

downendvoice

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March 2026, Issue 152



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FREE EVERY MONTH IN DOWNEND, MANGOTSFIELD, STAPLE HILL, BROMLEY HEATH & FRENCHAY

Lions welcome Year of the Horse



BRISTOL University's Chinese Lion Dance Troupe performed under the clock tower in Page Park as part of the Lunar New Year celebrations welcoming the Year of the Horse.
Park news: Pages 32-33



Looking forward to retirement

THE owners of Staple Hill opticians Dury and Tippet have retired, after working together for more than 30 years.

PAGE 13

Pedestrian killed

A MAN has died in a collision with a car in Staple Hill.

PAGE 4

Clubhouse plan

DOWNEND Cricket Club is planning to rebuild its clubhouse to make it fit for its growing membership.

PAGE 5

School reports

TWO schools in the Downend area are among the first to be inspected by Ofsted under a new "more demanding" system.

PAGES 8&9

Council tax bills top £2,500

COUNCIL tax bills for the typical household in Downend will top £2,500 for the first time this year.

Band D tax payers living in the area covered by Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council is set to pay an extra £129.60 or 5.44% from April when increases in charges from South

Gloucestershire Council, the parish council, police and fire service are added up, taking the total bill to £2,510.99.

People living in the area covered by Staple Hill & Mangotsfield Parish Council will have slightly lower bills, adding up to £2,496.81, while Band D taxpayers in the area covered by

Emersons Green Town Council will see bills reach £2,548.99.

Charges vary according to property values, with this year's overall bill in Downend ranging from £1,674 for Band A householders to £5,021.98 for people with homes in Band H.

Turn to page 6

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Growing healthy kids – the Chiro connection



Matt Sutton

Children are wonderfully resilient

THEY run, climb, skate, tumble, dance — and throw themselves wholeheartedly into the things they love. Along the way, they collect the usual knocks, bumps and strains, most of which pass without much fuss.

But sometimes, just like with adults, the effects can linger — particularly in posture and movement patterns.

At a young age, the body is still learning how to balance, stack and move efficiently. Small postural habits or unresolved niggles don't have to become "just the way they are". A gentle check-in at the right time can make a real difference.

I often share this next part with children when they come into the practice.

As a child, I loved skating. I'd have stay out all day — falling over, getting back up, and heading straight back for more. One fall left me with a small, nagging problem that didn't quite settle. Nothing dramatic — but my mum noticed I looked a bit wonky.

She took me to see our local Chiropractor, and after a few gentle sessions, everything resolved. I went straight back to doing what I loved — and I didn't carry that issue forward as I grew. In fact he became a pivotal person in my life, inspired me to take up Martial Arts which eventually lead to me representing

Great Britain internationally!

That experience really stayed with me.

It's one of the reasons I care so deeply about supporting children here at Sutton Chiropractic. We love helping young people continue doing what they enjoy — without small issues quietly shaping posture, movement or confidence over time.

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If you'd like to book your child in for a free posture screening, contact our reception team.

Warm regards,

Dr. Matt

Registered Doctor of Chiropractic
Sutton Chiropractic

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HUGE CONGRATULATIONS!

Hari has become the first person with no legs to complete the 7 summits — climbing the highest mountain on each continent!



Click here to see our video with him and stay tuned for his future challenges we will be supporting him with.

PS we'll happily look after the grownups too- call if you're no longer little but would like a free posture screening :)

Kids posture clinic 6th & 13th March 4-6.30pm

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Fleur is still remembered, 30 years on



Bex Lombard-Earl lays a wreath at the memorial to her sister



Bex with Nikki Marshall and Barbara Hopton, who both knew Fleur

FIREFIGHTERS and family of Fleur Lombard were joined by members of the public as they remembered her death in the line of duty.

Staple Hill fell silent at 1.04pm on February 4, as people gathered around the 21-year-old firefighter's memorial in Broad Street marked the exact moment, 30 years earlier, when she was killed in a flashover.

Fleur died as she and her colleagues fought to contain a fire started by an arsonist in the Leo's supermarket that stood on the site now occupied by Tesco.

Her memory is honoured every year on the anniversary of the tragedy, and this year Fleur's father Roger, sister Bex Lombard-Earl and Bex's youngest child Rowan travelled from the North of England to attend the ceremony, along with the unveiling of a red plaque in her memory at Kingswood fire station.

Bex said: "Thirty years on, the word that best describes how we feel as a family is overwhelmed – in the best possible way.

"This anniversary has brought with it an extraordinary outpouring of kindness, respect and care, not just towards Fleur's memory, but towards us as the family who loved her long before the uniform.

"To see her remembered so thoughtfully, three decades on, is deeply moving.

"Everywhere we went, people came forward with stories. Not grand gestures – just memories.

"It reminded me that what has lasted isn't the tragedy, but who she was."

Among the moments Bex said she most valued were talking with firefighters Rob Seaman and Pat Foley, who went back into the burning building to find her sister after the flashover, and Jess Cole who, as a nine-year-old girl, was a vital prosecution witness in the court case against store security guard Martin Cody. He was jailed for seven-and-a-half years, after being found guilty of Fleur's manslaughter and arson.

Bex said: "Jess's steadfast determination and sense of justice have always reminded me

so much of Fleur."

She said she would never forget hearing Downend musician Gavin Ball perform a song at the ceremony that he wrote in memory of Fleur, telling the story of the day she died.

Fleur was based at the now-closed Speedwell fire station.

One of her colleagues there was Nikki Marshall, of Bromley Heath, who was on White Watch while Fleur served on Blue Watch.

They both joined the then Avon Fire Brigade in the same year, 1994.

Nikki, who organises friends and colleagues of Fleur to attend the memorials each year, said: "If I'm at work I lay yellow roses, which is what I laid on the day she died.

"It's heartbreaking, but I think what's incredible is that everybody still remembers every year – it's something that will always go on."

Barbara Hopton, of Downend, was a cook at Speedwell fire station and came to pay tribute to the firefighter she remembered as a "lovely lady".

Chief Fire Officer Matt Cook said: "This is an opportunity for us to acknowledge the lasting impact Fleur's courage and commitment has had on those she worked with and the local people she served.

"Fleur's loss continues to be deeply felt across our service, within our communities, and across the wider UK Fire and Rescue Service.

"Her legacy will continue to inspire current and future generations of firefighters; her courage and selflessness will never be forgotten."

Fleur was the first female firefighter to die on active service in peacetime Britain.

She was posthumously awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal and Chief Fire Officer's Commendation in recognition of her bravery.

After Fleur's death, a number of "significant improvements" were made to



Gavin Ball sang at the memorial



Fleur Lombard

safety across the fire service that have helped save lives since.

She has had a Great Western Railway train named after her, and is also remembered with a bursary fund set up to encourage firefighters to travel the world and learn about the work of other fire services.

Bex said she was also "stopped in my tracks" to hear of a firefighter and his wife who had named their daughter Fleur, after her sister.

She said: "Thirty years on, Fleur is still remembered. Still honoured. Still shaping lives, learning, and care."

downendvoice

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Publisher **Gary Brindle**
0117 907 8585
07799 461169



Journalist
Linda Tanner
07770 700579



Journalist
Ken McCormick
07715 770377



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sales@downendvoice.co.uk
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Tel 07799 461169

EDITORIAL

news@downendvoice.co.uk
Letters to the publication can be sent to the above e-mail address.
The editor reserves the right to edit your letter.

DEADLINE

Our April edition deadline is March 18.

LOCAL INFORMATION

West of England Mayor
Mayor Helen Godwin
mayor@westofengland-ca.gov.uk
0117 428 6210
70 Redcliff Street, Bristol BS1 6AL
South Gloucestershire Council
www.southglos.gov.uk
01454 868009

Police
www.avonandsomersetpolice.uk
general enquiries: 101
Emergency: 999

Fire
www.avonfire.gov.uk
General enquiries: 0117 926 2061
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COMPLAINTS

Despite our best efforts, we sometimes get things wrong. We always try to resolve issues informally at first but we also have a formal complaints procedure. If you have a complaint about anything in the Downend Voice, contact the publisher using the details below. We aspire to follow the Code of Conduct of the NUJ (National Union of Journalists), which holds journalists to a high standard of behaviour. Further details of the complaints process can be found on the Voice website here, or can be obtained by contacting the Publisher.



Pedestrian dies in collision



Police and fire vehicles at the cordon on North Street

A PEDESTRIAN died in a collision with a car in Staple Hill.

The man, who was aged in his 70s, died at the scene of the collision on North Street, near the junction with Pleasant Road, Victoria Street and Hermitage Road, at about 4.30pm on February 9.

Police are appealing for witnesses to the incident, which involved a blue Citroen DS3 car, or anyone with dashcam video footage they think could be relevant, to contact them.

A police spokesperson said: "Tragically the pedestrian, a man in his seventies, died at the scene.

"His family are aware and are being supported by a specially trained family liaison officer.

"They have asked for privacy in their grief, and have our sympathy."

North Street and Victoria Street were closed for around eight hours between Staple Hill High Street and Downend Park Road after the collision, as police carried out investigative work and removed the car from the scene.

The spokesperson added: "Officers spoke with the driver and made no arrests."

Police have asked for anyone with information or footage that could help the investigation to call 101 and quote the incident reference number 5226 037 525.

Dog bites three people

A DOG has been put down after biting three people in a Staple Hill street.

Police were called to Clarence Road at 8.35am on January 27 after the large German shepherd dog was reported to be on the loose and attacking people.

A police spokesperson said: "The three adult members of the public who were bitten by the dog suffered minor injuries and were treated at the scene."

The dog was trapped in a nearby garden and seized by the police, who launched an investigation and questioned the owner on suspicion of allowing the dog to be dangerously out of control.

Police appealed for any other potential victims to come forward but no further reports of injuries were received.

The spokesperson added: "The matter has been resolved with the owner by an out of court community resolution and the dog has been put down."

German shepherd or Alsatian dogs are not a banned breed and are often used as police or guard dogs.

Neighbourhood Inspector Barny Mabbett said: "Incidents like this are rare, and, fortunately, on this occasion the members of the public involved sustained only minor injuries.

"This serves as an important reminder for dog owners to ensure their pets are properly secured within their premises and to consider the use of muzzles if there are any concerns about how a dog may react around other animals or members of the public."

New £1.1m pavilion for cricket club

DOWNEND Cricket Club is planning to rebuild its clubhouse to make it fit for its growing membership.

The £1.1 million project would see the ageing existing pavilion at the WG Grace Memorial Ground replaced with a two-storey building that could accommodate upgraded changing rooms, a conference room and function room.

The club has started to sound out potential builders to develop the scheme and is also looking at sources of funding, from sponsorship to grants.

It expects the project to take about five years.

Club president Miles Davis said the new building would enable the club to grow without moving.

He said: "The club's getting bigger and our clubhouse isn't! We're outgrowing the facilities.

"We're getting a lot of people



A computer-generated image shows what the new pavilion could look like.

going in the clubhouse, thanks to the new bar manager and the growth of cricket, particularly girls' and women's cricket.

"We've been looking at it for a long time.

"It's iconic where we are, it's WG Grace, so we don't want to move, but we do want a new clubhouse - we've got squirrels in the changing rooms!"

Miles said the project would enable the club to provide separate changing rooms for the girls' and women's teams.

Function and conference rooms would enable the club to hire out space for private or community events while still keeping the bar open.

Miles said: "It's exciting, but

it's going to cost a lot of money.

"It's a big project - there's no point in doing it in small doses."

The new building would have a similar footprint to the existing clubhouse, with the extra space courtesy of a first floor.

The club is now inviting people to come forward with ideas for fundraising events and sources of investment.

Miles said: "We are keen for the community to come on board and get involved. Anyone with concerns is also welcome to get in touch at any time - the more local involvement, the better.

People can contact the club via its website, downendercricket.co.uk, or Facebook page.

By-election is called

A BY-ELECTION has been called for Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council.

The *Voice* reported last month that James Griffiths had stepped down from his position representing the council's Downend ward.

The by-election was called after the paper went to print, when the vacancy was contested.

Three candidates were nominated: Georgina Bennett, who is standing with the label 'Resident of Downend', Christopher Champ, of Reform UK, and Martin Chown, who is standing without a description.

The election has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 24, with polls open from 7am to 10pm.

The Downend ward includes most of the area covered by the parish council, but some streets between North Street and Hill House Road are part of the parish's separate Staple Hill ward, where no election will be held.

Hazel Holly Florist

Hazel Holly Florist is an independent florist which has been on the high street for many years giving the local people of Downend and Bristol gorgeous fresh flowers.

We use only the freshest flowers for our bouquets and deliver both locally and in the wider Bristol area.

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Average council tax bill up by £130

From page 1

South Gloucestershire Council approved a 4.99% increase – the maximum allowed without calling a referendum – at its annual budget meeting in February.

It takes the authority's basic charge to residents with homes in the average Band D tax bracket up by £94.66, from £1,904.91 to £1,999.57.

The council also levies a 'special expenses' charge for neighbourhood facilities it provides, which can include upkeep of neighbourhood parks and open spaces where it runs them.

The rest of the overall bill is made up of charges from other public bodies.

Avon & Somerset's police and crime commissioner Clare Moody is raising charges for a Band D tax payer by £15 (5.12%) from £293.20 to £308.20.

Avon Fire Authority is raising its annual charge by £5 or 5.53%, to £95.43.

Town and parish councils are not subject to government restrictions on how much they can raise charges without calling a referendum.

The Band D charge levied by Downend & Bromley Heath

Parish Council has gone up by £12.78 or 18.68%, from £68.43 to £81.21, after the council raised its overall budget by £60,748 or £19%, to £380,473.

The special expenses charge in Downend has risen by 8.85% or £2.16, to £26.58 in Band D, the final element in the £129.60 increase.

Emersons Green Town Council, which covers some areas of Mangotsfield and Downend, has frozen its precept budget at £816,102 this year.

Its charge to a Band D taxpayer has fallen by 89p or 0.75%, from £117.93 to £117.04.

This is because last year the town council mistakenly asked South Gloucestershire Council to increase its precept from £584,600 to £816,102, instead of the intended £599,215 – putting the charge to Band D tax payers went up by 40.9%.

The "administrative oversight" was not noticed until after bills were sent out, and the town council said it would keep the extra money in a savings account towards a "reduced or frozen" precept this year.

An increase in the number of homes in the area paying council tax, from 6,920 to 6,973, means the town council's charge to individual households has gone

Band D council tax bills 2026/27

Parish/town council	Parish budget	Precept Charge	Special expenses	Total Council tax
Downend & Bromley Heath:	£380,473	£81.21	£26.58	£2,510.99
Staple Hill & Mangotsfield:	£175,800	£43.26	£50.35	£2,496.81
Emersons Green:	£816,102	£117.04	£28.75	£2,548.99
Winterbourne	£248,435	£56.23	£8.22	£2,467.65

Figures from South Gloucestershire Council

down slightly.

However, a £1.68 increase in special expenses charges, and the increases to other parts of the bill mean the overall charge is still up 4.74% or £115.45 on last year in Band D, totalling £2,548.99.

Staple Hill & Mangotsfield Parish Council has increased its budget by £24,005 or 15.81%, from £151,795 to £175,800 this year, with the precept rising by £5.64 or 14.99%, from £37.62 to £43.26 in Band D.

Special expenses – which include the upkeep of Page Park – have gone up by £7.81 or 18.36% to £50.35, and the overall bill to Band D council tax payers is £2,496.81, up 5.41%.

The lowest overall bills in the area are for residents

of Frenchay, which is part of Winterbourne parish.

There the parish council has increased its charge to Band D taxpayers by £4.77 or 9.27%, from £51.46 to £56.23, and the special expenses bill is up by 58p from £7.64 to £8.22.

The parish budget has risen by £25,370 or 11.37%, from £223,065 to £248,435.

Overall band D bills for Frenchay residents are up £120.01, from £2,347.64 to £2,467.65, a rise of 5.11%.

The highest council tax bills in South Gloucestershire are in Filton, where the town council pays for facilities including a leisure centre. Its Band D charge is £321.68, and total bills are £2,735.60, this year.

Council spends £20 million of reserves

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council is spending £20 million of its reserves to balance the books, as pressure on local services continues to build.

Changes to how business rates are collected have left the council £16m worse off this year, councillors heard as they met to approve bills on February 11.

The council will spend extra money on social care, equalities work, community cohesion, schools and other services.

Council leader Maggie Tyrrell (Lib Dem, Thornbury), said: "Our costs are increasing faster than inflation, faster

than government funding, and faster than it's reasonable or sustainable to raise council tax.

"Although this is a very tight budget, we're pleased to invest in areas of great importance to us."

There is rising demand for spending on care for elderly and disabled people and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities, and an increase in costs to maintain roads, while extreme weather is making potholes worse.

Co-leader Ian Boulton (Lab, Staple Hill & Mangotsfield), said: "At a time when many councils across the country

are struggling to balance their books, we have delivered a responsible and balanced budget that protects the services residents rely on."

The budget includes a 19% increase in garden waste collection fees, from £63 to £75, and the introduction of three-weekly black bin collections.

Opposition Conservative leader Liz Brennan (Frenchay & Downend) accused the ruling coalition of passing a budget aimed at "short term survival" after her group's proposals to spend more on fixing potholes and cut spending on council political assistants and



Maggie Tyrrell

communications staff were voted down.

Meeting report by Alex Seabrook, Local Democracy Reporting Service

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Path CCTV approved as police seize e-bikes

A PROJECT to install CCTV cameras on a busy stretch of the Bristol and Bath Railway Path will go ahead after winning funding.

The West of England Combined Authority will spend more than £450,000 to fund cameras between Staple Hill tunnel and the old Mangotsfield railway station, and improve the path at nine "pinch points" between Siston Common and Warmley station.

South Gloucestershire Council first unveiled plans to install 20 permanent CCTV cameras on the path in 2024 to help tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

The funding means the scheme can now go ahead, although a start date has yet to be fixed.

WECA says the path is "one of the busiest traffic-free stretches in the country", with more than 1,100 cyclists and pedestrians on average using it daily between Staple Hill and Warmley.

The 'pinch points', where



The illegal e-bikes and e-scooters seized by police

bollards and narrow sections of pathway make it difficult for path users to pass and for some people to use the path at all, will be improved with a view to make it easier for disabled people those using "non-standard wheelers" to use the path.

