

## Gary Waller: Brighton Landlord

**The sun is shining and the weather is warming up. I hope that you have all survived the winter without too much mould and damp!**

Yet another editorial where we are still waiting for decisions on the final detail of the Renters Rights Bill and EPC standards, one assumes that this government like the previous one is not finding it so easy to bring in legislation that will balance tenants rights against all the landlords selling up and retiring to the sunshine. Needless to say that we live in unsettling times and when faced with a lack of confidence people sit tight. They don't go and buy the next investment or decide on fitting the new bathroom or kitchen. All the trades are reporting a drop off in business. Despite newspaper headlines to the contrary in my little world, house prices had taken a significant drop (20%) and hence there are opportunities and better

yields to be had than we have seen for a while.

But regardless of the government or international uncertainties people still want to rent and the vast majority of tenants look after the property and pay their rent (some even pay on time)!

My advice would be to continue to look after your customers and invest in your property. If you have tenants that don't pay or are anti social then harden your heart and give them notice, because that process will clearly get much more difficult. Make sure that you educate yourself and make sure that your processes are absolutely spot on, tenant background checks, right to rent check, guarantor checks and document and keep records. Good luck.

**In this newsletter you can expect:**

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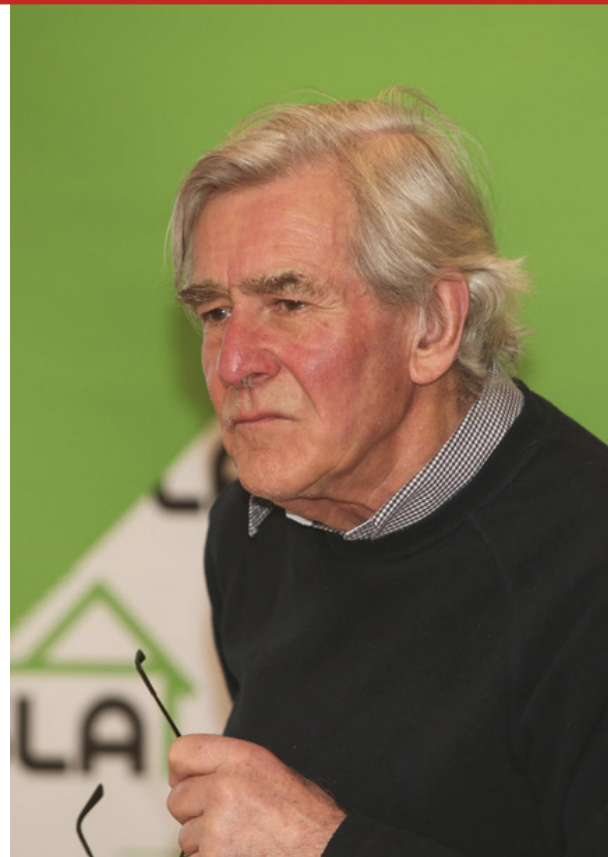
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# Mike Stimpson's Column

**I am afraid I have little good news to report. Although rents are most reasonable in many areas, regulations are becoming so unreasonable that one wonders whether being a private landlord is a sensible way to earn income. This is not to say for one minute that there are not opportunities, but the attitude of government is such that landlords will face many severe obstacles which I shall now go through.**

In the last newsletter I made reference to an appeal which I raised against a Judge in Brighton County Court; who refused to give me a Possession Order under Ground 8 for rent arrears. That appeal took place some weeks ago, and it was decided that the Judge in question had no right, in law, not to grant a Possession Order at the first hearing. This by the way is the second time I personally have experienced Judges in Brighton County Court that do not follow housing laws, and think they can overrule those laws.



In fact, I still have another case where the Judge adjourned the hearing for one month – he set a new hearing date, which I attended, only to find that the court had not listed the case and to date, have been given no reason for doing so. It has now been listed for the 14th May; some three months after the first hearing, and of course the tenant can legally occupy property and not pay any rent, until I obtain a Possession Order.

## Mandatory Licensing

Some members will have properties that are subject to Mandatory Licensing; that is those properties that are let to tenants with shared facilities. Mandatory Licensing was introduced many years ago, and the license is renewed every five years. It seems that the local authority's housing department do not keep records of the result of the licensed requirements. When the next five year inspection is carried out, all previous

agreed amendments etc are simply ignored. The inspection is carried out on the basis that the property has not been inspected before. What this does, it forces landlords to set out significant responses to requirements, where previously agreements have been made in respect of most of those requirements. Such action by local authorities, and not keeping records or what has been agreed in previous inspections, is unacceptable.

## Are county courts out of control?

Members will be aware if a tenant fails to pay the rent, then the landlord has to apply to the county court for an Eviction Order.

To use a more certain ground, Ground 8, a tenant must be a minimum of eight weeks in arrears at the time of application and at the date of the hearing.

It is often the case today that county court judges do not give Eviction Orders, but adjourn the cases without giving good reason for doing so. Once that happens, the case is unlikely to be re-listed for up to three months. If at that hearing the Judge does give a Possession Order of 14 days, if the tenant does not leave, the landlord is required to obtain the service of the court bailiffs – that can take a further three months before the eviction is effected.

It follows therefore that when a landlord has the misfortune to go to court, it can take anything up to nine months to effect an eviction. It seems that the courts are out of control, and it seems that some judges do not follow the regulations, and often give no reason for not doing so.

When the Renter's Rights Bill becomes law, probably later this year, then a landlord cannot even commence legal proceedings against a tenant until that tenant is a minimum of three months in arrears. That of course will only add to the time a tenant can legitimately occupy accommodation without paying the rent. This is the most unsatisfactory situation and members should be extremely careful that potential tenants have the right references, background etc. to give some assurance that they will pay the rent and act in a proper tenant-like manner.

Any member who has tenants not currently paying the rent on time or in full, should be given Section 21 Notices (No Reason Notices), prior to the Section 21 being abolished.

## Leasing Properties – Brighton & Hove City Council

Members may be well aware that for many years I have leased eight houses in the centre of Brighton to Brighton & Hove City Council, under various leasing schemes.

I always accepted rents much below the level of the local housing allowance. For very many years, I was most satisfied with the service provided; by either a local Housing Association or Brighton & Hove City Council, who eventually took over management letting of my properties from various Housing Associations.

