



**CHOICE
PLACES**

Residential Management Services

YOUR PLACE

THE NEWSLETTER OF CHOICE PLACES | ISSUE 6 - NOVEMBER 2023

BECOME AN ESTATE BUDDY!

Keeping our estates well maintained is a priority for Choice Places. We carry out regular, routine estate checks and inspections every month, making more additional visits to larger estates. Once a month, we also carry out joint estate inspections with our landscape contractor.

Three times a year, these joint estate inspections are open to all property owners and are attended by Choice Places staff and our landscaping contractor, along with representatives from East Ayrshire Council and local community council members. These visits are known as 'walkabouts'.

What's the purpose of a walkabout?

Walkabouts help us monitor your estate for any issues relating to the landscape maintenance and work carried out by our landscape contractor. We inspect all of the open landscape areas to ensure the area is looking clean and tidy, and that everywhere is being maintained to a high standard.

The purpose of these walkabouts is to identify any issues, present or hear ideas, create a future plan for works, check work has been carried out to the correct standard and solve any immediate issues. This gives us the chance to address any areas which require some attention. This also gives you, the owner, the chance to raise any concerns or issues you may have in your specific area.

Want to get involved?

Walkabouts are usually attended by one or two owners. You can come along by checking the timetable for these walkabouts at www.choice-places.co.uk or checking our Facebook page.

We're keen to see more involvement from our owners. We're looking for 'Estate Buddies' who would be willing to come along to three walkabouts in their estate each year.

If you're interested, let us know by calling 01563 557 000 or emailing info@choice-places.co.uk. We'll make sure you're given text reminders of when they're happening in your area.

Any owner who attends all three walkabouts for their area in a year will receive a £25 voucher as a small thanks for their involvement.



STAYING INFORMED

If you can't manage along to a walkabout, don't worry, you can still stay informed. In the New Year we're going to create individual estate pages for each area on our website, and we'll publish the outcomes of our inspections, relevant photographs and an action plan for anything identified. This way, you can check whether any issue has already been identified prior to reporting and also check on how remedial works are progressing.

ESTATE *Issues*

Electric Vehicle Charging

In line with Scotland's ambitious climate change legislation for net zero emissions, the Scottish Government has committed to phasing out the need for petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2035 with the transition to Electric Vehicles (EV) currently underway.

From June 2023, new legislation has come into force regarding the provision of domestic electric vehicle charging points. However, these apply to new developments and major renovations only. The legislation will support and encourage the growing uptake of electric vehicles, by ensuring that all new homes, including flats, **which have a dedicated car parking space**, are built with an electric charging point, making charging easier and more convenient for drivers.

This standard does not apply to existing developments with communal (non-allocated) parking.

As a factor, Choice Places has received an increase in requests to install charging points from individual households as electric vehicles become more mainstream. Two key questions are being asked:

Why is permission not granted for an individual household to install an EVCP (Electric Vehicle Charging Point)?

If a property does not have off street/in curtilage/ dedicated parking, Choice Places cannot agree to an EVCP installation. This is because:

- If we did so, it would reduce the availability of parking spaces within the communal car parks.
- We could not guarantee a household exclusive use of the parking space, meaning you may be unable to charge your car as you cannot access the space.
- We cannot allow a household to run charging cables over the pavement between their vehicle and their home. It's illegal to cause an obstruction on roads, pavements and footpaths, and you may be liable for any resulting damage or injury.

How do people charge electric cars if there are no chargers in the communal car parks?

Anyone who doesn't have off-street parking can still keep their EV topped up by exploring the network of available points within East Ayrshire. Various websites, such as <https://chargeplacescotland.org/> or <https://www.zap-map.com/charge-points/kilmarnock> can provide further information on local charging points.

We recognise the existing pressures on parking spaces within communal parking areas. We'll continue to monitor demand for EV charging points prior to considering installation for common use. However, any costs incurred in provision would be recharged to owners.

Tree Maintenance

Ash dieback is a serious disease of ash trees caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (previously called *Chalara fraxinea*).

The disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees and can lead to the death of the tree.

Sadly, Choice Places has identified some trees in our open landscaped areas suffering from the disease. We'll be preparing an action plan to not only mitigate any safety risks to our customers in our open areas, but also to allow for the regeneration of resistant trees, where possible.



Flytipping

Flytipping is a blight on our communities and continues to soak up staff time in actioning, while creating considerable shared costs for all owners.

In particular, there are ongoing problems in New Farm Loch, potentially due to the ability to dump rubbish in a number of blind spots and dead ends.

We recognise that people may be reluctant or unable to pay the additional costs for special uplifts. However, it's a false economy to ignore this option, as you'll end up being charged through common charges if we have to organise a special uplift.

A wide range of items can be collected using the EAC bulky uplift service, including white goods. The following charges apply:

- 1-3 items: **£15.93**
- 4-5 items: **£29.21**
- **£3.49** per additional item – with a maximum of 10 additional items allowed per uplift



Choice Places works proactively to try and resolve issues around refuse collection and fly tipping, working alongside partners such as Cleaner Communities, East Ayrshire Council. One example of successful joint working has been the improvement of refuse disposal and the subsequent environmental improvements at flatted blocks in Nether Robertland. Euro bins were installed to provide greater capacity for waste for the block and we've seen a massive improvement in the general standard of the area.