A public consultation was held last year and the council has also spoken with Bristol Cycling Campaign and other groups.

Announcing the funding in

February, Metro Mayor Helen Godwin said: "By improving lighting, safety and accessibility, we're making it easier for people to choose sustainable travel options and to do so with confidence. This is especially important for women and girls, as we can feel more vulnerable using the path."

The money is coming from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, £540

million of funding awarded to WECA by the government in 2022 to pay for improvements to the region's travel and transport system.

The funding was announced days after police from the Staple Hill Neighbourhood Team carried out a one-day operation in January targeting illegal e-bikes and e-scooters being ridden on the same stretch of path earmarked for CCTV.

Officers stopped people riding three illegally-modified bikes, that go above the legal speed limit of 15.5mph, have a battery of more than 250w or can operate with a throttle instead of the pedals, as well as two people riding privately-owned e-scooters on the path. The only e-scooters that can be used on public roads and paths are those in the region's hire scheme.

A police spokesperson said the riders of the seized bikes and scooters were "given warnings and education".

Anyone found re-offending may face prosecution in future.



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First school reports published under new Ofsted system

OFSTED has published its first reports on schools in the Downend area carried out under a new 'significantly more demanding' marking framework.

The education regulator changed its method of assessing and grading schools after widespread calls for change to the previous system of one and two-word ratings.

The pressures the system placed teachers under came to national attention when a coroner ruled that an Ofsted inspection of a Berkshire primary school in 2022 contributed to the suicide of its head teacher, Ruth Perry, who had been told it would be downgraded from the top rating of 'outstanding' to the bottom rating, 'inadequate'.

Ofsted abandoned overall ratings for

schools last year.

Its new system has replaced the old grades - 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' - with a "traffic light" system.

Schools are given marks in seven areas, ranging from 'exceptional' (blue) through 'strong standard' and 'expected standard' (green) to 'needs attention' (amber) and 'urgent improvement' (red).

However, the new system has already been criticised, with an independent review commissioned by Ofsted finding the increase in areas judged has led to concerns there are now "many more ways to fail" for schools.

Leaders of one of the first schools inspected, Blackhorse Primary School, say the system is "significantly more

demanding" than the previous one, with "more exacting and tightly defined" judgements.

Teachers have also stressed that the new scoring doesn't match up exactly with previous ratings: some performance that would have been judged to be 'good' previously can now receive a 'needs attention' score, and some 'outstanding' performance now falls within the third, 'expected standard' category.

Ofsted has stressed that 'needs attention' is "not a fail" but "highlights where issues can be addressed before they become bigger problems that need urgent improvement".

The first schools in the area to have reports published are Blackhorse and St Augustine of Canterbury primary schools.

Report calls for improvements at primary school

INSPECTORS say a Downend primary school does not give pupils the quality of education they should have.

Ofsted visited St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic Primary School in Boscombe Crescent in December.

The three inspectors said the school's Early Years provision, for children in Reception, meets its expected standard.

But they said pupil achievement, attendance and behaviour, and personal development all need attention. Their report said the school's curriculum and teaching, leadership and governance, and inclusion work also need attention.

The inspectors said: "Pupils at St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic Primary School do not benefit from the quality of education they should. Many do not achieve as well as they could.

"This is because teaching does not consistently help them to know and remember important knowledge and skills.

"Staff expectations of behaviour are not consistently high. Consequently, not all pupils remain focused on learning.

"Leaders have only recently started to improve attendance and punctuality. Currently, not enough pupils attend regularly.

"The school's programme for personal development and well-being does not prepare pupils well enough for life in modern Britain."

The inspectors pointed



St Augustine of Canterbury Primary School

to "significant turbulence in leadership and governance", which they said has now stabilised.

The school was without head teacher Mark Hilliam for several months last year through illness, including during Ofsted's visit. He has now returned but is moving to a new school in April, having relocated to Gloucestershire.

The report said: "Leaders have an accurate view of the school. They have begun to strengthen weaker areas.

"However, this work is very recent and has not yet improved pupils' learning."

Figures published in the report showed the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined over the past three years was 49%, below the national average of 61%.

The inspectors highlighted a number of strengths of the

school, which has 184 pupils aged between four and 11 on its roll.

They said: "Pupils are happy and feel valued.

"Pupils are safe and know that staff will help them if they have any worries.

"Staff and pupils are proud to belong to a close-knit school.

"Bullying is rare and pupils are confident that any instances are dealt with promptly and effectively. "The school's distinctive values underpin its caring, compassionate atmosphere."

The inspectors praised the school's work with children joining its Reception year, including positive relationships with parents, work with children who have special educational needs or disabilities, and "keen focus on developing children's language, early reading and positive behaviours for learning".

In a statement, the school's

governing body said: "We are disappointed by the wording of the report, but accept the findings of the Inspectors.

"Although disappointing, the areas needing attention had been identified by governors and the Senior Leadership Team and actions already put in place to address them, along with the support of the local authority.

"We were especially encouraged that the inspectors were clear they could see the beginning of the positive impact of these actions, and that they had faith in the leadership of the school (governors, leaders and staff) to quickly move these areas forward to reach expected standards.

"We are also pleased that inspectors acknowledged the many positive areas at the school.

"The inspectors were also confident leadership and governance has stabilised, and leaders have an accurate view of our school, focus on the right priorities, that governors fulfil their statutory duties and decisions are made in the best interest of all pupils."

School governors, leaders and staff held a meeting for parents to ask questions or "voice any concerns".

The governors said: "This was a positive meeting, and all present were fully dedicated to ensuring the continued improvement of the school for the benefit for all of our pupils and staff."

Praise for 'highly positive' school

INSPECTORS have praised a primary school's "highly positive culture for learning" and inclusive ethos.

Blackhorse Primary School in Blackhorse Lane was one of the first schools in the country to be visited by Ofsted using the regulator's new 'report card' grading system in November.

The team of four inspectors, whose report was published in late January, said the school had achieved the education regulator's 'strong standard' in three areas: attendance and behaviour, personal development and well-being, and inclusion.

It was given 'expected standard' gradings for pupil achievement, curriculum and teaching, leadership and governance, and early years provision.

The inspectors said: "The school fosters a highly positive culture for learning, maintaining a calm and purposeful environment.

"Staff implement the school's approach to behaviour with kindness and sensitivity.

"Pupils show high levels of self-discipline and maturity. In the classroom, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They listen carefully, work hard and are supportive of each other.

"On the playground, pupils' respectful and considerate behaviour continues. Discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated."

The inspectors said pupils at the school's Resource Base for children with autistic spectrum disorder integrated successfully into classes where appropriate.

They said: "The school's inclusive ethos ensures that pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, and those who are disadvantaged, participate fully in school life."

More than one in ten Blackhorse pupils have an education, health and care plan, providing more support than is available through special educational needs support: three times the national average of 3.5%. Another 9.26% have SEN support - below the national average of 15%.

The report said the school, which has 421 pupils aged between four and 11, provides a comprehensive range of

opportunities to develop "artistic, musical and sporting passions".

The inspectors said: "Pupils take pride in being part of the 'track team'. They enjoy learning to play musical instruments, such as the recorder, or taking part in musical theatre. This develops pupils' confidence and builds their self-esteem."

Figures published in the report showed the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined over the past two years was between 70% and 73%, above the national average of 61%.

The inspectors said pupils achieve well.

They said: "Leaders prioritise teaching pupils the most important knowledge and skills they need to succeed. This ensures that most pupils develop their handwriting, spelling, reading and knowledge of number well."

The report recommended that checks on learning and understanding are made more consistent and precise to ensure all "gaps" in knowledge are addressed.

Leaders and trustees of the school were described as "highly ambitious" for the school and its community, taking measured actions to achieve priorities and ensuring staff have high-quality training.

The inspectors said: "Pupils and families are at the centre of the decisions they make.

"Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about many aspects of the school's work."

Blackhorse executive head teacher Simon Botten said the inspection was "one of the most rigorous" the school has experienced.

He said inspectors have to show evidence for "every word of every judgement", and most schools are expected to receive at least one area identified as 'needs attention'.

Mr Botten said a 'strong' judgement is "broadly comparable" to a high 'outstanding' rating under the previous system, while an 'expected' grade compares with a high 'good' rating.

He said: "This framework sets the bar extremely high.

"Inspectors must evidence



Blackhorse head of school Neil Fry and executive head teacher Simon Botten with pupils.

every statement they make, so this was a searching and thorough process, but one which allowed us to demonstrate the ethos which makes our school so special.

"We are particularly pleased to see the school's emphasis on children's wider school experience - through our extensive extra-curricular offer - being singled out for praise.

"We are delighted that the report captures the lived experience of our pupils and

the strength of our school community.

"It reflects the commitment, care and professionalism of our staff, who go above and beyond for children every day.

"This outcome is a moment to celebrate for our children, families and staff.

"It recognises a school where pupils thrive, feel a strong sense of belonging, and are supported to become confident, resilient learners - true champions in the making."

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Your tax year end checklist

As the end of the tax year approaches, you might be wondering whether there's anything you should be doing before the 5 April deadline. The good news is that you don't need to overhaul your finances to make a difference. A few simple checks now could help reduce the amount of tax you pay and put you in a stronger position for the year ahead. Even small actions can add up over time.

Local Financial Planner Jonathan Southgate, of Southgate Wealth Management Ltd, highlights some key areas worth reviewing.

Use your ISA allowance

ISAs (Individual Savings Accounts) are one of the easiest ways to save or invest without worrying about any further liability to tax. Each tax year, you can put up to £20,000 into an ISA. Any interest, growth, or income you earn stays free from Income Tax and Capital Gains Tax, both now and in the future.

If you have a spouse or civil partner, they have their own £20,000 allowance. That means between you, you could potentially protect up to £40,000 from any further tax.

You can also save for children or grandchildren using a Junior ISA. Up to £9,000 can be contributed per child each year. A parent or guardian must open the account, but friends and family can also add to it. Over time, this can grow into a useful pot for later life.

Check your pension contributions

Pensions are a tax-efficient way to save for your future. Check what you've paid in this tax year and whether you could afford to top it up. You may also be able to use unused pension allowances from the previous three years.

If you're approaching retirement, planning when and how you take money from your pension may help reduce the tax you pay overall. And remember, you are never too young to start paying into a pension!

Check your Capital Gain Tax allowance

When you sell something that has increased in value – such as shares, a second property, or valuable personal possessions – you may pay Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on the profit. Everyone has a CGT allowance of £3,000. Reviewing this before the tax year ends may help you use it more effectively.

Don't forget gifting and business finances

You can gift £3,000 each year without it counting towards Inheritance Tax, or £6,000 if you didn't use last year's allowance.

If you run your own business, it's also a good time to check whether your mix of salary and dividends still makes sense.

A simple tax year end check doesn't need to feel overwhelming. Get in touch today to see how Southgate Wealth Management can help. Email Jonathan.southgate@sjpp.co.uk or call 07863 164159.

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SJP approved 10/02/26



Jonathan Southgate

Further arrest for ex-Metro Mayor

FORMER Metro Mayor Dan Norris is facing new allegations of sexual offences.

Avon & Somerset police initially arrested the 66-year-old politician in April last year on suspicion of rape and child sex offences alleged to have happened between the 2000s and 2020s.

He was placed on police bail as officers from the Operation Bluestone dedicated rape and serious sexual assault team continued their investigation.

In February police said: "Following our enquiries, the man has been further arrested on suspicion of rape against a second woman, sexual assault against a third woman, as well as voyeurism and upskirting against a number of women."

"We're no longer actively investigating any sexual offences against children, but the original rape and misconduct in a public office investigation is continuing."

"Investigations into sexual offences are sensitive and complex and as a result, it can take a significant amount of time for enquiries to be completed."

"The man remains on conditional bail."

Mr Norris, whose term as Metro Mayor ended last May, was suspended from the Labour Party immediately after his arrest but remains the MP for North East Somerset and Hanham.

He issued a statement after his further arrest, saying: "I vigorously and entirely deny the serious allegations made against me. They are untrue. I am challenging them through my legal representatives."

Mr Norris has been banned from entering Parliament, under rules restricting access to MPs arrested on suspicion of a violent or sexual offence.

He told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: He was "Still representing constituents."



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Car park charges miss income target

THE amount of money raised by controversial car parking charges in South Gloucestershire is set to fall short of the council's target.

Monitoring by the authority also shows that usage of car parks is down by more than the national average.

The council says it expects the charges at 22 of its car parks, including Byron Place, Haynes Lane and Page Road in Staple Hill, and at St James Street in Mangotsfield, to raise £557,000 during the current financial year - about 30% below the £800,000 target.

As the charges were introduced after the start of the financial year, the adjusted forecast for the first full year of operation from May is expected to be £630,000 - just over 21% below the target.

The council has been unable to provide figures for the use of car parks in Staple Hill, where traders say business is down by up to 40% since the charges were introduced last May and rows of empty spaces can frequently be seen.

But it says usage of car parks in Kingswood, including the Kings Chase shopping centre, is 7.4% below the previous year, compared to a national decrease of 5.1%. It says that in Downend, where there are no charges for parking, car park use is down 4.6%.

Around 40 traders from Staple Hill met with council officials at Page Community Hall late January to discuss the impact of the charges.

Staple Hill Chamber of Trade chair George Georgiou, who runs the Butcher's Hook in the High Street, says they appealed to the council to introduce a new half-hour of free parking for all spaces, to stem the loss of customers.

George said: "My trade is down between 30 and 40% and other traders are the same.

"I've had to get rid of staff and am thinking of cutting my opening hours and closing at 1pm instead of 4pm - if people aren't coming to the High Street, what's the point in keeping my fridges on?"

"I've put the business up for sale but no-one is interested in buying it - we're hanging on by our fingertips."

The council says the charges are providing "vital funding" to support council services.

A spokesperson said: "Local traders have expressed concerns that charging for car parking is affecting the number of visitors to their businesses, and the council is listening to those concerns.

"Looking forward, based on the data and feedback, the council will look at potential amendments to the scheme to simplify the charges in some locations, for example where a car park has areas for both long and short stays.

"Proposals will be contained in a draft revised order, under which charging was introduced, that will be published for consultation soon."

Buses key to transport 'vision'

A NEW "vision for the future of transport" in the region, including a mass transit link to Bristol Airport, has been unveiled by Metro Mayor Helen Godwin.

The system would see trams or bendy-buses introduced in some places.

But in the Downend area the most immediate change is likely to be the arrival of electric buses on major routes.

The West of England Combined Authority run by the Metro Mayor has £752 million of funding available for better buses, more trains, and mass transit plans across Bristol, South Gloucestershire and B&NES, as well as North Somerset, which could join WECA if a proposal now out for consultation goes ahead.

A spokesperson for the mayor said more than 250 new electric buses would be on the region's streets by the end of the year.

This will include in the Downend area: the Lawrence Hill bus depot, where the vehicles used on routes including the 48 and 49 are based, will be converted for electric buses later in the year.

But within five years an upgrade to routes between the city centre and Emersons Green, and along the ring road corridor, potentially including mass transit, could be introduced.

A public consultation on a new bus plan is expected to be launched during March.

Ms Godwin said: "We need a transport system that people can trust, wherever they live. Together, we can and must deliver the integrated transport system that people need and deserve."

South Gloucestershire Council leader Maggie Tyrrell said: "With significant growth across South Gloucestershire, we need transport improvements that help communities and businesses thrive, connecting people to key services and workplaces."

Details of the Transport Vision can be found online at tinyurl.com/yzu83kuh. **Metro Mayor: Page 44**



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Peter Turner is an Independent Prescribing Senior Optometrist at Turners Opticians in Bristol. He also works as a Senior Medical Optometrist at Bristol Eye Hospital and has a specialist interest in visual development and performance.



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Helen and Steve look back at long partnership

THE owners of Staple Hill optician Dury and Tippet have retired, after working together for more than 30 years.

Co-founder and dispensing optician Steve Dury and optometrist Helen Tippet held their last appointments before handing over to a new team on February 11.

As they prepared to sign off they told the *Voice* about some of the changes technology has brought to eye treatment - and the problems caused by ever-increasing screen time.

Steve co-founded the business in 1983, and it was initially known as Dury and Shaw.

It was his first business as an owner, having previously worked for other opticians.

Steve grew up in South Bristol and started out on his 57-year career as a teenager, after learning that the other guitarist in his band, Out of the Blues, was training to become a dispensing optician.

He started work as a student optician with Curry & Paxton in Park Street, in 1968.

Helen, who was brought up in South Wales, decided on her career when an optician gave a talk at her school.

She came to Bristol to do her pre-registration work at Goatman opticians in Clifton, after studying at university in London, and qualified in 1981.

She joined the practice in 1992 and became a full partner in 2005, at which point the business was renamed Dury and Tippet.

The practice was initially based in one unit in Fountain Square but expanded into a second next door about 15 years ago.

It is known for its quirky individual style, with a jukebox, artwork, reproduction Tardis-

style police box and a Welsh flag among the decorations.

Steve said: "We wanted it to look as little like Specsavers as possible!"

They worked in tandem, with Helen testing patients' eyes to draw up prescriptions that Steve then interpreted into a finished pair of glasses.

During their careers Steve and Helen have seen technology bring many changes, from the increase in NHS cataract operations, which have transformed the sight of many patients, to the Visufit 1000 digital 3D measurement system used by Steve to help create glasses, using an array of cameras and 45 million reference points to capture facial details and eye movements.

Helen adopted 3D OCT (optical coherence tomography) scanning, a process similar to ultrasound, that produces images of the interior of the eye to help identify the earliest signs of conditions.

On the flip side, Steve and Helen say the increasing use of smartphones and other screens is leading to an "epidemic" of short-sightedness, or myopia, among children.

Treatments have been developed to manage the condition, using specially-designed contact lenses and eye drops, but because it is not funded by the NHS, many parents won't spend the extra money on it.

Steve and Helen sold the business to the Hakim Group of independent opticians last November but stayed on for three months as consultants, while the new practitioners settled in.

Steve said: "We've been working together so long, for about 30 years, that I can't



Helen Tippet and Steve Dury

imagine working without Helen. It seems a good time to go.

"The business will carry on as Dury and Tippet, even though we have gone into the sunset."

Helen and Steve both said they will miss their patients, most of whom are "lovely people" - many have been customers for years.

