HUNDREDS have hit out at proposals to close three leisure centres across Dudley borough to be replaced by two new centres – as it looks as if Halesowen could be the biggest loser.

The council is planning to build new centres next to the bypass in Lye and on Dudley’s Flood Street car park, meaning Halesowen would be the town losing a leisure centre.

More than 1,000 signatures have already been gathered by the Save Our Leisure Centres group led by former councillor Tracy Wood.

Council chiefs want to close Dudley’s three main leisure centres – at Wellington Road in Dudley, Cornbow Road in Halesowen and Stourbridge’s Crystal Leisure Centre – and replace them with two new facilities in a bid to save the cash-strapped council £1.7 million.

The big issues are location and accessibility. Halesowen has already lost some key places, like the courts and the police station, and now the proposed nearest leisure centre will be Lye. It is said when we work really hard to get footfall into the town too.

“Lye is not the easiest of places to get too and the traffic getting into Stourbridge is always bad.”

Campaigner

About 600 people have signed an e-petition, while more than 800 have signed the paper version. Campaigner Mrs Wood said: “We really want to gain 5,000 names to gain a full debate with the council on this issue. This is a huge thing that is affecting so many people.”

Dudley Council regeneration boss Khursid Ahmed says Dudley’s Flood Street car park and vacant land off the Lye bypass had both been earmarked for the possible new builds. Council cabinet members will be discussing the issue on Wednesday, December 14.

John Birtle, whose Dudley Olympics group encourages people with learning difficulties to participate in sport, said: “If Halesowen leisure centre was to close then it would make a terrible difference. We have up to 50 disabled children who use the facility on a Monday night and if it is taken away from them then we would need to look for an alternative venue. This would be devastating.”

ONE of Halesowen’s oldest residents, who had lived through both world wars, has died at the age of 107.

Miss Ellen ‘Nell’ Cook died at Gower Gardens Care Home in Halesowen on November 29. Her family paid tribute to a “wonderful” lady who was family orientated.

Born in the Digbeth district of Birmingham on March 26, 1909, she grew up in a back-to-back house in Moseley Street with a shop in the front and lived with her mother, father, two brothers and three sisters.

Nell’s niece Dianne Hall, 69, from Halesowen, said Miss Cook outlived all her siblings. She never married but took pride in her family which also included two nieces, two great-nephews, one great-great niece and one great-great-nephew.

“Nell used to class herself as an ‘unclaimed treasure’,” said Dianne. “She put her longevity down to two spoonfuls of sugar in her tea and plenty of salt on her food – they tell us that’s bad for us nowadays. She was very sad about her death but are relieved she passed away peacefully in her sleep.

“She loved life and lived a full life too. She was a wonderful lady who was very close to us all. She was extremely strong and feisty.”

Her funeral will be held at St Margaret’s Church, in Hasbury, on December 16, at 1pm.

Miss Cook, who had lived in Halesowen for 25 years, left school when aged 12 and had various jobs including working at the Austin car plant during the Second World War.

She was also a keen knitter who made garments for the charity Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge.
Glassboys’ FA Cup dream is put on ice

A DRINK-DRIVER who was handled a five-year road ban is facing jail after being found slumped and intoxicated in his car.

Paul Tibbetts, aged 65, who admitted breaching a suspended sentence for a previous drink-driving offence, had parked at Tesco in Halesowen around 8pm on October 13 when he was found with a bottle of red wine in the passenger seat.

When breathalysed he was almost twice the limit. He had 84mg alcohol in 100ml of breath. The legal limit is 35mg.

Tibbetts, of Hereford Rise, Halesowen, was convicted on October 28, but his sentence was deferred. He will now hear his fate on January 9 after the probation service provide reports.

Prosecutor Mr Edward Salihahry told Wolverhampton Crown Court: “He was sentenced to nine months in prison, suspended for 12 months on January 15 this year for drink-driving, and was disqualified for five years.

He was seen by members of the public driving in the wrong side of the road, clipping the kerb. He pulled into the Tesco store and two police officers were called.

Tibbetts pleaded guilty to driving with excess alcohol, driving while disqualified, driving with no insurance, taking a vehicle without consent and breaching a suspended sentence order.

Defence barrister Mr Simon Warlock told Judge Michael Challinor: “He went to a relative’s house to be over the limit.

“Tibbetts said he had taken a bottle of wine from an organisation to be over the limit.

“Mr Warlock said: “He had a tough time.”

Tibbetts was found slumped in the passenger seat and he was clearly in drink. He told police he was using a pool car which had been taken from an organisation he worked for. He also told them he was disqualified.

After a warm-up in front of the bandstand, the run was started by Mayor of Wolverhampton Coun singer Barry Findlay who told the fundraisers: “You’re all superheo- ros.

Even pets joined in the festive fun at West Park in Wolverhampton, including a Shih Tzu named Oscar dressed in an elf costume.

The Santas could choose between a one mile and a 5km route, which was the equivalent of one and three loops of the park respectively.

After a warm-up in front of the bandstand, the run was started by Mayor of Wolverhampton Councillor Barry Findlay who told the fundraisers: “You’re all superheroes.”

Administrative Sue Craniam, 52, from Wednesbury, a Halesowen Running Club member, said: “It’s a great way to come together to raise some money for a good cause.”

IT worker Mike Turner, 40, and Nicola Piggott, 45, both from Lower Gornal, had both taken part in a similar fundraiser before.

Nicola said: “It makes you feel Christmas and you feel good to be helping. It’s just a pity they couldn’t let us know sooner. Maybe they expected the pitch to thaw out in time.”

Chairman Andy Pountney said: “Everyone is a little bit disappointed as we had been looking forward to the game and we were ready to play.”

The frozen pitch on Sunday

The Santas bring cash ho, ho, home

Beer festival £12k charities boost

MEMBERS of Dudley and South Staf- fordshire branch of Camra (the Campaign for Real Ale) voted Kinver Brew- ery’s 7.5 per cent strength ale Over The Edge as beer of the Festival, at the recent the three-day Dudley Winter Ales Festi- val in Dudley Town Hall.

Sponsored by Holden’s Brewery, the festival had been rescued after supporters rallied around.

The 31st annual fair raised £12,076 for the Blind Veterans’ Association and the Mayor of Dudley’s charities.

The opening night also saw the judging of West Midlands Camra’s old ale and strong milds competition which was won by Dark Baby Mild – six per cent – from Sedgley’s Sarah Hughes Brewery at the Beacon Hotel pub.

Young entertainers in theatre showcase

A YOUTH theatre group’s Christmas showcase will be held this weekend. Halesowen Youth Theatre will perform on Saturday at Shenstone Theatre at Halesowen Youth Centre.

Tickets are £5. For tickets contact 01384 353244 or liz.barratt@expressandstar.co.uk.
**NEWS IN BRIEF**

**Faster broadband is in more areas**

ANOTHER 30,000 businesses and homes are now able to access high-speed fibre broadband, thanks to the ambitious Black Country Broadband Project which is running.

Areas of Halesowen, Kinvergrove, Ly, Penn, Sedgley, Stourbridge and Wolverhampton are among the latest communities to benefit from the ongoing upgrade.

The progress was welcomed by Stourbridge MP Glyn Taylor, who had urged for a faster broadband boost for his constituency.

Mr Taylor said: “I am delighted to see the high-speed fibre broadband service is now available in more areas of my constituency.

“Consumers, businesses and communities up and down the country have been calling for better broadband and this project is a good example of the government’s ambition to deliver it.

“Following the Prime Minister’s pledge at the Conservative Party Conference, we are already five months ahead of schedule and 350,000 premises across the West Midlands are now able to access fibre broadband.

“With the modernisation of the和服务, there is a clear need for better broadband to support our businesses and communities.

“Black Country is now well placed to continue to grow and develop, thanks to this ambitious project.”

**Travel website accolade for zoo**

DUDLEY Zoo has been awarded a TripAdvisor 2016 Certificate of Excellence after receiving lots of positive feedback from visitors.

The award reflects consistently high ratings for the attraction on the popular TripAdvisor travel website. Staff say they were delighted.

Zoo director Derek Grove said: “We are thrilled to see visitors giving us such great feedback and it shows that the work the team have been putting in has paid off.”

**Festive singing by ladies choir**

A WOMEN’S choir from the Black Country is to hold a Christmas concert.

The team thanked foster carers for their continued support, the valuable work that they do and recognised their commitment to children.

Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mohammed Hanif, personally thanked foster carers. He said: “The work that our amazing carers do for our children and families is invaluable.”

For more information on fostering in Dudley visit www.dudley.gov.uk or call 01384 813833.

**Bully will sign copies of his book**

Adam Western, 18, admitted causing serious injury by dangerous driving and two counts of dangerous driving.

He said: “We are thrilled to sign the book and meet a lot of people who have been affected by bullying.

“Carers thanked

“Risk

Hussain was on the way to visit his sister and told the jury that he had braked on the approach to the junction but carried on as he could see no vehicles coming. He blamed the driver of the Mitsubishi, Adam Western, prosecuting, described his account as ‘rubbish’.

Judge Francis Lancis QC said Hussain had shown no remorse. The judge added: “You took a risk. What you did that fateful evening will last with others for the rest of their lives.”

See Black Country Echo, a footballer for Wex- thall-based footballing talent and attended Queen’s Grammar School in Walsall.

Amar’s parents revealed that they had tried to conceive for five years before IVF treatment allowed them to have their beloved son. His mother, Suchindra Atwal, recalled that when she last saw her son alive, she gave him a hug and told he loved her. His family revealed that Amar’s organs had been donated to help others.

**Pervert in prison for trying to lure girls**

A PERVERT who tried to lure school- girls into the back of his car has been jailed for four and half years.

Shawn Jones had been found guilty by a jury of four charges of attempted ab-duction and one charge to commit a sexual offence.

As he was sentenced, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard the offences had a serious impact on all four victims.

Prosecutor Ruth Samuel said both the girls involved in the KFT incident had since required counselling and felt anx-iously leaving the house. The other two girls involved had been found guilty by a jury of four charges of attempted ab-duction and one charge to commit a sexual offence.

As he was sentenced, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard the offences had a serious impact on all four victims. Prosecutors said both the girls involved in the KFT incident had since required counselling and felt anxiously leaving the house. The other two girls involved had been found guilty by a jury of four charges of attempted abduction and one charge to commit a sexual offence.

Shawn Jones was sentenced to a year sentence in prison and the rest on a bail order.

Judge Wait said he had taken into account good character references for Jones and the fact that he had not got out of his car. But he told him that com-plainants had made to girls were ‘grossly inappropriate’ and caused ‘very great distress’.
A 14-year-old schoolboy who slashed a man across the stomach in Sedgley High Street has been locked up for three years.

The teenager, who cannot be named for legal reasons, attacked 18-year-old scaffolder Michael Hunter by slicing open his abdomen. He has been left with a scar on his hip.

Mr Hunter was stabbed with a six-inch blade and left on the ground as the attacker cut and stabbed him.

Prosecutor Linda Cortese, Wolverhampton Crown Court: “Mr Hunt and his girlfriend were in Sedgley High Street at around 2.45pm (on October 9) heading to a convenience store. They came across a group of males who Mr Hunt had previously said had a falling out with him.

Hospital

“There had been a previous argument with the defendant’s cousin. The defendant took a hat from Mr Hunt. Someone shouted to him that they should sort it out in the car park. Mr Hunt started to remove his bag as he expected he was about to get involved in a fight. Someone shouted ‘put the knife away’ to the defendant, who then stabbed the victim.

Mr Hunt was taken to hospital. He required emergency surgery.”

The court heard that the defendant was arrested and interviewed. He admitted seeing Mr Hunt speaking to him but said he was blacked out and didn’t know whether he produced the knife or used it.

In his victim statement, Mr Hunt said: “I could have died and for what? Since this happened, I have been scared to go out. It’s had an effect on my whole life.”

The court also heard that the victim had lost his job because of the injury and would not be able to work again until March. He was in hospital for five days.

The attacker, who pleaded guilty to wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm and possession of a bladed article, had a previous conviction for battery. Defense barrister Stanley Beza said: “He has a problem managing his anger. He acknowledges what he did was incredibly serious. He has written a letter to the court apologising to the victim and has genuine reparation.”

It will serve his sentence in a Young Offenders Institution.

Go West calling on Beth Sherburn

Dudley pop star and former Merry Hill shop girl Beth Sherburn has called on her fellow Dudley citizens to work together and get rid of knife crime.

The 14-year-old put behind bars after knife attack

Wikipedia - Dudley.

The heralds of Christmas are all around us – lights, crowds of shoppers and the first flush of work parties. For most people it promises to be loads of fun, but for some who wear dentures, the season is anything but.

