

downendvoice

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April 2026, Issue 153



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

Railway remembered



A special event has been held to mark the 60th anniversary of the day the last British Rail train services ran through Mangotsfield and Staple Hill stations on the Mangotsfield and Bath branch line. Picture: Adam Ashford, for Avon Valley Railway. Full story: Page 7



Sarah's epic run

Head teacher Anna Martin has thanked parent Sarah Davis, who is running 225km in a month in support of Christ Church Infants. **PAGE 9**

Bus service cuts

Some bus services are being cut and some new routes added in the latest timetable changes, which come into force on April 5. **PAGE 5**

Jack's Ukraine role

Former Downend MP Jack Lopresti has revealed he is serving with special forces in Ukraine. **PAGE 10**

Green Belt demo

Campaigners to save the Green Belt in east Bristol from large-scale housing development plan a day of action this month. **PAGE 17**

Festival is cancelled

MANGOTSFIELD Village Festival will not go ahead this year.

The free event, which attracts thousands of visitors each summer, was due to be held on Pomphrey North Playing Fields

on June 13.

But the volunteer committee which runs the festival has had to put it on hold, after finding that the financial numbers were not adding up.

They plan to bring the event

back next year - but say they will also need more volunteers to commit to helping them out in order to make sure the 2027 festival happens.

Full story: Page 3

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Spring, the garden and feeling younger than your years



Matt Sutton

Aches - It's not about age

THIS Spring you're back out in the garden, or walking a bit further than you have over winter, and you catch yourself thinking:

"I don't remember feeling this old when I did this last."

This is a familiar moment many of us have around this time of year.

It's not usually anything dramatic.

Just little things.

A back that tightens up sooner than you expected.

That twinge in the knee that's come back again.

Those first few steps in the morning that feel, if we're honest, a bit awkward.

You get moving and it eases off — but it's there.

And then there's posture.

You might notice it getting dressed, or passing a mirror —

a bit more stooped, shoulders rounding, head sitting further forward.

Some people joke they're "getting the family posture".

A slight hump at the top of the back. A bit of a forward head.

Nothing sudden. It just creeps in.

A common spring pattern

Here at Sutton Chiropractic in Downend, this is one of the most common patterns we see each spring.

People aren't unwell.

They're just getting back to doing more — and noticing their body isn't quite keeping up.

After a quieter winter, muscles tend to be a bit tighter and less supportive. Movement becomes slightly less efficient.

So when activity picks up again — walking, gardening, getting out more — certain areas start to take more strain than they should.

Most often:

the neck • the knees • the lower back

That's when the stiffness lingers, and those familiar niggles return.

Where posture fits in

Posture plays a bigger role in this than many people realise.

It's not about "standing up straight" for the sake of it.

It's about how your body is balanced and

supported as you move.

When posture shifts — even gradually — it changes how load travels through the body.

Over time, that can mean:

more pressure through the neck and shoulders

more work for the lower back

less ease and confidence in movement

balance issues

Mobility problems

The result is what many people describe simply as:

"Everything feels a bit harder than it should."

What we see in practice

The encouraging part is that this is often very workable.

With the right approach, many of our patients and their family notice:

improved uprightness

less visible stooping

movement feeling lighter and more natural

fewer flare-ups of the same old problem areas

better balance

less falls

more energy

Often, it's not about doing more —

It's about getting the body better aligned so it can do what it's already capable of.

A sensible time to check

Spring is when people quite naturally want to get moving again.

It's also the point where small issues either settle... or start to build.

A simple check at the right time can help prevent a season of stop-start progress.



HUGE CONGRATULATIONS!

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



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Free April Posture Clinic

If you've noticed things feeling a bit stiffer, heavier, or less reliable than they used to, this is exactly what our Posture Clinic is for.

We start with a focused posture and balance screening, where we look at how your body is currently working and where unnecessary strain may be building up. From there, we can show you what's changeable — and what would make the biggest difference. Patients often tell us they feel noticeably more upright, looser and more comfortable once these things are addressed.

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No Mangotsfield Village festival this year

ORGANISERS of the Mangotsfield Village Festival have cancelled this year's event.

The decision not to go ahead was taken at a meeting in March of the volunteer committee that plans and organises the festival.

The free event attracted around 3,000 visitors last year, but immediately afterwards there was a warning that it could be the last, if new volunteers could not be found to help run it.

A number of long-standing committee members, including previous chair Paul Mallorie, stepped down in the autumn.

Another committee member, Madeleine Bills, then volunteered to take on the chair's role, and the team set about organising a festival for June 13.

But the organisers have found sponsorship hard to secure, raising fears that there could be a shortfall of up to £3,000 in funding for the festival, which costs around £17,000 to put on.

Madeleine, who has been on the committee for around 12 years, said: "We've always made sure we've got enough money in the bank to pay for the event, even if it poured with rain."

"We were finding sponsorship quite hard to get and felt there could be a shortfall, which would fall on us."

Visitors to last year's event enjoyed music, dancing, displays, fairground stalls and competitions including a dog show at Pomphrey Hill North playing fields, off Johnson Road in Emersons Green.

Madeleine said the funding secured this year would have only covered a much smaller event.

She said: "Rather than do an event where we had to curb everything because of costs, we felt it would be better to do a good event next year."

"If we do a poor event this year, it would be harder to get back the following year."

The committee is already planning to bring the festival back for its 34th staging next year - but also needs volunteers to commit to helping out to make sure it happens, both throughout the year and on the weekend of the festival itself.

Madeleine said this included young volunteers to help with publicising the festival on social media during the run-up, a team of around eight people to set up on the day before the event and about ten to help take the stages, marquees, bunting and other equipment down at the end of the event.

She said: "We will definitely be there next year, but like all things it's going to be an uphill job to get back."

Emersons Green Town Council and Staple Hill & Mangotsfield Parish Council both supported the festival financially last year.

Town council clerk Jo Bryant said the committee had taken a "difficult but responsible decision", adding: "The Town Council remains committed to supporting the Village Festival wherever possible."

"Officers and members of Emersons Green Town Council will continue to work closely with members of the festival committee to support fundraising efforts and volunteer recruitment, with the aim of helping to ensure a successful event in 2027."

Anyone who would like to help make sure next year's festival goes ahead can volunteer by emailing chair@mangotsfieldfestival.co.uk or calling 07955 184003.



The Sambistas lead last year's festival parade



School aces it!

HAMBROOK Primary School has named Avon County Tennis School of the Year, for its commitment to developing opportunities in the sport for all children over the past year.

PE lead Maisie Welch said: "Judges praised the high standards of participation, coaching and enthusiasm shown across our tennis programme, reflecting the dedication of our children, staff and external providers."

The school was presented with the award in March and will now go on to a Lawn Tennis Association national contest.

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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.

A member of the



Teen traumatised by group attack

THE father of a teenage girl who was beaten and kicked in Bristol city centre believes more should have been done to help her.

The sixth former at a South Gloucestershire school, who cannot be identified for legal reasons, was attacked in Penn Street on the evening of March 4 at around 7.45pm, shortly after leaving the Zara Cabot Circus store.

She needed hospital treatment for head injuries afterwards.

Five children, aged between 12 and 14, have since been arrested on suspicion of offences including affray, causing racially aggravated fear of violence and grievous bodily harm with intent. They have been released on police bail.

The girl's father, who lives in Staple Hill, says she was followed around the city centre for about 20 minutes by a group of up to 30 children, who were shouting at her and asking her name and school.

He said: "She got scared and tried to get on a bus, but they surrounded her and waved the bus on."

The dad feels his daughter was let down by adults in the area before the attack took place. He says she went into the Zara store while she was being followed to seek help, and says that the attack took place in view of adults including security staff.

Police were called by residents of a nearby student housing block, where his daughter took refuge afterwards.

A demonstration over the incident, attended by around 20 people, was held outside the Zara store on March 14, and led to the doors being briefly locked.

The dad believes the attack was linked with a 'school wars' trend on social media, where schools were put on two opposing 'red' and 'blue' lists and encouraged to arrange fights.

He said: "When she told them the school she goes to, one of them shouted 'she's a red'."

Since the incident, he said

his daughter had stayed in her room, embarrassed by the number of people who had watched videos of the attack online.

The dad said: "I can't get her to leave the house."

"I just feel let down, I really do. I think she was failed by a lot of people that night."

A police spokesperson said a 14-year-old girl, and a girl and boy aged 13 were arrested the day after the incident, with a boy aged 12, and another 14-year-old girl arrested two days later.

Anyone with information about the incident is being asked to call 101 and quote the reference number 5226 061 116.

Both Cabot Circus and Zara UK say they have reviewed CCTV footage and spoken to staff after the incident.

A Cabot Circus spokesperson said: "Following the awful incident that took place in the city centre, we are aware of a short period of time when the victim entered Cabot Circus."

"There was no approach to the security team and if they had been made aware they would have acted swiftly and professionally given the seriousness of the situation."

"We have fully supported the police with their enquiries, including sharing all CCTV footage."

A Zara UK spokesperson said: "Our security team and some staff were aware of a group of young people causing a commotion, but at the time it was not apparent that the victim was under threat while in the store, or as she left. Of our colleagues had understood that anyone was being harassed or in distress, they would have sought to support them."

"The safety and wellbeing of our customers is extremely important to us, and our teams are expected to assist anyone who they understand to be in distress."

"We were horrified by this attack and how it escalated after the victim left our store, and we are committed to supporting the police and the victim to ensure she gets justice."

Bus shake-up sees some services cut

BUS operator First has announced a series of changes to bus services in Downend, Staple Hill and Frenchay.

New timetables coming into force on April 5 include cuts in frequency to the 48, 49 and 50 services to the city centre, the 19 service to Bath and Bristol Parkway, and extra buses from Staple Hill to Southmead Hospital.

The city's main bus operator says the changes are "designed to improve punctuality and create a more reliable network for our customers".

It says a new 18 service from the city centre to Southmead Hospital via St George, Kingswood, Staple Hill will combine with the existing 17 service to provide a half-hourly service between Kingswood, Staple Hill, Fishponds and Southmead Hospital during the daytime.

First is revising the timetable for 48 and 48x services from Downend to the city centre and for 49 and 49x services from Staple Hill to the city centre.

The frequency of weekday daytime 48 and 49 services, which go to the centre via Stapleton Road, is decreasing from around one every 30 to 35 minutes to one every 35 to 50 minutes.

The decrease comes as First increases the number of 47x services from Oldbury Court in Fishponds to the city centre from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes, so that it can run a direct 'x' service, using the M32 in stead of Stapleton Road, every 10 minutes on Fishponds Road.

The frequency of 48x and 49x services will remain approximately every half hour under the new timetable.

The 19 service, which links Downend to Bristol Parkway station in one direction and Kingswood and Bath in the other, is being halved in frequency, from half-hourly to hourly on weekdays.

First said the cut had been made "following the ending of funding to increase the frequency that started at the last service change," adding: "Journeys will no longer operate into the late evening." The biggest cutback will be on the 50 service between Frenchay and the city centre via Stapleton and Eastville.

Instead of running from Frenchay between 6.25am and 8pm on weekdays, with 14 services per day, the service will now only run four times in each direction, between 9.30am and 2.40pm.

First said: "Due to low customer demand, this service will operate only during the off peak on Monday to Fridays and daytime on Saturdays."

The company, which is Bristol's biggest bus operator, say the changes will improve punctuality across the network.

More details can be found online at tinyurl.com/4dj9hrpj.

Speed table move

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council is consulting on plans to change the location of a proposed speed table to slow traffic on North Street in Downend.

The speed table - a lengthened section of raised surface designed to slow traffic in the 20mph zone, was originally proposed for a site next to the south end of Downend Cricket Club's WG Grace Memorial Ground.

But the council says the original proposals, which were consulted on in 2022, are no longer seen as feasible; instead it wants to place the speed table by the north end of the ground, near the junctions with Salisbury Road and Carpenter's Shop Lane.

A consultation on the new plans is open until April 8 at tinyurl.com/mrx5ap46.

Fake cigarettes seized

POLICE seized counterfeit cigarettes and tobacco with an estimated street value of around £16,000 after searching "a person and vehicle linked to a convenience store in Staple Hill".

Officers found a "large quantity" of products, including fake Amber Leaf and Golden Virginia tobacco and Dubai-based Manchester brand cigarettes, during the operation in February.

A police spokesperson said: "We would like to thank the public for passing on information, which was vital in helping us take proactive action, and we're grateful for their continued support."

"South Gloucestershire Trading Standards is leading the investigation with our support."

The spokesperson said the person arrested was linked to a store in the High Street but the force could not confirm which one at this stage.

A council spokesperson said investigations remain ongoing into the sale of illegal tobacco and vapes across South Gloucestershire, and called on anyone with information about illegal products to report it to trading standards via the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133.

Information can also be given anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.



Some of the tobacco found by police



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Death crash driver avoids jail sentence

A DRIVER who crashed his van at high speed into a car queueing on an M32 slip road, killing another man, has avoided a jail sentence.

Jamie Nicholls told police he was looking for a cigarette and his attention was off the road "for a second or two" before he crashed into Michael Stone's car, killing the father-of-two from Longwell Green.

Mr Stone's car was pushed into the car in front, causing further collisions involving a fourth and fifth vehicle.

A work colleague of 68-year-old Mr Stone, who was a passenger in his car, suffered "significant physical injuries" including a head injury and seven broken ribs.

Nicholls and another driver also needed hospital treatment.

Nicholls, aged 48, pleaded guilty to charges of causing death

and serious injury by careless driving before he was sentenced on February 26.

He was not sent to prison, instead being given a 14-month suspended sentence and a one-year driving ban.

Nicholls, of Otterhampton, near Bridgwater, was told he must take an extended test before he can get his licence back, abide by a 60-day curfew and undergo 10 days of rehabilitation, as well as paying a victim surcharge and costs, when he was sentenced at Bristol Crown Court.

In a statement read to the court Mr Stone's widow, Penny, said she had had to break the news that her husband of 40 years had been killed to one of their two daughters who was in America on her honeymoon at the time.

She said: "Mike was the

foundation on which our family was built.

"When we gather around the table now there is an empty space where he should be sat, head of the family. You knew you were safe when Mike was around and everything would be alright.

"I have lost my husband, my best friend, the father of my children, my rock, the person who rubbed my back when it ached, made my morning cuppa, laughed with me, wiped away my tears, danced with me, loved me.

"My heart is truly broken, and I miss him so much it physically hurts. All I have left of him are my memories, and that shouldn't be.

"Our daughters have lost an amazing dad who would do anything for them however old they were.

"I never got the chance to say goodbye to Mike on that fateful

day. I waved him off to work and the next time I saw him was 11 days later in the mortuary."

She told Nicholls: "The actions you took on that day when you got in your van have changed everyone in our families' lives forever.

"But, more importantly, Mike was denied the right to live his life because of you."

After the case, police investigating officer Noelle Poupard said: "This was a collision caused by Nicholls' failure to concentrate on the road ahead of him.

"A motorist looking away from the road, even for a second, will cover quite a significant distance when they are travelling 70mph and the consequences can be horrendous, as this case painfully demonstrates."

Cyclist killed on M32 slip-road

A MAN in his 80s died when his bike was hit by a vehicle on a motorway slip-road.

Police were called to Junction 1 of the M32 at Hambrook, shortly after 9am on February 17.

A spokesperson said: "Emergency services responded and, despite their efforts, a man in his 80s sadly died.

"His next of kin were informed and we are offering them support through a specialist family liaison officer.

"Our thoughts are with them during this incredibly difficult time."

Police said the collision happened on the southbound entry slip-road, where traffic from the roundabout at the Hambrook junction heads onto the inbound M32.

The entrance to the slip-road is crossed by a light-controlled crossing for cyclists and pedestrians, which operates independently of the other traffic lights on the roundabout.

The crossing is part of the pedestrian and cycle route between Downend and Filton.

Police have not named the man who died in the incident, at the request of his family, but say he was 81 years old and lived in Patchway. An inquest into his death has been opened.

The slip-road was closed for around five hours after the incident, as police recovered the vehicle and examined the scene.

Police are appealing for witnesses to the collision.



The slip-road for the motorway has a crossing for pedestrians and cyclists

They say the driver of the vehicle has been assisting them in their enquiries, and no arrests have been made.

Anyone with information should call 101 and quote the incident reference number 5226 045 155.

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Lost railway remembered at closure 'protest'



An actor playing Dr Beeching is given a rough reception by re-enactors and passengers at Bitton Station. Picture: Adam Ashford for Avon Valley Railway

THE clock was turned back to 1966 for a day at a special event to mark 60 years since the end of passenger trains on the railway line that once served Staple Hill and Mangotsfield.

Avon Valley Railway held a special commemorative event, called The People and Their Protest, which saw Bitton station transformed into the scene of a dramatised confrontation between demonstrators and Dr Richard Beeching, the former chairman of the British Railways Board.

It was Dr Beeching's infamous report of 1963, *The Reshaping of British Railways*, that recommended the closure of the Mangotsfield and Bath branch line, which included passenger services calling at Staple Hill station and Mangotsfield station on their way from Bristol Temple Meads to Bath Green Park.

Local stopping passenger services between Bristol and Gloucester on the line ended in January 1965, and the final British Rail services to Bath ran on March 6, 1966, with the line officially closing the following day.

Trains continued to pass Staple Hill and Mangotsfield stations, without stopping, on journeys between Bristol and Yate until a landslip on Boxing Day 1969 blocked the line, a week before it was scheduled to close.

The old track bed now forms part of the Bristol & Bath Railway Path, and the platforms of both stations are familiar landmarks for path users.

Mangotsfield station was also the scene of an art project,

Mangotsfield Folly, from 2022-23, and has earned a place in theatrical history as the inspiration for *The Ghost Train*, a hit play in the mid-20th century written in 1923 by Arnold Ridley, who would later become a household name playing Private Godfrey in *Dad's Army*. Ridley was waiting for a train on one platform of the triangular station when a train passed, out of sight, on another side, giving him the idea for the play.

The Avon Valley Railway's event on March 8 this year saw trains running between Bitton, Oldland Common and the Avon Riverside halt, on the preserved section of the line that was revived by rail enthusiasts following a campaign to bring trains back, launched in 1972 by the Bristol Suburban Railway Society.

Trains running on the day carried the old British Rail carriage window labels listing the stations served by the old line: Bristol Temple Meads, Fishponds, Staple Hill, Mangotsfield, Warmley, Oldland Common Halt, Bitton and Bath (Green Park).

Hundreds of visitors stepped back in time, with children paying just 20p to travel - the equivalent price of a ticket from 1966.