Steve says he won't miss the 6am starts travelling from his home in North Somerset to the

practice.

He plans to spend more time playing the guitar - he recently picked up a Fender Ultra II Stratocaster - and refurbishing a model railway that his son, now 40, last played with as a child.

Helen, who lives in Kingswood, is planning to spend more time with her grandchildren and potter in the garden with her husband.



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William visits robo lab and supercomputer

THE Prince of Wales has found out how Bristol's universities are working together to use robotic technology to help older and disabled people.

The prince visited the Bristol Robotics Laboratory at the University of the West of England's Frenchay campus in January to meet researchers and start-up businesses working in areas including smart garments, exoskeletons and self-stabilising mobility scooters.

BRL is a joint venture between UWE and Bristol University, and is described by the two universities as "the most comprehensive academic centre for multi-disciplinary robotics research in the UK".

Prince William met the engineering research team at the VIVO Hub for Enhanced Independent Living, where robotic and digital healthcare technology is being combined to develop new equipment to help older and disabled people, including clothing that can help prevent falls, and support

people getting up from a chair, climbing stairs and walking.

The prince also met the founders of two start-up firms led by Bristol University graduates: Supersmith, which is building mobility scooters with self-stabilising robotic technology, and Milbotix, which is making 'wearable technology', including socks that monitor dementia patients' well-being.

UWE Bristol's pro-vice chancellor for research and knowledge exchange, Professor Darren Reynolds, said: "Prince William has seen first-hand our thriving community of tech-minded and solutions-focused entrepreneurs and researchers, reimagining tomorrow through robotics and the power of AI.

"These start-ups are addressing societal challenges that will improve people's lives and power our economy."

Earlier the same day the prince was at the Bristol and Bath Science Park in Emersons Green, where he visited the National Composites Centre and Isambard-AI supercomputer.

The £225m government-funded national facility, built and run by the Bristol Centre for Supercomputing (BriCS), was officially launched in July last year and is the world's fastest university supercomputer.

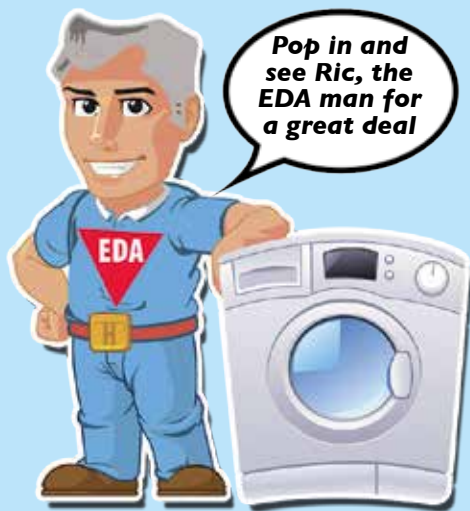
Prince William met BriCS director Professor Simon McIntosh-Smith, as well as Bristol University senior research fellow Dr Danielle Paul, whose British Heart Foundation-funded research is using the



Prince William watches a demonstration of Supersmith's 3Scooter, which uses self-stabilising robotic technology. Picture: Andrew Parsons/Kensington Palace

supercomputer in the development of new drugs to combat heart disease, and climate scientist Professor Dann Mitchell, whose research shows how to use AI to better predict extreme weather under different climate scenarios.

Bristol University deputy vice-chancellor Professor Judith Squires said: "Today's visit shines a light on the extraordinary impact that is possible when universities, industry and regional partners work together with a shared sense of purpose."



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House party for 100th birthday

A STAPLE Hill great-grandmother has celebrated her 100th birthday - in the house where she was born.

Elizabeth Hodges, nee Wilkins, was born on February 2, 1926, at the family home in Edgware Road.

The youngest of five sisters and three brothers, she went to primary and secondary school in Staple Hill and, apart from a short time away after getting married, has lived in the same house for her whole life, even sleeping in the room where she was born.

Great-granddaughter Lainey Oliver said: "At one time, all of the Wilkins sisters lived on Edgware Road, so it was fondly known locally as 'Wilkins Road'."

After leaving school Elizabeth,



Elizabeth Hodges on her 100th birthday.

also known as Betty, worked at Hodders the chemist in Fishponds and also developed a love of amateur dramatics, regularly appearing in plays at the Hebron Church.

It was around this time that she met her husband, John. They married in 1951 and went on to



Elizabeth (front, left) as a young girl, with her nephew Peter (front, right), mum Agnes, dad Henry and sisters Hannah and Irene.

raise two children, Julie and Jeff.

After raising her children she worked as a dinner lady at a primary school in Hillfields.

Elizabeth has two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Her early memories include sheltering in the cupboard under the stairs during air raids as a young teenager during the Second World War.

Lainey said: "They had a bed in the cupboard and they used to put a cushion between Nan's legs to stop her knees knocking, as she was so scared!"

Elizabeth celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by

her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as well as her niece and niece's husband, who made a surprise visit from their home in Florida to join the celebrations.

Lainey said: "While all of her siblings have sadly passed away, Elizabeth remains at the heart of a close and loving family."

"She still enjoys regular lunches with her nieces and nephews."

"At 100 years old, Elizabeth's life is still defined by the warmth of family, shared meals and the home that has always been at the heart of her story."

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Warning over fake £20 note scams

POLICE are trying to trace a man who conned a Downend resident out of a laptop by buying it using fake £20 notes.

They say the man in the picture, captured by a doorbell camera, used several counterfeit notes to buy the computer, which he picked up at around 5pm on January 21.

A police spokesperson said: "The item was advertised for sale on an online social media marketplace, and we have received similar reports where counterfeit notes have been used in other areas across Avon and Somerset.

"We are following lines of enquiry in relation to this incident, have carried out CCTV enquiries and intelligence checks, but we are now appealing to the public to come forward with information on the identity of the man, who we believe may have information which could assist our enquiries."

The man is described as black and around 5ft 10in tall.

He was wearing a gilet and a sweatshirt with the hood up.

Anyone who thinks they know who the man is should call 101 or contact the police online and quote the crime reference number 5226 027 249.

Inspector Barney Mabbett said a series

of frauds using the forged notes had been reported.

He said: "Officers are investigating multiple incidents where the victims have advertised an electrical item for sale online, with the offenders later attending their home addresses and paying for the item with counterfeit currency."

Police are issuing advice to spot the fake notes, and asking people to:

*Look out for three serial numbers repeatedly appearing on the fakes: YA09 592802, DK57 985923 and DK92 639731.

*Check the hologram image, which should change between "Twenty" and "Pounds" when tilted on a genuine note.

*Check the transparent window has clearly-defined images and edges.

*Check for raised print, especially on the words 'Bank of England', on a genuine note.

*Not accept a note that feels unusual, appears blurry or lacks security features.

They are advising anyone who is offered a fake note not to confront those involved but to record information including descriptions of people and vehicles, and to keep hold of the fake note if it is safe to.

Businesses are being advised to notify their bank and share information to help prevent the notes circulating more.



The man police want to trace

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Sisters' marathon challenge

TWO sisters are training to run the London Marathon for a charity close to their hearts.

Jen Davis and Mel Glanville will take on the 26-mile and 385-yard course in April to raise money for Marie Curie, which provides end of life nursing and hospice care.

The charity's nurses cared for their grandad when he died at home in 2016, and Mel now works for Marie Curie, providing overnight end of life care for terminally ill patients in their own homes.

Jen and Mel grew up in Downend and Mangotsfield, and still live in the area.

This will be the first time they have taken on a marathon together: Jen has done the London Marathon once before, in 2023, and Mel has done a 10k and some parkruns.

Jen, who is a full-time foster carer, said: "We know it will be a challenge but want to run it and cross the finish line together."

"It's been tough fitting in the training, with Mel working nights as well as being a mum, but she fits it in around sleep.

"I have done lots on the treadmill when the kids



Jen Davis and Mel Glanville on a previous run

are in bed, but am hoping to be out on the road more during March and April!"

Mel and Jen have set up individual donation pages on the marathon's fundraising website, which can be found by searching for their names at 2026tcs.londonmarathon.enthusie.com.

They are aiming to raise £2,500 each.

Jen said: "Every five minutes someone dies without the care they need. That needs to change. "Marie Curie nurses provide nursing and hospice care whatever the illness. They also provide support and information on all aspects of dying, death and bereavement."

For more information on Marie Curie, visit mariecurie.org.uk.

10k entries open

THE 44th Frenchay 10k is open for entries.

Since the race began in 1980, around £200,000 has been raised for charities by the volunteer organisers.

This year's nominated charities are mental health charity Bristol Mind, 1625 Independent People, which supports young people at risk of homelessness, and Freewheelers emergency volunteer service, which provides a free out of hours courier service for hospitals for blood and other vital supplies.

The event will take place on April 19 from 11am, following its established course from the race headquarters at UWE's Glenside campus through Snuff Mills, up into Oldbury Court Park, through Frenchay Village and then back up Blackberry Hill to the university site.

The event has an updated website this year where entries can be made, at frenchay10k.co.uk.

There are 600 places, with reduced rates for juniors and affiliated club runners.



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Inspectors find no bias at school in MP row

INSPECTORS sent into a secondary school following a row over the cancellation of an MP's visit have found "no evidence" of political bias.

Ofsted made a snap focused monitoring inspection of Bristol Brunel Academy in January, after Chief Inspector of Schools Sir Martyn Oliver said he was concerned the school "may have been intimidated" into cancelling Bristol North East MP Damien Egan's planned visit to talk with pupils.

The announcement was made after Communities Secretary Steve Reed said Mr Egan, whose constituency includes Staple Hill and Mangotsfield, had been "banned" from the school, claiming it was an example of anti-semitism on account of the MP's Jewish faith.

The Speedwell school insisted the visit in September had been postponed on safety grounds, after leaders learned of planned protests by unions and activists.

Bristol National Education Union had accused Mr Egan,

who is the vice-chair of the Labour Friends of Israel group, of supporting "Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza".

The issue was raised at Prime Minister's Questions in Parliament before Ofsted's visit was announced.

The team of four inspectors said they were investigating "a potential insufficient observance of the Department for Education's 'Political impartiality in schools' guidance".

They said: "Inspectors found no evidence to substantiate these concerns within the school."

Ofsted said that while the postponement of Mr Egan's visit was not the subject of the inspection, "leaders openly referenced the decision" and their concerns about the safety of children, staff and visitors if a protest went ahead.

The inspectors said the school's leaders and trustees have a "profound commitment" to providing an inclusive environment, promoting tolerance and respect for

diversity.

They said: "This school has a comprehensive and carefully considered strategy for promoting and celebrating fundamental British values.

"Leaders at this school ensure political impartiality in the curriculum and teaching. If leaders' high expectations are not met by staff or pupils, quick action is taken.

"Staff, including those from minority groups, spoke of the harmonious and religiously tolerant atmosphere in the school."

The inspectors said parents were "overwhelmingly positive about their children's experiences".

Mr Egan told the *Voice* his visit to the school went ahead unannounced in February, and included a meeting with principal Jen Cusack and Cabot Learning Federation leaders.

He said: "The highlight was meeting the school council. We were supposed to be there for half an hour but we were there

for an hour."

Mr Egan said that "ironically", there were no questions from students about Gaza.

He said: "We did talk about crime, safety, school provision for young people, votes at 16, the social media ban and local improvements - to be honest, questions I would get if I was talking to a group of adults."

Mr Egan, whose husband is Israeli and has relatives in the country, said Labour Friends of Israel is a "progressive" group that has been trying to help establish a UK-sponsored peace conference involving Israeli and Palestinian civil society groups.

He said: "Of course I don't support genocide. A lot of this is based on assumptions of what I think.

"It's not about me so much as the democratic principle that MPs, of whatever party, should be able to go into schools in their constituencies."

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YOUR Community NEWS

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**on Sunday, 16th August,
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Last year's Grand Opening drew hundreds of visitors for shopping, food, and fun, and this year will be even bigger!

We're expanding outdoors with more family activities, vendors, and community spirit.

If you are interesting in having stall at the event please email

pavilionmanager@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk

for more information.

Don't miss it, mark your calendars now!



FREE TREE GIVEAWAY!



Free Tree Giveaway

A massive thank you to everyone who supported the Free Trees event back on the 17th January at King George V Pavilion.

The event was a resounding success and by the end of the event pretty much all of the 100+ trees we had purchased had gone to new homes!

DOWNEND & BROMLEY HEATH PARISH COUNCILLORS

Downend Ward

Councillor Phillip Abbott

phillip.abbott@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 0117 957 0075

Councillor Janet Biggin

janet.biggin@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 0117 957 6987

Councillor Jacky Dockerty

jacky.dockerty@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07963 841 270

Councillor Matt Pitts

matt.pitts@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07837 870 039

Councillor Mike Richards

mike.richards@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07846 893 543

Councillor Raj Kumar Sood

raj.sood@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07901 621 632

Councillor Sam Burch

sam.burch@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07812592256

Councillor Terry Meech

terry.meech@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07900451267

Councillor Sharon Herniman

sharon.herniman@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07534603704

Staple Hill Ward

Councillor Dave Somers

dave.somers@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07831 239 195

Councillor Stephen Pick

stephen.pick@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk 07584 425 242

Clerk to the Council

Mr Kevin Spratt - Email: clerk@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk

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Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council

Head confirmed

DOWNEND School has confirmed that its interim head teacher has been appointed permanently to the role.



Rachael Corns

Rachael Corns had been the school's deputy head before taking over temporarily last year after predecessor Linda Ferris took on a directorial role at the Castle School Education Trust.

CSET has now confirmed that the roles of Mrs Corns and senior deputy head Ben Hickman have been made permanent.

Mrs Corns has previously served as the school's head of PE, a head of house and special educational needs coordinator, before becoming the deputy head.

Lorry ban to be lifted

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council is planning to remove a ban on HGVs using a road in Downend - after continued damage to bollards and railings on the diversion route.

Vehicles weighing more than 7.5 tons are currently not allowed to use Cleeve Road to travel from the traffic lights at the top of Cleeve Hill to the Westerleigh Road double mini-roundabout.

The ban is not in force in the opposite direction.

The council wants to allow lorries to use Cleeve Road because they have caused so much damage trying to get around the corner at the junction of Badminton Road and Westerleigh Road, between the Sainsbury's Local store and the Horseshoe pub.

In a statement announcing the change, the council said: "In recent months there has been an increase in the number of HGVs taking out these bollards.



Damage to the railings on the pedestrian crossing outside Sainsbury's. Picture: Downend In Bloom

"From CCTV it has been shown that the majority of the HGVs are coming from Cleeve Hill and turning right onto the A432 Badminton Road then turn left into Westerleigh Road, to avoid the weight limit on Cleeve Road."

The council said it is "not possible for the largest HGVs to turn left onto Westerleigh Road from Badminton Road without hitting the bollards or the pedestrian barriers on the crossing," adding: "The barriers and bollards have already been hit a number of times this year,

resulting in expensive repairs."

It says the purpose of the scheme is to reduce the "frequency of damage and associated maintenance costs" by preventing the bollards and pedestrian barriers from being struck by HGVs.

A three-week public consultation on the plans on the council's website, *consultations.southglos.gov.uk*, was set to finish on February 23.

If the scheme goes ahead, work is expected to start in the coming financial year.

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TURNERS HEARING CARE BLOG

Blocked Ears Are Not a Minor Nuisance (Even If You've Been Ignoring Them)



Most people don't book ear wax removal because of pain.

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Fed up with asking people to repeat themselves.

Fed up with turning the TV up one notch at a time.

Fed up with that muffled, cotton-wool feeling they keep hoping will "just clear".

And here's the quiet truth: **ear wax rarely clears properly on its own once it becomes impacted.**

In fact, many well-meaning attempts to fix it, cotton buds, drops used too late, home gadgets, often make the problem worse by pushing wax further in.

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If your ears feel blocked, sounds seem dull, or ringing has crept in, book an appointment with our friendly audiologist. We'll check your ears, show you what we see, and, if needed, remove any troublesome wax safely and comfortably.

Deb Campbell

Debbie Campbell is a qualified and experienced Audiologist, who has joined the clinical team at Turners Opticians in Fishponds having worked for many years in NHS Audiology clinics.

DOWNEND FOLK & ROOTS PREVIEW

SHERBURN BARTLEY SANDERS

FRIDAY 20 MARCH 2026

DOWNEND Folk & Roots celebrate the week of St Patrick's Day with a distinctly Irish flavour as they welcome Sherburn Bartley Sanders to headline this month's concert.

Chris Sherburn (concertina) and Denny Bartley (vocals, guitar) have brought their unique sound to audiences across the globe since 1993.

In 2016, they joined forces with Emily Sanders (fiddle, vocals) blending vocal harmonies and strings to their unique sound.

Now, their soul-stirring songs, exhilarating tunes and quick-witted banter ensures that no two concerts are ever the same. From festival stages to intimate venues,

their performances are filled with warmth, laughter, and exceptional musicianship. Don't miss this chance to experience their magic live!

Opening the evening will be Paul Lloyd Nicholas. Paul is proud to call himself a South Wales singer-songwriter who's fallen on his feet and has a brilliant time playing to terrific audiences.

Tickets for the concert, which takes place at Christ Church Downend on Friday 20th March 2026, are available online via downendfolkandroots.com or from Downend Cards & Gifts (cash only). They are priced at £14 each in advance or £16 on the door. Doors open at 7.00pm and the music starts around 7.45pm.

There will be a bar, stocking cider, soft drinks, wine, hot drinks and real ale from Bristol's Hop



Union Brewery. Audience members are encouraged to bring their own glass/mug/tankard, as well as reusable bottles for water, as part of the drive to be more environmentally aware; there is a 50p discount for those that do. There will also be sweet treats

available at the bar courtesy of Radstock-based The Great Cake Company, as well as a prize draw, which helps to fund the support artists for each concert.

For further information, please email info@downendfolkandroots.com or find them on social media.

DOWNEND FOLK & ROOTS REVIEW

THE BLACK FEATHERS + HANNAH WOOD

FRIDAY 16 JANUARY 2026

PEOPLE who make new year's resolutions are just boring, aren't they? What's wrong with being happy with who you are, with what you are, right now? What's wrong with embracing your favourite thing, not searching for something new? What's wrong with looking back, not forward?

At Downend Folk & Roots this month it's, very much, a case of New Year, Old Favourites.

UK Americana superheroes THE BLACK FEATHERS have played here three times in the last ten, or so, years and a packed room is delighted to welcome them back again.

