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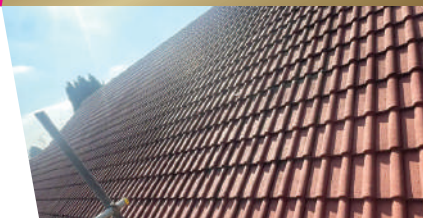


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### Featured

#### 5 From Stourbridge to Stardom

Jude Bellingham's Road to the World Cup

#### 7 Summer Panto Magic

Comes to Stourbridge with Aladdin Adventure

#### 8 Tidy Stourbridge

Keeping Our Town Clean, One Litter Pick at a Time

#### 11 This Months

Local Lowdown, Quirky Tales & Local Lore

### Regular

#### 14 Raise a Glass to Britain's Finest

Whiskies at Stourbridge Glass Museum

#### 17 MP Update

Cat Eccles Member of Parliament for Stourbridge

#### 22 From Stourbridge to the World Cup

And Never Back Again

#### 31 Interiors

Kitchen Island ideas, Boiler repairs and Lavender in this months Garden and Interiors section

#### 39 Health & Wellbeing

Summer Foods That Can Naturally Support Better Gut Health and Skin safety this summer

#### 43 Food & Drink

British Strawberries, Summer Fruits and Eton Mess recipe

#### 46 Whats On

Highway Bring Classic Rock Anthems to The River Rooms, Ian Parker Band Live at Katie Fitzgerald's & The Selecter Live at Stourbridge Town Hall

#### 52 Motoring

July, Summer Road Trip Ready



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## From Stourbridge to Stardom

### Jude Bellingham's Road to the World Cup

As excitement builds ahead of the upcoming World Cup, England fans will once again be looking to one of the nation's biggest football stars to inspire the Three Lions. For people in Stourbridge and the surrounding area, there is an added sense of pride because one of England's most gifted players began his journey right here in the Black Country.

Born in Stourbridge on June 29, 2003, Jude Bellingham grew up in a football-loving family. His father, Mark Bellingham, became a legend in non-league football, scoring hundreds of goals during a remarkable career while also serving as a police officer. Football was a huge part of family life, and Jude quickly developed a passion and talent for the game.

Jude attended The Priory School in Edgbaston, where he balanced his studies with the demands of being one of the country's most promising young footballers. Teachers and coaches soon recognised that he possessed a rare combination of technical ability, determination and maturity beyond his years.

His football education began at Birmingham City, where he joined the club's academy as an under-eight player. Progressing rapidly through the ranks, he regularly played against older opponents and impressed coaches with his intelligence and composure. In August 2019, aged just 16 years and 38 days, he became Birmingham City's youngest-ever first-team player, a record that highlighted just how exceptional his talent was. His rise was so remarkable that when he left for Borussia Dortmund in 2020, Birmingham City took the unusual step of retiring his number 22 shirt in recognition of the impact he had made on the club despite his young age. The move to Germany



proved to be the perfect next step in his development. Playing week in, week out against some of Europe's best players, Jude matured into one of the finest midfielders in world football.

His performances for Dortmund earned him a regular place in the England squad and established him as one of the country's most important players. Fans were impressed not only by his technical ability but also by his leadership qualities, confidence and maturity under pressure.

A subsequent move to Spanish giants Real Madrid further cemented his reputation as one of football's elite talents. Playing for one of the world's biggest clubs, Jude has continued to shine on the biggest stages,

winning trophies and earning praise from football legends and pundits alike.

The Bellingham football story does not end with Jude. His younger brother, Jobe Bellingham, was also born in Stourbridge and followed a similar path through Birmingham City's academy system. After making his mark at Sunderland, Jobe earned a move to Borussia Dortmund, following in his older brother's footsteps. Still only in his early twenties, he is already regarded as one of England's brightest young prospects and many believe he has the potential to enjoy a career every bit as successful as Jude's.

As England prepares for another World Cup campaign, supporters across Stourbridge

will be hoping Jude can play a leading role in bringing success to the national team. His story is particularly inspiring because it demonstrates that world-class talent can emerge from local communities and ordinary backgrounds.

From playing football as a youngster in the Black Country to starring for Real Madrid and England in front of millions of fans around the globe, Jude Bellingham's journey has been remarkable. He remains a source of immense pride for Stourbridge and an inspiration to young footballers throughout the region.

With the World Cup on the horizon, local supporters will once again be watching closely as one of Stourbridge's most famous sporting sons looks to make history on football's greatest stage.

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## Summer Panto Magic Comes to Stourbridge with Aladdin Adventure



Who says pantomimes are only for Christmas? This summer, local audiences are being invited to enjoy all the fun, laughter and silliness of a traditional panto as A Comedy Theatre Group brings its lively production of Aladdin to the stage in Stourbridge.

Based in the heart of the community, A Comedy Theatre Group was formed to give people with little or no acting experience the chance to step into the spotlight, build confidence and most importantly, have fun. The group prides itself on creating a welcoming and relaxed environment where local people of all ages can "have a go" at performing without pressure, while sharing a love of theatre and comedy.

Following the success of their previous productions, the group is now preparing for its second ever summer pantomime and audiences can expect plenty of

laughs along the way. Their version of Aladdin includes all the classic characters people know and love, alongside a few unexpected additions and some very unusual twists to the storyline. Packed with corny jokes, colourful characters, singalong moments and energetic dance routines, the show promises traditional pantomime fun for the whole family. As with many community productions, there may even be a few accidental laughs in places the cast did not quite expect all adding to the charm and entertainment of live theatre.

The production has been written, directed and performed entirely by local actors who are passionate about community theatre and bringing people together through entertainment.

Performances take place at Wollaston Village Hall, Bridgnorth Road, Stourbridge, on Friday 17th

July at 7pm and Saturday 18th July at both 2pm and 7pm.

Tickets are priced at just £5 each and can be booked by calling 07954 692593 or by emailing [acomedytheatregroup@gmail.com](mailto:acomedytheatregroup@gmail.com).