Re-enactors from the Kingswood Players acted the parts of Dr Beeching and a group of angry protesters.

Avon Valley Railway trustee Joseph Dean said: "With it being 60 years since our railway closed under British Rail, we really wanted to do something special



Mangotsfield station in 1964. Picture: Avon Valley Railway Archive

to mark the anniversary, so after months of planning, *The People and Their Protest* was born.

"We wanted to shift focus from just railway operation to include both community and social perspectives, attempting to capture the emotions and characters of the time.

"Working alongside the Kingswood Players, we managed to recreate 1966 for the day, with protestors swarming Bitton station and onboard our trains, interacting with the general public, and handing out sheets to fill in and flyers to wave.

"They were joined by Dr Richard Beeching, preparing to close the railway, which certainly caused some drama. These interactions even led to passengers giving Dr Beeching some (slightly inappropriate) choice words!

"There was one unplanned moment of our passengers literally queuing to take photos with both Beeching and our

fantastic re-enactors, which was great to see.

"The comments from the public throughout were overwhelmingly positive, which was greatly appreciated by all of us."

The event also saw the unveiling of a new sign at Avon Riverside station, remembering the closure of the line and reaffirming Avon Valley Railway Heritage Trust's commitment to restore the railway to the outskirts of Bath.

Representatives of South Gloucestershire and B&NES councils, including Staple Hill & Mangotsfield councillor Ian Boulton, attended the event.

The Avon Valley Railway has more special events taking place in April, including Easter Eggspress on the 5th and 6th, Farmyard Friends on the 11th and 12th and Local Residents' Weekend on the 25th and 26th.

More details can be found at www.avonvalleyrailway.org.



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Junior school wins 'beacon status'

A DOWNEND junior school has been awarded 'beacon school' status for its work supporting the mental health and well-being of children and their families.

Christ Church Junior School has been given the Healthy Roots Quality Mark award by South Gloucestershire Council for providing evidence of "consistently outstanding" practices, policies, and procedures "to promote and improve the health and well-being of children, young people, staff, parents/carers, and the wider community".

The beacon school award recognises schools which have been recognised more than three times within two academic years for an ongoing commitment to mental health.

The Healthy Roots Quality Mark has been added to the school's Mental Health award, School Games Mark gold award, Young Carers bronze award and Church School Partnership gold award. Together the awards led the council panel to recognise the school as a 'beacon setting' in South Gloucestershire.

Head teacher Pippa Osborne said: "We are so delighted to have been recognised for the work we do to support children and their families.

"It is the most important aspect of education in schools, as without this holistic approach, children cannot fully access learning.

"I am so incredibly grateful to our staff team, as every single person works tirelessly to contribute to this caring ethos, striving to enable children to learn to live life in all its fullness."

School inclusion leader Tracy Eatwell said: "We feel incredibly passionate about supporting positive mental health and well-being for our children.

"Every day we see how important it is that children feel safe, understood and supported, both in school and at home.

"When families are going through difficult times, it's vital that we work together to provide the right support, helping children and their families feel heard and cared for.

"Being able to support some of our most vulnerable families and see positive outcomes for them is something I feel truly privileged to be part of."

The school's special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, Sadie Groves, said: "Our whole team shares the same commitment to nurturing and supporting every child.

"We genuinely care about our community, and it is wonderful to see our collective efforts recognised through this beacon school status."

Councillor calls for safety measures

A COUNCILLOR has called for road safety improvements outside Christ Church Infant School in Downend.

South Gloucestershire Frenchay and Downend ward

councillor Liz Brennan said a series of improvements are needed on roads surrounding the school, Christchurch Avenue, Christchurch Lane and Church View.

Cllr Brennan said: "Parents and residents have raised serious concerns about the safety of the roads outside the school.

"At busy drop-off and pick-up times, unclear road markings and parked vehicles can create hazardous conditions for children and families.

"Children should be able to travel to and from school safely.

"These improvements would help create a safer environment and ensure the road layout properly protects pupils and

pedestrians."

The Conservative councillor has set up a petition on her party's website, bsgconservatives.com, calling for:

- a clearly-marked pedestrian walkway across the end of Christchurch Avenue,
- reinstatement of zig-zag markings,
- installation of clear and enforceable 'School Keep Clear' markings,
- new double yellow lines and the resurfacing of Christchurch Avenue outside the school.

Cllr Brennan is calling for the council to treat the issue as a priority road safety project.

Clean up after your pet!

SCHOOL children from the Park Primary in Kingswood are helping to make Kingswood Park safer.

They have designed posters reminding dog owners to clean up after their pets. These have now been put up around the park.

South Gloucestershire Council has welcome the pupils' efforts to promote responsible pet ownership.

The council's dog wardens will also be stepping up patrols and people are being urged to report dog fouling issues. Offenders can be fined £100.



Liz Brennan



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A PARENT is running 225km in a month to raise money to fund specialist support for pupils' mental health at a Downend infant school.

Sarah Davis picked the target to represent one kilometre for each of the pupils at Christ Church Infant School in Christchurch Avenue.

She started the challenge at the start of March, aiming to complete a 10km run on most days of the week before finishing with a run alongside pupils, staff and families at the Page Park parkrun on Sunday, March 29.

Sarah has two children at the school, Thomas in Year 1 and Summer in Reception.

She said: "I am a medic in the Royal Navy, so have a base level of fitness - however I don't tend to get up and run 10km every day, so this is definitely a challenge!"

"Both of my children have required extra support from the school, who are incredible."

"I wanted to help the head teacher Anna Martin by removing some of the financial constraints, specifically in support of the mental health and well-being of the children."

Sarah's big run supports children's mental health



Christ Church Infant School head Anna Martin with Sarah Davis

"I have seen first-hand the care, determination, and compassion Mrs Martin and the team all bring to the school community. They are constantly finding ways to overcome challenges and stretch limited resources, always with the children's well-being at the centre of every decision."

"They work tirelessly to make sure no child is left behind, often changing the plan for a whole

day to make sure no child is left out."

Sarah, of Staple Hill, has worked out a regular route near her home which she has been taking on during her lunch hour and fitness time allocated as part of her duties.

She said: "I'm just running and hoping everyone backs me with donations."

Mrs Martin said the school

planned to use the funds raised by Sarah's challenge to fund one of the teaching assistants to become a 'thrive practitioner', a specialist role supporting children's social and emotional development to improve attendance, behaviour and well-being.

She said: "Levels of anxiety seem to be rising in children, with reports of emotionally-based school avoidance starting in junior schools."

"We would really like to run sessions where children can check in if they have anxiety about something school-related. It would really help, particularly for children moving up to the juniors."

Sarah had raised £990 as the Voice went to print and has a target of £1,500 for the challenge. Donations can be made via her online fundraising page at tinyurl.com/bda7z9kb.

Pupils' week of wonder

CHRIST Church Infant School held a Wonder Week to create memorable experiences for pupils.

Teachers devised a programme of hands-on workshops, immersive learning events and a collaborative art project that linked the infant and junior schools.

It included visits from exotic animals children could see up close and touch, a virtual trip into space with a mobile planetarium giving an immersive experience of planets, stars and galaxies, and collaborative art project called the 'Spirituali-tree'.

Each child at the school designed and decorated a wooden leaf to create half of a tree, which was added to another half created by pupils at nearby Christ Church Junior School.

Head teacher Anna Martin said: "The piece symbolises the shared values and close relationship between the two schools."

"The project was inspired by Mr Jones and Miss Connor, the Art Leads at each school, who worked together to plan a joint outcome that would bring both communities together."

The finished work was displayed alongside other artwork in a gallery-style exhibition at Christ Church, for families to see.



A pupil meets a giant insect during the event



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Ex-MP joins Ukraine special forces

FORMER Downend MP Jack Lopresti has revealed he is serving in Ukraine's best known military unit.

Mr Lopresti, who first joined Ukraine's war against the Russian invasion last year, says he has now joined the 12th Special Forces Azov Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine, known for its role in the siege of Mariupol in 2022.

Announcing the move on social media in late February, the former Conservative Party deputy chairman said he was "honoured" to join the brigade, describing it as "a symbol of resilience and uncompromising principle".

Mr Lopresti, who lost his Filton & Bradley Stoke seat to Labour's Claire Hazelgrove in the 2024 general election, served in the defence intelligence section of the International Legion of Ukraine before joining the Azov Brigade.

The former UK Territorial Army soldier, who spent five months in Afghanistan in 2008-9, said: "To have served in what I consider two of Ukraine's finest military formations is one of the greatest honours of my life.

"Azov was formed in 2014 in response to Russia's aggression. It began with volunteers, many without prior military experience, driven by conviction rather than obligation.

Over time, it evolved into a benchmark for modern warfare, defined by innovation, frontline medical care, relentless training and a clear focus on the motivated, well-prepared soldier as the decisive factor.

"In 2022, the defence of Mariupol showed the world exactly what Azov stands for: resistance under impossible conditions.

"Today, the Ukrainian military is not only defending its own sovereignty, it is also the frontline guarantee of Europe's security. What happens here will shape the future of the free world.

"Ukraine continues to resist. Ukraine stands firm. Together, we will prevail. Slava Ukraini!"

After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the Azov Brigade was at the centre of some of the fiercest fighting as it fought to defend the coastal city of Mariupol, where it was based.

Russian forces outnumbered Ukrainian fighters by more than three to one, and carried out heavy bombing that killed thousands of civilians, including in a maternity hospital and the city's theatre.

The Azov Brigade is controversial because of its links to far-right groups when it was founded in 2014, and its use of symbols that were also used by Nazi units during the Second World War. Commentators are



Jack Lopresti posted this picture of himself in front of the Azov Brigade flag on social media

divided over whether it still has far-right links.

The Voice has asked Mr Lopresti for his view of the controversy.



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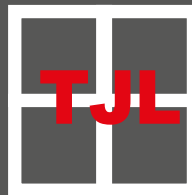
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New secondary eases pressure for places

THE opening of a new secondary school in Lyde Green is easing the pressure on other schools to provide extra places.

The new Lyde Green Community School had originally been due to open in 2022, to provide secondary school places for families in the fast-growing estate east of Emersons Green.

But it was hit by a series of delays and in the meantime, neighbouring schools including Downend, Mangotsfield and Winterbourne Academy had to increase capacity and host extra forms to accommodate the demand.

Now the new school is on track to open in September, offering places for up to 180 Year 7 students in six classes every year.

Already this year it has received 248 applications, including 107 first-preference bids, and has made offers to a total of 131 pupils, with capacity to take on more by September.

It means that Downend, which two years ago had 325 first-choice applications, had 287 for its 240 places this year, making offers to a total of 236 first-choice applicants and four who put it second or third.

At Mangotsfield, which in 2024 and 2025 raised its admission number to 270 to help accommodate demand, offers have been made to 209 pupils for its 210 places, with all 178 families who put the school as their first choice being offered places.

At Winterbourne Academy, which has a capacity of 300 students per year, all 232 families who made the school their first choice were given

offers, with a total of 267 places filled: two years ago it had 304 first-preference applicants, and 54 missed out on a place.

South Gloucestershire Council cabinet member for education Ian Boulton said: "The opening of Lyde Green Secondary School this September marks an important step in ensuring that local families have access to the school places they need within their own communities.

"When this administration took office less than three years ago, the project was effectively starting from scratch. Thanks to the hard work and commitment of everyone involved, we are able to deliver a much-needed new secondary school at pace, providing the additional capacity our growing communities require.

"The benefit is clear: for the first time in several years, no existing secondary school has been asked to exceed its published admission number. This gives families greater certainty, supports school stability, and ensures we can continue to respond positively to families moving into the area throughout the year."

Lyde Green Community School head teacher Tom Hill said the school expected to have around 140 students when it welcomes its first ever intake of Year 7s in September, which was broadly in line with predictions.

He said: "We're also seeing increasing interest since the initial allocation – with just over 10 new enquiries in the past week or so – which is a really positive sign.

"Many families have told us



Lyde Green Community School head teacher Tom Hill and his senior leadership team at the new building, which is still under construction

they were initially unsure about selecting a brand-new school, but now that they can see the build progressing so strongly, the quality of our facilities taking shape, and the strength of the staff team we've appointed, confidence is clearly growing. We fully expect numbers to continue rising."

Mr Hill said families who have recently moved into

the area or are considering transferring their child's place can contact the school directly at enquiries@lydegreens.org.uk.

He said the school's build is "progressing extremely well", with carpets in many classrooms, furniture going in and internal spaces starting to take shape.

Mr Hill said: "It's a lovely moment to see the building come to life."



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TURNER'S VISION

Look out – here comes the sun!

LIVING in Britain we sometimes forget just how bright the sun can be, largely because we spend half the year wondering where it's gone.

Now I'm not sure about you, but with the wet start to the year I barely had a reason (excuse?) to wear my sunglasses. It's been such a relief to have even a few days of sunshine and be able to dust off my sunglasses and enjoy clear, glare free vision, out in the sun.

I say dust off, metaphorically of course. I don't imagine anyone

reading this would actually expect me to have a dusty pair of sunglasses, although I will confess that after a busy holiday or burst of gardening I may well need to give my sunglasses a thorough deep clean.

Good sunglasses don't just reduce glare - they protect your eyes from UV damage and make outdoor vision far more comfortable. Of course you can squint your way through bright sunshine - but decent sunglasses mean you don't have to.

For this year, and due in no small part to the fact that I had another birthday last year, I needed my first varifocal sunglasses. Previously, I have kidded myself that my old faithful Ray-Bans, with brilliant distance vision correction, could also be worn for reading too. This is clearly no longer the case.

Whilst we all like to hold on to our youth, myself included, my new, Oakley frames with our Brunel 10* All Vision sunglasses give me both the range and protection that I need without straining or needing to grow my arm

length. It is of course a revelation being able to see both far and near out in the sun, much as I can in my everyday varifocal glasses.

I can now say that whether I'm driving, using my phone or relaxing reading in the sun, I can see again at all distances clearly and comfortably.

If any of this sounds familiar, whether it's struggling to read your phone in bright sunshine, or realising that your arms just aren't quite long enough anymore, it may well be time to have your eyes properly checked.

At Turners Opticians we take the time to assess your eyes thoroughly and recommend the right lens solution for how you actually live day to day. The right lenses can genuinely transform how comfortable and effortless your vision feels.

So if you're thinking your sunglasses, or perhaps your everyday glasses could be working a little better for you, we'd be delighted to help.

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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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Friends conquer Kilimanjaro for Cameron

TWO friends have raised more than £3,300 in memory of a Downend teenager by climbing Africa's tallest mountain.

Jo Robb, of Mangotsfield, and Kim Dixon, of Warmley, took six days to reach the summit of Kilimanjaro, which at 5,895m (19,341ft) is the highest free-standing peak in the world.

They took on the challenge to raise money for the Cameron Williams Foundation, which aims to help men talk about their mental health, and charity Suicide Prevention UK.

Former Stanbridge Primary and Downend School pupil Cameron, who was 19, took his own life in 2024 after being left devastated by the death of his friend Tyler Carley in a lorry crash the previous year.

Cameron was not physically injured in the crash, but was left with survivor's guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder, which he hid from his family and friends.

The foundation was set up by Cameron's mum Melissa Care, his aunt Amelia Care and their mum, Karen Parker, to keep his memory alive by helping other men find help with their mental health when they need it.

Jo's daughter Millie was Cameron's girlfriend and he worked at their family business, the Window Hub in Staple Hill.

Jo, an advanced nurse practitioner based at Kingswood Health Centre, said: "Standing

on the roof of Africa is something I will never forget, but the journey to get there was far more than just a physical challenge.

"There were moments during that climb where I questioned whether I could go on. Fatigue, cold, and the mental strain all combined to push me to my limits. But it was also in those moments that I found my reason for being there.

"Knowing the cause behind every step gave us strength when we needed it most. It reminded me that while this climb was temporary, the struggles many people face every day are far greater—and often invisible.

"Reaching the top wasn't just about completing the climb - it was about honouring Cameron, raising awareness, and proving to ourselves that even in the most difficult moments, there is a way forward.

"If sharing our story encourages even one person to reach out for help or to check in on someone else, then every step of that climb was worth it."

Jo and Kim thanked everyone who has donated and sent messages of encouragement.

They have an online fundraising page which is still taking donations, at tinyurl.com/3s7ra7ch.

The total raised stood at £3,321 as the Voice went to print.



Jo Robb and Kim Dixon at the summit of Kilimanjaro

TURNERS HEARING CARE BLOG

The sun's out ... but why do my ears feel blocked?

There's something about that first proper spell of sunshine in the UK that lifts the mood, isn't there? The garden starts calling, sunglasses come out, and suddenly everything feels a little lighter.

But interestingly, this time of year is also when I start hearing a familiar phrase in practice:

"My ears feel a bit blocked... I thought it might just be hay fever?"

And sometimes, it is. But quite often, ear wax is playing a quiet (and slightly annoying) supporting role.

Spring brings a few subtle changes that can affect our ears. Warmer air, increased pollen, and spending more time outdoors can all influence how the ear canal behaves. Add in a bit of natural dehydration (we tend to drink less than we think), and ear wax can become a little drier, stickier, and more prone to building up.

Then there's the classic combination: a bit of wax + a bit of pollen-related congestion = ears that feel full, muffled, or just not quite right.

It's not uncommon for people to notice it when they're out enjoying themselves, chatting in a pub garden, on a walk, or wondering why the birds sound slightly less enthusiastic than usual!

Now, a gentle reminder: ear wax isn't the enemy. It's there to protect your ears. But when it builds up or gets a bit stubborn, it can start to affect your hearing and comfort.

This is where professional microsuction comes in. It's quick, precise, and far kinder to your ears than cotton buds (which, as you know, tend to make things worse rather than better).

So if things sound a little muted, or your ears feel blocked as we head into the brighter months, it's well worth getting them checked.

After all, spring is full of lovely sounds, birds, laughter, the odd distant lawnmower...

It would be a shame to miss them. Get in touch with Turners Opticians and book in to see me - I'd love to help you hear clearly again!

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.



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Pre-school work starts

BUILDERS are set to move into the former Frenchay Primary School premises over the coming weeks to start work to transform part of the building into a pre-school and community hub.

The historic building next to Frenchay Common, which dates back to 1842, is being repaired and refurbished as part of a scheme agreed between Frenchay Residents' Association and South Gloucestershire Council to enable it to be adapted for use by the community.

A charity, Frenchay Residents' Education and Community Hub (FRE&CH), was set up in 2024 to lease the old school building from the council and sub-lease part of the premises to the pre-school.

Frenchay Common Pre-school is currently run from a temporary building on the site but will eventually have 50 places, including up to ten for children with special educational needs or disabilities, in the Grade II-listed school building.

