

# DROITWICH Standard

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# Rising costs signal end for historic club

by **Tristan Harris**  
 tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

THE CENTURY old Droitwich Working Men's Club is set to close for good on March 28.

The tough decision was taken following an emergency general meeting on Sunday.

In a post on Facebook, staff said the permanent closure was taken with a 'heavy heart', citing rising operating costs, mounting building repairs and debt.

The building has been a working men's club since 1920.

The statement added: "This hasn't been an easy decision to make. However, between the significant rise in operating costs over the last few years and the mounting challenges of building repairs and debt, we have reached a point where we can no longer move forward."

"We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support, our smiles, and your business over the years."

"We would love to see you one last time before we lock the doors, so please do stop by before the 28th."

People took to social media to express their sadness about the situation.



**Droitwich Working Mens Club is due to shut its doors later this month. Picture by Marcus Mingins 0926004MMMR3**

Barry Knott said 'another Droitwich icon had been lost' and called for it to be preserved.

Angela Buffery added: "I used to work there when Tony was the landlord. It was a lovely place to work. This is so sad."

Some people recalled their

happy memories of meeting up with friends and taking part in darts competitions while others said 'soon there would be nowhere to go in Droitwich'.

The building is now for sale and the current operators would love to see the space continue to have a

role in the town centre.

Anyone interested in purchasing the property or who knows anyone who may be interested should contact the club secretary at: [facebook.com/Droitwichwmc](https://facebook.com/Droitwichwmc) - the Droitwich Working Men's Club Facebook page.

## Town meeting

RESIDENTS will be able to have their say to those making the decisions at the Droitwich Annual Town Meeting.

The event, hosted by Droitwich Spa Town Council, will take place from 6pm on Monday, March 9, at Droitwich Spa Community Hall.

The meeting will begin with reports from the town's mayor, Coun Chris Bowden, and chairmen of the council's standing committees.

Members of the public will then be able to put questions to members to the council about any issues they want addressing in the town.

Previous meetings have spurred a number of ideas, such as a suggestion the town could set up a 'small chamber of commerce' to help get business booming.

This led to the Droitwich Business Association being formed.

## New store

DROITWICH is set to get a new Iceland next month, bringing around 25 new jobs.

The discount supermarket will open its doors in the building in St Andrew's Shopping Centre on April 21.

Poundland, which used to occupy the building, closed in December.

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## Witness appeal

ROAD USERS' lives were put at risk when objects were thrown from a motorway bridge on the M42.

The incident, near Junction 2 at Hopwood services, happened at around 1.55pm on Tuesday, February 17.

One vehicle had its windscreen smashed and the driver narrowly avoided what could have been a serious collision.

PC Stuart Head, who is investigating the incident, said: "Throwing things at moving vehicles is incredibly dangerous and can endanger lives."

He said officers wanted to hear from anyone in the area at the time who could help find those responsible.

He appealed for anyone with dash cam footage showing a person on the bridge at Junction 2 to email him at [stuart.head@westmercia.police.uk](mailto:stuart.head@westmercia.police.uk), or to call him, on 07773 043048.

## Having a think

MORE THAN 250 girl guiding members came together at Trinity High School in Redditch to celebrate 100 years of world thinking day.

The event remembered the girl guiding founders and thought about the global girl guiding family.

Girls took part in lots of activities and finished the day with a promise renewal and candle ceremony.

The girls also filled a special picture with coins which will be donated to the world thinking day fund, to help other girl guides and girl scouts.

# Tributes page to remember special mums

by **Tristan Harris**  
[tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com](mailto:tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com)

**THE PRIMROSE Hospice has set up a digital tribute page where people can honour mums ahead of Mother's Day, on March 15.**

The day can be tough for anyone missing their mum - whether they lost them recently or decades ago.

The Primrose Hospice and Family Support Centre helps bereaved adults and children, including Lilly, whose mum Lizzie died of stomach cancer in 2017, when Lilly was just six years old.

Lilly said: "Primrose Hospice helped me process what was happening when my mum was ill and after she died. They helped me to meet other people going through similar things and have given me someone to talk to when I need to."

The Hospice is offering guidance for anyone grieving a mum.

The charity advises anyone finding the day hard, to remember they are not alone, and that all emotions are normal.

Sadness, anger, guilt or even a moment

of joy are all natural. The hospice advises people talk openly about their mums, share stories and maybe keep something near that helps them feel connected. That could be a photograph, or they could play a piece of music which reminds them of their mum.

Those connections matter and keep love and memories alive.

Remembrance can bring peace, which is why the Primrose has set up a digital tribute page where people can honour the exceptional women who touched their life.

Those wanting to honour their mums can post a photograph and heartfelt message on the page at [primrose.dedicationpage.org/mothersday2026](http://primrose.dedicationpage.org/mothersday2026).

Alternatively, call the hospice's fundraising team on 01527 889796.

■ **Lilly with her mum Lizzie, whom she will be remembering on Mother's Day this year. s**



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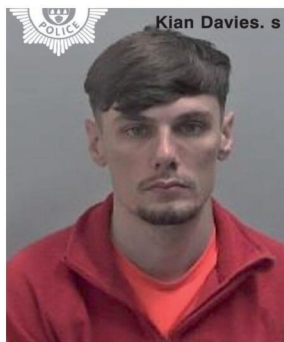
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See page **38**

# Car key trio given long jail terms for burglary roles



Kian Davies. s



Ethan Beresford. s



Connor O'Keefe Clancey. Pictures by West Mercia Police

THREE members of a gang who carried out car key burglaries across the Midlands, including Bromsgrove and Lickey, have been jailed to almost 24 years between them.

Kian Davies, 25, and Connor O'Keefe-Clancey, 21, who are already in prison, and Ethan Beresford, 25, of Ely Close, Birmingham, were each found guilty of one count of conspiring to commit burglary and one count of conspiring to steal a motor vehicle at Redditch Crown Court.

The three were responsible for a series of ten car key burglaries in February and March of last year that took place in Bromsgrove district, Earlswood in Warwickshire, and addresses in Staffordshire and Northamptonshire.

Davies, O'Keefe-Clancey and Beresford stole cars after breaking into their victims' properties with a modus operandi of gaining access to the homes by lock snapping and blow torching the locks.

Davies received a total sentence of seven years and five months (89 months), O'Keefe-Clancey got seven years and seven months (91 months) and Beresford got six years and six months (78 months).

Beresford was further convicted of burglary, receiving a further 28 months consecutively for that, and attempted burglary for which he was handed 24 months concurrently.

He was also convicted of a theft for which there was no separate penalty.

This meant his total term was eight years and nine months (106 months).

The total for all three of 23 years and 10 months (286 months).

The three were identified following a complex investigation conducted by officers DC Jodi Lothian and DC Max Beswick under the experienced supervision of DS Kirsty Hill in the north Worcestershire CID team.

Mobile phone examinations revealed the extent of their conspiracy to burgle properties and steal cars, sometimes threatening occupants with violence as they fled.

Phone mast data also placed them at the scenes of the crimes.

Once they had stolen the keys, they would steal and move on the vehicles - often high value ones such as BMWs, Mercedes and Audis. They travelled around in a VW Golf R which was on false or cloned number plates.

Det Supt Kirsty Hill, from north Worcestershire Proactive CID, said: "This was a complex investigation, so we are pleased to get these sentences for Davies, O'Keefe-Clancey and Beresford whose car key burglaries harmed many people in our force area and neighbouring forces too."

"We understand it often seems like car thieves get away with it but hopefully this result shows we will always work hard to bring such criminals to justice and try to halt the impact their actions have on our communities."

## Assault outside town pub

A WOMAN was sexually assaulted outside a pub in Bromsgrove.

The incident happened in the outdoor smoking area at The Ladybird Inn on Finstall Road around 4.30pm on January 31. The suspect was a white man with brown hair and was wearing a lumberjack style jacket.

A 23-year-old was arrested on sus-

picion of sexual assault following the incident and has been released on bail while enquiries continue.

Police have appealed for witnesses and have urged anyone who was in the smoking area at the time and saw anything to email PC Lucy Link at [lucy.link1@westmercia.police.uk](mailto:lucy.link1@westmercia.police.uk) or call her on 07854 280503.

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# Performing an important role

THE STANDARD joined district council chairman Coun Sam Evans as the Pauline Quirke Academy (PQA) Bromsgrove and Redditch opened at Lickey End First School.

Sessions run for three hours on a Saturday from 9.45am to 1pm with opening and closing assemblies either side.

Three age groups - six to nine-year-olds, 10 to 13 and 14 to 18-year-olds - each do an hour of musical theatre, an hour of comedy and drama and an hour of film and TV.

Sessions are led by industry experienced professionals with guests visiting to give different tips and insights. And participants can make new friends as well as learn new skills.

Principal Ariya Amin said: "Because schools are under pressure to deliver so much on the National Curriculum, there are some skills they either do not have time in school days to teach or not in as much depth.

"That is where we come in - we do have the time."

Ariya added the new setting at Lickey End First School was perfect as the spaces both inside and out enabled the PQA to deliver what it wanted.

And Lickey End headteacher Chris Burton is also delighted with the link-up.

He said: "When Ariya contacted us we jumped at the chance - PQA shares the same ethos and values as our school so it is a perfect fit and a great coup for Bromsgrove.

"We have the space and want to use the building as much as possible - not just during school days and term-time.

"It is important to me Lickey End First School is not just here for its main purpose but also for the whole community to use."

Lickey End is an OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) school meaning it places more emphasis on the importance of children being outside for activities as often as possible.



In Comedy and Drama, PQA students will work on a 'Shakespeare in the Park' project where a piece will be performed outdoors while parents and other audience members enjoy a picnic.

es young people the differentials between acting on stage and on screen. And they also learn skills in public debating, monologues and stand-up comedy.

very young age. And, every Saturday at 12.30pm, parents are free to go along and have a tour to see what is on offer with free taster sessions also available.

Ariya added: "Everyone was absolutely buzzing after our first day - we are so happy in our new home.

"We all just could not wait to get going and it has been a fantastic start."

Coun Evans, joined by the Worcestershire County Councillor for the area, Josh Robinson, said he was 'blown away' by the PQA.

"The range of talent here is impressive and incredible and the fact we have PQA to allow and enable that talent to flourish and grow is amazing."

Visit [pqacademy.com/academies/redditch/](http://pqacademy.com/academies/redditch/) to book a free session.

Vice Principal Ben Patefield and Principal Ariya Amin with Coun Sam Evans. Pictures by Tristan Harris. Copyright Bullivant Media Group Ltd.



