



Connexus

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Issue 7
Winter 2021



Season's Greetings

A very warm and festive welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. There's been lots happening over the past few months at Connexus, from funding new spaces (p5) to building new places (P7).

We've also been working hard to try and tackle the repairs backlog built up following Coronavirus restrictions earlier in the year. A shortage of labour and materials is still causing delays in some areas and jobs can sometimes take longer because of the safety checks we must make to keep colleagues and customers safe. We also know that because of the volume of work we are doing, some of you have not been responded to as quickly as we would have liked and have sometimes had to call us back. If you've been affected by this, we apologise and are doing everything we can to try and reduce waiting times.

Overall performance has still been good however, and we encourage you to take a look at how we've been performing in our most recent annual report (more details on P3). As well as being able to scrutinise how we've been doing there's lots of information about how we're supporting customers, our communities and making your money go further. After all that focus on customer and community is what Connexus is all about.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and we'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback about future editions by taking our survey (P3). It will help us to continue providing you with information in our newsletter that is both useful and entertaining.

Have a great Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Chief Executive, Connexus

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Christmas Opening Hours

Our offices will close for the festive season at 2pm on Friday 24 December and will reopen again at 9am on Tuesday 4 January.

If you need to contact us during this time to report an emergency repair, please call 03332 31 32 33 and our Customer Service Centre will help with your urgent enquiry.

From all at Connexus, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Looking back - how did we do?

In September, we published the Connexus Annual Report. It's jam-packed with useful information and shows how we performed in 2020 and 2021. It also explains how we plan to improve in the future and respond to what you, our customers, are telling us. You can read and download a copy of the report by visiting our website www.connexus-group.co.uk/annualreport or request a printed copy by calling 03332 31 32 33.

Have your say

We're reviewing the look and feel of your newsletter. As part of this we'd like your feedback on what you'd like us to include in future newsletters and how you'd like it to look.

We'd really like to hear your thoughts!

Send us your feedback/suggestions by:

- Filling in the slip below and posting it to us
- Using our online form www.connexus-group.co.uk/newsletterfeedback
- Handing it to our staff

WIN! When you send us your feedback on the newsletter you'll be entered into a prize draw to win a £25 voucher!!

*For full Competition Terms and Conditions, please visit our website www.connexus-group.co.uk/competitions



MY FEEDBACK ON THE CURRENT NEWSLETTER:

Full name:

Address:

Postcode:

Do you always read our newsletter?

Yes No If not, why:

Do you like how the newsletter looks?

Yes Undecided No

If not, what would you change:

Do you like the type of articles featured?

Yes Undecided No

On a scale of 1 to 5 how useful do you find our newsletter?

Not useful Very useful
 1 2 3 4 5

What would you like to hear about in future issues of the newsletter? (Tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community News | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy Updates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal updates | <input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developments | <input type="checkbox"/> Advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet our team | <input type="checkbox"/> How we're performing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Company updates | |

MY SUGGESTIONS

(Remember, this can be anything from wanting to see more good-news stories, to reading important updates on what's going on at Connexus)

Please cut out and return by post to - FAO Comms & Marketing Team, Connexus, The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BW. Or visit our website: connexus-group.co.uk. Your feedback is very much appreciated!

Remembering Joan Grant



We recently learned that long-term involved customer Joan Grant had sadly passed away. Joan was involved for over 20 years, helping make our services better through her scrutiny work, organising events and encouraging customers to have their say.

Some of the events Joan organised included Kurling competitions, cake sales to raise funds for charity; Air Ambulance, Poppy appeal; fishing competitions at the local fishing pools (Froggats Pool), Gardening competitions and photography competitions.

Joan was involved with our planned maintenance contracts, was a tenant member of our equality and diversity panel and got involved in consultations and focus groups.

Our posts about Joan's passing on social media received some really kind comments from those who worked with her and got involved alongside her. Our thoughts are with Joan's family and friends, and she will be missed by everyone at Connexus.

To commemorate Joan, here are some pictures of her involved in various initiatives and events that were close to her heart.



Joan was a force to be reckoned with - always good at telling us where we were going wrong, but quick to praise us too. She made sure that Connexus - or SSHA as it was mostly for her, were doing the right thing and was instrumental in ensuring that our work was focused on tenants.

Joan's love of community and championing causes to help others not only extended to Connexus tenants, but also to the residents of Bishops Castle where she was also an active member of the community.

**Jacqui Gears
Communities Manager**



Be Involved and help shape your service

Customers have the opportunity to work with us and to make sure that we deliver on our promise of delivering high quality affordable housing.

We want you to be open and tell us about your good and bad experiences of our service. With your feedback and involvement, we can make sure our services are focused on what matters most to you.