A spokesperson for FRE&CH said: "We are delighted that work is finally starting on site after a busy autumn and winter finalising the proposals. The timescales for building are very tight but everyone will do their best to keep on programme for the autumn term."

South Gloucestershire cabinet councillor Adam Monk said: "We're really pleased to see work start to repair and refurbish the former primary school. The new pre-school and community hub will offer a range of education and health and well-being support services available in the heart of Frenchay, delivered by people who know the area better than anyone."

The project has access to £310,000 handed over to the council by developers Redrow as part of a legal deal for permission to build on the former Frenchay Hospital site.

It is likely to need more to finish the project and has already raised more than £20,000 in grants, donations from educational charities and benefits in kind, including unpaid work from lawyers, surveyors and energy consultants.

For more details email fredcomhub@googlegroups.com.



Frenchay head teacher Nicola Dawson and pupils with their new banner

School celebrates stars

A SCHOOL has been given an award to recognise its work to persuade more families to leave the car behind on the school run.

The Modeshift STARS (Sustainable Travel Accreditation and Recognition for Schools) scheme encourages more children and their families to walk, cycle or scoot their way to and from school.

Frenchay Primary head teacher Nicola Dawson said the school developed a unique travel plan, monitored how children get to school and how this changes over time and hold assemblies to help pupils learn about different modes of transport and why they are important.

In recognition of their work the school won the silver Modeshift STARS award for a 'very good' travel plan.

South Gloucestershire Council is planning to introduce an 'school street' scheme on a trial basis to keep cars out of Alexander Road near the entrance during school run times - the scheme was backed by 56% of respondents to a recent consultation, and opposed by 39%, with 5% unsure either way.



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Why do I need Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs)?

It seems like you cannot turn on the TV without seeing Martin Lewis (TV's money saving expert) saying Lasting Powers of Attorney are now more important than Wills. This has raised several questions with readers answered here by John Baden-Daintree, solicitor at local specialists Simpson Solicitors.

What are Lasting Powers of Attorney? Known as LPAs, they are legal documents where you name who you trust to manage your money, pay your bills and to get you the medical care you'd want. They are used if you were become injured or became seriously ill.

None of us wants to be a burden, so having LPAs already in place makes it much easier for those you want to support you.

Do you still need LPAs if you are married? YES – otherwise your

other half is likely to face a difficult Court process to prove you would have wanted them to support you

Can I do them myself, without a firm of solicitors? You can but they are quite complicated legal documents, best prepared by lawyers. Martin Lewis has pointed out that 51,000 LPAs were rejected last year. Also, most banks will still require a "Solicitor-Certified" copy.

When should you put LPAs in place? NOW! It must be before you become ill or injured. Martin Lewis did his in his 30s. He understands the problems caused by not having them. Also, the Court takes about 3 months to register them.

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Campaigners set for day of action

GREEN Belt campaigners are planning a walk to raise awareness and funds for their fight against new housing developments.

Members of Save Our Green Spaces-South Gloucestershire (SOGS-SG) will be holding the event as part of the Community Planning Alliance's National Day of Action for Nature, Parks and Green Spaces on April 18.

The announcement comes as government inspectors confirmed when a public examination of South Gloucestershire Council's draft Local Plan, which proposes sites for more than 22,000 homes in the district over the next 15 years, will take place.

SOGS-SG will hold a fundraising walk on April 18 starting at 11am from Warmley Station Waiting Room Café. The walk will take in Warmley Forest Park and Siston Common, before arriving at the old Shortwood Golf Course, near Mangotsfield, where 1,600 new homes are proposed to be built in the Local Plan, at around 12.15pm.

A spokesperson for the group said: "The purpose is simple: to demonstrate, visibly and collectively, that people everywhere care deeply about the natural world and want to see it protected and restored."

"South Gloucestershire Council's Local Plan proposes to build many thousands of new homes on Green Belt at Emersons Green, Shortwood, Warmley, Oldland Common, Bitton and Hanham, with neighbouring authorities also planning huge developments around Saltford, Keynsham, Hicks Gate and Brislington."

"If all of these developments are given approval then our green belt and open spaces will be severely impacted."

"SOGS-SG are extremely concerned about the impact that mass housing developments will have on our semi-rural communities and villages."

"Our infrastructure simply cannot cope with housing on this enormous scale."

The group says the council's current plans are flawed because



Members of SOGS-SG and residents who protested in January against plans for homes at Shortwood

the council's own data shows three times the number of potential jobs in the north of the district than in the east, where most new homes are proposed, potentially adding thousands of extra daily car journeys on the already congested A4174.

The Planning Inspectorate has announced that it will hold 15 days of hearings to examine the council's draft Local Plan in public in the council chamber at Kingswood Civic Centre, between May 19 and July 16.

Each set of hearings will be held over three days between

Tuesday and Thursday, with one in May and the rest in June and July.

SOGS-SG have employed a planning consultant to represent the group at each day of the hearings.

They are aiming to raise £15,000 towards their representation and had raised more than £7,000 as the Voice went to print.

The fundraising page is at gofundme.com/f/sogs-sg, and more details of the walk can be found on the SOGS-SG website and Facebook page.

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Council to remove website ads

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council is set to axe adverts on its websites after inadvertently promoting fish and chips on its healthy lifestyles page.

The website also had ads for air travel on its climate emergency page, and luxury ship cruises on a page for housing benefits claimants.

The council has admitted the ads were 'misleading and inappropriate'.

Officers have recommended scrapping all advertising on the authority's public-facing websites when it moves to a new content management system (CMS) this year.

A report to the cabinet said: "The content of adverts displayed on our websites is an uncertainty since we do not control exactly what is shown to users (although we do exclude certain categories of adverts).

"Adverts shown might not always accurately support the council's values.

"For example, adverts have previously appeared that promote air travel on our climate and nature emergency page, fish and

chip shops on our healthy lifestyles' website, and cruises on a page for users claiming Housing Benefit.

"In 2026, our main public websites will move to a new CMS platform. As a result some design changes will be needed.

"Incorporating advertising would significantly limit the flexibility of this design and is expected to negatively impact overall user experience.

"Since most of the advertising is national and multinational companies, the removal of advertising would reduce confusion about whether the advertising links to council services.

"The financial impact is very low."

Officers included 'screengrabs' in the report showing examples of inappropriate adverts on its three websites that carry them – its main site, healthy lifestyle-focused One You South Gloucestershire, and Glos Life, which provides residents with information and advice on council services.

They include an advert for Marella Cruises at the top of the page for people trying to claim housing benefit. A two-week Caribbean cruise by the operator costs up to £8,938 for two people sharing.

A huge advert for fish and chips, as well one for pub lunches, appeared on the home page of One You.

A promotion for air travel featured prominently next to information telling residents what the authority was doing to

tackle climate change.

The report said councillors approved advertising on our public-facing websites in 2014, to create a new "revenue stream", and appointed the Council Advertising Network (CAN) to handle ad sales and provide technology to display them on its websites.

Officers said: "Before the initial contract was signed, the supplier projected estimated income to

the council in the first year would be £27,425 and this would increase in subsequent years."

They said the actual income for the first year was £4,145.74, rising to a high of £7,245.65 two years later before falling steadily, to £1,788.77 in 2023/24 and £1,301.11 last year.

The report said CAN "admitted to overestimation of income" and clicks had fallen since 2018, a trend accelerated by increasing use of ad-blocking software.

It said: "There are no current arrangements with local businesses to advertise on our website.

"Whilst we can include our own house adverts, for example to promote our resident newsletter and fostering service, these could be promoted through our other existing communication channels such as social media, website homepage promotions, and newsletters."

By Adam Postans, Local Democracy Reporting Service

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The St Augustine's pupil with her poster

Milly wins poster contest

A PUPIL at a Downend primary school has won a competition to encourage other children and their families to pick green travel options when they travel to school.

The Year 5 pupil at St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, saw her poster design promoting green travel chosen from more than 300 entrants across South Gloucestershire to win a council-run competition.

The competition was judged by the council's active travel team, who awarded Milly the first prize - a scooter and helmet.

Head teacher Mark Hilliam said: "We have a strong focus on active travel training for our pupils, and have been awarded 'very good' accreditation from Modeshift.

"Our pupil's message, 'why pollute when you can scooter?' has pride of place outside our school and continues that important focus.

"We are all very impressed with her design."

Charges raise £98,000

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council is making more money than originally predicted from its car parks in Staple Hill, new figures show.

Usage and income data from the four car parks where charges were introduced last May, shared with traders in February, show that the authority expects to make £98,026 from current financial year - about £6,300 more than originally budgeted.

The amount collected at each car park varies wildly from the predictions, with the Page Road short stay car park forecast to bring in £23,407 - more than £8,000 above the initial prediction - and the Page Road/Kendall Road car park forecast to make £38,298 - around £13,400 more than originally expected.

However, two car parks where long-stay charges are in force, at Byron Place opposite Tesco and Haynes Lane, are performing below the council's expectations, with Byron Place expected to bring in £28,221 by the start of April, about £7,000 less than budgeted, and Haynes Lane forecast to bring in £8,099 - less than half the £16,273 originally budgeted.

The Voice reported last month that the council's overall income from charges at 22 of its car parks, is forecast at £557,000 for the 2025-26 financial year - about 30% below the £800,000 target.

The council now forecasts its Kings Chase long stay and short stay car parks, serving the Kingswood shopping centre, will both bring in more money from drivers than originally expected.

However a spokesperson said that precise usage of the car parks was not recorded before charges were introduced, so it is not possible to compare current numbers with last year.

Traders in Staple Hill say business is down by up to 40% since the charges were introduced last May.

The council said: "Crucially, the revenues we have generated are able to relieve some of the ongoing pressure on our budgets."

A further report on the charges will be published after the end of the financial year.

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TWO opticians' practices in Downend and Staple Hill have merged.

Norville & Dobinson in Downend has joined with Dury & Tippet, of Staple Hill, following the retirement of dispensing optician Steve Dury and optometrist Helen Tippet in February.

Last month's Voice reported that Steve, who co-founded the business in 1983, and Helen, who joined in 1992, were handing over to a new team after selling the practice to the Hakim Group of independent opticians in November.

The new owners merged the businesses on March 2, and the Dury & Tippet premises in Fountain Square have now closed.

Its remaining staff moved to Norville & Dobinson in the Willow Centre, Downend Road, with the exception of one employee who retired.

Optometrist Adrian Dobinson now leads a team of optometrists and dispensing opticians at the merged practice, which will continue to be known as Norville & Dobinson.

Opticians' practices merge



Steve Dury, Adrian Dobinson and Helen Tippet outside Norville & Dobinson opticians in Downend

Hakim Group said the merger has taken place "to safeguard the future of independent eye care in the local community," adding: "The merger will allow Dury & Tippet patients to continue to receive high standards of eye care just a short distance away, with only half a mile separating the two practices.

"All patient records have been safely and confidentially transferred to the new premises at Norville & Dobinson Opticians."

Norville & Dobinson has had a presence in Downend for 35 years. Hakim group rescued Norville from administration in 2020 and the local branch joined forces the same year with another long-established independent Downend optician, Adrian Dobinson, who became the director.

Adrian, who has been based in Downend for more than 20 years, said: "All of the team have been really excited for this merger - it's a fantastic

opportunity to combine two practices who value offering a personalised service.

"We're really looking forward to welcoming the dedicated and loyal patients of Dury & Tippet Opticians and can guarantee that their welcome will be a warm one."

Helen and Steve said: "Merging with Norville & Dobinson Opticians will ensure that our patients continue to receive an excellent level of eye care at a practice that is close by, and with some fantastic facilities."

Patients of the merged practice will benefit from its combined 3D OCT scanning and Optomap Ultrawide Field imaging, Zeiss dispensing measurement system, hearing care and expanded range of lenses, frames and contact lenses.

The former Dury & Tippet premises in Staple Hill were rented by the business and have been returned to the landlord.

Norville & Dobinson Opticians | Hearing Care

Norville & Dobinson Opticians is an independent, well known and long established opticians in Downend.

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YOUR Community NEWS

Brought to
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**DOWNEND & BROMLEY
HEATH PARISH COUNCIL**



Sunflower Competition

Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council invites families to take part in the joyful Grow a Sunflower Competition, a fun and creative way to get children excited about gardening! From Monday 6th to Friday 17th April, families can collect free sunflower seeds, soil, and a pot from King George V Pavilion (BS16 6QW), open weekdays from 10am to 2pm. Once your sunflower reaches full height, simply snap a photo and email it to pavilionmanager@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk, including your name and the height of your sunflower. The deadline for entries is 14th September 2026, and the winner awarded a prize for the tallest sunflower will be announced on our Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council Facebook page on 17th September. Let's get growing!



Easter Egg Hunt

Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council, in partnership with Friends of King George V & Badminton Road Playing Fields, invites families to take part in a fun-filled Easter Egg Hunt this spring! From Thursday 2nd to Sunday 12th April, children can follow the trail, find hidden letters, and enter a prize draw to win some Easter goodies. Trail sheets are available to collect from outside King George V Pavilion (BS16 6QW) by the main entrance. The winner will be announced on Monday 13th April via the Friends Group Facebook Page. Happy Hunting!

DOWNEND & BROMLEY HEATH PARISH COUNCILLORS

Downend Ward

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Councillor Janet Biggin
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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

By-election win for Georgina

A BY-ELECTION to find a new member of Downend & Bromley Heath Parish Council has been won by an independent candidate.

Georgina Bennett polled

1,092 votes in the election held on February 24 - almost twice as many as the runner-up, Reform UK candidate Christopher Champ.

A third candidate, Martin Chown, polled 127 votes.

Cllr Bennett stood under the description 'Resident of Downend' in the election, which was held after Conservative James Griffiths stepped down from his position representing the council's Downend ward.

Mr Chown stood without a label.

A total of 1,811 votes were cast in the election, a turnout of 21.28% in a ward with an electorate of 8,511.

There were 11 spoiled ballots.

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 was

held.

Ten of the current parish councillors represent Downend ward, with three representing Staple Hill.

Vacancies on the parish council in the middle of the four-year electoral cycle, which runs until next year, are often filled by a vote of existing councillors, a process known as co-option.

The *Voice* understands that the February by-election took place after a request was made by ten voters from the ward, on behalf of a candidate.

Bridge update

NATIONAL Highways says it expects to have finished work on a key part of the new A432 Badminton Road bridge over the M4 by Easter - and will remove the traffic restrictions on the motorway in May.

The body responsible for the project says the building of the concrete abutments linking the bridge to the embankment either side of the motorway is expected to be finished before the bank holiday weekend at the beginning of April.

In addition to overnight closure of the M4 on the evenings of March 26, 27, 28 and 29 for hard shoulder resurfacing, further overnight closures of the motorway will take place in April and May.

A National Highways spokesperson said: "We have made positive progress on the bridge despite the wet weather in January and February, which has impacted the programme slightly. Despite the weather, the abutment construction has been progressing well and should be completed by Easter, and we are still on target to open the road in spring."

After resurfacing of the hard shoulder in March, the agency will adjust temporary lane positions to allow for central reservation work during April's overnight closures from the 27th-30th, before removing all traffic management from the M4 during the closures on May 26-29.

Diversions via the M32, A4174, A420 and A46 will be in place during overnight closures.

Work is still under way on the earthworks at each end of the bridge - after they are finished, the contractors will move on to lighting, traffic signals, crossing points and surfacing before the bridge is connected to the A432 and A4174 Avon Ring Road.



DOWNEND FOLK&ROOTS SUMMER PROGRAMME 2026



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DOWNEND FOLK & ROOTS PREVIEW

THE SAM KELLY TRIO + LOU SHEPHERD

FRIDAY 17 APRIL 2026

THE top quality folk music continues to flow through South Gloucestershire as Sam Kelly brings his trio to headline Downend Folk & Roots' monthly concert on Friday 17 April, where he will be joined on the bill by a fast-rising local star.

Sam Kelly is a BBC Radio 2 Folk Award winning musician, singer, songwriter, and producer from Norfolk. Described by legendary folk broadcaster Mike Harding as "one of my favourite singers ever" and by Cara Dillon as "an amazing singer with so much soul", Sam has become one of the most accomplished and well-respected performers on the UK folk scene, with an impressive discography of four full length solo albums, as well as numerous other collaborative works.

As an accompanist on guitar and Irish bouzouki, his portfolio

includes playing with the likes of Kate Rusby, Seth Lakeman, John McCusker, Phil Beer, and Katherine Priddy. Sam has become respected by peers and audiences alike as a unique and innovative arranger and pioneer of traditional folk song. Joining Sam on stage at Downend will be long-term collaborator Jamie Francis and one of the finest musicians on the UK folk and roots scene at the moment, Archie Churchill-Moss.

Opening the evening will be Bristol-based contemporary folk singer Lou Shepherd. Lou is a rising folk singer-songwriter whose emotive voice - "moss-soft and sun-tinged" (Bristol 24/7, FATEA) - has confirmed her place as one of the UK's most exciting emerging folk artists. With her compelling storytelling rooted deeply in nature and connection, Lou's poetic lyrical perspectives, immersive soundscapes and commanding melodies cast 'Laurel Canyon Shadows', with the



'quiet determination of a seedling seeking the light'. (Bristol 24/7, FATEA).

Tickets for the concert, which takes place at Christ Church Downend on Friday 17 April 2026, are available online via downendfolkandroots.com or from Downend Cards & Gifts (cash only). They are priced at £15 each in advance or £17 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.

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 OFTEN HERD + GREEN TREE

FRIDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2026

IN some parts of the South West, it has rained for more than 50 days this year. It certainly feels as though Bristol has been drenched for most of 2026, and it's all been a bit miserable really. What we need then, more than anything, is a bit of sunshine.

There's probably some kind of ridiculous irony that it takes a four-piece from Newcastle to bring some warmth to Downend, but that is exactly what Bluegrass northerners, The Often Herd, do.

And there is nothing that invokes the last rays of a sleepy summer sun quite like the duel between mandolin and fiddle, the frog-on-a-log ribbit of a double bass and a guitar that simply sings. The Often Herd have all of these and magical harmonies too. The darkest days are instantly brightened.

This is the first date of a nationwide tour and it seems to be an opportunity to try out some new, yet to be recorded, songs and re-visit an old favourite, or two.

Casablanca is a recent-ish single and dust motes dance through sunbeams straight away. Evan Davies' mandolin and Niles Krieger's fiddle link arms and do-si-do effortlessly while Rupert Hughes' voice is all laid-back '70s ease. It's the sound of well-worn denim, soft to the touch.