## Musical Theatre

Young people learn a number of skills, including acting through song and dance and the importance of telling stories through those disciplines.

Members get to perform in in-house productions and some in the West End.

As well as on-stage attributes, students also learn about sound, lighting, choreography, producing and directing.

## Comedy and Drama

This most varied module teach-

## Film and TV

Young people work on creating scenarios for the screen before watching each one back as a group.

As well as acting and presenting in front of the camera, participants learn about story-boarding and shot decision making, along with sound, lighting, props, costume design and even hair and make-up.

## Poppets

PQA also runs Poppets from 10.15am to 11.45am for four to five-year-olds to give children their first taste of performing arts from a



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# Nominate brave teen Leo for a national award



Help Leo to win a Pride of Britain award. s

by Ryan Smith  
ryan.smith@bullivanmedia.com

**A BROMSGROVE teen who has smiled his way through leukaemia and inspired others to sign up to the stem cell register has been nominated for a Pride of Britain award.**

After months of seeking a match, Leo Sproson, aged 16, had a stem cell transplant last month and has been undergoing chemotherapy.

Leo's mum Jenna has been so amazed by Leo's response to his potentially life-threatening illness she has nominated him for a Pride of Britain Child or Teenager of Courage award.

Staff at the *Standard* have also nominated Leo and we want others to nominate the brave lad.

Leo has permitted his story to be shared widely and heard through his Leo's Army Facebook page in a bid to get other people to join the DKMS stem cell donor register.

The teenager's family held a registration day in November and some 718 people signed up to the stem cell register on the day, with many more registering for online kits.

That event also raised more than £4,000 for DKMS, which will help the charity to process the necessary swab kits.

Jenna has sat with Leo day in and day out for just over five months now.

She said that throughout the gruelling treatment, long hospital stays, the endless tests and the fear and uncertainty Leo had faced, he had shown a kind of bravery that left her and others in awe.

She added: "He still smiles.

"He still thinks of other people. He still finds ways to lift those around him, even on the hardest days.

"When most would crumble, Leo shows quiet determination.

"When things are frightening, he faces them head-on.

"That isn't just strength - that's courage in its purest form."

Leo will be in hospital until May 25, meaning he will not be home in time for his birthday, on March 25.

His aunt Kate Best said: "The actual stem cell transplant was the easy part, the isolation and chemotherapy before, and the 10 days after, have been brutal for Leo.

"As always, he hasn't moaned, though, and just keeps pushing on."

People can visit: [data.reachplc.com/242643338335962](http://data.reachplc.com/242643338335962) to nominate Leo for the award.

## MP demands safety mirror

**BROMSGROVE MP Bradley Thomas has called on Worcestershire County Council to install a mirror to improve road safety along the town's Ednall Lane.**

Mr Thomas has been working with the residents of Nailers Court, who have raised concerns about the lack of visibility when exiting their car park. The residents say there have been several near misses at the site.

The roads in the area are narrow but Mr Thomas said the county council had informed them there had been no serious accidents reported and, as vegetation and hedges in the area are overgrown, cutting them back would improve safety.

The MP and residents do not feel that would be sufficient to improve safety and have warned something needs to be done before a serious crash occurs.

Mr Thomas said: "What [the county council] fail to take into



Bradley Thomas MP, left, with residents of Nailers Court who want something done about Ednall Lane. s

consideration is the numerous near misses that have happened.

"It just shouldn't be the case that a serious accident has to happen before any action is taken by the county council."

He vowed to continue working with the residents until something is done.

Mike Chaplain, from Nailers Court, said: "The residents are becoming extremely concerned that the lack of visibility will lead to a serious accident and ask the council to help in preventing that happening. The suggestion of cutting back vegetation, we do not believe, will solve the problem."

## Cars taken off road

**BROMSGROVE Police seized two vehicles in Catshill for motoring offences.**

The vehicles had no road tax, no MoT and no insurance. Officers said: "These offences pose a risk to other road users. Both vehicles have now been removed from the public highway."

West Mercia Police reiterated any vehicle used on a public road must be taxed, insured and - if more than three years old - must have an MoT.

"Parking an untaxed or uninsured vehicle on a public road is an offence," the force added.

## Clean-ups planned in B45

**THERE will be plenty of tidy-ups going on in Rubery, Rednal and Frankley as part of this year's Great British Spring Clean.**

Efforts in the B45 postcode areas are being led by The Rubery Wombles, who have pledged to rid the areas of more than 50 bags of rubbish.

At 9.30am on Friday, March 13, the group will be at the back of the Rubery flyover, including the woods leading to Parkway.

At 7am on Saturday, March 14, the first part of Egghill Lane, in Frankley, will be tidied, from the junction of Frogmill Road.

At 9.30am on March 20, the

woods at the back of Morrisons, in Rubery Great Park, will be given a spring clean and at 9.30am on March 21, attention will be turned to St Chad's Park and New Road.

The group will be getting together at 9.30am on March 24 in Frogmill Walk, in Frankley, and at 9.30am on March 26, at the Doweries and Cock Hill Lane.

The final litter-pick will take place at 7am on March 27, when the second part of Egg Hill Lane will be spruced up, from the junction of Frankley Hill Lane.

Equipment and black bags will be provided for the clean-ups, with everyone welcome to pitch in.



The Rubery Wombles are on a mission. s



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Calls have been made for Council leader Jo Monk to resign. Picture by Ryan Smith © Bullivant Media.



# Lengthy debate ends in council tax up by 8.9%

COUNCIL tax across Worcestershire is set to rise by almost 8.98 per cent after an eight-hour budget meeting last Thursday.

Reform-led Worcestershire County Council approved its 2026/27 budget with the tax rise from April adding about £145-a-year to the bills of those in Band D properties.

The government recently awarded the authority £59million in emergency support to enable it to avoid effective bankruptcy.

Several budget amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats went through.

These included using £1million to create a footway / footpath fund where each councillor would have £17,500 per year to invest in works on the most urgent and in need footpaths

They also requested to divert £5million per year in 2026/27 and 2027/28 of the currently unallocated Local Transport Grant to increase the number of pedestrian crossings, construct and improve footpaths in villages and develop cycle-

ways, including Malvern to Worcester.

The Lib Dems proposed £5m in 2026/27 of the currently unallocated DfT Highways Maintenance Block to raise the roads at Eckington Bridge and Pershore Bridge to eliminate risk of flooding disruption and proposed £2million from the same fund to support side roads in Bromsgrove negatively impacted by BREP works.

A further £1million in 2026/27 will go towards creating a £1million drainage stability fund for roads routinely affected by local flooding, when drains collapse and make the roads unusable or they deteriorate. The cash is aimed at making roads safer for longer.

And the party proposed £2m in 2026/27 of the currently unallocated DfT Highways Maintenance Block for a rural roads priority fund.

The Lib Dems also put forward an amendment to create a one-off revenue budget of £200k for a feasibility study to look at existing county buildings to identify whether any were suitable to be converted

for small scale SEND provision.

Lib Dem councillors then staged a walkout, enabling the budget to go through.

Leader of the Conservative Group, Coun Adam Kent said the Lib Dems' actions were 'the worst of a political group he had ever seen'.

"Reform could have made enough savings since May 2025 to have stopped this mega tax rise but their election promises to cut waste and reduce taxes are now shown for exactly what they are.

"The Conservative Group put up a valiant fight but with only 12 out of 57 we just don't have the numbers."

Council leader, Coun Jo Monk, said it was a difficult decision to raise council tax.

She insisted the financial difficulty the council was in was because the previous Tory administration - of which she was a member - kept taxes artificially low.

Councillors voted by 24 to 19 to pass the budget, including the council tax rise, with four councillors abstaining.

## Calls for Reform pair to go

THE LIBERAL Democrats have called for Worcestershire County Council's Reform UK leader, Coun Jo Monk, and deputy leader, Coun Rob Wharton, to step down.

It comes after the authority approved an 8.98 per cent council tax increase with the leadership citing a dire financial situation as the reason for the rise.

Coun Monk previously said this budget was needed due to the dire financial situation the previous Conservative administration had left them in when they came to power in May 2025.

At a press conference last month, she claimed the Reform administration 'being honest with the public' and was taking responsibility for the 'mess' that was left.

The Conservatives said Reform could have made sufficient savings since tak-

ing over last May to 'prevent a mega tax rise'.

Coun Josh Robinson, from the Worcestershire's Liberal Democrats, said: "Council leadership has clearly failed over the past nine months.

"They promised to cut waste and cut taxes. Elected officials should stand by their word.

"When a clear failure has occurred, you need to stand by your actions.

"The situation we face is grave and I have no confidence in this leadership to enact it."

The calls came after the Lib Dems staged their walkout ahead of the budget vote.

We contacted both Coun Wharton and Coun Monk but neither was available for comment by the time we went to press.

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# District council claims rise will boost services

**BROMSGROVE** District Council has lauded one of its final ever budgets 'resilient', extolling its plan in protecting key frontline services.

Members agreed a 2.99 per cent increase for the authority's section of the council tax bill.

The figure is below inflation and equates to an average increase of just 15p per week for district council services.

The rise means the council's part of the average band D council tax will cost £265.18 which is \$5.10-a-week.

Councillors said the budget kept services sustainable, green spaces glowing and infrastructure improving.

Bromsgrove District Council collects the whole bill on behalf of Worcestershire County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Service and parish councils.

Due to a delay in the county council's setting of its precept, an extraordinary meeting of the district council will be held on March 6 to incorporate Worcestershire County Council's agreed increases.

This will complete the final council tax setting position and enable the whole bills to be sent out to residents.

This will be one of the last Bromsgrove District Council



annual budgets as the Local Government Reorganisation is due to take shape in the next 12 to 18 months.

Coun Simon Nock, the cabinet member for finance, said the resilient budget would enable the authority to continue to provide frontline services at a difficult time for local government.

"It is a budget in which all

political groups have been involved, and it was great to see unanimous support in the chamber last night.

"By creating a new £2.5million resilience fund, we are also ensuring that Bromsgrove remains on a stable footing, no matter what the national economy throws at us and with Local Government Reorganisation in mind."

The council said spending was once again in line with its priorities of Economic Development, Housing, Environment and Infrastructure.

This year it had rolled out new wheeled bins for every home across the district and a new fleet of bin collection lorries.

This was on top of multi-million-pound commitments already made by the district council for major regeneration and wellbeing projects, including Bromsgrove town centre through redeveloping the former Market Hall site, transforming it into Nailers Yard.

