

January, 2026 Issue 156

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'Our shared goal is to make people healthier'

BRISTOL Rovers had a tough time on the pitch in the final months of 2025 but the club's community trust kicked off an important initiative to improve the health of people in the city.

It has signed a two-year deal with North Bristol NHS Trust to improve access to services and strengthen public engagement.

The collaboration agreement between NBT and Bristol Rovers Community Trust aligns with the NHS 10-year-plan's shift from hospital to community. It outlines a joint commitment to:

- Promote physical activity, mental health awareness, and healthy lifestyle choices, for example through free health checks for members of the local community.
- Deliver community-based health education programmes, such as visiting local schools together to teach pupils about health and wellbeing.
- Provide access to local resources, for example by NBT attending local events at the football ground.

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Maria Kane, of NBT, and Adam Tutton of Bristol Rovers Community Trust



'Shop Local' award winners

The winners of the first Gloucester Road Business Awards have been announced at a celebration event.

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Sustainability success for cafe

The community cafe at The Ardagh on Horfield Common has become the first in Bristol to recycle all its food waste.

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Author Deborah's double joy

Author Deborah Tomkins, from Bishopston, is celebrating the publication of her first two novels in the space of a few months.

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February deadline

Our February deadline is January 14. To ensure your news or letter is included, please contact us by this date. Advertisers are also asked to contact us by the same date.

Your views

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A member of the



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Bristol Rovers Community Trust and NBT sign deal

From Page 1

- Co-create campaigns and events that are inclusive, engaging, and measurable in their impact.

Maria Kane, chief executive of Bristol NHS Group, which North Bristol NHS Trust is part of alongside University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust, said: "I'm delighted to launch this collaboration, which is about more than just working together, it's about building a healthier, more connected community. By joining forces with Bristol Rovers Community Trust, we're better able to reach people where they are, in ways that are meaningful and accessible."

Adam Tutton, chief executive officer of Bristol Rovers Community Trust, added: "We're thrilled to announce our collaboration with North Bristol NHS Trust. This groundbreaking collaboration between a football club charity and a leading healthcare provider has the

potential to harness the power of football to reach people, improve lives, and drive meaningful change in local health and wellbeing."

To mark the beginning of the collaboration, members of Bristol Rovers Community Trust and Bristol Rovers football club received free health checks from the Health Checks Team at NBT. These checks provided insights into health and wellbeing to help individuals take proactive steps toward healthier lifestyles.

NBT provided free health checks to other organisations and the community last summer, including at the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta, and will explore further ways to provide these to local communities as part of the collaboration with BRCT.

The organisations say there's a growing recognition that health and wellbeing is shaped not just in hospitals and clinics, but in schools, sports clubs, and community spaces.

■ NEWS

Ups and downs of life in Bristol inspire Chris to write poetry

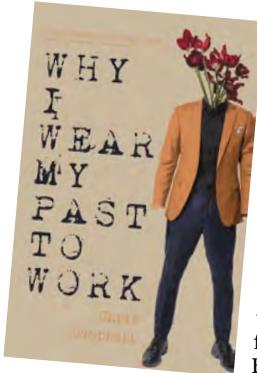
A POET from Bishopston has had a second full poetry collection published, described as “a celebration of life.” Chris Campbell wrote Why I Wear My Past to Work in Bristol and launched the book in The Bridge Inn, on Passage Street, with six top Bristol poets.

Robert Walton, Helen Sheppard, Tom Sastry, Anna Maughan, Sophie Dumont and Adam Elms took to the mic, with Ms Sheppard as compère. Campbell also headlined two Bristol nights back in November.

Why I Wear My Past to Work is a collection of 48 poems that explores fatherhood and a male perspective of family life. The collection touches on the contrast between the idealised and reality of life as a dad with two young children alongside marriage, work, illness and urban life.

Written in Bristol and published by Atlanta-based Parlyaree Press, it highlights current and historic relationships and an ear infection that led to bacterial meningitis, a brain haemorrhage and a four-week stay at Southmead Hospital.

Chris Campbell is a Dublin-born former journalist who works as an editor in Bristol. Why I Wear My Past to Work follows the publication of his first collection, All Island No Sea in 2022. With two pamphlets already available, his new mini pamphlet will be published by Atomic Bohemian in 2026. His poems appear in publications including Magma, Prole, Ink



Sweat & Tears, The Waxed Lemon, Síðhe Press, Indigo Dreams’ The Dawnreader, Black Bough Poetry, and Streetcake.

Chris was Highly Commended in the 2024 Cobh International Poetry Competition and shortlisted for Canterbury Poet of the Year 2023. He also features on BBC Radio Bristol.

Chris said of his second publishing success: “I’m delighted to have launched Why I Wear My Past to Work in Bristol. It’s fitting to reveal them in The Bridge Inn, which is known for its creativity and music – thank you to everyone who has supported the collection.”

Speaking of the collection, Bristol poet Robert Walton added: “Why I Wear My Past to Work is an uplifting, hugely enjoyable collection that will have you lingering on individual poems, re-reading them, but wanting to devour more.”



Five Schoolboys Peel Pyracantha

berries from homes above a broken wall.
Inspect their hostages before rocketing

passing scooters, a shoulder shrug away.
Red palms under woollen gloves, the ones
their folks forced upon them after breakfast.

These kidnappers who infiltrate such
well-kept lawns. I recognise one of the troop –
he was pointing out the pharmacist to a swollen

soul, now he’s a criminal to boot.
Or is he feeding the present to passers-by?
Pockets of autumn reminding there is life

on this road; this jolly gang, serenading October
after class. Chestnut sleeves, sherbert deodorant;
their firethorn fingers paint houses with sunset.

(inspired by schoolboys walking home in Bishopston)

Book makes its debut

THE first book to be published by the Bristol School of Writing has been launched.

Seventeen writers have had their work selected for publication in the 176-page anthology entitled Life and Death, although 60 writers have been involved so far with the Writing School

The book was launched at the Folk House, Park Street, on December 8 with readings and discussions with some of the writers.

“Our first anthology includes short stories, memoir, reportage and poetry” said Justin Lyle, founding editor of The Bristol School of Writing.

The Writing School is now inviting subdivisions for its second collection of articles on the theme of Fear. <https://thebristolschoolofwriting.co.uk/submissions/>



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■ NEWS

'Culture is not a luxury - it's our lifeblood'

MORE than 1,100 arts and culture champions have signed a strongly worded open letter to the city council opposing huge cuts to creative groups.

Leaders from Aardman, Watershed, Bristol Beacon, Bristol Old Vic, Arnolfini, and the city's Balloon Fiesta are among those urging the Qauthority to abandon plans in its budget to gut all £635,000 from its Cultural Investment Programme (CIP) by 2029.

It has emerged that ideas to identify replacement funding to plug the gap would generate only £225,000 annually after five years – a third of the current pot of grants.

A report to councillors in December said the money would come from developer contributions, called strategic Community Infrastructure Levy, a new philanthropic fund and a membership scheme to generate grassroots support.

The open letter said: "We are writing collectively as organisations and individuals across Bristol's cultural sector to express our deep concern about the proposed closure of the Cultural Investment Programme in the council's draft 2026/27 budget.

"Bristol trades on its cultural reputation, yet after years of chronic underinvestment, the ecology that sustains the city's creative life is beginning to break down.



Equity members protest at City Hall

"The council's own research shows that the cultural sector generated £892.9million in economic impact in 2023/24."

The letter said the crisis could not have hit at a worse time.

"There are no easy solutions, but it is time for the council to face reality: cultural support cannot be cut indefinitely without severe social and economic consequences.

"Culture is not a luxury – it is the lifeblood of Bristol, and it is time the city invested in it accordingly."

The local authority's own research found that every £1 it invests leverages £88 from arts organisations and that the cultural sector reached almost 11 million people in 2023/24, delivering £122.4m in social value through health, education and community building.

In an open letter reply, council leader Cllr Tony Dyer (Green, Southville) and Bristol One City Culture Board co-chair Cllr Ani Townsend (Green, Central) said they shared the signatories' passion for the arts and creative economies.

They said: "The financial situation facing our council – and local authorities across the country – is stark.

"Rising demand and costs for the services people rely on, combined with continued real-terms cuts in central government funding, mean we must consider every non-statutory budget carefully to meet our legal duty to set a balanced budget.

"This is not a choice we make lightly.

"No decision has been taken on the future of the Cultural Investment Programme, and the proposals remain subject to many rounds of review until all councillors vote on the budget at February's full council meeting.

"We deferred these proposals last year to give us time to develop a cultural strategy and explore alternative, sustainable funding models. That work continues at pace."

Performing arts union Equity and other campaigners is urging the council to drop the plans.

By Adam Postans, Local Democracy Reporting Service

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■ NEWS

Hero 'Shop Local' traders celebrated

IN November 2020, the 'Shop Local Gloucester Road' Facebook group was set up to help everyone (particularly the traders) survive lockdown. To celebrate the fifth anniversary of the group – and highlight the breadth and innovation of businesses along Gloucester Road – the first Gloucester Road Business Awards were held in November 2025.

Locals and shoppers voted in droves – nearly 700 votes in all – for 65 nominees across six categories and on November 20 the Nevil Road Community Club played host to the awards ceremony attended by around 200 people. With entertainment provided by DJ Asher and the Pretend Friends band, the evening also offered a jerk BBQ and a fire pit on the sky bar roof terrace, as well as a £25

offer on a gold award-winner champagne. Raffle tickets were also available to buy for a signed print in support of the Bristol RSPCA.

The inaugural winners announced on the night were:

Best value on Gloucester Road

Books for Amnesty

Most Environmentally Sensitive Business

Scoopaway

Friendliest Business

Café Dream

Most Innovative Business

The Key Cafe

Best Customer Service

The Phone Shop

Gloucester Road Legend

Joe's Bakery

Speaking after the event, Alice Darley, one of those who



Celebrating five years of Shop Local Gloucester Road

established the group, was delighted with how the evening went, saying: "Thank you to everyone who nominated and voted and who attended the awards ceremony. Thank you to Nevil Road Community Club

for doing such a brilliant job of hosting us and putting on the most amazing party. Thank you Pretend Friends for the music. And most importantly, thank you to you all for shopping local."