Krieger's fiddle floats gently over so much of this evening. It's

lazy and gentle on Remember My Name, nudging a bitter-sweet Davies memory into the light. Eventually it sweeps in, shoves any hint of melancholy to one side, and wipes the slate clean. On Sycamore Gap it is plaintive, aching with loss, while it swoons over the waltz-y Hold On.

It is the perfect mix between American, country-tinged good times and the lush green of an English pastoral idyll (maybe not that surprising as the American Krieger has lived in England for fifteen years). A version of Bill Monroe's Working on a Building is flecked with sawdust while raising gospel rafters. The fiddle carving light and hope. Solos from everyone else add gorgeous decoration and Hughes sings his heart out. Bluegrass magic in the most English of churches.

Dylan's You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go bounces along to Sam Quintana's bass, the perfect foundation for more intricate solos from Davies' mandolin, while Inner Peace struts along a high wire, mandolin and fiddle recklessly chasing one another, just for fun.

A cover of Lindisfarne's Meet Me on the Corner is comforting like an old friend. Hughes almost shimmers in '70s heartthrob soft-focus, singing from the hazy pages of Look In. The fiddle and mandolin are simply astonishing as Americana invades Englishness, once again. Each player steps forward to show what they've got



but this isn't to show off, it's more a celebration.

New songs, many of which go un-named, show that The Often Herd aren't satisfied with just (!) being a Bluegrass band. There are hints of "proper" country music, of swirls of folk and gauzy pop. Evergreen Blues, for example, is a stately waltz, filled with wit and charm, that explodes as Krieger pushes against the canopy overhead, letting in so much light.

By the end of their set there's dancing in the corners, whooping and hollering and dazed smiles on every face. And maybe, just maybe, there's some sunshine on the horizon.

The support for the evening was local duo Green Tree. Abbey and Rory from high-energy Bristol Bluegrass foot-stompers, Old Baby Mackerel, thank us for coming to see "weirdo American folk music" and then play a lovely set of, um, weirdo American folk music.

Except, of course, it's not that weird at all - unless you consider writing a Bluegrass song about queueing in the Tesco in Staple Hill as strange (I Always Back the Wrong Horse).

Abbey's voice is wonderfully sweet, on Take me to the Sea, while her mandolin chugs away, allowing flash guitar solos from Rory. There's infectious exuberance and an assuredness that only the very best duos have, the ones that really know about this stuff. The instrumental, Where the Gnomes Live, taken from their latest EP, is just great. Two instruments, gloriously inter-locked, playing for the sheer delight of it. Another band finding light in the dark.

If the time since Christmas has been water-logged and miserable then a hefty dose of Bluegrass is exactly what is needed. Downend Folk & Roots, as it so often does, delivered in spades.

Words: Gavin McNamara
Photos: Barry Savell

Come and see

THE Good Friday and Easter activities at Christ Church Downend are an invitation to come and see: come and see what the Easter story is all about, and come and see what being part of a church family is all about.

The Easter story is full of twists and turns, and emotions. On Good Friday morning, we will be walking through the story together in the churchyard for Experience Easter Outside.

Dress up for the weather and bring the whole family: this is suitable for all ages. Note that there is uneven ground in the churchyard.

We will start off in the church, and end with hot cross buns.

In the afternoon of Good Friday, we will revisit the story in a quiet reflective service.

On Easter Saturday at 8pm, join us for a special vigil, starting outside the church by the fire, and continuing in the church, including communion.

On Easter Sunday, it will be time to celebrate, with a choice of a traditional communion, which takes place at the Church Centre, Quakers Road, or a contemporary style communion at Christ Church itself. This is planned with children in



mind, and will end with an Easter egg hunt.

We won't just be re-telling the story: there will be opportunities throughout these services to reflect: what actually happened, and what

does it mean for me?

So come and see!

Anita Dobson

ADVERTISING FEATURE

New Elim Church launched in north-east Bristol



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A NEW chapter in Bristol's faith community is unfolding as King's Elim Church establishes a growing presence in the north-east of the city, marking Elim's first new church plant in Bristol for many years.

The initiative is being led by Pastor Paul James, who returns to the city after more than two decades pastoring one of Elim's flagship Bristol churches and a further eight years leading a large, multinational congregation in London. His return is driven by a renewed vision to see local communities reconnect with faith, worship, and one another.

Speaking about the launch, Pastor James said he has observed "a renewed interest among people across the city to gather in a faith-centred environment where worship is joyful and freely expressed." He added that this long-held vision has now become a reality, describing the opportunity to plant a new Elim church in Bristol as "a genuine privilege".

The church was established in Kingswood in 2023, following months of prayer and planning by a committed group of leaders who shared a desire to see their community encounter the love of God. From the outset, Sunday services attracted steady attendance, with visitors describing the atmosphere as warm, inclusive, and spiritually engaging for people of all ages and backgrounds.

As numbers have continued to grow, King's Elim Church has recently moved to a new Sunday venue at Vincent Court on Soundwell Road, providing greater capacity and facilities. Leaders say the move reflects not only numerical growth but a deepening commitment to serve the surrounding community in practical and meaningful ways.

King's Elim Church forms part of Elim Pentecostal Churches, a global movement with a strong presence across the UK and beyond. The movement is known for its emphasis on personal faith, community life, and creating spaces where people can experience what it describes as the transforming love and power of God.

At the heart of the church's message is the Christian belief that God's love and forgiveness are available to everyone, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, remembered by Christians each Easter.

Sunday services begin at 11am, with people gathering from 10.30am for refreshments and conversation. Services feature live music, vibrant worship, and a Bible-based message offering hope, purpose, and assurance. As a Pentecostal church, there is also an expectation that God's presence is active and life-changing.

Looking ahead, King's Elim Church says it is eager to build strong relationships within the local area and to be a positive, visible presence in the community it serves. Residents are warmly invited to visit, connect, and explore faith as the church continues to grow and establish its roots in north-east Bristol.



Crazy Minister!

HAVE you ever done anything slightly crazy? I think for me the answer to that question is, yes, all too often. I am a bit impetuous and often speak or even act before I've really thought things through. Rather than foot AND mouth disease, I think I have foot IN mouth disease!

Just at the moment I'm anxious about a commitment I've made. The church (URC) are giving me a sabbatical, time away to reflect. I've committed to a cycling pilgrimage from Lindisfarne to Iona and then down the Hebrides Islands to catch a ferry to Ireland, and then through various pilgrimage sites in Ireland eventually to Dublin, where I will see the 'book of Kells' A very ancient biblical text that was written by the early monks who brought the Christian Faith

from Ireland to Scotland and on to England. I'll be riding alone for around a month, camping wild, carrying all my stuff... and I'm not quite sure where I am going to wash.... Or indeed do 'other' things! Now you are perhaps imagining that I am a fit young man.... NO. I'm 62, with a minor heart condition and although I have cycled long distances before.... I've always slept in comfortable beds... and eaten from lovely restaurants. (I will eat at restaurants if I can find them, and I'm not so smelly they don't let me in!) To make it even more crazy I'll be carrying a fold up guitar so I can write some bold adventurous hymns on route, probably about hobgoblins and midges and wild winds blowing tents away!

Frankly I think sometimes I may have taken leave of my senses! Many of my 'friends' agree. So how will I make it through? Truth is, I don't know. It is an adventure, a pilgrimage, where although

planning my route, scouting out places I can rest and eat is important, I don't really know what will happen. I feel anxious and excited in equal measure! In effect I will be truly living the uncertainties of life for a few weeks. I can't control the weather, I can't control the wind. I don't know how my body will manage. I can look at the hills and roads, but I don't know what I will encounter. I will have to take each step at a time, or rather.... One pedal at a time. I realise this is a cliché, but that is perhaps the most important thing about life. None of us know what tomorrow brings, so my message is simple. Make sure you live the days you have. Love with a passion, all the people around you. Open your eyes to all the beauty and when the wind or struggles blow hard in your face. Take the hand of a friend, and keep going, one step, one breath at a time. I'm hoping that as I peddle I will find that I am not really alone, that as the Celtic blessing goes, the road will



rise to meet me, the wind will be always at my back, the sun shine warm on my face, and the rain will fall soft on the fields around me...and most important of all, that God will hold me, and indeed you in the palm of His hand.

Finally of course, all the churches in this area send you and your loved ones, Easter Blessings.

Join us for Easter at Christ Church

Experience Easter Outside!

Good Friday 3rd April at 10.30am at Christ Church

Come and join the story - suitable for all ages

Journey to the Cross

Good Friday 3rd April at 2pm at Christ Church

Reflective service with traditional hymns

Easter Saturday Vigil

Easter Saturday 4th April at 8pm at Christ Church

Reflective service with traditional hymns

Easter Day Communion

Easter Sunday 5th April

9.15am at Quakers Road: Traditional Easter Service

10.30am All-Age at Christ Church: Celebration Service with coffee and egg hunt!



Why the cross?

I AM sure you recognise the symbol as a widely used representation of Christianity. We see them on or in church buildings, on Bibles, and on chains around people's necks. But have you ever thought how strange it is to have a form of execution as your logo or chosen jewellery bling? Surely Christians could have chosen something a little more pleasant. Why a cross?

You may know that it was upon a cross that Jesus Christ, the key figure in Christianity, was unjustly crucified. But we don't look at the cross to simply remember how Jesus died, but why he died. As when we see the rows of gravestones in Normandy, we remember not only that so many died, but that they gave their lives for the sake of ours. The cross is all about God's plan to save us.

You see, the Bible teaches that none of us are good enough for God. He is pure and just and we are accountable before him for the wrongs we do and the rights we fail to do (our sin). Wonderfully, the Bible also teaches that God is loving and merciful. Through his Son, Jesus, God has provided a way for us to be completely forgiven. Jesus suffered in our place. God poured out his judgement for our wrongs upon his holy Son. One of Jesus' close followers wrote, 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross' (1 Peter 2:24). Therefore, for those who place their faith, trust and hope in Jesus, we can say 'my sins became his, he died in my place, he paid the price and I am forgiven - forever'. That means I have peace with God now, I have a new life in and with Jesus and I have confidence that when I die, I will be with God in heaven.

And how can we be sure of this? Well, this takes us from Good Friday to Easter Sunday and to what I think should equally be on church buildings, Bibles and on a chain around a neck - the empty tomb of Jesus! Jesus'

sacrifice was accepted and he rose to life again! The cross is not the end of the story. Christians do not mournfully remember a leader who died but rejoice in a Saviour who is alive. Because Jesus



defeated sin and death, we may know life with him now and eternally beyond death. Now that is something indeed to remember and celebrate!

Do come and join us at Good News Church and discover more about forgiveness and life in Jesus this Easter. We are a friendly bunch, and you will be very welcome! Or, if you are feeling a little nervous about that, check out our services on YouTube first or contact us for a personal visit. We are here to help.

May you have a very blessed Easter.

Easter Celebrations at



Pendennis
**GOOD NEWS
CHURCH**

Discover why the death & resurrection of Jesus is such Good News

Friday 3rd April

10:30am Good Friday Communion Service

2pm Easter Trail & Tea

Sunday 5th April

Sunrise Walk & Worship (contact us for details)

10:30am Resurrection Day Family Service

Pendennis Good News Church, Pendennis Road, Staple Hill, BS16 5JB. Tel 07721645279

Pendennis Good News Church Easter Trail

Our Easter Trail starts at Page Park Clock Tower where families will receive a trail map. Children will hunt around the park for a laminated paper egg and collect the names of characters from the Easter story. The trail will continue along Clarence Avenue to North Street where crossing supervisors will help you over to Pleasant Road which will lead you to our church building on Pendennis Road.

At the church building there will be free drinks, cakes and cookies for children and adults, an Easter craft, an Easter presentation and the children can exchange the paper egg they found for a chocolate one!

To book a child's place, please text 'Easter Trail' and your name to 07721645279

Celebrate this Easter at Downend Baptist Church

This Easter at Downend Baptist Church we will be remembering the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ who died for each one of us so that we may be forgiven and have

a relationship with the Lord God Almighty, creator and sustainer of all.

We shall be doing this by having our usual Good Friday Communion Service at 10.30 am on Friday 3rd April and an All-Age Easter Celebration Service at 10.30am on Easter Sunday, 5th April.

All are welcome to join us at both these services. In addition, this year, we are inviting children currently in Reception to Year 6 to join us for our Easter Fun Day from 9 am to 3 pm on Easter Saturday, 4th April, when we will be learning about the true meaning of Easter through games, cooking, crafts and music.

We would love to see as many children as possible. The activities are free but there is a small charge for lunch. As places are limited you need to register your child for this day.

The QR code on the below poster will take you to the booking form (<https://book.stripe.com/7sY28r34x6HhgxfgDP3VC00>) or phone 07429 951224.

We look forward to seeing you this Easter. God bless you all. David




**Pendennis
GOOD NEWS
CHURCH**

Easter Trail
3rd April
Starting 2pm
Page Park Clock Tower
concluding at
Pendennis Good News Church
with activities and refreshments

Pendennis Road, Staple Hill, Bristol, BS16 5JB



**Easter
Fun Day**
For 5-11
year olds

**Music Games
Crafts
Fun Food**

Exploring the real Easter story

**Saturday
4th April
9am-3pm**



**Downend Baptist
Church
Salisbury Road
Downend
BS16 5RA**

Please register as places are limited. Lunch will be provided at a cost of £2.50 per child.

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Big families can ask for extra wheelie bin

LARGE families who might struggle with South Gloucestershire's move to three-weekly black bin collections can apply for a second wheelie bin, council leaders say.

The reduction from fortnightly kerbside collections of non-recyclable rubbish is being accompanied by a rollout of new reusable white recycling bags for plastic, cans and foil, rolls of smaller blue bags for soft plastic, and a nappy and hygiene waste collection.

Council leaders have admitted making mistakes during the transition to a new waste contract seven months ago, which included changes to collection days.

At a council scrutiny commission meeting in March, Paul Hughes (Con, Bitton & Oldland Common) asked if the authority had "modelled the impact on vulnerable residents and larger households" of the

change to three-weekly black bin collections.

Cabinet member for communities Sean Rhodes (Lab, Kingswood) said: "Any household that is struggling to manage with the move to three-weekly, even once they've taken on the recycling, there is the capacity for applying for an additional black bin."

"They will be assessed on that, and as long as all of the appropriate levels of recycling and sorting are happening, the option of getting an additional black bin is available to people, as long as they apply through the website."

As part of the new £120 million, eight-year waste contract, the council has taken over waste transfer stations and Sort It household waste recycling centres.

Kerbside collections continue to be outsourced to Suez, which held the previous long-term deal.

The new contract has seen more than 50 Suez staff transfer to the council and more than half of all bin lorries replaced.

Cllr Rhodes said: "I genuinely cannot overstate the amount of work that has gone into delivering transformational change to a service which connects to almost every single one of our residents."

A report to the scrutiny commission said not everyone was aware their bin day had changed when the new contract started last August, despite the authority sending two separate leaflets to every household, as well as social media posts, adverts, and information in One Stop Shops and libraries.

Asked by Cllr Hughes if the council "could have done more", Cllr Rhodes said: "The ideal way of doing it would be 1-2-1 to every household, and knock on every single door to let people know, but obviously that's not

going to happen.

"The simple answer to your question is yes, there are always lessons we can learn to get our comms better."

"Overall a good job was done in terms of getting that information out."

"A considerable change happened."

"Could we have done more? Always, we could do more, absolutely."

Replying to a question by Brenda Langley (Con, Hanham) about collection delays on New Year's Eve, Cllr Rhodes said high levels of staff sickness, combined with an "unprecedented" rise in cardboard from home deliveries, meant extra rounds could not be made.

He said: "Maybe we should have had a better handle on that, but it was at a level that we genuinely didn't expect."

By Adam Postans, Local Democracy Reporting Service

NEWS: CONTACT US AT: NEWS@DOWNENDVOICE.CO.UK

Your black bin collections are changing



Find your new three-weekly collection day and set reminders in the council app.



southglos.gov.uk/app



Glosters' stand remembered, 75 years on

APRIL marks the 75th anniversary of one of the most celebrated - and costly - battles in the history of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

The last stand of the Glosters at the Battle of the Imjin River during the Korean War in 1951 helped save the city of Seoul from invasion by a huge force of Chinese soldiers - but came at a cost of 59 men killed in action and 522 taken prisoner, with a further 34 dying in captivity before the end of the war in 1953.

The Glosters were an Army infantry regiment headquartered at Horfield Barracks in Bristol, and drew many of their recruits from the city and surrounding area.

Sent to Korea as part of the United Nations force defending South Korea from the North and its Chinese allies, the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment was part of the 29th Infantry Brigade, a force of around 4-5,000 guarding a ford over the Imjin River.

On the night of April 22 the 27,000-strong Chinese 63rd People's Volunteer Army launched an attack, with the aim of sweeping aside the defenders and reaching Seoul by May Day.

Over the following three days, the 750 men of the 1st Battalion fought a defensive battle across a series of positions overlooking the river, against more than 10,000 Chinese regular troops, becoming increasingly isolated and eventually surrounded on Hill 235, which would become known as Gloster Hill after the battle.

While other units of the 29th Infantry Brigade managed to withdraw, attempts to relieve the Glosters and help them break out failed due to the overwhelming numbers of Chinese troops.

Describing the last stand, the National Army Museum says: "Towards the end of the battle the Glosters were completely surrounded and running out of ammunition.

"Some men were reduced to fighting with bayonets and fists. Against overwhelming odds they held the line against the Chinese for four days.

"When they were finally given the order to break out only 40 men managed to reach safety. The Chinese captured or killed the rest.

"The Gloucestershire



Roll call of Gloucestershire Regiment survivors after the Battle of Imjin River Picture: National Army Museum

Regiment's actions in delaying the Chinese allowed the rest of the United Nations forces time to regroup and block the advance of the enemy towards the South Korean capital Seoul."

Chinese casualties during their frontal assaults on UN positions were estimated at 10,000-15,000, and the 63rd Army was withdrawn from the front line after the battle.

The 1st Battalion's actions earned the Gloucestershire Regiment the nickname the 'Glorious Glosters'.

Commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel James P. Carne, who was among those captured, was awarded a Victoria Cross, along with Lieutenant Philip Curtis, who was killed in a lone counter-attack on enemy machine-guns. Other Glosters received decorations including the George Cross, Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross and Military Medal.

The Gloucestershire Regiment and 170 Battery of the 45th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery were both awarded a US Presidential Unit Citation, the highest American award for heroism and collective gallantry.

Their citation said: "Without thought of defeat or surrender, this heroic force demonstrated superb battlefield courage and discipline.