"Our communities have enjoyed events all over the district, in clean, green spaces maintained by our teams."

Bromsgrove District Council leader, Coun Karen May, said the authority only retained a small proportion of the entire council tax bill - historically around 13 per cent.

"We are making that work harder than ever to protect the frontline services our residents value most."

**Councillors agreed a 2.99 per cent rise of Bromsgrove District Council precept. Picture by Marcus Mingsins. Copyright Bullivant Media Group Ltd.**

## Council opts to freeze its share

WYCHAVON District Council has frozen its share of the council tax for Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore residents for the seventh time in nine years.

It means the average Band D household will continue to pay just £128.21 a year - less than £2.47-a-week for the services Wychavon provides, such as parks, public toilets, refuse collections, business support and housing help.

As part of the budget, councillors have agreed to invest £5million into a 'We Are Wychavon Support Fund' to deliver a package of grants, free and discounted services over the next two years. The funding will help people stay active, boost business growth, support young people, improve connectivity and protect the environment.

A total of £400,000 will be put into a new community grants scheme and up to £4million will be spent on decarbonising leisure centres in Pershore and Evesham - energy-efficiency measures are being installed at Droitwich Leisure Centre as part of the current upgrade.

The council will also provide £872,000 to support the local economy, including £412,000 for new Growth and Rural Grants to continue supporting small and medium-sized businesses.

There will be £100,000 for community energy efficiency and biodiversity projects and £3.7million extra to deliver day-to-day services.

Wychavon said it built on major regeneration projects, including upgrades to leisure facilities in Droitwich Spa and the redevelopment of the Riverside Shopping Centre site in Evesham.

While Wychavon's share of council tax is frozen, the overall bill residents receive will go up as it includes increases from Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and parish/town councils.

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# GUN-POWDER PLOT

OR,  
A Brief Account of that bloody and fable Design laid against the King, and Commons in Parliament, and of a Happy Deliverance by Divine Power To the Tune of him not too high. Licensed according to Order.



The Plot being I pray you do knowe, since this sheweth the same, the Kings are dead through the Gunpowder, which was true as the book saith, which James the first in England thought King, for to keep freeer this their Willing, the length, these wretched Romans all agreed to kill the King and Queen his wife, by Powder, all agreed both joint Content, to blow up both the King and Parliament.

**THE PLOT THICKENS:** THE LATEST talk in Redditch History Society's annual programme takes place this Monday, March 9, and focuses on the Gunpowder Plot.

Guest speaker Philip Bowen is an historian with an interesting and varied background - he has worked for the Ministry of Overseas Development, setting up schools in North West Zambia and was deputy headmaster at Bromsgrove School for 26 years. Philip is also a keen ornithologist, and has published widely on the birds of Africa. He is a reader in the Church of England.

At this meeting, Philip will take a fresh look at The Gunpowder Plot which he considers to be 'the most audacious terrorist plot in our history, very much planned and located in our region'.

He will introduce attendees to various plotters and examine their motives, disentangle myths about Guy Fawkes and discuss of the

child who would have become Queen Elizabeth II, identifying a fatal weak link.

And he will reveal and marvel at an unrivalled spy system, lament dire consequences for loyal Catholics which lasted centuries and allegedly discover surprising connections with Macbeth, world-famous islands and a gorilla.

This presentation promises to be a lively combination of local history and fascinating details of an historic, nation-defining event with an enduring legacy.

The society meets from 2pm to 4pm on the second Monday of every month at Oasis Christian Centre on Plymouth Road.

Non-members are always welcome for a £4 admission fee and refreshments are available after the talk for just 50p per person.

Further details of the 2026 season can be found at: redditchhistorysociety.org.uk or on the leaflet available from Redditch Library and The Palace Theatre.

# Offering a space for performances

YOUNG creatives can make the most of a free performance space at this year's Rik Mayall Comedy Festival.

The organisers of the popular event have put a call-out to local theatre schools, drama groups, students and individuals to take over the stage at the Droitwich Community Hall during the festival.

'The Showcase' on June 6 is aimed at capturing the anarchic, creative spirit of Droitwich's comedy icon, Rik, by giving performers a platform to experiment with comedy, short plays, and sketches.

New for 2026, the inspiration for the event comes from the success of The Crew, a student-led production from Warwick Uni who performed last year.

Robin, The Crew's creator, said the festival made the group feel part of a friendly and supportive community.

"I found it rewarding to create a show for a festival known on a national scale, and it was a fantastic process of advancing our skills as young performers."

"The Crew enjoyed the opportunity to create a comedy that was thoroughly enjoyable to perform."

Festival committee member Phoebe Haywood, 24, is helping bring this event to life. She said: "Rik had a fearless, DIY approach to creativity, and we want to bring that same energy back to



The Crew, a student-led production from Warwick Uni, performed at last year's festival has inspired The Showcase. Picture by Mark Wild. s

his home town by giving young people the opportunity to perform.

"By offering this space for free, we're removing the barriers that often stop young performers from getting their work seen, ensuring the next generation of local talent has a platform of their own."

The opportunity is open to all young people aged 18 and under and those over 18 currently in full-time education or apprenticeships.

To ensure the event is accessible to all, festival organisers are providing six 45-minute performance

slots throughout the day and covering all costs for the venue and PA services.

Organisations and individuals wanting to be part of the programme should submit a brief description of their proposed performance, including the age range of the performers and any specific technical requirements.

Applications should be sent to: youngones@rikmayallcomedyfestival.com by next Friday, March 13.

Visit rikmayallcomedyfestival.com for more on the festival.

# WHAT'S ON AT ARTRIX

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- 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: TINA TURNER EXPERIENCE
- 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: FLEETWOOD UNCHAINED
- 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH: FEARLESSLY TAYLOR (TAYLOR SWIFT TRIBUTE)
- 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: THE ARMED MAN - BARNET GREEN CHORAL
- 2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL: SMOOTH CRIMINAL - MICHAEL JACKSON EXPERIENCE
- 4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: ELECTRIK LIVE ORCHESTRA
- 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: K-POP SUPERSTARS
- 10<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: THE RADIOHEAD PROJECT
- 11<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: THE ANNIE LENNOX & EURYTHMICS SHOW
- 12<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: SHANIA TWAIN - BY SHANIA LIVE
- 17<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: ONE NIGHT OF ADELE - NAOMI JOHNSON
- 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL: WILD BOYS OF THE 80S
- 2<sup>ND</sup> MAY: GIVE ME THE NIGHT (GEORGE BENSON TRIBUTE)
- 3<sup>RD</sup> MAY: THE SABRINA CARPENTER TRIBUTE
- 4<sup>TH</sup> MAY: CASSIDY JOHNSON SINGS CAROLE KING
- 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY: AND FINALLY PHIL COLLINS
- 9<sup>TH</sup> MAY: OASISH
- 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY: ELTON'S SONG - BEYOND THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD
- 15<sup>TH</sup> MAY: THIS IS MERSEYBEAT
- 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY: CLASSIC ROCK REVIVAL
- 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY: CELEBRATING CELINE - A NEW DAY
- 22<sup>ND</sup> MAY: FRANKIE - THE CONCERT (FT THE FALSETTOS)
- 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY: RHINESTONE COWBOY: THE GLEN CAMBELL STORY
- 30<sup>TH</sup> MAY: BURN DEEP PURPLE TRIBUTE
- 5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE: THE CARPENTERS EXPERIENCE
- 6<sup>TH</sup> JUNE: EVERYLY BROTHERS BY CANDLELIGHT
- 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE: BEEGEES YOU SHOULD BE DANCING
- 26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE: PM EVERY WHITNEY
- 4<sup>TH</sup> JULY: SOUND & VISION (TRIBUTE TO BOWIE)
- 10<sup>TH</sup> JULY: BLONDISH (THE MUSIC OF BLONDE)
- 11<sup>TH</sup> JULY: G2 DEFINITIVE GENESIS
- 23<sup>RD</sup> JULY: ULTIMATE ELVIS EXPERIENCE
- 24<sup>TH</sup> JULY: DESPERADOS EAGLES

**EVENT CINEMA:**

- 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: SIEGFRIED
- 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL: NATIONAL THEATRE LIVE: ALL MY SONS
- 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: THE MAGIC FLUTE
- 5<sup>TH</sup> MAY: ROYAL OPERA LIVE: EUGENE ONEGIN
- 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY: NT LIVE: LIVE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
- 25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE: NT LIVE: LES LIAISONS DANGEROUS
- 12-14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH: THE GREAT BRITISH BAKEOFF THE MUSICAL
- 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH: DISNEY NEWSIES JR.
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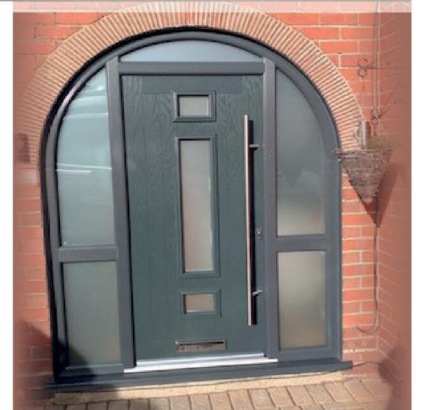
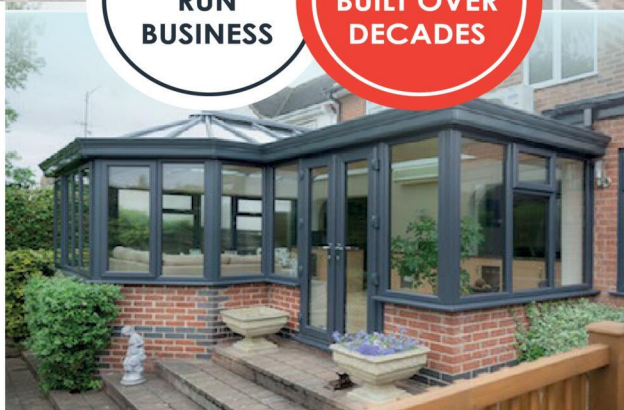


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# What's missing from our gardens and why it matters to us all

WHO REMEMBERS when the garden buzzed with insects all summer?

Bees, butterflies, dragonflies and grasshoppers. Not now.

They are vital for pollination, food for birds, reptiles and mammals and for decomposing dead organic matter.

Worldwide we have lost 42 per cent of all insects in 10 years. This is catastrophic.

Causes include habitat loss, intensive farming, climate change and pesticides - insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

They are all poisons and are heavily used in agriculture - 4million tonnes annually across the world and rising.

