

Winter 2021/2022

# voice

Informative news and advice from Watford Community Housing

- In conversation with Luther Blissett
- Finding your perfect home
- Supporting the LGBT+ community
- How residents are helping us improve services
- And more!



watford  
community  
housing

# In conversation with Luther Blissett

The former Watford FC player and local legend joined us at our latest development – which is part of our programme to deliver much-needed homes for social rent.



**In response to the growing need for quality, affordable housing, we're working closely with Watford Borough Council to deliver a £15.2m programme of 56 new homes for social rent.**

Former England footballer and Watford legend Luther Blissett (Deputy Lord-Lieutenant for Hertfordshire) is lending his name to Luther Blissett House, which is at the heart of the programme. Situated on Raphael Drive, the development will consist of 12 three-bedroom flats and 5 two-bedroom flats to be let for social rent.

After a recent tour of the site, which is scheduled for completion in early 2022, Luther sat down with us and told us a bit about why social housing is so important to him:

**Q Could you tell us about your experience with social housing?**

**A** I came to England from Jamaica in 1964/65 and we lived in social

housing for many years. My mum worked three jobs and my dad was a carpenter, and with seven children money could be tight.

At the time, we couldn't even think about buying, and affordable social housing gave us this amazing stability. It's that stability that is vital to families and particularly to young people growing up in the UK.

I feel incredibly fortunate with where I grew up, living where I did there was a palpable sense of community – everyone got on and looked out for each other. I don't think you can ask for anything better for young people than that togetherness and team spirit.

**Q Why have you decided to put your name to this development?**

**A** I'm proud and I'm in awe to be given the opportunity to put my name to this. Obviously, it's important to me because of where I grew up and how I was

raised by my parents, but I also want to credit Graham Taylor's influence too.

Graham reminded me, John Barnes and that entire team of how privileged we were to be playing top-flight football for Watford at that time. He never let us forget that it was the community around us that was paying our wages and how it was crucial that we give back to a community that supported us so passionately.

We've actually just started the Former Players' Club, to continue our community work in Graham's name, so there's more of that on the horizon.

**Q Why do you think social housing is so important to the future of our communities?**

**A** When I was growing up in social housing, it was almost like a school uniform. No one was looking at what other people had and thinking of themselves, we all just looked after each other and that created a strong, caring community. That's why I'm so happy to see that Luther Blissett House will have a dedicated community hub – it will be brilliant for the residents to have that shared space to put on community events, fundraising initiatives, and sports clubs.

On a wider note, it's near impossible for regular people in the UK to get on the property ladder and buy at the moment. Privately renting can be ridiculously expensive too and there has to be this option of affordable housing for those who don't have the financial capacity to keep up with massive market rates. I also think for private landlords that are renting out multiple properties there should be some form of quota at an affordable rent level, but that's another conversation for another time...



# Supporting the LGBT+ community

We're committed to making our communities more welcoming and inclusive. Recently, we've been working to support our local LGBT+ community.

Earlier on this year, Hertfordshire's biggest LGBT+ event took place in Cassiobury Park. We were proud sponsors of the Health and Wellbeing marquee at Herts Pride, where we had a great time catching up with some of our tenants and letting everyone know about our commitment to championing inclusivity and diversity, as well as creating safer and friendlier communities for all.

More recently, the Sexuality and Gender Identity network of our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion group also held their first open meeting at our Clarendon Road office in November. The event encouraged our LGBT+ customers to join us over some food and bubbles, to discuss how we as

a social landlord can do more to support people exploring their gender or sexual identity. We were very pleased to be joined by Clive Duffey, Herts Pride Director and co-founder for Ask for Clive, and Tyson Martin, CEO and Founder for Hertfordshire LGBTQ+ Health and Wellbeing CIC, and Chair for Herts Pride.

The attendees discussed topics including the challenges the LGBT+ community are facing within Watford, how we can provide the best possible support to the community and an update on our House-Proud Pledge pioneer accreditation. Keep an eye out for the next resident evening meeting!



## Helping people find the perfect home!

To help tackle the growing demand for family homes in Hertfordshire, we've held two mutual exchange events at The Harebreaks and Leavesden Green Community Hubs, helping tenants find an appropriately sized home.