"Every yard of ground they surrendered was covered with enemy dead until the last gallant soldier...was overpowered by the final surge of the enemy masses."

The Gloucestershire Regiment became part of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire



Harold Griffiths took this picture of an abandoned gun emplacement on the battlefield during a visit after the end of the war.



A US medical helicopter photographed by Harold Griffiths during his time in Korea.

and Wiltshire Regiment in 1994, then part of The Rifles in 2007.

The battle is being remembered by a series of special events at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum in Gloucester Docks during April.

A weekend of talks takes place on April 18-19 - more details can be found online at soldiersofglos.com.

soldiersofglos.com.

Chief executive Matthew Holden said: "Sadly, there are very few remaining survivors of the battle." None are believed to live in the Bristol or South Gloucestershire area.

"Do you have a relative who fought at Imjin? Email news@downendvoice.co.uk.

RETIRED surgeon Harold Griffiths, of Rudgeway near Thornbury, treated Glosters taken prisoner at Imjin after their release at the end of the conflict.

Harold was an officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps, based at the British Commonwealth General Hospital in Kure in Japan from 1952 until the end of the conflict in 1953, after which he was sent to take charge of a casualty collection post in Korea itself, as a company commander for the 26th Field Ambulance.

Born and bred in Monmouthshire, Harold was sent to Japan and Korea during his National Service after finishing his medical training in London.

The hospital in Japan received convoys of wounded twice a week from Korea. The wounded would be treated first at a US or Norwegian MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) in Korea before being transported to Seoul and shipped to Japan.

Harold remembers treating soldiers injured in battles during the later stages of the war, including from the Duke of

Surgeon remembers POWs

Wellington's Regiment during the Battle of the Hook in 1952.

He said: "The only time I got to see the Glosters was when there was a prisoner swap, and they came through and had to be examined before they could be given a clean bill of health to travel on the ship home.

"A lot had got parasitic infections in captivity, and several had got anaemia, dysentery and tapeworm, and were very thin.

"Lt Col Carne, the CO, was given a uniform but he was so thin it sort of hung off him - he was treated particularly badly in captivity.

"The thing that struck me was that most of these people were National Servicemen, all these soldiers who behaved as seasoned warriors.

"We felt very sorry for them - they were shipped into National Service and ended up with some very serious injuries.

"Most of them were very stoical."

After being posted to a base

near Imjin after the war finished, Harold was able to see the battlefield and took pictures of abandoned positions.

He said: "We were situated just north of where the Glosters made their last stand and within a mile of the Imjin river.

"You had to be careful where you walked - there was a certain amount of ordnance still lying in the grass."

After the conflict ended, medical staff were still kept busy treating soldiers for a variety of illnesses and injuries.

They included haemorrhagic fever, a severe and often fatal virus. Anyone suspected of having the disease was evacuated by US helicopters, which would later become familiar to millions of TV viewers through the American Korean War drama MASH, because they would not survive long enough to be taken to hospital by land and sea.

After the end of his service Harold returned to the UK and became an orthopaedic surgeon in London and Glasgow before



Harold Griffiths

moving to Bristol, where he was based at Southmead and Frenchay hospitals until he retired.

He was on the Army's reserve list for two years and transferred to the Territorial Army, commanding the field hospital in Keynsham for several years.

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Charity wants to help more people like Claire

A SOUTH Gloucestershire charity that helped a Mangotsfield mum after she was diagnosed with a rare condition is appealing for more people to help support its work.

Claire Reynolds' life changed overnight in 2017, at the age of 35, after finding out she had a rare and degenerative neurological condition, Spina Cerebra Ataxia-17.

The condition turned what had been a typical life for Claire, husband Dave and their two children into one filled with uncertainty.

Claire looked for emotional and social support and found Paul's Place, a charity dedicated to supporting and enhancing the lives of disabled people that was based in Coalpit Heath at the time but has recently moved to a new, bigger base in Yate.

Paul's Place was established in 1995 when a group of physically disabled adults got together to create a social club that they could access, and named in honour of one of its founders who died before the club opened.

Over the last 30 years Paul's Place has evolved into a week-day service supporting around 100 disabled adults each week, and up to 30 per day.

It provides social activities aimed at connecting people, reducing isolation, improving health and well-being, and giving people the opportunity to develop new skills, enjoy new experiences and live life to the full.

A Paul's Place spokesperson said: "Shortly after joining, Claire found a welcoming community and a range of programmes that became a beacon of hope for her

and her family.

"Paul's Place helped her maintain confidence, purpose, and connection, even as her condition progressed.

"Claire loved arts, crafts and music sessions, and accessible day trips, all of which brought her joy, independence, and a chance to express herself.

"She especially treasured pamper days, which made her feel herself again.

"When her condition became worse, she lost her ability to walk and speak. Claire and her family found this extremely hard. But they knew that when she was at Paul's Place, she was safe, cared for and enjoying her life.

"Sadly, Claire passed away in 2023. It was devastating as everyone thought she had more time."

Dave said: "Paul's Place was a special place to Claire - she was able to be herself, have fun, and always talked about her day when she returned home.

"It was particularly great seeing her return home after a pamper day at Paul's Place, looking glamorous.

"Her time at Paul's Place gave me some time to myself and helped me to carry on working. As a family, we will always be grateful."

The charity moved to its new home, Paul's Place Hub in Shire Way, Yate, last year and is now looking for regular donors so it can help more people like Claire.

Head of fundraising Kayley Waller said: "It will make sure support is available for those who may need it one day, perhaps you or someone you love.

"By contributing regularly, you will help Paul's Place reach more people with their support



Claire Reynolds, who found support at the charity Paul's Place

and when they need it most.

"Together, we can help disabled people rebuild confidence, discover new goals, and live life to the full."

For more information about Paul's Place and to make a donation, visit www.paulsplace.org.uk.

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Young engineers' festival

MANGOTSFIELD School students had a taste of the challenges and rewards on offer to engineers on a visit to a Bristol company.

The school's design and technology department took 29 Year 8 pupils to Babcock International's Stoke Gifford base for a day of activities including bridge and boat building challenges.

The Festival of Engineering event in March included software and electronic engineering tasks, driving robots and welding using cutting-edge virtual reality headsets.

Head teacher Hetty Blackmore said: "The students got a chance to speak to a range of representatives from engineering firms, as well as an opportunity to explore the Babcock General Logistics vehicle during its first ever visit to the site.

"The students performed brilliantly, excelling in their bridge designs, which beat many of the other schools' efforts. It was a hugely informative and inspirational day."



Mangotsfield School students took part in challenges at Babcock International

World of work

DOWNEND School sixth form students have been taking part in a wide range of work placements, both in person and virtually.

A work experience week for Year 12 students gave them the chance to explore possible future careers and gain some valuable real-world experience for their CVs.

Head of sixth form Kate Long said: "Many students chose placements linked to their future ambitions."

"Aspiring vets spent time at organisations such as Vets4Pets and Chew Valley Animal Park, gaining hands-on experience with animals and learning from professionals in the field.

"A number of students hoping to go into teaching completed placements in local primary schools, including Tynings, Bromley Heath, Lyde Green and Blackhorse Primary, where they supported lessons and worked closely with staff and pupils.

"Students interested in healthcare careers also had exciting opportunities. Several spent time in hospitals, including Bristol Children's Hospital, where they were able to shadow cardiologists, physiotherapists and other staff. These placements offered a valuable glimpse into the fast-paced and rewarding world of healthcare."

Students with an interest in business and finance were given placements with Bristol companies including McCanns and Focus Accountancy.

Some had virtual placements with national organisations, including EDF Energy, Airbus and the Woodland Trust.

Ms Long said "We are extremely grateful to all the organisations who welcomed our students and supported their development.

"These opportunities make a real difference to young people as they begin shaping their future pathways.

"If you or your organisation would be interested in offering work-experience placements in the future, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact the school."

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Working Open Morning

Friday 24th April

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WHAT'S ON LOCALLY

April 1

■ **JOURNEY THROUGH THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM**, Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 2-4pm and 7-9pm. Free drop-in event, refreshments included.

April 1

■ **MOTHERS UNION** meets at Christ Church Downend, 2.15pm. Worship, friendship, refreshments, talk, fundraising for good causes. Non-members welcome.

April 1

■ **SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE MINES RESEARCH GROUP** meets at the Miners Institute, Badminton Road, Coalpit Heath. Talk: Miners, Accidents, Diseases, and (no) Compensation, by Rev Roy Crew, starts at about 8.15pm (following AGM at 7.30pm). Non-members welcome - £4 each (cash).

April 2

■ **EASTER THURSDAY CHURCH**, Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 11.15am-noon. Refreshments from 10am.

April 3

■ **EASTER MUSIC** in Fountain Square, Staple Hill, 11.30am-noon, presented by Staple Hill Salvation Army band. Preceded by all age worship at Salvation Army in Broad Street, 10-11am. All welcome, coffee and hot cross buns afterwards.

April 3

■ **EXPERIENCE EASTER OUTSIDE**, all-age walk through the Easter story, Christ Church Downend, 10.30am. Hot cross buns served. Followed by Journey to the Cross at 2pm - reflective service.

April 4

■ **EASTER VIGIL** at Christ Church Downend, 8pm - creative experience with communion starting in churchyard around the fire, before moving into the church.

April 5

■ **TRADITIONAL EASTER SUNDAY COMMUNION** at the Church Centre, Quakers Road, 9.15am, followed by all-age Easter communion 10.30am at Christ Church Downend, with Easter egg hunt.

April 5

■ **EASTER SUNDAY ALL-AGE**

WORSHIP at Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 10-11.15am.

April 10

■ **GOLDEN OLDIES CONCERT** in the David Baker room at the Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Oldbury Court, 1-2pm. Tea and coffee served from 12.30pm. Retiring collection - suggested donation £2.

April 12

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

April 14

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

April 16

■ **DEMENTIA CAFE AT WARM SPACE**, Christ Church Downend, 11am-1.30pm with full hot meal. Also hot meal on 1st Thursday of month; live music from Music Train, with soup & roll lunch, on 2nd & 4th Thursday of month. Free.

April 18

■ **COFFEE MORNING AND TABLETOP SALE**, Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 10am-noon. Coffee, cake and bacon rolls.

April 18

■ **BRISTOL MALE VOICE CHOIR CONCERT**, with guest soprano Jennifer Peck, Saturday April 18th at St Augustine's Church, Boscombe Crescent BS16 6QR at 7.30pm Tickets £10, available from Church Office 0117 9833939 and BMVC concert secretary 07956392612. Refreshments available during interval and after concert.

April 19

■ **FRENCHAY 10K RACE** from UWE Glenside campus, Fishponds, to Snuff Mills, Vassalls Park, Frenchay Village and Blackberry Hill. Starts 11am. Raising money

for Bristol Mind, 1625 Independent People and Freewheelers emergency volunteer service. More details and entries at frenchay10k.co.uk.

April 20

■ **DOWNEND SENIOR FILM CLUB**, Christ Church Hall, North Street, 2pm. Film: Maria (12), the story of opera singer Maria Callas, starring Angelina Jolie. Carers welcome, easy access. Refreshments £4. More information from 0117 435 0063.

April 23

■ **FRIENDS OF HILL HOUSE PARK** public meeting at hall behind Aspirations, South View, Staple Hill, 7-9pm. All welcome. More info friendssofhillhousepark@gmail.com.

April 25

■ **RNLI DOWNEND AND KINGSWOOD BRANCH COFFEE MORNING**, Staple Hill Methodist Church, 10am-noon. Bric a brac and cakes on sale. All welcome. More details from tonibawdon@gmail.com.

April 26

■ **CAR BOOT SALE**, Mangotsfield School, Rodway Hill, 10am-1pm. £5 per car, £10 per van, £1 entry per adult. Raising money for a new school minibus! More details on Friends of Mangotsfield School Facebook.

April 26

■ **MESSY CHURCH** at Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 4pm. Craft based afternoon for all the family, including shared meal. More details from 0117 956 9733.

April 27

■ **CAMEO CRAFT-BASED EVENING** open to all, Staple Hill Salvation Army, Broad Street, 8pm. Different craft activity each month, with expert help. More details from 0117 956 9733.

April 28

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

April 30

■ **HOME-START** Bristol & South Gloucestershire training course for volunteers to support families with under 5s starts at The Greenway Centre, Southmead, every Thursday for four weeks, 9.30am-2.30pm. More details at www.homestartbsg.org.uk, email admin@homestartbsg.org.uk or call 0117 950 1170.

April 30

■ **BROMLEY HEATH PROBUS CLUB** for retired and semi-retired people, free taster coffee morning at Downend Assembly Hall,

Salisbury Road, 10am. More details at www.bromleyheathprobus.org.

May 25 & 26

■ **TOOLS FOR SELF RELIANCE, BRISTOL** Massive Tools Sale Find yourself a bargain, pre-loved refurbished Hand and Electrical Tools for carpentry, plumbing, engineering, sewing, gardening and more.... Sunday May 25th and Monday May 26th 2026 11am to 4pm At Kingswood Heritage Museum, Tower Road, Warmley, BS30 8XT Donations of tools welcomed www.tfsr.org

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 9608935 for more details.

■ **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, Overdale 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 peter.a.bruce@gmail.com 07527-118586

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

Whats On at Downend Library

Free Activities for Primary school aged children at Downend Library:

Wednesday 8th April, 2.20-3.30pm - Treasure Hunters! Free drop-in craft activity
Monday 13th April, 10.30 - 11.30am - Ancient World Lego Challenge!
Free drop-in Lego Activity Age 4+
All Children must be accompanied by an adult

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

■ 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** meets at the Assembly Hall, Salisbury Road, on the third Tuesday of every month at 9.45am. Speaker at 10.30am. Non Members welcome, £3 including tea/coffee.

■ **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, Overdale Road. New members always welcome. For information see website at www.lincombebarncameraclub.co.uk or email lincombe.barn@gmail.com.

■ BEGINNERS AND REHAB PILATES (GP referral qualified, Tuesday 18:15

£8 per session. Pendennis Church, Staple Hill. Message Samantha on 07736309272 for more information.

■ 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 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: davidhrynan@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 at purplewellies@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, Cossham 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

Continued on next page

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 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 tap, 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 Aboseh 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.

by Mel Woolley, Local Growth
Officer for Wiltshire and Avon Scouts

Adventure, opportunity and community: these are what Scouting makes possible

LAST month I had the chance to visit Woodhouse Park Activity Centre while attending the Squirrels and Beavers Adventure Days, where hundreds of young people from across the area came to experience outdoor adventure.

I was given a tour of the site by the centre manager, Andy Scully, and spent time speaking with volunteers who help make these experiences possible.

Hidden among rolling countryside and woodland near Almondsbury, Woodhouse Park is an incredible space for young people to challenge themselves and experience the outdoors. Set among beautiful grounds and even home to a magnificent 450-year-old oak tree, the centre offers a huge range of activities.

Young people can take on the climbing wall, tackle Jacob's Ladder, or try the centre's new snow tubing slope. Campfire areas are dotted throughout the woodland, and the views across the countryside make it a truly special place for camps and activities.

Over the past five years, the site has been transformed into a thriving hub for outdoor adventure thanks to the passion and dedication of the team who run it. Andy, who lives on site and works closely with staff and volunteers, says his approach is simple: whenever young people or volunteers come forward with an idea or an activity they'd like to try, his aim is to find a way to say "yes."

The centre is also creating opportunities beyond adventure. Through an apprenticeship programme, young people have been able to train and develop careers in outdoor activity leadership. One apprentice has even progressed into a management role on site. A great example of how environments like this can help young people build skills for the future.

Accessibility is a key focus. The team work hard to ensure activities can be adapted so that young people with mobility challenges or additional needs can still take part, including experiencing the climbing wall and other activities. =

But what really stood out during the visit was the role volunteers play in making experiences like this possible.

Many adults first get involved in Scouting because their children join a group and then they stay because they discover how rewarding it can be.



Adventurers start young
at Woodhouse Park

One volunteer I spoke to joined when her son was a Beaver. Years later her son is now a Group Lead Volunteer, and she is still involved alongside her husband. When I asked what her favourite part of Scouting was, she didn't hesitate.

"Camping," she said. "And encouraging kids to try new things."

It's a sentiment shared by many volunteers. The County Lead Volunteer, who was also visiting the event, said he often attends activity days like this so he can be reminded of why he does what he does.

Challenge

Watching young people challenge themselves, support each other and achieve things they didn't think they could do is at the heart of Scouting.

During the Adventure Days, even the youngest members of Scouting were getting involved. Squirrels as young as four years old were proudly taking on the climbing wall, supported by volunteers and instructors as they challenged themselves to reach the top. For many, it was their first time trying an activity like this, and watching their confidence grow with every step was a powerful reminder of how Scouting helps young people build resilience and believe in what they can achieve.

The team at Woodhouse Park are keen to welcome more local Scout groups from Avon to experience everything the site has to offer. They have even offered free camping opportunities for Avon groups who might otherwise struggle with the cost of camps, helping ensure that cost is never a barrier to adventure.

Experiences like those taking place at Woodhouse Park show

what Scouting is all about.

Adventure, confidence, teamwork and creating opportunities for young people to grow.

But these experiences only happen because adults give their time to make them possible.

Scout groups are always looking for more volunteers to help create opportunities like these.

From lighting campfires and supporting activities to helping

young people climb higher than they thought possible, volunteers are the people who make Scouting happen.

If you've ever looked at places like Woodhouse Park and thought "that looks incredible," you could be part of it.

Volunteering in Scouts isn't just about supporting young people; it's also about being part of the adventure yourself. Whether it's helping at weekly meetings, joining camps and activities, being on a trustee board or sharing skills and hobbies, there's a place for everyone.

Because Scouting isn't just for young people it's for the adults who help make the adventure possible too.

Want to be part of the adventure? Whether that is at the forefront or behind the scenes, Scout groups across Avon are always looking for volunteers. For more information, email volunteer@avonscouts.org.uk

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Easter topper unveiled



The new postbox topper pictured before being put up in Downend

A GROUP of knitting and crochet creatives have unveiled their latest work to brighten up Downend's high street.

The team, led by Ann Wilde with support from Downend Yarn Busters, has created an Easter scene complete with rabbits, chicks, eggs and flowers.

Ann said: "Work started on the daffodils in January, the rabbits were started late January until early March. Then everything was assembled to give a colourful topper to cheer everyone up. The Downend Yarn Busters team provided carrots and small flowers, as well as the base and leaves."

The topper was due to be put up before the end of March.

Sports club grant

HAMBROOK Sports Club has been awarded £30,000 of funding to develop an action plan for climate and nature.