Mainly Christmas pudding infused with brandy ... or Royal icing on Christmas cake – too hard for some

Some are embarrassed by the aesthetics of your dentures which look like they just don’t belong to your face. Others are ashamed by sunken cheeks and pinched lips, existing for fear of forgetting those dangerous dentures. Many even dread the thought of a dentist visit.

Will it be a difficult Christmas? The natural harmonium fit that should exist between prosthetics and the soft tissues of the mouth is no longer there and the consequence is all too miserable, but repellent and frustrating.

The natural harmony that should exist between prosthetics and the soft tissues of the mouth is no longer there and the consequence is all too miserable, but repellent and frustrating.

Do you know? For nearly 30 years I’ve been involved in dentistry and have been responsible for helping to solve some of the worst case scenarios ever presented to a dental practitioner.

If you have denture issues and are reading this, chances are I’ve encountered your dentist’s dilemma many times.

Prosthetics can be problematic – even the natural reaction to those Christmas joyous moments can be stifled as laughing can be perilous, with the possibility of dentures slipping out and falling.

Sadly, laughing can also present an opportunity for the patient to inadvertently have their dentures’ prosthetics lose all adhesion.

And as for seasonal colds ... coughing is something that, certainly for some, needs to be done with teeth out. Stuffed laughter, smiles hidden behind hand, is this the way to live when an answer can be so close at hand?

There are those who, whose days are strategically planned around the need to replenish dental fitness for life’s teeth.

Cupboards are supplied, secreted away in hampers, bathrooms, kitchens, cars, pockets, and other hiding places.

For the simple task of eating a Christmas meal can become a hurdle which demands ‘must-have’ strategies to survive the evening.

Simply not wanting to join in the celebrations, always having to find a reason to avoid socialising.

A life ruled by dentures that just don’t work – especially where there’s party food.

No longer able to enjoy your favourite foods.

Restriction diet and generally a poor nutritional intake on a daily basis.

I once heard of a tragic case where a lady in her 80s had lived her whole adult life as a ‘consummate actress’ because of failing false teeth.

She went out only to work, had no social life and never spoke to anyone.

She was deeply troubled by her dentures and the issues relating to them eclipsed her life.

A complex clinical case, I was privileged to help transform her life for the better many years ago.

She learned to live in the later years, making new friends, going to restaurants and shopping for her clothes in the street. Her ‘act’ — and mine too — that she just accepted her problem.

A great deal of the dentist and dental Hygienist appointment with me would disappoint, she suffered in silence.

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eering carolo

CANDLESOWN Choral Society will be performing Carols by Candlelight on Saturday evening at St Margaret’s Church, in Hasbury. Tickets cost £8 for the concert, including refreshments, and can be bought on the door or by calling 0121 550 7206.

Interviews to start for new boss at trust

THE next step in the hunt for a new chief executive at the trust which runs Dudley’s Russells Hall Hospital begins this week.

GORDON TAYLOR, from the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, will become deputy chief executive, it has been announced. He said: “I am very pleased by the board’s decision and I look forward to supporting the new chief executive in leading the organisation and building on our successes. The NHS is enter-

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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews

Plastic not fantastic, or tasteful for vegans

APPEARENTLY the new plastic £5 note contains some animal fat, and this has made some militant vegans very angry. And broad-minded right-on so-and-so that I am, I can see where they are coming from. These new fivers taste dreadful, far too salty, and if you eat three or more you get the most terrible indigestion. So, to be helpful, and prevent any unfortunate issues from arising, I am going to offer my services.

Any vegans who uninvitingly come into contact with the new fiver, please feel free to send them to me at the Chronicl the address is on the opposite page — and I promise to dispose of them responsibly. Well, I promise to dispose of them, anyway.

I SUPPOSE we should be pleased that local authorities are to get a £2.4 million boost to deal with potholes in this neck of the woods. Some of the roads around here, particularly in the more rural areas, are a disgrace, and I'm sure many of us will at some time or other have had to fork out the £50-plus for a damaged alloy wheel because of this. However, forgive me for sounding a note of caution.

A few months ago I noticed some workmen laying a cable from one side of the road to the other. It involved a digging a trench about six inches deep, and maybe eight inches in width, and frankly it could have been covered by a bit of hardboard when the work was not being done.

It wasn't, of course. Instead there were temporary traffic lights in operation for an entire week, three days while the work was done on one side of the road, four days for the other. The result in traffic delays even when there were no other cars about, such as the early hours of the morning.

All for 12ft of cable. This is not the only project which has caused our frustration. On the set of his film Amityville, shot around the Black Country, including Wednesbury Town Hall.

Part of the film was shot at Wednesbury Town Hall, which took on the guise of an eerie American library. It is not just as a hospital patient or enjoying a pint in the Queen Vic, but also as a hospital patient or enjoying a pint in the Queen Vic, where you might have spotted John.

You may well recognise him from the food counters at Tesco in Dudley, where he still hasn't given up the day job despite having his own film career. He started working as a TV extra.

On the set of his film Amityville, shot around the Black Country, including Wednesbury Town Hall.

"It's since been dubbed into German, turned 3D and released on blu-ray in Germany and currently is enjoying a nationwide cinema release in the Philippines."

"He has also made hits in Hollywood, with one of his most notable appearances as Arthas the butler alongside Harry Potter star Daniel Radcliffe in 2012 thriller The Woman in Black." He continued: "Amityville cost me my entire savings."

I just dread the disruption that the work is going to cause.

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 acknowledgment.
Like many others, apart from the cut-throat politics, I am totally opposed to the proposed cuts to the Dudley borough. The Labour councillors, I am totally opposed to their idea of excitement we have differing views.

What would be exciting would be to keep open our three leisure centres and build two to replace those which have been closed at Brierley Hill and Coalway.

I decided to sign a petition against closure and into my search engine on Google I typed in: ‘Save Our Leisure Centres’. I did not expect it to come up with campaigns to Save Our Leisure Centres in Chesterfield, Durham, Southampton, Falmouth, Stockbridge, Manchester, Sherborne, Gateshead, to name but some!

These are the Tory Government cuts and carried out by its willing footsoldiers – Labour Councillors. I wonder if they also trotted out tired, worn out excuses to justify their intended cuts?

When will one council stand up and say we cannot do this to people and just say ‘No! We believe we were elected to help people and not make things worse for them’?

Then we, the public, might have more respect for politicians.

C STOLL Halesowen

THE announcement that the Government will spend £30 million on refurbishing the 700 plus rooms in Buckingham Palace highlights the priorities of the Conservative Party. Within one mile of the palace, hundreds of homeless people live and sleep on filthy pavements, in stinking alleyways and on park benches.

If we have a harsh winter, it is almost 100 per cent certain that some homeless people will die. How many shelters, hostels or starter homes could be built with that sum of money? I am not saying that it shouldn’t happen, just that the homeless and the housing crisis should have a higher priority.

As Her Majesty is at the head of the Church in Britain, I would like to think that she would prefer to honour one of the most important duties of any Christian, that is: to help those most in need.

I am not really that surprised, however. Despite the rhetoric of the contrary, every Conservative Government I can remember has rushed to the aid of the rich and left the poor on their own.

In reply to the letter from D Bune regarding the parking in Coalway, we have been constantly on at Dudley Council about the train commuters using our street (Bridgewater Drive) as an overflow car park. We have our drives blocked by inconsiderate people, cars are double parked and parked on the pavement causing obstruction.

All the residents are fed up and the council don’t want to know. This all started when yellow lines were put down a couple of years ago and has pushed the problem into the residential streets.

These commuters need somewhere to park so until the council wise up and take action to provide extra parking, the problem will never go away.

From one very fed up resident who just wants to be able to park outside my own property!

MRS I ELWELL Coseley

THE idea that any press organisation should pay the costs of an opponent who loses a case against them is patently ridiculous.

The likes of Maxwell are thieving politicians should be immune from genuine claims against the press; losing a case against them is a very public airing of their activities.

Investigative journalism is able to park outside my own property, all the residents are fed up and the council don’t want to know. This all started when yellow lines were put down a couple of years ago and has pushed the problem into the residential streets.

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Mrs Gould of Hurst Green

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Fraud team in clampdown on tenants who were sub-letting

British Gas offices shut doors for good

FRAUDSTERS have been caught out sub-letting their council houses. A crackdown uncovered four council tenants who brazenly let their properties out.

They were caught following an investigation by Sandwell Council’s CCTV and fraud teams. Footage showed three properties being used by people who were not the tenants. At the other, images showed a tenant living at a different property resulting in benefit over payments.

The fraud meant families on the borough’s massive housing waiting list were being denied a roof over their heads. The four tenants were evicted and bosses said it was unlikely they would be given council housing again.

Getting back the properties is expected to save the cash-strapped council £400,000. The action has seen the properties go back into legitimate use.

Sandwell Council leader Steve Kling said: “It is a crime and a serious issue about people having tenancies on council houses they are not entitled to.”

“If they have moved on and bought a house, for them to sub-let it out to other people and make a profit on it, which is what they tend to do, then it is a crime and they should be duly prosecuted.

We often mention people on waiting lists applying for council housing and every one of those houses that is unlawfully and fraudulently let out means that somebody who is qualified and on waiting lists is missing out,” he said.

Sandwell Council wants to build about 600 homes over the next three years, at a cost of £74.1 million. As well as building homes from scratch, the authority is also keen to buy known new developments from house builders to boost numbers.

Earlier this year, it was revealed there were more than 6,000 people in the borough on the council house waiting list.

ARTS Council England is due to invest £450,000 in an international programme exploring the legacy of iconic Birmingham rock band Black Sabbath.

The money will go to Digbeth-based arts organisation Capsule which will help bring together Black Sabbath fans with artists, academic institutions and cultural venues around the world.

The organisation’s programme is called Home of Metal. It will last for three years after its launch in February, in Birmingham. The council’s Peter Knott said: “Capsule has created events and exhibitions which celebrate music from Birmingham and the Black Country. Now, it will be brilliant to see our funding supporting them to reach out to international audiences, exploring and sharing how the cultural heritage of the West Midlands has shaped musical tastes around the world.”

Capsule’s Lisa Meyer said: “We will be celebrating what is at the heart of the genre – the fans.”

The Swallowsfield One premises in Wolverhampton Road, Oldbury, which closed down last month

BRITISH Gas offices in Oldbury have closed their doors for the final time with the loss of more than 600 jobs.

The energy firm revealed plans in April to close its office at Swallowsfield One. A total of 645 jobs were saved.

Now British Gas has confirmed its offices closed earlier this month. The giant has revealed 420 of the Oldbury staff have now found new jobs elsewhere.

Sandwell Council leaders called the closure a “devastating blow” to Oldbury which has also seen the loss of jobs at Npower and Carphone Warehouse.

The latest figures from Sandwell Council reveal more than 200 former British Gas workers remain out of work following the closure at Oldbury.

Councillor Stephen Jones, chairman of the jobs, economy and enterprise scrutiny board, said: “This is just another devastating blow to Oldbury.

More than 600 jobs have gone here, and with 1,400 jobs lost at Npower in Oldbury and those at Carphone Warehouse in the town, that adds up to more than 2,000. I would like to know why those jobs have gone at British Gas. I think it is unfair that because five per cent of their share prices were lost, we lose almost 700 jobs.”

Councillor Jones said the figure for staff out of work was revealed at the last committee meeting in October. But an update on that number will be delivered at the next meeting.

Sandwell Council and Job Centre Plus stepped in to help staff find new jobs following the losses at British Gas in Oldbury.

The offices were closed on November 11.

The four-piece will top off at the Birmingham and the Black Country.

LITTLE Mix reveal extra Brum date

ONE of the biggest girl groups around, Little Mix have announced an extra date at Birmingham’s Genting Arena, next autumn.

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HE was described as a private person who served in the RAF in the Second World War – but preferred not to speak about the war.

Jack Rowe, aged 95, was laid to rest at a funeral held last week at Stourbridge Crematorium where the Last Post was played by a bugler from the Royal British Legion.

Widower Jack was born in Romsley, near Halesowen. He was married for more than 60 years, until his wife died.

Pastor Steve Hyde led the service and told the congregation that Jack loved cricket, as a youth and, after service in the RAF, had a career in journalism. He worked at the Birmingham Evening Gazette and then the Birmingham Evening Mail.

Two Legion members stood at the front of the service with standards, one stood at the back with the bugle and played the Last Post, as the area’s ex-service personnel ensured Mr Rowe had a fitting send-off at the 40 minute service.

The Chairman of Cradley Royal British Legion and Ex-Servicemen Association, Norman Catton, said: “Jack was a good old guy, he cared about other people.”