We know what damage they do to wildlife, including soil organisms, fish, birds, aquatic life, plants and terrestrial animals.

Fipronil is a poison in flea treatments for dogs - recently found by our group in Spadesbourne Brook.

There is a tablet used more now but that too is toxic when excreted.

There is more evidence now of pesticide's effects on human health too, particularly children, who are much more susceptible to it.

There have been links to cancer, Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimers, childhood leukaemia, developmental delay and neurological development issues in children and male and female infertility, respiratory disease and cognitive impairment.

Governments frequently rely on research of these chemicals done by manufacturers. We can and must do something. About 30 per cent of urban land consists of gardens. Bromsgrove Climate Action is asking people to pledge to



give up using pesticides completely. There are so many alternatives.

We can encourage natural predators by making safe habitats for birds, frogs and hedgehogs.

Providing water and shelter is vital. Leave small gaps under fences so hedgehogs and frogs can get through. Don't be too tidy.

Leave twigs and dead leaves in corners and patches of long grass for winter and leave dead flower heads and stems until spring - ideally when the temperature is consistently 10° or more. Insects overwinter in these.

Grow flowers to encourage predators, such as dragonflies, hoverflies and ladybirds, put up bird boxes or leave safe spaces for them to nest and reduce lighting at night. Bright lights interfere with birds' nesting and sleeping patterns.

Doug Henderson from our council is committed to phasing out the use of Glyphosate in all public places and is piloting an alternative chemical-free weed control method.

Many councils have already done this successfully. Good news.

Please join us and pledge to give up using garden chemicals. We owe it to the planet and to our children.

Column provided by Bromsgrove Climate Action.

# Aiming to raise cash for trip

AN 11-year-old footballer from Redditch is seeking sponsorship to enable him to compete in an international youth football tournament in Barcelona.

Billy Jeavons, has been selected to travel with his team in March to compete against youth sides from across Europe.

It is a significant achievement for the young player who is known for his talent, dedication and passion for the beautiful game.

Football is Billy's life - he trains regularly, plays with enthusiasm and commitment and is widely recognised for his natural ability and strong team spirit.

But the cost of travel, accommodation, tournament fees and kit means additional support is needed to make his opportunity possible.

Billy's mum, Kerry Murphy, said the experience would be incredibly valuable for her son and highlighted the wider importance.

"Sport plays such an important role for boys.

"It encourages them to stay active, spend time outdoors, and learn how to work as part of a team. Team sports build confidence, resilience and a real sense of belonging.

"Football means everything to Billy and he works so hard at it.

"Taking part in an international tournament at his age would be a wonderful experience for him, and we would be extremely grateful for any support that might help him take part."

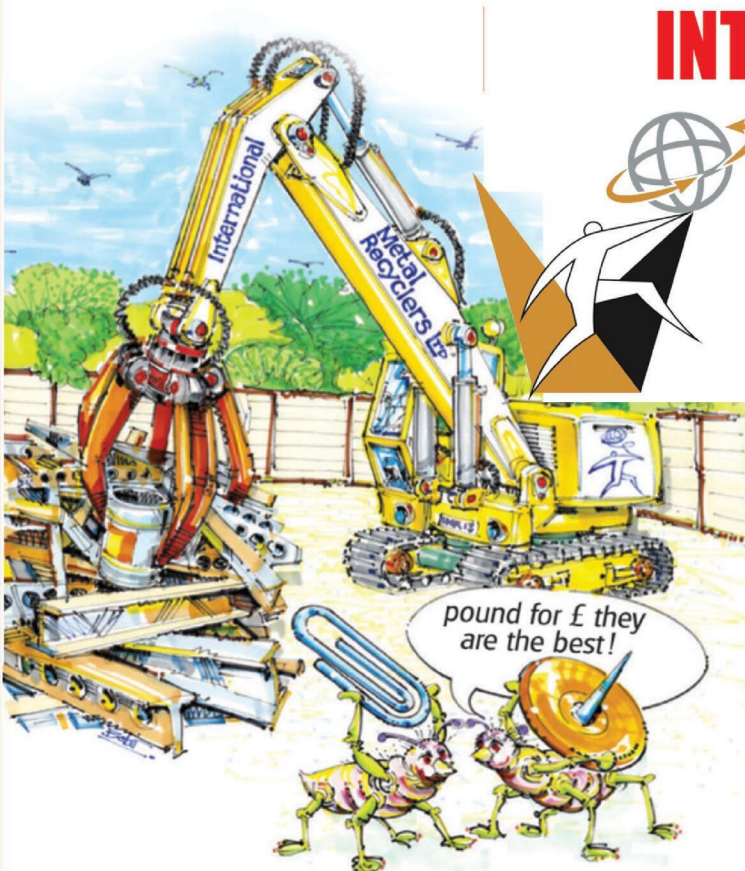


Local businesses, organisations and community members are being urged consider sponsoring Billy's journey.

Contributions of any size would help towards the trip's costs and be acknowledged through team communications, social media mentions and logo placement on training wear where appropriate.

Email Kerry at: [kerrymurphyx@icloud.com](mailto:kerrymurphyx@icloud.com) to get in touch.

**Billy Jeavons, has been selected to travel in March with his team to compete against youth sides from across Europe. s**



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## Sessions set to start up

PEOPLE wanting to get creative or fit can go along to some new sessions starting at Bromsgrove's Artrix.

A new creative writing course is launching at the School Drive venue.

Those who wanted to write stories, poems, scripts or memoirs but did not know where to start or finish can go along.

Whether people are total beginners or a lapsed writer looking to reconnect, the class provides a welcoming space to explore ideas, build confidence, and actually write.

Sessions will include fun prompts, supportive feedback, no pressure, creativity, skills and learning, confidence building and the chance to make new friends.

People are urged to write for themselves, meet others with curious minds and discover what they can create.

The courses are £80 per person for a block of 10 sessions.

A Children's Creative Writing class is also soon being launched with sessions taking place around 10am every Saturday morning.

Email [marketing@artrixbromsgrove.co.uk](mailto:marketing@artrixbromsgrove.co.uk) for more.

A new Zumba class is starting at 9.30am every Monday at Artrix, run by award-winning local instructor Charley.

People can book a block of five sessions for £32.50 on Artrix's website.

To book any of these courses, go to: [artrixbromsgrove.co.uk](http://artrixbromsgrove.co.uk) and click the 'Workshops' tag on the top of the page to find them.

And, the first ever Artrix Youth Theatre has been launched.

Sessions for 12 to 18-year-olds run from 2pm to 4pm every Saturday.

The first show the group will be performing will be High School Musical.

Email [youththeatre@artrixbromsgrove.co.uk](mailto:youththeatre@artrixbromsgrove.co.uk) for more information.

# Inspired to make the run in memory of his dad



Tom Stafford will be braving the half marathon in memory of his father, Tony Stafford. s

A BROMSGROVE man is running the Shakesphere Stratford Half Marathon in memory of his father who passed away just before Christmas.

Tom Stafford will brave the 26.2mile course on April 26 in tribute to Tony Stafford who died on December 22 following a brave battle with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.

Tom ran the Worcester City half marathon back in September, where his dad was able to cheer him on and he raised crucial funds for Leukaemia Care.

He is once again lacing up his running shoes to support Leukaemia Care and has raised £425 so far.

The lives of Tom and his family changed forever in May last year when dad Tony was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia, despite no clear signs he was seriously unwell.

Then one week later, disbelief was replaced by hospital admission when Tony walked into the Worcestershire Royal, where he would spend 151 nights.

He underwent intense chemotherapy, bone marrow biopsies, and countless blood transfusions. Tom said: "Bad days came, days where the chemo took more than it gave."

"There were days when he was too weak to move much, too tired to pretend he wasn't exhausted.

"But there were days when he could go outside, for a while, to see his grandchildren, as inside the hospital, they were isolated from each other.

"On those days, he wasn't a patient, he was grandad again - those moments were everything, as isolation was so cruel.

"He became the life and soul of the ward. The nurses knew him, not just as a patient, but as a person.

"He made friendships, and he made them laugh.

"He brought warmth into a place filled with uncertainty."

At one point, Tony was in remission, but deteriorated again and, on December 16, just six days before he died, he was told the Leukaemia had not responded to treatment.

Tom added: "Nothing prepares you to sit beside your dad and hear that there is nothing left to do.

"Nothing prepares you to watch the strongest person you know face the end of his fight.

"And those final days were filled with love and heartbreak in equal measure.

"His fight lives on in us and we want to continue his legacy and raise awareness of Acute Myeloid Leukaemia and support others on this journey and their families."

Visit [justgiving.com/page/tom-stafford-18?](http://justgiving.com/page/tom-stafford-18?) to donate.

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Monday 23rd March - Friday 27th March	Was £279 <b>NOW £236pp</b>
Monday 6th April - Monday 10th April	Was £295 <b>NOW £247pp</b>
Monday 20th April - Friday 24th April	Was £299 <b>NOW £251pp</b>
Monday 27th April - Friday 1st May	Was £299 <b>NOW £251pp</b>
Monday 4th May - Friday 8th May	Was £309 <b>NOW £258pp</b>
Monday 11th May - Friday 15th May	Was £319 <b>NOW £262pp</b>

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Friday 13th March - Monday 16th March	Was £265 <b>NOW £219pp</b>
Friday 20th March - Monday 23rd March	Was £269 <b>NOW £222pp</b>
Friday 27th March - Monday 30th March	Was £269 <b>NOW £230pp</b>
Friday 3rd April - Monday 6th April (Easter)	Was £315 <b>NOW £269pp</b>
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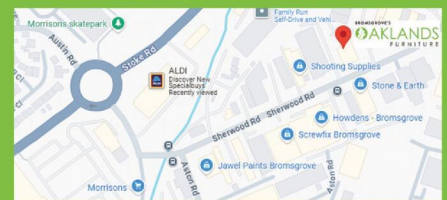
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# Great fun, but the turnout is a joke for comedians

## Comedy review

COME ON, Bromsgrovians - you can do better than this.

I was amongst a sparse audience in Artrix's main house to watch local stand-up comedian, the self-styled Fat Theo.

I was fully expecting it to be packed out as - along with live theatre - comedy nights are a rare treat on the stage of the town's premier performance space.

It was also my first time seeing Theo perform anywhere and felt 'here is a guy with a

unique voice that deserves to be heard'.

Before he gave us his new show, there were support routines from the talents of Danny Strachan and Katie Slater.

Strachan played on his likeness to Bruce Willis and offered us dubious financial advice as a 'council-estate Martin Lewis'.