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■ NEWS



A second HotBin composter at the Ardagh will help ensure all food waste can continue to be recycled. This commitment to sustainability has earned awards for the community trust



Community café wins praise for action on sustainability

A COMMUNITY café on Horfield Common has become the first in Bristol to recycle all of its food waste on site, marking a significant milestone for local sustainability. The community garden, adjacent to the café, has recently installed a second HotBin composter, enabling the team to process 100% of café food waste just metres from where it is produced.

Both the café and the garden are part of the Ardagh Community Trust (ACT), a local charity dedicated to community wellbeing, sustainability and inclusive local facilities. Alongside its social enterprises, the ACT hosts a wide range of events and activities, which it does with a tiny core team and the help of a small army of volunteers. It receives no central funding, so relies on grant applications, fundraising campaigns and on-site income generating activities.

"We're excited to have achieved this long-held ambition," said Sol Harmsworth, head gardener at the ACT. "It's the result of vision and teamwork from café staff, Rich and garden volunteers and our longest-standing trustee, Fiona Wright, who have all worked



Bristol Lord Mayor Henry Michallat joined staff, volunteers and visitors to mark the achievements of Ardagh Community Trust

together to raise funds, train staff and change practices to make the dream a reality."

Fiona added, "Between the two HotBin composters (nicknamed Pinky and Perky) we can now recycle all the café's food waste, saving over 30 tonnes of CO₂ each year. That's the equivalent carbon sequestered by 35 acres of forest a year, or 75,000 miles in

an average car."

The second composter was formally inaugurated on November 14 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, during an official visit from a representative of the Royal Horticultural Society as part of the 'In Your Neighbourhood' awards. The scheme, under the Britain in Bloom umbrella, recognises projects excelling in community participation, environmental responsibility and gardening achievement.

The Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Henry Michallat, joined staff, volunteers and visitors at the ceremony, held inside one of the garden's polytunnels, metres away from the on-site café.

The Ardagh Community Trust's CEO, Christine Storry, celebrated the achievement: "Community, sustainability and health are three of the pillars of our work here at the Ardagh, and this seemingly simple achievement brings all of these together in a meaningful way.

"We have many more schemes like this in the pipeline. We may be small, but we have big ambitions."

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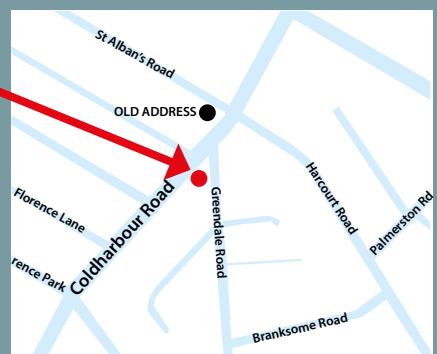
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■ ADVERTISING FEATURE

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What is Child Inclusive Mediation

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The main benefit of the process is that children get to meet a neutral person who can convey their wishes and feelings. The process is respectful to the child and the mediator will only feedback what the child expressly agrees to. Child inclusive mediators have specialist

training to enable them to carry out this type of mediation, to ensure the meetings are handled sensitively.

How old should the child be in order to take part in the process?

The general guidance is that children should be aged 10 or over. However there have been instances where younger children (particularly ones with older siblings) have taken part in the process. Both parents will know and understand the maturity of the child.

Ultimately the decision-making will be that of the parents – and the child will be told this, but the process shows the child that they are respected by their parents and that their voice is an important part of the process.

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■ NEWS

Henleaze Christmas Festival proves a dazzling success in the moonlight

THE Henleaze Christmas Festival once again attracted huge crowds who enjoyed the variety of stalls, entertainment and late-night shopping.

Festival co-ordinator Jane Emery said: "It is always wonderful to see how many of the local community turn out to enjoy the evening. It makes all the hard work to put on the event worthwhile."

Stalls and shops, many remarking on the "great vibes", reported good business as festival-goers took the chance to get ahead with their Christmas shopping. There were ten new stallholders this year including children's bead jewellery and upcycled/recycled handbags. Shops offering tasty hot treats outside their premises did a brisk trade.

There was a long queue of young hopefuls waiting for a chat with Father Christmas in his Grotto in Cardigan Road where the ever-popular children's entertainment was also sited.

Entertainment, both in the Bradbury Hall and the Outside Arena in Waterford Road, attracted the crowds. Local schools were much in evidence – choirs from Henleaze Infants and Juniors plus St Ursula's E-Act Academy, and a String Group Wind Band and handbell ringers from Red Maids Junior High School. And there were more young entertainers from the Dance Inspirations dance school.

Musical entertainment also came from a variety of choirs from barbershop with Bristol A Cappella, rock from the Bristol Rock Choir, shanty from Storm Force 10, popular music from the Mosaic Singers and Bristol



Choral entertainment adds to the atmosphere as, top, people of all ages throng the streets for some festive fun

Cantorian, and choral from the Henleaze Choral Society.

There was more dancing with demonstrations from two local Scottish Dancing groups and Mevans Dance who run

weekly sessions and performance workshops. The Salvation Army were on hand bringing their own special Christmas spirit with their brass band.

"We are hugely grateful to

all the performers who give their services free. It is such an important part of the evening," Jane Emery said.

Steve Yabsley of Radio Bristol was MC for the evening. Both Trinity-Henleaze URC and St Peter's opened for the evening with craft work for young visitors featured.

The three charities supported this year by the festival's prize draw were: EveryFAMILY who provide help for families with children under five, The Family Centre (Deaf Children) and Vision Care for Homeless People.

Work will soon begin on planning next year's festival. "There's a lot to organise and much to do," said Jane Emery.

Anyone who would like to join the team of volunteers is asked to contact Jane by email at: janeemery1951@gmail.com



Santa's ready to receive visitors



Stalls display their wares



Fairground rides in the street

■ NEWS

Change at top for Redmaids' Juniors

AFTER 11 years of leading Redmaids' High Juniors, the school has announced that Lisa Brown will be retiring from Headship at the end of the academic year. Since first joining as a Year 4 teacher, Lisa has worked in the school's community for over 30 years.

Current Deputy Head, Anthea Newton, will succeed Lisa next September as Head of Juniors and will work closely with Head of School Paul Dwyer. During her Deputy Headship, Anthea has played an integral role in the success of the Junior School, ensuring that pupils transition with ease into Year 7 each September with strong bonds forged between the year groups.

Anthea said: "I am delighted to have been appointed as Head at Redmaids' High Junior School - it's such an exciting opportunity

to take on the next chapter of such a wonderful school. I look forward to leading the Juniors as a beacon of excellence for girls' education, ensuring we build on the foundations that Lisa has established, whilst maintaining consistency, continuity and community."

She added: "Lisa has been a rock at Redmaids' High Juniors for so long now, it's hard for us all to imagine the school without her leadership. She will leave a legacy that can be seen – and felt – in our culture of community and kindness. Continuing that vision will be paramount under my leadership of the School.

"Lisa has blazed a trail in creating an environment that shapes and develops young girls both academically and emotionally, and I will take up that torch to ensure we keep



Lisa Brown, on the left, and Anthea Newton

developing and moving forward. On joining the school, I took on the robotics curriculum which is thriving and sees girls succeed in competitions like the First Lego League, sharing robotics learning and showcasing their programming skills. All pupils here have their own iPad to support their learning, and we are proudly part of the Apple Education Community, so I am excited to take the curriculum forward to reflect current

technology and innovation."

Lisa Brown commented: "I am delighted that I am passing the baton of headship to Anthea Newton, who is experienced, knowledgeable and forward thinking. We have worked closely together as a team, which will ease transition, and she puts the girls at the heart of every decision, as I do. Under her leadership, there is promise of exciting times ahead for the Junior School."

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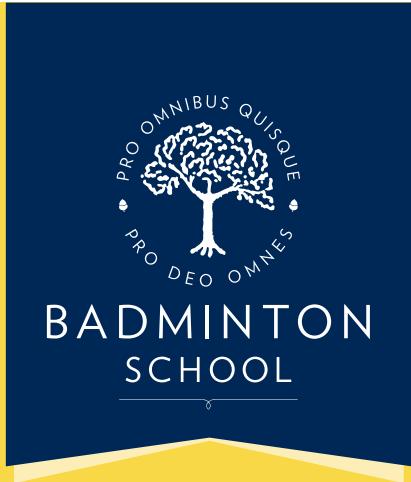


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■ NEWS

Dancers make sure principal's silver anniversary is celebrated in style

FROM the tiniest pupils as adorable clowns, elves and reindeer to the lyrical 'waves' of the adult class, all were part of something memorable as Bristol Ballet Centre (BBC) put on quite a show to celebrate 25 years of its principal, Alexandra Sherman, heading the school in Westbury-on-Trym.

Two sell-out performances at Trinity Academy's theatre saw students of all ages showcase their skills in ballet, tap and modern dance, with numbers including tributes to The Greatest Showman and Disney shows, contemporary fire, wind and earth dances and a festive celebration. Irish tap, Spanish tango and Italian tarantella took the audience around the world, while little ones hopped and skipped with smiles as bright as the lights, often supported by older pupils to guide into place anyone a little overwhelmed by the occasion.

The final performance ended with a film montage of parents, friends, colleagues and pupils past and present recalling their memories of BBC and thanking Alex for her dedication and nurturing of the school for the last quarter of a century.



Bristol Ballet School dancers strike a pose

Asked how she felt about reaching this milestone, Alex Sherman – who was herself a pupil of the school under its original owner, Lorna Martin, before training at the Royal Ballet School – described: "Taking over the school that

Lorna founded in 1983 has been one of the greatest privileges of my career. Every day, I hope I've made her proud and continued to grow the school in a way that honours her vision."

She explained how she took over the school "armed with a

big dream, a small studio and the firm hope that people would actually continue to turn up to class" and thankfully they have done so for 25 years.