## Tidy Stourbridge

### Keeping Our Town Clean, One Litter Pick at a Time

For more than 16 years, Tidy Stourbridge has been helping to keep the town's streets, parks and public spaces looking their best through the dedication of local volunteers who care deeply about their community.

Founded in April 2010 by local residents and former 102.5 The Bridge radio presenters Dave Colley and Russell Eden,

the organisation was created in response to growing concerns about litter across the town. At the time, a social media campaign called Stourbridge Dump highlighted some of the worst examples of rubbish and neglect in the area, attracting widespread attention and sparking debate about how the issue should be tackled.

Rather than simply criticising the problem, Dave and Russell decided to take positive action. With local councils facing significant financial pressures and limited resources, they recognised that local residents could play an important role in helping to improve the appearance of their community.

That vision became reality in June 2010 when the first-ever "Pick'n'Pint" event was held at The White Horse in Norton. The concept was simple but effective: volunteers would spend time collecting litter before enjoying a social gathering together afterwards. The idea proved popular and laid the foundations for what would become one of the area's most successful community-led environmental groups.

Since then, Tidy Stourbridge has organised around 20 clean-up events every year within a two-mile radius of Stourbridge. Hundreds of bags of litter have been collected over the years, helping to make local parks, pathways,



roadsides and green spaces cleaner and more welcoming for everyone.

The group is run entirely by volunteers who share a common goal protecting the town they love from becoming overwhelmed by discarded bottles, cans, takeaway packaging and other litter. Their work is not only about cleaning up existing rubbish but also about encouraging greater pride in the local environment and helping to prevent litter from accumulating in the first place.

One of the reasons for the group's longevity is its welcoming and social nature. Tidy Stourbridge believes community

volunteering should be enjoyable as well as worthwhile. Litter picks provide an opportunity for residents of all ages and backgrounds to meet new people, make friends and contribute positively to the place they call home.

Over the years, the organisation has become a familiar and respected presence across the town, demonstrating what can be achieved when local people work together towards a shared goal. Their efforts have helped inspire community spirit while making a visible difference to the appearance of Stourbridge.

As environmental concerns continue to grow and public

resources remain stretched, groups such as Tidy Stourbridge play an increasingly important role in maintaining community spaces. Their message remains as relevant today as it was in 2010: small actions by dedicated volunteers can have a big impact on the town we all share.

Whether you're passionate about the environment, looking to meet new people, or simply want to give something back to your community, Tidy Stourbridge continues to welcome new volunteers to help keep the town clean and green for future generations.

For more information visit: - [www.tidystourbridge.wordpress.com](http://www.tidystourbridge.wordpress.com)

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*The "Bottomless" Pool in the Forest!*

For decades, children growing up around the a local Forest dared each other to visit a dark woodland pool in the forest rumoured to have no bottom. Stories claimed branches thrown into the water would mysteriously disappear, while older locals warned youngsters to stay away after heavy rain. In reality, the pool was likely just deeper than nearby streams, but that never stopped generations of local children turning it into one of the forest's spookiest legends.

*The Pub Sign That Went Missing Overnight!*

One long-standing local tale tells of a painted pub sign in a Wollaston village mysteriously vanishing overnight during the 1970s. Villagers searched nearby lanes and hedgerows, convinced it was a prank, but the sign was never found. Months later, rumours spread that it had turned up hanging in a barn miles away after being taken by students on a late-night adventure. Whether true or not, the story still gets mentioned in pubs whenever signs are being cleaned or replaced.

*The Sheep That Escaped Onto the Railway!*

A story still told by some railway volunteers recalls the day a runaway sheep wandered onto the tracks were briefly slowed while staff attempted to guide the stubborn animal away from the line. According to the tale, the sheep calmly ignored everyone before eventually following a passenger eating a sandwich back through a gate to safety. The incident became a favourite local story, especially among families travelling on the line.

## THIS MONTHS

# Local Lowdown Quirky Tales & Local Lore

*The Cat That Rode the Steam Train!*

In the days when steam trains regularly passed through the Stourbridge, railway workers spoke fondly of a ginger cat nicknamed "Whistle." According to local legend, the cat would regularly hop aboard trains at stations including Kidderminster and travel short distances before calmly stepping off at the next stop. Conductors apparently became so used to the furry passenger that some would leave scraps of food waiting on the platform.



*The Bell That Could Predict Rain!*

An old Stourbridge saying claimed that if the church bells sounded unusually loud across the valley, heavy rain was on the way. Residents in villages around the forest believed changing weather conditions carried the sound further before storms arrived. Older generations often trusted the bells more than weather forecasts, and some still swear the tradition works today especially during muggy July afternoons when thunder clouds gather over the trees.

# AGE concern

Stourbridge & Halesowen @ The Elton Centre

## Age Concern's Tabletop Sale Set to Bring Community Together

Age Concern Stourbridge & Halesowen is inviting local residents to discover a host of bargains while supporting a worthy cause at its upcoming tabletop sale later this month.

The event will take place at the Elton Centre on St John's Road, Stourbridge, on Saturday, June 27, from 12 noon until 2pm. Conveniently located next to the town's bus and railway stations, the venue will be packed with affordable items, handmade crafts and community spirit.

Visitors can browse a wide variety of stalls featuring handcrafted gifts, artwork, books, vintage

treasures, children's nearly-new toys and much more. Many of the items on sale have been lovingly created by members of the charity's own craft and art groups, making them unique gifts and keepsakes.

Age Concern Stourbridge & Halesowen has been supporting older people across the area for more than 50 years. The charity provides advice, activities, social opportunities and practical support to help people aged over 50 enjoy active, fulfilling lives. The Elton Centre itself serves as a vibrant community hub, welcoming groups of all ages throughout

the week.

