

# DROITWICH Standard

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## 'Not going anywhere'

by **Ryan Smith**  
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**DROITWICH'S** fire station is set to remain on its existing site despite mooted plans to build a new one.

In its annual report to Worcestershire County Council, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority confirmed its intention to have Droitwich's crews stay put.

The fire station on Friar Street is the only full-time occupied Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service location which has not been relocated or rebuilt in recent years.

The annual report, written by the fire authority's chair Coun Roger Phillips, admitted there had been a long-standing consideration to potentially relocate and build a new Droitwich Fire Station.

However, the plan now is for the fire station to remain at its current loca-

### Fire station is set to stay



tion and the service will consider how best refurbish and optimise the entire current site.

The fire authority's report said the current projected capital build costs now made a full rebuild or new build unaffordable.

It added the existing site was in good condition and location, making it easier for them to decide to keep Droitwich station where it is.

However, the site is now larger than needed, following the service's training department's relocation to Wyre Forest Fire Station.

Therefore, a new range of options is being explored based on remaining at the same location.

Potential options for the fire station's future include exploring opportunities with partners or commercial organisations.

The current fire station is home to two wholtime watches, an on-call unit and Hereford and Worcester's Urban Search and Rescue team.

Wychavon Council leader and Droitwich West county councillor Richard Morris welcomed the announcement in the fire authority's report and praised those working there.

He told the Standard: "It's pleasing to know the fire station will remain in Droitwich because it gives great assurance to our great community."

"We saw the Droitwich fire team were the first on the scene with the Raven fire and the knowledge and visibility that they are in town is hard to replace.

"They do a great job and are a big part of our community."

The Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority is made up of 25 county councillors, including 19 from Worcestershire, with seats being politically aligned and balanced.

**Friar Street Fire Station will not be relocated. Picture by Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. s**

## More cuts WILL hit fire services say chiefs

FIRE chiefs have warned further funding cuts will 'undoubtedly' lead to fewer frontline services.

In its annual report to Worcestershire County Council, the Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority admitted there had been 'serious financial challenges' to the local fire service over the past

year. The report added the fire authority's financial strains would most likely continue over the next few years.

It added, whilst there has not been a reduction in services to the public this year, further cuts in funding against high inflation and annual costs would undoubtedly

lead to frontline resources being axed.

The Chief Fire Officer has, according to the report, had to address a significant budget gap this year, leading to around 2.6 per cent in-year revenue budget reduction.

It added this had resulted in

some restructuring and job losses, but despite the negative impact on the support functions, there had been no discernible changes in the services provided to the public yet.

A similar gap is expected next year and in future years which has led fire chiefs to fear changes to

the delivery of frontline response, protection and prevention services to meet these budgetary challenges.

Coun Roger Phillips, the fire authority's chair, said, despite financial challenges, the service was currently in a healthy and productive state.



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## Skills on offer at new town base

REDDITCH Business Improvement District (BID) has opened a new town-centre learning hub.

The scheme provides employees of BID-supported businesses in Redditch town centre with free, unlimited access to hundreds of professional development courses.

The learning hub is designed to help employees build new skills and support business performance.

Courses cover a wide range of topics relevant to both retail and professional services, ensuring the offer meets the diverse needs of local businesses.

BID manager Muj Rahman said: "Employees of our levy-paying businesses can choose from subjects ranging from retail management and customer service to Microsoft Excel and project management.

"With so many different types of businesses operating in our town centre, this is a fantastic way for us to address a wide range of learning and development needs."

"Once a course is completed, learners can download a Redditch BID certificate of learning, helping employees evidence their personal development and progress."

All courses in the Redditch BID learning hub are delivered as live, interactive webinars, enabling employees to learn flexibly at scheduled times.

Sessions can be accessed from home or the workplace, making learning accessible and convenient.

The learning hub has been launched in partnership with SEEDL, a pioneering virtual live learning subscription service.

# Holocaust memorial day services

by **Toby Almond**  
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**RESIDENTS have been invited to join Mayor of Redditch Councillor Joanna Kane for this year's Holocaust memorial day service.**

There will be two separate events on Saturday, to commemorate Holocaust memorial day.

The first is an outdoor commemoration service at the Redditch Holocaust Memorial Marker at Redditch Town Hall, from 10.30am to 11am.

A ticketed, indoor event will take place at the Ecumenical Centre in Evesham Street, from 11am until 1.45pm. Attendees at the latter can hear first-hand testimony from Lejla Golos, a survivor of the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bridging Generations is this year's national Holocaust memo-

rial day theme, as a reminder the responsibility of remembrance does not end with the survivors. It lives on through their children, grandchildren and all those committed to ensuring such atrocities are never forgotten.

Redditch Borough Council leader Coun Sharon Harvey said: "As we observe this year's Holocaust memorial day theme of bridging generations, it is vital for our community to pause and reflect on the profound suffering caused by the Holocaust."

"By acknowledging this tragic history, we can better understand the ongoing injustices faced by many around the world today."

"We invite all residents to join us in this crucial moment of reflection, honouring those who have endured pain and suffering due to dehumanisation and hate. Let us strive for a world filled with peace, love and respect, united as one humanity, without divisions."



**Couns Juma Begum and Bill Hartnett prepare for Holocaust Memorial Day in Redditch. Picture by Marcus Mings 0226004MMR**

Holocaust memorial day, officially observed on January 27, is held annually for people worldwide to remember the millions killed in the Holocaust Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Coun Bill Hartnett, chair of the Holocaust memorial committee, said: "Holocaust memorial day serves as a reminder of the horrors of the past, remembering all those who lost their lives in the atrocities of the Holocaust and genocides around the world.

Our speaker this year is Lejla Golos, a survivor from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina 31 years ago.

"It is our goal, through these events, that everyone in our communities feel their history is remembered and everyone has a chance to reflect meaningfully on this important day of commemoration."

Visit [redditchbc.gov.uk/things-to-do/activities-and-events/posts/holocaust-memorial-day-2026/](http://redditchbc.gov.uk/things-to-do/activities-and-events/posts/holocaust-memorial-day-2026/) to book free tickets for the event.

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See page **30**



# Dad steps in to be Leo's donor

**THE family of a Bromsgrove teenager with leukaemia say they have no option but for his dad to be his stem donor after a transplant had to be delayed.**

The loved ones of Leo Spronson, aged 16, thought they had received the best Christmas present ever after a stem cell match was discovered in the UK.

However, this transplant, which was a 10/12 match, was delayed due to the donor needing further tests.

Unfortunately, Leo cannot wait for the donor to be ready, as he needs a Stem Cell transplant as soon as possible.

His mum, Jenna and dad, Warren, have both put themselves forward to be his donor, but at most, they can only be a half-match.

Warren has been chosen as

the only option for now, as male-to-male donations are more successful than female-to-male donations.

Leo's aunt, Kate Best, told the Standard nothing was yet set in stone, as Warren had not had any tests although, all being well, Leo will be admitted at the beginning of February.

She added: "Leo will never be discharged from the hospital and will be monitored for the rest of his life."

"We have no option for now but to potentially use Leo's dad, Warren, as a donor."

"It's not ideal, but Leo needs a stem cell transplant as soon as possible."

"Everyone is just taking it day by day, we've learnt that anything can change at the drop of a hat."

"The best thing the people of Bromsgrove can do is sign up to the Stem Cell Register and encourage those around

them to do the same.

"These delays can be avoided if more people were on the register and ready to go when somebody needs a stem cell transplant."

Leo is currently in remission, meaning doctors can see significantly less of the leukaemia than they could when he was admitted.

However, he is not currently cancer-free and, despite chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant, he has a 40 per cent chance that the leukaemia will return within the first two years.

Since his diagnosis, Leo's family have been working with blood cancer charity DKMS to get more people on the stem cell donor register in a bid to improve his chances of finding a match and held a registration day in November.



Leo Spronson, aged 16, urgently needs a stem cell transplant. s

## Centre will get an official reopening

THE REOPENING date of Droitwich's Tourist Information Centre has now been revealed.

The centre closed last Thursday and will re-open on Monday, February 9.

Last year, the Heritage and Information Centre was temporarily relocated to the town's council chambers, still located in St Richard's House.

The centre has been running a reduced offering with no museum open.

The temporary closure is enabling the

council chamber to be refigured for meetings and allow staff to make the final preparations for the centre's new layout.

Plans for an official opening ceremony are currently being finalised, with Droitwich Spa Town Council staff expecting it to take place during March.

A spokesperson for the centre said the reopening was exciting news for 2026, adding they could not wait to welcome people back to the new-look building.

## Woman critical after three-car crash

TWO women have been injured and one was left fighting for her life after a serious three car crash in Ombersley.

West Midlands Ambulance Service was called to Hadley Lane, Ombersley by police at 12.39pm on Wednesday.

Police closed the A4133 between Droitwich and Ombersley in both directions for most of the day.

Two ambulances, two paramedic officers, a specialist paramedic and the Midlands Air Ambulance from Strensham were sent to the scene.

A West Midlands Ambulance Service

spokesperson said crews found the driver of one car in a critical condition.

They added the team of medics quickly administered advance trauma care and she was taken to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital for further treatment.

The driver of a second car, a woman, was treated for injuries not thought to be serious at the scene and a young child was uninjured.

Both patients were taken to the Worcestershire Royal Hospital for further checks.