Sian Chandler and Ray Hughes have, clearly, decided that there's no need for resolutions either. This might be the first show that they've played in three months but they are just as glorious, just as heart-wrenching, just as perfectly imperfect as ever.

Down by the River is taken from their 2016 debut, Soaked to the Bone, and has lost none of its ability to wrap you up in the Black Feathers world. There are wonderful harmonies, the lazy strum of an acoustic guitar, the shadow of melancholy cast by the Country sun and a tune that gently lodges itself into your psyche. It might be ten years old but, when things are this good, why bother with anything else?

The same goes for Hurricane (from 2022's Angel Dust & Cyanide) and Strangers We Meet (from their

very first EP); they are old friends that you simply wouldn't want to do without. These are songs where the emotions are right on the surface, barely kept in check by two voices working together beautifully.

Don't go thinking, though, that there's nothing new here. Tonight marks the first time that they have played a cover of Adele's When We Were Young. Hughes reckons he's "terrified" but it doesn't show, instead it becomes the sort of thing you could find on the soundtrack from one of those John Hughes movies from the '80s. Chandler's voice is gravel-dipped-in-honey while Hughes replaces Adele's lachrymose piano with delicate, sensitive acoustic guitar and an effortless foundation.

It is this symbiosis that makes The Black Feathers so remarkable. There is no doubt that Chandler's voice is an astonishing thing - part heart-broken Country, part Soul stirring sister, part evangelist abandonment - but when she sings on her own she turns the dial down. Sometimes it sounds as though she's singing in another room, she's vulnerable, hesitant. It is when Hughes joins her that you catch your breath. It's as though she just needs a hand to hold, a ledge to lean on. Then, she blazes.

On Goodbye Tomorrow she adds steely strength to a classic chorus, on Perfect Storm she plumbs the depths of misery while Hughes shimmers and twinkles. The two make a perfect whole, you need them both.

A new song, probably called Return to my Trees, encapsulates



all of this. Chandler is exposed, halting, struggling with the weight of melancholy as the song begins. Perhaps it is because it's new, perhaps because they've barely ever played it live but her voice catches, is uncertain... until Hughes joins her. Then there is power and colour and an incredible sense of balance. If this is where the new album is going to take us, it's going to be so good.

There are, of course, a couple of brilliant cover versions in amongst all of the Country-got-Soul beauty. Portishead's Glory Box continues to be a sassy stomper in the hands of Chandler and Hughes. Less a smoky noir-ish femme fatal, more a technicolour Hollywood tempt-ress. Spirit in the Sky is performed off mic for the well-deserved encore, and has the fervour of a Pentecostal revivalist meeting, Chandler testifying with the best of them. With a couple of Munsters' finger clicks they are gone and, inevitably, you can't wait to see them again.

If The Black Feathers show us

the value in remembering old friends, then HANNAH WOOD represents an exciting new year's resolution for most. A Bristol-based singer-songwriter, she is a seriously good teller of tales. There's a delicious spookiness to The Ash Tree, all Victorian lace and flitting shadows, while Sweet Reprieve has a chorus that is almost hymn-like and a tune that relishes its Old Grey Whistle Test folkie vibe. Fundevogel is inspired by one of Grimm's Fairy Tales and has echoes of Suzanne Vega in its word-y swoops; it is delightfully complex and wonderfully clever. The title track of Wood's latest EP, Rabbits, sways gently, her voice as clear and pure as a crisp January day. It casts a shaft of sunlight across the melancholy.

In 2026, if you must make a resolution, make it this - remember your old friends but make new ones too. Downend Folk & Roots will help you.

Words: Gavin McNamara
Photos: Barry Savell

Suspended sentences for MOT fraudsters

TWO employees of a Staple Hill garage who carried out a "dangerous MOT fraud" have been given suspended prison sentences.

Owain Shaw and Jamie Lee have also been ordered to carry out unpaid community work after issuing MOT certificates for 223 "potentially unsafe vehicles" that had never been brought to the business they worked for.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency said Shaw, an MOT tester at Staple Hill MOT Centre in Broad Street, and Lee, who worked at the garage as a mechanic, set up a system to avoid carrying out MOTs.

A spokesperson said: "Lee would send Shaw vehicle registration numbers. Shaw would then issue pass certificates without ever seeing the vehicles.

"This type of fraud is called 'ghost' MOT testing. The vehicles being 'tested' are not actually there - like ghosts."

DVSA investigators externally monitoring the garage's MOT system in September 2023 detected Shaw issuing an MOT certificate in less than a minute.

The DVLA said: "The vehicle he was supposed to be testing was nowhere to be seen at the MOT centre.

"Further investigation revealed suspicious patterns. Multiple MOT tests were being completed in unrealistically short time periods. This raised immediate red flags for DVSA."

Bank records showed Lee had paid Shaw £11,428 for issuing fake certificates - payments they tried to disguise as purchases of 'car parts'.

The DVSA said the fraudulent certificates were immediately cancelled once the scam was uncovered, with the vehicle owners contacted.

Shaw admitted 44 counts of fraud at Bristol Crown Court in January, with a further 199

offences taken into consideration by the judge. He was given a two-year suspended jail sentence and told to carry out 300 hours of unpaid work.

Lee was given a two-year suspended sentence and told to carry out 250 hours of unpaid work after being found guilty of helping to run the fraudulent operation.

Both men face having their assets seized as proceeds of crime at a later court hearing.

MOTs test brakes, lights, tyres, steering and other vital parts for potentially dangerous defects.

The DVSA says it is trying out a new system where MOT testers must photograph vehicles during testing and upload the images to its computer systems.

Abigail Ollis, one of the directors of the family-run garage, told the *Voice* the two men had breached the trust of both the business, which had

paid for their training, and its customers.

She said Shaw had issued the MOT certificates via a mobile phone at home.

Ms Ollis said: "The judge agreed we weren't at fault but the garage is being tarnished - it's obviously having a knock-on effect."

She said the situation had caused so much stress that the garage's other director had suffered a heart attack - and they had had to wait almost three years before the case could be brought to court.

The business issued a statement which said Shaw and Lee's actions "were completely at odds with the standards and values we have upheld for decades", adding: "We have since carried out a full review of our procedures and strengthened our compliance systems to ensure this cannot happen again."

LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS - EMAIL US AT: NEWS@DOWNENDVOICE.CO.UK



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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Safeguarding commitment: The Leaf Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. All appointments are subject to appropriate vetting, including an enhanced DBS check.

Speaking truth to power

YOU can't escape it! Wherever you look in the media there are disturbing headlines about people who should know better abusing their power and destroying their victims lives as a result. As a man, it's gutting to read of princes, politicians and businessmen taking advantage of vulnerable young women to satisfy their sexual desires; to reflect on world leaders abusing power to boost their own egos and build their own empires at the expense of the poor and vulnerable; and to consider the failings of the Church worldwide in responding to devastating abuse scandals. Leaders are called to lead, to set a clear example and inspire those who follow, but somewhere along

the line things have gone horribly wrong - It's easy to despair!

Yet in the midst of all of this, there are incredible examples of courage – where individuals are raising their voices, refusing to accept the status quo and speaking truth to power. Women abused by Jeffrey Epstein and others, communities seemingly forgotten by the wider world, victims of injustice and intolerable pain. Many powerful men (and women) are now facing the consequences of their evil actions.

For most of us the situations documented on our screens or social media feeds might seem distant (although for a few the connections to our own

experiences might leave us raw and numb). That doesn't give us reason to keep our heads down and our voices muted. The Bible reminds us of our responsibility to "defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalm 82: 3-4). What that looks like will be different for each of us and it's not just a call to those with faith, but a universal one to all humanity.

Will we have the courage to speak up where we see injustice in our local community – to uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed? I'm so grateful for charities, organisations, faith communities and



individuals who stick their heads above the parapet as they speak and act for truth and justice. They demonstrate something of the heart of God, and of his Son Jesus who was never afraid to speak truth to power. This month ask yourself - Is there one simple way I can do the same?

Libraries build confidence



A visit to Downend Library

THE head of one of Downend's schools has praised the area's libraries for helping children "develop confidence, independence, and a genuine love of reading".

Christ Church Infants head teacher Anna Martin says local schools are "incredibly lucky" to have both Downend and Staple Hill libraries on the doorstep.

The school organises at least two visits per year to one of the libraries for each of its eight classes, supported by volunteers who help walk the children to the libraries and support each visit.

Mrs Martin said: "A huge part of what makes these visits so special is the people. The librarians are fantastic: warm, knowledgeable, and patient. They take the time to talk with our children, recommend books, and help them feel confident as readers. They make every visit feel like an event."

"In a world where so much competes for children's attention, our local libraries offer something priceless: free access to stories, knowledge, and a quiet place to explore imagination."

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One Team to One in Ten Homes – The Window Hub's Success Story

Every great local business starts somewhere. For The Window Hub, it began in Bristol with a single team, a simple belief in doing things properly, and a promise to treat every customer like the only customer. Fast forward to today, and that same family-run, independent business now completes one in every ten domestic window and door installations across the South West and South Wales – without ever losing sight of what made them successful in the first place.

2025 has been a landmark year. The Window Hub was proudly crowned UK Installation Company of the Year at the prestigious national G-Awards, placing this Bristol-born business firmly on the national stage. As if that wasn't enough, two outstanding members of the team were also recognised with National



Fenestration Awards, proving that behind every great company is an even greater team.

Despite the national recognition,

The Window Hub remains rooted in the local community. Being named finalists for Retailer of the Year at the Bristol Life Awards is

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**Kip
McGrath**
EDUCATIONCENTRES

Let's talk about children and social media

SINCE my election, it has been super to see so many of you at my informal 'Coffee with Claire' events, focusing on priorities for our community.

Having completed a place-based round of these reaching every ward, including Frenchay and Downend, I'm holding thematic events focusing on these priorities, and where we can feed into key government consultations (like I did on SEND a few months ago).

The next Coffee with Claire, in partnership with youth work charity FACE on February 28 at 11am, will focus on potential restrictions on social media for under 16s.

The government is consulting on options,

and I want to make local views heard, sharing our feedback with ministers.

The event will be open to all across our Filton and Bradley Stoke constituency - RSVP for more details.

Young people are very welcome, with those aged 13-16 accompanied by a parent or guardian.

To RSVP, please visit tinyurl.com/bddx2396.

Last month, my team and I worked on 926 new cases supporting residents. I was out knocking on doors and listening to people's priorities in Little Stoke and Patchway and will keep doing this across our constituency, which stretches from Cribbs to Lyde Green.

In Parliament, I was proud to vote to remove the two-child benefit limit, seeing around 1,640 local children lifted out of poverty. Children do not choose the circumstances they are born into, and it is right that we are in their corner as a society.

I was glad to speak in a debate on animal welfare and also fully support our government's announcement tackling rising vet fees. We will see clearer pricing, greater transparency and consistent access to care, rather than a postcode lottery.

The government also announced strong plans tackling 'fleecehold' practices, where homeowners are charged fees by private



management companies. Ground rents will be capped at £250 and new leasehold flats banned. Since being elected, I've supported local leaseholders directly, met with management agencies and spoken to the Housing Minister. I'm pleased that this has contributed to long-overdue action.

I've also met with government ministers to share local insight on important issues, including how child maintenance processes are sometimes being used to continue domestic abuse, and challenges for local residents and postal workers from delays receiving 2nd Class letters.

Locally, I met with Green Valleys Health about the prolonged closure of Emersons Green Medical Centre. They are now awaiting a response on funding from the NHS locally.

I was also glad to open the National Gas regional office in Stoke Gifford, bringing great new jobs to our area.

As always, please get in touch anytime at claire.hazelgrove.mp@parliament.uk.



Claire Hazelgrove with partners at Green Valleys Health.



Get ready for THREE-WEEKLY black bin collections

From May 2026, your black bin will be collected once every three weeks.

Recycling and food waste will continue to be collected weekly.

Green bins (for garden waste subscribers) will be collected every two weeks.

A new hygiene and nappy waste collection will take place every two weeks (if registered).

FIND OUT MORE



southglos.gov.uk/three-weekly

Club on wheels rolls out

A NEW mobile community hub has gone into use for residents and groups in the area served by Emersons Green Town Council.

The multi-purpose vehicle, also known as the Community Hub On Wheels, or CHOW, has been commissioned to provide a space for activities, learning or meeting up.

It has a particular focus on youth work, going to areas where there are no youth clubs or other venues to offer access to drop-in sessions.

It is also available for families and older residents, to provide well-being and community services, workshops, community consultations and pop-up events in parks and neighbourhood spaces.

The town council says it will improve access to services for any residents who face barriers to travelling to static facilities.

The Voice first reported on the £155,000 project, which is being funded from contributions made to South Gloucestershire Council by developers as part of planning deals, last year.

It has games consoles, WiFi, kitchen facilities, music, charging stations for devices, sports equipment, art facilities, heating and air conditioning.

Town council youth liaison officer Shea Stew is spearheading the project, having run similar mobile provision in Bristol for five years.

Shea said: "The CHOW will allow us to reach more people in more places and in more flexible ways."

"It marks an exciting new chapter for our Youth and Community Teams and will help us deliver vital services where they are needed most."

One of the CHOW's first trips after going into service in February was to Mangotsfield School, where students found out what it has to offer.

Head teacher Hetty Blackmore said: "Shea has been a big supporter of the school's ambition to work more directly with the local community to support its young people.



Pupils from Mangotsfield School in the new mobile community hub, also known as the CHOW

"He brought the community club in on a wet lunchtime and parked on the playground, and used the opportunity to make some new acquaintances amongst the school community and promote the work he was doing."

"Lots of students took the opportunity to have a look at the bus, enjoy the sound system and have a better understanding of what is now happening in the evenings in the local area."

"It is a fantastic idea and

a well equipped unit that will allow young people to gain new experiences through the Youth Service's work, and make some new friends."

The hub has also been at Lyde Green Community Centre to support youth work with Sovereign Network Group, and is due to visit Emersons Green Village Hall, Rodway Hill, and Emersons Green Skate Park soon.

More information is available on the town council website.

Students win cash for charities

YEAR 8 students at Mangotsfield School competed for the chance to win a £1,000 donation to the charity of their choice.

The school's annual First Give final was held at the end of January, as part of a programme organised by the social action charity as part of personal, social, health and economic education lessons.

Pupils from each Year 8 group made a presentation to the whole year group,

showing the charity's impact and an action plan for the donation.

Head teacher Hetty Blackmore said: "It is always the highlight of my year, and this year the standard was extremely high!"

Class Pomphrey 8.2 won the £1,000 for mental health charity Changes Bristol after an "excellent solo presentation" from one of its students.

Pomphrey 8.1 was highly commended category for a "stunning" presentation for homelessness charity Caring in Bristol.

Right: The winning class secured a £1,000 donation




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Bank announces closure

ONE of Downend's closest remaining high street banks is set to close this summer.

Lloyds has announced the closure of its branch in Fishponds Road - the last of the 'Big Four' major UK banks left in the busy shopping street - on June 6.

The branch was the closest recommended to customers of the banking giant's Downend branch, which closed in 2021.

Lloyds closed its Staple Hill branch in 2019, and the closure of the Fishponds branch means its nearest outlet is now in Kingswood.

The bank did not respond to a question about the number of staff working at the branch and what would happen to them after it shuts.

A spokesperson said: "Customers want the freedom to bank in the way that works for them and we offer more choice and ways to manage money than ever before.

"In addition to our app, customers can use the local Post Office or walk into any Lloyds or Halifax branch to manage their money and can also deposit cash at PayPoint locations."

Lloyds published usage data on its website that says 1,335 customers use the bank on a regular, monthly basis.

Weather hitch for bridge

NATIONAL Highways says the recent wet weather has delayed work to connect the new Badminton Road bridge over the M4 to the embankment.

But the body responsible for the motorway network insists it is still on track to open in the spring.

A spokesperson said: "We have made positive progress on the new bridge, with works on the reinforced earth wingwalls starting imminently, and have been rebuilding the embankments as the weather allows.

"The wet weather has impacted the scheme slightly, with earthworks needing to meet certain moisture content requirements - too wet and it can't be placed.

"However, we don't anticipate this having an impact on the overall opening date of the road this spring.

"Once the earthworks have been completed, we can start waterproofing the deck, allowing for the road formation and approach slabs to be built. Then we will be placing the kerbs, footpath and finally surfacing and line marking from the site limits over the bridge."

Four nights of overnight closures of the M4 are planned from March 26 to 30, for hard shoulder resurfacing.

School street delay

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council says it is considering feedback from a consultation on plans to ban traffic outside Frenchay Primary School during school run times before making a decision whether to go ahead.

The council originally intended to introduce the School Street from March 1 outside the school in Alexander Road.

A spokesperson said: "We have been working closely with the school and have listened carefully to concerns raised by parents and local residents about traffic flow and parking in the area during school drop-off and pick-up times.

"The feedback gathered during the consultation is currently being considered before a decision is made on whether to progress with the trial as proposed."

Frenchay head teacher Nicola Dawson said: "The school's position remains unwavering: the safety of our children is paramount. Irresponsible or dangerous parking places our pupils at unnecessary risk, and we remain committed to working alongside the Council and our neighbours to ensure a safe environment for everyone."



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Awards celebrate 'remarkable people'

SOME of the "unsung heroes" who keep community organisations across South Gloucestershire going have been honoured with awards.

Volunteers for Staple Hill-based organisations were among the 30 individuals and groups to receive a Chair's Community Award at a ceremony at the end of January.

Recipients included community well-being projects, youth support groups and environmental projects.

Among them was Colin Bracey, who organises the fundraising Friends of Page Park calendar and the photo competition to choose the images for it every year.

His citation said: "Colin's leadership in producing and selling the Friends of Page Park calendar has created a successful fundraising initiative that engages the community and supports improvements to the park."

There were two awards for Staple Hill & District Royal British Legion.

Vice-chair Di Roberts received an individual Community Hero award for her outstanding dedication to the organisation.

Her citation said: "Diane is a dedicated Royal British Legion volunteer, whose leadership and tireless community work have ensured the success of Staple Hill's Remembrance events and preserved vital local groups, making her a respected cornerstone of the community."

The branch itself also received an award, which Diane collected along with chair Ian Campbell.