Having had to cancel the show marking her 20th anniversary due to a certain global pandemic, Alex was determined to celebrate the humour, resilience and vitality of the school community for her 'silver' anniversary. She paid tribute to her "fantastic teaching team for their creativity, artistry and tireless hard work", but most of all thanked her dancers, past and present, saying of them: "whether they've taken one class or trained for years, they are the heartbeat of BBC and watching them grow in confidence, technique and artistry has been one of the great joys of my life."

Many young people will recall fond memories of their own classes with Miss Sherman at Bristol Ballet Centre (which have inspired several former pupils to train at top vocational schools) and will no doubt join Alex in toasting "here's to the next chapter". The show will go on.....

Rosie Watson

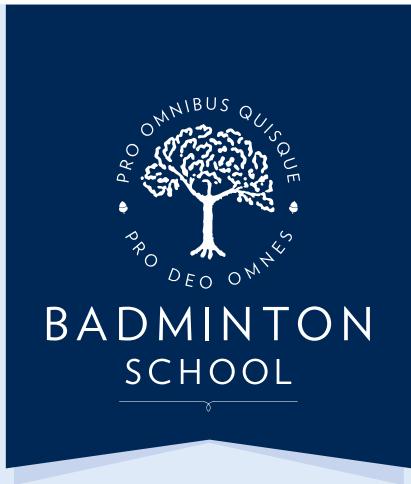
Stirring festive memories

IT'S all over for another year – but photos like this conjure up memories of the magic of the festive season.

It's from the annual Christmas Fair, at St John's Primary School in Redland, which was a brilliant afternoon filled with stalls, treats, and plenty of seasonal cheer. Despite the dreadful weather, families turned out in force, and the school was buzzing.

Children enjoyed a range of activities across the school, from the Secrets Room and Toy Tombola to Tin Can Alley, raffle prizes and a very mischievous "Splat the Elf"! There was a fantastic singalong, led by the Singing Club, as well as delicious hot food and mulled wine on offer too, to help warm everyone up! Santa's Grotto was a big hit too, capturing the spirit of the season.





Spring Open Events



Whole School Open Mornings
Friday 27 February
Friday 1 May

Pre-Reception and Reception 'Stay & Play'
Friday 13 February
Friday 8 May



Scan to book your place

■ PHARMACY COLUMN

Want a healthier body and mind in 2026? Your pharmacy can help you

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or drink, can really help—but building habits that last takes time and support.

Treatments such as Mounjaro and Wegovy have given many people in the UK a real boost in their weight-loss efforts. These medicines work with your body's natural appetite signals to help reduce hunger and cravings, and many patients experience significant weight loss when used correctly.

And remember—losing weight isn't just about how you look. It can also lower your risk of conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes, helping you feel healthier and more confident overall.

Long-lasting success comes from the right support. Free tools like the NHS Weight Loss Plan can help you build healthier habits over 12 weeks, and simple activities—such as adding a daily walk to your routine—can make a huge difference to your physical and mental wellbeing.

Getting up and choosing to make a change can be daunting but with the right advice and support, it pays off.

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■ NEWS



Left: Ivory Buddha on stone base. Base carved with seven snake heads. From the Commonwealth Institute Collection.

Right: East India Company Officer's waist belt plate mount. Within a laurel and palm wreath, a circlet inscribed with the company's motto "Auspicio Regis et Senatus Angliae" and surmounted by the lion and globe. To the centre, a cross with crowned device in the top quarter. Three short, squared loops to the reverse.



Historic treasures stolen from museum archives

MORE than 600 artefacts from Bristol Museum's British Empire and Commonwealth collection have been stolen.

Police are appealing for help to identify four men seen on CCTV during the raid on the archive near the Cumberland Basin in September.

They explained that news of the theft of the "items of significant cultural value" had not been made public until mid December until the museum team had been able to identify exactly what had been taken.

The theft took place on Thursday 25 September between 1-2am.

Detective Constable Dan Burgan said: "The theft of many items which carry a significant cultural value is a significant loss for the city. These items, many of which were donations, form part of a collection that provides insight into a multi-layered part of British history, and we

are hoping that members of the public can help us to bring those responsible to justice.

"So far, our enquiries have included significant CCTV enquiries as well as forensic investigations and speaking liaison with the victims.

"If you recognise the men pictured or have seen any of the possible items being sold online, please call us on 101 and quote reference 5225269603."

Items taken during this event include:

- Militaria including medals, badges and pins.
- Jewellery including necklaces, bangles and rings
- Decorative art items including carved ivory, silver items and bronze figurines
- Natural history pieces including geological specimens

Philip Walker, head of culture and creative industries at Bristol City Council, said: "We're deeply saddened by the theft of these

artefacts. The British Empire and Commonwealth Collection is of cultural significance to many countries and provides an invaluable record and insight into the lives of those involved in and affected by the British Empire.

"We're continue to work closely with officers to investigate this crime."

Ship lantern, copper, brass and glass, flat back, curved front, handle. Made by Tongwoo, Hong Kong. Number M453, named masthead. From the Commonwealth Institute Collection.



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■ NEWS

Debut author's double publishing success

LOCAL author Deborah Tomkins had an extraordinary time in 2025 with the publication of her first two novels, Airth and The Wilder Shore.

Deborah said: "It's certainly been a bit of a whirlwind, with two books coming out within five months of each other – but it's also been enormous fun, working with really excellent editors and learning a lot about the publishing industry."

Airth, which was published by Weatherglass Books last January, is the story of Magnus, a young man on a planet not unlike our own, except that it has a very small population and is heading towards an ice age. Although life is really tough, growing enough food for the long winters, society is deeply kind and respectful. But Magnus longs to explore as past generations did, so when there is an opportunity to join the space programme, he jumps at it, going first to Mars, and then to Urth, a planet very different from Airth in almost every respect. Needless to say, things don't go well.

This book appeared in The Daily Telegraph's Books for Christmas, a guide to



Deborah, left, with her books above and far left

violent weather event, with only an injured cormorant for company. There, she reflects on life as a parent and her path to becoming an eco-activist, prompted by the death of her eco-warrior son Jonnie years before.

"I know North Cornwall quite well," says Deborah, "and it seemed the ideal setting for this powerful emotional story."

Stanfords Bookshop in Corn Street hosted both Bristol launch events for the books, and Deborah says they have been amazing champions of her work. And what's next? "I have a couple of projects in mind – but they are secret for now!"

Airth and The Wilder Path are available from any bookshop, or from the publishers.

the best books of 2025.

"I am just thrilled," says Deborah. "It is so unexpected – but very welcome! My publisher is delighted too." The book will be published in Italian later this year by Italian publisher, Zona 42.

The Wilder Path was published by Aurora Metro Books at the beginning of June – just before Deborah's daughter's wedding. This novel is about Rosalie, an older woman, who becomes trapped in a tiny cave on the North Cornish Coast after a 'rain bomb', a

■ NEWS FROM THE METRO MAYOR

Kids make the most of their freedom

HAPPY New Year! I hope you are having a restful festive period.

Over the school holidays, Kids Go Free is back on the West's buses.

This means under-16s can travel for nothing once again throughout Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire between December 20 and January 4.

No registration or bus pass is required – just hop on board.

This follows on from the success of our scheme over the summer, in partnership with local councils and bus operators.

More than 910,000 free journeys were taken by kids across our region, putting almost £1 million back into the pockets of families and opening up our region for more young people.

The summer scheme saw 32% more children travel by bus than did in summer 2024.

We saw more footfall at local visitor attractions and retail centres, and got new people onto our brand-new green buses, inspiring the passengers of the future.

Almost half of the people in our sample survey said Kids Go Free had helped them visit new places they had not been to before, which would have otherwise been too costly.

December brought more good news on transport in the West. We secured over £40

million for buses as we plan longer-term on how to invest in things like Kids Go Free in the future. This was another real vote of confidence in the West Country, as we continue working together on a bus network that works.

Since May, we've secured the best part of £1 billion for transport in our region – better buses, more trains, and mass transit plans – soon we will spell out our vision for how to get the West moving.

The end of the year also saw the West start to catch up with other regions.

Active Travel England now rates the West of England alongside Greater Manchester and the West Midlands for better walking, wheeling, and cycling routes. We all know that active travel is good for our health and our planet, so it makes sense to make sustainable choices easier for people.

Our upgraded rating comes with £12 million for us to add to the green cycle lanes in South Gloucestershire, safe crossings like the one opened by Ralph Allen School in Bath in October and work progressing to improve Victoria Street in Bristol, linking town to Temple Meads.

December also saw the publication of the child poverty action plan for the region I mentioned in last month's column, after a welcome national strategy and November's Budget deci-



Metro Mayor Helen Godwin
writes for the Voice

sion to scrap the two-child benefit cap.

The majority of children affected are in working households, and our area is expected to be more than £20 million better off as a result.

Lifting kids out of poverty is a key part of our new Growth Strategy, which aims to secure the investment needed to create 72,000 new jobs in the region.

Together, we've turned the page and are writing a new chapter for the West of England.

I'm optimistic for what 2026 can bring, and determined to make a difference local people can see and feel, including on child poverty, economic investment, and transport.

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BOOK REVIEW

We have always lived in the castle

By Shirley Jackson

THE narrator of this novel is 18 year old Merricot Blackwood who lives with her older sister Constance and their Uncle Julian in the Blackwood family home on the outskirts of a village. They live an calm and ordered but socially isolated existence, with Constance and Julian confined to the house and garden, and only Merricot venturing out to the village on Fridays and Tuesdays to get food from the local shops. The sisters carry the prejudices of their aristocratic upbringing, having nothing but contempt for the villagers who they regard as drab and unpleasant and resentful that the Blackwoods have always had plenty of money to pay for whatever they wanted.

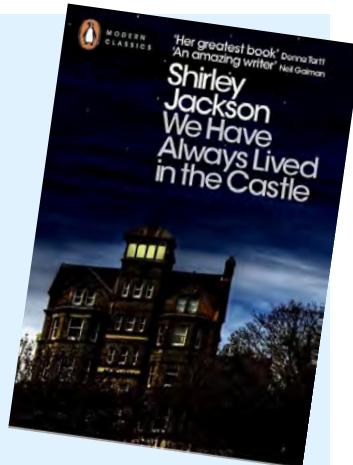
We discover that six years previously, several family members of the family were murdered by arsenic poisoning. Constance who was then 22, was tried and acquitted for lack of sufficient evidence. She claimed that she had brought the arsenic to kill the rats in the house.

