

News in Brief

Planning applications are being turned around in record time. Nearly 90% of all applications are dealt with within eight weeks – 30% higher than 12 months ago. It means the council is now exceeding targets laid down by the government by around 10%. Additional resources and a departmental restructuring are helping the change – vital as the number of applications has already risen by more than 300 so far this year.

Hambleton residents are being urged to apply for free grants to help keep warm this winter.

The North Yorkshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre says that up to 1,500 homes are eligible for the Government's 'Warm Front' grants scheme which funds insulation and heating improvements.

The grants – of up to £1,500 – are available to homeowners and private tenants receiving certain income or disability related benefits and credits.

People over 60 receiving qualifying benefits or credits who do not have adequate heating may be eligible for up to £2,500 to enable them to have central heating installed.

For more information call the Advice Centre on **0800 512012**. If you are not eligible you may still receive a 50% discount on insulation.

Sponsors for the 60,000 parking discs distributed every year are wanted!

Advertising space was sold on the discs for the first time in 2002.

The income helps offset the costs of the parks as well as offering district-wide advertising to local businesses.

Disc parking operates in short stay car parks in Northallerton, Stokesley and Thirsk. Parking is free but time is limited to control the availability of spaces.

The discs are distributed free to local residents and visitors through district council offices, tourist information centres and shops.

Businesses interested in sponsoring the discs should contact Clive Thornton on **01609 767052**.

Sports coaches can catch up on the latest legislation in three new courses being held over the winter months.

Almost 50 have taken in 'Coaching Good Practice' and 'Child Protection' sessions over the last few months. A further 'Good Practice and Child Protection' course takes place on February 23.

There is also a session on 'Coaching for Children and Young People' on December 8 and 'Equity in Your Coaching' on March 16.

To book – call Sally Cottam on **(01609) 767245/767198** or e-mail sally.cottam@hambleton.gov.uk

Two new strategies will cater for the needs of both Hambleton's younger and older populations.

The learning and support needs of the over 50's are being explored by the Hambleton Strategic Partnership.

The work will link into the annual conference of the Hambleton Over Fifties Forum being held on November 10th at Bedale Hall. For further information contact Paul Fisher on **01609 783066**.

The Young People's strategy for the district aims to build on the current work being delivered by organisations. It also focuses on improving partnership work and encourages organisations to take account of young people when developing future work.

The Strategy can be accessed on www.communityhambleton.org or call Sam Swinbank on **01609 767233**.

• Leaflets detailing the work of the Hambleton Strategic Partnership are currently being delivered to every home in the district by Royal Mail

A grant scheme which aids natural environment projects across Hambleton has already earmarked almost 75% of its annual budget.

The £8,000 'Natural Environment Fund' is used to help achieve the aims of the district's Biodiversity Action Plan - to create new wildlife habitats, such as ponds and small woods, and plant new countryside hedges and trees.

Grants have also been made to schools and Cub Scout groups for educational wildlife projects.

Any scheme that contributes to objectives in the Biodiversity Action Plan will be considered. The Action Plan can be found on the Council's website – www.hambleton.gov.uk – or copies can be viewed at Council offices in Northallerton, Stokesley or Easingwold. It can be bought on CD ROM or hard copy.

For more information on the Plan or the grants scheme call Glen Robinson on **(01609) 767165**.

A plan to help conserve and enhance the Howardian Hills was formally adopted this summer.

The AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Management Plan is the culmination of 18 months research and consultation. It details objectives to protect and improve the area over the next five years. Three of its key themes are:-

- a living and working landscape;
- natural beauty and tranquillity; and
- local communities.

The Plan was launched this summer by Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries, Ben Bradshaw and Chairman of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee, District Councillor Percy Featherstone, following its adoption by Hambleton District Council, Ryedale District Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Call Paul Jackson on **01653 627164** for more details.

A new second hand furniture store has opened in Thirsk.

FRADE (Furniture Reclamation and Delivery Enterprise) has taken over the old Thirsk and Sowerby Community Care Association store in Chapel Street.