David Harbach, Chair of Trustees, said: "Fundraising events such as our tabletop sale play a vital role in helping us continue our work within the local community. As our population ages, social isolation is becoming an increasing concern for many older people. "Our aim is to ensure that nobody feels left behind. We provide opportunities for people to make new friends, learn new skills and enjoy life to the fullest. We would love local residents to come along, support the event and discover everything we have to offer."

The Elton Centre Café will also be open throughout the event, serving a range of affordable hot meals, snacks and refreshments. Anyone interested in booking a stall can contact Kim on 01384 390065. Tables are available for £10 each, subject to availability.

For more information about Age Concern Stourbridge & Halesowen, its services, activities and facilities, visit the charity's website or contact the team directly. The Elton Centre also offers room hire and a welcoming space for community groups and organisations.



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# Raise a Glass to Britain's Finest Whiskies at Stourbridge Glass Museum

Whisky lovers are in for a treat this June as Stourbridge Glass Museum prepares to host an unforgettable evening celebrating some of the finest spirits produced across the United Kingdom.

Taking place on Saturday, June 20, the new Union Jack Premium Whisky Tasting Experience promises a unique blend of flavour, heritage and craftsmanship, all set against the stunning backdrop of the museum's historic glass gallery.

Guests will embark on a guided tasting journey featuring seven premium whiskies, each sourced from across the British Isles and valued at more than £50 per bottle. From the rugged islands and world-famous distilleries of Scotland to the emerging whisky makers of England and Wales, the evening will showcase the remarkable diversity and quality

of British whisky production. Led by an expert whisky host, attendees will discover the stories behind each dram, learning about the landscapes, traditions and techniques that give every whisky its distinctive character. Whether you are a seasoned enthusiast or simply curious to explore the world of whisky, the event offers a rare opportunity to sample some exceptional bottles in the company of fellow whisky lovers.

To further enhance the tasting experience, each whisky will be paired with artisan chocolates carefully selected to complement and elevate the flavours of the spirits. Light refreshments and palate-cleansing snacks will also be available throughout the evening.

As an added bonus, visitors will have the opportunity to explore the museum's new Church-

ill Exhibition and admire the world-renowned displays of Stourbridge glassmaking that surround the event. There will also be the chance to win vintage Stourbridge-made glassware – the perfect vessel for enjoying a premium dram at home. The museum team has built a reputation for hosting popular sell-out events, and organisers are confident this latest addition to the calendar will prove equally successful.

The Union Jack Premium Whisky Tasting Experience takes place from 7pm to 9pm on Saturday, June 20, with tickets priced at £50 per person.

Early booking is strongly advised, as demand is expected to be high for what promises to be a memorable celebration of British whisky and local heritage.

Tickets available at: [www.stourbridgeglassmuseum.org.uk](http://www.stourbridgeglassmuseum.org.uk)



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## Cat Eccles Member of Parliament for Stourbridge

It's been another busy month both in Parliament and across Stourbridge, Brierley Hill and Netherton, and I wanted to share some of the work I've been doing. A major piece of good news for our area has been the launch of the Pride in Place programme, which will bring £20 million of investment to Netherton over the next ten years. This funding has the potential to make a real difference by supporting local projects, improving public spaces and helping to drive regeneration. It is vital that local people are at the heart of shaping how this funding is spent, and I would encourage residents, community groups and organisations to get involved as plans develop.

Another issue I have been working on is the future of the Crystal Gateway Dementia Centre. Following concerns raised by local families and campaigners, I secured an Urgent Question in

Parliament, pressing the government about dementia services and support in our community. These services provide vital support for people living with dementia and their loved ones. I raised constituents' concerns directly with ministers and will continue to make the case for proper consideration of the impact any closure could have on local families.

Alongside this work, I have continued to raise issues affecting our area in Parliament. In recent weeks, I have challenged ministers on pressures facing the steel industry, including concerns about the impact of proposed tariffs and quotas on companies and jobs across the Black Country. I also led amendments to the Railways Bill aimed at protecting passengers and staff. These included proposals to safeguard ticket office services and ensure all rail fares

remain available at ticket offices. Too many people, particularly older and disabled passengers, are being disadvantaged by an increasingly digital railway. Rail services must remain accessible, affordable and responsive to everyone's needs. Supporting local businesses remains a key priority. Across Stourbridge, Brierley Hill and Netherton, I regularly hear from business owners working hard in the face of rising costs and economic pressures. That's why I recently signed an Early Day Motion calling for a reduction in VAT for the hospitality sector. At a time when many businesses are facing rising energy, staffing and operating costs, we need to do more to help them thrive. I look forward to continuing conversations with local businesses about the challenges they face.

I was also delighted to visit King Edward VI College to meet students and staff and discuss the future of Criminology qualifications. Hearing directly from students reinforced the importance of ensuring young people have access to a broad range of educational pathways. Whether through academic or vocational routes, every young person should have the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed.

As always, if there is an issue affecting you, please don't hesitate to get in touch. My team and I are here to help and support you.

You can contact Cat via email, telephone or online:

Email:  
[cat.eccles.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:cat.eccles.mp@parliament.uk)

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## Young Artists Invited to Take Part in Exciting Doodle Quest

Children across the region are being encouraged to put their creativity to paper as renowned Stourbridge glass artist Allister Malcolm launches a brand-new Doodle Quest competition designed to inspire the next generation of artists and makers.

The exciting initiative, organised in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Glass Sellers and Stourbridge Glass Museum, invites school-age children to create imaginative drawings based on a special theme. The competition offers young people a unique opportunity to see their artwork transformed into a stunning piece of glass art by one of the country's most respected glassmakers. The Doodle Quest has become a popular way of connecting children with the rich glassmaking heritage of the Stourbridge area while encouraging creativity and artistic expression. Participants are invited to produce an original hand-drawn design using any traditional art materials, from pencils and crayons to paints and felt-tip pens.

What makes the competition

particularly special is the prize on offer. The winning doodle will be recreated in glass by Allister Malcolm and his team, allowing the young artist to see their imagination brought to life through the centuries-old craft that made Stourbridge famous around the world. The creation process will take place during a live demonstration, giving visitors the chance to watch skilled glassmakers at work.