Over the past 2-3 years, I have found that the management of those properties, and the tenants occupying them, has simply been ignored by the local authority. Tenants have been allowed to do whatever they like and have caused serious damage, yet Brighton & Hove City Council has said it has been 'fair wear and tear'. I am taking back all eight properties, and I am ashamed to see the condition that Brighton & Hove City Council has left them in, its whole attitude towards compensating me for their failings, and needless to say, I will not ever go in for further leasing of my properties.

Members should be warned that although Brighton Council promotes its leasing scheme, offers landlords fairly low rents, it is not currently providing the appropriate service. Members should therefore be very aware of leasing properties.



# Revaluations of council tax

Tenants in non self-contained accommodation are not required to pay council tax direct to the local authority from 1st December 2023. I have 22 tenants living in non self-contained accommodation. I informed Brighton & Hove City Council in January 2024 of those tenants, the properties they occupied, and the breakdown of the accommodation in those properties (self-contained or non self-contained). I expected therefore, for the local authority to actively seek revaluations by the Valuation Office, in order that my tenants need not pay council tax; both to the local authority and to me as a proportion of what I would be paying when the revaluations occurred. Despite continued emails of Brighton & Hove City Council's Council Tax Department, it has still not had the properties revalued and charges my tenants full council tax, whilst I am attempting to obtain a proportion from them, towards the council tax that I will be required to pay as from December 2023.

Some of my tenants have been prosecuted for non-payment; others are in rent arrears as they are unable to pay the council the council tax, and myself. I have also had to lend some of my tenant's money in order to pay the council tax demanded by the council, and because of the absolutely unacceptable way in which the council is acting, I too have been summonsed for non-

payment of council tax on properties that are occupied by my tenants. The situation is extremely distressing for some of my tenants, and I am receiving regular emails/ phone calls from them, demanding to know why they are still paying council tax to the council some 16 months after the new regulations were introduced.

I have been invited to attend a meeting on Friday 28th March, hopefully to get this matter sorted out, but what I envisage will happen, is that when the council know the element I will have to pay on each property, it will bill me in full on 1st December 2023, whereas I will find it most difficult, in fact impossible, to calculate the amounts owed by some of my tenants who have died, and others just simply are in extreme financial difficulties. Of course, the council will refund the council tax paid by my tenants since 1st December 2023, that is of course if they can find those who have since moved etc. This is a case that unless the local authority make big concessions as to my payments, I shall have no option than to take this case to the ombudsman.

It would be most interesting to know if any other members are still faced with the same situation as I am? Where the council have failed to deal with revaluations, and the consequences as mentioned.



# Rent Increases

Members hopefully are aware that the government is setting out new regulations of rent increases, when the Renter's Rights Bill becomes law. It is extremely important therefore if you have not already increased your rent for over 12 months, do so now to ensure you obtain the current market level for the accommodation you are providing. For what is happening in future, will be that you have to give two months notice of a rent increase, which can only be once in 12 months; losing the Section 13 procedure. If then a tenant is dissatisfied, they have the right to object to the increase and refer it to a first tier tribunal. When that tribunal assess the rent, a decision of the tribunal will be the date the new rent (if any) becomes effective, not a date the landlord proposed to increase the rent).

Members will also be interested to note that application to the first tier tribunal is free for the tenant, and therefore one can imagine many tenants objecting to the landlords' proposed increase, whereas if a member increases the rent now, there is no facility for the tenant to appeal to the first tier tribunal.

Members must understand that time is probably very limited, so if you have not increased your tenants' rent, do so now and ensure you get the proper rent for the tenancy, as in future it may well be more difficult.



# Summary

Having had to give members what I would describe as 'bad news', which will only increase when the Renter's Rights Bill becomes law. There are some very good prospective tenants, and it is essential that landlords take appropriate steps to avoid tenants who will be either anti-social or not pay the rent.

In this respect, all tenants previously on Housing Benefit, under retirement age or not in supported accommodation, are being transferred to Universal Credit. As a benefit, each tenant is being given two weeks' Housing Allowance which they would not usually be entitled to, prior to being transferred. However, the Universal Credit Department are not making smooth transitions; some of my tenants are not receiving a full benefit that they were from Housing Allowance, and others are not receiving anything at all currently. Again,

members taking on such tenants need to make sure that the rental is paid directly to you as the landlord.

Although there are still opportunities in the residential lettings market, officially if one takes into account the changes in the planning regulations, however in my own personal point of view, if I am to expand in any way, it will only be in the commercial sector – which does not involve the same regulations as those in residential.

**I wish you all a successful 2025, but we aware of the pitfalls and act to mitigate.**

*Michael Stimpson*





# How 1 investment type will shape the market in 2025

By Jeni Browne– Business Development Director – MFB

It seems that just as property investors come to terms with a challenge, the government enjoy throwing another one in to stir the pot. The particular challenge I'm referring to is the surprise hike to the Stamp Duty surcharge on additional properties, which penalises landlords for providing desperately sought-after rental homes.

But this will not deter our peers—landlords are fiercely resilient. Our number one priority is focusing on property investment opportunities that will boost rental yields and offer stability. Here, we look at what that is and how you can benefit from investing.

## Let's talk semi-commercial property

Semi-commercial property is a fantastic investment type for landlords with established portfolios, perhaps now more than ever.

Thanks to different Stamp Duty tax thresholds, purchasing these properties is typically cheaper than purchasing a standard buy to let, even more so in the wake of the new 5% surcharge.

As an example, here's a comparison of how much Stamp Duty you would pay for both property types (assuming you own at least one residential property and are purchasing from 1st April 2025):

For a **residential property** priced at £300,000, you will pay:

Stamp Duty to pay: **£20,000 (incl. 5% surcharge)**

For a **semi-commercial property** purchase comprised of flats above a commercial unit at £300,000, you will pay:

Stamp duty costs: **£4,500.**

Savings on purchase compared to a buy to let purchase for landlords: **£15,500.**

## The benefits

Based on our conversations with commercial lenders, semi-commercial is set to be busy this year. From the volume of applications and enquiries received, there is clear confidence in the rise in semi-commercial investment.