The citation said: "The Staple



Colin Bracey

Hill & District Branch of the Royal British Legion has spent 100 years supporting veterans and fostering community spirit through remembrance events, the Poppy Appeal, and volunteer-led outreach across South Gloucestershire."

The awards are held every year by South Gloucestershire Council to recognise and thank local volunteers who give up their time to help others, in a ceremony hosted and sponsored by South Gloucestershire & Stroud College.

They were presented by the council's chair, Staple Hill & Mangotsfield councillor Katie Cooper, along with SGS chief executive and principal David Withey.

Cllr Cooper said: "It is a privilege to recognise the remarkable people who contribute so much to our communities."

"Their kindness, energy and commitment bring genuine benefit to residents across South Gloucestershire, often without seeking any recognition in return."

"Their actions make a hugely positive and lasting difference to the lives of residents across South Gloucestershire, and I want to thank each of them for their kindness and selfless



Ian Campbell and Diane Roberts of Staple Hill Royal British Legion receive the organisation's award from council chair Katie Cooper and SGS College principal David Withey.

Thank-you to Norman

A VOLUNTEER with the Royal Naval Association and the Royal British Legion has received a personal letter of thanks for his service from Defence Secretary John Healey.

Norman Low, who is 90, continues to play a role at community events, including laying crosses on Commonwealth war graves at Christ Church Downend ahead of Remembrance Day, among other voluntary work.

The letter was arranged by Filton & Bradley Stoke MP Claire Hazelgrove, who said: "It was an honour to request this recognition for Norman Low. His service to our country and his ongoing commitment to the Royal British Legion and Royal Naval Association truly deserve to be acknowledged. Veterans like Norman remind us of the importance of service, remembrance and community spirit."

RBL branch chair Ian Campbell said: "Norman is a hugely respected member of our branch and a true example of dedication and service."

Park news: Pages 32-33



Norman Low with his letter

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Friends of Page Park

PLANTS in and around Page Park have been damaged by a mystery vandal.

Members of the Friends of Page Park volunteer team that tends the sensory garden first noticed that plants had been cut back excessively a few weeks ago.

At first it was believed to be someone trying to help maintain the garden, but some of the plants have been cut back so far they are not expected to recover - and some have also been stolen.

Cuttings have been left lying around, including from the holly trees by the Park Road/Broad Street traffic lights and laurel hedges inside the park.

Friends vice-chair Steph Purser said: "All our volunteers will be wearing Friends of Page Park high viz jackets, and at the moment are only in the sensory garden on Wednesday mornings.

"If you should see anyone else attacking our park plants or doing a bit of digging around the beds and borders, please report to the grounds staff.



Performers from the Bristol University Chinese Lion Dance Troupe at celebrations for Lunar New Year in Page Park on February 15. The event, organised by Melody Beard of the Bean Tree cafe with South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network, Mingle Bristol CIC and Me Time Cafe, also included music from the Dawn from Hong Kong group, which features musicians from Hong Kong and Ukraine, activities, games and crafts.

"Whoever has done this had to be there for some time doing it.

"It's disheartening when we raise the money with calendar and plant sales and people put in their free time to raise money for these plants that some people don't have respect for what we're doing."

The incidents have been

reported to the police and council.

The Friends are in the process of setting up a new volunteer group to help with gardening and maintenance - anyone who is interested in joining should email friendsopageparkbs16@gmail.com or visit the group's Facebook page.

Bamboo maze plans

A REVAMP of the play area for young children in Page Park is likely to start with a bamboo maze.

The Friends have been gathering ideas via online surveys and by talking to park users, and a maze for children to explore outside the play area fencing is one of the first new facilities likely to be created, along with interactive play boards mounted on the fencing itself.

The Friends have raised £28,000 so far towards the revamp, which will eventually see more new equipment provided, but are looking for help to raise more money for the project.

Donations can be made online at cafdonate.cafonline.org/18954 and the

Friends are also looking for people with children who play in the park to come and help support the project, including with fundraising ideas.

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Friends of Hill House Park

THE Friends of Hill House Park continue to build momentum with practical conservation work transforming the park - even as we navigate the administrative challenges of securing the full site.

Our recent AGM saw all committee positions filled except one - we're still searching for our next chair.

If you'd like to lead this passionate group of volunteers into the next chapter, please get in touch. While the lease negotiations move forward slowly, our volunteers haven't waited around.

We've held three brilliant community work days, with residents rolling up their sleeves to repair fencing, remove dead hedging, and plant native species including hazel, blackthorn, dogwood, and elder.

We've also planted spring bulbs and mowed paths winding around and through the park, making it more accessible for everyone.

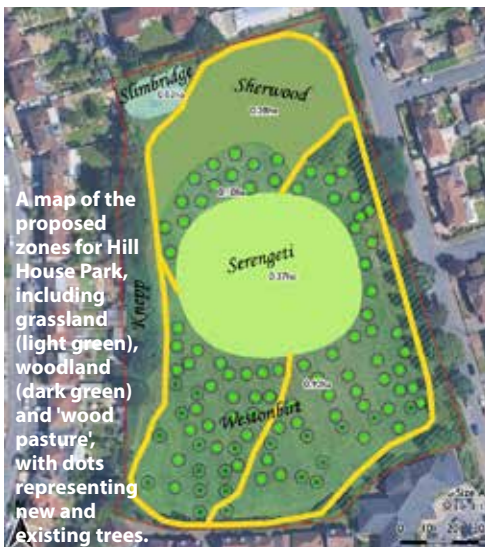
The real excitement is the new map showing what Hill House Park could become.

Think of it as a teaser - a first glimpse of the park's potential.

The site has been divided into themed habitat zones, each named after famous nature reserves: Slimbridge (our wetland area), Sherwood (woodland), the central Serengeti grassland, Westonbirt's wood pasture, and Knepp (rewilding area).

It's an ambitious vision of diverse habitats supporting local wildlife.

However, we must be clear - making this vision reality depends on clearing several hurdles. We need



to secure the lease for the full site and finalize a partnership with Forest of Avon.

Plans were presented to Downend and Bromley Heath Parish Council's February meeting, and the parish will be taking them out to public consultation so residents can have their say.

This is your park, and your voice matters.

If you like what you see - or you don't - come to our next public meeting on April 23, from 7-9pm, and tell us.

This is a community project, and we need to hear from everyone.

Katie Cooper

Friends of King George V Park

SPRING is in the air and, hopefully, by the time you're reading this the ground will have dried out and the puddles will have disappeared!

The Friends group has been asked to help with the planned Easter Egg Hunt across the two fields. If you'd like to help by keeping an eye on the trail cards, that would be very welcome.

The Friends will also be providing the prize, so please follow our Facebook page for updates.

We're delighted to have been asked to partner with the parish council in planning and supporting the anniversary of the King George Pavilion in August. If you have ideas about what you'd like to see included, or if you'd be able to help in any way, we'd love to hear from you. Our next Friends Meeting is on April 23.

If you'd like to get in touch, please email kgvdownend@gmail.com or contact us via Facebook group.

Fiona Konteh



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Busy preparing for the spring

It was lovely to see the crocus and daffodils at the end of Cleeve Park Road whilst coming back from a walk recently.

Dave and I seem to have been unable to get out much with the rain, but we took the opportunity of a dry patch and decided to meander along Leap Valley, seeing daffodils and snowdrops on the way.

I do think, however, it would be beneficial to our panolas for the rain to stop! They have held up reasonably well with the battering they have had, but I think we do now need a bit of warmth to get them up and running!

Our crew guys have been busy once again cutting and sanding.

We always seem to be working in advance with In Bloom – almost wishing time away – but our forward planning is always necessary.

This time we are looking to Easter, and making Easter items to sell.

The guys have been making some cute Easter bunnies, which can be personalised and are designed to hold a Crème Egg, so off we went to the shops to buy one we could measure for size.

I'm sure a lot of you probably feel the same way as Dave and I do - that Crème Eggs have shrunk in size from when we were younger.

Shame they have not also shrunk in price!

Also in the last few weeks, we have been preparing for another group of school pupils and have been cutting bird boxes and Easter characters. I will show you what the characters are next month.

Talking of bird boxes, we are hoping to encourage the blue tits to our boxes this year – there has been some interest, but unfortunately, maybe because of the weather, there don't seem to have been many birds around.

I don't know if any of you do the annual RSPB birdwatch but it always seems to us that they choose the weekend when we have virtually no birds in the garden. I think this year we reported our blackbird, which comes everyday for his food, crows and wood pigeons!

Finally, on Wednesday February 25 we are hoping to have our In Bloom AGM at Cleeve Hill Tennis Club, starting at 7pm.

If you would like to come along and join us, please do. You will be most welcome and it will also give you the opportunity to find out about the work we do.

If you can't make it, and want to get in touch, email us at dbhinbloom@gmail.com.

Jackie Baker



Crocuses in flower and daffodils in bud

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February 24

■ **VINTAGE ADVENTURE** at Church Centre, Quakers Road, 2-3.30pm. Activities, refreshments, friendship and a Christian message for the season, for seniors. All welcome.

March 1

■ FRIENDS OF LINCOMBE

BARN WOODS litter pick/ woodland management morning, 10am-noon. Tools provided, and refreshments for all helpers. Meet in the car park off Rockland Road.

March 4

■ **MOTHERS UNION MEETING** at Christ Church Downend, 12.15pm. Hunger Lunch and talk, 'Call the Midwife', by Ruth Spencer. Book in advance for lunch via the parish office by calling 0117 908 9867

March 8

■ **BUBBLE CHURCH** at the Church Centre, Quakers Road, 4pm. Fun interactive short church service for families with young children, followed by children's tea.

March 10

■ **BEREAVEMENT GROUP** at Christ Church Downend, 2pm. Friendship, refreshments and a chance to reflect together with others who have lost a loved one.

March 12

■ **LIVING WELL** in Staple Hill free advice event for over-50s, Shrubbery Court communal lounge, Berkeley Road, Staple Hill, 10am-2pm. Advice on money, health and wellness, community groups, free tea and coffee.

March 12

■ **THURSDAY CHURCH** a midweek Christian service open

to anyone, at 11.15am Staple Hill, Salvation Army, Broad Street, Bristol BS16 5LN. Tel 0117 9569733 for more information

March 13

■ **ACOUSTIC GUITAR CONCERT** with Keith Hodges at the Dawn James room, Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Oldbury Court, 1-2pm. Tea and coffee served from 12.30pm. Retiring collection with suggested donation of £2.

March 14

■ **COFFEE MORNING** and Table Top Sale @ 10am – 12 noon Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, Bristol BS16 5LN. Tel 0117 9569733 for more information

■ **February 16 DOWNEND SENIOR FILM CLUB** at 2pm The Critic (15)

When the most feared and vicious theatre critic in town Jimmy Erskine finds himself suddenly in the crosshairs of the Daily Chronicle's new owner, he strikes a sinister Faustian pact with struggling actress Nina Land who is desperate to win his favour. Starring Ian McKellen, Mark Strong and Gemma Arterton. Carers welcome, easy access Refreshments £4 Christ Church Hall, 57 North Street, Downend BS16 5SG For more information, please call 0117 435 0063.

March 19

■ **DEMENTIA CAFE** at Warm Space at Christ Church Downend, 11am-1.30pm. Full hot meal. Also hot meal on first Thursday of month and live music from Music Train, with soup and roll lunch, on 2nd & 4th Thursday. Free.

March 20

■ DOWNEND FLOWER

ARRANGING CLUB are hosting Kathryn Delve, Master Florist demonstration "She Came Late To Tea". Friday 20th March 7.15pm, Emersons Green Village Hall. Tickets £12 per person include refreshments from downendflowers@gmail.com. All arrangements raffled at the end of the evening.

March 21

■ **HAM FARM FESTIVAL** Young Performer Spotlight concert at Resound, Blackhorse Road, 6.30-8.30pm. Performances by local children followed by professional group CarmenCo, a trio with voice, flute and guitars. Tickets £12 adults, children free, from tinyurl.com/9sfw4eem.

March 24

■ **VINTAGE ADVENTURE** at Church Centre, Quakers Road, 2-3.30pm. Activities, refreshments, friendship and a Christian message for the season, for seniors. All welcome.

March 29

■ **MESSY CHURCH** @ 4pm Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, BS16 5 LN. A craft based event for all the family with a shared meal. Tel 0117 9568733

March 30

■ **CAMEO** a practical craft evening for anyone creative or interested in learning creative skills. Held at 8pm Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, Bristol BS16 5LN. Tel 0117 9569733 for more information

REGULAR EVENTS

■ **BRISTOL U3A:** Have you reached a point in your life where you have fewer responsibilities and more time for yourself? Would you like to take part in activities where you can share skills, abilities or hobbies whilst having fun and making new friends? Go to www.bristolu3a.org.uk for details.

Monday

■ **SINGALONG 4 ALL** - Mondays 10.30/11.30, Grace court, Dial Lane, Downend BS16 5UP, £4 ...£1 tea n bikkies Tel: Barbara 07816839141.

■ **PUCKLECHURCH SHORT MAT BOWLS CLUB** are looking for new players. We meet every Monday evening (7.15-9.30) and Sunday & Wednesday afternoons 3.15pm-6pm at Pucklechurch Community Centre. Refreshments available. For more information contact John 07926541933.

■ **SILK PAINTING** at Downend Baptist Church. Come along to an enjoyable afternoon, every alternate Monday 2pm-4pm. Make cards, tuition given, tea and biscuits provided, cost includes all materials. One large card £2 or 3 for £5, small cards £1 each. Please contact 0117

OVER 30s DANCE PARTY at the superb BAWA Club, Filton

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■ LUNCH CLUB AT STAPLE HILL

COMMUNITY HUB, Berkeley House, Berkeley Road, every Monday, 12.15pm. More details from the hub on 01454 868374.

■ **KINGSWOOD LACE MAKERS** - meet at Lincombe Barn, Overndale Road on Monday afternoons from 2-4pm, evenings 7.15-9.15pm every third Monday. New members welcome, first meeting free. For more information contact Beverly on walkingwithlace@yahoo.co.uk.

■ **JOB SEARCHERS SUPPORT** Staple Hill Community Hub, 2-4pm. Benefits advisor available second Monday of each month.

■ **FRENCHAY CHAPEL** 'Wild, Wise Curious' Discussion Group with coffee and cake 12.30 weekly For more info or to go on weekly email contact petera.bruce@gmail.com 07527-118586

■ **FRENCHAY CHAPEL** Mindful Pilates weekly – Contact Debbie 07771 544549

■ **ADULT TAP DANCING CLASSES**, Frenchay Village Hall, Monday mornings, 10.30-11.30am Fun class with lots of laughs. £9 a session. Call Suzanne on 07787 396718

Tuesday

■ **DOWNEND GARDENING IN RETIREMENT CLUB** Third Tuesday of every month at 10.15am Varied Topics Non Members welcome at £3 including Tea / Coffee. Assembly Hall, Salisbury Road. Easily reached by any bus into Downend

■ **BOARD GAMES NIGHT** every Tuesday from 7pm. All Welcome The Wooden Walls Micropub, 30 Broad Street, Staple Hill, BS16 5NU

■ **LINCOMBE BARN CAMERA CLUB** meets every second, fourth and fifth Tuesday of the month at Lincombe Barn, Overndale Road. New members always welcome. For information see website at www.lincombebarncameraclub.co.uk or email lincombe.barn@gmail.com.

■ **BROMLEY HEATH GARDENING CLUB** Meets at Christ Church Centre, Quakers Road, every third Tuesday of the month at 2.30pm. Talks, day trips and short holidays - everyone

Whats On at Downend Library

Adult Activities

Mondays 10 -12 Knitter Natter – come along and join this friendly group for a cuppa, a natter and some knitting!
Fridays 10.30 – 11.30 Coffee Morning – come along to the library for a chat and a cuppa!

Children's Activities

Mondays – Term Time Only - 15.30 – 16.30 Afternoons for primary school age children
Pop along after school for a free, fun crafting session!
Wednesdays 10.30 – 11.00 Rhymetime for pre school children
Come along for a free, fun filled session with lots of singing and bubbles!
Wednesdays 11.00 – 11.30 Mini Builders for pre school children
Stay after Rhyme Time for a free play session with Duplo, train sets and much more!
Lego Club – for children 4+
Once a month on a Saturday, 10.30 – 11.30 Free
Join us for a story and Lego building session and see your Lego creation displayed in the library!
March 6, 10.30-11.45am. Creative Jounalling Workshop
explore your creativity in a supportive women's workshop for International Women's Day. Materials provided. Limited places - book at sglibraries.eventbrite.com.

Please contact the library for dates
Downend.library@southglos.gov.uk

welcome. Call May on 0117 957 3695 for details.

■ PUCKLECHURCH FOLK

DANCING CLUB Pucklechurch Community Hall, Abson Road every other Tuesday from 7.30 to 10.15pm. All welcome either with a partner or solo. Enjoy an evening with us. Call Sue on 07742114566 or Linda on 07843240414.

■ **MESSY SPACE**, Badminton Road Methodist Church Downend. Term-time group for toddlers and their carers, 10-11.45am. Toys, books, play dough, paint & craft, singing and refreshments. First visit free, then £3 per child or £5 per family. More information at www.badmintonroadmethodist.org.uk or 0117 956 1106.

■ **DOWNEND BAPTIST CHURCH**: Coffee time 10.30-12.30 the first Tuesday of the month.

■ **FRIENDSHIP & EXERCISE GROUP**, Salvation Army, Broad Street, Staple Hill, every Tuesday 10-11.30am.

■ **MOVE-IT CLUB** for children aged 7-11, Staple Hill Community Hub, Berkeley House, Berkeley Road, every Tuesday 3.30pm. More details from hub on 01454 868374.

■ **TEA AND TOAST** after school drop-in for primary aged children and families, Christ Church Parish Hall, North Street, Downend, term-time Tuesdays, 3.15-4.30pm. All welcome for tea, squash, toast, board games, colouring and play in a friendly atmosphere.

■ **DOWNEND WI** meets at Christ Church Hall, North Street, Downend on the last Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. For details email downendwi@yahoo.co.uk.

■ **RIDGEWAY BADMINTON CLUB** meets every Tuesday evening from 8-10pm at Downend Sports Centre for informal badminton doubles/singles matches between adults of all ages. First visit free. For more information contact Graham on 07968 050 320

■ **SINGING FOR THE BRAIN**, free music club for people living with dementia and Alzheimer's, Staple Hill Hub, every Tuesday 2-3pm. Call 01454 868374 for more information.