As well as the overall winner, selected entries and runners-up will be displayed at Stourbridge Glass Museum, showcasing the creativity of local children and celebrating the area's continuing connection with the glass industry.

The competition highlights the ongoing efforts of local organisations to engage young people with Stourbridge's unique heritage while encouraging them to explore their artistic talents. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for families and schools to become involved with the museum and learn more about the town's world-famous glassmaking

traditions.

For generations, Stourbridge has been synonymous with excellence in glassmaking, and initiatives such as Doodle Quest help ensure that this proud tradition continues to inspire future generations. By combining creativity, education and craftsmanship, the competition offers children a rare chance to become part of the area's remarkable story.

With imagination as the only limit, organisers are hoping for another fantastic response and a collection of colourful, inventive designs that demonstrate the creativity of young people across the region.

Children wishing to take part should note that entries must be submitted by 5pm on Wednesday, July 1, 2026. Full competition details, entry requirements and submission information can be found on the Stourbridge Glass Museum website. Organisers are encouraging schools, families and young artists to get involved and seize the opportunity to have their artwork transformed into a unique piece of handcrafted glass.



## From Stourbridge to the World Cup And Never Back Again

Most football fans dream of following England to a World Cup. For a group of young men from Stourbridge and the Black Country, that dream became a life-changing adventure that lasted four decades.

In the summer of 1986, a band of football-mad friends from Stourbridge, Lye and the surrounding area packed their bags and

travelled more than 5,000 miles to Mexico to support England in the World Cup. What happened next is the stuff of legend.

Rather than returning home after the tournament, many of them decided to stay abroad and build entirely new lives in North America.

The group, who called them-

selves "The Disco Firm", were all in their early twenties when they set off. Britain was a very different place in the mid-1980s. The country was facing economic uncertainty, jobs were scarce in many industrial towns, and several members of the group had recently found themselves unemployed.

For them, the World Cup offered more than football, it offered adventure.

Among the travellers were Stourbridge friends Gary Allen and Stuart Bates, together with David Arnold from Solihull and Garry Hardwicke from Lye. Armed with little more than a few hundred pounds and a sense of optimism, they boarded a flight to Mexico to follow England through the tournament. The friends watched every England match, including the infamous quarter-final defeat to Argentina. They were among the thousands inside the stadium who witnessed Diego Maradona's notorious "Hand of God" goal, followed moments later by



what many regard as one of the greatest goals ever scored. But while England's World Cup dream ended in Mexico City, the adventure for these Black Country lads was only just beginning.

After the tournament, they headed north and found work in the hospitality industry. Opportunities appeared plentiful and, with few prospects waiting for them back home, they decided to stay.

One of the most remarkable stories belongs to Garry Hardwicke. According to his friends, Garry told his partner he was simply popping out to buy a pint of milk before beginning a journey that would keep him away from home for the next 12 years.

The group quickly adapted to life abroad. Along the way they accumulated countless stories, from wild nights out to convincing local people that they were members of the England

squad. On one memorable occasion, they persuaded a group of women that they were football stars Peter Shilton and Gary Lineker.

What started as a football trip soon evolved into something much bigger. The friends settled down, married and raised families. Between them, they would go on to have 14 children.

Gary eventually settled in Atlanta, where he built a highly successful business in the drainage and sewage equipment industry. Over the years, the company grew into a multi-million-dollar enterprise before his retirement in 2025.

Stuart made his home in Houston, Texas, where he continues to work in the automotive sector. David remained in Mexico and became headteacher of a school in Monterrey, a role that allowed him to make a lasting impact on future generations.

Although thousands of miles

separate them from the Black Country, the men have never forgotten their roots. Stourbridge, Lye and the wider West Midlands remain close to their hearts, and they have regularly reunited over the years.

This summer, 40 years after their extraordinary journey began, surviving members of the group will once again come together to watch England at the World Cup. Joined by friends travelling from the UK, the reunion promises to be a celebration not only of football, but of friendship, adventure and the unexpected twists life can take.

Sadly, Garry Hardwicke passed away two years ago, but his friends say his spirit will be very much part of the occasion.

Their remarkable story is now being told in a new documentary, *Lost Down Mexico Way*, which charts how a simple football trip changed the course of several lives forever.

For most supporters, following England abroad creates memories that last a lifetime. For this group of Stourbridge lads, it created entirely new lifetimes.



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# Is It Time to Replace Your Boiler?

## Why Summer Is the Best Time to Upgrade



Most people only think about their boiler when something goes wrong usually during the middle of winter. But according to heating experts, summer is actually the ideal time to consider replacing an older boiler before colder weather returns.

One of the biggest advantages of upgrading during summer is avoiding the seasonal rush. As temperatures drop later in the year, heating engineers often become extremely busy dealing with breakdowns and emergency callouts. Booking a replacement during warmer months can mean quicker installation times, more appointment flexibility and less disruption to daily life. A new boiler can also significantly improve energy efficiency.

Older systems often work harder to produce the same level of heating and hot water, leading to higher energy bills. Modern boilers are designed to be far more efficient, helping households reduce energy usage while improving overall performance.

There are also several warning signs that may indicate a boiler is nearing the end of its lifespan. Frequent breakdowns, unusual noises, inconsistent heating, rising energy bills or radiators taking longer to warm up can all suggest it may be time for an upgrade. Most boilers typically last between 10 and 15 years depending on maintenance and usage. Summer is also a practical time for installations because households rely less on central

heating. This means any temporary disruption during fitting is usually far easier to manage compared to colder months.

Many homeowners are now also exploring smart heating controls alongside boiler replacements. Smart thermostats and zoned heating systems can help improve comfort while giving people greater control over energy use.

While replacing a boiler may not be the most exciting home improvement, planning ahead during summer can help avoid unexpected breakdowns, improve efficiency and provide peace of mind before winter arrives again.