The club, based on Whiteshill Common, had been given the money by the National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund, coordinated by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership, to take steps to reduce its environmental impact.

Chair Naomi Bowler said: "If I said over the bar on a Monday night to the skittlers, 'Let's talk about climate change', they would immediately switch off.

"But talk to them about our winter fuel bills coming in at over £1,200 per month, or the football pitch being massively degraded by hot, dry summers, and they get it.

"There are lots of steps we could take as a club to reduce our impact, and their voices are key in shaping how we approach this."

Governor needed

STANBRIDGE Primary School is looking for a new volunteer community governor.

The school in Stanbridge Road is looking for someone interested in playing an active role in school life and helping shape the futures of our young learners.

A spokesperson said: "To ensure the right balance of perspectives are represented on the

board, we are not currently seeking applications from parents or carers with a child at the school.

"Applicants don't need to have an education background - we welcome diverse skills, perspective and experience from people who can uphold the values of the school."

Responsibilities include helping guide the school's strategic direction, supporting school improvement and providing support and oversight to school leaders.

Anyone interested in the voluntary role should email the school: admin@stanbridgeprimary.org.uk.

Mangotsfield Community Association

MANGOTSFIELD Community Association will now hold its annual spin cycle fundraiser at the Red Lion pub in May.

Renovation works at the pub over Easter mean that the 'Red Lion to Lisbon' event will now take place on Saturday and Sunday, May 2 and 3.

Starting at 10.30am each day, fundraisers will clock up virtual miles on the spin bikes until participants notch up the distance of around 940 miles.

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.



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A local hero: Bill Demmery

JENNY ALCOCK writes about a relative who put his renowned goalkeeping talents to an unusual use – to save a young boy's life in Staple Hill

BILL Demmery was my great uncle.

He was born in Kingswood in 1876. His family had relocated from South Wales to establish a shoe and boot-making business, which operated a factory and shop in Staple Hill.

Boot-making was a significant employment source in the Kingswood area of Bristol.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Kingswood boot and shoe factories employed over 11,000 workers, making it the third largest centre for boot making in the United Kingdom.

From a young age, Billy was involved in the shoe trade. Upon completing his schooling, he was duly apprenticed to become a cordwainer (making shoes from new leather) and cobbler (repairing and altering shoes) in the family business.

However, Billy's true passion lay in football, where he played as goalkeeper for his local amateur clubs, Warmley (1894-7), Staple Hill (1897-8), and Bristol East (1899-1905).

His significant breakthrough came in 1905, when he was signed by Bristol City and made his debut against Manchester United in the Football League.

He went on to play in 32 League games, helping Bristol City achieve their highest ever League finish, reaching the FA Cup Final and finishing in second place.

In 1908 he joined Bristol Rovers, where he played for two seasons.

In his senior career he represented various Welsh clubs, including Aberdare, Treharris, and Douglas, before retiring from the sport in 1919, at the age of 42.

Billy became a local hero when he fearlessly saved the life of a young boy in Staple Hill.



Bill Demmery (top row, second right) in a Bristol City team photo

A local rhyme was commonly sung by children, which went as follows:

The boy was on the tramlines,
The driver rang the bell,
The tram went on to Staple Hill,
The boy to Arnos Vale.

This rhyme would have come true had it not been for Bill Demmery.

A young boy with no road sense was indeed on the tramlines and quite unaware of the approaching tram, on its way to the terminus.

There was no way that the tram could stop in time at the speed it was travelling. It seemed that a tragedy was inevitable.

Whatever could be done? Bill knew what to do. Quickly, he ran out of his shop, delivered one of his famous goal kicks to the boy, and landed him on the other side of the street. Then he ran on behind, narrowly missing the tram!

Already famous as a professional footballer, Bill quickly rose to the status of a local hero and subsequently became a celebrity within the Staple Hill community.

At the end of his football career, Bill returned to Bristol and continued in the shoe and boot

trade until his retirement.

He passed away in 1952 and was cremated at Arnos Vale.

I am indebted to my father's autobiography, "Ralph Pritchard: Memories of My Early Years," for providing the account of William and the boy on the tram lines.



Portrait of Bill Demmery

Downend Community History and Art Project (CHAP) is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation that aims to create a coherent identity for Downend and Emersons Green, built around interesting or significant places, people and events from the past, and run activities to bring history to life for the community.

To get in touch visit www.downendchap.org, email big.gin@yahoo.com or write to CHAP, 49 Overhill Road, Downend, Bristol, BS16 5DS.



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Your views help shape change

KNOWING how broken the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support system is, I have collated views from local parents and schools.

This included a specific 'Coffee with Claire' event and online survey last year, which I shared with the Education Secretary.

I was pleased to receive a letter from her, recognising our community's influence in shaping new significant proposals for improving SEND support.

These involve a complete overhaul of the system - unrecognisable from the failed one where parents have to battle for support for their child - with expert support as a new

standard in mainstream schools, backed by a £3.7 billion investment to expand specialist support.

In the House of Commons, I asked the Education Secretary how local parents and others could help further shape these proposals. She confirmed she wants to hear your thoughts as the next step, and I will organise another local event shortly.

I was also proud to raise the experience of Stoke Gifford mum Christine Lote in the House of Commons. Her incurable stage 4 cancer diagnosis could not be considered when allocating her daughter's primary school place.

The Schools Minister confirmed that a new school admissions consultation will look at this.

I spoke in a debate on health systems in Gaza, calling for our Government to continue to do everything possible to help vulnerable children.

I've been working hard for you across our constituency, with my team and I working on 793 new cases.

I held my latest 'Coffee with Claire' event on crime and anti-social behaviour with Clare Moody, our Police and Crime Commissioner, in Emersons Green.

I believe politics and Parliament should belong to everyone, so was pleased to welcome students from UWE, Coniston Primary



School and those who are home-educated to Parliament.

Locally, I met with South Gloucestershire Council cabinet member Sean Rhodes to discuss real progress on the Hambrook Junction as part of our joined-up work.

Since 2019, two consecutive years of legally safe air quality data has been required for restrictions to end, but not met before now.

I've contacted government ministers to make sure the council have the information they need on next steps if this is now - as we all hope - confirmed shortly.

As the first woman to serve our community in Parliament, I joined an International Women's Day panel on women's experiences in typically male-dominated sectors. There's some real progress, with 40% of MPs women, but still more to do.

It was great to visit Winterbourne Academy for a wide-ranging Q&A session with students.

You can get in touch anytime at claire.hazelgrove.mp@parliament.uk.



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**Kip
McGrath**
EDUCATION CENTRES

The delights of black and white

AS I think I've written in the past, photographers love to try their hands in black and white.

That was the early history of photography, going back to the 1840s, and remained the norm until comparatively recently.

When I was growing up it was standard in newspapers, and colour film was so expensive that it was a lot cheaper to stick to black and white.

All the best photographers mainly worked in black and white. I, and I think many of my fellow club members, still have a feeling that it's more 'respectable'.

The emotion of a photograph can be heightened with monochrome: winter can be made more wintry, for example, and the composition can be seen more clearly without colour to distract.

Lincombe Barn Camera Club's most recent competition illustrated how this can apply particularly to landscapes.

Vincent Reeves's entry, '1st Severn Crossing', also illustrates how well bridges lend themselves to photography, with their curves and dynamic movement towards a vanishing point - in this case as it curves towards a distant Chepstow. This is further enhanced by keeping the rocks of the river bank well in focus.

Roy Shergold is a club member who particularly favours black and white photography, as can be seen from his two offerings here.

'Countryside Winter' summarises a wet day in the depths of winter precisely. Puddles reflecting back the poor light, the trees leafless against a grey sky - in short, a world without colour but full of mood.

Roy's second photograph, 'Succumbed to Age', shows how decrepitude may be enhanced by using black and white, and increasing the contrast between the two. A dead tree stands below a glowering sky with an old wall and an



■ 1st Severn Crossing by Vincent Reeves



■ Countryside Winter by Roy Shergold

abandoned cart wheel in the foreground. The mood and composition precisely reflect the picture's title.

Whether you love colour, want to impress with black and white or just enjoy snapping pics on your phone, we'd love to see you at Lincombe Barn Camera Club.

We're a friendly group who chat about all things photography and get together every other Tuesday from September to June, with



■ Succumbed to Age by Roy Shergold

regular outings during the summer, so there's always something interesting to do.

Lincombe Barn is conveniently located on Overdale Road, with plenty of parking on-site.

More details are on our website, www.lincombebarncameraclub.co.uk, or contact us

on lincombe.barn@gmail.com. **Sid Stace**

BRISTOL u3a

Let's dance!

IN March, Angela Rippon launched a national campaign to inspire everyone in the UK to embrace dance as a way to improve their health, connect with others, and have fun.

Supported by leading organisations such as the Sport and Recreation Alliance, NHS, and Parkinson's UK, its mission is to get more people dancing, regardless of age, fitness level, or experience.

We're fortunate to have several u3a dance groups in our local area: two 'Daytime Disco' groups, one soul music group and three tap

dancing groups.

Tuition is provided at the tap dancing groups but all the other groups are informal - you dance to as many tracks as you like, and sit out the rest.

Don't worry, you don't have to be a "good dancer" to join in - no-one will judge you.

However, we do promise that you'll leave the meeting smiling!

If you are interested in trying one of the groups, send me an email at the address below and I'll reply with the full details.

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 don't have to be a member to attend.

These are usually scheduled from 2-4pm, and in April you'll find us at Orchard Coffee & Bakery in St George on Friday 10th, the Market Café and Lounge in Kingswood on the 14th, the Crafty Egg in Fishponds on the 22nd, Mokka Downend on the 27th and Hillfields Park Community Centre on the 30th. We'll also be at Ivy's Café, Hanham Hall between 10am and noon on the 24th.

If you can't make it to a social, send an email to learnlaughlive@bristolu3a.org.uk if you'd like to find out more about the groups mentioned or u3a in general.

Membership is half-price from April 1.

Council needs balance on religion

SOUTH Gloucestershire Council's recent eNews email on February 18 included an article titled 'Blessed Ramadan', that went on to explain that "Ramadan is a significant period marked by fasting, prayer and spiritual reflection".

Whilst I have no problem with the principle of supporting any members of the South Gloucestershire community, I do find it strange the council didn't also include an article on Lent, a significant 40-day period marked by fasting, prayer and spiritual reflection, starting on Ash Wednesday - which was February 18 this year.

The Al Jazeera news channel, based in Qatar, reported both the start of Ramadan and Lent, so I find it strange and rather disappointing that the council is unable to have a balanced and unbiased approach.

The omission makes the article appear to be an example of political correctness rather than a sincere support for the 1.5% to 1.6% of the South Gloucestershire population who identify as Muslim, as the council is not also expressing support for the 44.1% of residents who identify as Christian.

In future please can we have similar messages of support for all the significant Christian festivals, similar articles for other Muslim festivals and of course the festivals and significant spiritual days for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish and any other faith groups in South Gloucestershire?

Or maybe the council should simply focus on its core activities of providing social services, education, environment and infrastructure, planning and development and fixing all the potholes?

David Quintin

(Retired Baptist minister, writing in a personal capacity)

Tell me your Page Park stories

I'M currently making a film all about Page Park and the surrounding area, where I have a strong local connection.

My great-grandfather was George Gerrish, who owned the big house on the corner of South View and Hill House Road. I lived in South



Two bags of litter collected by Rob Higgins

View as a child up until 1979, before moving to North View, where my mother and brother still live today.

I'm looking for people to interview on camera, telling their stories or memories of Page Park.

I would like to hear from people who use the park for different activities, from running, playing music, bowls or gardening to the artisan markets, walking their dogs and much more.

I would particularly like to hear local people's stories about Page Park and what it means to them.

I have already done some filming in the park, with the council's permission.

Further filming will take place throughout the year: the more people who can contribute to the story of Page Park, the better the film will be.

I'm funding the film myself and hope it will help the Friends of Page Park secure some further funding, and maybe more.

If you'd like to share your story, email info@julianwillmottphotography.co.uk

Julian Willmott

Respect the common

I RECENTLY collected two bags of litter collected from the mountain bike track in the wooded area of Rodway Common.

This covered only a third of the area, and should be of concern to any parents whose children visit this area, as it's their kids who are creating a mess. All the litter was plastic pop bottles, sweet and crisp packets.

It's amazing how many people thank you for picking up litter, however it would be better if it wasn't there in the first place!

If everyone stopped walking past a piece of litter but actually picked it up and deposited in a bin, what a wonderful place this country would be. But all too common is the phrase "It's not mine, I'm not picking up someone else's mess!".

Most users of the common have little

objection to its use for cycling, however it's the complete disrespect for the surroundings and other users that upsets people. **Rob Higgins**

Help local families thrive



A Home-Start volunteer with a mum and child

ARE you a parent or grandparent?

Local charity Home-Start Bristol & South Gloucestershire is looking for new volunteers who have parenting skills.

We support families with under-5s across Bristol and South Gloucestershire who are going through tough times. Volunteers are needed for home-visiting or to help at parent groups, for two or three hours a week.

We currently have a high demand for our services, with several families waiting to be allocated a volunteer.

We're particularly looking for home visiting support in South Gloucestershire.

Families may be experiencing isolation, financial difficulties, physical or mental health issues, multiple births or other challenges, and need extra support while their children are young. Volunteers provide a listening ear, practical help, and encouragement to help give children the best start in life.

One mum said her volunteer left a "big glow in my life".

Volunteers also benefit from giving their time, building their own skills and confidence. They receive free training and are fully supported by our expert staff team.

The next volunteer training course starts on April 30 at The Greenway Centre, in Southmead, running every Thursday for four weeks, from 9.30am-2.30pm.

There will also be a course in October.

Visit www.homestartbsg.org.uk, email admin@homestartbsg.org.uk or call 0117 950 1170 to find out more.

Catherine Potter
Trustee, HomeStart

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More info and booking:

www.mud-pies.co.uk








Sprouts are growing!



A Staple Hill Sprouts session

AFTER a winter break, Staple Hill Sprouts has returned to coincide with the start of spring.

The free after-school gardening and nature club, delivered by Turtle CYP at Staple Hill Community Hub, runs every Thursday from 3.45–5pm, term time only from March through to October.

Open to children aged between six and 11, and completely free, Sprouts gives young people the chance to grow plants, explore the natural world, and pick up skills they'll carry for life.

Spaces are still available, so it's not too late to join.

Hub manager Julie Snelling said: "There's something really special about Sprouts.

"Seeing children outdoors, learning and having fun together — it's a great thing to be part of"

Turtle CYP also runs Terrapins, a free term-time after-school club for children aged from 6–11, every Tuesday between 3.30pm and 5pm, offering sports, games, arts and crafts.

Spaces are available on both clubs — to register your child, contact Barbara at Turtle CYP via email at barbara@turtlecyp.co.uk or call 07510 380596.

Separately, Staple Hill Community Hub is also running its popular Fresh Air & Free Food programme over Easter.

The Hub and the Bean Tree Café in Page Park are providing free light breakfasts for children near the Bean Tree Café on Wednesday and Thursday, April 8 & 9, from 10–11am.

No booking is required — just turn up.

For more about the Hub's services, call 01454 868374 or email hello@staplehillcommunityhub.org.uk.

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Local Slimming World success

Ashleigh relaunches Downend group to help others transform their lives

A LOCAL woman who transformed her own life after losing more than five stone is now on a mission to help others do the same, as she relaunches the Downend Slimming World group at St Augustine's every Tuesday at 5.30pm and 7pm.

Ashleigh's journey began after what should have been one of the happiest days of her life — her wedding day. While she had a wonderful celebration, seeing her wedding photographs left her feeling shocked and unhappy with how she looked. Determined to make a change, she threw herself into attending her local Slimming World group just a few weeks later.

"I was amazed at how much delicious Free Food I could still enjoy with my family," Ashleigh explains. "I never felt like I was missing out, and the weight soon started dropping off giving me the motivation to keep going!"

Ashleigh explains: "What I love about my group I attend as a member is the support I receive weekly both from my consultant and all the friends I've made it really is a judgement free zone!"

Ashleigh reached her target weight just before Christmas and says it transformed not just how she looked but also how she feels and her confidence has soared.

"It really has changed my life and I realised how much I wanted others to feel this way." To join Ashleigh's friendly and supportive Slimming World group call 07948 602404 or come along to groups held every Tuesday 5.30 & 7pm, St Augustine's Church Boscombe Crescent, BS16 6QR



To join Ashleigh's friendly and supportive Slimming World group call
07948 602404

Or come along to groups held every Tuesday 5.30 & 7pm
St Augustine's Church, Boscombe Crescent, BS16 6QR

real food, real support, real results

Thoughts from a new volunteer

It has been a busy and exciting start to the spring season at the Bee Garden, which is part of Downend School where In Bloom are based.

As the weather begins to warm, signs of wildlife returning have already been spotted.

Butterflies, bees and frogspawn have miraculously appeared, bringing plenty of life and activity to the space, taking advantage of the early flowers.

The daffodils and hellebores are looking particularly spectacular at the moment.

The In Bloom men involved with the garden have been working hard over the weeks, clearing areas, tidying beds and preparing the ground for a variety of new plants that will soon begin their growth.

Alongside the gardening work, they have also been getting creative, by making wooden Easter wreaths and bunny decorations.

These handmade items will be available soon to buy, with all proceeds going to support our ongoing work.

With nature already thriving and more planting planned, we are looking forward to a colourful and lively spring season.

As a relatively new volunteer to In Bloom, I want to share some of my thoughts on the experience. Joining in the activities has become

much more than helping to plant flowers or tend beds, it has been a source of purpose, connection and quiet joy in my life.

Being part of a group that cares so passionately about our local environment has made me feel rooted in the community, knowing that even small acts can have a lasting impact.

Working with flowers through every season has taught me to appreciate colour and beauty all year round.

In summertime, displays lift spirits instantly, bringing warmth and life to the High street and surrounding areas.

In winter, when colour is harder to find, the carefully chosen plants offer comfort and hope, reminding me that beauty doesn't disappear, it simply changes.

On a personal level, volunteering makes me feel calm, grounded and proud. Seeing people pause to admire the flowers, or hearing positive comments from passers-by, reinforces the value of what we do.

It reminds me that these shared spaces belong to everyone, and that nurturing them brings people together.

Through this work I feel I am giving something back while also gaining a great deal



Sandra Drakett planting at Christchurch Infant School

myself: a sense of achievement, well-being and connection to both nature and community.

To contact In Bloom visit our Facebook page, downendandbromleyheathinbloom, or email dbhinbloom@gmail.com.