■ **COFFEE AFTERNOON** with free coffee & cake, friendly conversation and a 'thought for the day'. First Tuesday of the month, 2pm at the Pendennis Good News Centre, Pendennis Road, Staple Hill. All welcome.

■ **KARATE FOR MUMS AND DADS**, 7pm, Page Community Association Staple Hill. More info from www.zenkarate.club.

■ **MEDITATION** at Frenchay Chapel, 7pm. Kundalini Osho movement meditation on 1st Tuesday, person-centred

meditation on 3rd Tuesday.

■ **DOWNEND BAPTIST CHURCH COFFEE TIME**, first Tuesday of the month, 10.30am-12.30pm. Join us for tea, coffee, cakes. Relax together. Quiet area. All ages welcome. Starts July 1. www.downendbaptist.co.uk

■ **WALKING NETBALL** every Tuesday at Mangotsfield Secondary School 7pm-8pm, £5 per session, ex players or new to netball welcome, for more info please email lindab2023@gmail.com

■ **GREENBANK BOWLS CLUB** Gordon Road, Whitehall, BS5 7DP (What three words: same. zone.frozen) Every Tuesday 5pm until dusk. All equipment provided. Please wear flat soled shoes, eg. trainers. No need to book. Car Parking Licensed Bar greenbankbowls@gmail.com

Wednesday

■ DOWNEND BRIDGE CLUB - NEW MEMBERS ARE WANTED

Come and join us and play duplicate Bridge at Lincombe Barn Downend on Wednesday afternoons 2pm. All levels welcome. Please contact everforbes77@gmail.com or 0117 9836886 or Yvonne Scoulding rscoulding@googlemail.com or 0117 9568944

■ **CLEEVE SINGERS OF DOWNEND** This four part choir meet at Lincombe Barn, 7.30 p.m. from September until July. For more information contact the Secretary on 0117 9561881.

■ **DOWNEND SENIOR CITIZENS CLUB** Musical entertainment from 2-4pm every 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month at North Street Church Hall. All are welcome.

■ **ROYAL BRITISH LEGION WOMEN'S SECTION** meets on the first Wednesday of the month, 1-3pm at the YOU Foundation, Page Road, Staple Hill (by the long-stay car park). New members welcome. More details from Diane Roberts on 0117 956 3407.

■ **DOWNEND TANG SOO DO** meets at Christchurch Parish Hall, North Street on Wednesday evenings from 7.30-9pm. Suitable for beginners and ages 10+. First class free. More details from Ian on 07817 744689 or at the Downend Tang Soo Do Facebook page.

■ **FRENCHAY PROBUS CLUB** We meet at Frenchay Village Hall on the first Wednesday of each month between 10.00 and 12.00 hrs. For further details contact: davidhjryan@gmail.com.

■ **WARMLEY JAZZ CLUB**, Every Wednesday except first one of the month, 7.30pm, Cadbury Heath Social Club, £7 on the door. More details at warmleyjazz.co.uk.

■ **BRISTOL SCRABBLE CLUB**

meets every Wednesday evening at 7pm until 10pm at Filton Community Centre, Elm Park, Filton BS34 7PS. New members welcome-first visit free so come along and give us a try. Information: Jo Hunter by email atpurplewellies@live.co.uk

■ **CROSS STITCH** Like to learn this absorbing relaxing hobby and have fun at the same time? Why not join the Club at Lincombe Barn. Beginners and those with all abilities welcome. New term commences beginning of September on Wednesday mornings 10.00 am until noon. Contact Lincombe Barn 9562367.

■ **THE FRENCHAY FOLK DANCE CLUB** meet fortnightly at Frenchay Village Hall from 7:45 until 10:15pm. All standards of dancer are welcome to enjoy live Bands and experienced Callers. Visit frenchayfdc.co.uk or call 0117 3021543 for more information.

■ **FRIENDLY VOICES** dementia-friendly singing group, Mangotsfield & Castle Green URC, Cosham Street, second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, 10.30am to noon. No charge, carers welcome. Sessions led by music therapist. More details from June Watts on 0117 956 6625.

■ **WEDNESDAY CAFE FOR SENIORS**, at Badminton Road Methodist Church (BS16 6NU) every Wednesday 10am to 12 noon. All Welcome – just come along – make new friends over a cuppa and cake. Information: 0117 239 5984

■ **DOWNEND FLOWER ARRANGING CLUB** We are a friendly group, we meet at 7.30pm on 1st & 3rd Wednesday each month from September to June at Emersons Green Village Hall, Emersons Way, Emersons Green, BS16 7AP. Ring Genise on 0777 2451217 for more information.

■ **LADIES ENTERPRISE CLUB** We are a friendly group who meet in Downend Baptist Church Salisbury Road Downend on the 3rd Wednesday afternoon of the month from 2.30pm - 4.00pm. Everyone is welcome. If you require any more details Contact Ruth on 07733413823

■ **MOTHERS UNION** - worship, friendship, supporting charities, refreshments: First Wednesday of the month, 2.15pm at Christ Church Parish Hall, North Street. Non-members welcome. More details from 0117 908 9867.

■ **FRENCHAY & HAMBROOK HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY** meets at Friends Meeting House, Frenchay, 7.30pm first Wednesday of the month from September to March. Talks on garden-related topics, meet other gardeners, trips in April & May. Phone 0117 967

2390 for more information.

■ **COFFEE MORNING**, Staple Hill Community Hub, Berkeley House, Berkeley Road, every Wednesday 9.30-10.30am. More details from the hub on 01454 868374.

■ **KEEP FIT**, God's House International Centre, The Sanctuary, 55 High Street, Staple Hill, every Wednesday 10-11am, followed by cup of tea and a chat. For adults 50+. More information from Lin on 0770 707 6281 or email Lincornish@hotmail.co.uk.

■ **SPROUTS**, free gardening and nature club for children aged 7-11, Staple Hill Hub every Wednesday, 4-6pm. Call 01454 868374 for further information. Thursday

■ **HOLY COMMUNION** at St James Church, Mangotsfield, from noon.

■ **QUIZ NIGHT** at St James Church, Mangotsfield, 8pm.

■ **BEECHWOOD READING GROUP** Meets at the Beechwood Club, Fishponds. Third Wed of the month 1.45pm to 3.15pm. New members welcome. Contact Carolyn at 07527 841443

■ **LADIES-ONLY KARATE GROUP**, 7pm Page Community Association Staple Hill. More information from www.zenkarate.club.

■ **HANHAM BRIDGE CLUB** Every Weds 7-10pm at Hanham Community Centre, new members welcome. See www.hanhambridgeclub.co.uk or call Graham 07790 491564

Thursday

■ **BARN BELLS** handbell ringers meet at Lincombe Barn, Downend, from 2-4pm weekly. Anyone who can read music is welcome to join.

■ **DEWDROP INN CAFE**, Resound church, Blackhorse Road, Mangotsfield. Every fourth Thursday of the month, 2-4pm. A place for the community to relax and unwind with old & new friends. Tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits £2.

■ **ROOTED YOUTH GROUP** at Christ Church Downend - age 11-18 7pm-8.30pm Every Thursday in term time. Games, crafts, reflections. Contact Paul on 07939 125375 for more details.

■ **MANGOTSFIELD AND CASTLE GREEN UNITED REFORMED CHURCH** regular coffee mornings, held on the first Thursday of the month, 10.30am-noon

■ **SCRABBLE** Downend Folk House Thursdays 10-12noon Info: 07789772538 Jonathan Seegrove.

■ **WARM SPACE CAFE** at Christ Church, Downend, free every Thursday 11-2pm. Soup and roll lunch from noon. Live music, including Music Train on 2nd and 4th Thursdays. Dementia-friendly

Continued on next page

WHAT'S ON LOCALLY

cafe on 3rd Thursday of the month, 11am-1.30pm.

■ **HAMBROOK MEN'S PROBUS CLUB** meets on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month, 10am-noon at Whiteshill Chapel, Hambrook, with a speaker at each meeting. Friendly group, new members welcome. For details call the secretary on 07788 882386.

■ **BROMLEY HEATH PROBUS CLUB**, holds fortnightly meetings with Speakers for ladies and gentlemen on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month from 10:00 am till 12:00. We also enjoy lunches/outings together. Please join us at the Assembly Hall, Downend. More details on 0117 9574583 or see our website.

■ **FRIENDSHIP AND EXERCISE GROUP**, Staple Hill Methodist Church, High Street, Staple Hill, every Thursday - first session 9.30am, second session 11am.

■ **BROMLEY HEATH WI** meets at Bromley Heath Junior School Hall on the second Thursday of each month (except August) at 7.30pm. Email bromleyheathwi@gmail.com for more information.

■ **FAMILY DROP-IN** with free after-school refreshments and activities for families. Every Thursday, 3.15-4.45pm during term time, at Pendennis Good News Centre, Pendennis Road, Staple Hill.

■ **DOWNEND HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY** meets every second Thursday of the month at Downend Assembly Hall, Salisbury Road, at 7.30pm. New members welcome. More details from downendhortsoc@gmail.com.

■ **COFFEE, CAKE, AND COMMUNITY MORNING** at Emersons Green Village Hall. Free Tea, Coffee, and Cake served 10am to 12pm, with extra time to relax and finish your drinks until 1pm. Everyone is welcome! Donations to Emersons Green Village Hall welcome. Supported by Emersons Green Town Council.

Friday

■ TAI CHI FOR PARKINSON'S.

Weekly beginners Tai Chi & Qi Gong class for people with Parkinson's disease, their families and carers. Lincombe Barn. (term times) 10.15 - 12.15 including tea / coffee break. Contact: Claire - Claire@Taichibodyandmind.co.uk (07769 857672) or Sarah - buqiworks@gmail.com (07815 662844)

■ PAGE PARK UKULELE CLUB,

Bean Tree café, Fridays at 1pm. All abilities welcomed. Places £4 each. For further details call or text 'Ukulele' to Ben on 07910 668258.

■ JIGSAW TODDLER GROUP,

Fridays in term time at Christ Church Parish Hall, North Street, from 9.45-11.15am.

■ LATER LIVE MUSIC, Resound

church, Blackhorse Road, Mangotsfield. Every second Friday monthly, except August & December, 8-10pm, £2.50. facebook.com/lateratresound.

■ ARTWINGS, Resound church,

Blackhorse Road, Mangotsfield. Every fourth Friday, except August & December, 7.30pm. Explore new ways of creating and making, natter over refreshments. £5, includes materials.

■ RAINBOW TOTS PARENT

AND TODDLER GROUP meets at Emersons Green Village Hall every Friday morning in term time, from 10-11.30am. For more info email church.egbc@outlook.com

■ **IN-THE-PINK** Exercise to music 9-10am followed by chat & coffee time. Pay session-by-session basis. Get yourself fit & make new friends at Hillfields Park Baptist Church, Thicket Avenue. For details call Julie 07903123793.

■ **TUTTIFLUTTI**, an inclusive ensemble welcoming flautists of all ages from Grade 3 up, rehearses at Lincombe Barn in term time, from 6.30-7.30pm. New members always welcome. Details from Fiona on 07817 629 691.

■ **LUNCH CLUB**, Staple Hill Community Hub, Berkeley House,

Berkeley Road, every Friday from 12.15pm. For details 01454 868374.

■ **AFTER SCHOOL DROP-OFF KARATE GROUP** for mums and dads, 9am, Page Community Association Staple Hill. www.zenkarate.club.

Saturday

■ BRISTOL SUGARCRAFT

GUILD We are a small friendly group who meet every third Saturday of the month 2pm to 4pm at St Andrews Hall, Elm Park, Filton. If you would like to make sugar flowers and models we hold workshops with instruction. Beginners very welcome. For more information contact Julia Mackay on 07563 628513

■ STAPLE HILL METHODIST

CHURCH Coffee mornings in our beautiful building every Saturday 10.00-12.00 in aid of church funds or charities. Enjoy Fairtrade coffee, tea and cake, and stalls.

■ **REPAIR CAFE AT STAPLE HILL METHODIST CHURCH**, 3rd Saturday of the month, 10am until 12pm. Free repairs - owner pays for spare parts. Donation to church appreciated. Drop in for a chat and advice.

■ **BALLET CLASSES** at Assembly Hall, Salisbury Road, Downend. Baby ballet (aged 2 1/2 to 4) at 3pm; Royal Academy of Dance pre-primary ballet (4-6 year-olds) 3.45-4.25pm followed by introduction to club, 4.25-4.45pm. Contact Rosie on 07534 119467. Starting April 26.

Sunday

■ EMERSONS GREEN BAPTIST

CHURCH services are held every Sunday morning from 10.30am-11.30am at Emersons Green Village Hall, Emersons Way. Contact Simon on 07765 201435, e-mail church.egbc@outlook.com or visit www.emersonsgreenchurch.org

■ BADMINTON ROAD METHODIST CHURCH BS16

6NU. Sunday worship 10.30am. Service of Holy Communion usually fourth Sunday of the month. More information from www.badmintonroadmethodist.org.uk

■ MANGOTSFIELD AND CASTLE GREEN UNITED REFORMED

CHURCH hold regular weekly Sunday morning worship at Coss-ham Street. Services start at 10.30 a.m. with different speakers each week. New members welcome. For details contact Peter Redding (Ch. Sec.) on 0117 9657075.

■ RESTORATIVE SEASONAL

YOGA 1st Sunday each month 18:00-19:30 Frenchay Village Hall (Jubilee Room) Only 8 spaces - booking necessary: www.SarahBtheOT.com

■ COMMUNITY GARDEN

WORKING PARTY, Percy Walker Court, Lincombe Road, Downend, every Sunday 10am-noon.

■ KARATE FOR MUMS AND

DADS, 7pm, Page Community Association, Staple Hill. More information www.zenkarate.club.

■ FRENCHAY CHAPEL Beckspool

Road. Sunday services, weekly at 10.30am. All welcome. More details from peter.a.bruce@gmail.com.

■ STAPLE HILL METHODIST

CHURCH, High Street BS16 5HQ Sunday services 10.30am + Sunday Club for ages 5-17. Holy Communion 2nd Sunday of the month - all invited. Taizé worship 6.00pm 3rd Sunday of the month. Contact Rev Dr Aboshe Ngwana 07482 550888, Philippa Church Liaison at staplehillmethodist@hotmail.co.uk or www.staplehillmethodist.com

■ FRIENDS OF LINCOMBE

BARN AND WOODS litter picking and woodland management, first Sunday of month, 10-11am (weather permitting).

■ SERVICES AT ST JAMES

CHURCH, Mangotsfield. Holy Communion at 8am every Sunday. 10:30am services: 1st Sunday Holy Communion, 2nd all-age service, 3rd Holy Communion, 4th morning worship, 5th morning worship with healing.

■ **FRENCHAY CHAPEL** Beckspool Road. Community Arts for all, Frenchay Chapel, Beckspool Road. 1st Sunday of the month, 12.30pm.

■ GREENBANK BOWLS CLUB

Gordon Road, Whitehall, BS5 7DP (What three words: same. zone.frozen) Every Sunday 10am to Noon All equipment provided Please wear flat soled shoes, eg. trainers No need to book Car Parking Licensed Bar greenbankbowls@gmail.com

■ **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**, Frenchay Chapel, Beckspool Road, 6pm weekly.

■ CHRIST CHURCH DOWNEND:

9.15 am Traditional morning worship (Holy Communion on 2nd & 4th Sundays) at Church Centre, Quakers Road BS16 6NH. 10.30 Morning worship with youth and children's groups at Christ Church Downend, Downend Rd BS16 5UF

■ FRENCHAY QUAKER

MEETING, at the meeting house, Beckspool Road (opposite Frenchay Village Hall), every Sunday 10.30-11.30am. All welcome to come and experience stillness, reflection and connection, with refreshments afterwards. Regular children's meetings. More details from frenchay.clerks@bristolquakers.org.uk or 0117 956 7337.



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Happy Landings

THE mark of a successful pilot is to retire with the same number of landings as take-offs. Photographing aircraft is certainly less challenging than flying them, but it still takes a lot of practice, and a bit of luck.

To capture a satisfying image of an aircraft returning to a runway requires a combination of the right equipment, the right camera settings and practice.

You can only take photos of landings from a safe distance, so filling the frame is likely to need a telephoto lens of 200mm to 600mm. For very large aircraft, 50mm might be enough.

Unless the light is very poor, you don't need a wide aperture, F8 will do, and even smaller might help get a large aircraft all in focus within the depth of field, wing-tip to wing-tip.

The reason small apertures are acceptable is that to give the image a sense of speed, a slow shutter speed is preferred, so there will be time for light to get to the sensor (or film).

How slow? It depends on a few things. The slower the shutter speed, the more the background will be blurred, giving the aircraft more apparent speed, but the harder it will be to obtain a sharp image of the aircraft as you follow it down the runway.

For propeller-driven aircraft, a blurred propeller is much more attractive than a frozen one. To make the propeller appear similar to how it appears to the eye, a shutter speed of around 1/25th of a second is needed.

However, panning to follow a 75mph aircraft horizontally without getting blur from vertical movement of the camera and the aircraft towards or away from you is often more a matter of luck than skill.

A more reasonable speed to begin with would be 1/125th or 1/160th. A high frame rate (10 frames per second or more) improves the chance of getting a couple of pictures that are 'keepers' from each landing.

The best shots often come when the aircraft is directly in line with you, so that the unwanted components of its speed are smaller.

The examples here are by no means perfect,



■ Tiger Moth Picture: Ben Newby



■ Red Hawk Picture: Ben Newby

but that is what keeps it interesting: you can always challenge yourself to do better next time.

Whether you are attracted by the technical or artistic side of photography, Downend Camera club can support and help you on your journey. New members are always welcome.

Visit www.downendcameraclub.org.uk or come along to the Assembly Hall in Salisbury Road on Tuesdays at 7.45pm.

Ben Newby



■ Comet Picture: Ben Newby

CHRISTINE'S COLUMN WITH CHRISTINE BROADWAY

Having a whale of a time in the rain

HAVING this recent wet weather sent my memory back more than 30 years ago.

Somewhere along the line I picked up a leaflet about whales becoming in danger of extinction.

I took it home and showed it to Kirsty, my daughter, who immediately became fascinated by these whales.