The BBC came in from some hard-edged jibes as well.

Slater was more self-effacing using her bad luck with men as the main core of her routine. She has the bubblyness of a female football pundit in a male dominated domain and - not too subtly - procures both our laughter and respect.

Theo's 60-minute show was a mixed bunch of satire, observational comedy and embellished real life experiences.

All entertaining stuff from a smooth voice that could just as easily be an actor as a comedian.

In fact, the best part of the show for me was his tales of his first acting experiences in pantomime - the lure of the greasepaint and the quirkiness of his fellow cast members.

Musical Tribute acts (which currently fill most of Artrix's calendar) are undeniably popular and certainly have their place, but they will always be just copies of original artists.

Fat Theo offers up originality - small though the audience were, they were very appreciative.

Let's spread the word for the next time: contender now - champ tomorrow.

Euan Rose

Picture by Sophia Theophanous. s



Jean Chalk, Imogen Chalk and Rosalyn Chalk all feature in the show. s

# Yeoman on the march

ASTWOOD Bank Operatic Society returns to the stage this spring with a new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's The Yeomen of the Guard at the Norbury Theatre from Thursday to Saturday, March 12 to 14.

This year's show brings a fresh perspective to the beloved operetta, moving the action from the 16th century into a contemporary setting.

The staging is uniquely personal for the company, with three generations of the same family taking key roles.

Jean Chalk takes the helm as director, her daughter appears as Dame Carruthers, the formidable housekeeper of the Tower of London, and her granddaughter plays Kate, Dame Carruthers' spirited niece.

Jean, a member of Astwood Bank Operatic Society for 43 years, said she was delighted to be directing.

"This performance is particularly special to me because my daughter and granddaughter are both taking principal parts."

Often described as the darkest and most emotionally resonant of the Savoy Operas, The Yeomen of the Guard is widely consid-

ered to feature Sullivan's finest score.

The story unfolds within the walls of the Tower of London, where a travelling troupe of performers arrives and sets in motion a tangled web of romance, deception, and unrequited love.

Audiences can expect a compelling blend of melancholy and mirth, with the operetta's more mature themes balanced by the duo's trademark wit and flair for farce.

The production features many of the show's most cherished musical numbers, including 'I Have a Song to Sing, O', 'When a Wooer Goes a-Wooing', and 'Free from His Fetters Grim'.

At the centre of the story is Phoebe Meryll, who has caught the attention of the jailor Wilfred Shadbolt - though her heart lies elsewhere with the condemned Colonel Fairfax.

A daring escape plot, an unexpected marriage proposal and the arrival of performers Jack Point and Elsie Maynard create a chain of events that leave one character without the happy ending they hoped for.

Visit [norburytheatre.co.uk](http://norburytheatre.co.uk) or call Norbury Theatre Box Office on 01905 770154 for tickets and more information.

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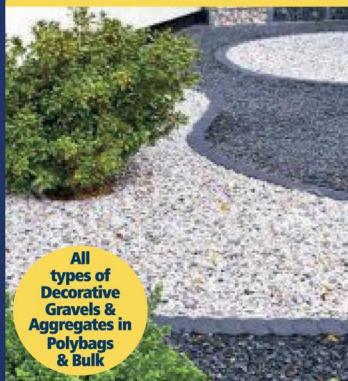
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Winning team The Frog Squad: Oliver Rees, Sarah Rees, Oscar Rees, Paula Knight and Pete Richardson. s

by **Tristan Harris**  
 tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

**A QUIZ-for-a-Cause was held at Stoke Prior Sports and Country Club in aid of the Harry Bennett HB9 Foundation.**

Local businesses sponsored each round of the quiz, and team entry fees and a well-supported raffle raised a total of £700.

Nine rounds covered subjects from literature and geography to music, history and TV and film and teams battled it out in good spirit.

Quiz master Alex Crawford – and his mum – were in charge and JW Catering fuelled the contestants.

The Frog Squad won, with 72 points, to bag the bespoke winner's slate produced and donated by STMS Merchandise.

Corinthians Mean Machine were two points back and 'home team' CJ Promotions' You May Have Heard of Us were half a point behind them.

Stoke Prior Sports and Country Club gen-

eral manager Mark Goddard said: "It's evenings like this that show the power of community. We're incredibly grateful to the businesses who sponsored rounds and donated raffle prizes and to everyone who helped behind the scenes."

The club chose to support HB9 last year, setting an ambitious £5,000 target. Having fallen short, they have continued this year.

Thanks to quiz night success, the total raised now stands at £4,633, with just £367 needed to reach the target.

The HB9 Foundation was established in memory of Bromsgrove teenager Harry Bennett, who died from sepsis in 2020, aged just 16 years old.

The charity honours Harry's passion for sport and his belief in its power to change lives. It supports individuals and teams so more young people can benefit from the physical and mental advantages of playing grassroots sport.

Anyone wanting to help the club get its fundraising to £5,000 can visit: [justgiving.com/page/stokepriorclubhb9](http://justgiving.com/page/stokepriorclubhb9) for more details, and to donate.

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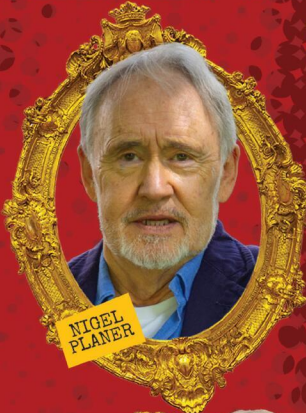
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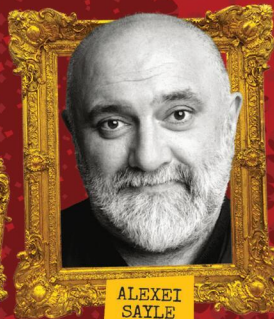
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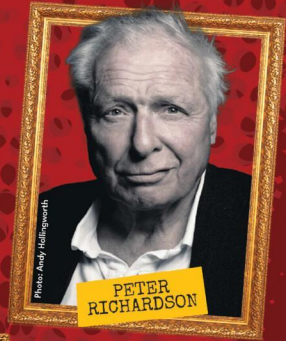
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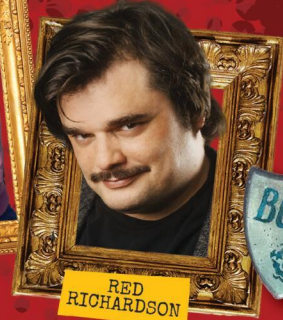
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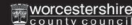


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# TV face brings the sound of success

WATERLOO Road star Liam Scholes burst into song to officially launch the new sound system at Woodrow First School - and wowed pupils, parents and staff in the process.

The actor and musician, who plays Noel McManus in the hit BBC series, had been invited to perform at the Longdon Close school's fabulous new performance arts centre.

And he immediately proved a massive hit sending the children literally jumping for joy.

Not only that but he's promised to come back and play again - once he's had a sell-out gig at Wembley Stadium.

"I want to play on the biggest stage there is, I want to play Wembley - and also right back here, because this school has a mega stage right here too. It's a mega facility."

As bad boy Noel on Waterloo Road, music plays a huge part in his TV role, and he revealed it was the same in real life.

"It's my passion, my dream," said the Mancunian. "I'll just sit down and write a song on the guitar, it's something I'm well happy about. It's like therapy for me."

"The song we sung, Fortune Teller, had all the children jumping up and down and it was bringing a load of joy to them."

"It's the only thing I want to do, bring happiness."

"And with the guys I've got around



Simon, Liam and Andy meet the pupils at Woodrow Primary School. Picture by Marcus Mings 0826006MMR7

me and Waterloo Road still going on, there's no reason why I shouldn't smash it."

Liam, who started in theatre aged 11, has appeared in shows as diverse as Coronation Street and Peaky Blinders before four years ago landing the role of Noel in Waterloo Road.

He was joined on the stage by top guitarist Andy Bennett of Ocean Colour Scene fame, as well

as the school's very own Miss Sophie Davies who sang the Amy Winehouse version of 'Valerie'.

Woodrow First School headteacher Richard Kieran said: "It's wonderful that Woodrow children, staff and the local community get the opportunity to share the music of this rising star."

"The children absolutely loved it and we wish Liam every success for the future."



Bromsgrove MP Bradley Thomas will once again be hosting his pensioners fair. s

## MP's fair promise

BROMSGROVE MP Bradley Thomas has promised this year's pensioners fair will be bigger and better than ever.

More than 40 exhibitors will now be on hand to provide retirees with free information at the event, which will take place between 10am and 2pm on March 26 at the Ryland Centre.

Wiltshire Farm Foods, Artrix, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, the Worcester to Birmingham and Droitwich Canal Society, Carers and Communities, Bromsgrove Library and Hanbury Health Hub are among the exhibitors set to take part.

Other exhibitors at the fair include Specsavers, Heart of Worcestershire

College, Wenman Healthcare, The Gables Care Home, Bromsgrove u3a, Act On Energy, West Mercia Police, Kingfisher Probud Club and Redditch and Bromsgrove Talking Newspaper.

Those attending will also be able to enjoy free tea and coffee as the fair's pop-up cafe will be returning.

Mr Thomas said: "My Pensioners' Fair is back - bigger and better than before - ensuring retirees in Bromsgrove can access vital help and support, especially at a time when the cost of living is continuing to bite."

"There will be more than 40 exhibitors on hand to provide free information and to showcase their services."



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Tom presenting Mark with his award.



## The toast of the town

REDDITCH'S longest-serving publican has been awarded a prestigious Dedicated Service Award.

It was given to Mark Callaghan of The Gate Hangs Well by area manager, Tom Maddison, in recognition of the contribution he has made to the community during his 25 years behind the bar.

The Gate Hangs Well is Mark's first and only pub. Born and bred in Redditch, prior to taking on The Gate Hangs Well, he used to work in IT for Xerox.

For five years he also had a part-time job at the pub. So, when the lease became available, taking it on seemed the right thing to do at the right time.

Mark said: "I was sitting with my wife having a drink with the previous landlords when they mentioned that they would be putting it on the market.

"My wife turned to me and made an off the cuff remark. She said, if you were made redundant you could buy it.

"Spookily, the following week I was made redundant and so I did just that.

"I haven't regretted my decision. I love my work and seeing the community evolve - being

a part of Redditch residents' lives - witnessing customers socialise with one another, get married, have children and then seeing their own children come in and buy their first drink.

"Of course, there are the sadder occasions too when customers pass away. The constant however is the pub."