A huge thank you to everyone who came along, as these open events proved popular, and we heard from more than 30 families wanting to find out more about their housing options. We've helped 21 residents find a home better suited to their needs since the start of April this year.



Missed the events? Not to worry! You can call us on 0800 218 2247 to discuss finding the right sized home for you. And look out for more of these events in 2022!



## Raising money for local charities

We've been busy fundraising for charities who provide vital support to local people recently. Our Independent Living team and the residents of Hollytree House came together for a coffee morning which raised almost £400 for Macmillan Cancer Support. It was attended by 26 tenants, family members and our staff, raising money through a table-top sale and a raffle.

A team from Watford Community Housing also took part in Peace Hospice Care's 'Pedal for the Peace' event. We came together with other companies and community groups to collectively cycle a distance equivalent to the circumference of the world and raise £30,000!

## Want to get on the housing ladder?

Shared ownership makes it easier for first-time buyers to afford their home, as the amount of money required for a deposit is much lower than when you buy a property on the open market.

With shared ownership, you pay a mortgage on the share of the property that you own and pay us rent for the remaining share. In some cases, you can start with as little as 25% - and you only pay a deposit on your share.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

## The latest news from the Gateway Membership Team – which represents you!

# How residents are helping improve our services



**Did you know that Watford Community Housing is a community gateway housing association, which means that residents have the chance to have more of a say over what we do? Tenants and communities are at the heart of our decision-making and we have a number of membership opportunities that give you the chance to influence major decisions about our future.**

If you are one of our tenants, you can become a full member, and if you are not a tenant but still from our communities, then you can become an associate member. All members vote on key decisions, such as any changes to the rules that govern how we operate, giving you a real say in how we are run.

### Our first scrutiny sprint event

On 1<sup>st</sup> November we held our first 'scrutiny sprint' on the topic of damp and mould. The attendees discussed a range of topics including what causes damp and mould, statistics on the number and types of

cases we have dealt with over the last few years, how much it costs us to fix issues caused by damp and mould, complaints, and their own experiences.

It was a great opportunity for our tenants to directly influence and scrutinise our performance to ensure we are constantly improving our services and our customers' experience with us. We also followed up the success of the scrutiny sprint with a Tenant Question Time event, to enable more tenants to ask questions on this subject.

### Giving you a voice

These scrutiny sprints are just one of the many ways our residents can get involved. We also give residents opportunities to get directly involved with our work, improving communities and delivering better services.

Whatever skills you have, and whether you have plenty of time to spare or just an hour here and there, there's something for you in our Involvement Menu.

You could help us to review funding bids from community groups, join one of our scrutiny panels to help improve our services, or apply to join our Gateway Membership Team (GMT).

Made up of residents from our communities, the GMT are your representatives within Watford Community Housing. The team meets regularly, working with us to help set our priorities and influence our decisions, keeping residents at the heart of what we do.

The GMT works closely with our Group Board on key issues, such as the decision to offer lifetime tenancies as standard, rather than fixed-term tenancies. After discussion between the team and the Group Board, it was agreed that this was in tenants' best interests, giving people the assurance of a safe and decent home for the future.

The GMT has also worked with our Community Engagement team to help provide vital support to residents who have been having a difficult time as a result of the pandemic.

### Diary dates – get involved!

In our next scrutiny sprint and Tenant Question Time, we're focusing on customer contact. We'll look at the service you receive when you get in touch with us, including how calls are handled.

**Scrutiny sprint – 16<sup>th</sup> February**

**Tenant Question Time – 16<sup>th</sup> March**

**Would you like to take part?**

Email [community@wcht.org.uk](mailto:community@wcht.org.uk) to find out how you can get involved.

## All-new community services at our Hillside Hub!

Working with Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) and other key local organisations, we've unveiled a brand new range of services at our Hillside Community Hub!

We've teamed up with TRDC and a range of outreach services including Citizens Advice, Herts Mind Network and Three Rivers Healthy Hub, to offer a range of services

including employment guidance, domestic abuse support, and health and wellbeing advice.

Find out more about the groups and activities at the Hillside Community Hub here: [www.wcht.org.uk/hillside](http://www.wcht.org.uk/hillside)