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# Car will be a life-saver

by **Tristan Harris**  
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**MORE lives could be saved across north east Worcestershire after an ambulance hub received a new emergency response car.**

The car, funded by Worcestershire County Council's public health community grant programme, has been unveiled at Bromsgrove Ambulance Hub.

The vehicle will support the work of North East Worcestershire First Responders (NEWFR), a volunteer-led charity whose trained responders attend 999 calls for the West Midlands

Ambulance Service. The team provides immediate care at life-threatening incidents such as cardiac arrests, strokes and road traffic collisions, often arriving before an ambulance and delivering vital early intervention.

The charity, which originally served just Redditch, has expanded to cover Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Alvechurch, Wythall and the surrounding villages, with 14 volunteers each providing at least 240 hours per year.

The public health community grant, along with National Lottery cash, has enabled NEWFR to purchase a second response vehicle, doubling operational capacity.

The funding also supports wider community health schemes including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid training, bleed-control awareness and the



The new emergency response car has been unveiled at the West Midlands Ambulance Service Hub in Bromsgrove. Picture by Marcus Mingins 0226006MMR1



Coun Satinder Bell, left; and Bromsgrove District Council chairman, Coun Sam Evans, right; cut the ribbon with Ross Harris, from North East Worcestershire First Responders. Picture courtesy of Worcestershire County Council. s

expansion of community defibrillators.

Sessions in schools, youth groups, workplaces and community organisations equip residents with life-saving skills.

Councillor Satinder Bell, Worcestershire County Council's cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "This project is a clear example of how public health investment can save lives long before someone reaches a hospital."

"By supporting North East Worcestershire First Responders, we are strengthening emergency response times but we are also building vital community skills through CPR and first aid training. Prevention, early intervention and community confidence are at the heart of good public health and this funding helps

ensure more residents know what to do in a crisis."

She described the volunteers' commitment as 'extraordinary' adding, the new vehicle would help the team "reach more people, more quickly, across our communities."

Ross Harris, from NEWFR, said the funding had made a huge difference.

"A second vehicle means we can respond to more emergencies across a much wider area and it gives our volunteers the tools they need to save lives," he said.

"The support for training equipment and community education also means we can teach more people CPR, first aid and bleed-control skills. We're incredibly grateful for the council's support and proud to continue serving our communities."

Tim Cronin, from West Midlands Ambulance Service, said: "Community first responders play a vital role in their communities, volunteering their time to respond to life-threatening emergencies alongside the West Midlands Ambulance Service."

"This new vehicle will make a real, life-saving difference and we are incredibly grateful for the grant funding and support that made it possible."

"It ensures our responders are better equipped to support and reach more patients when every second counts."

Go to [northeastworcestershirefirstresponders.com](http://northeastworcestershirefirstresponders.com) for more on NEWFR.

Visit [worcestershire.gov.uk/communitygrants](http://worcestershire.gov.uk/communitygrants) for more on the public health community grant programme.



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# MP slams government over failure to spot 'flawed housing formula'

BROMSGROVE's MP has accused the Government of failing to listen to the people of Bromsgrove over his Parliamentary petition to 'save the green belt'.

Bradley Thomas presented the petition - signed by 5,900 people - on the floor of the House of Commons in December.

It demanded the Government justified the 'flawed' formula used to calculate the 85 per cent increase in Bromsgrove's housing target and called for Birmingham, which had its target reduced, to take its fair share.

It demanded Bromsgrove's 85 per cent increase and the Second City's 31 per cent reduction both be reversed.

This, he said, would ensure the burden was shared in a fair and proportionate way and only allow new houses to be built when the accompanying infrastructure was provided.

Mr Thomas reiterated Bromsgrove District was 89 per cent green belt and 79 per cent rural while



**Bromsgrove MP Bradley Thomas has hit out at the Government for ignoring his calls for the district's housing target to be reduced.**

Birmingham's target had 140 hectares of brownfield land that could be built on.

In responding to Mr Thomas' petition, the Housing and Planning Minister has both refused to reduce Bromsgrove's housing target and to reverse the decrease in Birmingham's housing target.

Mr Thomas is continuing the fight and he and Bromsgrove District Council leader, Coun Karen May,

will be meeting with the Housing and Planning Minister next month to once again make their case.

The MP said: "It's quite clear that the Government's talk of protecting the countryside is entirely hollow.

"The Housing Minister has emboldened housing developers to build on the green belt, and it seems there's no way to stop him whilst this Government remains in power.

"We all except the need for new houses, but not on the scale the Government is imposing on Bromsgrove.

"And not when we're clearly being punished to enable the Government to dramatically reduce Birmingham's housing target where the need is more acute."

He said the country's housing policy should be pretty simple - 'build on brownfield land first and provide communities with the required infrastructure before any houses are built'.

"That's something I'm sure we can all get behind.

"Building on our precious green belt and on agricultural land erodes our rural way of life.

"Once the greenbelt's gone, it's gone.

"Not only, that it severely weakens our country's food security and a time of global instability."

He accused the Government of 'failing to listen' with regard to the 'flawed formula'.

Visit [bradleythomas.org.uk](http://bradleythomas.org.uk) for further details.

## Developers announce new homes are now complete

A MAJOR \$13.8million, 26-home housing development on the edge of Hagley has been completed.



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The Hagley Manor residential development on Western Road is made up of 16 open market houses, three first homes and seven affordable homes, which have been transferred to Bromsgrove District Housing Trust.

All properties on the 3.2-acre site were sold before completion.

Open market homes ranged from three to five bedrooms.

The site was allocated for housing in Bromsgrove District Council's adopted local plan.

Planning consent was granted to the developers, Cameron Homes, in 2023.

The homes include features such as electric vehicle charging points, solar PV panels, a new cycle path and smart heating controls.

Paul Morrissey, Cameron Homes' operations director, said: "We are thrilled to see this wonderful development completed in only 18 months, with all 26 houses now lived-in family homes.

"As it is a sloping site, boundary retention work was required to create the development area, prior to housebuilding commencing, which required specialist groundworks and site preparation."

Guy Bebbington, managing director of Cameron Homes, added: "Hagley is one of the most desirable villages across the entire West Midlands.

"Sites for new homes are few and far between, so it's been wonderful to add to the village's appeal with a beautiful collection of energy-efficient Cameron houses."

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# Recognition for his contribution

A FORMER Dean of Bromsgrove has been awarded the Cross of St Wulfstan for his outstanding contribution to the church in the Diocese of Worcester.

Rev Dick Johnson was Area Dean of Bromsgrove from 2008 to 2012.

He has worked in the Diocese since 2006, most recently as Development Officer for Faith at Work in Worcestershire, as well as Lead Chaplain for West Mercia Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Dick was ordained in 1990 and, after three years in the Philippines, in 1997, he was appointed town centre Chaplain in Bexleyheath.

When Dick moved to the Diocese of Worcester, his role included serving as chaplain to the Fire Service and to Qinetiq in Malvern.

He also served as Team Vicar in the Holy Trinity Team in Redditch and Chaplain to Redditch Town Centre.

In 2017, Dick left the parish to work directly, part-time, for the Fire Service and West Mercia Police as their joint Lead Chaplain.

Dick said: 'It is an honour to join the fellowship of those who have been recipients of the Cross of St Wulfstan and one which I see as recognition of the ministry of all those who have been industrial and workplace chaplains in Worcestershire with me over these 20 years.'

'It has been an amazing team to work with, and a great Diocese to be part of.'

Bishop Hugh, who presented Dick with his award, added: 'I was delighted to be able to award my first Wulfstan cross to Dick



Johnson.

'Dick has been a great proponent of chaplaincy in this diocese and nationally and has been a Christian presence for those who might not otherwise encounter our faith.'

'It is obvious that he has a strong commitment to being at the interface between the church and the world and throughout his time in our diocese has ensured we continue to focus on those outside of our buildings as well as those inside.'

St Wulfstan lived between 1008 and 1095, serving as Bishop of Worcester under the last two Saxon kings and the first two Norman kings.

Rev Dick Johnson was presented with the Cross of St Wulfstan by Bishop Hugh. s



The cadets supported the Redditch community with a litter pick. s

## Things are really picking up

CADETS and adult volunteers from Churchill Troop took part in a community litter-picking activity at Arrow Valley Lake in support of the local council and the wider Redditch community.

The activity took place between 10am and 2pm and formed part of the Army Cadet Force's community engagement syllabus.

During the session, cadets from the small Churchill-based detachment worked around the lake, collecting litter and helping to improve the local environment while also raising awareness of the importance of keeping public spaces clean and safe for everyone.

This community engagement task is designed to encourage cadets to give something back to their local area, develop a sense of civic responsibility and actively support the communities in which they live.

The event also highlighted the positive role that youth organisations, such as the Army Cadet Force, play in supporting local schemes.

Churchill Troop was pleased to be able to assist Redditch Borough Council and contribute in a practical way to the upkeep of one of Redditch's most well-used public spaces, reinforcing the message that small actions can make a meaningful difference to the community as a whole.

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Droitwich's repair cafe will return this month. Picture by Marcus Mingins 0523008MMR, copyright Bullivant Media.

# Cafe fans can get a fix

by **Ryan Smith**  
ryan.smith@bullivantmedia.com

## DROITWICH'S Repair Cafe will be re-launching at a new venue at the end of the month.

The popular event is set to return on Saturday, January 31, at Droitwich Spa Baptist Church, and will offer residents the chance to have their broken household items repaired for free, helping them save money and reducing waste in the process.

The cafe used to be hosted on the final Saturday of each month at the Droitwich Arts Network Hub.