Here are some of the benefits of this property investment type:

- **Stamp Duty Savings** – Semi-commercial property is largely exempt from the 5% stamp duty surcharge, which significantly reduces your purchase costs.
- **Longer Leases** - Commercial property tends to be leased longer due to business use, so these properties give landlords a steady and reliable income. It also takes the stress out of the situation if your tenants in the residential part of the property decide to leave, as the commercial rent will likely cover it.
- **Higher Returns** – Semi-commercial property attracts much higher rental

yields than standard buy to let properties, giving you a well-deserved boost in your portfolio profits!

## Converting commercial properties to residential

The government hopes to speed up these types of conversions and increase rental supply in the market with improved planning permission processes. This can be a great opportunity for all landlords to explore.

You will need to apply for approval from your local council under permitted development. There are a number of steps you'll need to take:

1. **Check the building's classification:** Make sure it's in Use Class E (commercial, business, and service).
2. **Check the building's history:** Make sure the building has been in commercial use for at least two years and vacant for at least three months.
3. **Check the proposed changes:** Make sure the conversion doesn't increase the height of the building, lose floor space, or make the property unsuitable for its original use.
4. **Prepare the application:** Have an architect prepare designs and a planning package.
5. **Apply:** Submit a prior approval application to your local council.
6. **Wait for approval:** Wait for your local council to respond with a grant of prior authorisation.

Furthermore, you'll have to consider that:

- Local authorities can still turn down the conversion for a number of reasons.
- The conversion must be subject to prior approval.

## The finance for these property types

The right finance option for these property types depends largely on your portfolio plans. If you're looking to purchase a semi-commercial unit, then **Mortgage Finance Brokers (MFB)** can help you explore your rate options.

On the other hand, if you're looking to complete a conversion project, it's **bridging finance** that you'll be looking for. Again, we can discuss your options, how this finance type can work for you, and the associated costs to help you make a better-informed property investment decision.

Whatever you may be looking to do, our brokers would be delighted to help. We recognise the challenges you are facing in the market, and we're here to help you keep your mortgage costs down.

To speak to our team, call us on **0345 345 6788** or email **enquiry@mfbrokers.co.uk**.





# National Landlord Investment Show Celebrates Milestone 90th Event with Resounding Success in Old Billingsgate, London

The National Landlord Investment Show (NLIS) marked a significant milestone as it hosted its 90th event at Old Billingsgate, London this week on 19th March. The highly anticipated show proved to be a tremendous success, drawing **thousands of landlords, property investors, and property professionals**.

From the moment the doors opened at 8:30 AM until the event concluded at 5:00 PM, attendees engaged in exclusive panel discussions covering some of the most pressing topics in the UK private rental sector. The opening panel on the topic of surviving the Renter's Rights Bill, held in the main auditorium, exceeded capacity—underscoring the high level of interest and demand for expert insights on one of the biggest reforms in the private rental sectors. Key discussions throughout the day focused on important, engaging topics such as the Renters' Rights Bill, Women in Property, and a New Investors Masterclass among 50+ other expert seminars on referencing, investment tips and tax strategies.

Once again iHOWZ had an exhibition stand and our very own Peter Littlewood presented and took part in a panel discussion.

"We started organising live events and property exhibition shows as young landlords eager to learn about the private rental sector and how to manage our properties effectively. To think that from our humble beginnings in 2013, we've now reached the milestone of hosting our 90th show is truly incredible. We're absolutely thrilled with the turnout and success of this 90th event. While every show has been a success, this one feels particularly momentous, especially considering the upcoming changes that will impact the UK private rental sector. It's a privilege to continue to contribute to the industry by delivering such an informative and educational event" says **Tracey and Steve Hanbury, Founders of NLIS**.



The National Landlord Investment Show will continue to bring invaluable insights to landlords, investors, and property professionals across the UK through live events at several other locations across the UK in 2025 including Kent, Birmingham, Bristol, London and Manchester. In addition to the live shows, the National Landlord Investment Show has recently launched **UK Property News**, the go-to channel for the latest updates on the UK property market with expert insights, interviews and analysis. UK Property News is available to watch on YouTube on **Landlord Investor TV**, subscribe now for updates on the latest episodes.

**Next Stop: Kent – 30th April in Ashford International Hotel!**  
**REGISTER NOW**

*Established in 2013, the National Landlord Investment Show is the UK's Number One property investment exhibition, bringing together thousands of landlords, investors, and property professionals throughout the UK.*

## E-Bikes the Growing Risk

E-scooters and e-bikes are a feature of the transition to more sustainable transport, and their low cost makes them appealing to many tenants. The cost of living and cut backs in public transport have been a driver of the growing use and ownership of these personal transport modes.

Whilst a positive in removing the noise and pollution associated with traditional mopeds and motorcycles, landlords need to be aware of potential risks they may bring.

Landlords are reminded that they should provide clear guidance to tenants regarding the storage and charging of e-bikes and e-scooters.

### Trips, falls and fire exits

Like prams, traditional bikes and mobility aids, e-bikes and e-scooters pose a potential trip hazard and risk blocking fire exits. Transport for London have just announced a ban on non-folding e-bikes (presumably for similar reasons).

### Potential fire risk

In addition to trip and access/exit risks, landlords should be aware that there has been a steady rise in fires from e-bikes and e-scooters.

### E-bike and E-scooters Are The UK's Fastest-Growing Fire Trend

Fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in e-scooters and e-bikes have increased four-fold since 2020, resulting in deaths, hospitalisations, homelessness, and staggering financial losses. Since 2020, over 190 people have been injured, and at least 13 lives have been lost due to this tragic trend.

The UK is now facing a disturbing projection of nearly one e-bike or e-scooter fire per day this year, a significant leap from just over one per week in 2020.

According to the London Fire Brigade, on



average there was a fire every two days in 2023 in London. London Fire Brigade attended 143 e-bike fires along with 36 blazes involving e-scooters. Sadly, there were 3 deaths and around 60 injuries caused by these fires.

Many of these fires are caused by incompatible chargers, modifications to e-bikes, or faulty or counterfeit products which are purchased online. This includes chargers, lithium batteries and conversion kits for e-bikes.