Things you can get involved in:

- Community projects
- Check and challenge what Connexus does
- Discussions about services



To become an involved customer, you can sign up on our website at connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved, email hello@connexus-group.co.uk or call us on 03332 31 32 33.

Community Development Fund

Our Community Development Fund has been set up to help fund communities working together, on local projects, which have a positive effect in their area of Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Stretton Petanque

Residents of all ages in Church Stretton were grateful when back in August, Our Community Development Fund helped them towards constructing a terrain to be used for games of petanque. The community have enjoyed the social opportunities that the new petanque terrain has created, and Stretton Petanque have since confirmed that they will be organising coaching sessions, teams, games and even competitions in the coming year!

Kingsway court new bench



One of our Independent Living Scheme's in Whitchurch had a new seating area fitted for residents.

Herefordshire lore

Herefordshire Lore, run by a group of volunteers since 1989 have been collecting, publishing and archiving people's recollections and publishing a range of resources including their quarterly journal 'In Our Age'. They recently looked at the history of social housing in Herefordshire interviewing local residents to hear and record their stories, culminating in a special 'Pride of Place booklet on the history of social housing. For more information go to www.herefordshirelore.org.uk or call Jacqui Gears via 03332 31 32 33.

West Mercia Women's aid

The Connexus grant will allow West Mercia Women's Aid to kick start their Resettlement Project and benefit the community. West Mercia Women's Aid supports around 50 women and their children to move into permanent housing in Herefordshire each year.



Grants
up to
£5,000

Festival Martial Arts in Clehonger



The Connexus grant gave Festival Martial Arts a lifeline to come back from the lockdowns, as well as providing a club t-shirt for all our students.

Festival Martial Arts

Do you run a community group that could benefit from our Community Development Fund?

Visit connexus-group.co.uk/cdf for more info



Sandpits Refurbishment Scheme

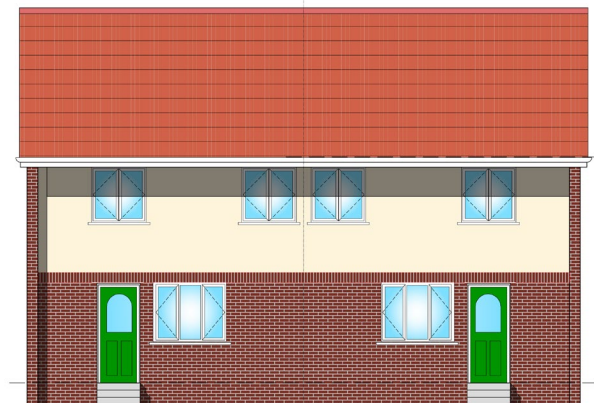
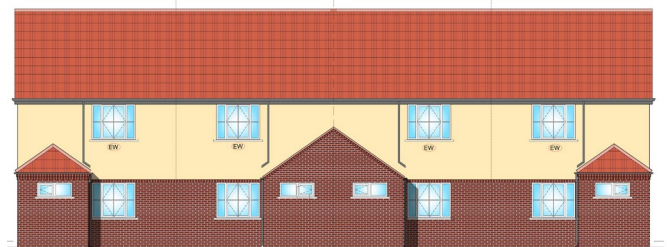
At Sandpits Avenue, Ludlow, renovation work is being planned which will run in phases over the next few years. Much of the work will focus on bringing the homes up to a modern standard but will include a number of large-scale environmental improvements.

Connexus will be installing new external wall insulation to the outside, digging up the concrete ground floors and insulating these and insulating the lofts fully too. There will be improvements to airtightness within the properties and we'll be replacing the existing heating systems with modern efficient boilers.

The homes will also be futureproofed and allow renewable and green technologies to be more easily retrofitted as they become available, for example the new ground floors will have underfloor heating. To counter the increased threat of flooding from rising global temperatures, new deeper flow gutters will be installed to remove rainwater more quickly.

As well as making the homes fit for the future, the work is also hoping to solve some of the traditional challenges that come from homes built in the early part of the twentieth century.

Damp and condensation are big problems at Sandpits and results in a lot of calls and visits each year. Connexus is taking the opportunity with the renovation to address the problems. There will also be damp proofing walls and floors, installing improved ventilation, and fitting modern windows and doors - all of which should help to improve the lives of our customers and reduce the time we spend managing the issues.