However the venue closed in August to make way for the new Droitwich Banking Hub, in St Andrews Square.

The repair cafe will run from 10am to 2pm with additional sessions planned for the final Saturdays in February and March as part of a three-month trial.

Repair cafes are community-run events where skilled volunteers help people fix

everyday items such as small electricals, clothing, bikes, toys and household objects.

Instead of throwing items away, residents can learn how repairs are carried out and extend the life of possessions that might otherwise end up in landfill.

The repair cafe is run by volunteers from Bromsgrove and Droitwich Makerspace, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to hands-on learning, sustainability, and community education.

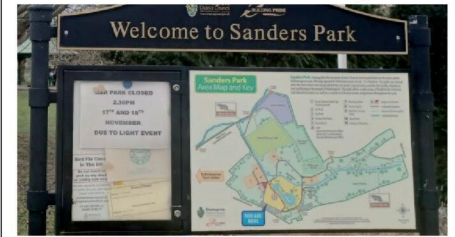
Repairs are free but dona-

tions are welcome, to help cover essential running costs such as venue hire and insurance.

A spokesperson for the repair cafe said: "The relaunch comes at a time when many households are feeling the effects of rising living costs.

"By helping people repair rather than replace items, the repair cafe provides practical support while also promoting environmental responsibility and skill-sharing within the community."

## Avian 'flu warnings



Warning posters about avian flu have been put up in Sanders Park. s

BROMSGROVE District Council has moved to allay fears about avian 'flu after flyers were put up in Sanders Park warning residents not to touch dead or sick birds.

A resident told the *Standard* the notice mentioned the disease had been 'found in the local area'.

The council said avian 'flu has been found in Arrow Valley Country Park, in Redditch, with which Bromsgrove DC shares some services. It has not been found in Sanders Park but the warning has been extended to the neighbouring borough.

Speaking last week about the discovery of the disease in Redditch, the council said: "Please don't touch or pick up any sick or dead wild birds.

"This helps protect both people and other wildlife. Stick to paths and keep

dogs on leads. And do not feed the birds ... stop them gathering and the virus spreading."

The member of the public who contacted the *Standard* about the warning notice said: "Bird populations are struggling without this happening.

"It is important that dogs are kept on leads and not allowed to run loose over the grass etc, to help prevent the spread."

Anyone who finds an injured, unwell or dead bird is advised to report it to parksandopenspaces@bromsgroveandred-ditch.gov.uk and the authorities will report it to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

People can report dead wild birds to Defra online at <https://bit.ly/3Y880CA>, or can call 03459 33 55 77 (option seven).

Using What3Words will provide a more accurate location.



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# Council tenant feedback sought

by **Ashleigh Osborne**  
ashleigh.osborne@bullivantmedia.com

**REDDITCH Borough Council has launched this year's tenant satisfaction survey and is inviting council tenants to share their views on the services they receive and to help shape improvements.**

The survey is an opportunity for tenants to tell the council what worked well over the last 12 months and where changes are needed across areas such as repairs, maintenance, communication, and neighbourhood services.

Tenants may receive invitations to take part via official text message, by post, through business cards left by officers when visiting properties and more, as the council reaches out to as many tenants as possible.

Councillor Bill Hartnett, Redditch Borough Council's portfolio holder for housing, said: "Every response gives us valuable insight into tenant priorities and helps us identify where we must improve."

"The 600-plus responses we received last year directly shaped a range of changes, from strengthening tenant engagement to introducing new maintenance services, all driven by what tenants told us."

"Most importantly, the survey helps cement tenants' voices at the heart of our improvement planning."

"As we continue this journey, that feedback keeps our work aligned with what really matters to our tenants."

"This is an ongoing, year-on-year process, and I encourage every tenant to take part and help shape the future of council housing in Redditch."

"We're also actively recruiting tenants and leaseholders right now to join our focus groups and tenant

panels, so there are many opportunities to be heard – whether by simply filling in a quick survey or coming and getting actively involved."

The survey, which forms part of the council's duty to its tenants under current social housing regulatory requirements, will be increas-

ingly familiar to many tenants as it enters its third full year.

All the survey feedback gets carefully analysed and the findings are shared publicly, along with the actions the council will take in response.

The results also go to the reg-

ulator of social housing. People interested in responding can visit [redditchbc.gov.uk/tenantsurvey](http://redditchbc.gov.uk/tenantsurvey) to complete the questionnaire. Paper copies are available from housing officers.

The consultation closes at 5pm on Friday, February 13.

## Lights of Love generates £33,000 for hospice

LAST YEAR'S Lights of Love campaign raised a massive £33,165 for the Primrose Hospice.

The annual fundraiser – the charity's biggest of the year – once again gave the community the chance to remember loved ones during the festive season while supporting their local hospice at the same time.

In 2025, the appeal raised the impressive amount thanks to more than 1,500 dedications, which were displayed on Christmas trees in Bromsgrove and Redditch town centres throughout November and December.

Kelly Wetherall, fundraiser at Primrose Hospice said: "I've been lucky enough to take care of this appeal for three years now, so it is close to my heart."

"Having a tribute to a loved one on the displays is a tradition for some that has contin-

ued for many years while for others, it will have been their first.

"We hope Lights of Love gives our community the chance to come together, to pause and to remember."

She added, she wanted

to pay particular thanks to headline sponsor Thomas Brothers Funeral Directors for its continued generous support over the years.

Primrose Hospice would like to also like to thank the dedication board sponsors,

The Bromsgrove Lights of Love tree shone brightly in November and December. Picture by Tony Slade. s

their performers, all their volunteers and most of all, everyone who donated.

The Primrose Hospice – which needs £1.95million each year so it can provide the services it offers – is always looking for people to raise funds for the cause throughout the year.

People can visit the site [primrosehospice.org/support-us/events-calendar/](http://primrosehospice.org/support-us/events-calendar/) to find out how they can get involved.

## WHAT'S ON AT ARTRIX

Whether you're starting the year with big resolutions or just looking for something fun to look forward to, we've got the lights on, the stage set, and a warm welcome waiting for you. Let's make 2026 a standing ovation kind of year.

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- 6TH FEB: ROY G HEMMINGS - TSOP & MOTOWN
- 12TH FEB: A HEADFULL OF COLDPLAY
- 13TH FEB: ECLIPSE - THE PINK FLOYD EXPERIENCE
- 20TH FEB: JOSH HINDLE (KING OF THE ROAD TOUR)
- 21ST FEB: MOTHERSHIP LED ZEPPELIN
- 27TH FEB: ABBA GOLD
- 28TH FEB: THAT BRITPOP BAND
- 4TH MARCH: THE TAP CHAPS
- 6TH MARCH: BEATLEMANIA
- 7TH MARCH: NEARLY DAN - THE SOUND OF STEELY DAN
- 15TH MARCH: THE SPICE PARTY - 30 YEARS OF THE SPICEGIRLS
- 19TH MARCH: TINA TURNER EXPERIENCE
- 20TH MARCH: FLEETWOOD UNCHAINED
- 21ST MARCH: FEARLESSLY TAYLOR (TAYLOR SWIFT TRIBUTE)
- 2ND APRIL: SMOOTH CRIMINAL - MICHAEL JACKSON EXPERIENCE
- 4TH APRIL: ELECTRIK LIVE ORCHESTRA
- 9TH APRIL: K-POP SUPERSTARS
- 10TH APRIL: THE RADIOHEAD PROJECT
- 11TH APRIL: THE ANNIE LENNOX & EURYTHMICS SHOW
- 12TH APRIL: SHANIA TWAIN - BY SHANIA LIVE
- 17TH APRIL: ONE NIGHT OF ADELE - NAOMI JOHNSON
- 23RD APRIL: WILD BOYS OF THE 80S
- 1ST MAY: RAY QUINN: KING OF SWING
- 2ND MAY: GIVE ME THE NIGHT (GEORGE BENSON TRIBUTE)
- 3RD MAY: THE SABBINA CARPENTER TRIBUTE
- 4TH MAY: CASSIDY JOHNSON SINGS CAROLE KING
- 8TH MAY: AND FINALLY PHIL COLLINS
- 9TH MAY: OASISH
- 14TH MAY: ELTON'S SONG - BEYOND THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD



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- 5TH FEB: R.E.M X BUSTER KEATON'S SHERLOCK JR
- 9TH FEB: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: WOLF WORKS
- 2ND MARCH: NATIONAL THEATRE LIVE: THE AUDIENCE
- 3RD MARCH: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: GISELLE
- 31ST MARCH: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: SIEGFRIED
- 20TH APRIL: NATIONAL THEATRE LIVE: ALL MY SONS
- 21ST APRIL: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: THE MAGIC FLUTE
- 5TH MAY: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: EUGENE ONEGIN
- 28TH MAY: NT LIVE: LIVE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
- 25TH JUNE: NT LIVE: LES LIAISONS DANGEROUS



### THEATRE:

- 12TH - 14TH MARCH: THE GREAT BRITISH BAKE OFF MUSICAL
- 22ND MARCH: DISNEY NEWSIES JR.
- 26TH MAY: WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE
- 24TH - 27TH JUNE: SLEUTH
- 18TH AUGUST: WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE NEXT CHAPTER
- DECEMBER: RAPUNZEL THE TANGLED PANTOMIME

### COMEDY:

- 4TH FEB: MILTON JONES - FUNNY BEESENESS
- 26TH FEB: FAT THEO - THE CONTENDER
- 5TH MARCH: MATT PARKER GETTING TRIGGY WITH IT
- 26TH MARCH: ACAPOLYPSE NOW - ALFIE MOORE
- 14-15TH APRIL: JONNY COLE ARMAGUDD'N
- 21ST NOV: TINY TIM'S FAMILY ADVENTURE
- 21ST NOV: TINY TIM'S STAND UP ADVENTURE



### SPOKEN WORD:

- 18TH MARCH: BIRMINGHAM CITY LEGENDS - AN EVENING WITH CLINTON MORRISON AND MICHAEL JOHNSON

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ARTRIX THEATRE - 26TH FEB 2026

**THE CONTENDER**

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SUZANNE LANE

# Police hoping to save a few quad

by **Ryan Smith**  
ryan.smith@bullivantmedia.com

## A WARNING has been issued after a spate of quad bike thefts across North Worcestershire.

Between January 7 and January 9, West Mercia Police received four reports of off-road vehicles being stolen, including two on the same night.