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## Plant of the Month Lavender

Few plants capture the feeling of summer quite like lavender. With its vibrant purple flowers, calming fragrance and ability to attract bees and butterflies, lavender becomes one of the standout plants in gardens throughout July.

Originally associated with Mediterranean climates, lavender grows surprisingly well in the UK, particularly during warm, sunny summers. It thrives in well-drained soil and enjoys plenty of sunlight, making it ideal for borders, patios, pathways and pots. Once established, it is also relatively low maintenance and drought tolerant, which has helped make it increasingly popular with gardeners looking for hardy plants that still provide plenty of colour.

July is when lavender is usually at its peak flowering stage. The distinctive scent is instantly

recognisable and is often linked with relaxation and wellbeing. Many people cut and dry lavender stems during summer to use indoors, whether in homemade bouquets, scented drawers or natural sleep sprays.

Beyond its appearance and fragrance, lavender is also highly valued for supporting wildlife. Bees and pollinators are particularly drawn to its nectar-rich flowers, helping gardens become more environmentally friendly and beneficial for local ecosystems during the height of summer.

There are also many different varieties to choose from. English lavender remains one of the most popular due to its strong fragrance and resilience, while French lavender offers slightly more unusual flower shapes and colours.

Garden centres and local nurseries often see strong demand for lavender during July as people refresh outdoor spaces and prepare gardens for summer gatherings. Its neat appearance works well in both traditional cottage gardens and more modern outdoor designs.

Whether planted in borders, lining pathways or growing in decorative pots, lavender remains one of the most versatile and recognisable plants of the British summer season, bringing colour, fragrance and wildlife into gardens year after year.



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## WHEN THE WORLD ENDS

### A POWERFUL NEW PLAY COMES TO WOLLASTON

What happens when the world ends and only two people remain?

That intriguing question sits at the heart of a bold and emotionally charged new theatre production coming to Wollaston this July. Written by local playwright Shadow Liptrot (also known as Laura Liptrot), the play explores love, regret, identity and the lasting impact of toxic relationships in a story that is both deeply personal and universally relatable.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the story follows Shadow and Edmund, the last two people alive, as they come face-to-face

and reflect on the woman who shaped both their lives – Robyn. Shadow spent years loving countless people but never found the courage to tell Robyn how he truly felt. Edmund, meanwhile, married her in an attempt to suppress his own struggles with identity and self-acceptance, only to become trapped by his own emotional turmoil.

Through a series of flashbacks, audiences witness the evolution of this complex love triangle. The production shines a light on difficult but important themes, including emotional abuse, gas-lighting and the hidden realities

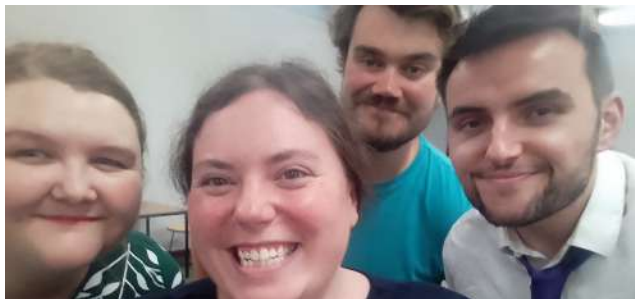
that can exist behind seemingly perfect relationships. Alongside these darker moments are powerful messages of self-affirmation, acceptance and hope.

Described as wild, honest, funny, painful and ultimately uplifting, the play promises an unforgettable evening of theatre. It also serves as a spin-off from *The Garden of Time*, Shadow Liptrot's space-fantasy-romance book series published by Tenebrous Texts.

The performance takes place at Wollaston Village Hall on Saturday 4th July, with doors opening at 6.30pm for a 7pm start.

Please note that the production is strictly for audiences aged 18+ and contains sensitive themes. For ticket information, email [laura.l.liptrot@gmail.com](mailto:laura.l.liptrot@gmail.com) or call 07906 763 455.

Support local theatre and discover a thought-provoking new work from one of the area's creative talents.



JOSHUA WYKES

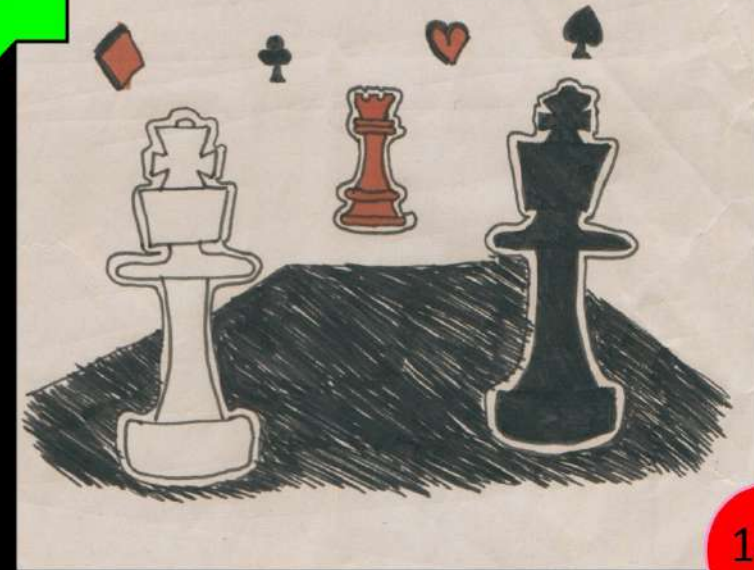
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## Grow Your Own Courgettes in July How to Successfully Grow at Home

Courgettes are one of the easiest and most rewarding vegetables to grow during the summer months, making them perfect for both beginner and experienced gardeners alike. July is when plants really begin to thrive, with warm temperatures helping them grow rapidly and produce regular crops.

One of the great advantages of courgettes is that they can be grown almost anywhere. While they do well in vegetable patches and allotments, they are also ideal for patios and smaller gardens because they grow successfully in large pots or containers. If growing in pots, choose a container that is at least 40cm wide and deep to allow enough room for the roots to spread. Good drainage is essential, so ensure pots have holes at the bottom and use quality multi-purpose compost mixed with a little organic matter.