### Summary

Consider adding a clause to your tenancy agreement detailing policy on storage of e-bikes and e-scooters

Provide guide to best practice

- where possible lock bike or scooter outside property
- battery can be removed and kept in defined area (not hallway or other high risk area)
- only use original manufacturer's charger
- do not leave on charge unless in the property and remove battery when charged
- ensure smoke alarms working and consider combined smoke and heat alarm for designated charging area
- regularly test alarms or ask tenants to confirm regular testing
- add as risk for periodic inspections

In the event of an e-bike, e-scooter or lithium-ion battery fire – **do not attempt to extinguish the fire**. Get out, stay out, call 999



# Have the Judicial System and Councils Failed Landlords?

As professional landlords with 39 years of experience, we recently endured a costly and frustrating legal battle with Newham Council and problem tenants. In 2018, we participated in the Council's 'Nightly Lets' scheme, providing a property for social housing tenants. Just six weeks in, the Council terminated their contract without explanation, leaving us with tenants who refused to vacate. The Council declined to assist with eviction or rehousing.

Over four years, the tenants caused severe property damage, leading to significant financial losses. When we served a Section 21 notice in 2022, they maliciously reported us to Environmental Health, triggering council inspections. Despite passing all checks, we were subjected to an extraordinary level of scrutiny, with all our Newham properties being reviewed—something only four landlords in the borough experienced.

The legal process became a nightmare. The tenants, aided by legal aid solicitors, delayed eviction by exploiting loopholes, filing counterclaims, and appealing court rulings. Despite providing extensive evidence, our Section 21 possession order was overturned due to an obscure legal technicality. After an eight-hour final hearing, we ultimately won the case, but not before incurring £60,000

in losses from unpaid rent, legal fees, and property damage.

Newham Council placed these tenants, abandoned the contract, and later advised them to remain in our property until forcibly evicted—while refusing to provide a statement about the property's original condition. This experience has led us to conclude that both the judicial system and local councils are failing landlords. As a result, we plan to sell all our properties in Newham.

This case highlights why increasing numbers of landlords are withdrawing from council schemes and the private rental sector, further tightening housing availability. Councils must be held accountable for the tenants they place, and landlords need stronger legal protections against abuse of the system.



## Renters Rights Bill

**The big news for landlords continues to be the Renters Rights Bill. We have put a summary of the Bill as it currently stands on page ???**

Hopefully you are aware that the Bill is the 'son' of the Renters' Reform Bill introduced by the last Conservative Government but failed to become law. Because of this, the Labour Government have circumvented much of the normal procedure stating that it enjoyed a substantial amount of Parliamentary time under the last Government. They have therefore taken this as authority to rush it through.

Whilst many bodies, including iHowz, are lobbying Government warning of the probable unintended consequences of this action, the Government are clearly determined to get it through. And with their large majority in the Commons will certainly do. It is clear that some Labour MPs are unhappy with the Bill, but they have been told to support it.

It is still not possible to be certain of the timetable, but we know

- The Lords Committee Stage will begin on Tuesday, April 22nd, running for four days.
- The Lords Report is anticipated to be

released in mid-May.

- The Bill will then return to the House of Commons for further debate.
- A period of back-and-forth revisions between the Commons and Lords is expected, a process known as 'ping pong'.
- The Commons will eventually impose a deadline (a guillotine) on the ping pong process, at which point the Bill will pass into law.

It remains uncertain whether the Bill will receive Royal Assent before Parliament rises on July 22nd. If not, the earliest the law could come into effect would be early October. However, there is still a possibility that it could be finalised in July.

We will keep you informed by our regular eNews. Make sure you are getting yours, else you might not know what is going on.

### Summary Of the Renters Rights Bill as of March 2025

– note it could change before it becomes law.



Tenancy System:

- **Abolition of Fixed-Term Tenancies:**  
The bill moves away from fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) and introduces a system of periodic tenancies, where tenants can end their tenancy with two months' notice, at any time.  
They are being called a Tenancy for Life by the Government.
- **Periodic Tenancies:**  
All tenancies will be periodic.
- **Rent Increases:**  
Landlords can only raise the rent once a year, and only through a Section 13 notice. Tenants will be encouraged to challenge all rent rises through the Tribunal system, and any new rent will not be applicable until the Tribunal rules.
- **No Minimum Tenancy Term:**  
There will be no minimum tenancy term, allowing tenants to leave with two months' notice.

Evictions:

- **Abolition of Section 21:**  
Landlords will no longer be able to serve "no-fault" eviction notices (Section 21).
- **Expanded Section 8 Grounds:**  
The government is adding and updating grounds for possession under Section 8, which landlords will need to use to evict tenants.

Other Key Provisions:

- **Awaab's Law:**  
The bill applies Awaab's Law to the private rented sector, requiring landlords to address hazards like damp and mould within a specified time period.
- **Ban on Rental Bidding Wars:**  
Landlords and agents cannot accept offers above the advertised price.
- **Private Rented Sector Database:**  
A database will be created to compile information about landlords and properties, enhancing transparency and compliance.
- **Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman:**  
A new ombudsman service will be established to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

- **Decent Homes Standard:**  
All rental properties must meet minimum quality standards, known as the Decent Homes Standard.
- **Prohibition of Discrimination:**  
Landlords cannot discriminate against tenants based on benefits or having children.
- **Renting with Pets:**  
Landlords cannot unreasonably refuse tenants with pets, but can require them to take out insurance to cover potential damages.
- **Strengthening Local Council Enforcement Powers:**  
Local councils will have enhanced powers to identify, penalize, and eliminate rogue landlords.

Additional Legislative Challenges

The Renters' Rights Bill is not the only major legislative change affecting landlords. The government is also progressing with:

- **The White Paper on Leasehold Reform:** A broad set of proposals aimed at improving transparency and fairness in leasehold property ownership.
- **The Planning and Infrastructure Bill:** Aimed at reforming the planning system to facilitate more efficient development and housing supply.

These additional reforms further complicate the legislative landscape, placing additional pressure on parliamentary time and increasing uncertainty for landlords.

Conclusion

With multiple significant legislative changes on the horizon, landlords must stay informed and proactive in adapting to new regulations. iHowz remains committed to advocating for landlords' interests, providing updates, and ensuring that our voices are heard in policy discussions.

We encourage landlords to participate in our upcoming survey, engage with industry discussions, and stay informed about legislative developments. By working together, we can navigate these changes effectively and ensure that the private rental sector remains a viable and sustainable option for both landlords and tenants.