Mr Catton, aged 81, said his friend was a very private man who he understood had served in the RAF but did not like to talk about the war years, perhaps because of the memories it brought back.

Barbara Woodin, landlady at the Edward VII pub in Halesowen, said Jack was a regular, having lunch at the pub most days.
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Don kicks off new 3G pitch at college with MP

Don Goodman and Ian Austin at the launch of Dudley College’s £800,000 all-weather pitch at Priory Road

DUDLEY College has opened a brand new £800,000 3G artificial pitch.

Former Wolves player Don Goodman officially unveiled the pitch at Priory Road along with MP for Dudley North, Ian Austin.

It comes as the college received a grant from the Premier League and the FA Facilities Fund, which is delivered by the Football Foundation.

The college has built a new floodlit artificial grass pitch that will be used year-round by the college’s students and grassroots clubs, including Wyens Neat FC and Worsley Wasps JFC.

A new changing room pavilion with two team changing rooms, two officials’ changing rooms, a standing area and spectator toilets has also been built.

League

- Sky sports pundit Don, who played nearly 600 games during his twenty year career in the Football League – including many years playing for West Bromwich Albion, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Walsall – gave his backing to the project.

- He said: “It’s great see such fantastic facilities being made available to the young people of Dudley. I hope this new facility inspires them to keep playing throughout their lives. Perhaps one day I’ll be commenting on them as they run out on the pitch in the Premier League.”

- The Albion Foundation – charitable arm of West Bromwich Albion – will offer a range of activities on the pitch, including Premier League Kicks and a Player Development Centre.

- Mr Austin said: “These new all-weather pitches help keep youngsters fit and healthy, off the streets and out of trouble, so I want to thank Dudley College for their hard work and the Premier League and The FA Facilities Fund for the financial support.”

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Hospital is ‘doing all it can’ to recruit

RUSSELLS Hall Hospital in Dudley was understaffed on more than 130 occasions over a month, figures reveal.

The hospital sets a required amount of care and support staff for each shift. But, in October, the hospital was unable to meet that number over 136 shifts. This was the highest number of occasions in a month since December 2015.

Bosses at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust expected the number to drop to normal levels during this month.

The hospital has been struggling to fill vacancies, according to a report to the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

Shift numbers were made up of figures for both registered staff and care workers.

Where vacancies have caused problems, agency staff as well as staff from other departments have had to be drafted in to fill these gaps.

Trust bosses said recruitment from the local area would continue, as would advertising for registered nurses.

Doctor Paul Harrison, acting chief executive at the trust, said: “In October we saw a higher than expected number of patients with complex needs.

“For example, our maternity unit had a higher than expected number of complex births. This explains the increase in the number of shifts under the required levels of staff.

“We have robust escalation systems to manage these situations and patient safety was maintained.”

By Jamie Brassington

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Conservation officer Chris Leeson is appealing for bird feeders to put on the Castle Hill zoo site

STAFF at Dudley Zoo are appealing for bird feeders to use across the 40-acre Castle Hill site.

Dudley Zoo is also a home for native wildlife with hundreds of different small wild bird species, including chaffinches, robins, blue tits, long tail tits and nuthatches.

Workers at the site all keen to receive feeding stations and they have added plastic bird feeders to their Christmas wishlist.

Chris Leeson, conservation officer, said: “Birds need to be nice and plump for the cold months to come, so we’ve built wooden bird tables around the site where we can feed them up with fat balls, bars and wild bird seed.

“Any help supporters can give us with bird feeder donations would be much appreciated.

“It’s just as important that we care for, and provide visitors with information about, our native species as the more exotic ones we have on site, as these are the animals that people can readily find in their own back gardens.”

Donations can be dropped off at the Safari Shop.

Safety rules move over the trampoline parks

POPULAR trampoline parks need more safety measures, say a group of organisations.

A total of 13 organisations including the British Gymnastics and the International Association of Trampoline Parks have backed the new series of rules to make the parks safer.

The rules that have been suggested include better lighting for clearer visibility and padding on walls or obstacles within 1.5m of an area where trampolines may be dismounted.

Figures obtained from a Freedom of Information request showed that the ambulance service were called to three trampoline parks in the Black Country 34 times between 2015 and 2016.

Incidents

Indoor trampoline parks are made up of several trampolines next to one another which can include a range of activities such as a basketball, slides and bridges to jump off.

The service were called to Flip Out on Opal Way in Stone the most, 17 times in the space of a year for a range of different incidents.

Peter Brown, chairman of the UK committee of the international association of trampoline parks, said: “As an industry we’ve been working very hard to increase safety across the board as this new industry started in 2014 with only four or five parks but now there are 120 parks open.

“There are no current regulations or best standards out there. Enforcing agents like the local authorities and Health and Safety England don’t know what they’re looking at when they’re going to the parks.”

Problems dealt with include fitting, trauma and lower back pain.

Air Space trampoline park in Wolverhampton, the biggest park and in the Midlands was visited by the enforcement service 12 times between 2015 and 2016 whilst Jump Nation on Bentley Mill Way in Walsall five times.

Air Space and Jump Nation both tried to squeeze by.

Police want to talk to witnesses to an assault at McDonald’s in Dudley

Police want to talk to witnesses to an assault at McDonald’s in Dudley.

The teenager was blocked by a man in a McDonald’s restaurant and tripped over as she tried to squeeze by.

She was punched several times and received minor head injuries.

The victim was assisted by staff at the restaurant after the incident on October 24 at around 4.20pm and police want to hear from witnesses.

The trampoline park where the assault took place was visited by the enforcement service 17 times in the space of a year for a range of different incidents.

Suspect sought after attack

A CCTV image of a youth who police want to talk to in connection with an assault on a girl in McDonald’s at CastleGate Way, Dudley, in October.

A 15-YEAR-OLD girl was assaulted as she tried to leave a McDonald’s restaurant in Dudley.

The teenager was blocked by a man suspect in CastleGate Way restaurant and tripped over as she tried to squeeze by.

She was punched several times and received minor head injuries.

The victim was assisted by staff at the restaurant after the incident on October 24 at around 4.20pm and police want to hear from witnesses.

A CCTV image of a suspect police want to trace has been released.

Officer say that want to hear the full circumstances of what led up to the assault and are appealing for witnesses to get in touch. Anyone with information is asked to contact PC Michael Horton by emailing him at m.horton@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk with crime number 20FV/215361M/16 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

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T-shirt crew chuffed at bostin’ first year in town

IT has been a bostin’ first year for a Black Country business that is celebrating its move to Dudley town centre.
Black Country T Shirts, which was previously based on Reddal Hill Road in Cradley Heath, moved to Castle Street in the heart of the town on December 5 last year.
The shop sells T-shirts with slogans from the region along with thousands of custom-made print jobs.

Australia

In the 12 months since moving, the shop has printed more than 10,000 garments. This has also included items for Black Country expatriates as far away as Australia and Canada.

Stephen Pitts, director, said: “The moment we saw the Black Country flag flying on top of the castle we knew it was the right thing to do.
“We wanted more of a retail area and with Dudley we had much of a bigger space and a lot more room for people to come and look around.
“We have quite a following and it’s really great to see people are pleased with us as well. It’s a nice feeling.
“Our initial aim was to promote the wonderful Black Country culture and we will continue to do that.”

The business first started nearly ten years ago and became an hit in the region for celebrating the Black Country and because of its cheeky slogans based on the local lingo.
Earlier this year the shop also created a T-shirt to mark the anniversary of the death of Dudley football legend Duncan Edwards.

James Watkin and Paul Palmer with Black Country flag badges and other merchandise from the shop.

Village is shocked at death of teenager

TRIBUTES have been paid to a popular teenager from Kinver who was killed in a car accident in Shropshire at the weekend.

Former Kinver High School pupil, Jack de Bell, aged 18, died after the crash on the B4176 near Telford when his Ford Fiesta hit a tree at about 4.30am on Saturday.

On the evening after his death family and friends met in his memory at the White Hart pub in the village’s High Street.

His former headteacher, Chris Rogers, said: “The staff really liked him. He had a real twinkle in his eye.
“It really shocked and upset the staff here when we heard. He was a really charming and well-managed pupil.”

Remember

White Harte manager Carl Coffman said: “He’d come in every weekend. He was a good lad. Always polite. It’s such a shame.”

Mr Coffman said around 60 people gathered at the pub on Saturday to remember the teenager.

“In the afternoon a couple of lads had come in and said there would be a few of them meeting up, but I didn’t expect that scale.

“There was a lot of pride flying on top of the castle we knew it was the right thing to do.”

West Midlands Police said the teenager’s death is being treated as murder and is investigating the incident.

The accident happened on a straight section of the B4176, which is known as the Rabbit Run, about half a mile from the Sutton Maddock Shell service station.

A spokesman for West Mercia Police said the teenager was pronounced dead at the scene.

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Children’s home is rated as ‘outstanding’

STAFF at a council children’s home in Dudley have been praised by Ofsted following an inspection.

The home, which specialises in looking after young people with learning disabilities, has retained its outstanding rating.

The home, which cannot be named for legal reasons, achieved outstanding status in 2015 and inspectors continue to be impressed with standards.

Seven young people aged between 10 and 17 are currently looked after at the centre.

Ofsted praised staff for making young people feel respected, supported and ensuring they could have a ‘strong sense of personal identity’.

The watchdog said the youngsters staying at the home were making progress.

It said staff worked closely with parents, and that by providing continuous help meant all of the young people were able to grow in confidence and develop skills to help them move towards semi-independence.

They are performing well at school, enjoying taking part in social activities and even undertaking voluntary work in their local communities, Ofsted said in its inspection report.

Dudley Council’s children’s services boss Councillor Ian Cooper said he was delighted with the report and praised staff at the children’s home for their commitment and dedication.

Cancer fatalities for under-15s is falling

THE rate at which children are dying from cancer has fallen five per cent in a decade, according to new figures.

The statistics were revealed as it was announced the bravery of children with cancer in the Black Country is to be recognised with a special award.

Thanks to more research and better treatments, the latest figures show that death rates for under-15s in the West Midlands have decreased from around 24 deaths per million children a decade ago to around 22 deaths per million children today.

According to figures between 2012 and 2014, around 145 children are diagnosed with cancer each year and around 20 die in the West Midlands.

Cancer Research’s Children’s Cancer Trials Team co-ordinates ground-breaking cancer trials for children and young people in specialist treatment centres across the UK.

Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens has now launched its annual Star Awards across the country to recognise survivors and patients. To nominate a child for an award, donate or fundraise, visit cruk.org/kidsandteens.
Historic trophy saved from scrapyard

ONE of the oldest trophies in football which was contested by early Wolves and Albion teams will take its rightful place in the National Football Museum after being saved from the scrapheap.

The Wednesbury Charity Cup was restored by a Black Country jeweller after being brought into his store by a customer and has now sold for more than £7,000 at auction.

It pre-dates the Football League and was won by both Wolves and Albion during the late 19th century.

Aaron Sheldon, from Wednesbury jewellers Bowjangles, admitted he thought the cup was a piece of scrap when it was first shown to him in a worn condition. But he set to work on it and soon had it sparkling again.

The trophy caught the attention of the National Football Museum in Manchester, which houses some of the rarest and most famous football memorabilia. It went under the hammer at Cuttlestones auctioneers in Penkridge on Friday, selling for £7,250 – more than £2,000 above its guide price. The sale is also good news for Wednesbury football team Wood Green Athletic, which is due to receive 15 per cent of the sale price.

Ben Gamble, from Cuttlestones, said: “It is an important trophy from towards the end of the 19th century. All of the main sides in the West Midlands played in it and many won it. It is nice that it was saved from being scrapped and will go on display to the public.”

The Wednesbury Charity Cup dates back to 1880 and was launched as an end-of-season competition. The first team to win it was Stafford Road. Walsall Town won it in 1886 and two years later it was lifted by Wolves. Albion then got their hands on it in 1894. The competition ran until 1991 when Cradley Town were the last team to win it.
Ex-Yeltz man Deeney opens up on turning away from crime

FORMER Walsall and Halesowen striker Troy Deeney, whose career was disrupted when he was jailed for affray, has told of how he has got his life back on track.

The 28-year-old from Chelmsley Wood currently captains Premier League South Walsall with eyes firmly on an England call-up. But life has not always been plain sailing for Walsall academy graduate Deeney, who spent two months in prison in 2012.

In an interview he said: “It was good growing up in Chelmsley Wood. I had a normal upbringing and everyone looked out for everyone. I was a good kid and then I got to year seven and got detentions and I’d be on report all the time.

“The people you look up to are the drug dealers, the robbers, the schemers – they’re the guys with the nice cars, the nice trainers.”