The quad bikes were stolen from outbuildings in Rowney Green, Mustow Green, Hagley and Hartlebury.

Investigations are ongoing into the spate of burglaries, and police have been forced to offer extra crime preven-

tion advice.

Sarah Seats, a Worcestershire rural and business crime officer, said: "We have received several reports recently of burglaries where quad bikes have been stolen, and while investigations continue, we are encouraging anyone who owns one to review their security."

She urged people to consider taking photos of their bikes for their own records and for insurance purposes.

This will also make them more identifiable in the event they are stolen.

She added: "Keep them locked away when not in use and consider chaining them to a secure fixing and using other vehicles to block access to any sheds or out-

buildings they may be kept in overnight.

"A GPS tracker or tagging system is a useful security measure as are forensic marking solutions such as SmartWater.

"CCTV is another good choice, especially one with a motion sensor system linked to a mobile phone device."

Call 999 immediately if you see anyone attempting to steal your quad bike, but do not approach them.



Snow White says 'Hello' to the Seven Dwarfs at the St Peter's Church panto. Picture by Marcus Mingins0326003MMR

## Extra dwarf provides panto mystery

A REDDITCH church has performed its latest pantomime to the participants of St Peter's Pantry.

The show they staged was Snow White with a interesting twist to the story, performed at St Peters Church in Ipsley.

The production followed the same plot of the traditional fairytale, but in this case there were eight dwarfs.

Vera Stanhope, a character in the well-known detective series of the same name, asked the audience for its help in finding the missing dwarf.

Snow White, played by John, escaped to

the Dwarfs' Cottage but was confused as there was eight of everything there.

The unexpected ending discovered Hoppy the dwarf was disabled from birth and was therefore unable to go down the mine.

The dwarfs were played by Paul, Sarah, Michael Jackie, Stephen and the two Daves. Dwarf number eight, played by Kerry, was wheeled in by his carer Dawn.

A final reflection given by Rhoda Lingard - the writer - which reminded the audience we are all different.

## Cannabis grow discovered in town

A PERSON was arrested after police raided a property in Bromsgrove on Wednesday and uncovered a cannabis grow.

The swoop was carried out by Bromsgrove Safer Neighbourhood Team.

The set-up was dismantled and, West Mercia Police

said, an investigation into the find was ongoing.

All the items discovered at the property have been seized and destroyed.

A West Mercia Police spokesperson said: "We continue to act on information from our community to tackle drug production

and protect our neighbourhoods."

They urged anyone with concerns about suspicious activity in their area to report it. Residents can call 101 or by visiting: westmercia.police.uk and using the 'Tell Us About It' section of the website.

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Stephen wants people to roll up their sleeves and help others.

# Hero appeals for plasma donors

by Sarah Mason  
sarah.mason@bullivantmedia.com

## A CANCER survivor from Hollywood is encouraging people to donate plasma.

Stephen Franklin was a dedicated donor from 2020 until last year, when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer – meaning he can no longer donate.

The 60-year-old received his shock diagnosis on May 8 – VE Day – a significant date for him, as a veteran who served in the army as a helicopter co-pilot.

Stephen said: "It was during the two-minute silence, as I left the hospital after hearing the devastating news. I just stood there, trying to process everything that just happened."

In August, Stephen had his prostate surgically removed – just a day after his 60th birthday.

Stephen was a blood donor before becoming a dedicated plasma donor for five years, collecting more than 150 credits for his blood and plasma donations in the process, and has been a powerful advocate for plasma donation.

Donated plasma in England is transformed into life-saving medicines for patients with rare and serious conditions.

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) collects plasma at specially dedicated donor centres in Birmingham, Reading and Twickenham, as well as through whole-blood donations.

Following a low haemoglobin deferral at one of his regular plasma donation sessions, Stephen went to

his doctor for further tests, with the aim of finding out how he could get back to donating.

That visit to the doctor's spiralled into several different medical appointments and further medical examinations that eventually led to his prostate cancer diagnosis.

### Covid

After contracting Covid-19, the retired firefighter of 27 years, bounced back to try and help other coronavirus victims by donating more plasma than anyone else to a treatment trial in England.

At the time, he was the first person in the UK to hit 10 donations of plasma for the Covid-19 convalescent plasma programme, in 2020.

After the trial ended, Stephen continued to donate plasma as the

NHS started to build up stocks to begin producing vital, life-saving medicines.

Stephen is now in remission and, at the end of November, was able to return to working as a teaching assistant in a school for pupils with special educational needs.

He said: "I am gutted I can no longer give plasma – it was a big part of my routine. I religiously donated every three weeks so it was hard to hear that I could never donate again after my diagnosis. However I know I can still help by inspiring others to donate in my name."

"The staff at the donor centre are so kind and professional. I will miss seeing them regularly but I still look forward to popping into the donor centre to say hello whenever I am in town."

"Although I can't donate plasma any more, my work here isn't over yet. I will be rounding up all my friends and family to donate plasma in my name now that I am no longer able to."

Mark Bailey, Birmingham Plasma Donor Centre Manager, said: "Stephen's story is a powerful reminder of how every donation can make a real difference and I thank him for everything he has done to support plasma donation over the years. January is the perfect time for people to make a resolution that truly saves lives and I urge them to join our community of blood and plasma donors."

To book an appointment or to register as either a blood or plasma donor, visit: [www.blood.co.uk](http://www.blood.co.uk), download the NHS Give Blood app or call 0300 123 23 23.



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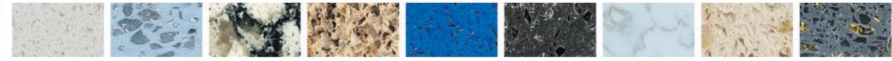
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**Editor's Comment**

THIS YEAR'S Big Garden Birdwatch runs from today until Sunday and comes at a critical time for many of our feathered friends.

Shocking statistics show the UK has lost around 38 million birds in the past 60 years.

Some species once commonplace in British plots – including song thrushes, greenfinches and house sparrows – are now on the red list.

Please take part in the count, which will help the RSPB with its important conservation work.

Turn to **page 24** for more details.

# Letters to the Editor

The Bromsgrove and Droitwich Standards, Webb House, Church Green East, Redditch, Worcestershire B98 8BP  
Tel: 01527 588688 Fax: 01527 584371 email: editor@bromsgrovestandard.co.uk

**Our readers have written to tell us about their experiences with Royal Mail deliveries:**

I HAVE been having issues with Royal Mail since before the snow.

I've had medication not delivered three times now (from Pharmacy2U).

I've also bought and paid for two expensive, special birthday cards.

There has also been post lost in transit. Luckily for me, my doctors prescribed me some emergency medications which I went to go and pick up from the surgery.

I also contacted Moonpig about my cards.

They reimbursed me and asked for me to reorder them. Yet again, they did not turn up.

As for mail, I've had absolutely nothing since about December 20. Most of our road, or area, is the same.

I am unable to visit the Post Office to collect anything as I cannot park anywhere near the office and I have difficulty walking.

Blaming it on the snow and illness is outdated now.

Apparently, the posties have asked to do overtime to get this backlog down (they aren't even delivering in a red Royal Mail van, I've heard).

They have asked management, and management has said 'no'.

[Labour MP for Birmingham Northfield] Lawrence Turner is aware of this situation and is meant to be speaking to Royal Mail soon.

Something is going on. This is totally wrong.

I'm sure Royal Mail is committing offences by not holding up their end of the bargain by delivering post and parcels, especially private documents like renewed passports and even my business and personal bank statements.

This needs to be addressed ASAP.

**Paula Bryant**

I RECEIVED an NHS letter for an appointment today (January 19) and it was for an appointment that was supposed to take place on January 16.

How long has that been sitting in the system, I wonder?

Fortunately, it was not a life-or-death situation but that could be happening for some people and/or for expensive medical procedures.

**John Connelly**

MOST of the residents on our estate have collected post from the office at Aston Fields.

We had been told that postal services would resume mid-week, although that was the previous week.

**Amanda Allen**

I REQUESTED copies of a birth certificate and a marriage certificate, urgently, and paid £49 each for 48-hour priority delivery last Wednesday.

It is now Tuesday and there is no sign of the important documents required for Wednesday.

I don't know what will be the result of this now.

**Rubery resident (B45)**

I HAVE received a letter today - January 19 - dated January 2.

How can this possibly have taken 17 days to be delivered?

**Mrs C Stamp**

WE HAVE not had a single letter delivered for the first two weeks of the year and then, at the weekend, a mountain of post arrived.