Sandra Drakett

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Last year's winning photo by Kevin Hallett

Friends of Page Park

Photo competition

PEOPLE are being invited to take and send in photos of Page Park - with £125 on offer for the best one.

This year's Friends Of Page Park Photo Competition runs until June 30 and, with the spring weather getting better, organisers say it's a good time to get your camera or phone out.

As well as the cash prize, the winning photo will be on the front cover of the 2027 Friends of Page Park calendar, the group's major fundraising source, which sold out this year.

Another 11 entries will be chosen for the calendar, with pictures picked from across the four seasons.

Competition organiser Colin Bracey said people can enter up to four landscape-shaped images each, which are judged by a panel led by a professional photographer.

Pictures can be enhanced to remove spots and scratches, and made brighter, but should not have colours manipulated. They should not include any people, but can include wildlife in the park.

The competition is open to photographers of all ages - full details of how to enter can be found on the friends' Facebook Page or website, www.friendsofpagepark.co.uk.

Colin said: "We are looking forward to seeing all the entries from our amazing park visitors and community."

Toilets damaged

VANDALS have damaged the disabled toilet at Page Park.

The latest incident in March, in which the plastic wall was damaged by a flame, follows an earlier spate of vandalism last autumn, which led to the toilets being locked at 3pm each day.

The hand wash system in one of the toilets is also broken, although it is not clear whether this was caused deliberately.

South Gloucestershire Council is still planning to lengthen the opening times of the toilets to 7.30am-8pm once the clocks go forward.

Friends of Page Park vice-chair Steph Purser has appealed to visitors to keep an eye on the toilets and report any damage or suspicious activities.

Council dog wardens are also stepping up patrols in the park after an increase in dog waste being left by owners. Offenders can be fined £100.

Volunteer sessions

NEW volunteer sessions to help keep Page Park looking good have been launched.

They take place from 1-3pm every other Tuesday and support the general maintenance of the park, including gardening and cleaning in collaboration with the council's grounds crew.

No experience is needed to join - anyone who is interested can email friendsofpageparkbs16@gmail.com or visit the group's Facebook page to find out details of the next session.

Friends of King George V Playing Fields

THE friends group are delighted to be working in partnership with Downend & Bromley Heath Parish

Council to host the first Easter Egg Hunt at King George V Playing Fields.

You may have already spotted the posters around the community.

Each poster includes a QR code that will take you directly to the Friends Facebook page, where you can download and print an entry form (found in the Featured/Announcements section).

Trail dates are Thursday April 2 to Sunday April 12, with the winner announced on the 13th, on the friends' Facebook page.

We are putting together a lovely Easter hamper for the lucky winner.

If you would like to donate items for the hamper, they would be very gratefully received.

Donations can be left with the parish council team at the King George V Pavilion, or you can email kgvdownend@gmail.com for more information.

Any surplus items will be donated to a local foodbank in time for Easter.

Behind the scenes, the friends group is also working hard to introduce new groups and activities in the park very soon - watch this space for updates!

We always welcome new members and feedback from the community, either via our Facebook page or by email.

Fiona Konteh

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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
Group Times- Friday 7:30am, 9:00 am and 10:30 am

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■ Pictures by Russell Smith

Owl photography around Bristol

PHOTOGRAPHY has always been more than just taking pictures for me, but owl photography has become a real passion.

There's something special about being out early in the morning or late in the evening, standing quietly in the countryside around Bristol, waiting for a glimpse of one of these incredible birds.

The barn owl was the species that truly hooked me.

Seeing one glide effortlessly over a field, almost silently, is an experience that never gets

old.

Their pale plumage and heart-shaped faces photograph beautifully, especially in soft evening light. Getting the shot isn't easy though – it takes patience, knowledge of their hunting routes, and a willingness to come home empty-handed some days.

I've also grown very fond of the little owl. Unlike barn owls, little owls are often active during the day and have a real character about them. I've spent many enjoyable hours watching them perch on fence posts or old trees, tilting their heads as if trying to work me out. Their bold expressions make them one of my favourite owls to photograph.

The short-eared owl is perhaps the most exciting to encounter. Usually seen in open countryside during the winter months, watching one quarter a field in daylight is unforgettable.

It's a reminder of how lucky we are to have such wildlife so close to home.

I use a Canon R5 Mark II with a Canon 100–500mm lens, which allows me to keep my distance and photograph owls without disturbing them.

I am proud to have won several competitions within my local photography club at Downend, which has been hugely encouraging and has helped build my confidence as a wildlife photographer.

Owl photography has taught me patience, awareness, and appreciation for the natural world around Bristol. It's a hobby that slows me down.

For more information about the club, visit www.downendcameraclub.org.uk or come along to the Assembly Hall in Salisbury Road, on Tuesdays at 7.45pm.

Russell Smith

CHRISTINE'S COLUMN

An unexpected soaking

DID you know I have been doing this column for 11 years?

My first one was about gardening, back in April 2015.

It all started when I was secretary of the gardening club at Lincombe Barn: I was secretary for 34 years!

Easter is fairly early this year and in my garden, apart from some daffodils and primulas/primroses,

and a few clumps of pulmonaria scattered around, there is not much out.

Even in the rock garden there are only a couple of groups of grape hyacinths.

That has not deterred me from a visit to a garden centre with Kirsty, my daughter. She was on the lookout for a tall herbaceous plant that would be in flower soon and last for two or three months, as well as an azalea for her mum-in-law's recent birthday.

Strangely enough, I was hoping to find an azalea, too, for part of my dappled shady garden.

Firstly we looked at the

herbaceous stock, with me giving Kirsty advice on the various perennials available, but we could not see anything suitable. Kirsty did grimace as I picked up a plant and flicked off a slug that was on the bottom of the flower pot!

We almost gave up finding the azaleas and then we found them, in an open enclosure protected by a roof.

We began considering which to buy when without any warning we felt some wet in the air and the next minute we were almost drenched – the misting system had come on!

We hurried outside, hoping it

would turn off, but it persistently carried on.

Other customers were amused at how wet we were!

As the water did not stop, Kirsty decided to inform someone and when she returned, the water had stopped and we went back inside to choose a couple of Japanese evergreen azaleas, a purply colour called Konigstein.

After a well-deserved cuppa and a huge chunk of cake in the Lavender Cafe, we were still chuckling to ourselves as Kirsty drove us home.

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BROMLEY HEATH WI

WHAT a fantastic night we had for our March meeting!

Roma came to give her expert advice on painting watercolours, and we had a fun evening recreating a painting of Stonehenge.

It was a very well-attended night, especially as the weather was wet and windy. We had a very enjoyable evening, with some real talent in the room.

The subgroups appear to be very busy at present, with trips to the St Nick's Market and air raid shelter, Highgrove gardens, Six and The Greatest showman all planned for March and April.

We are also looking at extending the groups: one already put forward is a Sunday lunch club, so please message if you would like to join.

Next month's meeting will be on April 9, when we have the Tudor royalty and Tudor queens' wardrobe experience.

We welcome any new members: please email bromleyheathwi@gmail.com if you are interested in joining our friendly group of ladies.

We meet at Bromley Heath junior school, usually on the second Thursday of the month at 7.30pm. Come and see what it's all about!

Jane Hickey

DOWNEND WI

THIS is such a lovely time of year, when everything begins to blossom.

We can finally start enjoying the lighter evenings and - hopefully - drier days, too!

At our February meeting, we enjoyed a fascinating talk from Ian Caskie about the SS Great Britain. It was inspiring to hear how Brunel blended and adapted cutting-edge technologies to create the world's first transatlantic liner - a true marvel of the Victorian age.

Our next meeting is on Tuesday March 31, when Jenny Benson will join us to speak about the Abused Women's Charity.

Looking ahead to April, we'll be dusting off our cowboy hats and giving line dancing a try!

We have a wonderfully exciting year planned, filled with inspiring speakers, creative activities, and plenty of opportunities to connect and socialise.

Other events coming up include Neil from the Blood Bikes Charity on May 26 and Alan Toyne, author of Gorillas in Our Midst, on June 30.

If you'd like to come along and

see what we're all about, you'd be very welcome.

We meet at Christ Church Hall, North Street, Downend, on the last Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm.

As a member, you're free to take part in as much or as little as you like.

Our programme is wonderfully varied, with something for everyone — and it's a great way to meet new people and try new experiences.

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 Spring Supper was a huge success, thanks to the hard work put in by the committee and delicious food provided by AHM Catering.

The quiz certainly tested our knowledge of Bristol!

It was an incredibly sociable evening with good friends and a delicious buffet.

Some of us also attended a very enjoyable Avon Federation Spring Event in Portishead. The speakers were Briony May Williams, a contestant on the Great British Bake Off, and Stephanie Millward MBE, a Paralympic gold medallist swimmer.

A number of our members also attended the World Day of Prayer, an international movement of women.

In April our speaker, on the wonderful topic of Land Girls, is Fiona Warin.

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 the secretary at FrenchayWI@gmail.com.

Linda O'Carroll

STAPLE HILL WI

NOW we are entering the Easter Season, which is a very important and meaningful time of year for many people; for others, it heralds a time of Easter rabbits and lots of chocolate!

For our Easter meeting this year we have been promised another Easter surprise craft evening, but at the moment it is "Top Secret".

Last year we made Easter

bonnets, which we thoroughly enjoyed - and surprised ourselves with our imagination.

We have also made 213 poppies to send off to the Standing with Giants project.

In the middle of March we held another of our charity coffee mornings at Staple Hill Methodist Church, which was another successful event.

For our monthly walk this month we met at Dyrham Park for a walk around their beautiful grounds.

This was a complete change for us. It was a beautiful day with beautiful scenery, many wild flowers and even the deer came to see us.

Our twice monthly coffee mornings were held as usual.

If you feel like dropping in on our regular meeting on the third Tuesday evening of the month, at Christchurch Parish Hall, North Street, Downend, you can be sure of a warm welcome, with a cup of tea and a cake.

We are looking ahead at our April meeting to our 30th birthday party.

If you want to know more about us, please visit our website: staplehillwi.weebly.com.

Maureen Wood

RODWAY RUBIES WI

OUR March meeting began with a presentation of a cheque for £1,500 to Hannah from Parkinson's UK Bristol branch, which was the culmination of our fundraising efforts for 2025/26.



The presentation

The cheque was presented by our committee member, Molly Bishop, who has been liaising with the charity this year, as our president, Ruth Smith, looked on.

Hannah gave us some facts and information about the work the local Parkinson's branch does to help those dealing with this illness, their carers and families, which was interesting to hear.

Our charity for 26/27 was decided on by our members at the meeting and is BUST, which is affiliated with the Bristol Breast Care Centre and raises money to assist the centre and the many women who have recourse to its facilities.

It is totally run by volunteers, and every penny raised is spent on supporting patient care.

It uses its funds to support innovation and the purchase of new technology, such as state-of-the-art scanners, and also contributing to pioneering surgery.

Jane Eldon

MANGOTSFIELD DOLLY MIXTURES

OUR March meeting in the hall was musical, as we welcomed Frankie Johns' grandson, who came along, together with his fans, to entertain us.

He started by singing Hello, Dolly! of course, and then a range of ballads from the 40s and 50s, from singers such as Frank Sinatra, Matt Munroe and more - plus some upbeat numbers that we all joined in with. We finished where he started, with Hello, Dolly!

It was a lovely evening and we will all be looking forward to seeing Frankie later in the year. We then invited them all to stay for tea or coffee, and a piece of cake.

We have our own Dolly Mixtures greeting cards and decided to send all Dollies one with a heart in on Valentine's Day. This was a real lift to all the membership and brightened their day.

Our number 19 bus trip to the Botanist in Bath is almost upon us.

Final arrangements have now been made, so we all end up on the same bus. Once in Bath we'll go firstly to Wetherspoons for liquid refreshment: our lunch is booked for 1pm. We'll let you know how we get on in the next edition.

In June we have booked a bespoke tour to explore subterranean passageways under Corn Street and St Nicholas Market. This time we have included partners. It will be an interesting look at Bristol during the second world war.

Our monthly pub lunch at the Lamb in Mangotsfield was, as always, very well supported: our thanks to Kate and her team.

For more information about Mangotsfield Dolly Mixtures email carol@applause.co.uk.

Carol Coombes

To infinity... and beyond!

LAST month, I hinted at a range of exciting things that are happening at Men in Sheds.

First, I'd like to spend a few words focusing on 'transitions'.

We all experience them in our daily lives, whether it's looking after your first grandchild, responding to an illness, or moving house.

Men in Sheds' current transition is changing our work base.

Regular Voice readers may remember that the Pavilion at Bromley Heath playing fields was deemed unfit for use last year.

That dealt us a major blow, given that it was more than half of our workspace, and it left us with two usable, but very cramped, shipping containers in which to carry on our work.

There was also little or no information to give us any certainty as to when/if we might be able to move back into the pavilion, and the prospect of having to wait for months for a replacement workspace loomed large.

So what to do? The logical answer was to seek more clarification, and explore the possibility of moving to new premises. With no clarity on the pavilion's future, we had to begin looking for a new home – a transition most members didn't want but reluctantly acknowledged as being the right thing to do to ensure our survival as a group.

Without doubt, this is a major transition.



Men in Sheds members at 'Living Well in Staple Hill'

Not unexpectedly, our members accepted the challenge with grit and determination.

In terms of a new home, we think we've found what we're after, and there are certainly challenges to overcome, but we will rise to them.

It will take time: it's a transition, after all.

We've been reassured that the power will remain on in our shipping containers, which means our woodworking activities can continue and we will have a presence at this year's local fairs and events.

All being well, we will have a seamless transition, and an exciting move that will present us with a whole new range of

possibilities – a bespoke workspace, new and exciting projects, and many years of productive teamwork ahead - more to follow!

Our photo this month is from the recent Living Well in Staple Hill event, a well-organised and well-attended event, at which we got to meet a lot of interesting people.

We're planning to attend a few fairs in Downend over the next few months - it would be great to see you there.

Interested in joining us? You can contact me at dave.mensheds@gmail.com or John Lockwood at downendmensheds@gmail.com.

Dave Alcock

COMMUNITY NEWS

Bromley Heath Probus Club

RESIDENTS across Downend, Mangotsfield, Emersons Green, Staple Hill and surrounding areas are invited to discover friendship, conversation and new interests with a welcoming coffee morning hosted by Bromley Heath Probus Club.

The club, which brings together retired and semi-retired people for engaging talks, social activities, and outings, is holding a free taster event on April 30 at 10am at Downend Assembly Hall, in Salisbury Road.

Visitors will be able to meet current members and experience the relaxed atmosphere that has made the club a valued part of the community.

The event is ideal for anyone looking to widen their social circle, learn something new, or simply enjoy good conversation over coffee.

There will also be a short illustrated talk by traveller Helen Bishop, titled Tales of an Unknown Land. Her presentation will explore the history, culture and landscapes of Nagorno-Karabakh - a fascinating glimpse into a region rarely featured in mainstream travel stories.

Probus meetings normally take place twice-monthly and feature a varied programme of speakers, social events, meals and outings, all designed to foster friendship and shared

interests in a friendly, informal setting.

The session carries no obligation: anyone interested is encouraged to simply turn up on the morning, where a warm welcome, tea, coffee and good company will be waiting.

More information can be found on our website www.bromleyheathprobus.org.

Sarah Chivers

Bromley Heath Neighbourhood Watch

A RESIDENT is needed to step into the role of chairperson from the Autumn.

The retiring job holder is happy to help support the settling-in process and explain what's needed, beyond:

*A desire to be part of keeping the community safe and crime free

*Preferably some knowledge or interest in how the policing, fire and rescue, local authority and West of England Combined Authority organisations work in partnership

*Chairing our meetings and representing the Watch.

For an informal chat contact us on 0117 956 3325 or drop us a line at contactus@bhnw.org.uk.

Bill Crocker

Page Park Bowls Club

WE still have a few places left on our annual beginners' course.

The course has enabled us to maintain a healthy membership.

Sadly, this is not the case country-wide, and every year sees a decline in the number of bowls clubs, including two in the local area that have closed this year.

This has the knock-on effect of reducing the number of fixtures with opponents and, whilst keeping our numbers at a good level, it has been our aim over the last several years, to provide new players for other local clubs.

There are currently around 30 people playing for different clubs who began their bowling careers on our courses.

We now have six coaches and can increase the course size from a maximum of 30 to 36 students, whilst maintaining a good coach/student ratio.

We therefore have additional spaces available, which can be filled by people from further afield.

Anyone interested should contact me on 07718 306623 or donwillcox@hotmail.co.uk.

Don Willcox

Next stop: better buses

REGULAR readers of my column will know I am determined to build a transport network people can trust.

It is time to tackle unreliable journeys and deliver reliable, affordable services with one ticket and one timetable.

We want to help more people across our region get home sooner, get out into nature more and explore the best the West has to offer, rather than being stuck waiting for a bus or in traffic.

Now, though, it is time to hear from you.

We are asking for your views on what matters most when it comes to travelling by bus, as we develop our Bus Plan to improve services across the West.

What is most important to you when it comes to your local bus services? Do you want them to be more reliable, or more frequent?

Do you want more green buses or to be able to get on multiple routes with one ticket?

I am determined to have a bus network we can be proud of, and for that we need you to have your say.

We want to hear from residents, businesses, bus users - and people who don't get the bus, too - about what matters most,

to help shape improvements across the network.

We have secured a record-breaking investment in transport in the West and are planning to invest £150 million into bus improvements.

The best way to spend that money will be shaped by you.

Visit haveyoursaywest.co.uk/betterbuses online and have your say, from March 30 until May 10.

Paper copies are also available at Bristol and Bath bus stations.

You can also contact your local library to see if they have any in stock.

Since I was elected, we have delivered more than £2 million in savings for families through the Kids Go Free holiday scheme and the £1 child fare cap, which is set to continue for another three years.

The Diamond Pass, for older people and people with disabilities, has also been extended and we are going to continue funding free bus travel for care leavers up to the age of 25.

Thanks to successful bids for funding, we are also one of the best-funded regions in the country when it comes to the number of electric buses in the region.



Metro Mayor Helen Godwin
writes for the Voice

Soon there will be 250 green buses across Bristol and Bath, meaning that more modern, reliable bus travel is delivering cleaner air and quieter streets too.

People are already seeing and feeling the changes we have made to our bus network, on their journeys and in their pockets. But we need to do more.

With your feedback we can make sure to get the most out of our huge investment into regional transport and deliver the bus network we all deserve.

Please do take a few minutes to have your say on what you want from your local service, because the next stop is better buses!

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True story on stage

STAPLE Hill-based theatre group St Mary's Players is bringing a true story to the stage.

