

# TENANTS' VOICE

An independent newsletter produced for tenants and leaseholders

## SPIRE HOMES & THE LONGHURST GROUP – A QUICK GUIDE

One of the most common questions we are asked is: Who is the Longhurst Group? And how does Spire Homes fit into it?

If you visit the website – [www.longhurst-group.org.uk](http://www.longhurst-group.org.uk) – you will see that the Longhurst Group is based in Boston, Lincolnshire and is a leading regional organisation managing more than 15,000 homes in around 40 local authority areas.

### SO WHO IS IN THE LONGHURST GROUP?

#### 1. Longhurst Homes

Registered in 1971 this association is the founding member of the Group and owns and manages more than 5,300 homes in areas around Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Norfolk.

#### 2. Home From Home

Is a charitable subsidiary of Longhurst Homes which works with older and disabled people.

#### 3. Friendship Care And Housing

The newest member of the Group, joining in May 2006. This association operates mainly in Birmingham, Derby and Charnwood, and owns and manages 3,600 homes.

#### 4. Havelok Homes

A member since October 2003, this association works in North East Lincolnshire and South Humberside. It manages a stock of nearly 1,800 homes.

#### 5. Spire Homes

Spire is based in Rushden and the youngest housing association in The Longhurst Group. It is itself a stock transfer association which received 3,500 homes from East Northamptonshire District Council in February 2001.

#### 6. Keystone Developments

The final member of the Group is this not-for-profit company set up in 2001 to develop homes for sale on behalf of the Longhurst Group.

The Longhurst Group also leads a consortium called **Blue Skies**. Sixteen housing associations (managing around 40,000 homes) work together to share costs and compete for development funds. In 2008 the consortium received an allocation of £42 million from the **Housing Corporation** to develop more than a thousand new homes.



### *A message from the RTLTP*

By now all our readers should have had a visit at home from Council staff or Spire staff. These home visits are to help explain the transfer proposal. We are very keen to hear from our readers about how their visit went.

- Were the staff helpful and well informed?
- Did they give you enough of their time?
- Were all your questions answered during the visit or soon after?

## 0800 0855 492

We also welcome aboard all the volunteers who have formed the **Transfer Steering Group** with us to keep a close watch on events and make sure Spire Homes can deliver all their promises if we do vote for them.

### GET IN TOUCH – GET INVOLVED

[www.dwa-housingconsultants.co.uk](http://www.dwa-housingconsultants.co.uk)

click on **Tenants' Zone - Rutland**

*If you do not have a computer, some free internet access is available to all members of Rutland libraries.*

Photos: Tenants and Leaseholders in the Transfer Steering Group discussing options.



If we did vote 'yes' to a transfer to Spire Homes they are a member of The Longhurst Group.

Group structures (as they are called) are common in today's housing sector. They allow housing associations to share skills, avoid duplication of effort on things like computers and Health and Safety and so save costs. The Longhurst Group is the parent company of a team of other housing companies. The Group has been in operation since 2001 and employs almost 1000 staff. On a day-to-day basis Spire Homes operates independently with its own staff and its own Board of Management but buys in services from the Group.

**We want everyone to have their say about the future of our housing service**

**Transfer cannot happen without a secret ballot of all tenants this summer**

**Only if there is a majority 'yes' vote can a transfer go ahead**

## DWA

A NOT-FOR-PROFIT HOUSING CONSULTANCY COMPANY

**Genuinely Independent Advice**

**This is NOT a Council newsletter**

It has been produced with local tenants and leaseholders and **DWA**, your Independent Tenants' Advisors

**FREEPHONE  
0800 0855 492**

### ARE YOU A LEASEHOLDER?

This affects you too. You have a right to be consulted too.

**Get in touch – get involved**

Our day-to-day Housing Service in Rutland already comes from a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) – Spire Homes, who have been running our Housing Service since 2006.

USE OUR REPLY SLIP TO GET IN TOUCH OR FREEPHONE DWA 0800 0855 492

This newsletter is available in other languages and formats such as CDs and bigger print. If you know anyone who needs this kind of help please let us know. You can also visit our website on: [www.dwa-housingconsultants.co.uk](http://www.dwa-housingconsultants.co.uk) and click on Tenants' Zone – Rutland. Remember – no transfer can go ahead without a secret ballot.