Most of the post we received was massively important – several of the letters were from our mortgage provider.

It is simply unacceptable that we are expected to wait around two weeks for a simple letter.

Royal Mail need to sort it out.

**Wythall resident (B47)**

Have your say, log onto [www.bromsgrovestandard.co.uk](http://www.bromsgrovestandard.co.uk)

**Reform is failing**

WORCESTERSHIRE County Council, led by Reform, has failed to fix the basics: a lamppost in Bromsgrove High Street has remained unrepaired for more than 500 days, with no confirmed date for action.

I have been pushing for this repair for more than a year and am dismayed at the lack of action and communication from the council.

Our High Street needs the support from both councils and this includes them fixing issues in a timely manner.

The lack of urgency, or any update from the county council, makes you question whether they really care for our town?

Whilst the county council wastes taxpayers' money on the A38, they are failing to fix the basics.

It is not just the lamp posts on High Street, it is numerous other issues, like the closure of the bridge on Little Lane, closed for months without any timescale for it being reopened, just passing the blame to other councils.

The Lib Dems demand Reform get back to basics and ensure Bromsgrove continues to see improvement whilst it wastes money on an A38 project that will do nothing to resolve the issues facing Bromsgrove residents.

**Councillor Josh Robinson, Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats**

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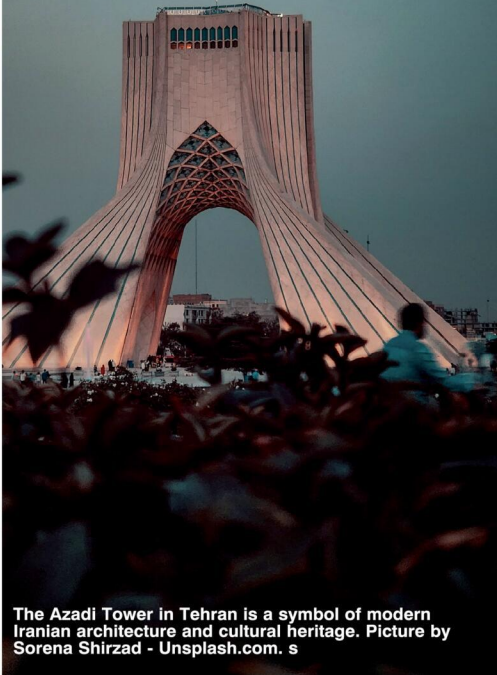
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# A moment history will remember



The Azadi Tower in Tehran is a symbol of modern Iranian architecture and cultural heritage. Picture by Sorena Shirzad - Unsplash.com. s

AN IRANIAN who made his home in Bromsgrove more than 30 years ago has spoken of his fears for his home country and the people living there.

The man, who did not want to be named, said the nation had been betrayed and begged the World 'not to look away'.

Reports in the UK national media suggest thousands have been killed 'some in an inhuman and savage manner' since the civil unrest began at the end of last month.

But the now Bromsgrove resident said the country 'should have been one of the great success stories of the modern world'.

"Blessed with immense natural wealth, Iran ranks among the top four nations globally in combined oil and natural gas reserves.

"It possesses a young, educated population, a strategic geographic position, and one of the richest cultural heritages on Earth. Few countries have ever had so much potential."

He said, before 1979, Iran's potential was being realised.

"Under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran was rapidly modernising and opening to the world.

"The economy was growing, education was expanding and women gained fundamental rights, including the right to vote.

"Iran's cities were alive with culture, innovation and confidence. Its foreign policy was pragmatic and inclusive - guided by cooperation rather than confrontation.

He said, back then, Iran was 'admired' but that country no longer existed in its successful form.

"Millions of Western tourists visited a country that seamlessly blended ancient civilisation with modern life.

"There were luxurious hotels, vibrant nightlife, pristine beaches, ski resorts and historic wonders like Persepolis which made Iran a regional beacon of stability and progress."

But, he claimed, '46 years of rule by the Ayatollahs had transformed Iran from a rising global power into a broken state'.

"The Islamic Republic is now widely recognised as one of the world's leading sponsors of terrorism - exporting violence, destabilising entire regions and leaving a trail of destruction from Lebanon and Syria to Yemen and Iraq."

He said, after failing abroad, the regime had turned its brutality onto its own people.

"Today's Iranian uprising is not spontaneous - it is the inevitable result of decades of corruption, theft, and systemic injustice.

"The average Iranian survives on roughly £100-a-month while basic living costs exceed £400.

"The national currency has collapsed, losing over 200 per cent of its value in less than a year.

"Clean air is a luxury - pollution poisons cities. Gas, electricity, and water are rationed. Food and utility prices change by the hour. For millions, survival itself has become a daily battle.

"And yet, when Iranians demand dignity, they are met with bullets."

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many Iranians have been killed with some estimates at more than 12,000 and others at over 20,000.

The man, who still has family and friends living in Iran, said many killed by Revolutionary Guard forces were under the age of 30 and the total communications blackout was in a bid to erase the evidence of mass killings and war crimes against its own citizens.

"Iranians speak of streets soaked in blood, of a stench of death lingering in the air. This is not governance. This is terror.

"The international community can no longer hide behind failed strategies - 46 years of sanctions have not freed the Iranian people.

"Endless condemnations, unaccompanied by action, have changed nothing. Words alone do not stop bullets. Silence does not save lives. The Islamic Republic is weaker than it has ever been - fractured internally, isolated externally, and exposed for what it truly is: a regime incapable of being a responsible member of the global community."

The man said the world needed to actively support the Iranian people in their struggle to reclaim their futures.

"This can be done through political pressure, diplomatic isolation of the regime and concrete support for civil resistance and human rights.

"Iranians are not asking for charity - they are demanding the right to choose their own destiny.

"A free Iran - liberated from the rule of the Ayatollahs - would not only restore hope to its people but would bring lasting peace and stability to the Middle East and beyond.

"Economically, politically, and morally, the stakes could not be higher.

"History will remember this moment."

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# Long journey in memory of Alma ends with heartfelt thanks to all

A MAN from Solihull has finished his epic drive through Europe, all in memory of his beloved dog Alma.

Nigel Patterson, who lives in Monkspath, spent two weeks driving through Europe alongside his friend John Arthur in two old Peugeots to raise money for Wythall Animal Sanctuary.

When Alma died, Nigel went to the sanctuary to donate her bedding and food.

He got chatting to the staff and asked how the sanctuary operates, and said he was shocked to find out they survive only on donations.

To channel his grief, he decided to redo the fundraising challenge he did for a children cancer ward in Birmingham in 2010.

He said: "Our beloved dog Alma was nearly two years old when we rescued her and she had such a bad start in life, but we had 13 fantastic years together and she travelled all over Europe with us."

"She filled three doggy passports and they were just the happiest of times."

"We loved her very much and she us."

Wythall Animal Sanctuary is a non destruct Sanctuary and have been helping rescue and rehabilitate animals since 1968.

They help the animals who need it most by giving them a second chance at a forever home, or where



Nigel is joined by Mark Baker, Adam Avery, Darron Baillie and Russell Baker. Picture by Marcus Mings 4625004MMR

this is not possible due to behavioural or medical reasons, the Sanctuary is their forever home.

Nigel is hoping to raise £5,000 so the sanctuary can create a specialised quiet area for the dogs that are more sensitive and get easily overwhelmed and stressed with the comings and going's of daily life, and has so far raised over £4,000.

Nigel added: "By creating these quiet spaces we can give the sensitive souls of the sanctuary a relaxing haven for them to enjoy the peaceful life they so deserve."

"We want to help so that other animals don't have to suffer like she did, give their residents tranquility and help to find their rescue animals good and loving homes."

Nigel used Springfield Pet Crematorium to handle Alma's passing and said the service they provided was amazing.

They donated £400 to get the fund off the ground, and Nigel said he was so thankful.

Nigel also visited Baker Ward, a printing company in Wythall that designed the stickers on the cars.

He said they donated £80 to the fund and were amazing at making sure all the stickers on the cars were done before they headed off across Europe.

If you would like to help Nigel visit [justgiving.com/crowdfunding/almas-trust](http://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/almas-trust) to donate.

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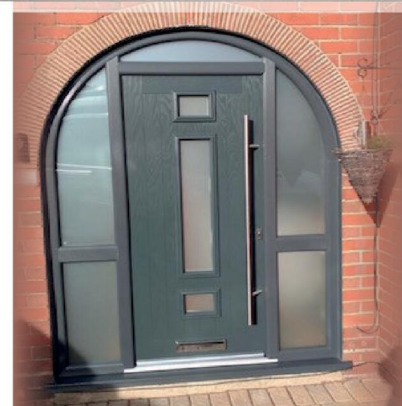
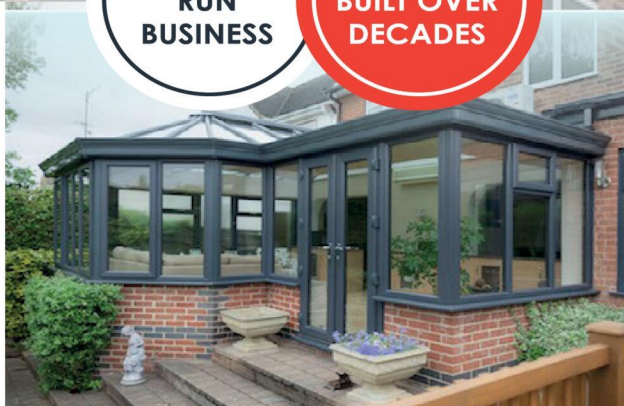


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# The Standard Recommends

## The benefits local businesses can bring to our community

Local companies play a pivotal role in reinforcing the fabric of their communities, offering a myriad of benefits that extend beyond their immediate economic contributions. These enterprises contribute significantly to the social, cultural, and environmental well-being of their surroundings.