The sisters' quiet life, is rudely interrupted by the unexpected arrival of their boorish cousin Charles who makes romantic overtures to Constance, determined to become the master of the household and to gain access to their deceased fathers money. Merricot resolves to do everything in her power to protect her remaining family, including the secret which she shares with Constance, bonding them together.

This is a highly addictive black comedy, providing a enjoyable satire of small town rural America and a beautifully drawn relationship between the two sisters as they seek to protect their idyllic life from the outside world.

For this book and many more, please come and visit Bishopston Library at 100 Gloucester Road, where you are guaranteed a warm and friendly welcome.

Review by Bob Deacon of Bishopston Library



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■ FROM BRISTOL CENTRAL'S MP

Going backwards on warm homes

IN November's Autumn Budget, this Labour government had the opportunity to do something huge. Rachel Reeves could have taken bold action to invest in our economy and improve life for everyone by taxing extreme wealth fairly. Instead, she papered over the cracks with half-measures that won't help us in the long-term.

Take the scandal of high energy bills. Ahead of the Budget, I called on the Chancellor to lower bills by moving so-called 'policy costs' off household energy bills and pay for them through general taxation instead. These 'policy costs' pay for things like home insulation for low income households, which is a good thing. The trouble is that putting the costs on energy bills means those same low income households struggle to pay the bills. Putting it on general taxation would be fairer because it adjusts according to what you can afford. Reeves did take some of the money off bills – but she's

paying for it not by taxing wealth fairly, but by moving funding earmarked to pay for other homes across the country to be properly insulated. The result? A 25% cut in funding for warm homes.

We know making our homes easier to heat is the number one way to lower bills and keep them low. Right now, far too much of what people pay for their heating is literally going out of the window, because their homes aren't built to stay warm.

Since 2013, the ECO scheme has helped to address this problem, insulating homes owned or rented by lower-income households. But now Reeves has taken the axe to that scheme.

The government is promising a new Warm Homes Plan – but we don't know when this will come or if the funding will make up for what's been lost. It's been predicted by experts that this gap in funding could mean over 200,000 households on low incomes missing out on lower bills.

It's also a huge blow to jobs across the country. Experts are warning cancelling ECO without having a new scheme in place to replace it will lead to the loss of 10,000 skilled jobs and could cause some businesses to fold.

The Chancellor's approach is completely backwards – cutting long-term support for insulation programmes may result in short-term savings, but it leaves people colder and poorer in future, and it makes hitting our climate goals harder.

The worst part is, there are so many other choices this government could have taken. Like a wealth tax on the super rich, to rebuild our public services and make our country fit for the future.

I will keep fighting for this government to make fairer choices – so the people of Bristol don't keep paying the price of its failure to tax wealth fairly.

As we head towards the end of the year, I'd like to wish everyone celebrating a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. I



Carla Denyer
writes for
the Voice

look forward to continuing to work hard for you in 2026.

If you live in Bristol Central and need help with a local issue, email me at bristolcentraloffice@parliament.uk or write to Carla Denyer MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA For national issues email me using carla.denyer.mp@parliament.uk

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■ FROM BRISTOL NORTH WEST'S MP

Working for you all year long

AT this time of year, we often reflect on what we've accomplished. So, here's my recap of the past year.

In 2025, more than 1,000 tickets were booked for my eight constituency events, I popped along to 13 nurseries, schools and colleges across Bristol North West, and visited 33 local businesses and organisations. My team and I responded to more than 9,300 policy enquiries from constituents and helped with about 910 personal issues.

We can't always get a positive outcome on personal issues, but we've had some great successes this year. For example, we helped to overturn a £12,000 hospital bill for a constituent whose Ukrainian father had needed treatment, and sadly passed away, during his first visit to see his son and family since the war had broken out.

No two cases are ever the same, but they're all about the real-life struggles that my constituents are facing. I would like to thank my

team for their continued efforts and tireless compassion.

Nationally, it has been a busy year for this government, too. In January, we announced sweeping planning reforms that will help us to build 1.5 million homes. In February, Nova Primary School in Shirehampton was among the first 750 schools starting a government-funded breakfast club. And in March, we updated our Employment Rights Bill so that workers will receive Statutory Sick Pay from the first day of illness.

In April, we introduced a penalty of up to two years in prison for water bosses who cover up illegal sewage spills. In May, we announced that the West of England is among eight areas to receive £5 million each to offer targeted support to help get thousands of young people into work. And in June, we banned single-use vapes, putting an end to their alarming popularity among schoolchildren and reducing plastic

waste.

In July, we secured a trade deal with India – our third trade deal in as many months, following deals with the EU and the US. In August, the government's ban on ninja swords and a new law to tackle online weapon sales, called Ronan's Law, came into effect. And in September, we expanded the eligibility for free school meals and started offering 30 hours of free childcare for working parents with children from as young as 9 months until they start school.

In October, we introduced Awaab's Law to force social housing landlords to investigate and fix significant hazards within strict timeframes. In November, the Chancellor announced the removal of the two-child benefit cap, which will benefit 2,420 children in Bristol North West. And in December, we announced a £3 billion boost to improve bus services, with £42.4 million of this coming to the West of England.



Darren Jones
writes for
the Voice

We still have much more to do – here's to a productive 2026!

• As always, if you need my help or have a question, you can get in touch with me on e-mail at darren.jones.mp@parliament.uk, by calling my office on 0117 959 6545 or by writing to me at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.



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■ FROM YOUR COUNCILLORS

Redland: Martin Fodor and Fi Hance (Green Party)

Local Plan policy setbacks

We know there's always interest in planning issues since they affect construction and other changes locally. For around nine years work has been underway to research, consult and develop a new, up to date, local plan. This guides new development and provides policy for decisions at the local level. Without an up to date adopted plan development is far less easy to manage so getting it in place has been a meticulous process.

The government planning inspectorate have to agree the document and they have just given their verdict on the almost-ready new plan. They have called for a requirement to find sites for 39,915 new homes in the city - 250/year more than expected. This increases pressure to say yes to planning applications and increase density.

We shall need a new supplementary planning document to deal with student flats and develop a policy to describe the maximum density for students.

Local Green space allocations have all been overruled by the inspector. They will be "reserved green spaces" instead. This is still a very high level of protection presuming against development. The Inspector considered that we had not provided sufficient evidence to justify that the green spaces we wished to allocate as "local green space" including The Downs. Other issues overruled include the city's heat network and policy on public toilets.

After adjustments the new plan will come back to Full Council for

adoption in late spring at which point work starts on the next local plan!

Electric Vehicle charging

Modified lamp posts have recently been installed on some local streets including several on Bishop Road. These are part of a citywide programme for posts ready for charging points. We know there's been a barrier for people replacing older cars for new or second hand electric vehicles (EVs): where to access to charging facilities near home where there aren't driveways or garages for home charging. Only some lamp posts are suitable due to power supply capacity, and some posts being set back away from the kerb and the sites have been selected where we know charging is going to be needed as people switch to cleaner vehicles.

We're expecting the new posts to be converted in the new year and they will complement other sites in destination car parks plus a forthcoming trial of cross pavement charging gulleys where people can pay for cables to be kept tidy to avoid trip hazards. Use of these doesn't guarantee anyone a parking space or charging site as use is expected to be occasional when space is available.

The maintenance and repair of existing charging points is also being looked at.

Postal vote changes

If you applied for a postal vote on or before 30 January 2024 you need to re-apply by 31 January 2026 otherwise your postal vote

will expire.

This is because the law now requires voters to prove their identity when applying for a postal vote. Most new applicants are using the government's online portal, which checks their national insurance number, date of birth, and signature. Paper applications are still allowed but take much longer to process.

In Bristol, around 28,000 postal voters need to re-apply and we know use of postal votes is high in this ward.

More action taken for the Downs

As part of the ongoing work to manage van dwelling and caravan living it's recently been agreed that antisocial behaviour and high impacts are occurring on the Downs. A number of vehicles have already been moved. There is a strong emphasis on welfare checks and advice for residents without housing, many of whom need additional support. There are now several new sites being developed where van dwellers can rent a pitch with water, waste facilities, sanitation and security. This has been a long term issue that built up but we appreciate frustration that new facilities are taking time to develop - however there's now a concerted strategy by all the relevant services across the council to tackle these issues, led by our Housing Committee and progress is underway.

New budget being developed

The council budget for the coming municipal year is continuing its development. Realistic proposals

for the next two years are again being considered. While the position is far better and more stable than in 2024 the financial situation remains uncertain due to delays in knowing the central government contribution and due to continuing spending pressures such as social care, SEND, home to school transport and temporary accommodation. Funding remains well below the levels at the start of austerity so every service is under scrutiny. Bristol's situation is similar to most of its comparator councils and much better than those where central government has intervened.

Representatives of each service took part in public meetings [including public forum] of the Finance sub committee recently so that councillors from all parties could ask about draft proposals. The next step will be to consider responses made during public consultation to all the savings being considered that may be needed to achieve a legally required balanced budget. The final proposals will be voted on in February by all councillors who have a duty to set a balanced budget for the coming year. We are continuing to keep a close priority on day to day service delivery and looking for ways to help support local priorities.

Contact us

Fi: Cllr.fi.hance@bristol.gov.uk
Martin: Cllr.martin.fodor@bristol.gov.uk **Fi:** 0117 3534720. **Martin:** 0788 4736101 [Facebook.com/cllrmartin.fodor](https://www.facebook.com/cllrmartin.fodor) or [cllrifi.hance](https://www.facebook.com/cllrifi.hance)

■ NEWS

WINDOW Wanderland is our very own inspirational festival where everyone is encouraged to have a go at lighting up our neighbourhood.

From single candles burning in memory of a loved one to interactive multimedia displays, it's been lighting up our streets since 2015 and has spread across the world.