Mark has employed around 20 people in the years he has been running the pub, including the children of customers. Today it's a one-man band with the help of his wife.

Mark was given the nickname Harry by regulars, named after Harry Callaghan - the lead character in Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry. As a result, the pub's food offer is called Harry's Kitchen.

The pub hosts the longest running quiz in town every Sunday from 9pm with no restrictions on team sizes. It also has a dart board and darts and domino teams.

Mark's wife Karen helps out part-time in the pub and sells her own hand-made cards, gifts and jam in a corner of the bar.

Mark said: "I feel so lucky to run The Gate Hangs Well, which is a real hub of the community. The best bit for me is my customers, many of whom have become friends."



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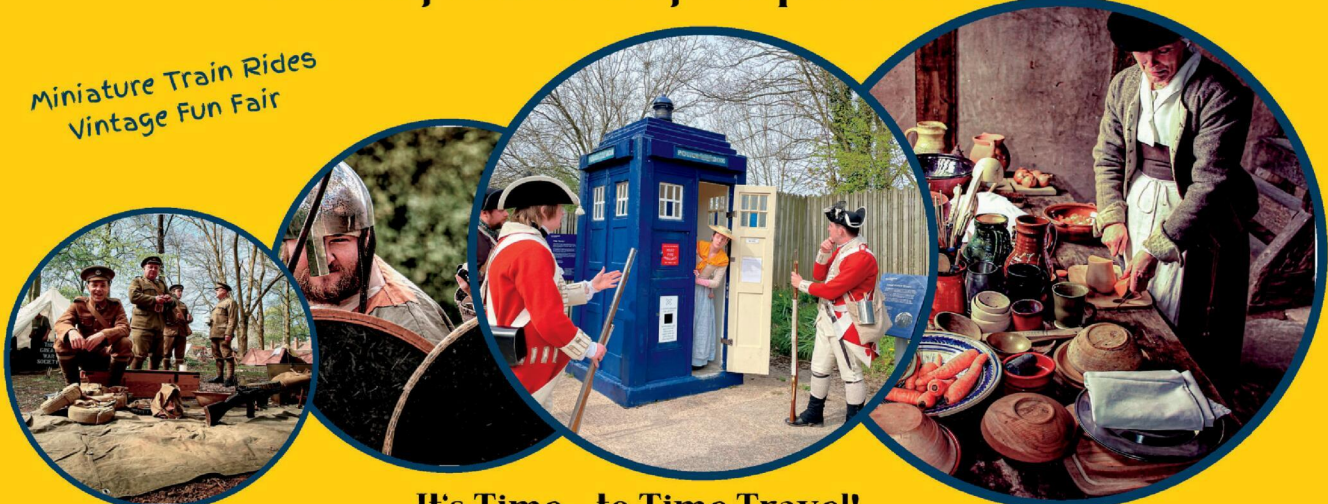


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# Campaign to bring even more women for screening

by **Tristan Harris**  
tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

**THERE has been an increase in the number of women across the West Midlands eligible for regular breast screening who are taking up appointments, the latest figures show.**

Mammograms are offered every three years to women between the ages of 50 and 71 and there were 689,664 women in the region eligible in the three years to April 2025.

During that time, 489,210 of those eligible took up the appointments, raising the figure to 70.9 per cent.

In 2024, 69.2 per cent of eligible women went for their breast screening appointment and in 2023 the figure was 65.7 per cent.

In the Midlands, in the 12 months to the end of March last year, more than 3,500 cancers (3,552) were detected – 8.8 cases per 1,000 women screened – for an increase from 2,985 from the data to March 2024.

That means hundreds more Midlands women were able to access treatment earlier, when there are more options available and treatment is more likely to be effective.

Despite the progress, however, the latest statistics from the NHS breast screening programme showed almost three in 10 women did not take up screenings.

Take-up rates vary in different parts of the West Midlands.

The lowest take-up was in Birmingham, where 109,767 women were eligible and 66,662 took up their appointment. That equated to 60.7 per cent, up from the previous year, when 58.9 per cent in the Second City attended appointments.

Coventry had the region's second lowest take-up, with 63.7 per cent – 21,862 of 34,297 eligible women. That was up from 62.6 per cent a year earlier.

In Solihull, 72.6 per cent of women aged 53 to 71 (19,035 out of 26,227) went for breast screening in the last 12 months for which figures are available. Warwickshire had a similar figure (72.4 per cent, with 52,441 out of 73,857 eligible women).

### Highest

The highest take-up figure in the West Midlands went to Worcestershire women, with 79.6 per cent (almost four in five) attending their breast screening appointment – 61,757 out of 77,616.

Despite percentage rises in all West Midlands areas apart from Walsall, local screening services are working with NHS England in a bid to improve uptake.

The campaign includes targeted outreach in lower-attending areas, reminder texts and expanded use of mobile screening units to bring services nearer home.

The NHS also launched its first national breast screening campaign in February last year, to help even more women to come forward.

The drive is backed by charities including Breast Cancer Now, and has featured public figures including Victoria

Derbyshire, Julia Bradbury and Shirley Ballas, who all shared personal messages to encourage women to attend.

During the campaign, the NHS saw a huge increase in people accessing information online, with tens of thousands of women visiting NHS breast screening pages in a single week, and clicks to the screening service-finder rising sharply.

Stephanie Beaumont, head of public health commissioning and operations at screening for the West Midlands, said: "Breast screening saves lives.

"It is encouraging to see more women attending but we know there is still more to do to encourage those who do not.

"We are working on making it as convenient as possible for women to access the service by using mobile units, which can be located in supermarket car parks and community centres as well as hospital-based sites.

"If you receive an invitation, please don't ignore it – it is an appointment that could save your life."

Women aged 50 and up to the age of 71 are invited for breast screening every three years, with appointments provided locally through clinics and mobile units.

NHS England said breast screening does carry some risk.

Some women who have screening will be diagnosed and treated for slow-growing breast cancers that may never otherwise have been found or have caused them harm, the health service said.

Mammograms also do not always find a cancer that is there but most people feel the benefits of breast screening outweigh the possible drawbacks.



There has been an increase in the number of women taking up their breast screening appointments across the West Midlands. s

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West Midlands Railway has been named Train Operator of the Year.

# Railway company secures top award for service

by **Tristan Harris**  
tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

## WEST Midlands Railway (WMR) has been named Train Operator of the Year at the 2026 Rail Business Awards.

The accolade follows a milestone period for WMR and sister-brand London Northwestern Railway (LNR), as a £1billion investment into new trains and infrastructure came to fruition.

The two brands have introduced three new fleets in recent years, increasing capacity on services by 40 per cent and improving journeys for more than a million passengers every week.

A key part of the programme included WMR's introduction of the Class 730/0 electric trains, to popular routes such as the Cross City Line – the busiest commuter route outside London, which runs from Redditch and Bromsgrove to Lichfield, via Birmingham.

The spacious electric trains feature 'intelligent' air conditioning, improved accessibility and power points at every seat. Since their introduction, figures show customer satisfaction has risen 19 per cent.

Investment was also made into the company's train depots.

Facilities in Birmingham, Coventry, Worcester and Shrewsbury have been modernised, including a £70million refit of Birmingham's Tyseley depot.

The enhancements, unveiled by West Midlands Mayor Richard Parker, provided increased capacity and future-proofed equipment to support the new fleets.

Ian McConnell, managing director at WMR, said: "We are extremely proud to win Train Operator of the Year.

"This award is testament to the hard work of colleagues across our business, who have successfully introduced three new train fleets and future-proofed our train depots while continuing to keep passengers moving every day.

"It's been a tremendous team effort so it's fantastic to be recognised for our achievements over the past year.

"We are committed to keeping up

this high standard and continuing to improve so we can deliver the best possible service for our customers and communities."

The investment programme has driven passenger growth.

A recent report from the Office of Rail Road showed a massive, 12 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of people using the sister operators' services in the first quarter of the 2025/26 fiscal year, equating to more than 2million extra journeys. WMR and LNR carried 67.7 million passengers in 2024/25 and that figure is forecast to rise to more than 80 million journeys in 2025/26.

The Rail Business Awards is held in Manchester and run by the *Railway Gazette*.

■ On February 1, West Midlands Trains became the fourth operator to enter public ownership under the government's Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act, joining Greater Anglia, C2C and South Western Railway.

It is part of the government's Great British Railways plan to improve services for commuters and leisure passengers.

The government wants to bring the whole railway together under one brand with one mission: to deliver for passengers. The brand aims to create a more unified railway, putting customers first, making the experience better for passengers, improving reliability and having simpler rail fares and ticketing.

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As well as our Readers in print, in January 2026, that **134,387 Unique Visitors visited The Bromsgrove Standard online** (\*Source Google Analytics January 2026) and **46,499 Unique Visitors visited The Droitwich Standard online** (\*Source Google Analytics January 2026)

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If you have 'News to Tell' then call **Tristan Harris (Editor)** on **01527 588657** or email: **tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com**

or if you have a local business and have 'A Service or Something to Sell'

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*We look forward to taking your call and/or receiving your email.*

And if you are one of our regular readers in print and or online - we look forward to continue to provide your local news service - free 247, as well as promoting trusted local business services available across Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Barnt Green, Rubery, Rednal, Longbridge, Frankley, Northfield and the surrounding areas.



# CARING People CARING Places

Because caring isn't something we do, it's who we are.

## Caring People, Caring Places: The heartbeat of our community

**In every corner of our towns and villages, there's a quiet network of people and places who make care their calling.**

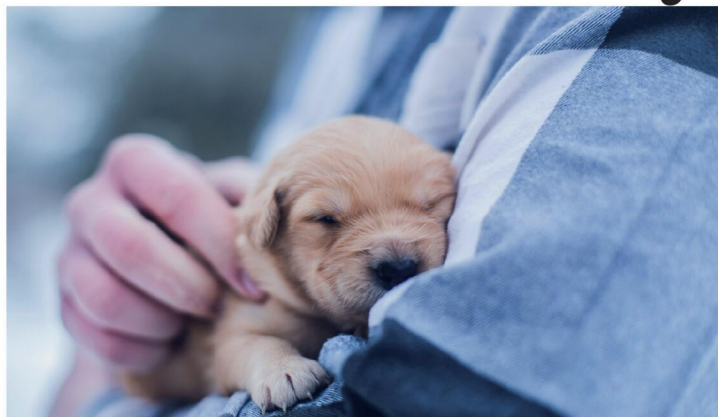
From the vet who checks on your family dog like it's their own, to the funeral director who offers gentle guidance during life's most difficult goodbyes, these unsung heroes are woven into the very fabric of our daily lives. This isn't just about care for the elderly – though they are, of course, a cherished part of this picture – but about the many ways compassion shapes our communities, across all ages and walks of life.