### Economic Impact

One of the most significant benefits of local companies is their positive economic impact on the communities they serve. Local businesses tend to use local suppliers and hire from the local workforce, ensuring that the money spent remains within the community. According to numerous studies, for every £1 spent at a local shop, approximately 63p circulates back into the local economy. This contrasts sharply with national chains, where a lower proportion of each pound spent stays in the local area. As a result, the presence of local businesses boosts

the community's economic health, supporting job creation and reducing unemployment rates.

Furthermore, local companies often adapt their offerings to the specific needs and preferences of their community. Whether it's a café that provides organic produce sourced from regional farms or a craft shop showcasing local artisans, these businesses cater to the tastes and values of their customers. This ability to tailor products and services fosters a unique market environment that attracts residents and visitors alike, enriching the local economy. >>



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# The Standard Recommends

## Cultural Enrichment

The cultural contributions of local companies can be profound. They often provide stage for local artists and craftsmen, helping to preserve and promote the unique cultural identity of the community. By hosting events, workshops, and exhibitions, local businesses not only showcase local talent but also create opportunities for interaction and collaboration among community members.

Furthermore, local eateries and shops often reflect the culinary and artistic heritage of the region. They offer unique products that tell the story of the area, fostering a sense of pride among residents while attracting tourists interested in authentic experiences. These businesses serve as ambassadors of local culture, reinforcing community identity and cohesion.



## Resilience and Innovation

Local companies often exhibit resilience and innovation in ways larger corporations may not. Because they are closely connected to their communities, they can respond quickly to changing conditions or customer needs. During challenging economic times or crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, many local businesses adapted by pivoting their operations, whether by enhancing their online presence, offering deliv-

ery services, or creating new products that met emerging needs. This adaptability not only ensures the survival of local businesses but also strengthens the community's economy in the face of adversity. Communities with robust local business ecosystems tend to recover more quickly from economic downturns, as these businesses are often more flexible and capable of navigating change.

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# SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, every column and every 3 x 3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9.

## EASY

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 3 |   |   | 8 |   | 7 | 5 |   |
| 6 |   | 8 |   | 4 |   | 9 |   |   |
| 7 |   |   |   | 1 |   |   | 2 | 4 |
|   | 7 |   | 8 | 1 |   |   |   |   |
| 8 |   | 5 | 3 |   | 9 | 1 |   | 7 |
|   |   | 6 |   |   | 4 |   | 8 |   |
| 9 |   |   |   | 5 |   |   |   | 3 |
|   |   | 7 | 9 | 3 |   | 2 |   | 1 |
| 3 | 1 |   |   | 7 |   |   | 9 |   |

## HARD

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 7 |   |   | 2 |   |   |   |   |
|   |   |   | 8 | 4 |   |   | 6 |   |
|   |   | 8 |   |   |   |   |   | 2 |
|   | 2 |   |   | 7 | 3 |   |   | 1 |
|   | 8 |   |   |   |   |   | 9 |   |
| 5 |   | 4 | 9 |   |   |   | 7 |   |
| 4 |   |   |   |   |   | 5 |   |   |
|   | 1 |   | 7 | 5 |   |   |   |   |
|   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | 8 | 9 |

# PATHFINDER

Beginning with the top highlighted letter, follow a continuous path of words associated with the given subject. The trail goes through each letter once, twisting up, down and sideways, but never diagonally.

## Puppets

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | A | I | N | T | T | C | Y | F | I | H | E | A | I |   |
| O | T | P | S | O | C | R | A | R | F | N | T | M | T | N |
| O | K | A | C | A | S | Y | L | O | U | M | L | U | P | T |
| E | I | C | R | R | L | G | A | R | A | T | E | C | A | R |
| M | O | N | E | T | E | G | N | D | S | E | P | T | Y | O |
| Y | D | S | T | E | D | I | P | S | T | B | M | E | H | E |
| F | N | Y | D | N | D | I | S | N | U | I | S | T | A |   |
| I | A | P | K | A | E | H | M | H | G | O | T | D | R | A |
| N | R | M | C | U | D | O | U | C | L | E | A | V | N | T |
| G | E | O | U | E | G | R | C | S | Z | O | R | D | O | H |
| F | E | H | S | H | T | R | A | O | Z | F | K | R | G | E |
| R | O | T | E | K | L | O | P | E | I | E | G | O | O | P |
| B | G | T | I | E | E | N | E | A | E | B | P | N | E | H |
| A | L | B | M | R | L | A | P | R | D | D | O | T | D | E |
| S | I | R | U | S | H | D | Y | D | A | Y | W | O | O | R |

Solutions opposite

# CROSSWORD

|    |   |  |   |  |   |  |    |   |  |   |    |
|----|---|--|---|--|---|--|----|---|--|---|----|
|    | 1 |  | 2 |  | 3 |  |    | 4 |  | 5 |    |
| 6  |   |  |   |  |   |  |    | 7 |  |   |    |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  | 8  |   |  |   |    |
| 9  |   |  |   |  |   |  | 10 |   |  |   |    |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  | 11 |   |  |   |    |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  | 12 |   |  |   |    |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  | 13 |   |  |   |    |
| 14 |   |  |   |  |   |  | 15 |   |  |   | 16 |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  |    |   |  |   | 17 |
| 18 |   |  |   |  |   |  |    |   |  |   | 19 |
|    |   |  |   |  |   |  |    |   |  |   | 20 |
| 21 |   |  |   |  |   |  |    |   |  |   | 22 |

## ACROSS

- 6. Endanger (7)
- 7. Coach (5)
- 9. Smooth (5)
- 10. Please (7)
- 12. Disorder (11)
- 14. Mercury (11)
- 18. Accept (7)
- 19. Hoard (5)
- 21. Cut (5)
- 22. Weakness (7)

## DOWN

- 1. Signify (5)
- 2. Erase (6)
- 3. Concealed (3)
- 4. Habit (6)
- 5. Enclose (7)
- 8. Squirm (7)
- 11. Inert (7)
- 13. Calm (7)
- 15. Gifted (6)
- 16. Involve (6)
- 17. Veracity (5)
- 20. Weep (3)

Scribble pad

# LADDER

Using the clues provided, fill in each step of the ladder with a new word, changing one letter at a time.

- Masculine
- Auction
- Singular
- Vended
- Precious element



# NINER

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

- 415339 gives wine;
- 875 gives beer;
- 1264 gives a beer ingredient.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

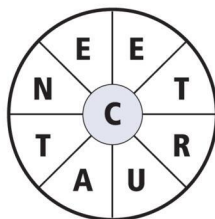
# CODEWORD

This puzzle has no clues. Instead, every number printed in the grid represents a letter, with the same number always representing the same letter. For example, if 8 turns out to be a V, you can write in V wherever a square contains 8. Using your knowledge of words, complete the puzzle.

|   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|   | 25 | 11 | 5  | 4  |    | 5  | 11 | 25 | 24 | 15 | 16 | 22 | 5  |    |
| A |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| B | 11 |    | 9  |    |    | 20 |    |    | 21 |    | 11 |    | 22 |    |
| C |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| D | 23 |    | 11 | 26 | 4  | 10 | 20 | 20 | 13 |    | 17 |    | 10 |    |
| E |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| F | 21 | 12 | 7  |    |    |    |    | 11 |    |    | 12 | 10 | 14 | 26 |
| G |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| H | 9  |    |    |    |    | 3  | 21 | 12 | 6  |    |    | 22 |    | 16 |
| I |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| J |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| K |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| L |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| M |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| N | 17 | 15 | 9  | 18 | 23 |    | 17 |    | 18 | 26 | 16 | C  | 4  |    |
| O |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| P | 15 |    | 15 |    |    | 3  | 18 | 8  | 8  |    | 10 | A  |    | 16 |
| Q |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| R | 3  | 21 | 10 | 12 |    |    |    | 5  |    |    | 5  | 15 | 10 |    |
| S |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| T | 11 |    | 7  |    |    | 21 | 2  | 15 | 17 | 15 | 10 | 22 |    | 22 |
| U |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| V | 26 |    | 21 |    |    | 10 |    |    | 11 |    | 12 |    |    | 22 |
| W |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| X | 7  | 21 | 14 | 26 | 22 | 18 | 9  | 15 |    |    | 7  | 15 | 26 | 13 |
| Y |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Z |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

# WORDWHEEL

You have 10 mins to find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the hub letter and at least 3 others. Letters may be used only once. You cannot use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one 9-letter word to be found.

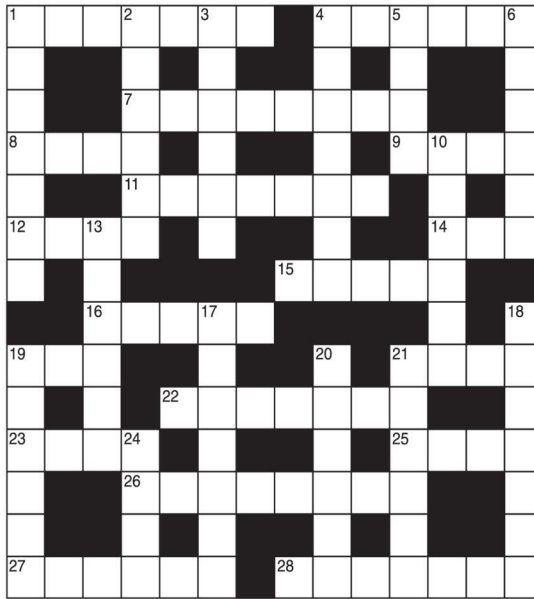


How you rate  
 20 words: average  
 30 words: good  
 40 words: very good  
 50 or more: excellent.

# GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

1. Surname assumed by the British royal house since 1917 (7)
4. Seclusion of women practised by some Islamic and Hindu peoples (6)
7. In biology, an occurrence of a new form differing from its parents (8)
8. A sunken fence bounding a garden, etc. (2-2)
9. In mythology, Norse god after whom Thursday is named (4)
11. Old musical instrument like a trombone (7)
12. Piece of crisp-baked bread (4)
14. A solemn promise or pledge (3)
15. Animal life of a region (5)
16. Kind of card game (5)
19. Fish closely related to the skate (3)
21. The female of an equine animal (4)
22. Territory of a country lying wholly within another (7)
23. In history, a Conservative (4)
25. Tailless, froglike amphibian (4)
26. Oxford and Cambridge (8)
- 27 and 28. Zoologist, author of My Family And Other Animals (6,7)



## DOWN

1. Ridge between the shoulder blades of a horse (7)
2. Reversible, figured fabric of silk, linen, etc. (6)
3. The science of sight (6)
4. Plant genus including polyanthus and primrose (7)
5. The smallest of a litter (4)
6. Public school founded by John Lyon in 1572 (6)
10. Cigar of Cuban tobacco (6)
13. "The Adventures of Tom —", a novel by Mark Twain (6)
17. "The Sailor", hero of a tale in the "Arabian Nights" (7)
18. Plant's slender shoot by which it clings for support (7)

19. Sailor who is not an officer (6)
20. Four-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage with folding hood (6)
21. Small, solid body, becoming luminous when entering the earth's atmosphere (6)
24. Hindu system of meditation, as a means of attaining union with the Supreme Spirit (4)

# SOLUTIONS

ACROSS: 1 Windsor; 4 Purdah; 7 Mutation; 8 Ha-ha; 9 Thor; 11 Sackbut; 12 Rusk; 14 Vow; 15 Fauna; 16 Whist; 19 Ray; 21 Mare; 22 Endave; 23 Tony; 25 Toad; 26 Oxbridge; 27 Gerald; 28 Durrell. DOWN: 1 Withers; 2 Damask; 3 Optics; 4 Primula; 5 Runt; 6 Harrow; 10 Havana; 13 Sawyer; 17 Sindbad; 18 Tendril; 19 Rating; 20 Landau; 21 Meteor; 24 Yoga.

**General Knowledge Crossword**  
 ACROSS: 6 Impert; 7 Tutor; 9 Sleek; 10 Gratty; 12 Deangement; 14 Quicksilver; 18 Receive; 19 Store; 21 Sever; 22 Frailty; Down: 1 Imply; 2 Delete; 3 Hid; 4 Custom; 5 Confine; 8 Whiggle; 11 Passive; 13 Quieten; 15 Clever; 16 Enrall; 17 Truth; 20 Cry.

**Crossword**  
 HORSEPLAY  
 Captain Troy Tempest, Bungle, Otis the Aardark, Fozzie Bear, the Grouch, Miss Piggy, Scott Tracy, Roland Rat, Muffin the Mule, Fingernouse, Kermit the Frog, Basil Brush, Lady Penelope, Oscar  
 UTTERANCE  
 Wordwheel Pathfinder  
 Cooke Monsters, Captain Scarlet, Edd the Duck, Andy Pandey

**Wordwheel Pathfinder**  
 24=A, 25=B, 26=N  
 17=R, 18=L, 19=Q, 20=P, 21=O, 22=T, 23=X, 16=C, 10=A, 11=U, 12=L, 13=Y, 14=W, 15=E, 16=C, 1=G, 2=Y, 3=F, 4=H, 5=S, 6=K, 7=D, 8=Z, 9=M, Make, Male, Sale, Sole, Sold, Gold, Good.

**Codeword**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 9 |
| 8 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 7 |
| 5 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 4 |
| 9 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| 6 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| 2 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| 1 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 8 |

Hard

**Ladder**  
 Make, Male, Sale, Sole, Sold, Gold, Good.  
 Easy  
**Sudoku**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| 6 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 3 |
| 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 4 |
| 2 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 7 |
| 1 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| 5 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 |



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LEFT: Twitchers will be out counting birds this weekend. Picture by Katie Nethercoat (rsqb-images.com) RIGHT: Blue tit, Parus caeruleus, perched on branch in garden. Picture by Ray Kennedy (rsqb-images.com)

# Things are looking up for Birdwatch survey

THE WORLD'S largest garden wildlife survey returns this weekend, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to watch and count the UK's garden birds for the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch.

Nearly 600,000 people took part in 2025, counting more than 9million birds.

In the West Midlands around 15,500 people took part, with the Woodpigeon taking the top spot as the most commonly seen bird, followed by the house sparrow and blue tit.

In Worcestershire, more than 9,500 counted with the house sparrow the most popular, the blue tit

second and woodpigeon third.

This year's event takes place on today, tomorrow and Sunday (January 23, 24 and 25).

People in the region are asked to spend an hour watching and counting the birds that land in their garden, allotment, balcony or local park, then send their results to the RSPB.

Beccy Speight, the RSPB's chief executive, said: "By taking part in the Birdwatch, you and hundreds of thousands of other nature lovers across the UK, are helping us understand how garden birds are doing."

"Birds and wildlife are struggling right now. Every observation counts, even if you see nothing at all.

"Whether you live in a city or

the countryside, anyone, anywhere, can take part in the Big Garden Birdwatch – even if you don't have a garden.

"A park, balcony, allotment or window box will do. Simply spend an hour and count the birds you see. It's good for wildlife and evidence shows it's good for our own wellbeing."

The Birdwatch, which started in 1979, has since become a much-loved annual citizen science survey, that gives the RSPB a valuable snapshot of how garden birds are doing in the UK.

There have now been over 7million surveys over that time, more than 200million birds have been counted and nearly 12.6million hours spent watching and counting

garden birds.

Last year's UK-wide Big Garden Birdwatch results revealed that, nationally, the house sparrow held the top spot for another year as the most commonly spotted bird, with blue tit riding high at number two and Woodpigeon coming in at number three. Starling and Blackbird made up the remainder of the top five most recorded species.

Despite the top 10 remaining the same as the previous year in 2024, there were declines in average numbers counted for house sparrow, blue tit, and starling. It could be that these results are weather related - Storm Eowyn hit last year's Big Garden Birdwatch weekend, which makes it even more interesting to

see this year's results.

Beccy added: "Even on the greyest winter day, garden birds bring a welcome dose of nature into our everyday lives."

"Take a moment to pause, to listen, to notice. We need nature, and nature needs us."

"By joining the Big Garden Birdwatch you're doing something positive for birds and nature."

"Because when we act for nature together, we can do so much more."

People can visit: [rsqb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://rsqb.org.uk/birdwatch) for a digital Big Garden Birdwatch guide, which includes a bird identification chart, top tips, along with an RSPB shop voucher and advice on how to attract wildlife to gardens.

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Reader Travel

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Beloved for its pretty beaches, and classic charm, Scarborough is the perfect destination for a stunning five-day getaway! We enjoy a stunning excursion programme with visits to Whitby, York and the filming location for the TV series Heartbeat, Goathland.

**SO MUCH INCLUDED...**

- ✓ Return coach travel from Redditch
- ✓ 4 nights at a selected hotel in Scarborough (JG2 rating) with dinner & breakfast
- ✓ Light entertainment every evening
- ✓ 2 for 1 bar (6pm-9pm) on selected drinks
- ✓ Excursions to Goathland (Heartbeat), Whitby & York

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**SO MUCH INCLUDED...**

- ✓ Return coach travel from Bromsgrove
- ✓ 4 nights at the Pentire Hotel, Newquay (JG3 rating) with dinner & breakfast
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## UK debut for new hybrid

**MARKING** the introduction of OMODA UK's first full-hybrid model, the OMODA 5 SHS-H represents the next step for one of the UK's fastest-growing automotive brands as it continues to broaden its electrified line-up for British customers.

Offered in two trim levels - Knight and Noble - prices start from just £25,740 OTR, with the model available through OMODA&JAECOO UK's nationwide dealer network from March 2026.

Positioned as a highly accessible full-hybrid SUV, the OMODA 5 SHS-H builds on the success of the existing OMODA 5 and all-electric E5, offering drivers an efficient electrified alternative without the need to plug in.

Powered by a 1.5-litre turbo full-hybrid system paired with a dedicated DHT automatic transmission, the OMODA 5 SHS-H delivers a combined power output of up to 150 kW, front-wheel-drive performance, and optimised efficiency across a wide range of driving conditions.

Equipped with a 1.5-litre turbo petrol engine, 1.83 kW battery and 51-litre fuel tank, the OMODA 5 SHS-H delivers a total driving range

of over 650 miles and up to 53 mpg (WLTP). Acceleration from 0-62 mph takes just 7.9 seconds, with the hybrid system expertly tuned to balance new front grille and bumper design and refreshed alloy wheel styling for 2026. UK customers can choose from five different exterior colours: Galena Silver, Garnet Red, Obsidian Black, Selenite White and Tourmaline Grey.