This year, Window Wanderland is ringing the changes by inviting participants to unite under a shared theme of Hope.

The festival's founder, artist

Window Wanderland is back

Lucy Reeves-Khan, says "I found out this year that thinking and acting hopefully can actually help your brain to be more resilient when times are bleak. Window Wanderlands are already incredibly hopeful festivals, so this seemed a natural fit for us."

Festivals will also take place on various dates from January to March in communities across the UK, and even in the Netherlands.

One of the touchstones of

the organisation is that Anyone Can Be a Maker. To facilitate this, artist Tracey English will provide a template of a simple image, which even people who are not confident art makers can use to create something really beautiful and take part in the festival, feel part of its community and message. Just download and make. People can then head out to the streets to spot the image in each other's windows during the

festivals.

Head to the website and sign up to get your house on the map. There's lots of ideas on the website. What's in the windows is up to you: as long as it's family friendly, anything goes!

<https://www.windowwanderland.com/event/bishopston-bristol-2026/>

Display making Workshops will be taking place in February at local venues. Keep an eye on the website and social media for more info.

Instagram: [windowwanderland_bishopston/](https://www.instagram.com/windowwanderland_bishopston/)
Facebook: Bishopston Window Wanderland

■ FROM YOUR COUNCILLORS

Bishopston & Ashley Down: Emma Edwards and James Crawford (Green Party)

As we move into 2026, we want to thank everyone in Bishopston and Ashley Down for your continued engagement, ideas, and support. Your involvement is what keeps our community vibrant and helps us make improvements to the area. We hope you all have a fantastic holiday season and new year and hope to have lots more updates for you in 2026.

Electric vehicle chargers on the way

We're excited to confirm that new electric vehicle charging points are scheduled for installation in mid-February 2026. This is part of the Bristol City Leap partnership, aiming to make sustainable transport more accessible across the city. After some initial delays, the project is now firmly on track, and we look forward to seeing these chargers in use soon.

New artwork for Ashley Down station

Following the vandalism of the Progression artwork, plans are underway to install a more robust and inspiring piece at Ashley Down Station. Thanks to collaboration between Severnside Community Rail Partnership, GWR, and local stakeholders, funding has been secured for a reprint and installation. The new artwork will celebrate our community's creativity and resilience, and we're exploring further sponsorship to keep this a vibrant feature for years to come.

Urban Nature Reserves – growing together

The Urban Nature Reserves – Ashley Down

(UNRAD) initiative continues to gain momentum. Volunteers have been busy clearing spaces, creating signage, and planning biodiversity projects like tree planting and dead hedges. Avon Wildlife Trust is providing guidance, and we're looking to arrange a community meeting in the new year for anyone interested in getting involved.

'Improve My Street' tool

Thank you to everyone who used the new street improvement tool to share ideas for safer and better streets, we've been really impressed by how many people have engaged with the tool and shared their ideas. Officers are reviewing your submissions to prioritise future projects as funding becomes available. Your input is invaluable in shaping the next steps for transport and safety improvements in our area. We also working with officers to see how data can be used for other projects as well, such as our new Vision Zero road safety policy, and any future traffic calming measures.

Wildlife pond at Horfield Common

Nature lovers will be pleased to hear that the new wildlife pond at Horfield Common is now complete. Supported by Friends of Horfield Common, this project aims to boost biodiversity and help manage flooding. We hope to install bat boxes soon, making this space even more welcoming for both wildlife and residents.

New: Sustainable Travel Grants now open

Bristol businesses and community groups are

now invited to apply for Sustainable Travel Grants of up to £20,000. These grants support projects that encourage walking, wheeling, and cycling, helping to reduce the environmental impact of transport across the city.

- For businesses: Fully funded grants of up to £250, or 50% funded grants between £250 and £20,000, are available for projects like e-cargo bikes for deliveries or staff travel improvements.

- For community groups: Grants of up to £20,000 can be match-funded through community activity, such as volunteer hours for leading walks or bike rides.

Recent recipients include Films@59, who used a grant to build a new bike shelter, and NICU Support, who set up an e-bike service for delivering donor breast milk to premature babies. Steppin Sistas, a grassroots group, organised 'Walk to Work' events and community walks celebrating the Windrush Generation, all supported by these grants.

The deadline to apply is 5pm on Friday, 30 January 2026. For more details and to apply, visit the Bristol City Council website.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to making Bishopston and Ashley Down a greener, safer, and more connected community. If you'd like to get involved in any of these projects or have ideas to share, please get in touch.

Contact us

Cllr.james.crawford@bristol.gov.uk

Cllr.Emma.edwards@bristol.gov.uk

■ COMMUNITY NEWS

FRIENDS OF BISHOPSTON LIBRARY

The friends of the library (all volunteers) have been busy planning events for 2026 with several dates for your diary. We are delighted to welcome back Dr Sam Morgan for two Women's Health events in the New Year.

Non-Hormonal Support for Perimenopause and Beyond: Tuesday 20 January 6.30pm - 7.30pm

Join Sam for an empowering session designed to help you navigate every stage of menopause with confidence. Discover evidence-based strategies for perimenopause through to postmenopause, focusing on nutrition, supplements, exercise, sleep, rest, and meaningful connections.

Understanding Hormone Replacement Therapy : Tuesday 24 February 6.30pm - 7.30pm

Join Sam for a practical overview

of HRT — from the different types available and how to get the best from each product, to recognising when testosterone may be helpful. We'll explore benefits and risks, address common myths, discuss how long HRT can be used, and I'll share tips on how to navigate shortages of your usual prescription.

Both events are free, and refreshments will be provided (donations welcome), but it is essential to book by via Eventbrite. Sam is a menopause specialist doctor accredited by the British Menopause Society with over 20 years of experience as an NHS GP. She founded Rethink Menopause to provide reliable, evidence-based information to individuals and businesses, and other healthcare professionals. You can find out more here www.rethinkmenopause.com.

To support the neighbourhood event and help people get their ideas under way, we're hosting a

Window Wanderland in-person workshop on Tuesday 17 February 7-9pm

Get ready to unleash your creativity at our super fun workshop. Whether you're a crafty newbie or a seasoned pro, this event is perfect for making amazing window displays that light up the neighbourhood. Bring your ideas, your smiles, and a splash of imagination. Let's make some magic together and turn ordinary windows into spectacular views! Materials and drinks included in the price of £7.50 + £1.33 Eventbrite booking fee For Eventbrite bookings, please search for Friends of Bishopston Library events on Eventbrite. co.uk. The links are also on the Bristol Libraries Events page <https://bristol.events.mylibrary.digital/> and our Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/bishopstonlibrary>.

In the spring, we will host another health event for men and women on "Overcoming Sleepless Nights

and Anxiety" led by solution-focused therapist, Debs Penrice. Then coming up in April and May, we will host Alison Boulton for an interesting session on "Telling Tales: bringing your family history to life", and her talk which explores the hidden history of the talented "Women in the Music Hall".

Please join our mailing list or check our Facebook page for more information. We would love a few more people to join in the Friends of Bishopston Library group. If you'd like to get involved planning and running events, you will get a warm welcome.

Get in touch with us: friends@bishopstonlibrary.org.uk
Library open hours: Monday – 1 to 7pm; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday – 11am to 5pm; Tuesday & Sunday – close. Bishopston Library, Gloucester Road, BS7 8BN
Hope to see you or hear from you soon.

WHAT'S ON IN OUR AREA

■ LA SCALA DELI HENLEAZE

Join us at the Italian Hub of Henleaze for our new series of wine tastings for 2026! Led by our in-house sommelier, includes 5 wines accompanied by a small aperitivo board - small plates available.

JANUARY

15th & 30th- Piemonte
16th & 31st -Winter Reds
17th - Wine & Dine Dinner Party
- 5 regional courses paired to 6 wines - Lombardia

FEBRUARY

13th & 14th Valentines Day
26th- Piedimonte
27th -Winter Reds
28th - Wine & Dine Dinner Party
- 5 regional courses paired to 6 wines - Lombardia

MARCH

6th & 12th- Liguria & Valle D'Aosta
7th & 13th - Spanish Tasting - La Scala Exclusive
14th - Wine & Dine Dinner Party
- 5 regional courses paired to 6 wines - Rome

APRIL

dates online
Tickets at www.lascaladeli.com/tickets and in-store

We also cater private tastings & Dinner Parties on your date of choice. Join our reel wine club for a free monthly treat!

January 26th

■ **HENLEAZE SENIOR FILM CLUB**, 2pm, Rory's Way (12). Based on the bestselling novel by Jose Luis Sampedro, Rory's Way stars acclaimed British actor Brian Cox as Rory MacNeil, a rugged old Scotsman who reluctantly leaves his beloved isolated Hebridean island and travels to San Francisco to seek medical treatment. Moving in with his estranged son, Rory sees his life transformed through a newly found bond with his baby grandson. Starring Brian Cox, Rosanna Arquette, JJ Field and Thora Birch. Carers welcome, easy access. St. Peter's Church Hall, The Drive, Henleaze BS9 4LD. For more information, please call 0117 435 0063

■ BLAISE COMMUNITY GARDEN

behind Blaise Museum BS10 7QS open Wednesday and Saturday 10 to 2, interesting walled kitchen garden, free to enter, new volunteers needed & welcomed, plants always available.