At its heart, Caring People, Caring Places is a celebration of humanity. It's about those who dedicate themselves to the wellbeing of others – people who don't just do a job, but perform a service rooted in empathy, patience, and

dignity.

Take, for instance, the local solicitor who offers free advice sessions on will writing, ensuring peace of mind for families at any stage of life. It's not just about legalese and paperwork – it's about offering reassurance, answering difficult questions, and helping people plan with clarity and care.

Veterinary clinics also tell a powerful story of compassion. Ask any pet owner and they'll say the vet is a lifeline during tough times – when the dog has eaten something it shouldn't, when the cat needs emergency surgery, or simply when a furry friend is nearing the end of their life. These clinics often extend their care beyond animals, understanding how closely our emotional health is tied to our pets. Many offer grief support and work closely with rehoming charities to give abandoned animals a second chance at love.



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# CARING People CARING Places



Speaking of second chances, fostering and adoption services are a profound example of care in action. Across our region, there are families opening their doors – and their hearts – to children who need stability, support, and love. Social workers, carers, and support staff



dedicate their careers to making sure that vulnerable young people find not just shelter, but a sense of belonging.

And while we're on the subject of homes, care homes and supported living facilities continue to provide more than just a roof and regular meals. Many of these places are hubs of life and activity, staffed by people who understand that dignity, independence, and companionship are vital at any age. Increasingly, intergenerational projects and pet therapy schemes are breathing new life into care spaces, offering residents laughter, stimulation, and purpose.

But care doesn't stop at the front door. Funeral directors – some of the most quietly compassionate professionals in our communities – play a deeply important role in helping families navigate loss with grace and respect. Alongside them, stonemasons craft lasting tributes that honour lives lived, with each inscription carved in memory and love. These trades might not often make headlines, but their impact is profound and lasting. And let's not forget the smaller, sometimes overlooked services that make a world of difference. The kennels and catteries that provide safe havens for pets when families are away; the hearing aid specialists who reconnect people to the sounds – and conversations – they've been missing; or the volunteers who give their time to animal shelters and community centres, ensuring no one is forgotten.

These people and places aren't glamorous, and they rarely seek the spotlight. Yet they form a backbone of care and community that deserves



recognition. Their work is local, personal, and essential. They remind us that "care" isn't a service – it's a value. One that's practiced every day in countless acts of kindness, patience, and professionalism.

It might be easy to picture care as something reserved for our oldest citizens – and yes, their needs are crucial – but Caring People, Caring Places shines a light on the broader picture. From children finding safe new homes, to pets being lovingly rehomed, to families finding comfort and support through life's major

transitions, this is a celebration of care in all its forms.

So next time you pass the hearing clinic, walk past the vet's office, or drive by the local foster services banner, pause for a moment. Think of the people inside – doing quiet, tireless work to make someone else's life a little easier, a little warmer, a little more human. Let's support these people, these businesses and these organisations.

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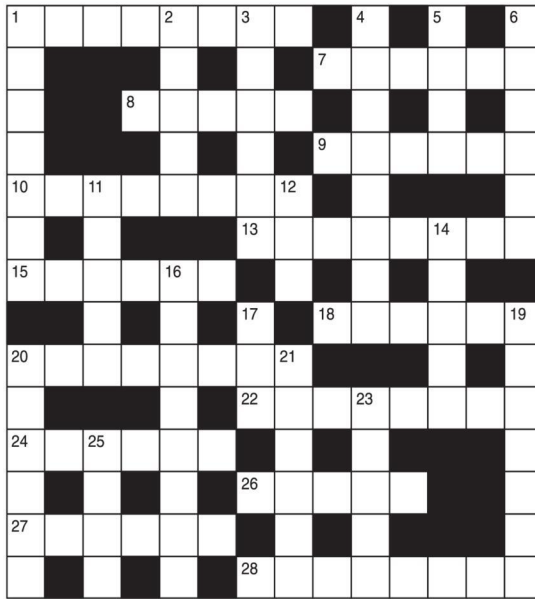
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# GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

- Animal described in Job, Chapter 40 (8)
- Ornamental clasp, worn on a dress, etc. (6)
- In short, it's beneath one's dignity (5,3)
- One of a race of female warriors in legend (6)
- A plant of the genus Narcissus (8)
- A golden-sand-coloured horse with a white mane and tail (8)
- One of the dominant people of Nepal (6)
- Improvises words in acting (2-4)
- Small planet revolving round the sun (8)
- A horse and pony meeting, for races, competitions, etc. (8)
- Alcoholic drink of beer, and ginger beer or lemonade (6)
- the Great; one of the Twelve Apostles and son of Zebedee (5)
- Fruit sometimes known as a "love apple" (6)
- Measure of capacity equal to 52.5 imperial gallons of wine, or 54 gallons of beer (8)



## DOWN

- The hero of stories by Sapper (H.C. McNeile) (7,8)
- Fleshy fruit eaten ripe or used for pickles (5)
- Biennial plant cultivated for its edible, white or yellow-fleshed root (6)
- See 1 Down
- An Israelite of rank, and second husband of Ruth (4)
- Ancient religion of Japan (6)
- Professional chief of the Royal Navy (5,3,4)
- An old convict (3)
- One of the Balearic Islands (5)
- Transmission from one generation to another of genetic factors that determine resemblances (8)
- See 8 Across
- See 11 Down
- Property of an insolvent person, considered as chargeable for all debts, etc. (6)
- A machine for generating electric currents (6)
- Joints between the thighs and shinbones (5)
- River in the Crimea, scene of an early battle of the Crimean War (4)

# SOLUTIONS

**General Knowledge Crossword**  
 ACROSS: 1 Behemoth; 2 Brooch; 8 Intra; 9 Amazon; 10 Daffodil; 13 Palomino; 15 Gurkha; 18 Ad-libs; 20 Asteroid; 22 Gymkhana; 24 Shandy; 26 James; 27 Tomato; 28 Hogshhead. DOWN: 1 Bulldog; 2 Mango; 3 Turnip; 4 Drummond; 5 Boaz; 6 Shinto; 7 Kneez; 25 Alma.  
**Crossword**  
 ACROSS: 6 Zealous; 7 Arson; 9 Try; 10 Encounter; 12 Disarranged; 15 Oliver Twist; 17 Smartness; 19 Ire; 21 Put on; 22 Reflect. DOWN: 1 Weir; 2 Sly; 3 Turn; 4 Frankness; 5 Forever; 8 Sorrow; 11 Silver fox; 13 Arrant; 14 Clamour; 16 Trick; 18 Seem; 20 Ale.  
**Wordwheel Pathfinder**  
 Partners in Crime, Nizopri, Lena Martell, The Archies, Baz Luhrmann, Fern Kinney, DJ Pied Piper, Teletubbies, Joe Dolce, Music Theatre, Clive Dunn, The Kumars, Anita Ward, Althea and Donna, Las Ketchup, Tubeway Army, Mr Oizo, Typically Tropical, Ricky Valance, Brian and Michael, Sak Noel.  
**Niner**  
 BOULEVARD  
**GENIALLY**  
 Ladder  
 Road, Roam, Room, Root, Soot, Show, Show  
**Codeword**  
 1=R, 2=L, 3=M, 4=S, 5=T, 6=Q, 7=A, 8=H, 9=E, 10=O, 11=N, 12=W, 13=Y, 14=G, 15=D, 16=B, 17=F, 18=P, 19=X, 20=C, 21=U, 22=Y, 23=J, 24=L, 25=Z, 26=K

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

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

Hard  
 Easy  
**Sudoku**

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Following on from the fantastic response to our debut 'Winter' edition of **Seasons**, we're delighted to announce that **Seasons** 'Spring' edition is about to be sprung.

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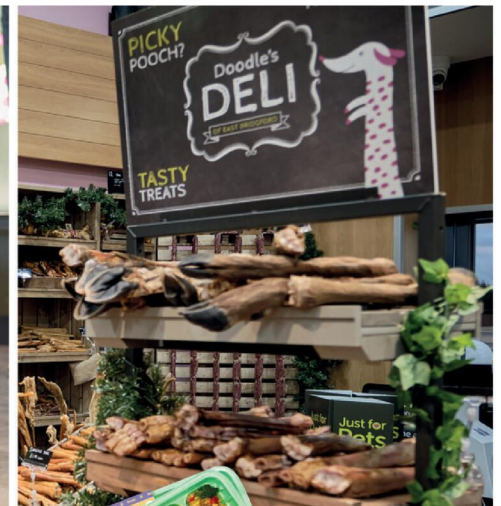
The 'Spring' edition of Seasons will celebrate everything uplifting, inspiring and quintessentially local across the three counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands.

The beautifully glossy A5 magazine will once again be freely available in print, from a major supermarket near you - and, the 'Spring' edition of Seasons will also be available 247 on line and will be showcased across all of our local Observer and Standard Newspapers, websites and social media platforms for the next 12 months.

So you'll be able to enjoy the exclusive, evergreen, editions of Seasons by logging on to [www.seasons-magazine.com](http://www.seasons-magazine.com) where you can browse the 'Winter' edition of Seasons 247 and soon, you'll be able to enjoy the 'Spring' edition of Seasons too!