Two-tone paint finishes are also available on selected colour options.

The OMODA 5 SHS-H is offered in two trim levels, each designed to meet different customer priorities. Knight provides a strong standard specification, focusing on design, connectivity, and everyday usability, with features including 18-inch alloy wheels, full LED lighting, dual 12.3-inch digital displays, wireless Apple CarPlay® and Android Auto™, intelligent voice control and a comprehensive suite of advanced driver assistance. Noble builds on this foundation with a more comfort- and technology-focused specification, adding features such as a 540-degree surround-view camera, an 8-speaker SONY audio system, ambient interior lighting, heated and ventilated front seats, and additional convenience features, offer-

ing customers a more premium driving and ownership experience.

Victor Zhang, UK Country Director, OMODA UK, said: "The introduction of the OMODA 5 SHS-H is a significant milestone for the brand in the UK.

It marks our first full-hybrid model and reflects exactly what OMODA is focused on delivering: highly efficient, intelligently engineered vehicles that fit seamlessly into everyday life.

"The OMODA 5 SHS-H brings together the bold design and technology our customers already value, with the added benefits of a self-charging hybrid system that requires no change in driving habits.

It's a key next step as we continue to broaden our powertrain offering in line with what UK drivers are asking for."

Since launching in the UK in August 2024, OMODA UK has recorded 23,484 registrations, with the OMODA 5 and E5 establishing themselves as popular choices among private buyers seeking distinctive design, advanced technology and accessible electrification.

The arrival of the OMODA 5 SHS-H further strengthens the brand's growing range of powertrain options, spanning petrol, full

hybrid, plug-in hybrid and battery-electric models.

Together, these vehicles reflect the brand's focus on delivering choice, efficiency, and modern technology, while maintaining a consistent emphasis on design, quality, and value across the UK line-up.

Offering the benefits of both electric assistance and petrol power - ideal for customers looking to reduce emissions without sacrificing long-distance driving capability - the OMODA 5 SHS-H will be available in the UK from just £25,740 OTR\* for the Knight trim and £29,240 OTR\* for the Noble. Every model is supported by OMODA UK's comprehensive 7-year/100,000-mile vehicle warranty, alongside an 8-year/100,000-mile battery

warranty, providing long-term reassurance for customers. UK customer deliveries are expected to begin in March 2026 and will be available through OMODA & JAECOO UK's nationwide dealership network.

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**DEATHS**

## JAY

**Doreen**

Aged 84 years

Passed away peacefully on  
Wednesday 7th January 2026.

Beloved Wife of David. Much loved Mum to  
Tony and Paul, and granny to Anneliese  
and Isabelle.

Doreen will be greatly missed by all of her  
family and friends.

A service to celebrate Doreen's life will take  
place at Redditch Crematorium on Monday  
2nd February 2026, at 10.15 a.m.

Immediate Family flowers only please.  
Donations if so desired to Parkinsons UK  
may be sent to

Thomas Brothers, The Funeral Directors,  
Birchfield House, 494 Evesham Road,  
Redditch, B97 5JF

01527 547777  
Thank You

**DEATHS**



## Daddy

Pink skies in the morning  
"you whisper good morning",  
Pink skies at night  
"you whisper goodnight".  
You are the brightest star.  
You are my forever superhero.  
*I Love you more always.*  
*Ralphie xxx*

**DEATHS**

## HARDING

**Alan Robert**

Age 74

Peacefully passed away on 2-01-26

Missed and loved by Doreen, Beth, Robert,  
Kim, grandchildren and all family  
and friends.

A Celebration of Alan's life will take place at  
St James Church, Harvington, Evesham on  
the 13th February at 10.30.

All Welcome.

Followed by being laid to rest at Westall Park.

The family request Donations through  
Thomas Brothers, Redditch  
for the family's chosen Charities.

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**DEATHS**



## Goodnight Paul

You will always be my forever love.  
Even though my heart is breaking  
I promise you that Ralphie will  
always know how much you loved  
us and of course Winnie.

Till we meet again

*I love you more always.*

*Tammy xxxxx*

**DEATHS**

## WILFORD Nigel Ashley



Pauline's brother Nigel Ashley Wilford sadly  
passed away 8th December 2025.

Originally from Redditch, emigrated to  
Canada in the 1970's.

*Loved and missed by Family and Friends.*

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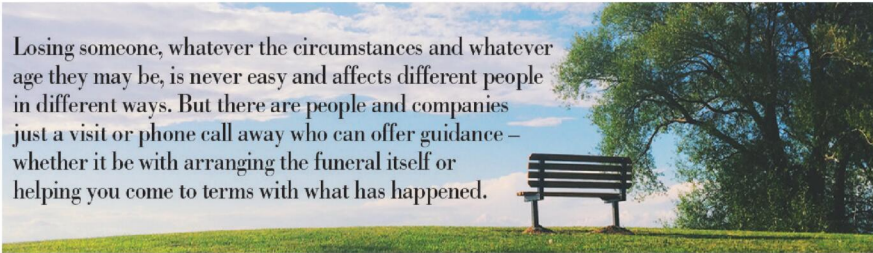
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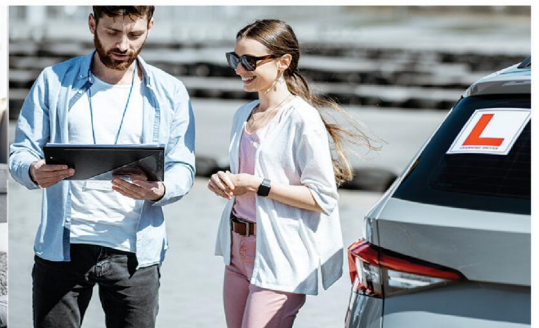


Losing someone, whatever the circumstances and whatever age they may be, is never easy and affects different people in different ways. But there are people and companies just a visit or phone call away who can offer guidance – whether it be with arranging the funeral itself or helping you come to terms with what has happened.



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## Observer Standard

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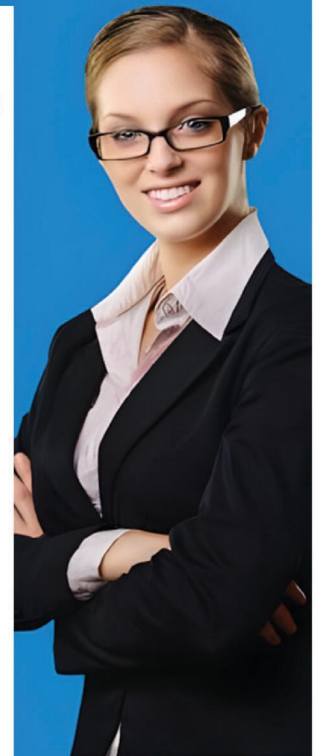
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Bullivant Media Group publishes local Newspapers, Magazines and Websites across Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands.



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# Spa stunned by 10-man visitors as Cinderford romp to victory



Josh Hurdman goes for goal from close range. Pictures by Mathew Mason.



James Lemon sees his header ruled out for offside.

by **Aaron Sutcliffe**  
 aaron.sutcliffe@bullivantmedia.com

**FOOTBALL:** DROITWICH Spa missed the chance to move top of the table following a heavy 4-0 home defeat against Cinderford Town.

The Saltmen's eight-game unbeaten run in the league came to an abrupt end at the King George Playing Fields.

Spa lost at home in the league for just the second time this season as a brace from Jack Watts and further goals from Kian Davies and Blaine Waugh condemned Andy Crowther's side to defeat.

That was despite Cinderford playing the final half an hour with 10-men after Sam Hunt received a second yellow card for a high boot when challenging for the ball with Josh Hurdman.

The result means Droitwich remain two points behind leaders Roman Glass St George with two games in hand in the Hellenic League Premier Division table.

Spa made the worst possible start in their first home game of the New Year as Davies finished a low cross from the left with the game just three minutes old.

The home side looked to respond to the setback as Alex Dugmore headed over while Charlie Tilley shot over the top from a tight angle after good work from Jack Brighton.

Droitwich goalkeeper Joe Stockton then denied Harry Leeson as Cinderford threatened to score a second goal before the interval.

The Saltmen almost drew level on

the stroke of half time only for Ben Tilbury to see his backheel come back off the crossbar from Dugmore's initial header.

And the last action of the half saw Stockton comfortably claim Davies' shot from the edge of the penalty area to leave Spa a goal behind at the break.

Crowther's side made a strong start to the second half as Hurdman flashed a low shot across the face of goal.

And Dugmore then sent a header narrowly wide of the post as the home side pushed for an equaliser.

However, Cinderford doubled their lead on 59 minutes when Watts produced a clinical finish into the bottom corner.

Droitwich received a lifeline just two minutes later when Cinderford's Hunt saw red after catching Hurdman with a high boot.

However, Watts doubled his tally for the game on 64 minutes with a sublime chip from distance which travelled over Stockton and nestled in the top corner.

Spa thought they had scored a consolation goal five minutes from time courtesy of a James Lemon header only for the assistant referee to flag for offside.

And Cinderford rubbed salt in the wounds in the final minute as Waugh scored a stunner to cap a perfect away performance from the visitors.

The Saltmen saw a second goal ruled out for offside at the death which denied James Baldwin a goal on his return to the club after more than 11 years away.

Droitwich are next in action against Corsham Town on Saturday, January 24 with kick-off at 3pm at Lacock Road.

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