Courgettes need plenty of sunlight to perform well, ideally around six to eight hours a day. They are thirsty plants, particularly during hot July weather, so regular watering is important. Water directly at the base of the plant rather than over the leaves to help prevent mildew and other fungal problems. In very warm conditions, plants may need watering every day.

Feeding courgettes weekly with a liquid tomato fertiliser can help encourage stronger growth and improve the number of vegetables produced. It's also important to keep the surrounding area free from weeds, which compete for nutrients and moisture.

As the plants become larger, their broad leaves can sometimes trap moisture, so removing any damaged or yellowing leaves will help improve airflow

and keep plants healthy. Regular harvesting also encourages continuous growth, meaning plants will keep producing throughout the season.

With a little care and attention each week, courgettes can become one of the most productive and reliable crops in any summer garden.



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## Don't Ignore The Signs

### Why Regular Roof Maintenance is vital



Your roof is one of the most important parts of your home, protecting everything underneath it from wind, rain and changing weather conditions throughout the year. However, many homeowners only notice roof problems once damage has already started to appear inside the property. Regular roof care and maintenance can help prevent costly repairs and extend the lifespan of your roof for years to come.

One of the most common issues homeowners face is slipped or damaged roof tiles, often caused by storms, strong winds or general wear and tear over time. Small problems like these may not seem urgent at first, but they can quickly lead to water

leaks, damp patches and structural damage if left untreated. Cracked flashing around chimneys, blocked gutters and moss build-up are also common issues that can affect drainage and lead to long-term problems.

Regular roof inspections are particularly important after periods of bad weather or during seasonal changes. Spotting issues early can often mean a simple repair rather than a full replacement later down the line. Homeowners should also keep an eye out for signs such as missing tiles, sagging gutters, water stains in loft spaces or visible daylight coming through the roof.

Professional roofing companies can provide a range of services

including roof repairs, tile replacement, chimney work, flat roofing, guttering repairs and full roof installations. Choosing an experienced and reputable local roofer is essential to ensure work is carried out safely and to a high standard.

If you think your roof may need attention, it's always best to seek advice sooner rather than later. A professional roofer can assess the condition of your roof and recommend the most suitable solution before minor issues become expensive problems.

For more information, inspections or repair work, contact your trusted local roofing specialist today and keep your home protected all year round.

## Fresh Summer Foods That Can Naturally Support Better Gut Health and Digestion



Gut health has become one of the biggest wellness topics in recent years, and summer is actually one of the best times to support it naturally through fresh, seasonal foods. A healthy gut plays an important role in digestion, immunity and even mental wellbeing, with experts increasingly linking gut health to overall health throughout the body.

One of the easiest ways to improve gut health during summer is by eating more fibre-rich fruit and vegetables. Seasonal favourites such as strawberries, raspberries, cherries, tomatoes and leafy salads all help feed the healthy bacteria that live in the digestive system. Fibre supports digestion and can help keep the gut balanced and functioning

properly. Fermented foods are also becoming increasingly popular during the summer months. Yoghurt, kefir, kimchi and sauerkraut contain live cultures known as probiotics, which may help increase beneficial bacteria in the gut. Adding natural yoghurt to breakfast with fresh berries or serving fermented sides alongside salads and barbecue dishes can be a simple way to include them in everyday meals.

Summer is also a great time to swap heavier meals for lighter options that are easier on digestion. Grilled fish, lean meats, salads, wholegrains and fresh vegetables can all support gut health while helping people feel less

sluggish during warmer weather. Hydration also plays a major role in digestion. Drinking enough water throughout the day helps the digestive system work efficiently and supports the body's ability to process fibre properly.

The NHS generally recommends around 6 to 8 glasses of fluid daily, with extra needed during hot weather.

While there's no single "superfood" for gut health, small daily habits can make a real difference over time. Eating a varied diet rich in fresh produce, staying hydrated and reducing heavily processed foods are all simple steps that can help support a healthier gut this summer.



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# Stay Safe in the Sun

## Why Protecting Your Skin Matters this Summer

As the summer months arrive, many of us look forward to spending more time outdoors, whether that's enjoying a family barbecue, relaxing in the garden, taking a holiday, or simply making the most of the warmer weather. While sunshine can boost mood and help our bodies produce vitamin D, too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation can have serious consequences for our skin health.

Skin cancer is now one of the most common forms of cancer in the UK, with cases continuing to rise. According to cancer charities and health organisations, excessive sun exposure and sunburn significantly increase the risk of developing skin cancer later in life. The good news is that many cases are preventable through simple changes in behaviour.

### Understanding UV Damage

Ultraviolet rays from the sun can damage the DNA within skin cells. While the body can repair some of this damage, repeated exposure over time increases the likelihood of permanent changes that can lead to skin cancer. UV rays are present even on cloudy days, and they can reflect off surfaces such as water, sand, and concrete, increasing exposure.

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Melanoma is the most serious form and can spread to other parts of the body if not detected early.

### Who Is Most at Risk?

Anyone can develop skin



cancer, but certain groups are at greater risk. These include people with fair skin, those who burn easily, individuals with a large number of moles, and people with a family history of skin cancer. Outdoor workers and those who spend significant time in the sun for recreation are also at increased risk.

Children are particularly vulnerable. Research suggests that severe sunburn during childhood can dramatically increase the risk of melanoma in later life, making sun protection especially important for young families.

### Practical Ways to Protect Your Skin

Health experts recommend a combination of protective

measures rather than relying on a single method.

#### Use sunscreen correctly.

Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 30 and apply it generously to all exposed skin. Reapply every two hours and after swimming or excessive sweating.

Seek shade during peak hours. UV radiation is strongest between 11am and 3pm. If possible, plan strenuous outdoor activities for earlier or later in the day.

Cover up. Lightweight long-sleeved clothing, wide-brimmed hats, and UV-protective sunglasses can significantly reduce exposure.

