints

Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%)



Lettings

Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 70.8% (target 58%)



Repairs and Maintenance

Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 98% (target is 97%)



Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 89% (target is 86%)



Percentage of repairs completed on time – 98% (target is 99%)



Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 84% (target is 85%)



Response to Letters

Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 94% (target is 98%)



Estate Inspections

Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months – 97.1% (target is 85%)



Value for Money

Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 4.77% (target is 5%).

This is accumulative and 4.77% was achieved within the first 9 months of the financial year.



Green
Performance on target






Amber
Performance below but close to target












Red
Action is needed to meet target

How we performed from 1st January 2017 to 31st March 2017

Income Management Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.42% (target is 1.90%) 	Complaints Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%) 
Lettings Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 67.5% (target 58%) 	Repairs and Maintenance Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 98% (target is 97%)  Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 90% (target is 86%)  Percentage of repairs completed on time – 97% (target is 99%)  Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 79% (target is 85%) 
Response to Letters Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 95% (target is 98%) 	Value for Money Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs – 9.7% (target is 5%) 
Estate Inspections Percentage of estate inspections completed within 6 months – 93.1% (target is 85%) 	

 **Green**
 Performance on target
 **Amber**
 Performance below but close to target
 **Red**
 Action is needed to meet target

How we performed from 1st April 2017 to 30th June 2017

Income Management Amount of current arrears outstanding – 1.93% (target is 2%) 	Complaints Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage – 100% (target is 87%) 
Lettings Percentage of properties re-let within target of 25 days – 54.3% (target 70%) 	Repairs and Maintenance Percentage of residents satisfied with the repairs service – 99% (target is 97%)  Percentage of repairs completed correctly first time – 86% (target is 87%)  Percentage of repairs completed on time – 96% (target is 99%)  Percentage of new residents satisfied with the condition of their home – 87% (target is 85%) 
Response to Letters Percentage of letters responded to within 10 working days – 94% (target is 98%) 	Value for Money Value for money savings achieved as a percentage of operating costs –4.3% (target is 5%). <i>This is accumulative and 4.3% was achieved within the first 3 months of the financial year.</i> 



Recipe: Creamy Chicken & Leeks

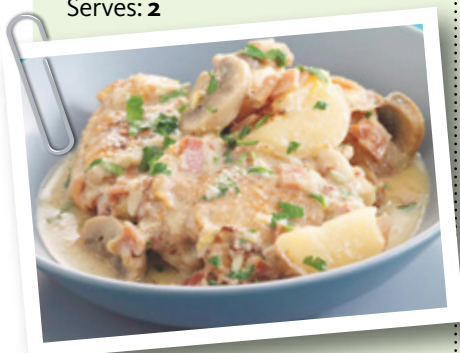
Prep time: **10 minutes**
 Cooking time: **20 mins**
 Difficulty level: **Easy**
 Serves: **2**

Ingredients

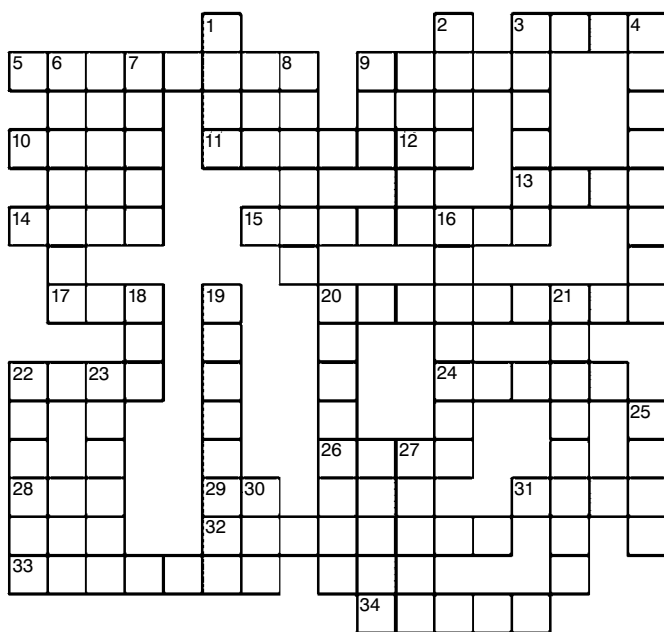
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3 rashers unsmoked streaky bacon, chopped
- 2 skinless boneless chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 2 leeks, sliced into thin rounds
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 300ml chicken stock
- 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard
- 2 tbsp crème fraîche

Per serving:

Kcal: 384 Carbs: 10g
 Saturates: 7g Sugar: 4g
 Protein: 42g Fat: 20g
 Fibre: 3g Salt: 1.75g



1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and fry the bacon for 2 mins. Add the chicken, then cook with the bacon for a further 2-3 mins, until the pieces begin to turn golden. Tip in the leeks and cook gently for 10 mins until wilted and tender.
2. Stir through the flour and gradually add the stock, stirring constantly. Add the wholegrain mustard and crème fraîche, stir again, then simmer gently for 5 mins until the sauce is slightly thickened and creamy.
3. Serve as a casserole with some potatoes mixed in or with jacket potatoes.



Autumn Crossword

Please cut out and return your completed puzzle to the address at the bottom of this page, remembering to include your name, address and contact number.



ACROSS

3. Cars travel on this
5. Woollen garments
9. Plural of goose
10. An angel has this
11. To make smooth
13. Things aren't always as they.....
14. Who, what, where,
15. Vegetables with many eyes
17. Maple leaves often turn this colour
20. The first month of autumn
22. Cautious
24. A tree with white, papery bark
26. To raise children

DOWN

1. Grows on a tree
2.ager
3. Playtime in school
4. Last month of autumn
6. Sunny, cold, rain e.g.
7. The nut from an oak tree
8. Spring, summer, autumn, winter
9. Fetch
12. your supper
16. Autumn month
18. Opposite of night
19. Large orange fruits which grow on vine
20. Nut hoarding animal
21. Used to carry school books
22. What you get from a fireplace
23. One who reads
25. Opposite of hot
27. Brownish yellow colour
30. He is here right now

Survey winner

The winner of our quarterly lettable standard survey, and receiving £25 in vouchers was Mrs Plummer, of Connaught Court, Middlesbrough.