After his dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer in February 2012, Deeney went on drinking in Birmingham. He ended up being part of a group involved in a brawl which left one victim with a broken jaw and another with 20 stitches. At 23, he was sentenced to 10 months prison, serving two after showing remorse.

He said: “I come back to Birmingham so I can be myself. To keep life as normal as possible. There’s a moral responsibility, there’s a way you can inspire people. I’m in a very fortunate position where I’ve learnt lessons the hard way, family are taken care of financially, and now its about trying to be the best Troy I can be.”

Ex-Villa trainee Deeney started his professional career at Walsall in August 2006 and spent time on loan at Halesowen Town before making the Saddlers first team, where he scored 27 goals in 123 league appearances. Walsall sold Deeney to the Hornets for £500,000 in 2010.

Walsall s old Deeney to the Hornets

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In an interview he said: “It was good growing up in Chelmsley Wood. I had a normal upbringing and everyone looked out for everyone. I was a good kid and then I got to year seven and got detentions and I’d be on report all the time.

“The people you look up to are the drug dealers, the robbers, the schemers – they’re the guys with the nice cars, the nice trainers.”

After his dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer in February 2012, Deeney went on drinking in Birmingham. He ended up being part of a group involved in a brawl which left one victim with a broken jaw and another with 20 stitches. At 23, he was sentenced to 10 months prison, serving two after showing remorse.

He said: “I come back to Birmingham so I can be myself. To keep life as normal as possible. There’s a moral responsibility, there’s a way you can inspire people. I’m in a very fortunate position where I’ve learnt lessons the hard way, family are taken care of financially, and now its about trying to be the best Troy I can be.”

Ex-Villa trainee Deeney started his professional career at Walsall in August 2006 and spent time on loan at Halesowen Town before making the Saddlers first team, where he scored 27 goals in 123 league appearances. Walsall sold Deeney to the Hornets for £500,000 in 2010.

Walsall s old Deeney to the Hornets

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Wolverhampton’s highest profile contribution to World War Two was the Boulton Paul Defiant fighter. Two squadrons of Defiants fought in the Battle of Britain, and seven squadrons fought as night fighters during the Blitz. Later the aircraft served in air-sea rescue squadrons, as an electronic countermeasures aircraft and finally as a target tug.

The Defiant had a revolutionary concept as all the guns were in the power-operated gun turret. When the prototype first flew in 1937 the turret was not yet ready, so it flew for a while as a single seater. As production aircraft were delivered to the RAF it fell to No 264 Squadron to introduce it into service, and to work out new tactics for the new concept. The squadron fought over Holland and Dunkirk, where it set a record by claiming 37 German aircraft shot down for no loss to itself.

In the Battle of Britain it was joined by No 141 Squadron, but as the summer of 1940 turned to winter, and the Blitz began the Defiants, including five more squadrons, were switched to night fighting, and were the most successful aircraft until radar-equipped fighters came along. As it was replaced as a frontline aircraft, the Defiant was still found vital roles, serving in Air-Sea Rescue squadrons, searching for downed aviators in the North Sea and Channel, and dropping life rafts. One squadron, No 515, became the world’s first electronic countermeasures unit, jamming German radar and communications, and still the Defiant was not finished.

Large numbers were converted to the vital target-tug role, both for the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm, and even the United States Air Force.

The sole surviving original Defiant has been in the RAF Museum at Hendon for nearly 50 years, but will soon be moved to the RAF Museum at Cosford, coming home.

The Tettenhall Transport Heritage Centre, which has its own Defiant cockpit on display, has stocked up with Defiant model kits, in time for Christmas. The centre, a volunteer-run charity, is open every Sunday, with many of its aircraft cockpits free to enter.
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4. Where can you get Wilja Potatoes for £5.99?

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(Prize draw closes at 12 noon on 19/12/16)

The winner will be announced on 19 December 2016. The winner will be notified by post. The prize consists of: Wilja Potatoes for £5.99. The prize will be valid for 4 weeks from the date of the draw. The prize is non-transferable. The prize is subject to availability.

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Comes complete with 16 coloured thread spoons, 16 coloured bobbin, five needles, a needle threader, measuring tape, thimble and foot pedal. Dimensions: 420 x 222 x 210cm.

Also available is a step by step guide for first time stitchers, written by designer Jane Blosver.

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This stylish stand mixer has a powerful 800W motor that allows you to create a range of tasty, homemade food. Ideal for preparing fluffy muffins, bread dough, cake mix, and more with the choice of three attachments - beater, whisk, and dough hook. The large 4.5 litre mixing bowl is great for mixing large quantities without spillage, while the six speed settings and a pulse function make mixing, whipping, whisking and kneading quick and simple. Mains powered, the stand mixer comes complete with a tilting head for easy removal of the bowl. The main body of the mixer is made from ABS plastic, the whisk and bowl are stainless steel, and the dough hook and beater are aluminium.

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The Large hamper contains: Matthew Walker - Classic Christmas Pudding 454g, Border Biscuits - Luxury Biscuit Selection 300g, Thornton & France - Four Luxury Mince Pies, Belgian - Fancy Truffles Original 205g, New English Teas – English Breakfast Tea 25s 50g, Duers - Cranberry Sauce 200g, Walkers - Highland Oatcakes 280g, Ringtons - Brazil Nut Biscuits 200g, Moyallon - Sweet Onion Relish 110g, Tiptree - Strawberry Jam 340g, Walkers – Milk and White and Dark Chocolate Classics 120g.

Order by the 19th of December for Christmas delivery.

Order Hotline 0871 911 7011

Order online at www.expressandstarshop.co.uk
**Winter warmers that also cut energy costs**

By Kate Whiting

WINTER is well and truly on its way – which means we’re finally free to forget about ‘bikini bodies’ and build up a layer of insulation to keep us going – hurrah!

If you’re conscious of rising energy bills, however, how can you cook your favourite comfort food in the most energy-efficient way possible?

Sarah Scrivener, smart energy expert at British Gas, says: “When fighting the chill with winter warmers, it’s important to remember you don’t need to have the oven on for long periods, when whipping up comfort food in the microwave takes minutes.”

She also recommends upgrading to smart meters to see exactly how much energy you’re spending in the kitchen in real time as you’re cooking, avoiding surprise energy bills.

Here are Scrivener’s top tips for energy-efficient winter warmers:

1. **JACKET SPURS**
   - Cook a jacket potato in the microwave for 10 minutes, rather than a whole hour in the oven, and save around 32p. With the average large jacket potato costing 25p, this saving can actually be more than the price of the potato.

2. **BEANS ON TOAST**
   - Hot haricot beans in the microwave rather than on the hob, then let the heat of the beans melt the cheese instead of putting it under the grill. Pre-boil them once a week with this method once a week over the winter to save around 28p.

3. **PUMPKIN PIE**
   - Save energy and precious time by swapping fresh pumpkin for a handy can of pumpkin purée – the perfect consistency for pie filling. It might be tempting to use fresh pumpkin for this autumn classic, however, avoid using the hob to melt the pumpkin and save 21p when cooking these pies – plenty for celebrating with family and friends.

4. **MAC & CHEESE**
   - Although macaroni cheese is traditionally made with a white sauce or roux, there are great recipes for a one-pot mac ‘n’ cheese – boil the pasta in milk and allow the starch to thicken the milk into a sauce, then add cheese. By keeping all the ingredients in one pan on the hob and using five-minute quick-cook pasta, you can save 24p per four servings. Simply dig in once it’s ready on the hob and skip the oven, and you’ll save a further 11p on top.

5. **CHILLI CON CARNE**
   - Keep the cold at bay with a warming chilli con carne and save 36p by cooking rice in a microwave steamer rather than on the hob for your weekly chilli night during the winter - there’s much less chance of burning it this way!

6. **SHEPHERD’S PIE**
   - Let the meat thaw in the fridge overnight so it’s ready to cook the next day and pop the potatoes in the microwave until they’re soft enough to mash - without using the hob, you can save £1.20 on your winter supply of shepherd’s pie.

7. **CASHEROLE**
   - Whether you’re using beef, lamb or pork, cook casserole in a slow cooker over several hours, rather than in the oven. Not only is the meat guaranteed to be melt-in-the-mouth tender, but you’ll also be saving 49p. Help the meat to cook even more quickly and use less energy by cutting into smaller pieces.

8. **SOPHIE**
   - Use a lid to trap heat when making soup. It maintains the same level of boiling without having the hob turned up as high, and can save up to 3% in energy costs per pot. To save even more energy, try making simple soups in the microwave, such as a warming chicken noodle soup - this can save up to 56p for a family serving, versus making it on the hob.

9. **ROAST DINNER**
   - Pre-boil potatoes before roasting them. Or better still, pop them in the microwave for five minutes before crisping up in the oven and cut energy costs by 75%. Cooking a roast chicken in a pressure cooker takes around half the time compared to an oven, and it’s especially good for extra succulence. If you like it crispy, simply put it in the oven for around 15 minutes at the end.

10. **HOT CHOC**
    - Hot chocolate is a low cost and energy-efficient way to warm up on a cold winter night.

    Using hot chocolate powder and boiling only the water you need in the kettle can cost as little as 1p in energy. If you like it milky, boiling milk on the hob will cost just 2p.

**Use a lid to trap heat when making soup to save energy and reduce costs**

**Look up some one-pot macaroni cheese recipes that don’t use the oven**

**Tuck into microwave beans on toast once a week over the winter months and you could save 36p**

**Hot chocolate is cheap, cheery and delicious**

**Early birds have it all wrapped up by December**

Have you got your Christmas shopping all wrapped up? For some people, it could pay off to head to the shops early.

While you may not feel in the festive mood just yet, new research suggests many people start thinking about Christmas shopping before shops started putting up their displays.

Nearly one in four (23%) of us had started our Christmas shopping by September or earlier, a survey from VoucherCodes.co.uk has found.

And with worries about stretching the budget over the festive season, many have been thinking ahead.

Just over two in five (42%) people have been putting a bit of cash away every month throughout the year to be able to afford Christmas.

Many are so well prepared that 23% expect to have the festive shopping all wrapped up by the first week of December.

Although there are always some who like to leave it to the last minute – with nearly one in 10 (9%) confusing they will be making a last-minute dash on Christmas Eve to finish buying their presents.

It’s clear that cost pressures are on many people’s minds when it comes to Christmas shopping habits – and with much discussion taking place in recent weeks about rising prices, it may well pay for some shoppers to plan ahead.

Nearly one in four (22%) people surveyed were concerned about the impact the festive season could have on their wallets.

And it’s little wonder when, according to the research, households are typically expected to spend £789 on Christmas, including gifts, food and drink, and cards and decorations.

Many plan to take advantage of shopping bonanzas to help them save money.

The survey among more than 2,000 people found that 22% of people are planning to shop on Black Friday (November 25), while 17% plan to splash the cash on Cyber Monday (November 28).

But before joining the stampede, it may well be worth doing your research before these shopping days – to check out whether what’s billed as a ‘bargain’ really is worth it.

Technology is also playing a big role in shoppers’ quests to scout out the best deals this year.

Nearly half (49%) of those surveyed will be shopping online this Christmas, with nearly a third (36%) planning to make festive purchases on their smartphones.

Those planning on hitting the high street are also doing their homework online first, with nearly one in five (19%) using mobile technology to find the best deals and prices.

The research suggests women are savvier than men when it comes to comparing prices on the high street with those online, with 21% of female Christmas shoppers admitting to searching for deals online while in-store, compared to just 16% of men.

There are also signs that rising prices may make this year particularly tricky for Christmas bargain hunters.

Official figures recently showed the consumer price index (CPI) rate of inflation accelerated to 1% in September – the highest level seen in nearly two years.

Economists have warned the weak pound could feed through to further price increases at the till in the coming months. This has led some commentators to suggest that this year, it really may pay off to do your Christmas shopping early.

**GET YOUR FESTIVE FINANCES ON TRACK**

We’re now more than half way through the tax year – and with the expense of the festive season ahead, it’s a good time to check whether your savings are on track.

Here are some tips from Clare Francis, savings and investments director at Barclays:

- **Don’t overlook your ISA allowance.** The ISA allowance this year is £11,880, and you can save £3,650 (30%) of your ISA allowance this year without having to pay any tax on it. The ISA for higher rate taxpayers is £5,940.

- **It’s important to have some cash savings even if you are happy to take the additional risk of stock market investments.**

- **Set savings goals.** They could range from a “rainy day” fund to life events such as a house deposit or retirement.
Find the right tree for your home and budget

Great ideas for gifts to delight the gardener

As the festive season draws near, it’s time to think about gifts for the gardener in your life. Hannah Stephenson digs out some of the best.