Stay hydrated. While hydration does not prevent sunburn, it helps the body cope with heat and supports overall wellbeing during hot weather.

#### Check Your Skin Regularly

Early detection is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes. Get into the habit of checking your skin every few months. Look for any new moles or changes to existing ones, particularly changes in size, shape, colour, or texture. A useful guide is the ABCDE rule: Asymmetry, Border irregularity, Colour variation, Diameter larger than 6mm, and Evolving or changing appearance.

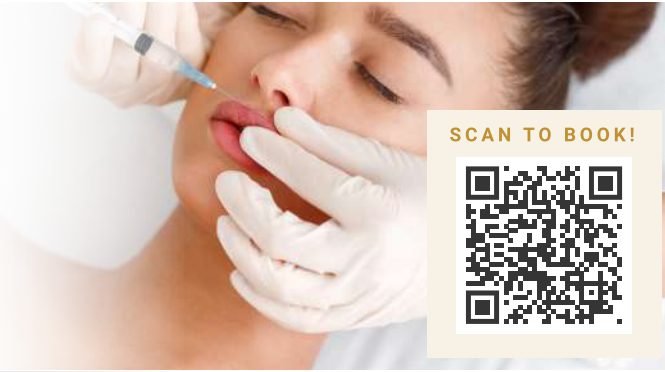
If you notice anything unusual, seek advice from your GP

promptly.

#### Enjoy Summer Responsibly

Sunshine is one of the great pleasures of summer, and there's no reason to avoid it altogether. However, balancing enjoyment with sensible precautions can help protect your skin for years to come. By understanding the risks, using effective sun protection, and monitoring your skin regularly, you can enjoy the season while reducing your risk of long-term damage.

A little care today could make a significant difference to your health in the future.



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**Staying Hydrated During Hot Weather**

As temperatures rise during the summer months, staying properly hydrated becomes increasingly important for overall health and wellbeing. While many people only think about drinking water when they feel thirsty, experts say thirst can often be an early sign that the body is already becoming dehydrated.

The NHS generally recommends drinking around 6 to 8 glasses of fluid a day, which is roughly 1.5 to 2 litres. During hot weather, exercise or busy days outdoors, the body often needs even more to replace fluids lost through sweating.

feeling tired, dizzy, developing headaches or struggling to concentrate if they are not drinking enough. Staying hydrated helps the body regulate temperature, supports digestion and can improve energy levels throughout the day.

Water is always one of the best choices, but foods with high water content such as strawberries, watermelon, cucumber and oranges can also help boost hydration. Carrying a reusable water bottle and drinking little and often throughout the day can make it easier to stay on top of fluid intake.

can be particularly vulnerable during warmer weather, as they may not recognise the signs of dehydration quickly. Checking in on elderly relatives, encouraging children to take regular drinks breaks, and avoiding long periods in direct sunlight during the hottest parts of the day can all help people stay safe and healthy during summer.



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## Why British Strawberries Still Define the Taste of Summer

Nothing quite says British summer like fresh strawberries. From Wimbledon traditions to garden picnics and afternoon desserts, strawberries remain the fruit most closely associated with July and for good reason. Their season may only last a few months, but when British strawberries are at their best, there's very little that compares. Thanks to a warm and relatively dry spring, growers across counties including Worcestershire and Herefordshire are expecting another strong strawberry season this year. Picked locally and sold quickly, British strawberries are often

sweeter, juicier and far more flavourful than imported varieties that spend days travelling before reaching supermarket shelves.

Strawberries have become far more versatile in recent years too. While the classic strawberries and cream combination remains unbeatable, cafés and restaurants are increasingly using them in more creative ways throughout the summer months. From strawberry cheesecakes and Eton mess to homemade milkshakes, gelato and pastries, the fruit has become a staple ingredient across seasonal menus.

One growing food trend this summer is pairing strawberries with savoury flavours. Strawberry salads with feta, balsamic glaze and fresh basil are appearing on menus everywhere, while some restaurants are even serving strawberries alongside grilled meats and charcuterie boards to add sweetness and freshness. For those entertaining at home, strawberries are also proving popular in summer drinks. Strawberry mojitos, frozen daiquiris, lemonades and fruit spritzes are all becoming favourites during warm evenings and garden gatherings.

Pick-your-own farms continue to thrive during July, offering families a simple but memorable summer activity while supporting local growers at the same time. There's something nostalgic about filling punnets with freshly picked strawberries and enjoying them before even leaving the farm.

Of course, the beauty of strawberries is often in their simplicity. Served fresh, chilled from the fridge, layered onto pavlova or scattered over breakfast, they remain one of the true highlights of the British summer food calendar.

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## Eton mess with Summer fresh Strawberries



### Ingredients

2 large egg whites  
120g caster sugar  
500g strawberries  
450ml double cream  
1 tbs icing sugar

the bottom shelf of the oven for  
1hr - 1hr15 mins until the meringues are completely hard and come off the paper easily.  
Leave to cool.

### Method

#### Step 1

Heat oven to 120C/100C fan/gas 1 and line a large baking tray with parchment paper. Whisk the egg whites in a clean bowl using an electric whisk or tabletop mixer until they reach stiff peaks, then add the sugar in 3 lots, re-whisking to stiff peaks every time.

Spoon dollops of the mixture onto the baking parchment, cook on



#### Step 2

Blitz 1/3 of the strawberries to make a strawberry sauce. In a large bowl whisk the cream with the icing sugar until it just holds its shape. Roughly crush 3/4 of the meringues and tip them in with the chopped strawberries and stir, then swirl through the strawberry sauce.

Dollop into bowls then crush the remaining meringues, sprinkling the pieces over the top.



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## The Selector Live at Stourbridge Town Hall

Ska legends The Selector are heading to Stourbridge Town Hall on Saturday 25th July 2026 for what promises to be a fantastic evening of classic 2-Tone energy, iconic hits and powerful live performance. The show starts at 7:30pm.