Developments

Find out about all our upcoming developments and how to find a home on our website (Connexus-group.co.uk). A few of our current developments across our counties:

Moreton on Lugg

- 22 homes
- 12 Social Rent - 1 x 2 bed bungalow, 1 x 3 bed bungalow, 5 x 2 bed houses, 4 x 3 bed houses, 1 x 4 bed house
- 10 Shared Ownership - 4 x 2 bed houses, 6 x 3 bed houses
- Phased completion from Summer 2022 to Autumn 2023

Minsterley



- 16 homes
- 10 Shared Ownership- 4 x 2 bed houses, 6x 3 bed houses
- 6 Affordable Rent - 6 x 2 bed houses
- Completing spring 2022

Our Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy properties are going fast, but we do still have some availability. For enquiries about Shared Ownership or Rent to Buy homes:
connexus-group.co.uk/shared-ownership
hello@connexus-group.co.uk

Bath Street, Hereford

- 47 homes
- 47 Affordable Rent apartments - 22 x 1 beds & 25 x 2 beds
- Completing early in 2022

Gatcombe Way, Telford

- 24 homes
- 18 Social Rent - 2 x 1 bed flats, 2 x 2 bed bungalows, 7 x 2 bed houses, 2 x 3 bed bungalows, 5 x 3 bed houses
- 6 Shared Ownership - 3 x 2 bed houses, 3x3 bed houses
- Phased completion between Summer 2022 and Autumn 2023

Tillington Road, Hereford

- 44 homes
- 13 Affordable Rent - 1 x 1 bed bungalow, 1 x 2 bed bungalow, 1 x 3 bed bungalow, 1 x 4 bed bungalow, 1 x 4 bed house, 6 x 1 bed houses, 2 x 2 bed houses
- 15 Rent to Buy - 6 x 2 bed houses, 9 x 3 bed houses
- 16 Shared Ownership - 8 x 2 bed houses, 8 x 3 bed houses
- Completing Spring 2022

Llewelin House, Oswestry, Shropshire

Our new development Llewelin House in Oswestry consists of 38 homes for independent living;

- 33 two-bedroomed apartments suitable for three people and
- 5 one-bedroomed, two person apartments

Within Llewelin House, there is a community room for all of the residents to enjoy on the ground floor; including a communal kitchen to help cater for the social events that will be held throughout the year. Landscaped communal grounds wrap around the building, which will give residents the ability to walk around and enjoy the outdoors.

The story behind the name

Llewelin House is named after Philip Llewelin (23 October 1940 - 1 July 2005), a British journalist and writer born in Oswestry.

Philip attended Oswestry School and Wycliffe College and went on to work as a journalist for the Oswestry

and Border Counties Advertiser and Shrewsbury Chronicle.

In 1969 he became a freelance writer. His work focused on his passion for cars and motoring working for publications including The Observer, Car Magazine, the Daily Telegraph, Truck magazine, The Independent, Car & Driver, and Automobile Magazine.

Llewelin was described as "one of the best motoring writers, if not the best, of the past four decades."



My Home Contents Insurance - Don't leave yourself at risk

Having the right contents insurance in place to cover your belongings is one of the most important things to consider when you rent or own your home.

Sometimes the unexpected can happen and no matter how careful you are, there's always a risk that your personal possessions could be broken, damaged or stolen.

Without the correct insurance cover, you could find yourself faced with large bills to replace your belongings such as furniture, clothing and your own household appliances.

It is important that you get the right contents insurance, with a trustworthy provider. The National Housing Federation has teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks, who provide the My Home Contents Insurance. This is a specialist insurance scheme provided by Thistle Tenant Risks and the policy covers the contents and personal belongings for tenants in social housing against loss or damage from unforeseen events such as:

- fire
- theft
- flooding
- accidental damage

Being insured gives you peace of mind and the security of knowing that should anything happen as a result of an insured event that you're covered. So, don't leave yourself at risk. We strongly recommend that you have insurance through our provider of choice, Thistle, or by making alternative arrangements with another insurance provider.

All social housing residents are eligible to apply for the scheme, which offers a range of flexible payment options.

To find out more please visit our website <https://connexus-group.co.uk> and search 'Home Contents Insurance Scheme'.

Wishing you a safe and happy Christmas

The festive period is a time for having fun with family and friends. But it is also a time when accidents can occur when our guard is down, and our spirits are high. Decorations, fairy lights and even trees can become hazards, but there are simple steps we can all take to lessen the risks and enjoy a hazard free Christmas.



- Check your Christmas lights carry the British Safety Standard sign
- Test your smoke alarms regularly and only remove batteries when replacing them
- Never overload electrical sockets. Always switch Christmas lights off and unplug them before you go to bed.
- Make sure your family and visitors know how to escape in an emergency



- Never place candles near your Christmas tree or materials that can catch fire easily
- Decorations can burn easily - so don't attach them to lights or heaters
- Most fires start in the kitchen. Avoid leaving the cooker unattended.
- Avoid cooking when under the influence of alcohol.

Check in this Christmas

Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to accidental fires in the home, which is why we are reminding people to take extra care over the festive period to ensure that their families and loved ones have a safe and merry one. If you can, take time to check on older relatives and neighbours this Christmas.