GREEN-FINGERED friends and family may have precision tools, pampering presents or ornamental must-haves on their Christmas wish lists, and indeed there’s the perfect gift for gardeners out there — but you just have to find it.

:: Plant theatre: Stage a spectacular display of your favourite flowers with this plant theatre made from wood, which will look good when the flowers are in season and can be folded away for easy storage if required (£9.99, www.miafleur.com).
:: Dutch plant pots: Made from wood but look like traditional slate. Each table, plot, kitchen garden or greenhouse plant can be folded away for easy storage if required (£95, www.elho.com).
:: Corsica doorstopper: This door container features a slot for a patio door, to stop it slamming. Fill it with your favourite plants to camouflage the fact it is actually a patio door stop. Comes in eight colours, white, terracotta, living black, lime green, vintage blue and mint. (£14.99, from garden centres. For stockists details, visit www.elho.com).
:: Discovery box: New from The Seed Pantry, this monthly subscription grow club discovery box is designed for those who are keen to grow food and flowers at home, delivered every month. It contains four bags of your own choice of seeds, bulbs or plants and grow guides. Gifting options will be available for six, 12 and 18 months subscriptions (£29.99 per month, for £28.99, www.seedpantry.co.uk).
:: Flower candle: The ultimate pampering gift when you’re soaking in the bath after a long day’s digging. This beautifully designed handmade Moss charity candle, of which 75% of all proceeds go to support its charity gardener projects nationwide (£4.49, www.jen-aline.co.uk).
:: Christmas scent: Bring garden fragrance into the home with this diffuser which will freshen up your room with the aroma of zesty orange with a dash of cinnamon, nutmeg and clove to create a handmade, stunning, spicy fragrance (£25, at www.helendawhiteandwhittaker.co.uk).
:: Tough ax to follow: Want a real wood fire over the festive season? Fiskars, a leading Finnish producer of exclusive gardening tools, offers a range of Next Generation axes to make light work of wood chopping (from £44.99, from garden centres, DIY stores and online, or visit www.fiskars.co.uk/support/store-locator).

It’s easy to grow, but is best cultivated in a bottomless bucket as it’s an invasive perennial with deep roots which can grow when they’re broken off. Buy the plants from specialist herb nurseries, dig a hole to house the bottomless bucket, leaving 2.5cm of the bucket above the soil so the roots are contained. Fill the bucket with compost and push a cane into the soil to make a hole, then feed a single long, thin root into it, leaving the tip at ground level. Plant three roots 60cm apart in a triangular shape for a good clump. You need to wait two years before collecting your first crop.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

1. Put a floating ball or a piece of polythene in ponds to stop the water freezing.
2. Stake Brussels sprouts with sturdy canes and remove dead or dying leaves around the bottom of plants.
3. Do some weeding if the ground is soft enough, to give your plants a good start.
4. Fill border gaps with new perennials.
5. Prune and remove dead wood, and knock off decorations in a smaller room, where you get a good view of them.

Consider how much room you have for a tree before you buy

The most common type of tree is the Nordmann fir

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Winter gardens are a breath of fresh air

TAKE a break from Christmas shopping, list-making and party planning by enjoying the best of winter gardens nationwide.

If you haven’t celebrated Capability Brown’s 300th anniversary this year, there’s still time to visit his majestic landscapes, while the National Trust offers a wealth of winter wonderlands and the RHS stages a range of horticultural events.

Here’s just a few of the best gardens to give you space to think before Christmas takes over.

**Dingle Nurseries and Garden, Frochuck, Walsall, Powys**
This family-run business has devoted a 4.5-acre area for a spectacular RHS partner garden taking in the mid-Wales rolling hills and is famed for its colour-themed and unusual planting. At this time of year, head for the lake to admire the brightly-stemmed dogwoods and trees with eye-catching bark, including euonymus and super birches, as well as the paper bark maple (Acer griseum). It also has great collections of conifers and shrubs, including witch-hazel and daphne (dingleburygarden.co.uk; 01782 655 146).

**Croome Court, Worcestershire**
Take in a guided tour of the gardens and parkland Capability Brown designed with stunning views over the Malverns at Croome Court. Guided tours run until December 31, with temples, follies and statues around every corner. If you want to explore on your own, downloadable walks, including a winter walk to Perton Castle, are available from www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

**RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate, North Yorkshire**
Adorned with dapples, witch hazels, birch trees and maples, the striking gentlemen’s Robert Adam-designed garden, Kenwood and parkland Capability Brown designed, take refuge in the amazing glasshouses where 10 different climatic zones display stately palms, stunning orchids, architectural ferns, a collection of plants that underlines their importance to our everyday existence and plants from some of the steamier jungles and driest deserts on planet earth (www.rhs.org.uk).

**Bodnant Garden, Conwy**
Bodnant’s winter garden has now been open for almost four years. Discover colour-stemmed birches and enjoy the scent of winter shrubs such as hamamelis, daphne and sarcococca. Highlights after Christmas include bright bergenia and bulbs such as snowdrops, cyclamen and crocus (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden).

**Wallington, Northumberland**
Leave the formality of the house behind this winter and explore the wonderful 18th-century pleasure ground waiting for you in the woods at Wallington. Follow the growing winter trail and take the seasonal planting through the East Wood, with trees, shrubs and plants showcasing coloured and textured bark and winter berries. Visit the new mini-lake covered in a sprinkling of frost and the enchanting Walled Garden. The grounds at Wallington are even open on Christmas Day, and are the perfect place to walk off your festive dinner (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington).

**Trentham Gardens, near Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs**
Top designer Piet Oudolf’s Rivers of Grass is a sight to behold in winter. The garden are open throughout the holiday season from Christmas Day itself. Book a skating session on their lake side rink (trentham.co.uk; 01782 646646).

**Bodnant Garden, Conwy**
Bodnant’s winter garden has now been open for almost four years. Discover colour-stemmed birches and enjoy the scent of winter shrubs such as hamamelis, daphne and sarcococca. Highlights after Christmas include bright bergenia and bulbs such as snowdrops, cyclamen and crocus (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden).

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Colourful planting to help raise the spirits of visitors to Bodnant Winter Garden

### WALKS

**By Hannah Stephenson**

**The Palmhouse, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh**

The Palmhouse, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

**Croome Park, Worcestershire, is worth a visit**

**The Pottery, The first 2.5-mile section includes Middleport Pottery, “home” of Burleigh ware and the BBC TV Great Pottery Throw Down, and continues to the city centre of Hanley.**

**Fittingly enough, Stoke-on-Trent and The Pottery is the place where the canal’s most enthusiastic promoter, Josiah Wedgwood, and his fellow manufacturers and businessmen planned a canal well beyond the scale of anything that had ever been seen before.**

**Less than a mile from Westport is the site where Wedgwood himself broke the soil to start the canal’s construction, 250 years ago.**

**Integral to the success of the Trent and Mersey Canal was the Canal Club, which is now also a part of the Heritage Canoe Trail.**

**The trail along the two canals can be enjoyed in several ways: short trips lasting around one to two hours; longer trips that take most of the day; or, for the very fit, longer trips that can be completed in one go, or over multiple days.**

**The trail also shows places to visit along the way, including Middleport Pottery and Café, Emma Bridgewater Factory and Café, Churnet Valley Steam Railway, and numerous historic canal-side pubs.**

**The trail as a whole is also well-signposted by new orange and white route plaques.**

**The online link to the trail can be found at http://www.visitsitkoe.co.uk/ aoe-de/canals.aspx**

### WALKS

**By Hannah Stephenson**

**The Palmhouse, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh**

**Croome Park, Worcestershire, is worth a visit**

**World-class hotels await you in Music City Seattle**

Fly to Seattle from London in under ten hours

**SPOTLIGHT ON SEATTLE**

**Currency:** US Dollar

**Brief overview:** For a while, Seattle was Music City. Like Nashville, New Orleans and Memphis, it became inextricably linked to rock’n’roll. Seattle is the city that gave us Jimi Hendrix and Nirvana. So stick that in your pipe, Liverpool.

You only gave us one-and-a-half bands – Cast being the half – Seattle gave us two. And we’re not counting Pearl Jam. Scouting for Girls, Alice In Chains, Death Cab For Cutie or Fleet Foxes, though we probably should.

The seaport city is the largest in the state of Washington and lies close to the Canadian and USA border. It’s one of the USA’s more relaxed and laid-back cities, a place that doesn’t rush nor take itself too seriously. Rich in history, Seattle was once a timber town that experienced numerous periods of boom and bust.

A gold rush, Great Depression and prosperity brought about by Boeing’s manufacture of aircraft and the dot-com boom have also shaped its modern era.

**Where to stay:** Seattle offers great, world class hotels and the Four Seasons is arguably the best. Expect sleek, polished service with local artwork on display.

**What to eat/drink:** The Four Seasons is similarly classy while others of a high standard include Hotel 1000, Inn at the Market, Hotel Monaco, Pan Pacific, The Arctic Club, Alexis Seattle, The Heathman Hotel and Spa, the Westin, and Hyatt at Olive 8, which was designed to be eco-friendly and as its possible to be.

**What to do:** You can whiz round Seattle in a couple of days if you really want to, though taking time to explore is a far better option. Either way, a list of sights that ought to be on your itinerary includes Space Needle, the landmark spire with city vistas. Pike Place Market offers great food and flowers while the Experience Music Project Museum is a revelation. Other points of interest include the Woodland Park Zoo, Pacific Space Centre, Museum of Flight, Chihuly Garden and Glass, Lake Union, Ballard Locks and Olympic Sculpture Park.

**What to eat/drink:** From the city that gave us world class coffee and Starbucks, try carved beef born at Mee Sum Pan, fried chicken at Heaven Bent, daily specials at Il Corvo, chicken teriyaki at Nasu Teriyaki, fresh oysters at The Walrus and the Carpenter, grilled cheese at Beecher’s, bitterweet cookies at Delancey, a Tokyo classic at Katsu Burger and a Seattle dog at Stands Around Seattle.

**How to get there:** Expect to find direct budget flights from London to New Orleans from around £400. The flight from London Heathrow to Louis Armstrong Airport takes under 10 hours.

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No escape from the abundance of branding

Style
Focus
with Janet Timmis

The newest trends in company symbols for advertising are all around us, every day.

Brand are all around us, every day. Look out for the Victoriana ones with leaded glass fronts but check the panes are undamaged before you buy.

Vintage cupboards and chests are often more roomy inside than their contemporary counterparts and you can still pick up old filing cabinets.

Smaller items, such as envelopes, paper clips, scissors, notebooks and so on can be stored in a desk or filing box.

Pen and pencils look really nice in an old jug or small vase, an angle-poise lamp on a desk will provide some ambient lighting and you may even be able to find and old skimmer.

Depending on space, you could have a small vintage sofa or a couple of upholstered chairs to complete the look.

Add to all this some period prints for the walls, maybe even a vintage telephone, a couple of old rugs and you will have re-created a roud, old-fashioned study which is extremely peaceful to work in!

Research by Tesco says that last year mums and dads spent an average of £294 buying Christmas gifts for the kids, but this year 66 per cent are unsure what to buy – often because young-sters are constantly changing their minds.

New research by Asda Money shows a quarter of those buying children gifts feel pressure to buy presents they can’t afford.

But what if your kids do know what they want and won’t stop pestering you for it? What if you’re stuck buying a gift for a boy, girls or both?

“Give yourself a helping hand and pick a gift that you’re interested in too.”

Pester Power

Harking back to the
write stuff in
home office

Antiques and Collectibles

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips

WITH the advent of computers in the not too distant past, home offices changed dramatically, becoming much more functional than the studies of previous years.

And usually far less comfortable, it has to be said, with wires everywhere, hard drives you either fell over or stabbed your toes on and computer desks you couldn’t actually sit at and so on.

But thankfully, and ironically due to advanced computer technology, we can once more establish the traditional study with vintage items – which is great for the increasing number of people who now work from home.

Because of neat little flat screens, laptops and tablets we are able to bring back the lovely roll-top desk, which was sadly not at all popular over the past decade thanks to its shape and size.

This also goes for the small pretty vintage desks with red or green leather tops which can also be used in the modern home office.

We sell a lot of really nice vintage desks in the sale-room and although prices vary it is possible to pick one up for a very reasonable sum.

And, because there is much more room on our desks now, we can actually furnish them with vintage writing stands – I know we don’t especially use ink any more, but they still look great!

There are some beautiful antique bookcases available. Look out for the Victorian ones with leaded glass fronts but check the panes are undamaged before you buy.