The leaflet was asking people if they would sponsor or adopt a whale, so I told Kirsty I would sponsor a whale for her.

I thought that by the time the information pack came she would have lost all interest but to my surprise it was quite the opposite!

Kirsty had two orca whales, also known as killer whales, with white spots - a mother and daughter called Holly and Ivy.

Together we set out to become involved in saving these whales through the sponsorship scheme with The Dolphin and Whale Society.

One event Kirsty and I took part in was a sponsored walk in Ashton Court. We acted as marshals, signing the walkers in and answering

any questions they wished to know.

The whales would have loved the weather - it poured with rain all day!

We thought no one would turn up but they did, all smiling and eager to do the walk and save the whales.

The highlight of the day was a visit by Michaela Strachan, with a gentleman - could it have been Chris Packham? She was most chatty, supportive and enthusiastic,

After all these years we now know Holly is 45, through an article Kirsty has seen on social media.

You can still 'adopt' Holly today.



■ Fat Man and Robin by Owen Richards

Make 'em laugh

HUMOUR is something that's very difficult to define, as everybody finds different things funny. Times have been published on the subject by writers ranging from Sigmund Freud to Ken Dodd - and still no-one agrees.

So, what makes you laugh? Is it visual, slapstick for example, or verbal? Do you laugh at people or with them? Do you prefer your jokes clean or a bit smutty?

Humour in photographs has the same problems.

Sometimes a funny photograph can be spontaneous, a moment caught - or it can be carefully staged. Many humorous photographs rely, for their effect, on the interaction between the photograph and the title.

Lincombe Barn Camera Club's most recent competition was for humorous pictures and was judged by the members themselves: a good way to see the effect of the joke on viewers.

Anita Fullerton was third with a triptych based on lavatory humour (well, somebody had to) called 'Going... Going... Gone'. With a smile, Anita has conjured that sense of panic when you don't know where the replacement roll is.

'Fat Man and Robin' by Owen Richards came second. This works by referencing 'Only Fools and Horses', with the Trotter brothers running out of the mist to unwittingly thwart a gang of muggers. That scene in turn referenced the high camp 60s Batman TV series.

The winner was Ed Shorney's 'Shoe Tree'. I don't know whether this was set up or not, but there is a surreal quality about the photo on its own, while the title provides both clarification and a smile.

Whether you use a digital camera, are a film lover, or just enjoy snapping pics on your



■ Going.... Going..... Gone by Anita Fullerton



■ Shoe Tree By Ed Shorney

phone, we'd love to see you at Lincombe Barn Camera Club.

We get together every other Tuesday from September to June and have regular outings during the summer, so there's always something interesting to do.

We host regular competitions, practical evenings, guest speakers, and in-house critiques: a great way to learn from others and improve your skills.

Your first visit is free, and there's plenty of parking on-site.

For more details visit our website www.lincombebarncameraclub.co.uk or contact us on lincombe.barn@gmail.com.

Spring is on the way, sunshine and flowers make for an excuse to get the camera out.

Sid Stace

BRISTOL u3a

Anyone for a spring walk?

WINTER is now behind us, so why not get out in the fresh air for a walk with friends?

Bristol u3a has five regular walking groups (no dogs) and a couple more that are organised informally.

One of the five regulars is the "Weekend Amblers", which enjoys weekend walks of three to six miles, led by different members.

The aim is to have leisurely ambles every weekend, where the social element is just as important as the walking element.

Walks can be urban or in the countryside, and most are accessible by public transport.

All members are encouraged to share favourite walks with the group and lots of support is available for people who've never dared to suggest a route before.

If you'd like to join a dog-friendly group, then the best way forward is to come along to one of the café socials and share your idea.

If you go on to join u3a, we can include your idea as a future activity.

In fact, this is how most new interest groups start - a chat over coffee often blossoms into a new regular event.

Café socials in March are at: Orchard Coffee & Bakery in St George (flat access) on Friday 6th; the Market Café and Lounge in Kingswood (stairs) on Tuesday 10th; the Crafty Egg in Fishponds (ramp) on Wednesday 18th and Mokka Downend (flat access) on Monday 23rd.

All socials run from 2-4pm, and

everyone is welcome.

Bristol u3a (you in your Third Age) is for anyone. There's no lower age limit, but most members are retired or semi-retired. Activities are wide and varied, so the best way to find out more is to come along to one of our café socials.

You can also key "Bristol u3a groups" into your favourite search engine.

Don't worry if you can't make it to a social - just send me an email at learnlaughlive@bristolu3a.org.uk if you'd like to find out more about walking groups or u3a in general.

Lindsay Gough

Keeping up to date with our history

SINCE the Community History and Arts Project (or CHAP) was set up in 2018, we have looked to engage as much as possible with the local community.

We are a voluntary collective of people with an interest and passion in the history of our local area, seeking out information about places, people, and events from the past of Downend and Emersons Green, to share them with everyone.

We have published a history map of the local area, worked with residents and groups to make a banner depicting key people and events from local history, had stalls at local festivals to hear tales old and new of the area, and held many community history walks - both for the public and over 1,000 local school children.

This is in addition to monthly articles in the Voice, of course, sharing our findings and activities.

We are very much a living history group too, and keen to document significant events and the development of our local area today.

This is why we photographically documented the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local area, and the celebrations for the coronation of King Charles III.

In the spirit of this contemporary history, we



Squares made for the CHAP banner by local individuals and groups.

recognise that social media and other forms of communication play an increasingly important role in all of our lives.

We already share our latest articles and findings via Instagram (@downendchap) and are seeking other ways to communicate with different generations of our local community and learn more about our collective history.

This is why we now have a Substack newsletter, which will enable us to better share our findings, upcoming local events and articles with you, our local community.

By subscribing via our website,

downendchap.org, or our Substack profile (downendchap.substack.com) you'll receive our newsletter directly to your email inbox.

We're always keen to hear from anyone in the community.

Whether you would like to get involved, are curious about our area's past, have memories to share or a question we may be able to answer, please get in touch via the CHAP website.

You can also email big.gin@yahoo.com or write to CHAP, 49 Overhill Road, Downend, Bristol, BS16 5DS.

Elliott Sargent

COMMUNITY NEWS

Bristol Male Voice Choir

BRISTOL Male Voice Choir are proud to say that they will be singing at St Augustines Church in Downend, with an 'afterglow' in the church hall afterwards.

The performance will take place on April 18 at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £10 in advance or at the church door on the night.

Bristol Male Voice Choir was established in 1968. We rehearse weekly and perform concerts approximately once a month, with a

further four or so at Christmas.

If you would like to join, ability to read music is not a must.

Of the 38 current choristers, some are proficient in reading music but most aren't, and we do not use printed music in concerts.

We aren't professional singers, but rather people from all walks of life who simply enjoy singing, and have a very broad repertoire.

We rehearse on a Thursday evening, from 7-9.15pm, at St. Andrews Methodist Church in Gloucester Road North.

If you'd like to buy a ticket for the concert or find out more about the choir, please call 0792 086 1315 or email treasurer@bristolmvc.org.uk.

Mangotsfield Community Association

MANGOTSFIELD Community Association will hold its annual spin cycle fundraiser at the Red Lion pub on Easter Saturday and Sunday, April 4 and 5.

Starting at 10.30am each day, fundraisers will clock up virtual miles on the spin bikes until the distance of around 940 miles is 'reached'.

Anyone can enter to help raise money for this year's charities, St Peter's Hospice and Pancreatic Cancer UK - just register at the Red Lion or show up on the day. **Clive Heath**

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BROMLEY HEATH WI

FEBRUARY'S WI meeting was a night of intrigue, with a look at the murder of Shirley Banks, from a detective involved in the case back in 1987.

Rob Jones made it a very interesting night, talking about how the case was solved and how other cases were linked to the convicted killer, John Cannan, in the Bristol area around the same time.

Our next WI meeting will be on March 12: we will be doing watercolour painting and there will be a raffle, so please feel free to bring any prizes and, most importantly, your purse to buy tickets!

We look forward to welcoming any new ladies who wish to join our friendly WI group.

We meet in Bromley Heath Junior School hall.

Meetings are usually on the second Thursday of the month at 7.30pm.

If you would like more information, please email bromleyheathwi@gmail.com.

Jane Hickey

DOWNEND WI

THERE are clear signs that spring is on its way: fresh shoots appearing on the bushes, snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils coming into bloom — and, of course, Easter eggs already filling the shops!

In January, we enjoyed a fascinating talk from Ali Ball, an experienced Egyptologist and educator. Ali co-founded the Kemet Klub in 2009 to offer accessible, community-based education about ancient Egypt in Bristol, and her talk was both informative and engaging.

At our next meeting, we look forward to welcoming Ian Caskie from the SS Great Britain, who will be giving a talk about this iconic vessel and its history.

We have an exciting year ahead, packed with inspiring speakers, creative activities, and plenty of opportunities to connect and socialise.

Our upcoming programme includes a talk from Jenny Benson of the Bristol Abused Women Charity on March 31 and line dancing on April 28.

We meet at Christ Church Hall, North Street, Downend, on the last Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm.

If you'd like to know more about joining us, please get in touch at downendwi@yahoo.co.uk.

Guests are welcome for a small charge of £3, which includes refreshments.

We look forward to welcoming

you!

**Linda Russ
President**

FRENCHAY WI

OUR speaker in February was Dr Mark Neath, on the Wonders of Sleep - a very interesting subject for our members.

We also had a discussion of the latest WI resolutions on our agenda, with a vote on the one we want the national WI to debate.

I am pleased to say our WI members knitted and crocheted a number of poppies, and these have been forwarded to the Standing With Giants project as there are plans to restore some of the poppies, which formed a central part of the display around the 18 soldier stillage crates.

Our meeting in March is for members only, as it's our spring supper, which will be provided by AHM Catering as usual.

I'm certainly looking forward to a very sociable evening, with good friends and a delicious buffet.

We have lots of interesting speakers lined up, so do come along and join us this year.

We meet on the third Monday of every month at Frenchay Village Hall at 7.30pm. There is always a friendly reception awaiting new members.

If you are interested in joining our WI or would like more information please email FrenchayWI@gmail.com.

Linda O'Carroll

STAPLE HILL WI

WE'RE nearly into March already - how did that happen?

It only seems yesterday we were celebrating Christmas, especially as we have only just enjoyed our delayed Christmas meal together.

We thought that it would be good to wait and have something to look forward to in the New Year.

We had a lively first meeting of 2026, starting by discussing the resolutions to be put forward by our Avon WI to the National WI for the conference in the summer.

We voted overwhelmingly for a resolution calling for full access to public toilets for all. We felt that it is extremely important for the dignity and well-being of people of all ages to have this facility.

So many of these facilities are being closed to save cash-strapped local authorities money.

At our next meeting we enjoyed hearing about the marvellous work that the Children's Hospice South West are doing.

Once again, lack of funding is hampering their work. But for sick children with life-limiting illnesses, as well as their parents and

siblings, the children's hospice and their excellent and experienced staff are a lifeline, and give all the family a much-needed break and a time of joy and happiness during difficult days.

In February we started our monthly walks again, with a stroll on the hard surface of the Bristol and Bath cycle path from Mangotsfield to Warmley: no muddy boots this time, just healthy exercise.

Our coffee mornings are becoming very popular, as they give members a chance to chat and get to know each other in an informal setting.

Our regular monthly meeting is on the third Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm, at Christ Church Parish Hall in North Street, Downend. There is plenty of parking.

If you would like to know more about us, please visit our website, staplehillwi@weebly.com

Maureen Wood

RODWAY RUBIES WI

RODWAY Rubies had a busy January, starting with our 'Xmas' lunch at Salford Golf Club.

There was great food and service, as always - the only little blip was the heating breaking down, but we carried on regardless!

Our January meeting's speaker was a last-minute change but

we found out a great deal about Treasure Trove and its legal realities.

We ended the month with our quiz night in aid of Parkinson's UK Bristol branch.

It was a fun night, and we raised the excellent sum of £408, which we will add to our previous efforts for the year. We are making arrangements to hand a cheque over in person to the charity in March.

We have now firmed up on the trips we are planning for later in the year. Coaches are booked and seats are filling up!

In February we have a speaker from the RNLI, who is a volunteer for the charity.

As its work is totally funded by volunteer efforts and donations, it will be interesting to gain an insight into the ways and means they raise the cash to keep their boats doing such sterling work. In March we are having a talk about Uganda, the 'Pearl of Africa', so something completely different. Our programme for the coming year is almost ready to go to the printers: always a varied mix of subjects to cover a wide range of interests.

We meet at St James Church Hall on Richmond Road in Mangotsfield at 7.30pm on the third Monday of the month.

Jane Eldon

MANGOTSFIELD DOLLY MIXTURES

OUR Strictly Experience day started by meeting at the Tesco coach pickup.

As the coach time wasn't until 10.15am, we decided to have a breakfast in Tesco's and bought a meal deal to eat in the coach going and coming back.

The coach was waiting for us and a cheery driver checked us in to our seats where we were all together.

A full coach of sparkly-dressed ladies and just two men, including the driver!

We arrived at Birmingham NEC with two hours to spare, so we found the nearest pub - which turned out to be rammed with Strictly supporters, who were also all in their sparkles.

We had lovely seats.

Janette Manrara was the compère, the judging panel consisted of Craig, Shirley and Anton; you could vote for your favourite dance couple on your phone. On this occasion the winners were George and Alexis.

It was a fabulous day. The coach left at 5.30pm and got us all back in good time.

For our February meeting in the hall we had Isla, a lady dance instructor. She gave us all light glo sticks, one for each hand, and then we switched the hall lights off.

Isla then went through the dance moves, with backing tracks from Michael Jackson. Some Dollies did chair dance moves. Isla congratulated us all for keeping up and our glo stick moves. A very different and fun evening!

Afterwards we had well-deserved refreshment of tea or coffee and cake, and discussed our plans for our number 19 bus trip to the Botanist in Bath and outing to Bath Races for Ladies Day.

For more information about our group email carol@applause.co.uk.

Carol Coombes

Time to tackle our litter

IN last month's article we highlighted the problems with the Christmas lights and that we needed to raise money to sort them out for later this year.

We did not for one minute think that one local couple would offer to fund the work.

It's an incredibly generous offer, and one which has left us speechless – a rare thing, as some of you will know!

We can now get on with making sure our 2026 display is back to normal, and perhaps improved.

Sad to say that there is more and more litter and more incidents of fly tipping, especially in certain 'hot spots'.

We will hold a litter picking morning on March 28 to try to get on top of it, albeit temporarily, but it would obviously be a lot better if we didn't have to do it.

And we would urge anyone seeing fly tipping to report it:

you can do that on the South Glos Council website at tinyurl.com/2r72czmw.

Spring is approaching or is already here - not quite sure with the current climate and weather conditions - and we are seeing lots of bulbs springing up, once they've learnt to swim!

The ones planted on the common over the last couple of years are doing OK but they could do with some friends, so, in conjunction with the parish council, we'll be planting more in the coming months.

If you want to get in touch, please do so by email at MangotsfieldRA@gmail.com, via the ever-popular Mangotsfield Matters Facebook page or by phone to our chair, Clive Heath, on 07507 168700 or me on 07918 701881.

Chris Amos

Diary dates:

February 28, 10.30am: Hour A Month – Planter and bench inspection walk, and coffee

March 4, 10am: Red Lion coffee morning - all welcome.

March 28, 10.30am: Litter pick

April 23, 7.30pm: AGM – venue to be advised



The flowers on the common are springing into life

DOWNEND MEN IN SHEDS

In with the new

AS the new chairman of Downend Men in Sheds, it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the dedicated work my predecessor has done for the group over the last eight years or so.

That John Lockwood was, and still is, committed to the group's work was clear for all to see. What people didn't see was the day-to-day attention to the people and processes that ensured the continued smooth running of the group.

The last six months have provided me with an opportunity to see behind the scenes, to visit a wide variety of organisations and people in the local community, and to get a sense of the things that need to happen in order to secure the continued smooth running of Downend Men in Sheds...needless to say, there's a lot that goes unseen!

Building on such a foundation has its challenges, and with an enthusiastic new admin team in place, we are hoping to see the Shed go from strength to strength.

A big thanks from all of the members John - you're a hard act to follow.



Some recent wooden creations from Men in Sheds

So, to the future! There's a lot of exciting things both underway and on the horizon.

The most exciting development is not something that I can share with you right at this moment but, rest assured, there will be a full account in the next edition of the Voice.

So, what are we doing? A "book swap" station for Staple Hill & Mangotsfield Parish Council is almost complete, work is soon to begin on a variety of projects for an outside wedding venue, the scroll saw team is working flat out producing some quality pieces, wooden planters are being made for sale, and various other projects are underway.

It's exciting stuff! The team is in full swing and there's always room for more members. If you're interested in joining us, having a tea/coffee, chatting and being creative, then don't hesitate to contact me at Dave.mensheds@gmail.com or John at downendmensshed@gmail.com.

You don't need to be a wood worker or to have high skill levels, we'll take things at your pace and train you up (if that's what you want).

Dave Alcock

AFTER many years as chair of Downend Men in Sheds I have stepped down to take the slightly lesser role of vice-chair, and handed over to a younger man.

I would like to thank all the members, and many people that have donated tools and timber for their help and backing our events: from possibly the biggest single event in Downend (apart from the fireworks) when 2,000 people turned up to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War in 2018, to smaller events where we have sold our products at Frenchay Flower Show and Lincombe Barn or helped parish councils, the brain injury therapy unit at Frenchay, churches and youth organisations.

None of this would be possible without your help.

John Lockwood

A transport network you can trust

NOBODY wants to sit stuck in traffic or hang around waiting for a bus that never turns up.

We all know that the West is best - but too often, our transport hasn't kept up.

As the country's fastest-growing region, we've been stuck in the slow lane for too long.

It's time to tackle congestion, potholes, and unreliable journeys, and build a transport network people can trust.

This isn't just about getting from A to B - it's about quality of life. It's about giving people their time back: to be home sooner, get out into nature more, or visit the many attractions that make our part of the world so special.

Transport is a big part of our Growth Strategy because it affects everyday life.

If we want more people across the West to be able to find work, access training, and take up new opportunities, we need a network that helps them get where they need to go.

Better transport also helps businesses grow and create more jobs locally.