For more information about fire safety and for advice visit www.connexus-group.co.uk/fire-safety

We're here to help this winter

Winter puts an extra financial strain on us all, with higher energy bills, festive spending and other costs quickly adding up. As a Connexus tenant, you can get advice and support from our specialist team. If you're having difficulties managing your finances, it is important to let us know as soon as possible, so we can support you.

We will always provide help for you stay in your home.

Some of the things we can do to help:

- Budgeting Advice
- Benefit Advice
- Help with claiming benefits
- Help to challenge benefit decisions
- Make referrals to foodbanks
- If you have rent arrears, we can make repayment arrangements to help prevent any further action being taken
- Signposting to external agencies and charities

If you are worried about how you are going to pay your rent or your circumstances are changing, please contact us straight away. You do not need to be in rent arrears to contact us for help.

[Connexus-group.co.uk/benefit-changes](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/benefit-changes)

03332 31 32 33

@weareconnexus

Hello@connexus-group.co.uk

The Autumn Budget 2021

There has been a lot in the news recently about changes to benefits, rising energy prices and an increase in the cost of living. In the recent budget statement, the Government announced that the Universal Credit taper rate is to be reduced from 63p to 55p by 24th November 2021. Alongside this there is an increase in the work allowance of £500 pa.

If you're worried about how you're going to manage or just want to know how the changes to Universal Credit will affect you, please contact our Tenancy Sustainment Team. They can help you with budgeting as well as calculating how much you are likely to get once the changes come into effect.

Energy saving tips this Winter

Here's some top tips on saving money on your energy costs this Winter:

- You can save by washing up in a bowl rather than using a running tap
- Washing your clothes at a cooler temperature can help reduce your energy usage (30/40 degrees)
- Putting lid on your pots and pans when you're cooking
- Turning off plugs for your devices, like phone chargers when you're not using them
- Turning off your TV at the socket rather than using standby
- If you use a meter, you can check them before you leave your home. You can then switch anything unnecessary off



Learning from complaints

Your feedback is important. It allows us to identify where we need to improve and understand when we're doing well. Here's a few examples of what we've been doing recently and what we've learnt from some of your feedback:

- We launched a new complaints policy and procedure earlier this year. It has been designed to make reporting complaints easier, the process more understandable and allow issues to be resolved more effectively.
- Do what we say we will, especially when it comes to calling customers back. We're improving how we use technology by reducing the number of different systems where we store information and keep a record of when you contact us.
- We've introduced regular training for our colleagues to improve our service and communication with you.

We encourage all feedback from customers and have lots of ways for you to have your say.

You can:

- Use our consultation portal available at consult.connexus-group.co.uk/
- Be an involved customer - Connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved
- Email - hello@connexus-group.co.uk
- Online form - connexus-group.co.uk/aboutcontact/contact
- Social - [@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus)
- Phone - 03332 31 32 33

For more information about our performance around complaints check out our annual report, available on our website: connexus-group.co.uk/annualreport

Our 'Better Value Together' Strategy Launch

You may have previously heard us use the term Value for Money? This is something that is extremely important to us all, particularly getting the balance of understanding what matters most to you, our customers. We want to get the best possible service for the most efficient cost, along with all the work we complete as an organisation.

To represent this more accurately, we have recently rebranded Value for Money, which is now called Better Value Together. Alongside this our Board have now approved our Better Value Together Strategy, which sets out our approach, priorities and outputs to be achieved over the next three years.

How do we achieve Better Value Together?

Better Value doesn't always mean going with the cheapest option - we want to make sure we get the best quality product or service, for the best price. Our colleagues help contribute to achieving this in many ways, from negotiating on a quote, car sharing, using digital communications where possible, or even booking courses where discounts or offers are available.






We'll be sharing further updates in future newsletters about Better Value Together, but in the meantime to see how we have improved, please read our latest Annual Report, or visit the designated Better Value Together page on our website.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for us please get in touch via hello@connexus-group.co.uk

Check out our Connexus Careers

Connexus provides an excellent offer for colleagues which includes flexible working options combined with some fantastic benefits.

Some of the benefits:

-  Up to 30 days annual leave & Bank Holidays
-  Generous pension scheme
-  Westfield Health healthcare plan
-  Enhanced Maternity & Paternity pay (increasing with length of service)
-  Continual learning and development opportunities
-  Tools, Van & Uniform provided (where relevant)

Sign up for job alerts
connexus-group.co.uk

03332 31 32 33 | hello@connexus-group.co.uk
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HM Government



BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY THIS WINTER

**WITH THE FLU VACCINE
+ COVID-19 BOOSTER**

Flu and COVID-19 can both be life-threatening and spread more easily in winter. If you're 50 or over, you are eligible for a free flu vaccine and a COVID-19 booster.

Get vaccinated. Get boosted. Get protected.
nhs.uk/wintervaccinations