# The National Landlords Investment Show

We are pleased to report a highly successful experience at the National Landlord Investment Show on March 19th. iHowz had the privilege of participating in the main panel at the start of the event and later hosted an afternoon panel session. Both sessions attracted significant interest, with standing-room-only attendance and a wealth of engaging questions from landlords and industry professionals.

Key Topics of Concern

The most pressing concerns raised during the discussions revolved around:

- The Renters' Rights Bill
- New energy efficiency requirements for landlords, including the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) and upcoming changes to the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) system.

A quick straw poll conducted during the event revealed a notable trend: while a small minority of landlords were strongly

considering selling their properties due to regulatory challenges, a similar number were actively looking to expand their portfolios. This suggests a divided market, with some landlords seeing challenges while others see opportunities.

To gain a clearer picture of landlords' intentions, iHowz will be launching a comprehensive survey.

We encourage all landlords to participate, as the data gathered will be instrumental in shaping our lobbying efforts and strengthening our case with policymakers.

# House of Lords Roundtable Discussion

As part of our ongoing advocacy work, iHowz recently attended a roundtable discussion in the House of Lords. This session was chaired by Baroness Scott, the opposition lead on the Renters' Rights Bill, and provided an invaluable opportunity to discuss landlord concerns directly with policymakers.

Key issues addressed included:

- **Loss of Fixed Terms:** Concerns over the potential loss of stability for landlords and tenants alike.
- **Student Lets:** The impact of the proposed reforms on student rental markets, which rely heavily
- **Impact on Rents:** The likelihood that increased tribunal appeals over Section 13 rent increases could lead to unpredictable rental adjustments and greater administrative burdens for landlords.

on fixed-term contracts.



# Labours proposal to improve the planning system

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is a pivotal component of the UK government's strategy to rejuvenate construction efforts and stimulate economic growth. Its primary objectives include accelerating the development of 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England and expediting decisions on 150 nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) by the end of the current parliamentary term.

### Key Provisions of the Bill:

- 1. **Streamlining Planning Processes:** The legislation aims to simplify and hasten planning procedures for both housing and critical infrastructure projects. This includes reducing consultation requirements for NSIPs, allowing the Secretary of State to consider non-statutory consultations conducted by applicants.
- 2. **Enhancing Local Authority Resources:** Local planning authorities may be granted the power to increase planning fees, potentially up to full cost recovery. These additional funds would be earmarked for reinvestment into local planning services, thereby improving efficiency and capacity.
- 3. **Addressing Environmental Considerations:** The bill introduces a "nature restoration fund," enabling developers to fulfil environmental obligations through upfront payments rather than project-specific mitigation efforts. While intended to streamline development, this approach has raised concerns among environmental groups about potential impacts on wildlife and habitats.
- 4. **Community Benefits for Infrastructure Projects:** Residents living near new electricity transmission projects, such as pylons, may receive discounts on their electricity bills. Additionally, forthcoming guidance will outline how developers can provide benefits to communities hosting transmission infrastructure, aiming to make such developments more acceptable to local populations.

### Public and Sector Responses:

- **Environmental Concerns:** Leading nature charities, representing approximately 8 million members, have urged the government to strengthen environmental protections within the bill. They advocate for amendments to ensure that development does not come at the expense of nature, emphasizing public support for increased planning protections for natural spaces. (the Guardian)
- **Impact on Ecology Sector:** The proposed reforms could significantly affect the ecology sector, which employs over 10,000 professionals. By reducing the need for protected species surveys, the bill may lead to job losses and deter new entrants into the field, potentially undermining efforts to safeguard biodiversity. (Financial Times)
- **Political Implications:** The bill presents challenges and opportunities for political parties. For the Conservatives, addressing the housing crisis through planning reforms is crucial to remain relevant, balancing the need for development with environmental and community considerations.

In summary, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill seeks to expedite the delivery of housing and infrastructure projects across the UK. While it introduces measures to streamline planning and benefit local communities, it also raises important environmental and sectoral considerations that warrant careful deliberation as the bill progresses through Parliament.

# White Paper on Leasehold Reform

In March 2025, the UK government published the Commonhold White Paper, outlining significant reforms to the property ownership system in England and Wales. The primary objective is to transition from the traditional leasehold system to commonhold ownership, granting homeowners greater autonomy and control over their properties.

### Key Proposals:

- **Ban on New Leasehold Flats:** The sale of new flats under leasehold terms will be prohibited, with commonhold set to become the default tenure. This change aims to provide homeowners with direct ownership and decision-making power over their properties.
- **Facilitating Conversion to Commonhold:** The government plans to simplify the process for existing leaseholders to convert their properties to commonhold. This includes overhauling the legal framework to make conversion more accessible and affordable.
- **Enhanced Homeowner Control:** Under commonhold, homeowners will have a direct say in building budgets, management decisions, and service charges, eliminating the influence of external landlords. These reforms are designed to address longstanding issues associated with the leasehold system, such as escalating ground rents and limited homeowner rights. By promoting commonhold ownership, the government aims to create a fairer and more transparent property market.

**Commonhold** is a form of property ownership that allows people to own their flats outright, along with a share of the building's communal areas, without the need for a landlord or lease. It is an alternative to the traditional leasehold system and is designed to give homeowners greater control over their properties.

### How Commonhold Works:

- Each flat (or unit) is **owned outright** by its occupant, with no lease that expires over time.
- All flat owners in a building become **members of a "Commonhold Association"**,

which is responsible for maintaining and managing shared areas (such as hallways, gardens, and roofs).

- There is **no ground rent** or landlord, meaning owners avoid the restrictions and extra costs often associated with leasehold.
- Owners **have a say in management decisions**, unlike leaseholders who depend on a freeholder (landlord) or management company.

### Key Benefits of Commonhold:

- **Permanent ownership** – Unlike leasehold, where ownership expires after a set number of years, commonhold properties are owned indefinitely.
- **No ground rent or leasehold charges** – Owners do not have to pay escalating fees to a freeholder.
- **Full control over property management** – Homeowners decide on maintenance and service costs together through the Commonhold Association.
- **Easier to sell or mortgage** – There are no lease lengths to worry about, making transactions simpler.

### Why Isn't Commonhold More Common in the UK?

Although commonhold was introduced in England and Wales in 2002, it has not been widely adopted because:

- Developers prefer leasehold since it allows them to collect ground rent and management fees.
- Mortgage lenders have been reluctant to offer loans for commonhold properties.
- Existing leaseholders face legal and financial challenges when trying to convert to commonhold.