REGULAR EVENTS

Various days

■ **PILATES** classes, Northcote Scout Hall, BS9 3TY. Mondays 9.30am (Improvers), 10.30am (Mixed Ability inc. Beginners); Tuesdays 9.30am (Improvers), 10.30am (Gentle); Thursdays 9.30am (Improvers), 10.45am (Mixed Ability - inc. Beginners). Small, friendly classes. Please register interest before attending. Full details at www.mindbodypilates.org. Contact; Leanne 07817189474 or leanne@mindbodypilates.org

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

... on the FIRST Friday of every MONTH (NO dance in August or January) It's the ideal night out for the 30-60 age range. Come dance and socialise amongst a friendly, lively crowd. Dancing Thru' the Decades includes Motown, Soul, Club Classics... Music you can relate to. Club times are 9 'til 1. Last entry 11pm - very smart casual. No t-shirts or trainers and gents required to wear collared shirts. Entry: £8. www.mingles.co.uk. Facebook: @Luv2mingle

■ GENTLE PILATES SMALL AND FRIENDLY GROUP

classes with a mindful approach. Beginners welcome. Tuesdays 7.15-8.15pm and Thursdays 11.30-12.30am at Bristol Yoga Space, Princes' Place, BS7 8NP. For further information visit pilates.ittahowie.co.uk or email Itta at mail@ittahowie.co.uk

■ BRISTOL HOME LIBRARY

SERVICE. A free home delivery service for Bristolians provided by local volunteers. For anyone affected by age, disability or caring responsibilities. 07714898558

Monday

■ **SHARED READING AT ST PAUL'S LIBRARY.** Meet and connect with others Mondays 2pm - 3.30pm. St Paul's Learning Centre, 94 Grosvenor Road, Bristol BS2 8XJ. Email: support@therereader.org.uk

■ **REDLAND WIND BAND** has vacancies for some woodwind, brass and percussion players. This friendly group meets 7.30-9.30pm at Redland Church Hall, Redland Green. Contact

via email on redlandwindband@gmail.com

■ **DICKENS SOCIETY.** 7pm, at Leonard Hall, Henleaze URC, Waterford Rd, Bristol BS9 4BT. Talks, costumed readings, book club and social events. See www.dickens-society.org.uk or phone Roma on 0117 9279875.

INSTRUMENT AMNESTY:

If you have an unused keyboard, guitar, violin or ukulele gathering dust Folkstars would love to hear from you! We will come and collect from you. Any condition, we will fix and use to give more kids in Bristol the chance to play an instrument. Smaller sizes a bonus but all sizes useful. Please email info@folkstars.co.uk to arrange a collection. Folkstars is a non-profit setup to give more children in Bristol the chance to learn an instrument. We provide affordable instrumental tuition during school time that's free for pupil premium, inclusive and fun. If you would like your school to be considered please email info@folkstars.co.uk

■ **PLAY BOWLS** at Canford Park in a friendly, social atmosphere. Qualified coaches and equipment provided. Contact: Les on 07305695579

■ BRISTOL COMMUNITY GEMELAN

play the music of Java at Cotham School from 6.30-8.30. We play by numbers - only 1-6, without the 4! So no auditions, no need to read music. If you fancy a different musical experience, contact us via email on keithtriley27@gmail.com

■ WESTBURY ON TRYM WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

meets on the third Monday of the month in the Westbury Village Hall, Eastfield Road, BS9 4AG, from 2.00 - 4.00 pm. We have interesting speakers, and extra activities of crafts, lunch club, skittles and outings. For more information call Sascha on 07961619806 or Traci on 07766073917

Tuesday

■ WESTBURY PARK WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

meets on the first Tuesday of every month in the Girl Guide Hut on Westmorland Road from 7.00 - 9.30pm. We are an active and friendly group with a varied programme plus extra sessions for craft, coffee, book clubs, walks etc. Visitors are always welcome and for more information do call Sue on 07813795936 or email westburyparkwi@gmail.com

■ THE ARTS SOCIETY BRISTOL

welcomes new members. Our lectures, given by specialists in their own field, take place on the second Tuesday of the month from September to May at 7.30pm at Redmaids' High BS9 3AW and by internet. For more information visit our website www.theartsociety-bristol.org.uk

■ **GENTLE PILATES** Small and friendly group class with a mindful approach. Beginners welcome. Tuesdays 7.15-8.15pm at Bristol Yoga Space, Princes' Place, BS7 8NP.

For further information email Itta at mail@ittahowie.co.uk

■ **BRISTOL HARMONY WEST GALLERY CHOIR** and band sing and play lively church and village music from the 18th century. St Edyth's Church Hall, St Edyth's Road, Sea Mills, 7.30 pm on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday each month. All voices (SATB), string, wind and reed instruments welcome. No auditions but ability to read music helpful. www.bristolharmony.wordpress.com or call Fritjof 0117 924 3440. Contact before attending.

■ **POETRY UNLIMITED** - poetry circle meet on the First Tuesday of every month 11am - 12 midday. Basement Room, Café Kino, 108 Stokes Croft, Bristol, BS1 3RU.

£2.50 - £3.00 donation towards the cost of the room. Bring a couple of poems to share, other poets or your own. Contact Dee: wetwo@gentlyblown.co.uk Web: www.poetryunlimitedbristol.weebly.com

■ COMPANION VOICES BRISTOL

We are a 'threshold choir' looking for new people to join us. We meet in Easton on the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 7 to 9 pm to learn songs by ear and build skills in sensitivity/compassion/loving presence to sing at the bedside of people nearing the end of life. To join/support us in this work, contact Valerie on bristol@companionvoices.org. Visit www.facebook.com/CompanionVoicesBristol and www.companionvoices.org

■ **BRISTOL A CAPPELLA:** Tuesdays 7.30pm, Victoria Methodist Church. Bristol A Cappella is an award-winning mixed barbershop chorus of around 30 members who love to sing close harmony a cappella. Our songs are mainly from pop music, with a bit of rock and some musicals. [www.bristolacappella.co.uk/](http://bristolacappella.co.uk/) Contact: membership@bristolacappella.co.uk

■ BRISTOL GOOD AFTERNOON CHOIR

rehearses at Westbury-on-Trym Methodist Church (BS9 3AA) 2-4pm (term time only). We are a fun and friendly, non-audition, community choir for both male and female voices - one of 32 Good Afternoon Choirs who 'sing in the afternoon' around

the South West and further afield. New members are always welcome and, whether you come alone or with a friend, we will be very pleased to meet you! For further details please visit our website – www.goodafternoonchoir.org – or contact us on 01761 472468 or via e-mail at gac@grenvillemusic.co.uk

Tuesday and Saturday

■ BRISTOL HF RAMBLING CLUB

We are a friendly sociable club with a variety of walks. We have 2 Tuesday walks of either 8-9 miles or 5-6 miles. On Saturdays we have varying length walks including a hill walk eg Brecon Beacons once a month. If you would like more information please visit our website.

Wednesday

■ OPEN DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE

For those interested in developing their spiritual awareness and mediumistic ability. 7.15 for 7.30 start at Westbury Park Spiritualist Church, Cairns Road BS6 7TH. Just turn up or visit www.westburyparksc.org

■ HEALING SESSIONS

Spiritual Healing is available from 2pm to 3.30pm by the accredited healing team at Westbury Park Spiritualist Church, Cairns Road BS6 7TH. Just turn up or visit www.westburyparksc.org

■ GOLDEN HILL WI

Meets the first Wednesday of every month. 1-3pm. Golden Hill Sports Ground, Wimbledon Rd, BS6 7YA. A vibrant, lively new afternoon WI in BS6. Contact Pam Scull at goldenhillwi@gmail.com.

■ BRISTOL VOICES COMMUNITY CHOIR

welcomes new members at any time. We meet at 7.30pm in St Werburghs Primary School during term time. See www.bristolvoices.org.uk for details.

■ 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. For further information contact Tania by email at tanialake@yahoo.co.uk

■ WELCOME WEDNESDAY

Friendly and free coffee afternoon on the last Wednesday of the month, 2-3.30pm at The Beehive Pub, Wellington Hill West, BS9 4QY. Meet new people, have fun, and find out what's happening in your local area. Call 0117 435 0063 for more information.

■ CLIFTON CRAFTERS

We all have craft items we started and are now lurking in a drawer unloved – dig them out and come and share a morning of knitting, crochet, tapestry, rag rugs or whatever you would love to resurrect or mend! Every Wednesday in October at Clifton Library 10.30-12.30pm.

Thursday

■ Highbury Badminton Club

CLUB: Pete Stables 0117 950 1524 or www.pete4458.wixsite.com/highburybadminton Thurs 7:30pm mid September to End April, Westbury-on-Trym Village Hall

■ THE STEPFORD SINGERS WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CHOIR

meets at Horfield Baptist Church, Bishopston on Thursday afternoons, 1pm to 3pm. No auditions and no need to read music! Come for a free taster session with our friendly, supportive group and learn to sing in harmony. For info, contact Fran franbolton66@gmail.com

■ MINDFULNESS YOGA

Thursdays 5.30 - 6.30pm. Deepen your yoga practice & awareness, through a meditative & loving-kindness approach. Classes adaptable for beginners and intermediates. By donation. See www.bristol-buddhist-centre.org/yoga/ for more details. Or email info@bristol-buddhist-centre.org

■ GENTLE PILATES

Small and friendly group class with a mindful approach. Beginners welcome. Thursdays 11.30-12.30am at Bristol Yoga Space, Princes' Place, BS7 8NP. For further information email Itta at itta@ittahowie.co.uk

■ THE READER

: We meet to share experiences using stories and poems that we read aloud; no pressure to read or talk. 11.30am to 1.00pm at Bishopston Library, Dee Derbyshire 07980364909 & Juliet Harvey

■ BRISTOL BACH CHOIR

are now recruiting new members. We are a friendly auditioned choir of between 30 and 40 singers. All voice parts are welcome. We rehearse on a Thursday evening at Bristol Grammar School from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. If interested please contact Julie at membership@bristolbach.org.uk

■ SWIFTS INCLUSIVE SPORTS

swimming sessions are for adults 18+ with any disability (hoist available) on Wednesday evenings from 7-8pm. £5 per session at Henbury Leisure Centre. Contact Karen Lloyd at 07734 335 878.

■ FRIENDS TOGETHER

DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CAFÉ

A dementia accessible café for all on the first Thursday of every month, 10am-12pm; The Randall Room at All Saints Church, Pembroke Rd, Clifton. Support, guidance, information and friendship with complimentary tea, coffee and homemade cake. No need to book – just come along and be a part of our community! For more information contact All Saints Parish Office: 0117 974 1355

■ ENJOY SCOTTISH DANCING]

Looking for a new hobby? Join us for fun, fitness and friendship (singles welcome). First evening free! Thursdays: New/Inexperienced dancers 7-8.30pm (£4). Intermediate/Advanced dancers

7.30-10pm (£6). St Monica Trust, Oatley House Main Hall, BS9 3TN. www.rscdsbristol.info. Contact Ruth 01179683057.