Block Surveys

Over the summer months we conducted condition surveys of all our factored blocks with communal areas. Owners will be contacted shortly with the outcomes of these inspections before we start discussions about future work requirements that have been identified.

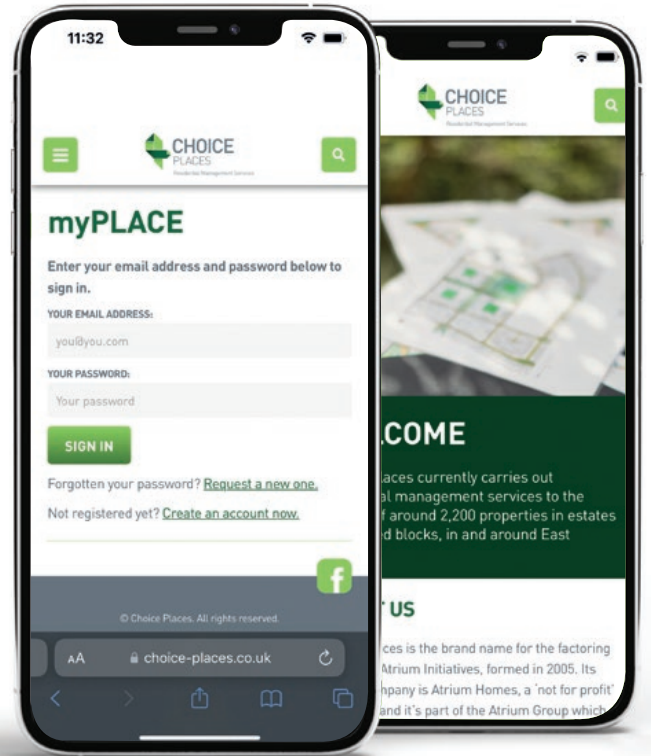
Are you signed up to myPlace?

Since we launched the Choice Place portal, over 10% of you have signed up to 24/7 access to make a payment, report a repair or landscaping issue, or manage all aspects of your account – via phone, tablet or computer.

The portal also has its own app which is compatible with both Android and iOS devices, so you can access your myPlace account on the go. It's available via the App Store and Play Store – just type in myPlace from Choice Places to download it.

You can set up your account via our website (select the myPlace button, and then "Create an account now") or via the app (select "Create an account") once you've downloaded it. You'll be asked for your name and home address, along with your email address and phone number, and then we'll use these to set up your account.

Our staff will run some security checks and if everything's in order, we'll create the account, and send you your username and password. After that, you're good to go!



Communicating with our customers

Factored owners' communications survey and contact details update



We'd like to review the way we communicate with owners. Would you like more information, invoices, etc to be issued by email or text? We hold email addresses and mobile numbers for only 45% of our customers, meaning the vast majority of our communications are still issued by letter with its associated postage costs and slower delivery times.

We're keen to hear your views about communication. If you've got a few minutes, please scan the QR code to fill in our short survey.

All entrants will be entered into a prize draw to win £25. The final date for the return of surveys is 15 January 2024.

Cost of living

Struggling to Pay?

The cost of living crisis has hit many people and may impact your ability to clear your annual invoice with us. However, we need to receive payment for these charges so we can cover the costs of landscape maintenance and other services.

Unfortunately, more and more staff time is being spent recovering outstanding charges. Persistent non payers cause a real problem for factors in our ability to deliver the services you want or need in a cost effective way.

Outwith those continuing to pay by Direct Debit, there are currently 5% of Choice Places customers who are in arrears with their account, representing almost 13% of the total bills charged this year.

We'll be carrying out regular home visits to all accounts with balances during this quarter.

Our debt recovery processes are robust. As we take further action against a customer, their outstanding bill goes up, as there are further charges for increased action added to their account.

Payment of your annual common charges is a legal obligation outlined in your Deeds of Conditions. We try to work with local solicitors to make sure these burdens are pointed out to buyers during the sales process to ensure incoming purchasers are budgeting for these costs.

Failure to pay on time uses our staff resource in chasing debt when we could be looking proactively to develop services and expand our activities on your behalf.

So, please play your part and settle your accounts. Or, if you're struggling to make payment to your account, call and speak to a member of our team in the first instance, who will be more than happy to discuss your options.

We can help by offering you:

- **A Money Advice service** which can review your income and expenditure, to see if you're entitled to any further welfare benefits or financial support. This can be done over the phone.
- **A realistic repayment plan** - no one wants to have debt hanging over them. We can work with you to come up with a way to help you clear your balance.
- **Preferred methods of contact** - you don't need to actually talk to us, but you do need to communicate with us. You can do this by email, letter or text. As long as you engage with us, we can work through this with you.



www.choice-places.co.uk



Residential Management Services

If you have any comments or questions, or want to know what Choice Places is doing at the moment, then please get in touch. Our contact details are:

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