Style
Focus

WHILE you are sitting reading this article, glance around you and take note of how many logos you can see. My list includes HSBC, Axa, Asda, Apple, Sainsbury’s, Wilko, Boots, Sky, Crocs, IKEA, to name but a few.

Our lives are inundated with product icons designed to grab our attention in a crowded marketplace and some familiar without any use of words to define the items such as Nike, MacDonalds, Chanel and most of the car companies.

A logo identifies a business by a graphic representation, branding however is the complete corporate image and consistency of way all its elements are used is hugely important to ensure we unknowingly recognise and remember. It is incredibly difficult to create the right image you can never please everyone and it is essential the icons used are not too contemporary or too old fashioned so that they will last a lifetime, the best are simple, clear and honest and best not altered.

Today every new company sets up with a logo, sometimes at great expense using graphic designers, sometimes just using a much loved doodle. Our ancestors named businesses after themselves, there was rarely an icon and the description of their trade was included, e.g. John Smith, Butcher or Jones and Sons, Ironmonger. Today it is the money spent on advertising that advertises us of the nature of a business. The money spent also makes businesses very productive. An icon (or Mark) can be registered as a trademark (sign, design or expression) and the owner can then pursue legal action for any trademark infringement. An unregistered trademark will be defined by the TM mark and a R in a circle defines a registered trademark. The first logo to be trademarked was the red Bass brewery triangle in 1876. There is even a board game involving stands – I know we don’t especially use ink any more, but they still look great!

There are some beautiful antique bookcases available. Look out for the Victorian ones with leaded glass fronts but check the panes are undamaged before you buy.

Brand are all around us, every day. Look out for the Victoriana ones with leaded glass fronts but check the panes are undamaged before you buy. Vintage cupboards and chests are often more roomy inside than their contemporary counterparts and you can still pick up old filing cabinets. Smaller items, such as envelopes, paper clips, scissors, notebooks and so on can be stored in a desk or filing box.

Pen and pencils look really nice in an old jug or small vase, an angle-poise lamp on a desk will provide some ambient lighting and you may even be able to find and old skimmer. Depending on space, you could have a small vintage sofa or a couple of upholstered chairs to complete the look.

Add to all this some period prints for the walls, maybe even a vintage telephone, a couple of old rugs and you will have re-created a roud, old-fashioned study which is extremely peaceful to work in!

By Lisa Salmon

With TV screens currently bouncing from one sparking Christmas advert to another, parents are under increasing pressure to buy the biggest and best gifts for their excited children.

But although studies show that last year mums and dads spent an average of £294 buying Christmas gifts for the kids, this year two thirds (66 per cent) of parents are unsure what to buy – often because youngsters are constantly changing their minds.

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Perry and Phillips Auctioneers hold sales of antiques and collectibles on the first Tuesday of each month. Valuation days, for sale items only, are held every Wednesday at the Mill Street saleroom in Low Town, Bridgnorth, from 10am until 4pm.
There are lots of things to consider when buying bathroom taps

BUYING bath and basin taps isn’t necessarily as straightforward as you might think – it’s easy to make the wrong choice, but how do you make the right one?

1. There are lots of things to consider when buying bathroom taps, not least the style. The different elements of your bathroom should all go together, so if you have a period-style room, you need classic taps to suit that period, and if you’ve gone down the contemporary route, you need sleek, modern taps. Try the taps with the bathroom suite to check they’re the right style and size – it’s especially important that the basin tap’s in proportion to the basin. Most bathroom taps are chrome these days, but other finishes are available.

2. Don’t forget ease of use, especially for the youngest and oldest members of the family, who may have difficulty operating some designs. “You’ll use these taps every day, so think about how you’ll interact with them,” says Simon Browning from Mira Showers. “Make sure the control feels precise and the taps are easy to use.” You also need to spend a fortune to get good taps, but it can be a false economy to buy really cheap ones because a tap has working parts and those parts can fail if they’re poor quality. If you soon end up having to get the taps repaired or replaced, you’ll wish you’d spent more on a product designed to last. “You can judge the quality of a tap by the warranty that comes with it, as well as aesthetics: look for perfect symmetry and flat lines on the edges of the taps,” says Browning.

3. Mixers taps, which only have one spout, are a popular choice and mix hot and cold water inside the tap, but some people prefer separate hot and cold taps (often called pillar taps). If your bath has two tap holes, you’re not confined to having separate taps – most bath mixers are designed for both holes. However, not all baths come pre-drilled with taps holes – to avoid drilling them, or if the bath isn’t designed to have tap holes, use wall-mounted or floor-standing taps.

4. There’s nothing worse than a tap that’s more a dripble than a deluge, so do consider your home’s water system before you buy. “This tends to be more important if you have a low-pressure water system – if the tap isn’t suitable and the flow is poor, it will take a long time to fill a bath,” says Browning. “Improvements in technology can not only make taps work better, but also improve their longevity and ease of cleaning.”

5. Good water pressure is especially important for bath-shower mixer taps. These taps are a cost-effec- tive way to have an over-bath shower because you need separate pipes for both hot and cold water, which can why not pay a bit more for taps that connect to a shower head and hose? Bath-shower mixers are useful for washing your hair, the dog and the bath itself, but good water pressure is needed for a good showering experience, so they can’t always be used instead of a separate shower.

Top tips for getting it right with taps

1. Think about the style of your bathroom – is it modern, traditional or country?
2. Consider the size of your bathroom – are you looking for a small, medium or large tap?
3. Think about how you’ll use the tap – will you be using it for baths or showers?
4. Consider the budget – how much are you willing to spend on a tap?
5. Consider the warranty – do you want a long or short warranty?

There are lots of things to consider when buying bathroom taps.

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### Top Product

**Evolve**

For a stunning statement in your smallest room, the Evolve range of taps from the Mira Showers Aspects Collection is a great choice. Beautifully designed and engineered, these lever taps are a mini舐or’s dream, with sleek, contemporary styling, clean lines and a smooth action. The range comes with a reassuring five-year guarantee and comprises both pillar and mixer taps for baths and basins (from £127.20 for Mira Evolve Basin Pillar Taps). Evolve taps are easy to install, easy to use – even with one or two fingers – and easy to clean thanks to integrated flow straighteners. What more do you need?

**How to Buy**

Dripping taps are not only annoying, they also waste water, which wastes money if you have a water meter. There’s usually a quick fix, such as replacing a washer, but even basin plumbing like this can seem daunting if you’re not an experienced DIYer. For novices, there’s an excellent, easy-to-follow guide to fixing leaking taps on the Wickes website at www.wickes.co.uk/how-to-guides/kitchen-bathroom/fix-leaking-taps.

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### Tree-t yourself to new splash of festive decor

By Gabrielle Fagan

DECKING the halls is all very well, but the real focal point at Christmas is the tree, which makes a statement about your decor taste and seasonal style.

There are four top-of-the-tree looks to choose from this season, to ensure yours is fashitionally fashionable and a star of the show.

**ARCTIC CHIC**

“The must-have look is modern minimalism – in other words, less is more – and that’s made white trees and white lights this year’s most popular choice,” says Steph Evans, managing director at Christmas Tree World.

“This is a sleek, fuss-free but magical setting and works brilliantly with blue decorations – they’re a really strong trend. Combine with silver, grey and white for a Frozen or Narnia-inspired look. This cool palette brings a frosty sparkle to the home, and if this is a little too chilly for your taste, intersperse accents of gold and copper to warm up the theme.”

Dive into Dolliss for brilliant blue baubles, including a Bauble with Green Leaf Tree, £5.99, and a retro-style Reflective Bauble £5.99. Gisela Graham’s Jeweled Snowflake Decoration, £19.95, Harrods, will add that essential sparkle.

For a look your children will love, combine a favourite furry friend and their tail designs feature on Very’s Glass Peacock Christmas Tree Bauble, Dobbies’ super red and tartan bauble collection includes a Red Bell Bauble With Berry Trim And Tartan Ribbon, £2.99, and a cheery red Glass Passion, £4.99. Wyevale Garden Centre’s handsomely Bayberry Spruce Christmas Tree is £21.99, and they have an impressive collection of traditional tartan decorations, available in stores. My favourites are a Tartan Stocking, £3.49; Wooden Sledge With Lights, £8.99; Red Berry Ball, £2.99, and Large Glass Ball With Red Poinsettia, £14.99.

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### Shimmer & Shine

People are lavishing more and more care and attention on decorating their trees, so they’re an eye-catching talking point in a room.

Metallic finishes always impress and attractively capture the light. Silver is always a contemporary choice, although there’s a real growth in the popularity of more antique silver and vintage baubles. Dolliss have an unusual Clock Face Bauble in gold or silver (£4.99), which is an example of the trend. It encapsulates the fashionable style of a mix of shabby chic and Victorian.

Gold is still strong for decorations, with rose gold featuring – but champagne gold is taking over because it’s glamorous and sophisticated, and suits more gentle, subtle schemes. Brown’s Glass Acorn Bauble, £5.99, incorporates a natural theme with green baubles.

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**The Artic look is all about modern minimalism**

Make a statement about your taste and style

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Go completely white for a magical, winter wonderland setting inspired by Frozen and Narnia

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Embrace Scandi style with a more natural theme
GAMERS have a better than ever choice of action games after the major companies surpassed themselves by literally unleashing their big guns in readiness for the season of goodwill – and console carnage – to all men (and women).

Several of the top titles are sequels but, reversing the usual trend of diminishing returns, these games actually improve upon, or at least match, the originals.

Titanfall 2 is the follow-up to 2014’s multi-award winner Titanfall and places you back in the thick of the action as a pilot in the galactic civil war between the Militia and the IMC. You can call upon a Titan, a hulking cross between a Transformers-like robot and a walking tank.

The single player campaign is shorter but more exciting than the original, with you as rookie pilot Jack, trapped behind enemy lines on a hostile alien planet after a mission goes badly wrong.

It is in multiplayer that developers Respawn have really pulled out all the stops with strange new worlds, more powerful weapons and bigger, better Titans for when the robots get ready to rumble. The whole experience has been upgraded. The rocket-powered grappling hook is likely to be a favourite innovation, letting you soar through the sci-fi landscapes like Spiderman.

Battlefield 1 is an exciting reboot of a classic franchise and is a must for all fans. It takes us back to the First World War to reboot the popular, more of a good thing is welcome.

It is undoubtedly the most cohesive, with a genuine steampunk world. Is it better than the original? Maybe not, but it matches it for thrills and imagination. When a game was this popular, more of a good thing is welcome.

In the first scenes, when you wake up again and again in the trenches, overwhelmed by the Kaiser’s hordes, the game drives home the message that many soldiers didn’t stand a chance. One skirmish ends with you facing a lonesome German soldier, and both of you decide to drop your weapon. Point made, a huge world of war opens up.

London Theatre Weekend with Evening Meal
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Price includes:
✓ Overnight stay at a 3-star hotel within 20 miles of central London with full English breakfast
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✓ Free time in London

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Quote Code: DTTSS9

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01524 37500

Pilot and Titan explore strange new worlds in Respawn and EA’s Titanfall 2 – and try to survive in them

Video game titans battle it out with action franchises

Saturday Night London Theatre
Selected Saturday departures until July 2017
Price includes:
✓ Overnight stay at a 4-star hotel within 20 miles of central London with 3-course evening meal and full English breakfast
✓ A show ticket for a Saturday matinee performance of a West End show from our fabulous selection
✓ Free time in London

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£149.99pp
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Quote Code: XFU112

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For full listings see Express & Star every Friday
R&B, JAZZ, SOUL, BLUES & MOTOWN

Up4 The Downstroke
Tonight - tomorrow,
The Jam House, Birmingham, B3 1QD. Call 0121 200 3030

Crossroads Blues Gees
Steve AjaA Blues Giants
Tower Of Song, Birmingham, B30 3EL. Call 0121 496 1200

Jools Holland and His Rhythm and Blues Orchestra
Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

Trobe
Sun, Glee Club Birmingham, The Arcadian Center, Birmingham, B3 3TD. Call 0871 472 0400

Jazz Tuesdays
Wed, Spotted Dog, Digbeth, B12 0NH. Call 0121 372 3822

The Urban Voodoo Machine
Wed, E14 - E16
The Robin 2, Brighton JV4 4LJ. Call 01902 401211

The Urban Voodoo Machine
Wed, E14 - E16
The Robin 2, Brighton JV4 4LJ. Call 01902 401211

Jazz Wednesdays
Wed, The Blue Note, Birmingham, B5 4TD. Call 0121 331 5901

ROCK & METAL

Jean Genie – The world’s No.1 tribute to David Bowie
Tonight, E10 - E12
The Roadhouse Birmingham, King’s Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

The Bootleg Beatles Tour
Tonight, Wulffan Hall, Wolverhampton, WV1 1RD. Call 01902 552122

Reef
Tonight, E19
Central Station, Wrexham, LL11 1SN. Call 01978 358780

The ZZ Topp – The World’s #1 ZZ Top Tribute Band
Tonight, E7
The Roadhouse Birmingham, King’s Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

Levellers – Levelling the Land 25th Anniversary Tour Tonight, 02 Academy Birmingham, B1 3SD. Call 0121 622 8250

Matt Goss
Absolute Bowie – Celebrating the life of David Bowie
Tonight, 02 Academy Birmingham, B1 3DZ. Call 0121 622 8250

Blink-182
KAISER CHIEFS
10 - 12 Nov 2017
5-6 May & 1-4 Jun 2017
14 Apr 2017

Jools Holland and his R&B Orchestra
Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

University Camerata
Today, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2PP.