■ HENBURY SINGERS WELCOMES

NEW MEMBERS Do you have a yearning to join a choir? Whether you are new to choirs, or returning after a short or long break, a warm welcome awaits you at Henbury Singers. We meet each Thursday 7.30 – 9.15 at Stoke Bishop Primary School, Cedar Park BS9 1BW during school term times. We perform a wide range of sacred and secular music under our conductor Barbara Rusbridge. No auditions. See our website www.henbursingers.org. Contact the secretary at secretary@henbursingers.org

■ HENLEAZE LADIES' CHOIR

Join us as we fill St Peter's Church Hall in Henleaze with a diverse selection of music. We are a friendly choir and meet on Thursday afternoons in term time from 1.45 to 3.45. There are no auditions, and the ability to read music is not necessary. Contact Jeanette on 9685409 or Jane on 07752 332278

■ HEALING FOR WELLBEING

- New time, 5pm to 6.15 pm. Drop in sessions with trained practitioners. Redland Meeting House, 126 Hampton Road, BS6 6JE. All welcome - donation basis. For information, visit <http://www.facebook.com/BristolHealingGroup> or <https://www.thehealingtrust.org.uk/healing/healing-centre> or phone Selina 0117 9466434.

■ BISHOPSTON COMMUNITY CHOIR

Meet on Thursday evenings, 7.30pm to 9.00pm at Horfield Baptist Church, 160a Gloucester Road, Bishopston BS7 8NT. Everyone welcome, no audition necessary. Contact us on bishoproadchoir@gmail.com

■ LOCAL CHOIR ACTIVELY

RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS. We meet at Stoke Bishop CE Primary School, BS9 1BW on Thursday, 7.45 - 9.15pm. We are a well-established mixed choir performing both sacred and secular music. See website www.henbursingers.org contact secretary at secretary@henbursingers.org.

Friday

■ BRISTOL SPANISH CIRCLE

Come and meet a group of friendly people and enjoy talks in Spanish, musical events and social evenings. We meet every month from September to June, usually on the last Friday of the month, at St Peter's Church Hall in Henleaze. For more info, see <https://www.spanishcirclebristol.com/>

■ COFFEES AND CRAFT

at Horfield Baptist Church, This community event is open to all who enjoy making and doing activities with their hands. Please bring your craft

to work on and expect to have a relaxing and social time. When: Fridays in January 9th , 23rd and 30th, February 13th and 27th. Times 10.30 to 12.15. For further information please contact the church office office@horfieldbaptist.net

■ HENLEAZE BOWLING CLUB.

Come along at 5.45pm on Fridays to see if bowling could be the sport for you. Coaching available. Experienced bowlers welcome. Grange Court Road, by Newman Hall. This is a friendly Club with good bowling facilities and social events throughout the year. Phone, Tom Logan, on 0117 962 1669 or email hbcsec@henleazebowlingclub.org.uk for further details.

■ FOLK NIGHT

every third Wednesday of the month at the Victoria inn, Chock lane, Westbury on Trym. 7.30-10.30pm. All musicians and singers welcome or just pop in. Call 0117 959 0834

Saturday

■ SEA MILLS REPAIR CAFE

offers sewing, woodwork, general, electrical and cycle repairs at the Methodist Church, Sea Mills Square, from 10am-12pm, every second Saturday of the month (except August). This is a voluntary service run by experienced repairers. Donations welcome. FFI see Facebook @seamillsrepaircafe

Fly me to the moon!

BRISTOL'S Royal West of England Academy launches a major exhibition this month.

Cosmos: the Art of Observing Space, opens on January 24 and runs until April 19.

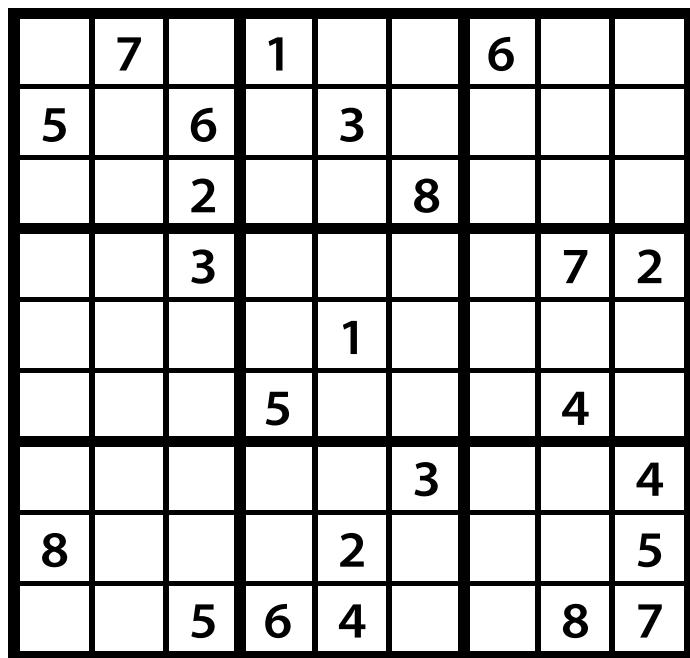
The exhibition explores humanity's enduring fascination with the cosmos through a blend of historic artefacts and contemporary artworks. *Cosmos* brings together works by artists including Yinka Shonibare, Christopher LeBrun and Wolfgang Tillmans alongside pieces by established and emerging artists. Visitors will experience artistic responses to Space through painting, sculpture, photography, installation, and digital media.

Curated by lone Parkin RWA, it also features rare treasures from the archives of the Royal Astronomical Society, National Maritime Museum and other collections. Highlights include historical drawings of the moon, celestial globes, a historic meteorite, and intricate star maps, showcasing the interconnection between art and science in our quest to understand the universe.

Puzzle Page

The FIEND

NOTE After feedback from readers, we have made The Fiend SLIGHTLY easier!



Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.
For example:
2 could be A,
B or C ... and
5678 could be
LOST



Across

1 7836574 (7)
5 4653 (4)
6 24784 (5)
7 8697 (4)
9 54787 (5)
10 9853 (4)

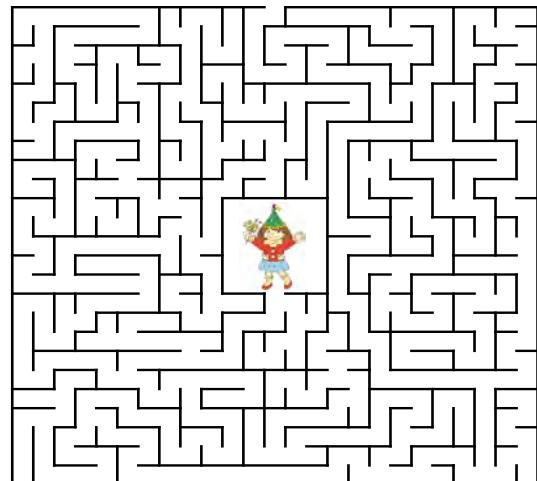
Down

2 544487 (6)
3 46559 (5)
4 376789 (6)
6 23557 (5)
8 7533 (4)
10 386 (3)

For younger readers

New Year Maze

Help the boy find his way through the maze to join the New Year party.

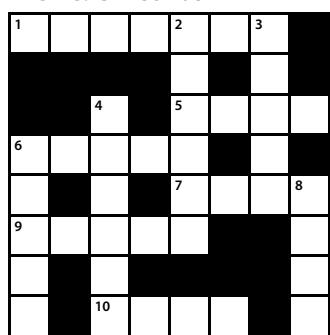


Solution on Page 29

Activity
village

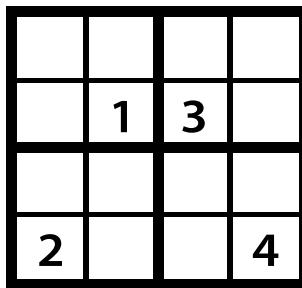
Txtpert

Theme: Christmas



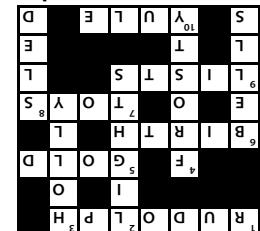
Easier sudoku

Rules the same as the Fiend, but only four numbers in each box, row and column



Solutions

Txtpert



We're a local roofing company providing all aspects of roofing.

SLATE
TILING
LEADWORK

Contact Kieran

T: 07764 457408

E: Holbrookroofingbristol@outlook.com

Graham Cook

Gardener and handyman

Grass cutting, hedge and shrub trimming, weeding, planting, felling small trees, clearing, small painting jobs including garden fences and other maintenance work.

Please call for a no-obligation chat



Call 0117 377 0644 or 07415 658 205

SPORT

Have your say on sports pitches for the future

USERS are being invited to give their views on Bristol's draft Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), a key document designed to protect playing pitch spaces and improve provision for the future.

The draft focuses primarily on the four main pitch sports—football, rugby, cricket, and hockey—while also considering lesser played sports. The council says the strategy sets out an evidence-based approach to planning, protecting, and enhancing pitch provision across the city. It aims to ensure that Bristol has the right combination of pitches and facilities to meet the needs of a growing population, both now and in the years ahead.

If approved, the strategy aims to help improve access to sport, support community wellbeing, and strengthen the city's ability to attract investment and funding.

Playing pitches are vital spaces for sport and physical activity, supporting health, inclusion, and community life. However, Bristol faces significant challenges in meeting current and future demand.

The draft strategy identifies that the city does not have a surplus of playing fields and that all existing sites should be protected wherever possible. Where protection is not feasible, any changes must comply with Sport England's strict exceptions

policy, ensuring that the loss of a pitch is only permitted under exceptional circumstances.

Councillor Stephen Williams, chair of the public health and communities policy committee, said: "Playing pitches are more than just spaces for sport—they are places where communities come together, where health and wellbeing are supported, and where young people develop skills and confidence. As a city we're renowned for our green space and the home of many vital grassroots sports clubs that play a pivotal role in supporting healthy and resilient communities. This strategy is about protecting what we have and planning for what we need, so that everyone in Bristol has access to quality facilities now and in the future. The consultation window is open for seven weeks and I encourage all to get involved and help us finalise a strategy that's fully informed by the communities of Bristol."