# EPC & Energy Efficiency Changes – What Landlords Need to Know

Energy efficiency remains a key concern for landlords, with ongoing discussions about future regulations affecting the private rental sector. While the UK government has delayed plans to require rental properties to have a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C, landlords must still consider the financial and practical impact of energy efficiency improvements.

## Planned but Delayed EPC Regulations

- The government had originally proposed that all new rental tenancies would require an EPC rating of C or higher by 2025, with existing tenancies required to comply by 2028.
- However, these deadlines have been postponed or reconsidered, with no new firm dates confirmed.
- Despite this, energy efficiency remains a priority, and landlords should be prepared for future changes.
- Mortgage Considerations: Some buy-to-let lenders now require a minimum EPC rating for mortgage approvals, making it harder to finance properties with lower ratings.
- Resale & Property Value: Homes with higher EPC ratings generally sell for more and attract more buyers, while those with lower ratings may struggle on the market.
- Future-Proofing Investments: Even if EPC regulations are delayed, making energy-efficient improvements now can reduce running costs and prevent expensive last-minute upgrades when regulations tighten.

## Why Energy Efficiency Matters for Landlords

- Tenant Demand: More renters are prioritising energy-efficient homes due to rising energy costs. A poor EPC rating can make a property less attractive.

## How to Improve EPC Ratings

Landlords can take several steps to enhance energy efficiency and prepare for potential future regulations:

- Insulation: Adding loft, cavity wall, or solid wall insulation improves heat retention and increases an EPC score significantly.
- Energy-Efficient Heating: Upgrading to a modern condensing boiler or installing a heat pump can reduce emissions and lower energy bills.
- Double or Triple Glazing: Replacing single-pane windows with modern glazing improves insulation and increases EPC ratings.
- LED Lighting: Switching to LED bulbs is an inexpensive way to improve energy efficiency.
- Smart Meters & Thermostats: These allow tenants to monitor energy usage and reduce wastage, improving the property's overall efficiency.
- Renewable Energy Solutions: Installing solar panels or air-source heat pumps can future-proof properties and improve EPC ratings, though these require a higher upfront investment.

## Costs & Financial Support

- Landlords have raised concerns about

the high cost of upgrading properties, particularly older homes that require significant work.

- While government incentives for green upgrades have been limited or inconsistent, landlords should keep an eye on potential future grants or tax relief schemes.
- Some local councils offer funding support for energy efficiency improvements, particularly for lower-income tenants.

## Conclusion

Although new EPC rules have been delayed, landlords should not ignore energy efficiency improvements. Tenant expectations, mortgage lending criteria, and property market trends are pushing towards more energy-efficient rental homes. Making upgrades now can help landlords stay ahead of future regulations while reducing operational costs and maintaining property value.

## Caveat

Note the proposed changes to the EPC methodology and its impact on landlords.

# Likely Changes to EPC Methodology & Impact on Landlords

The UK government is considering updates to the **Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) methodology** to better reflect real-world energy efficiency, carbon emissions, and the financial impact on tenants. These changes could significantly affect landlords, influencing property valuations, rental demand, and future compliance requirements.

## 1. Proposed Changes to EPC Methodology

### a. Shift from Cost-Based to Carbon-Based Assessment

- Currently, EPC ratings are based **primarily on energy costs**, meaning gas-heated homes often score better than electric-heated ones due to the lower cost of gas.

- Proposed changes would **focus more on carbon emissions**, meaning properties reliant on gas boilers could see their EPC scores **drop**, while **electrically heated homes** (especially those using heat pumps) might see **higher ratings**.

### b. Better Measurement of Actual Energy Efficiency

- EPC ratings currently use **theoretical models** rather than real-life energy performance.
- A revised methodology might use **metered energy data**, meaning homes with **poor insulation, outdated heating, or high actual energy consumption** may get lower scores.

#### c. Stricter Requirements for Insulation & Heat Retention

- Future EPC assessments may **put more weight on insulation, airtightness, and ventilation**.
- Homes with **solid walls, older windows, or poor roof insulation** could require upgrades to maintain a competitive EPC rating.

#### d. Encouragement of Low-Carbon Heating

- There may be a **stronger push towards heat pumps, solar panels, and other renewable energy sources**.
- Gas boilers might become **less favourable**, reducing their impact on EPC scores.

### 2. How These Changes Will Affect Landlords

#### a. Properties with Gas Heating Could Be Penalised

- Many rental homes currently have **gas boilers**, which may result in **lower EPC ratings** under a carbon-based system.
- Landlords may need to **invest in heat pumps or hybrid systems** to maintain compliance.

#### b. Higher Upgrade Costs for Older Properties

- Landlords with **older buildings (pre-1930s or solid-wall homes)** might face **higher upgrade costs** due to stricter insulation and heating efficiency requirements.

- Retrofitting insulation, **triple glazing**, or **ventilation systems** could become necessary.

#### c. Potentially Higher Property Values for Energy-Efficient Homes

- Homes with **better EPC ratings** tend to attract **higher rents and sale prices**.
- Investors may **prioritise energy-efficient properties**, reducing demand for less efficient homes.

#### d. Stricter Mortgage Lending Criteria

- Many **buy-to-let lenders** already require a minimum **EPC rating of E or above**, with some considering a shift to **C as the minimum**.
- If EPC methodology changes make it harder for properties to achieve a good rating, landlords could **struggle to refinance or secure buy-to-let mortgages**.

#### e. Rental Market Impacts

- If landlords **exit the market** due to high retrofit costs, rental supply may **shrink**, leading to higher rents.
- Tenants may increasingly **prioritise energy efficiency**, choosing homes with **lower energy bills**.

### 3. What Landlords Can Do to Prepare

- **Review EPC Scores Now:** Understand how your properties might be affected by upcoming changes.
- **Invest in Insulation & Heating Upgrades:** Focus on **loft/wall insulation, double glazing, and energy-efficient heating**.
- **Explore Renewable Energy Options:** Consider **solar panels, battery storage, and heat pumps**.
- **Monitor Government Policy:** Stay informed about **new EPC regulations, grants, and financial incentives** for green upgrades.