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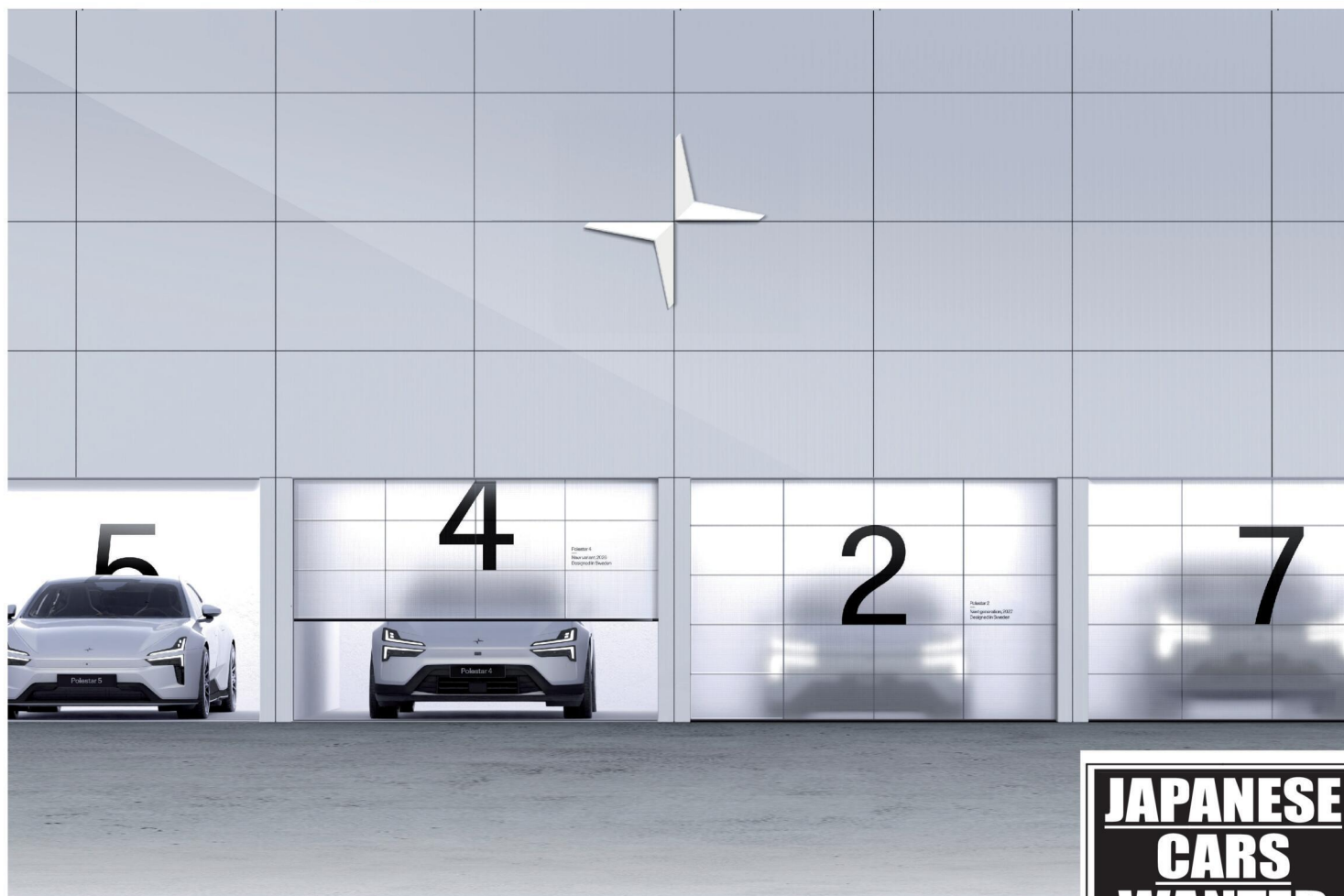
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## Polestar launch new fleet

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

**THIS YEAR Polestar announced the largest model offensive in its history, with four new cars planned in the next three years.**

The brand is still relatively new, only launching in 2017, and since then has gone from strength to strength, taking the electric car market by storm.

Over the next four years, Polestar's lineup will include Polestar 5 - the four-door Grand Tourer (GT) presented in 2025, with deliveries expected from summer 2026.

Polestar 4, which is a new variant of the brand's current best-seller based on same great technology, targeting a wider customer base by offering more versatility.

To be launched later this year,

with deliveries expected to start in the fourth quarter of 2026.

Polestar 2, the next generation of the sedan that built Polestar's brand, a completely new successor with a planned launch early in 2027 and Polestar 7 - the compact, premium SUV, planned to be launched in 2028.

I was invited to visit Mallory Park racetrack to experience driving the Polestar 3 and 4, hosted by Paul Rigby Group.

Traditional vehicles rely on friction brakes, which convert the kinetic energy of the car into heat, wasting all that potential power. Regenerative braking, on the other hand, captures this kinetic energy and converts it back into electrical energy, which is then stored in the vehicle's battery.

What all this means is, as soon as you take your foot off the accelerator to start braking, the car immediately slows down. Which is mostly terrifying, especially when you're

driving around a track. It would take some getting used to, but you are able to change the sensitivity of it, and after a while it would become a normal part of driving.

Both the 3 and 4 drive beautifully, both are comfortable cars with a fair amount of room. The 3 is your more traditional family SUV while the 4 is more of a coupe with better performance.

The Polestar 4 is also the first passenger car in the UK to remove the rear windscreen in favour of a digital rear-view mirror. It does provide a much broader view to the rear of the car, but was off-putting to begin with. Again something I think you would get used to after a while.

Both models are really nice places to be, they're high-tech without being too difficult to understand, and have a certain element of luxury you would expect from other traditional SUV's like a Range Rover Evoque or BMW X5.

The 3 has a range of 348 to 438 miles depending on the powertrain and configuration, with the 4 going 310 to 340 miles between charges.

Overall for my first experience of electric cars I would say it was positive. You still retain the traditional sensation of driving, and for petrol heads I do think you would be able to bond with the car as you would any high-performance vehicle.

Would I have one? No. Until the infrastructure is there to be able to fill your car with electricity as quickly as you can fill it with fuel it simply isn't practical, and although they are exciting cars, I don't think they excite me as much as my Range Rover.

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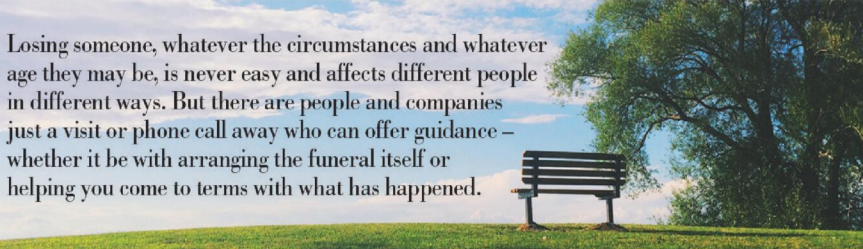
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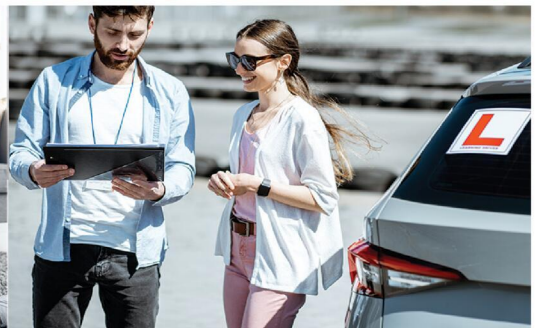


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Full details and application forms are available on the school website

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Full details and application forms are available on the School website:

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**Closing date for all applications 6 March 2026**

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Full details and application forms are available on the school website

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**Friday 13 March 2026.**

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## Former player to take up role of club president at Pears

by Aaron Sutcliffe  
 aaron.sutcliffe@bullivantmedia.com

**CRICKET:** WORCESTERSHIRE CCC have confirmed former player Paul Pridgeon has accepted a role to become the club's new president.

Pridgeon takes over from Phillip Neale OBE for a two-year term as Pears president.

The club will confirm Pridgeon in the role at the club's Annual General Meeting (AGM) later this month (Thursday, March 26), subject to the approval of members.

Pridgeon's association with Worcestershire spans more than half a century as a player, vice-president and honorary life member.

Pridgeon said: "It is a massive honour to take the role as club president.

"As a young boy from the Black Country, until accepting this role, over 50 years have passed, but my feelings towards the club haven't changed at all.

"My first game watching Worcestershire was at Dudley as a 10-year-old, which was 62 years ago now.

"I came on the playing staff at

17, in 1972, and enjoyed playing here for 18 years, where I had some incredible moments on the pitch.

"When I retired, I moved to work at Shrewsbury School, to try and continue passing on my knowledge and helping the next generation of players who held potential to possibly play for Worcestershire.

"I always wanted to help out and give back in any way I could, which then led me to join the board in 2013 in an advisory role, maintaining the link between the schools and the club, before I became vice-chair until 2022.

"Phil's contribution during his tenure has made it a hard act to follow.

"He threw himself right into everything and added a vast amount of experience and knowledge from his position.

"I know Phil very well from my playing days, he was my captain for a long period of time, and just as I did back then, I'll be picking his brains over the coming months.

"The club is in a very exciting place, the best it's been in for some time I believe.

"Financially, commercially and most importantly on the field, the culture and people

around the whole organisation make it what it is.

"There are plenty of reasons to be excited and optimistic.

"Whether I am needed to sit down with the senior figures from the cricket side, or from a business perspective, like Ashley Giles, then I want to talk to them and see where and how I can make a difference."

He joined the Pears as a player at the age of 17-years-old following a successful trial period.

And he went on to enjoy a stellar playing career at New Road, winning three County Championship titles with the club in 1974, 1988 and 1989.

Pridgeon also lifted two Sunday League titles in 1987 and 1988.

The seam bowler retired from professional cricket in 1989 with 530 first-class and 219 List A wickets to his name.

He later helped develop the next generation of talent at Worcestershire and played a role in fast-tracking the likes of Joe Leach, Adam Finch, Jack Home and Harry Darley into the side.

Pridgeon served as a Worcestershire board member for the maximum nine-year period, vice-chair for four years and had a spell as acting chair.



Tom Chilton won two races in the BTCC last season. Picture by Darren Price.

## Chilton gearing up for fifth season with team in BTCC

**BTCC:** TOM Chilton feels Droitwich-based Team Vertu have 'moulded' around him as he enters into a fifth season with the EXCELR8 Motorsport-owned outfit in the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC).

Chilton enjoyed a successful 2025 season as he secured two victories, two second places, two third-place finishes, pole position and multiple fastest laps.

This secured the experienced driver his highest championship finish in the last five years.

Now entering his fifth successive season with EXCELR8 Motorsport, Chilton feels the operation has been built around his preferences.

Chilton said: "I feel like the team have bent over backwards for me and done everything that I've asked for.

"They've even moved from Suffolk and Ipswich all the way up to Droitwich to be inside Team Dynamics.

"The whole team is moulded around

me and I get on really well now with Tom Ingram.

"This is my longest spell with one team. That is worth pointing out, actually.

"They must be doing something right. I think Justina Williams is doing something right.

"Last year was a successful year for me because the cars were harder to drive.

"With all my experience, that's how I like driving.

"I wear those silly heart rate monitors. My heart rate lowers when I go more sideways.

"I'm weird. I know most people get more like, ah! And the heart rate goes up.

"Whereas I'm like, ah, happy place. I'm going sideways.

"Without the hybrid in the cars, they were lighter and more twitchy.

"They were more on an edge, which is how I like driving."

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