The Stockton based charity offers furniture to people who are in receipt of means tested benefit or who have been referred by a health, housing or welfare officer.

Supported by the District Council, the warehouse - which provides a wide range of affordable household furniture – is open from 9.30-12.30 Monday to Friday.

For more information call FRADE on **01642 608791**.

The 'Property Enhancement Grant' can help people repair their homes. It is available to people on limited incomes to carry out maintenance and repair work – such as damp, electrical or roof work. Energy efficiency and security measures can also be included.

Up to £6,000 is available over three years.

It is available to anyone on guaranteed pension credit, council tax benefit, housing benefit, income support or income based job seekers allowance – but you must have lived in your home for three years and the property must be over 10 years old.

For a copy of the council's private sector housing assistance policy or information leaflet call **0845 1211 555**.

Easingwold Sports Study



Plans to improve sports facilities in Easingwold are taking shape.

The District Council is working with the town's Secondary School to explore the need for new facilities for the town – for use both by the school and the local community.

The results of a feasibility study into a new Sports Hall – commissioned by the Council – are expected in December.

"This study is looking at how sports facilities can be improved in Easingwold," said Cabinet Spokesman on Health, Councillor Neville Huxtable. "There is widespread support for this from the people living in the town as well as the surrounding villages – and, of course, the school. The school does not have a Sports Hall – it is using the same sports facilities now as it did 50 years ago and yet the school has doubled in size."

He said the need for improved provision is highlighted in the District Council's Leisure Strategy – which also recognises the value of the town's Galtres Centre.

"We are looking to provide new facilities which will complement the Galtres Centre – not compete with it," he added.

"There is a lot of hard work to do to get this project off the ground, but we must first find out if it is feasible – hence the study."

Council Officers are also working with Sport England and The Galtres Centre on the project.

BEWARE OF ROGUES

Businesses are being urged to beware of rogue agents looking to handle Rating Appeals.

The Valuation Office has already received a number of serious complaints about agents who offer unfair contract terms and demand up front payments.

They are warning businesses to be extra vigilant when appointing Rating Agents to handle appeals against their rateable values. With the new Rating List due to come into force from April next year many businesses will be approached by agents to process their appeals.

The Valuation Office recognises that many businesses will use specialist agents – but it advises that they should be wary of promised big savings. Big reductions in rateable values do not necessarily translate to big rates bill reductions because of transitional arrangements.

It advises businesses to:-

- beware of 'hard sell' telesales or doorstep sales;
- make sure they understand the contract terms and length;
- contact other businesses who have used the agent to gauge their satisfaction;
- be suspicious of agents promising big reductions without inspecting the property;
- check out the professional qualifications of the agent.

Businesses can appeal directly to the Valuation Office at no cost. Contact them on **(01423) 830800**.

New Homes Underway

Schemes to provide additional temporary homes to meet the growing demands from homeless people are being drawn up.

The District Council is working with Broadacres Housing Association on five sites in Northallerton, Thirsk and Easingwold.

It is hoped that the properties will be converted to furnished accommodation by early 2006. They will then be used as temporary homes for up to 20 people who would normally be placed in bed and breakfast houses.

The scheme will also see Thirsk Hostel modernised and refurbished to create self contained units for temporary accommodation.

"These schemes are just one prong of our work with local housing associations to secure more housing provision in the district," said Councillor David Blades, Cabinet Spokesperson on Housing.

"We want to create more affordable homes for people – as well as get homeless people out of hostels and bed and breakfast houses."

He said that the council is also working with Broadacres on:

- A £5 million development in North Road, Stokesley (pictured) to create a new extra care facility featuring 40 flats for the elderly. The scheme – with North Yorkshire County Council – will also see a new library and council offices open next spring.

- A £3.2 million scheme of homes for rent in Valley Road, Northallerton. The project will create a mixture of one, two, four and five bedroom houses and two and three bedroom bungalows by June next year.

Anyone wanting to enquire about housing provision should contact the housing team on **01609 767035** or e-mail: housing@hambleton.gov.uk