## Licensing & Regulation (Selective & HMO Licensing Expansions)

Local councils across the UK are increasingly expanding licensing schemes to regulate the private rental sector more strictly. These include Selective Licensing schemes, which apply to standard rental properties, and HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) Licensing, which targets shared accommodations.

### Selective Licensing

#### ● Current Expansion Trends

- Many councils, including **Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, and Bristol**, have **expanded or introduced new schemes**.
- Some councils require landlords to **pay for a licence per property**, increasing costs.
- Councils are using **civil penalties** to enforce compliance, with fines of up to **£30,000 per offence**.

#### ● Challenges for Landlords

- Licensing applications involve **paperwork, inspections, and fees (often £500-£1,000 per property)**.
- **Delays in application processing** can create uncertainty and slow down lettings.
- **Tougher enforcement** means landlords face **penalties or rent repayment orders** if they let properties without a licence.

### HMO Licensing (Houses in Multiple Occupation)

#### ● Recent Developments

- Increased **HMO inspections** and stricter enforcement.

- Councils now **demand higher standards** for fire safety, room sizes, and waste management.

- Some councils have **introduced Article 4 Directions, restricting new HMO conversions** in certain areas (e.g., Oxford, Manchester, and Leeds).

#### ● Challenges for Landlords

- **Stricter enforcement** means non-compliance can lead to **large fines and bans** from letting properties.
- **Higher compliance costs** for fire doors, soundproofing, and safety upgrades.
- **Reduced flexibility** in turning properties into HMOs due to planning restrictions.

#### 📍 Impact on Landlords:

- **More admin and paperwork** to comply with local authority rules.
- **Higher compliance costs** for licensing fees, inspections, and property upgrades.
- **Potential fines** (up to **£30,000** per offence) for non-compliance.
- **Stricter planning rules** making it harder to create new HMOs.



# Short-Term Lets

## (Airbnb & Holiday Lets Crackdown)

The UK government and local councils are **cracking down on short-term holiday lets**, particularly in tourist hotspots and urban areas with **housing shortages**.

### Current Restrictions & Proposed Changes

- **London:**
  - Properties can only be let for a maximum of **90 nights per year** on Airbnb and similar platforms without planning permission.
  - **Fines and enforcement** have increased for landlords exceeding the limit.
- **Scotland:**
  - **New licensing scheme for short-term lets** came into effect in **October 2022**, requiring all hosts to obtain a **council licence**.
  - Additional restrictions in **Edinburgh**, where short-term lets require **planning permission** and are **heavily restricted** in tenement buildings.
- **Wales:**
  - **Higher council tax rates** (up to **300% surcharge**) on second homes and holiday lets in some areas.
  - **New rules** mean short-term lets must be rented for at least **182 days per year** to qualify for business rates instead of council tax.
- **England** (Upcoming Changes):
  - **Potential licensing scheme for short-term lets** similar to Scotland's.
  - **Stronger planning restrictions** in areas with housing shortages.
  - **Councils may introduce caps on Airbnb-style rentals** in popular tourist areas.

### Challenges for Landlords

- **Increased regulation:** Landlords need **licences, planning permission, and**

**compliance with stricter rules.**

- **Higher costs:** Licensing fees, inspections, and potential new taxes on holiday lets.
- **Reduced profitability:** Limits on **rental days** and increased costs could make short-term letting **less attractive**.
- **More competition:** Some landlords may switch back to long-term rentals, increasing supply in the traditional rental market.

### Impact on Landlords:

- **Airbnb-style letting may become harder and more expensive.**
- **Licensing and planning restrictions will limit flexibility.**
- **Increased taxation (council tax, licensing fees, and fines).**
- **More landlords may exit short-term lets, returning to long-term rentals.**

### What Should Landlords Do?

- ✓ **Review portfolios** – Consider selling properties that don't meet new regulations or are unprofitable.
- ✓ **Check mortgage deals** – Fixed-rate deals may help reduce exposure to rate hikes.
- ✓ **Upgrade properties** – Investing in insulation, heating, and EPC improvements may be essential.
- ✓ **Stay compliant** – Keep up with licensing rules and legal changes to avoid fines.
- ✓ **Consider different rental strategies** – Some landlords are moving to corporate lets or furnished lets to improve profitability.

## How can insurance help landlords protect their property from bad tenants?

When it comes to protecting the legal interests of landlord and tenant, the laws governing property rental are pretty well balanced, thanks to the Housing Act 1988.

Property letting comes with lots of hard work and a few risks, but for most landlords, their relationship with tenants is a co-operative one. Landlords have well-defined responsibilities to their tenants, and in return, tenants pay the rent, treat the property well, and conduct their lives in a way that doesn't bring the landlord's property or business into disrepute. It's in the interests of both landlord and tenant to adhere to all terms of a tenancy agreement.

Landlord and tenant can be joint victims of property damage incurred through extreme weather, subsidence, fire, or crime. That's where buildings insurance comes in. But what happens when the tenant is the problem?

With the Renters' Rights Bill set to strengthen tenants' rights later this year, how does a landlord protect their property and rental income?

### The right to rent

Checking a prospective tenant's immigration status and right to rent is a legal requirement in England. It's a criminal offence to rent out your property without checking the right to rent of all adults, whether they're named on the tenancy agreement or not.

### Tenant referencing

Tenant referencing, which provides an overview of a prospective tenant's suitability to rent, is standard practice in the property

rental business. Tenant referencing is carried out with the prospective tenant's permission. A credit check will bring to light any debt, county court judgements (CJJ) or bankruptcies, and will often include an affordability calculation.

It's important to include all over-18s on a residential tenancy agreement as only named individuals can be referenced or held liable for the payment of rent. If you need to take legal action for unpaid rent, you'll have a better chance of success if all adults are liable. If you make a claim on your rent guarantee insurance, your policy might only be valid if every adult tenant has been checked.

If a tenant fails to meet the requirements of a reference check, you and the tenant may choose to use a guarantor. For the same level of landlord protection, a guarantor must be subject to the same referencing as the tenant.

Tenant referencing is a requirement for full cover on legal expenses insurance and rent guarantee insurance.

### Rent guarantee insurance

Rent guarantee insurance is triggered by an eviction for non-payment of rent over two consecutive months. This policy covers unpaid rent until you have vacant possession and legal expenses, which might include eviction notices, repair and renovation disputes, defence of an official investigation, and disputes about terms of tenancy.