The strategy has been developed using Sport England's nationally recognised methodology and overseen by a steering group including Sport England, national governing bodies for sport, and representatives from public health, planning, and parks services.

It provides a framework for protecting and improving



facilities in the most cost-effective way, ensuring pitches are flexible spaces that can serve multiple sports and age groups. Collaboration between sports is highlighted as essential to making the best use of limited space.

Key findings from the draft strategy include:

- Cricket faces the most significant under supply and considerable action is required.
- Football and Rugby Union should prioritise the improvement of existing club pitches and facilities. In doing so, most clubs will be able to meet future demand.
- Hockey should focus on making sure pitches are well used and able to continue operating. This includes potential redistribution of play, resurfacing of 'poor' pitches and securing access in the longer term.

More research is needed to support less played sports clubs to have a Bristol home ground.

The strategy also sets out city-wide priorities and sport-specific recommendations, supported by a Strategic Priorities Action Plan. This plan identifies the actions likely to have the greatest impact during the first phase of implementation, with a more detailed plan to follow once the strategy is adopted.

The development of this strategy will be followed by further work in 2026 to develop a separate plan to cover most other sports.

The consultation offers residents, sports clubs, and stakeholders the opportunity to share their views on the draft strategy and suggest any additional content. Feedback will help shape the final version of the strategy, which is scheduled for committee consideration in summer 2026.

The consultation will run until midnight on 26 January. To take part and view the draft, visit the council website.

Cricketer's success

OTIS, a Year 10 student at Fairfield High School, has been selected for two prestigious Gloucestershire County Cricket programmes.

Firstly, Otis received confirmation that he earned a place in the Gloucestershire County Under-15 Winter Squad. Just a day later came even bigger news — his selection for the Gloucestershire County Cricket Emerging Players Programme (EPP).

The EPP is reserved for only a small group of the county's most promising young cricketers, with just three players chosen from Otis' age group across Gloucestershire this year. Coaches have praised Otis for his commitment, talent and attitude, plus



the real potential to progress into the Gloucestershire Academy. According to the official website, "The Gloucestershire Academy is one of 18 first-class cricket academies in the UK, consistently developing talented players who captivate and inspire

Gloucestershire fans".

Last season, Otis played youth cricket for Stapleton Under-15s and men's cricket for Bristol West Indies 1st XI in the WEPL league. He was named Stapleton Under-15s Players' Player of the Year Award at the club's end of season presentation.

Otis is also a scholar with the ACE Programme, which has supported his cricketing journey over the past few years, including regular training sessions at the County Ground. The ACE Academy, established to champion and develop young players from African and Caribbean backgrounds who are under-represented in the sport, has provided an environment where Otis has been able to thrive.

■ VINEYARD NEWS with INGRID BATES

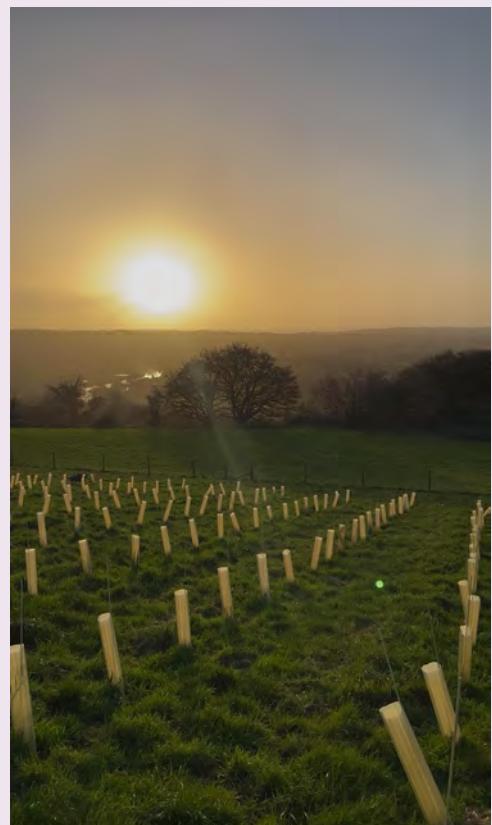
Rainwater will help our young vines to prosper

WITH the festive season over, the vineyard work continues at a steady pace. The pace of work is slower than summer but the work itself is, in many ways, more critical. Winter is the time for taking stock, and nowhere is this more evident than in the task of vine pruning. This isn't just cutting back; it is a vital process to create scarcity. We remove nearly all of the previous year's growth because we know that by limiting the number of buds now, we concentrate the vine's energy into producing fewer, but better quality grapes next summer.

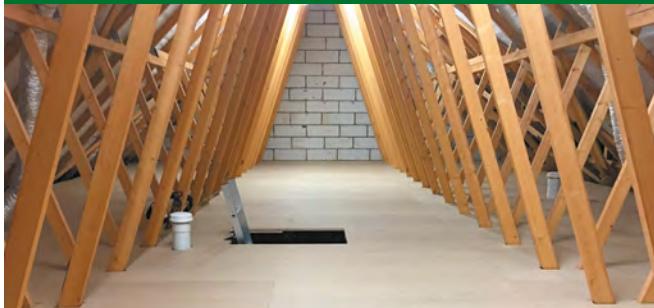
Our preparations for the 2026 season extend beyond the vines themselves

because we're also thinking about collecting and storing rainwater. This year, we are investing time and energy in creating a simple but effective method of rainwater collection. This is crucial at our new field in particular because, contrary to popular belief, young vines need a lot of water to help them get established. We've had some surprisingly dry summers recently and the first couple of years in a young vines life are critical to their survival.

*hello@dunleavyvineyards.co.uk
www.dunleavyvineyards.co.uk
@dunleavyvineyards (Facebook & Instagram)*



Loft Boarding & Insulation



www.useyourloftspace.co.uk

USE YOUR LOFT SPACE

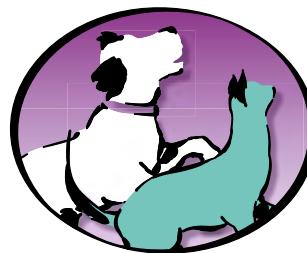
is the reliable, affordable and trusted local company for all your loft boarding, and loft insulation requirements

0117 2980810



**USE YOUR
LOFT SPACE**

INFO@USEYOURLOFTSPACE.CO.UK



Animal Health Centre

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■ NATURE WATCH

with Dawn Lawrence

Click! A focus on beauty and the beetle

I STARTED writing this column more than 11 years ago and my aim has always been to help the reader to notice the interesting, beautiful and bizarre creatures that share the city with us. It is very easy to miss things if we aren't aware that they exist: click beetles are my own, salutary, example. Many years ago, we were leading a guided walk and a small child pointed out a click beetle on some stinging nettles – we had never even heard of them!

The one that lives on nettles is a torpedo-shaped dull brown beetle but they also come in red, black and yellow. Click beetles have a unique mode of "locomotion": they can engage a peg between their head and their body and then violently release it with a "click", hurling themselves randomly into the air. The beetle will perform this trick if disturbed, which the child was keen to demonstrate. The click confuses a predator and, with luck, the insect's sudden relocation removes it from sight, and, I must say, entertains human onlookers considerably.

They can also use the mechanism to right themselves if they land on their back; I always imagine the hapless rose chafer must be envious of this ability as these large beetles are often to be found upside down on city



A mackerel sky highlights the Berkeley Beech in Bishopston

Photo Dawn Lawrence

pavements. The extraordinary click beetle shows how easy it is to overlook the perfectly obvious.

I'm afraid you'll have to wait for summer to look for click beetles (rose chafers start to appear in spring) but meanwhile you can hone your skills by looking for rainbows (we naturalists claim all natural phenomena) I occasionally come across someone who has never seen one, so let's sort that out.

To find a rainbow you need the sun to be shining on light rain – this often occurs at the beginning or end of a passing shower and the rain might be heading away from or towards you. Then you just turn your back to the sun and your shadow will point at the centre of the rainbow arc. Even if you don't see one at once, be patient (good practice for searching for click beetles later in the year); when the conditions are right a rainbow will appear. It may be only one base of the arch or the other - these short sections of rainbow will be at about 11 or 1 o'clock of your shadow's 12 o'clock. If you have never seen a rainbow you might simply have been looking in the wrong direction and you don't want to spend your life doing that!

Rainbows, even to modern humans used to a colour-saturated world of wonders, are always rather magical – even a hide full of hard-bitten birders with their bins on a buzzard will turn to look at a rainbow (well, some of them will). Once you've got rainbows under your belt there are other mesmerising optical phenomena and charming cloud formations to pursue, such as sun dogs, brockenspectres and mackerel skies.

Happy New Year!

© Dawn Lawrence

■ NEWS

Living in harmony

A CEILIDH at the Elmgrove Centre in Redland next month will raise funds for the Borderlands charity.

The event on Saturday February 7 will be hosted by Ceilidh Tree with stomping fiddles and a caller to show the moves plus acclaimed jazz-folk singer Gwyneth Herbert. There will be a bar with brews from Bristol Beer Factory plus hot food from FED. Earlybird tickets



Folkstars violin specialist Jake teaching children from asylum seeking families.

(£12/£15) now on sale.

The fundraiser will support Borderlands' outreach work in

the asylum hotels in Bristol, including the partnership with Folkstars which enables vulnerable children to participate in free weekly music lessons with instruments to borrow.

Borderlands was set up in 2011 to bring people from social exclusion to inclusion and belonging. Folkstars, established in 2024, widens access to music and works with 400 children each week in Bristol schools. Together, the two organisations hope to continue giving the

children of asylum seeking families the opportunity to learn an instrument and enjoy all the benefits that playing music offers.

To buy tickets or donate visit: www.folkstars.co.uk/solidarity-ceilidh. To learn more about Borderlands work visit www.borderlands.uk.com

If you are a music tutor and would like to volunteer with the project or have a guitar, ukulele, violin or keyboard to donate email info@folkstars.co.uk

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