Advent expectation – Lichfield Cathedral Chorus concert
Tonight, Lichfield Cathedral, WS13 1LD. Call 01543 306 100

An Enchanted Christmas
Tonight, St Hilda’s Church, Wednesfield, Smethwick, B67 5NG.

FOLK, COUNTRY & ACOUSTIC

The Stones
Thu, E15
Theatre on the Steps, Bridgnorth, WV16 4RD. Call 01746 766477

R & P HIP HOP

Rizzle Kicks (canceled) Tonight, O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

POP

70’s v 80’s One Stop Boogie! XMAS PARTY NIGHT Tonight, E13
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 8JN. Call 01384 397 177 or 07986 577 661

The Sensational 60’s Experience Tonight - tomorrow, Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB.
Call 01684 892277

The Human League Tonight, Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

AABA – Special Dreams – the ultimate Christmas party! Tomorrow, E9
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 8JN. Call 01384 397 177 or 07986 577 661

Jason Donovan 2016: Ten Good Reasons & Greatest Hits Tour Tus, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 3AD. Call 0644 871 7649 and
Wed, E34.16 - E37.12
Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

COMEDY

RH Comedy Presents
Tonight, The Roadhouse Birmingham, King’s Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

Paul Foot: “Tis a Pity She’s a Piglet” Tonight,
The Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, WV1 1HP. Call 01903 552122

25 Years of Reeves & Mortimer: the Poignant Moments Tonight,
Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

Matt Dodd
Jools Holland and his R&B Orchestra
Wednesday, 7pm
Civic Hall, Wolverhampton
Before joining his brother in a reunited Bros next year, Matt brings a festive version of his Rat Pack-inspired swing show honed in Las Vegas. See academycambridgegroup.com/o2academy-cambridge

Saturday, 6.30pm
Symphony Hall, Birmingham
The 88-year-old Liverpudlian comedian is celebrating more than 60 years in showbiz and promises a tattled-nellied Christmas Treat. See Frosty Christmas at the Helena Bonham Carter Christmas Show. See www.thsh.co.uk

Ken Dodd
The Ken Dodd Christmas Show
Tonight, Wulffan Hall, Wolverhampton, WV1 1RD. Call 01902 552122

Smash Entertainz
Sun, Glee Club Birmingham, The Arcadian Center, Birmingham, B3 3TD. Call 0871 472 0400

Seann Walsh: One For The Road Tonight, E14
Artic, Bromsgrove, B60 1QG. Call 01527 877 1680

Faulty Towers The Dining Experience Thu, E35
Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP. Call 0121 236 4455

Comedy 4 Christmas Special Thu,
The Robin 2, Bilston WV14 7LJ. Call 0121 429 1384

FOLK, COUNTRY & ACOUSTIC

Traditional Irish Music
Tonight, Spotted Dog, Digbeth, B12 0NH. Call 0121 772 3822

Kate Rusby at Christmas
Mon, E15 - E21.50
Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

The Dylan Project: Fifty years after Blonde on Blonde
Tonight, The Robin 2, Bilston JV4 4LJ. Call 01902 401211

Sing Political!
Wed, The Prince of Wales Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8EE. Call 0121 4484198

Seth Lakeman
Thu, Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

THEATRE

Sister Act
Tonight - tomorrow, E30.5 - £44.50
Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 BB2277

The Nutcracker
Tonight - Thu, £19
Birmingham Hippodrome, B5 4TB. Call 0844 338 5000

Tudor Christmas
Tonight, E10 Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP. Call 0121 236 4455

Keeping Dancin’
Tonight - tomorrow, New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, B5 4TB. Call 0121 246 2273

A Christmas Carol
Tonight, B5 4TB. Call 0121 246 2273

A Christmas Carol
Tonight, MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, B1 1PN. B1 2OQ, 0121 446 3323

Aladdin
Sun, B5 4TB. Call 0121 246 2273

XMAS PARTY NIGHT
Tonight - tomorrow,
The Green, Meriden Park, King’s Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 780 4141

Christmas Market at The Green
Tonight - tomorrow,
The Green, Marston Park, Birmingham, B37 5TB. See http://lineupnow.com/event/christmas-market-at-the-green

Christmas Decoration Making
Tonight, Creative Coffee, Birmingham, B29 6HJ. Call 0121 257 5757

Beyond the Barricade
Thu, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

The Roaring 20s Party
Tonight, E35
The ICC Birmingham, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 200 2000

Silver Stacking Ring Class
Tonight, The Quarterworks, Birmingham, B3 4LJ. See http://jewellerysilver smithclasses.bigcartel.com/product/silver-stacking-rings

Tudor Christmas
Tonight, Blakesley Hall Museum, Birmingham, B25 8RJ. Call 0121 464 2193

RCTA Christmas Flatpack Market
Tonight, Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 0844 338 5000

Woodland Elves
Tonight, Clent Hills, B62 0NL. Call 01562 712 822

Dr Darwin’s 265th Birthday
Tonight, Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield, WS13 7AD. Call 01543 306600

Christmas Reindeer Reeder
Tonight, Creative Coffee, Birmingham, B29 6HJ. Call 0121 7277000

Christmas Market at The Green
Tonight, The Green, Marston Park, Birmingham, B37 5TB. See http://lineupnow.com/event/christmas-market-at-the-green

Wire Christmas Decoration Making
 Tonight, Creative Coffee, Birmingham, B29 6HJ. Call 0121 257 5757

Sweet Treats
Tonight, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms, SY7 9RS. Call 01588 766060

Monday, 1pm
Recital Hall, Birmingham Conservatoire
Acclaimed as ‘opera’s coolest soprano’, this is a rare intimate venue recital from the Australia-born diva who found fame at Glyndebourne. See thsh.co.uk

Danielle de Niese
Paris goes to Chicago

“MURDER, greed, corruption, exploitation, adultery and treachery - all those things we hold near and dear to our hearts...” so begins the Broadway and West End hit musical Chicago, which is providing the alternative to pantos in Birmingham this festive season.

The UK tour comes back to the Midlands for an extended run from Saturday, December 10, to Sunday, January 22, the festive season hits the Wulfrun Hall on Saturday.

Aladdin reunites Joe with Lucy Partridge as slick brief Billy Flynn. Dancing on Ice winner, Sam Bailey, who played ‘Mama’ Morton when Chicago was staged at Wolverhampton Grand earlier this year, and most recently from EastEnders actress Jessie Wallace.

For tickets see www.atgtickets.com/venues/wolverhampton-theatre-wolverhampton or call 0844 871 3011.

“IT’s panto time at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre with Aladdin set to be the venue’s biggest pantomime to date. Running from Saturday, December 10, to Sunday, January 22, the festive family show has got pop and stage star Joe McElderry as Aladdin and one of TV’s Loose Women, Lisa Riley, as Slave Of The Ring.

Also in the cast are children’s favourite Ben Faulks – Cbeebies’ Mr Bloom – who will play the Policeman. Britain’s Got Talent soprano Lucy Kay is Princess Jasmine, whilst internet sensation and Black Country comedienne Doreen appears as the Lazy Empress Of China.

The glittering production features Ian Adams as Widow Twankey, Adam C Booth as Wishoo Washoo and Neal Wright as the Genie Of The Lamp. Aladdin reunites Joe with Lucy after they received acclaim for their performances as Joseph and the Narrator in Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat on tour. The 2009 X Factor winner Joe will be marking his fourth year performing in pantomime. The 25-year-old singer said: “I’ve heard Aladdin’s one about the age of four. I went every year with my family in South Shields and I desperately wanted to be part of it one day – the costumes, the dance routines, people throwing pies at each other.”

“I can honestly say it’s my favourite time of the year. I have a blast.”

It’s about the age of four. I went every year with my family in South Shields and I desperately wanted to be part of it one day – the costumes, the dance routines, people throwing pies at each other.”
The XF actor audience of thousands at head, in the first instalment of Osbourne deliver their verdict final. The three remaining to battle to ut in the second place in the grand final. Liz Bonnin travels to two. The Siberian tiger is one of is islandos of Gigha and Jura which, not be more different –o ne being lush and verdant, the other rugged, hidden world of this mysterious whose goal is to uncover he hidden world of this mysterious. Re-examining the events of 1989, which saw the fall America’s military into the Second World. (R)

You can now book through our website or by telephone on 0121 585 8228.
**CLAUDIA LOOKS TO MAKE ALL THE RIGHT MOVES**

If you feel like the pop music of 2016 has largely passed you by, then you're in good company. Claudia Winkleman admits she's not really got her finger on the pulse either. She says: “Music stopped for me when Duran Duran stopped. So you know how you have a cool person? I am the opposite of that.”

“The music I like is the music that I listen to on the radio all the time and I’m like ‘I know that one!’”

Although we suspect the Strictly Come Dancing presenter is being more than a little self-deprecating, it’s probably for the best that she’s not hosting the BBC Music Awards 2016 on her own. Instead, she’s joining forces with Fearne Cotton, who she thinks is the perfect person for the job.

Claudia says: “I can’t wait to be with Fearne as all we’ve ever done is chat and gravitate. She’s a proper friend, and we’ve never worked together so it’s just going to be standing there smiling at her. ‘She’s amazing and she’s got musical gravitas. She knows what she’s talking about and I can be the idiot, and that actually works really well.”

And of course, the awards will see Claudia and Fearne get a chance to remember themselves (or learn for the first time) what’s been going on in the world of music over the past 12 months.

The ceremony, which comes to us live from the O2 Arena in London, will feature five awards: BBC Music British Artist of the Year, Song of the Year, BBC Music Introducing Artist of the Year, BBC Radio 1 Live Lounge Performance of the Year and BBC Radio 2 Album of the Year.

And there will also be live performances from some of the biggest names in music, including Kaiser Chiefs, Lukas Graham, Emeli Sandé, the 1975, Robbie Williams and Craig David.

Fearne is especially excited about seeing Craig. “He’s a really old friend of mine and I absolutely adore him and I love the fact that he’s had this amazing comeback after all these years of holding his nerve and doing what he does, just still really making great music. I think the arena is going to go absolutely wild with that.”

“So I’m really excited about that and also The 1975 are a great little band doing so well internationally now and it’s always lovely to see Robbie play as well. Literally everyone there will be fantastic.”

Claudia adds: “I can’t wait to see a brilliant sheila with a brilliant sheila and I don’t think ever given a lacklustre performance.”

A night, of course, could never be enough to convince Claudia that there is a musical life after Duran Duran, but just don’t expect her to become such a fully fledged music that she embraces the current vinyl revival.

When asked if she’ll go back to buying LPs, her answer is: “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m technically challenged because I am an old lady but I have worked out iTunes.”

**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL**

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**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL**

Christmas operations for the first time, a job that involves heading to Huddersfield to pick up 50 miles of fairy lights and enough baubles to fill a swimming pool. But can she also find a star to switch all those lights on? Meanwhile, Nick’s bosses hope a new TV advertising campaign will ensure shoppers don’t abandon the centre in favour of online retailers.

**THEM**

The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas

Channel 5, 9pm

It’s a common complaint that Christmas seems to come earlier each year, but at the Manchester’s Trafford Centre, there’s a good reason why the festive season begins in the spring. With 1 million Christmas shoppers expected to visit the retail complex, the staff really can’t afford to put their preparations until the Bonfire Night.

This two-part documentary follows events manager Niki Tarsey as she spearheads the centres Christmas operations for the first time, a job that involves heading to Huddersfield to pick up 50 miles of fairy lights and enough baubles to fill a swimming pool. But can she also find a star to switch all those lights on? Meanwhile, Nick’s bosses hope a new TV advertising campaign will ensure shoppers don’t abandon the centre in favour of online retailers.

**NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS**

The Royal Variety Performance, Tuesday, ITV, 7.30pm

When asked if she’ll go back to buying LPs, her answer is: “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m technically challenged because I am an old lady but I have worked out iTunes.”