To qualify for rent guarantee insurance, you must have evidence that your tenants have been referenced, and an exclusion period applies before you can make a claim. You'll need a separate policy for each tenancy agreement, and you can't take out rent guarantee insurance after your tenant has defaulted.

### Malicious damage

Most landlord insurance policies will cover malicious damage as part of your buildings or contents cover if it's caused by burglars breaking in or vandalising your property. But some policies won't cover you for damage caused by tenants (or their guests). If this is the case and damage by tenants isn't included, you should be able to add it to

your policy as an optional extra. On the other hand, some policies will pay for malicious damage caused by anyone with a legal right to be on or in your property (like tenants and their visitors).

Your policy documents should clearly define what's covered and any other specific terms. This includes any claim criteria – for example, some insurers will only proceed with your claim if tenants passed their initial reference checks.

**To find out more about insurance to protect your property and income, speak to award-winning landlord insurance providers Alan Boswell Group, on 01603 218000.**

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## Spring Statement

**The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, has made her Spring Statement to Parliament. The spring statement is not a formal budget - as Labour pledged to only deliver one per year - but rather an update on the economy and any progress since her fiscal statement last October.**

At the same time as the statement, the OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility) issued their Economic and fiscal outlook, where they revised the UK's economic growth forecast for 2025 down to 1%, a decrease from the previous 2% estimate. Modest improvements are anticipated in subsequent years. Inflation is projected to peak at 3.2% in 2025 before declining to 2.1% in 2026.

The full OBR report can be seen here (<https://obr.uk/>), and a summary can be seen at the end of this article.

In the statement, the Chancellor included several key measures for housing:

- **£2 billion investment in affordable housing**, aiming to build **18,000 affordable and social homes**.
- Part of a broader goal to **construct 1.5 million homes** during the current parliament.
- The government is focusing on **housing supply and affordability** to address the UK's housing crisis.

These measures are intended to support lower-income households and improve housing accessibility.

She also pointed to a £600m investment announced earlier by the Education Secretary to train 60,000 additional construction workers, alongside plans for 10 new technical excellence colleges across Britain to empower workers.

There was no assistance for the Renters' Rights Bill announced, so no assistance for courts; in fact, the Ministry of Justice, along with other unprotected departments, is expected to face real-term funding **reductions** of approximately **1% per year** in the upcoming spending review. Legal professionals have expressed concerns about the lack of substantial investment in the justice system, highlighting the need for adequate resources to ensure its effective functioning.

She did announce an **£8 million** allocation aimed at reducing administrative burdens for probation officers, enabling them to spend

more time on frontline duties. So, there's a small amount for the courts.

Other matters announced were:

- **Welfare:** The government plans to achieve £3.4 billion in savings from welfare cuts by 2029-30.
  - **Public Spending:** There will be a reduction in the growth of departmental spending, with an average cut of 4.7% across departments. Additionally, a 10% reduction in civil service jobs is targeted.
  - **Defence:** An increase of £2.2 billion in defence spending is allocated from April to support advanced military technologies and refurbish the defence estate.
  - **Surplus Projections:** The fiscal outlook indicates a projected surplus starting from 2027-28, with day-to-day spending expected to align with revenues by 2029-30
- It is worth noting that the Spring Statement comes on top of a number of Government announcements related to our industry in the last two weeks (and we're expecting more to come by the end of the week), including:
- A '**Regulation Action Plan**' to reduce the number, complexity and scope of regulators and regulation;
  - A **one-year delay** to the introduction of the Building Safety Levy to Autumn 2026 (see item below);
  - An **extra £2bn of funding** to deliver 18,000 affordable homes by 2028, as a 'down payment' on the Comprehensive Spending Review in June; and

- **£600m** to train 60,000 new construction workers and deliver 10 technical excellence colleges

Finally, the Chancellor declined to rule out hiking taxes at her next Budget in response to speculation she will be forced to find more money to balance the books. Saying "*I'm not going to write four years of budgets; I've just delivered a spring statement today*"



# OBR outlook summary

## Economic Growth:

- The OBR has downgraded the UK's GDP growth forecast for 2025 to **1%**, down from the **2%** predicted in October 2024. This revision reflects increased global economic uncertainties and potential challenges in 2025. However, growth forecasts for subsequent years have been upgraded due to anticipated higher investment spending.

## Inflation:

- Inflation is projected to average **3.2%** in 2025, peaking at **3.7%** in mid-year, driven by higher energy and food prices, as well as wage growth.

## Public Finances:

- The UK deficit is projected to be **£36.1 billion** in 2025-26, with expectations of a transition to a surplus of **£9.9 billion** by 2029-30.
- Government borrowing is projected to be **£47.5 billion** higher than anticipated in October's budget, while debt interest spending is expected to remain stable as a share of GDP.

## Tax and Spending:

- The tax burden is anticipated to reach a record **37.7% of GDP** by 2027-28.
- The Chancellor announced **£14 billion** in welfare cuts and an additional **£2.2 billion** in defence funding.
- A **£1 billion** investment aims to promote employment, accompanied by **£400 million** for the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Overseas aid will be reduced, saving **£2.6 billion** by 2029-30
- **Household Income:** Real household disposable income per person is expected to grow by an average of around **0.5%** annually from 2025-26 to 2029-30, slightly higher than previous forecasts due to stronger wage growth.

These projections underscore the challenges and adjustments in the UK's economic landscape, influenced by both domestic policies and global economic conditions.

## Meetings/ events schedule for 2025

### April 2025

**April 30th** – National Landlord Investment Show - Kent

### May 2025

**May 19th** – Southampton evening meeting

### June 2025

**June 28th – 29th** Home Building & Renovating Show

### July 2025

**July 9th** – National Landlord Investment Show – London

### September 2025

**September 19-21st** – Home Building & Renovating Show

**September 22nd** – Brighton afternoon meeting

### October 2025

**October 1st** – National Landlord Investment Show - Bristol

**October 6th** – Southampton afternoon meeting

**October 29th** – National Landlord Investment Show – London

### November 2025

**November 13th** – LIS Awards ceremony

### December 2025

**December 1st** – Southampton afternoon meeting

**See the meetings section on the web for the latest information.**

We welcome members suggestions for topics and host presenters, so if there's something you want us to cover let us know.

**Note: attendance at these meetings counts towards CPD.**