**The second most common question we are being asked is about the credit crunch and whether it will have an impact on any transfer if we were to vote 'yes'. Britain appears to be suffering a crisis unheard of in living memory. So can Spire Homes and the Longhurst Group weather this (economic) storm and do they have the finances in place to deliver their promises to Rutland if there were to be a transfer?**

## YOUR QUESTIONS:

This recession is causing sleepless nights for many of us. How do we know that Spire Homes will survive? We already hear about Housing Associations getting into trouble.

If Spire has already borrowed money for their existing improvement programme in East Northants how do we know they can afford to pay back what they owe let alone borrow more?

And who is going to lend them money in the current economic climate?

## THE FINANCIAL FACTS:

The Council tells us that it will make sure Spire Homes has all the money it needs to complete the full programme of improvements to tenants' homes. We have also received a long letter from the Chief Executive of the Longhurst Group assuring us that the Longhurst Group and Spire Homes are financially strong and have the support of their funders and the regulator – The Tenants' Services Authority.

He also points out that their financial systems are independently audited and a set of the latest financial statements is available to anyone who wishes to see a copy.

His letter makes a number of important points:

- They have a 30 year business plan in place which is approved by their funders
- The total assets of the Longhurst Group are worth over £400 million
- Each year they collect about £65 million in rents, charges and other income

If you would like a copy of The Longhurst Group's latest Financial Statements or a full copy of the letter ring our freephone 0800 0855 492.

Rents can only change in line with a Government formula which covers both Council and Association rents. A transfer won't change the formula. How your rent is protected will be clearly stated in the Offer Document. And remember if there is a 'yes' vote and the transfer goes ahead all Offer Document promises have to be delivered.

## Competition Time

Congratulations to Mrs Dron of Ryhall, Mrs Davies and Mr & Mrs McEvoy of Empingham who were the first three correct answers opened. They each win a £20 voucher. Now try your luck again!

**How much do you know about what is going on?**

Q1. When do we vote 'yes' or 'no' to the transfer proposal? (tick the correct boxes)

This summer  This autumn

Q2. It's quite common for Housing Associations to join together in groups

No  Yes

Q3. By now everyone should have had a visit at home from Rutland County Council or Spire Homes.

Yes  No

Q4. Spire Homes is based where?

Rushden  Boston

Send your answers to Freepost SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA  
The first three correct answers to arrive will each win a £20 shopping voucher.

Don't forget to give us your name and address!

Name: .....

Address: .....



## GET IN TOUCH - GET INVOLVED

If you want to get involved or find out more please use this tear-off slip. Post it to DWA FREEPOST SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA. No stamp is needed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number (if you have one) \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Your question or comment \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Watch out for more newsletters, leaflets and local meetings.

## YOUR INDEPENDENT ADVISORS

When Landlords are thinking of making any major changes to the housing service Tenants and Leaseholders are entitled to their own independent housing experts to double check what the Council is doing or saying.

**DWA** are experienced Tenants' Advisors. They are a not-for-profit company who strongly believe that Independent Tenant Advisors should be just that – independent.

**DWA** works for Tenants and Leaseholders. They do not work for the council. **DWA** are here to explain the issues and make sure everyone understands what is going on.

Your Independent team of housing experts, community development workers and experienced tenants is led by Deborah Walthorne and David Williams. Their job is to make sure everyone gets the information they need about what is going on. The Government expects Councils to pay for this service so that expert professional advice is completely free for tenants and leaseholders at the point of delivery.

When we use the word 'Tenant' (or 'Tenants' or 'all Tenants') in this newsletter we are referring to secure and introductory Tenants of Rutland County Council. You may receive lots of unofficial information over the next few months. If you are not sure about anything please check with your Independent Tenants' Advisors to make sure you have all the facts. The Freephone 0800 0855 492 is open between 10 am and 3 pm Monday – Friday. It is free to landline callers. If you use a mobile phone there may be a fee – check with your phone company. Out of hours you can leave a message on our answerphone. We will ring you back if you leave your name and full telephone number – don't forget to tell us your area code. You can write to DWA at Freepost SWC 5119 Telford TF8 7ZA. No stamp is needed.

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