Come From Away, at the Redgrave Theatre from April 21–25, is the first amateur staging in Bristol of a hit Broadway musical telling how the small town of Gander in Newfoundland welcomed nearly 7,000 stranded airline passengers whose planes were diverted there after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

Founded in 1959 by parishioners of St Mary's Church in Fishponds, SMP has rehearsed at the Page Community Association hall in Staple Hill since the 1980s.

Ben Maxted, from the group, said: "Come From Away is a story about people coming together when it matters most. It reminds us that even in the most difficult circumstances, compassion and connection can make an extraordinary difference."

Ben and fellow cast member Chris Gowen-Bailey recently met Kevin Tuerff, whose experiences in Gander helped inspire the musical, in New York, making a donation to support his charitable work.

Chris said: "It was a really special moment for our company. Meeting someone directly connected to the story reminded us just how real and powerful these events were."

To book tickets, call 0117 315 7800 or visit redgravetheatre.co.uk.



Ben Maxted and Chris Gowen-Bailey meet Kevin Tuerff (centre) in New York.



Young performers and professionals together on stage. Picture: Steven Harris

Talent in spotlight

MORE than 100 people packed into Resound Church to hear young musicians and professionals perform at the same concert.

The Ham Farm Festival Young Performer Spotlight concert at the church in Blackhorse Road on March 21 featured 12 young people from West of England Music and Arts, followed by professional trio CarmenCo.

Organiser Emily Andrews, who is also a member of CarmenCo, said: "The children and youths performed beautifully, and there was a huge range of styles, ages, and instruments on display."

"Bravo to all who took part and thank you to everyone who came to listen. Especially thanks for the kind donations which will all go towards our summer festival!"

CarmenCo performed new arrangements of opera music from Aida, Samson and Delilah and Barber of Seville, ahead of a new touring production being staged later this year.

The concert was supported by charity the Paragon Music Trust. Another one is planned on June 6.

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Together we make neighbourhoods safer

I RECENTLY attended a Neighbourhood Watch event.

It was a reminder of something I see across Avon and Somerset time and again: the powerful impact of people looking out for one another.

Neighbourhood Watch is rooted in that simple, vital idea of bringing people together, strengthening connections and creating places where people feel included and safe.

One of the key principles of Neighbourhood Watch is prevention, which is a priority in my Police and Crime Plan.

One of the most visible elements of that work is increasing neighbourhood policing.

We have added officers to neighbourhood teams because I know that when officers are present and familiar, when they know the communities they serve, and those communities know them in return, it builds trust and reduces crime.

People feel reassured. Concerns are raised early and acted on quickly.

Neighbourhood policing is practical, visible

prevention and it matters. The officer who came to the Neighbourhood Watch meeting last week demonstrated the effectiveness of that.

But prevention also means investing in the right support, at the right time, in the right places and this work is happening across Avon and Somerset.

Recent activity includes:

*South Gloucestershire: Youth work and graffiti prevention project engaging young people in places impacted by Anti-Social Behaviour.

*Bath: youth work and mentoring sessions engaging young people.

*Across Avon and Somerset: More than 100 sports diversionary sessions, delivered to young people to reduce antisocial behaviour and youth violence.

Together, these programmes make shared spaces safer, support young people with positive opportunities, and reduce risks before harm occurs.

While formal schemes and funded programmes are essential, so too are the



Clare Moody A&SPCC
writes for the Voice

everyday actions each of us can take.

Creating safer communities doesn't come from just one initiative or one organisation, or just from better neighbourhood policing.

It's the sum of many actions, choices and relationships. It's communities pulling together, looking out for one another, refusing to let division take root, choosing compassion and care.

Every area can have a Neighbourhood Watch scheme but, with or without that formal arrangement, together we can continue building safer, stronger and more confident communities where everyone can live, work and thrive free from fear.

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Cleve take on Old Redcliffians

Bears host rugby stars of the future

YOUNG players from 22 rugby clubs from across the South West had a taste of competitive action and a professional environment at an event hosted by Premiership side Bristol Bears.

Mangotsfield-based Cleve and Dings Crusaders, of Frenchay, were among the clubs who sent sides to the Defender Rising Stars Cup at Bristol Grammar School's Failand Sports Ground, in March.

The annual Under-11s and Under-12s festival is one of a series of nationwide events, and was hosted by Bristol Bears in partnership with PREM Rugby to help develop the grassroots game.

A spokesperson for PREM Rugby said: "It was a day of competitive rugby which showcased the passion and commitment of the game's next generation of players.

"For many of the youngsters, it was their first time stepping onto a club pitch. Cheered on by proud parents and coaches, the teams played with determination, flair, and a real sense of camaraderie."

Organisers said the U11 teams were judged on rugby's core values of teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship, focusing on development and participation rather than match results.

The U12 teams had a competitive tournament which was won by Old Bristolians.

Bristol Bears stars Fitz Harding and Benhard Janse van Rensburg presented prizes at an awards ceremony at the end of festival.

Fitz said: "I've been so impressed by the skill and passion for the game displayed by these young players. They may be at the start of their rugby journeys but many are already living and breathing the values of our game like respect and teamwork."

"Competitions like this really benefit the future of our sport. The playing experience and environment helps young players grow and develop into the next generation of players."

Cleve RFC coach Nick Bull said: "It's been really good. It's very well organised.

"Everyone's in good spirits, it's nice. They loved having the Bears guys come down.

"Overall we are really impressed."

Dings Crusaders coach Gary Morton said: "It's really good. There's been great team play, it's well organised and it's really nice having the Bears players here, the kids love it."

Other clubs taking part ranged from Frampton Cotterell in South Gloucestershire and Whitehall in Bristol to Wellington in Somerset and Newbury in Berkshire.

More than 125,000 children have taken part in the Defender Rising Stars Festival since 2008, with some going on to play professionally.



Dings Crusaders take on Clifton



Cleve U11s line up on the pitch



Dings Crusaders U12s with Bears stars Fitz Harding and Benhard Janse van Rensburg



Cleve U12s. All pictures courtesy of PREM Rugby

Dragons win under-16s title

THE spring has sprung, the grass has riz... and at long last, the football is back where it belongs!

After an exceptionally wet winter that kept everyone guessing, Downend Flyers have finally begun to feel the tide turn.

Warmer days have returned, pitches are playable again, and the beautiful game is making its long-awaited comeback on real grass — just as it should be.

Like many clubs, our women's teams have battled a season of postponements that created quite the fixture pile-up.

The good news? It means even more chances to watch them in action before the season wraps up. The First Team continue their push to secure a Step 6 place for the eighth consecutive year, while the Reserves and the As eye strong top-half finishes in their respective divisions.

You'll find all upcoming fixtures at downendflyers.com.

In the girls' setup, our U16s Dragons have been among the first to reap the benefits of drier pitches, as they have been crowned Bristol Girls' League Division B champions, with three games to spare!

Meanwhile, in the U15s A Division, our



The Downend Flyers U16s Dragons team and coaches celebrating their Division B title.

Harriers are locked in a thrilling title race of their own, as they chase back-to-back league wins in what promises to be a nail-biting finale.

Across the intermediate age groups, several Flyers squads have been gearing up for Spring Cup finals at the end of March, while our youngest players continue to remind us what it's all about — joy, laughter, friendship, and football played with big smiles every single week.

Behind the scenes, preparations are in full swing for our annual girls' and women's tournament in late June, and we're excited to be building a brand-new U18s team for next season.

To get involved or learn more, head to downendflyers.com/contact.

As the pitches dry and the cheers grow louder, Flyers football is soaring again — and the best is yet to come.

Duncan Gardner

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Cleve comeback sees off Keynsham

CLEVE won away at old rivals Keynsham thanks to a relentless second-half performance.

Keynsham looked well-prepared for the game and were surrounded by fans as their ground basked in the mid-March sunshine.

The game started with both teams keeping the ball well outside the red zone, before Keynsham slotted over a penalty.

Urged on by their crowd, they camped on Cleve's line for 10 minutes until Cleve made an error and they went over to lead 8-0.

Cleve then lost Lewis Beer and brought on Matt Lane, who had an immediate impact.

After Cleve scored under the post, Archie Staples - kicking in the absence of Matt Jarvis - converted to bring them within a point but Keynsham immediately reacted, their winger scoring to make it 13-7.

Cleve then went through a bad period of penalties and mistakes and, after a number of scrums, Keynsham moved the ball wide to score.

The second half saw a different Cleve, more determined and precise, and back to full strength.

Josh Davies scored under tremendous pressure to make it 18-14.

Matt Lane was making deep runs into Keynsham's defensive line.

Keynsham scored to go 25-14 up but this did not affect Cleve's mindset, as they relentlessly



Harry O'Donnell linking with the backs during Cleve's win over Wotton Bassett

pursued the Keynsham try line.

A lineout, then catch and drive brought pressure on Keynsham's try line that saw Cleve go over.

Another try came after Cleve moved the ball to the wing, bringing them to within a point of the hosts as they desperately fought for the win.

Keynsham, really under pressure, gave away a penalty which Archie put over to put Cleve in front, 27 to 25.

Cleve, now on top, scored a late try to make the final score Keynsham 25, Cleve 34, after a performance a veteran player in the stands described as outstanding.

The match followed a comfortable 61-7 home win over Royal Wootton Bassett II, and a 36-10 home win over Witney.

Against Wootton Bassett Cleve opened the scoring after

5 minutes, with tries from Liam McGrath, Josh Davis, Matt Jarvis and Tom Gollop putting them 26-0 up at half time.

Theo Garnet and prop Steve Bush - following a 25m burst down the wing - scored before Cleve received a yellow and red card to go down to 13 players in the 65th minute.

They still scored three more tries, through Garnet, Will Warman and Lewis Beer. Jarvis converted all five second-half tries to take his points for the game to 21, before Wootton Bassett scored a converted try at the death.

In February Cleve's 2nd team edged out local rivals Yate 39-35 in a breathless, full-blooded contest that had everything from relentless defence to flowing attack, and late drama right up to the final whistle.

Cleve knew they were in for

a battle from the outset as Yate started with intent, moving the ball sharply and testing the home side's resolve, but Cleve's defensive line refused to buckle.

After soaking up pressure deep in their own half, Cleve clawed their way upfield and the breakthrough finally came when Neil 'Chuckie' Evans went over for the first try of the afternoon.

From there, Cleve were in the ascendancy, stretching the Yate defence. Tries from Dan Allaker and Hatib Jeldin kept them firmly in control, with Oakley Gwyther delivering a man-of-the-match performance that embodied the afternoon.

But Yate emerged after the break with renewed intensity and struck three times in quick succession, turning the match into a knife-edge contest as tension gripped the Hayfields.

Cleve, however, showed the resolve that has become a hallmark of their season, returning to the disciplined defence, controlled phases and intelligent territory that have served them so well.

With the clock ticking down and the game in the balance, Cleve worked the ball wide after drawing in the Yate defence, found space in the corner and put Archie Walker over to seal the contest. The finish was met with a roar from the touchline, relief and celebration mixing in equal measure.

Steve Bateman and Jonathan O'Hara

Andy steps down as cricket club chair

LONG-STANDING club servant Andy King has stood down as chair of Carsons and Mangotsfield Cricket Club.

Andy has seen many changes at the club, the most significant of which was the formation of a youth team. This has been the foundation of the club's success over the last few seasons and has secured the club's future.

Andy had enormous energy and enthusiasm for cricket, and Carsons and Mangotsfield in particular. The club owes a tremendous debt to Andy, who has given an enormous amount of time and effort to enable others to learn, play and enjoy the game.

New chair Craig Andrews intends to build on the foundations left by Andy and has started to diversify the cricket offered by the club, including indoor walking cricket and a ladies' cricket team with sessions being run on alternate weeks.

Craig said: "With Bristol being a host city for the women's World Cup, this is an exciting time for women's cricket, which is likely to be high on the summer sporting calendar. If you are interested in either women's cricket or walking cricket please get in contact with us."

Walking cricket is a new initiative encouraged by the Gloucestershire Cricket

Foundation to encourage new and older players to stay engaged in the game. It is a short-format game with a soft ball and the intention of plenty of involvement from the participants.

Both walking cricket and ladies are building towards the start of the new season, when sessions will be taking place outside.

Another new development is the appointment of a cricket development officer, Kieran Gallagher. Kieran's role is to bring a coordinated approach to training, lead adult coaching and help with the development of the youth players as they transition into adult cricket.

In addition to the current coaches, five club members have recently passed the foundation coaching level, which broadens the club's ability to provide sessions.

Ian Coles

What happens when 5,000 Chiropractors go to Las Vegas?

Every so often in your career you get an experience that reminds you just how big your profession really is.

Last month I had the privilege of travelling to Las Vegas for the Parker Seminars, the largest chiropractic conference in the world. Imagine more than 5,000 chiropractors from across the globe gathering in one place to learn, share ideas and help push the profession forward.

It was quite a sight.

For many UK chiropractors, this event is looked upon as a bit of a pilgrimage. You hear about Parker Seminars early in your career and think: one day I'd love to go to that. I was incredibly fortunate this year to attend as a VIP guest in my role as President of the British Chiropractic Association, which meant I even got a bit of backstage access to the speakers.

Now, Las Vegas is a pretty extraordinary place. Everything is bigger, louder and brighter than anywhere else. It's the only city I know where you can walk past the Eiffel Tower, a Roman palace and a Venetian canal all within about ten minutes... and still somehow be inside a hotel.

But the real reason we were there was to learn.

One of the highlights of the week was hearing from Steven Bartlett, entrepreneur and host of the

Diary of a CEO podcast. His talk was fascinating. He spoke about his humble upbringing and how success often comes from being willing to fail – sometimes repeatedly – before you finally get things right.

One point really stuck with me. After building a hugely successful company, Steven realised he didn't want to be known as the CEO of just one type of business. So he stepped away and went on to create successful companies across completely different industries. It was a powerful reminder that growth often means being brave enough to try something new.

Another surreal moment was meeting boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard. It's not every day you come face-to-face with someone whose dedication, resilience and discipline helped make them one of the greatest athletes in history.

But perhaps the most valuable part of the week wasn't the famous speakers. It was the conversations with chiropractors from America, Europe and Asia. We talked about the challenges facing healthcare, shared ideas and discussed how we can continue to improve patient care.

It's always reassuring to realise that, wherever you go in the world, chiropractors are all trying to do the same thing: help people move better, feel better and live healthier lives.

Of course, this being Las Vegas, my week in the Nevada desert ended in style and a splash of glamour.

The final evening finished with a huge rooftop celebration with thousands of chiropractors overlooking the famous fountains of the Bellagio Hotel. It was wild watching this amazing aquatic show while standing in a crowd of chiropractors from all over the world, all celebrating the fact that

we're all part of the same profession. It felt pretty special.

A massive thank you must go to Bill Morgan, one of the most influential chiropractors on the planet, who very kindly hosted me during the event.

Now, you might be wondering what all this has to do with Cleve Chiropractic back here in Bristol, thousands of miles away from the bright lights of Las Vegas.

Well, one of the most important things in healthcare is that should never stop learning. Conferences like this bring together the best minds in the profession, sharing the latest research, treatment ideas and rehabilitation strategies.

The knowledge doesn't stay in Vegas. It comes home with us.

So while the setting may have been slightly more glamorous than our clinic on a rainy Tuesday morning in Bristol, the goal is exactly the same: helping our patients stay active, move well and live healthier lives.

And if there's one thing I took away from the week, it's this: whether you're an entrepreneur, an Olympic boxer, or a chiropractor from Bristol... success usually comes from the same place – hard work, resilience and a willingness to keep learning.

Although I must admit, the Bellagio fountains were a nice bonus!

Now it's back to the clinic and the day-to-day mission to look after all our lovely patients... that's always a special place to be.

Tim, Clinic Director, Cleve Chiropractic




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Mangos exit two cups and play-off hopes end

MANGOTSFIELD United's faint hopes of making the Hellenic League play-offs have been dashed after several poor results.

The team was also knocked out of two cup competitions in ten days, and has lost four senior players in recent weeks.

With one month of the season to go, manager Ollie Price is fielding some of the club's Under-18 players to fill out the side for the rest of the campaign.

The Mangos crashed out of the Marsh Cup to Worcester Raiders on penalties after a 2-2 draw at Cossham Street in February.

Brandon Bak fired home at the back post after 28 minutes, following a good move down the right, but Worcester levelled eight minutes later. It was an even game afterwards, but late goals from Lewis Powell (89) and an even later one from the Raiders

took the game to a shoot-out, which the visitors won 5-3.

A week later, the Mangos travelled across the north of Bristol to relegation-threatened Cribbs, a must-win match for a serious play-off challenge.

It was a tough game, but Brandon Bak came up with the all-important winning goal with six minutes to go, the Mangos winning 1-0.

However, just three days later the team crashed inexplicably 6-4 at home to near neighbours and Toolstation League Division 1 side Bitton in the GFA Trophy.

Mircea Lea (36 & 55), Owen Pritchard (53) and Brandon Bak (77) were the Mangos' goalscorers.

The defeat to a side a level below the Mangos in the Non-League pyramid came as several senior players, including George Kellow, Jacob Spence and Aaron Parsons, started to leave the club.

Spirits were raised in the next game, a 3-1 home win against lowly Lydney Town.

Brandon Bak bagged a hat-trick for the Mangos on 35, 70 & 84 minutes, with O'Rian Reid scoring for Lydney just before the break.

But, as has been the pattern for much of this season, a win was followed by a defeat a week later, with the team going down 1-0 at mid-table Gloucester side Longlevens.

The only goal came on 33 minutes and, try

as they might, the Mangos could not get back into the game as the hosts stood firm.

The home game against promotion-chasing Slimbridge turned out to be a total disaster, with manager Ollie Price forced to field five U18 players, some of them making their first team debuts.

Despite Mangotsfield going ahead through a Harry Simons goal on six minutes, Slimbridge were 3-1 up at half-time.

Veteran striker Lewis Powell got one back on 49 minutes to give the Mangos some hope, but Slimbridge stepped up a gear and made it 4-2 six minutes later. Further goals on 62, 76 and 85 minutes completed a 7-2 rout for the visitors, who topped the Hellenic League table as the Voice went to print.

Away trips to promotion contenders Worcester Raiders and Droitwich Spa still await the Mangos before the season ends.

Dave Smale

Remaining fixtures

March 28: Worcester Raiders (away)
April 4: Royal Wootton Bassett Town (home)
April 6: Thornbury Town (H)
April 11: Westfields (A)
April 18: Droitwich Spa (A)

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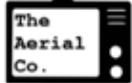
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