That's why we've set out a clear vision for a better-connected West of England, focused on five priorities:

- Better buses: reliable, affordable services with one ticket and one timetable.
- More trains: new stations, more frequent services, and low-emission trains.
- Mass transit: a high-capacity system linking

key places across our region.

- Active travel: safer walking and cycling routes, with e-bikes and e-scooters for short trips.
- Improved streets: smoother roads and pavements, more electric vehicle chargers, and better Park & Ride and travel hubs.

Wherever you're travelling, we need to invest so you can rely on how you get there. And we need a system that makes it easier to switch between different types of transport, with simple tap-on, tap-off travel so you never pay more than you should.

We've already secured record transport investment from government. With over 250 new green buses due by the end of 2026 and more stations being built, we can look ahead with genuine optimism.

One of the biggest opportunities ahead is mass transit. Right now, the West of England is the biggest city-region in the country without it. High-frequency services along dedicated routes would be a real game-changer, whether that's a tram, light rail, guided bus, or something else. It won't happen overnight, but council leaders and I are determined to do the work needed to start building within four or five years.

Alongside this, there is another important moment for our region: the consultation on North Somerset joining the West of England



Metro Mayor Helen Godwin
writes for the Voice

Mayoral Combined Authority is now open.

This is about bringing more communities into the decisions and funding that can improve everyday life.

If North Somerset joins, it could unlock an additional £15 million in the short term, with the potential for more investment in future, helping us deliver better transport, housing, and opportunities across a wider area.

I'd really encourage residents, community groups and businesses to take part. This is your chance to have a say on the future of our region.

Find out more on our website, westofengland-ca.gov.uk, or through paper forms at local libraries, community centres, and GP surgeries.

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Join our job club

STAPLE Hill Community Hub's Job Searchers Support Group is now welcoming new members, after placing 17 local residents into employment, training or volunteering positions last year.

The Monday afternoon sessions, supported by volunteers with their own experience of job hunting, have become an unexpected success story in tackling local unemployment.

We now have the capacity to support more people.

I've found that modern job searching has become incredibly difficult.

Everything's online, applications vanish without acknowledgment, and if you haven't updated a CV in years or lack digital confidence, it's overwhelming.

That's why having local support makes such a difference.

The group addresses these barriers with practical resources, including fast WiFi, quality laptops, and volunteers who help people navigate recruitment websites and complete applications.

We also run mock interviews – support that proved crucial for Paul, a recent graduate with autism who struggled with the social demands of job hunting despite his qualifications.

After six months working with the group, he secured a part-time position.

The Hub has developed connections with local employers, who share vacancies through the group's Facebook page, creating direct links between Staple Hill residents and businesses in the area.

We also work alongside Community Learning and We Work For Everyone to provide training pathways.

A benefits advisor attends sessions to help with pension credit, housing benefit and Universal Credit claims, including support for those who've been sanctioned.

The group welcomes anyone looking for work or considering a career change, with no referral process and no time limits.

Job Searchers Support Group meets Monday afternoons at Staple Hill Community Hub.

For more information, contact 01454 868374 or email hello@staplehillcommunityhub.org.uk.

Katie Cooper



The group is based at Staple Hill Community Hub in Berkeley Road

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Bristol business owner celebrates Guide Dog Ralph's graduation

DAVE Manning, who runs oven cleaning service Ovenu Bristol East, is celebrating after Ralph, the Guide Dog puppy he sponsored, officially graduated.

After more than 18 months of training and development, the Golden Retriever-Labrador cross has been successfully matched with a new owner and is already transforming their life. Once a playful pup, Ralph has matured into a calm and confident guide dog, whose presence provides greater independence and freedom.

Dave, who managed a local garden centre before taking on the business in 2016, said: "I'm really pleased to hear Ralph is now a fully trained guide dog. It's great to know he's out there making a real difference to someone's life, helping them live more independently and confidently. Supporting Guide Dogs is a fantastic way to give something back, and I'm proud to have played a part in his journey."

Ralph's trainer, Leonie, supported him through the final stages of training and matched him with his new owner, based on personality and guiding style. She said: "Ralph has already had a massive impact on his new owner's life. They've bonded beautifully and are forming a strong partnership built on trust and teamwork."

Ovenu franchisees began sponsoring Ralph in 2023 via Guide Dogs' 'Name a Puppy' scheme, following the early retirement of their first sponsored pup, Selsey, due to a minor health issue. Determined to continue supporting the charity, they named their next pup Ralph in honour of Ovenu founder Rik Hellewell's late grandfather, who lost his sight.

A spokesperson for Guide Dogs said: "Such generous support has made a real difference – not just to Ralph's journey, but now also to the person whose life he's helping transform."

For further information or to donate to Guide Dogs, visit: www.guidedogs.org.uk



Dave and Ralph



ANNA-MARIE TEL 07854 177308

Group - St Augustines Church Hall, Boscombe Crescent, Bristol, BS16 6QR
Group times - Tuesday 9:30 am and 11:00am

ANNA-MARIE TEL 07854 177308

Group - The Salvation Army 21, Broad Street, Staple Hill Bristol. BS16 5LN
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Volunteers protect rights and dignity

THE TV documentary *24 Hours in Police Custody* shapes many people's views of custody.

Dramatic moments often take centre stage, but the reality is more complex.

Custody is a highly pressured environment, where people are at their most vulnerable, and where decisions are made that have real consequences for individuals and for public confidence in policing.

What happens in custody matters. It is not a place the public typically sees, yet it is an area where human rights, dignity and safety must be protected without exception.

People arrive in custody in many different circumstances: some accused of serious offences, some experiencing mental ill health, and some under the influence of substances.

Whatever the situation, they are entitled to fairness and appropriate care.

That is why public scrutiny is so important and is provided by independent custody visitors (ICVs). They are volunteers from our

communities, who help my wider work in scrutinising the police and holding them to account, on behalf of you.

The volunteers who are recruited, trained and supported by my team are empowered to make unannounced visits to police custody suites.

Crucially, they operate independently of the police and their role is to check the welfare of detainees, ensuring rights and entitlements are upheld.

During visits, ICVs are escorted to the custody area and may speak to detainees in private, out of hearing of officers.

They look at conditions in the suite, access to food, water and hygiene, and assess if people understand their rights.

After each visit, they produce a report which is shared with me and with the police. These reports enable issues to be identified quickly, improvements to be made, and trends to be monitored over time.

Throughout January, we trained a new



Clare Moody A&SPCC
writes for the Voice

cohort of ICV volunteers to bolster those already in post.

They all bring a breadth of life experience and perspectives that will strengthen scrutiny.

Their willingness to give their time, often at unsocial hours, is deeply appreciated.

Transparency is at the heart of public confidence in policing, and custody is no exception.

I remain committed to supporting the volunteers whose independent oversight ensures that fairness, accountability and dignity remain at the core of policing.

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Last year's successful participants

Bowls course returns

A COURSE to teach people the basics of bowls will be held in Page Park from April.

The popular annual course is run by Page Park Bowls Club, with five qualified Bowls England coaches, and is open to anyone aged 12 and above.

It will be held on seven consecutive Saturdays from April

25, from 10am to noon, with an initial £5 registration fee, plus £5 per session charge to cover costs.

All equipment will be provided except for flat soled shoes, which participants need to bring as heels or ribbed soles aren't suitable for the green.

Anyone interested should contact club captain Don Willcox on 07718 306623 or donwillcox@hotmail.co.uk.

People taking the course don't have to join Page Park Bowls Club but it is a condition of club

rules that anyone who does join must have completed the course.

Don said: "We anticipate that this year's course will again be oversubscribed, so applicants will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

"We are again widening our catchment for the course to encourage new players who would prefer to play for other local clubs, whose membership is smaller than our own."

For more information visit www.pageparkbowling.org.uk.

Club captains confirmed

DOWNEND Cricket Club's 1st XI kicks off the new season under new captain Jordan Garrett, who replaces Callum Loud.

The side starts the West of England Premier League 2 campaign with an away trip to Old Bristolians/Westbury on May 2. The first home game v Taunton Deane is the following week.

Joe Tolman continues as captain for the 2nd team, who are now playing in WEPL Bristol & North Somerset Division after last season's promotion.

They start with a home game against Brislington on May 2, followed by a trip to Knowle.

Ryan Collins takes over the 3rd team captaincy from Jason Robinson. They start with a home game at King George V on May 2 against Bristol West Indian Phoenix, while the 4th XI start away at Patchway.

Downend Ladies will be running two sides this coming season - fixtures have yet to be confirmed. **Miles Davis**

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Flyers win through to semi-final

IF you've glanced out of the window at any point in 2026, you'll know the forecast has been fairly consistent: wet, wetter, and "is this a joke?"

It's now rained every single day so far in the UK, and while we're all doing our best to keep spirits up, our grass pitches at Pomphrey Hill and Johnsons Road have officially had enough.

The ground is so waterlogged it's less "football pitch" and more "mud spa with occasional goalposts."

Still, if there's one thing Downend Flyers are proving this season, it's that you can't rain on our parade — even if the rain is absolutely trying.

Despite the relentless drizzle (and the occasional downpour that feels personal), our Under 12s Kites have soared into the County Cup semi-final with a brilliant 1-0 win against Bristol Ladies Union.

It was a hard-fought battle from start to finish, with the young Flyers showing real determination and grit. The Kites held strong, battled through the conditions, and came away with a well-earned victory — a fantastic



Young Downend Flyers with players from Bristol City Women's FC Early Talent Centre.

achievement and thoroughly deserved.

Away from competitive fixtures, Downend Flyers also hosted a special event with Bristol City Women's Early Talent Centre, which gave young players an exciting opportunity to showcase their skills and play against some incredibly talented young and upcoming players.

The event was a huge success and marks the first of many as we continue to expand, develop, and build strong links for the future.

Of course, even with the wet weather trying its best to dampen everything (including socks, morale, and probably a few footballs), our Flyers teams have managed to get some football played. But we're all desperate for more consistent match time — and the planning is already underway for a much brighter summer. At this point, we'll take "partly cloudy" as a personal victory.

Speaking of summer, planning for our annual football tournament on June 27-28 is well underway — and it's set to be bigger than ever.

Due to high demand, we'll be expanding the age groups.

Registration is already open and applications are coming in fast — teams can sign up at tinyurl.com/4mrjkmw.

Finally, one of our biggest announcements: Downend Flyers will have an Under 18s team next season.

This is a fantastic opportunity for our current Under 16 players to continue their football journey in the Bristol Girls League. If you're currently aged 15-17 and interested in joining Downend Flyers for the 2026/27 season, please get in touch.

Steve Poole

Emergency Number: 07798 905337

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Cleve bounce back after Chippenham loss

CLEVE lost another clash with a club near the top of the table on the artificial pitch at Chippenham.

Both teams were well-prepared, and it was Cleve who started most at ease, taking control for the first 10 minutes and going 7-0 up with a catch and drive after 15 minutes.

But Chippenham were up for the game, a reunion day for their club which had everyone well motivated.

The hosts went towards Cleve's line and Ben Robinson bravely prevented a try five yards out, but from the resulting scrum Chippenham used a set backs move to score.

Cleve, who had narrowly lost their previous game to league leaders Trowbridge, then went 19-7 up with two tries, first after sending the ball along the line and then from a lineout.

Chippenham went on the attack, coming straight back to make the score 19-14 before Cleve produced the best move of the game so far, as Will Warman came into the line to score,



Steve Bush on the charge for Cleve against North Dorset

making it 26-14.

The home side then scored three unanswered tries to wipe out Cleve's lead and pull ahead 31-26 by half-time.

In what was one of the toughest games of the season, Chippenham were relentless. Cleve continually responded but could not get back in front and the match finished 52-40 to the home side.

In their next game, on January 31, Cleve bounced back

with a big win over North Dorset.

This was a special day for several reasons.

Firstly, it was a reunion dinner day. Ex-players, sponsors and officials gathered at Cleve prior to the game for a meal and celebration.

Secondly, one of the acts of celebration was the opening of a corner of the Cleve ground that is a memorial wall, with plaques on it that have names of ex-players and officials who have passed

away. A flagpole was also placed at the memorial garden. It was donated by the family of Stuart 'Buzz' Gaston, who died last year.

The game saw Cleve get back to winning ways in style, beating one of the Regional 2 Tribute Ale Severn division's bottom two clubs by 47 points to 7.

The Cleve family of players, sponsors and officials had a wonderful day.

The next game against mid-table Thornbury reflected the weather we have been experiencing.

It was postponed twice due to a waterlogged pitch and was looking likely to be postponed again, but Thornbury persuaded a local school to rent them a pitch.

The game went ahead in very different surroundings. Due to the weather it was difficult to get to, but supporters overcame these problems.

Cleve also rose above the rain and pitch, to run out winners by 30 points to 19.

Steve Bateman

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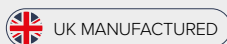
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FEBRUARY is that funny time of year. The nights are still dark, the pitches are still muddy, and everywhere you look there are red roses and heart-shaped chocolates.

Valentine's Day always gets people talking about love... but here at Cleve Chiropractic & Physiotherapy, we see a different kind of love every week. Love for sport. Love for movement. Love for football.

And sometimes... love for Bristol Rovers finally winning a couple of games and taking the pressure off me! Yes, the Gas have managed a few victories recently, which means I can walk into clinic without being reminded of league tables. Long may it continue.

Welcome Beth Birdsey – Our New Physio Star

This month we're absolutely delighted to welcome Beth Birdsey to the team.

Beth has joined us from Manchester, where she was working in Accident & Emergency — so when we say she's seen it all, we mean it. From acute trauma to complex musculoskeletal presentations, Beth brings calm, clarity and clinical excellence to every case.

But that's not all. Beth has also worked with the girls' pathway for the England women's national football team — helping to lead the Lioness talent pathway. That means she's worked with some of

the most exciting young footballers in the country, guiding their development, managing injuries, and keeping them performing at their best.

Having someone with elite sport and A&E experience join a community clinic like ours is huge. It means whether you're a weekend five-a-side hero, a young academy player, or just someone who twisted their knee stepping off a curb, you're in very safe hands.

Football Injuries – What We See Every Week

Football is brilliant. It's dynamic, explosive, technical and tactical. But it also places huge demands on the body.

The most common injuries we treat include:

- Ankle sprains – Often from tackles or awkward landings.
- Knee injuries – Including ligament strains and meniscal irritation.
- Hamstring strains – Especially during sprinting.
- Groin pain – A classic in footballers due to cutting and turning.
- Lower back pain – Repeated rotation and impact can build up over time.

With Beth's background and our multidisciplinary team, we're able to manage these from acute injury through to full return to sport.

How We Treat Football Injuries

One thing I'm proud of at Cleve is that we don't just "treat pain". We treat people.

For footballers, that usually means:

- Accurate Diagnosis
Understanding what's really going on — ligament, tendon, joint, muscle or referred pain. Beth's A&E background is invaluable here, especially when something feels more serious.
- Early Management

Load modification, manual therapy, taping, mobility work and pain management to calm things down quickly.

- Progressive Rehabilitation

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- Return to Play Testing

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Because the goal isn't just getting back on the pitch. It's staying there.

From Elite to Everyday

What I love about Beth's experience with the Lioness pathway is this: the principles don't change.

Elite athletes and grassroots players both need:

- Strong foundations
- Good movement quality
- Smart load management
- Recovery
- Confidence

Whether you're dreaming of Wembley or just trying to get through Sunday league without limping into work on Monday, the body responds to the same evidence-based approach.

And as someone who's been around sport for years — from rugby to running to skiing — I can tell you this: consistency beats heroics every time.

Tim

Clinic Director, Cleve Chiropractic



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Mangos' play-off hopes fade

MANGOTSFIELD United achieved perhaps their best result of the season in beating league leaders Roman St George, before falling to a defeat at home to mid-table Cinderford Town.

The reverse against Cinderford meant the Mangos' already slim hopes of making the play-offs became slimmer still.

Although 7th in the league table, they are 15 points behind the last play-off place, currently occupied by Corsham Town, with only 11 league matches left to play and 33 points available.

The morale-boosting 3-2 win over Roman Glass St George saw Lewis Powell score a hat-trick.

Despite an early goal from the visitors, the Mangos kept plugging away and more than matched their high-flying opponents and local rivals.

Man-of-the-match Powell's hat-trick came on 30, 77 and 84 minutes, with a

second goal from Roman Glass providing a grandstand finish.

Watched by a crowd of 327 at Cossham Street, it was a well-earned three points for the Mangos, giving them some hope for the rest of the season.

However, one week later they were brought back down to earth as they ended up on the wrong end of the same scoreline, as Cinderford Town nipped over the Severn Bridge to take all three points.

Mangotsfield began badly, and defensive lapses meant that the visitors found themselves 2-0 up inside 14 minutes, thanks to goals from Jack Watts (11) and Kian Davies (14).

Urged on by another large home crowd of 357, the Mangos battled back into the game, facing the tough task ahead of them, and pulled one back on 37 minutes through Jacob Spence.

Cinderford, however, made the perfect start to the second half by going 3-1 up on 50 minutes, through Jack Watts again.

The Mangos rallied immediately, and Lewis Powell got one back just three minutes later.

Try as they might though, the Mangos just could not break the visitors down any further, and the Foresters stood firm with an excellent performance.

The following week's away trip to Longlevens was, not surprisingly, called off because of a waterlogged pitch. It will be

rearranged as soon as possible.

Reaching the play-offs is going to be a very tall order indeed, and will need a few teams above the Mangos to implode big time if the miracle is to be achieved!

In the meantime, the club was still in two cup competitions, the Marsh Cup and GFA Trophy, as the Voice went to print.

Silverware in the trophy cabinet always means success of some sort at the end of a season, so there is still much to play for in the coming weeks.

The club hopes a mass of home games coming up in late February and through March will see more excellent attendances at Cossham Street as the Mangos try to win as many games as they can and see where it takes them.

Dave Smale

Upcoming fixtures

(3pm unless stated):

February 24: Bitton - GFA Trophy (home, 7.45pm)

February 28: Lydney Town (H)

March 7: Hereford Pegasus (H)

March 14: Slimbridge (H)

March 21: Corsham Town (H)

March 28: Worcester Raiders (away)

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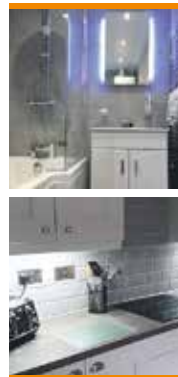
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