**BBC Music Awards 2016, Monday, BBC1, 8.30pm**

*Best of the Rest*
Teamwork Juhel in crown at Masala

With tasty dishes and such helpful staff MARK SHIPP found the Masala Lounge was absolutely mint

FORGET Peter Kay and his garlic bread, I’ve found an alternative taste sensation, mint rice. Mint . . . and rice. It’s the future I tell you.

It was not my initial choice to accompany my fish dish at the Masala Lounge in Wednesfield, I had opted for a sizzling variety. However, I listened to the advice of the waiter, and didn’t regret it.

Located at the old Cross Guns pub in Lichfield Road, the restaurant itself is doing a roaring trade and has been a popular draw for the townsfolk since it opened four years ago.

Inviting

It’s easy to see why as it’s spacious and inviting, with more than 100 covers, and with booths for the extra privacy and comfort, more than adequately catering for the customers wishing to get a taste of what is on offer.

Parking is available, too, which is always an added attraction. Nine staff are employed at Masala Lounge, and it’s clear they have a rapport with the clientele.

Jointly operated by Juhel Miah and Hafiz Khan, one could even say it’s the ‘Juhel’ in the crown.

The management team have run restaurants around the West Midlands, while the chef has 35 years experience. Having honed his skills in India, he has worked in many top UK restaurants, so there’s no doubting the quality of fare on offer. It has five stars from RateMyPlate and has been highly recommended on Trip Advisor due to its favourable reviews on the site.

The menu comes with fusion appetisers and authentic curries, together with tandoori exclusives and traditional favourites. Fish dishes include the zinga cinnamon and the cod machli salan, which was my choice. But this was after starters, something I rarely partake in.

They just sounded so tempting, however, like the haddock kebab, dipped in eggs, with mixed spices and breadcrumbs. I overlooked that, though, in favour of the Bombay wraps, chicken breast served in a sweet chilli sauce, while the other half chose the vegetable samosa. She even strayed from tradition by going half and half with her regular chicken makhani, combining it with a chicken dahi, which she enjoyed just as much. Oh yes, and there was a tikka masala for our younger guest.

My own main was meaty, only moderately spicy, but the accompanying rice was something I would never have dreamed of.

It worked a treat. The restaurant is not licensed, but I was able to wash mine down with some ale that I bought earlier. The starters took their toll as we were unable to manage desserts, despite its tempting selections.

Masala Lounge is open every day from 5.30pm. Bookings are being taken for Christmas Day, with three choices of either Indian or English fare for £28.95 per adult and £12.95 for children, under 12.

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Landlords adapting to changes in UK

Private rented sector landlords in the UK are adapting to changes brought on by the Government but rents are set to rise as a result, a new analysis report suggests.

Buy to let landlords have seen changes to stamp duty which means now paying an extra 3%, have to carry out immigration checks on new tenants, face tougher lending conditions in the New Year and then tax changes in April 2017.

But the research report from Kent Reliance suggests that landlord confidence has bounced back following the Government intervention as they see the benefits of continuing to invest in the sector.

It says that landlords’ confidence is at its highest in a year, with 54% of investors confident over the prospects for their portfolios, a recovery from the 39% recorded in the second quarter of the year, according to the survey of 600 property investor in association with BORC Continental.

It also reveals that property investors have taken action to mitigate the additional tax costs they will face when tax relief is lowered on mortgage interest payments for individuals. This has seen landlords increasingly turn towards incorporation and borrowing through a limited company structure where finance costs can still be offset through a limited company structure.

A survey of 900 property investors run in the last quarter.

The report found that landlords have felt at the mercy of political agendas. But confidence is returning as landlords take action to limit the damage to their finances.

The use of limited companies is soaring, and rents are increasing, even after one of the biggest surges in rental supply in recent history, said Andy Golding, chief executive of OneSavings Bank which trades under the Bank of England Financial Policy Committee’s new powers. If the cumulative effect of constant change undermines the expansion of rental properties, this will simply exacerbate the housing crisis,” he explained.

“The raft of recent measures aimed at the buy to let sector singularly increase to homeowner ownership levels. Ironically, they will achieve the opposite, with even greater upward pressure on rents combined with the prospect of declining real incomes likely to stretch affordability even further,” he pointed out.

“We have warned all along that the tax changes will push up rents, and this is already starting to happen. The ban on using mortgage interest payments for individuals is a much needed step in the right direction,” he added.

“Only through a substantive and long term building programme across all tenures will we see an end to escalating house prices and rents.”

“The Chancellor has moved to provide more support for house building, but it is not yet enough to see the step change in supply that we need.”
Looking forward to next generation

By Sharon Walters

It’s a multi award-winner and you can see why. Nissan’s Qashqai has more than proved itself as a capable family car since it first hit our roads almost 10 years ago and began our love of the crossover.

Back then it was quite a move for Nissan and one which several other manufacturers quickly followed. It led the way in the crossover segment creating the SUV Qashqai when the Japanese marque wanted to replace the Almera, its popular family hatchback.

There were plenty of smallish 4x4s but with that came the added expense of getting that ability when the majority of buyers would rarely, if ever, need it. But at the same time families wanted something with a little more road presence than a hatch and also a feeling of safety created by a higher-riding, rugged looking car. And so came the Qashqai.

Now it could have been a bit of a disaster, producing a car from such a concept. But engineers at Nissan hit on success with their first ever attempt a decade ago and have not looked back since.

It is Nissan’s most successful vehicle to date with over one million sales since launch and was the first model to be styled by Nissan Design Europe in London, with engineering development led by Nissan Technical Centre Europe (NTCE) in Cranfield, Bedfordshire. And built at the super efficient Nissan plant in Sunderland. Continued production in the UK was in doubt after Brexit but the company has now committed to the Sunderland plant for the next generation due late next year or early 2018, along with the X-Trail. All excellent for British car manufacturing.

State-of-the-art technology inside

And so to the car. First things first, handling may not be the sharpest but it does the job very well along with low noise levels both from wind and tyre rumble (especially on motorways) and good ride comfort. And the six-speed manual box is slick and responsive.

Build quality is good and it is spacious enough for three passengers in the rear although headroom for those who break six foot many feel a little tight.

Technology is advanced with state-of-the-art features including a safety shield which provides eight different safety systems with around view monitor, blind spot warning, moving object detection and driver attention alert.

The around view monitor has four cameras that give you a 360-degree bird’s-eye view around your Nissan Qashqai. Selectable split-screen close-ups of the front, rear, and side views help you avoid annoying parking bumps and scrapes.

NissanConnect apps (where would we be without them now!) give you easy access to your preferred social media and much more. Voice recognition means you can keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel. On top of that Nissan’s Advanced Drive Assist displays important turn by turn navigation to helpful driving aids, to audio track info, right in your eyeline enabling you to focus better on the road ahead.

There’s a choice of four trim levels and two petrol and two diesel options. I tried out the DIG-T 163 Tekna manual. This produces 163 bhp and returns (officially, although I did quite close to the figures) 47.1 mpg in a combined cycle.

Short and long journeys were comfortable with supportive seats and for the driver extra scope to get a good driving position with the electrically adjustable seat partnered with manual lumbar support – a feature I am particularly keen to have to prevent that lower back pain you often get after lengthier journeys.

It’s a stylish looking car, well equipped for the price tag with a high level of finish inside and out. I’m looking forward to experiencing the new generation.

Build quality is good and it is spacious enough for three passengers in the rear
NETHERTON CC honoured three club stalwarts as they rounded off their 150th anniversary celebrations with a night to remember.

Past and present players plus numerous guests checked into the Village Hotel in Dudley for a special dinner to mark the end of a momentous season.

Former New Zealand captain turned radio and TV pundit Jeremy Coney provided the cricketing entertainment with tales from his lengthy career while comedian Josh Daniels gave a brilliant stand-up routine.

Both were outdone, however, by the standing ovation club legend Reg Cooper received when his outstanding service was recognised.

The 84-year-old has served the club in numerous capacities for 53 years, having first joined as a player in 1963 and is still there at their Highbridge Road ground every Saturday during the season.

Emotional

Netherton president Dennis Lewis read out the tributes to Cooper and two other members who were honoured, Colin Brookes and Keith Culwick. Coney presented them gifts.

"The standing ovation Reg received was the highlight of the night for me," said Lewis.

"It was lovely and I think it was quite emotional for Reg. He is hugely popular at the club."

"He joined in 1963 as a player and he is still there every Saturday, making the opposition feel welcome and dishing out cups of tea."

"He played then sat on the committee for 30 years and also did a lot of work around the ground."

"He used to love cutting the outfield and took a lot of pride in his job. He designed the scoreboard we had built to mark our 125th anniversary and also the team room that we had built the same year."

"There isn't much he hasn't done during his time at the club and 53 years is an unbelievable amount of commitment."

"Brookes is another hugely popular character at the club and we all know across the Black Country and beyond for his time with Halesowen Town where he is the current president and a former manager."

"The former professional footballer, who was a youth team player alongside the Busby Babes at Manchester United before spells with Aston Villa and his home-town club Barnsley, is a keen cricket fan and Manchester United before spells with Albion and his home-town club Barnsley, is a keen cricket fan."

"He was a bit of a practical joker and likes to tell a few tales."

"He still comes down and bores us all with his stories," joked Lewis. "But he has the club at heart."

"Culwick joined Cooper and Brookes in the spotlight as the club thanked him for excellent work as groundsman. "Keith joined 20 years ago when his lads Matt and Mark started playing junior cricket with us," said Lewis.

"Keith ended up coaching the junior side and then started doing some work on the ground and has been our groundsman for the last 16 years, working things around his day job."

"People like this are the heartbeat of the club. Without them you wouldn't survive. You wouldn't have a club." said Lewis.

Lewis has served the club since 1984. He turned up one day to watch his brother play and with the team one short, he took to the field and has been hooked ever since.

Alongside the club's hard-working committee, Lewis has overseen a successful series of events that have marked a special year.

Beer

"It's been a very busy and enjoyable year. We had planned things out and everything has gone quite smoothly."

Lewis has overseen a successful series of events that have marked a special year.

"It was a very busy and enjoyable year," he said.

"We had planned things out and everything has gone quite smoothly."

"It started in May with the president's game. We had a lot of social events and a few beer matches along the way and then we had the game with MCC on May 31."

"It was a good game of cricket and a nice get-together in the club afterwards."

"And after seeing the on-field exploits prove such a hit, alongside a season that saw the first team just miss out on promotion for the third successive year in Division Three of the Worcestershire County League, Lewis was delighted with the end-of-season gathering at The Village."

"The dinner at The Village was absolutely great," he added. "The feedback that we have received has been really good. It was a great end to what has been a good season."
Glassboys could face Chairboys in Cup

STOURBRIDGE could face League Two opposition in the FA Cup third round - should they get past Northampton in their rearranged second round tie.

Victory over the League One Cobblers would see Gary Hackett’s men travel to Adams Park to face Wycombe Wanderers, setting up a tie between the Chairboys and the Glassboys.

Stourbridge will first have to overcome Northampton Town after last Saturday’s clash was called off less than two hours before kick off because of a frozen pitch. It has been rearranged for next Tuesday, December 13. The decision put the fixture back from December 9.

More than 100 primary school children took part in a tag rugby tournament.

The event was hosted by Halesowen College and five primary schools, but organised by sports students. They planned the event as part of their studies and contacted St Kenelms, Clint, Shakespeare, Belfield and Hagley Primary Schools to take part.

The youngsters designed posters which were displayed in the primary schools and planned the running order and certificates for taking part.

Katy Skinner, sports tutor at Halesowen College, said: “We had a great day and all the primary school children really enjoyed themselves and improved their fitness by taking part in the tournament. “Our students worked really well as a team and we were all very proud.”

The injured player from Halesowen, who has also received an MBE, joined host Sue Barker and regular team captains Matt Dawson and Phil Tufnell on the show last night (Wednesday). It will be repeated at 7.30pm tomorrow (Friday).

The first Grand Slam of 2017, the Australian Open, was a highlight for the world No.5 player from Halewood, as she saw off Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic and her doubles partner Polona Hercog of Slovenia to win the title.

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Katy Skinner, sports tutor at Halesowen College, said: “We had a great day and all the primary school children really enjoyed themselves and improved their fitness by taking part in the tournament. “Our students worked really well as a team and we were all very proud.”

The injured player from Halesowen, who has also received an MBE, joined host Sue Barker and regular team captains Matt Dawson and Phil Tufnell on the show last night (Wednesday). It will be repeated at 7.30pm tomorrow (Friday).

Meanwhile, Whaley was this week appearing on the long-running BBC TV quiz show A Question of Sport.

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