

“Points of View” Interview 2

On opening her door to me I was greeted with a warm smile “Come in Denis, what would you like tea or coffee” I had met Brigitte before, she is a very nice person, always well groomed, one of those people who look good, no matter what they are wearing.

Brigitte has very good taste, she has made her house both beautiful and comfortable; we sat on her large cream leather corner sofa and chatted about her life.

Although Brigitte was born in Leicester, her family moved into Rutland when she was a child, “so I think of myself as a Rutlander” she said.

Brigitte divorced some ten years ago, she had worked as a Nanny, then moved on, as an administrator in the local dairy, then moved on yet again to the Oakham School, where she first worked in the Laundry then was successful in her application for the prestigious position of Matron, a post she has held for the last eight years.

“I really enjoy my work” she says “but you do get a few surprises: for instance, the other day I became aware that the boys outside who were involved in a huge snow ball fight was getting just a little out of hand, I opened my door to shout at them to tone it down a bit - just in time to catch a snowball travelling at very high speed, right in the face! I didn't have to say much to them, I think they got the message, just from the look on my face”

Our conversation turned to the proposed transfer of stock from RCC to Spire, I asked what her feeling were at this stage of the proceedings. Brigitte thought for a few moments “I am worried about two things” she said, “First, the rents, are they going to go up when Spire takes over? And what about repairs and maintenance, are we going to get the quality of repairs that we have had with The Council.”

Brigitte went on to tell me about the fiasco she had a couple of years ago, when she had a new fitted kitchen. The Leicester Company that started the job did not finish it! Another company had to take the project over, in all the whole process took ten days to complete! As some 'consolation' she was told by the fitters that normally they are allowed up to twenty-one days to complete one kitchen!

“How anyone can be expected to manage without the full facility of a kitchen, I really can't imagine” she said - quite frankly, neither can I!

I explained that, at the moment, Spire were managing the Council Houses on behalf of Rutland County Council, they are having to work within a tight financial budget, if Council Tenants vote “yes” to the change then things will be totally different, Spire will have so much more money to spend on the upkeep and improvement of their housing stock, kitchen and bathrooms being a priority.

Regarding rents, there is strict legislation laid down by the Government. Housing Associations, like Spire, which is a 'not-for-profit Company' will not be allowed to increase rents any more than the Council would have done over any period of time.

We talked about the Offer Document which will be crucial in regard to the vote.

The Steering Group and the Rutland Tenants and Leaseholders Partnership (RTLTP) are trying to get as many opinions from tenants as they possibly can, so that these ideas and suggestions can be included as requirements in the Offer Document.

This Offer Document, if accepted by tenants by way of a 'yes' vote, becomes a legal document, any and all promises made by Spire within that document becomes law and must be adhered to by Spire.

I can understand the concern of people like Brigitte. She is very proud of her home, and wants to be sure that it will be maintained to a high standard, and, like most of us, are fearful of excessive rent rises.

We are all suspicious of change, but, if progress is to be made, change is inevitable.

Denis Owens
RTLTP
February 2009