

A flipping good time

Wimbledon's MP put in a flipping good effort but still finished on the losing team at an annual charity pancake race this week.

The event, held outside the Houses of Parliament on Tuesday, was held to raise awareness of brain injury charity Rehab UK. Stephen Hammond joined three other MPs to race against teams representing the House of Lords and parliamentary journalists. But the Lords team triumphed in the tightly-fought contest, with the politics reporters finishing second.

Rehab UK supports victims of brain injuries and their families. This year the charity is also expanding its services to include people with learning difficulties or disabilities, such as motor neurone disease or cerebral palsy.



Flipping: Lord Addington, Betty Williams MP, Stephen Hammond MP, Martin Horwood MP, Lord Redesdale and Andrew Selous MP

Moat comes under fire from angry residents

Infestations of rats and mice, properties falling into disrepair and a 150 per cent increase in service charges have triggered a raft of complaints among Pollards Hill residents.

Councillors and Mitcham and Morden MP, Siobhain McDonagh, have been inundated with correspondences from the estate's residents fed-up with their local housing association. Ms McDonagh met with Brian Johnson, chief executive of the under-fire organisation Moat, on Tuesday to express her concern and demand action.

The MP is also encouraging residents to question if the increase in charges has been lawful, by seeking free advice from a leaseholder advisory service at a public meeting on Saturday.

She said: "People have come to me with very technical problems that are a detailed matter of law so I've brought in specialists who can give people the best possible advice."

"I've been concerned about the decline in management at Pollards Hill for some time."

A tour of the estate, intended to enable residents to share their problems with police and officials from Moat, was cancelled on Tuesday after the Wimbledon Guardian began investigating the complaints.

Pollards Hill resident Paul Shaw said: "A group of us are up in arms. Our homes are being neglected - they need a massive money injection. Our service charges have gone up 150 per cent in two years - it's not justified."

Moat chief executive, Brian Johnson, said: "We have held two surgeries on January 29 and 31 and have made plans to hold two more on March 4 and 19. We encourage any resident who has any questions to either contact us directly or attend one of the upcoming surgeries."

"As a provider of affordable housing, we do not seek to profit from any service charges but rather deliver high quality services our residents expect and deserve."

The public meeting and advice surgery that will also feature representatives from Moat runs from 11am to 1pm on Saturday at the Pollards Hill Community Centre in South Lodge Avenue.

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Stock transfer case 'biased'

by BEN THOMPSON

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Council house tenants are being bullied and coerced into passing their homes out of the hands of Merton Council, a national campaign group has claimed.

The local authority is proposing residents vote in favour of allowing a housing association to take ownership and control of their homes on the promise of a £129m investment over the next decade.

But the Defend Council Housing campaign has criticised Merton for presenting a biased argument in the build up to a spring ballot.

And as 60 per cent of the borough's housing stock falls below the Government's decent homes standard, some tenants have said their properties are being neglected to force the result of a vote this spring.

One resident contacted the Wimbledon Guardian with a letter from a council officer. It said work to repair a hole in the roof of the Phipps

Bridge estate would not be repaired unless there was a "positive outcome" in the ballot.

Alan Walter, chairman of the Defend Council Housing campaign, said: "Often local authorities will spend between £500,000 and £1m on promoting its argument with no need to promote a balanced debate. It's nothing short of bullying."

"Council housing is far from perfect but having a secure tenancy is stronger in law than any other tenancy agreement and you lose that under a social landlord. People need a landlord they can hold to account."

But the cash-strapped council said it was being stripped of resources to carry out adequate maintenance work as 35 per cent of rents had to be ploughed back to central Govern-

ment, costing the borough £9m.

Head of housing, Jo Williams, denied it was bullying, adding if tenants did not vote in favour of the transfer, 80 per cent of the borough's homes would fall below the decent standard in five years.

She said: "If there was to be a no vote we would have to decide what services we could continue to run, we would have to reduce staff, and the level of maintenance and repair work, which people already complain about, would be even less."

"I do believe this is a fantastic deal for residents and there will be just as much accountability with a housing association as there currently is with the council."

All material published by the council prior to the vote has to be vetted by a tenant's advisory service. More than 50 per cent of residents need to vote in favour of the stock transfer for it to be accepted.



Concerns: Residents Jessie Pennings, 14, Emily Kerr, 14, Georgina Kovacs and Jodie Chard, 12, under a damaged roof

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Young rugby players in Sevens heaven



Wimbledon Minis U9s players had a treat on Sunday when they arrived for training only to be coached by England Sevens' boss Ben Ryan, just days before he flew out to Dubai with his squad for the World Cup.

The former Wimbledon College student represented England at scrum-half at all age groups up to U21 level and now combines his national Sevens role with being specialist coach to England's leading number nines, such as Harlequins' Danny Care and Andy Gomarsall.

As well as putting the minis through their paces, Ryan also



Treat: Young players were coached by Sevens' boss Ben Ryan

held a master class for the youth section's scrum-halves.

Club chairman John Woods said: "We have a great set of coaches at Wimbledon but it is something special when you have the chance

to learn from someone like Ben. It was a day our players and coaches will remember for a very long time."

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Save our pubs

South London brewery Youngs is calling on Wimbledon MP Stephen Hammond to help save British pubs in the area.

In a letter addressed to MPs in south-west London, Youngs' chief executive Stephen Goodyear has appealed to politicians to back the Axe the Beer Tax - Save the Pub campaign and attend a vital briefing with ministers on March 4. Youngs started the campaign in reaction to the Government decision to impose further taxes on beer and pubs.

"Pub-goers already pay nearly a third of the price of every pint to the taxman. And now beer tax is set to rise by an incredible 40 per cent over the next three years," said Mr Goodyear. "Pubs are at the heart of our communities. They are where people meet and socialise, and they promote responsible and sensible drinking."

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