Led by the legendary Pauline Black OBE, often referred to as the Queen of Ska, The Selector remain one of the defining bands of the 2-Tone movement. Famous for timeless tracks including On My Radio, Three Minute Hero, Missing Words and Too Much Pressure, the band continues to captivate audiences more than four decades after first emerging onto the UK music scene.

The performance also celebrates the 45th anniversary of their influential debut album Too Much Pressure, a record still regarded as one of the landmark releases of the ska revival era. Original drummer Charley 'Aitch' Bembridge continues to perform with the current line-up, helping to keep the unmistakable spirit of The Selector alive on stage.

The past year has also seen renewed attention on Pauline Black's remarkable story following the release of the documentary Pauline Black: A 2-Tone Story, directed by Jane Mingay and based on her memoir Black by Design. Following screenings at the BFI London Film Festival, the documentary has since been

shown across the UK and internationally.

Despite the sad passing of founding member Arthur 'Gaps' Hendrickson in 2024, The Selector continue to tour extensively across the UK and Europe, bringing the same passion, energy and socially charged sound that made them icons of British music history.

Tickets are £27.50 plus booking fees. This event is for ages 14+, with under 18s requiring adult accompaniment.

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- "Porky Blinder" 283g
- Peppered Steak 300g
- Peppery Steak & Gravy 283g
- Creamy Chicken & Leek 283g
- Chilli Con Carne 283g
- Chicken & Bacon 283g
- Cauliflower Cheese & Broccoli (v) 300g
- Spinach & Ricotta (v) 283g
- Vegetable Red Thai (ve) 283g

**GEEVOR RANGE** £3.30 each  
12+ £2.95 each

- Cheese & Onion (vegetarian) 300g
- Country Vegetable (vegan) 300g
- Bombay Potato (vegan) 300g
- Apple & Blackcurrant (vegan) 283g
- Rhubarb & Custard (vegetarian) 283g
- Apple, Cinnamon, Sultanas & Custard (vegetarian) 283g

**GIANT TRADITIONAL CORNISH STEAK PASTY 900g**  
£9.00 each  
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**GOURMET SAUSAGE ROLLS**  
£2.40 each

- Pork, Herb & Black Pepper
- Pork, Honey & Mustard
- Pork, Cheese & Red Onion Chutney
- Pork & Apple Cider
- Onion Bhaji with Roasted Cauliflower (vegan)

**GLUTEN FREE PASTIES**  
£6.30 each

- Traditional Cornish Steak
- Cheese & Onion

**7 INCH VEGAN "SAUSAGE" ROLLS**  
£1.90 each

**COCKTAIL PASTIES**  
£1.90 each

- Traditional Cornish 160g
- Cheese & Onion 160g

**CHEESE & BACON TURNOVER** £2.20 each



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Thursday	10:00am - 4:00pm	10:00am - 3:00pm
Friday	10:00am - 4:00pm	10:00am - 3:00pm
Saturday	10:00am - 2:00pm	10:00am - 1:45pm
Sunday	CLOSED	CLOSED

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## Ian Parker Band Live at Katie Fitzgerald's

Blues-rock fans are in for a real treat this July as the acclaimed Ian Parker Band takes to the stage at Katie Fitzgerald's on Sunday 19th July. Doors open at 6pm for what promises to be an unforgettable evening of powerful songwriting, soulful vocals and world-class musicianship.

Widely regarded as one of the UK's finest contemporary blues artists, Ian Parker has spent more than two decades building a loyal following across Europe and the United States. Known for his deeply personal lyrics and distinctive bittersweet vocal style, Parker's music blends honesty, emotion and exceptional guitar work into performances that leave a lasting impression on audiences.

Ian's career began to gather momentum in 2003 when he signed with Ruf Records after being introduced to legendary American producer David Z, best known for his work on Prince's iconic Purple Rain album. His debut album Inside was released later that year and quickly established him as a major talent within the blues-rock scene.

Since then, Ian Parker has continued to evolve as an artist, releasing further albums, live DVDs and touring extensively throughout Europe and America. Never content to stand still creatively, his music constantly explores new directions while remaining rooted in heartfelt storytelling and authentic performance.

Today, Parker performs with the confidence and experience of a seasoned artist who has truly honed his craft. With nothing left to prove and plenty still to say, the Ian Parker Band continues to captivate audiences wherever they play.

This is set to be a fantastic night of live music in an intimate venue, and one not to be missed for fans of blues, rock and outstanding live performance.

To book your tickets, visit - [www.katiessecretgarden.com](http://www.katiessecretgarden.com)

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## Highway Bring Classic Rock Anthems to The River Rooms

Rock fans are in for a brilliant night of live music as local favourites Highway take to the stage at The River Rooms on Friday 3rd July 2026. Doors open at 7:30pm, with the live show starting from 9:30pm, promising an evening packed with legendary rock anthems and crowd-pleasing classics.

Known across the local music scene for their high-energy performances and powerful sound, Highway have built a reputation as one of the area's standout rock covers bands. Their setlist celebrates some of the greatest names in rock history, featur-

ing music from iconic artists including AC/DC, Guns N' Roses, Queen, Van Halen, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, Metallica, Ozzy Osbourne, Rainbow and Lynyrd Skynyrd, alongside modern rock favourites such as Greta Van Fleet.

Whether you enjoy classic guitar riffs, soaring vocals or huge sing-along choruses, audiences can expect an electric atmosphere and a night full of timeless tracks that defined generations of rock music.

Tickets are priced at just £10, making this a fantastic value night

out for live music lovers. Free parking is available for River Rooms customers, with visitors simply needing to register their vehicle at the venue on arrival.

This event is open to ages 14 and over when accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, making it a great opportunity for younger rock fans to experience live music in a vibrant venue atmosphere.

Book your tickets - [www.theriverrooms.com](http://www.theriverrooms.com)

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## July Motoring Summer Road Trip Ready

With summer in full swing and the school holidays just around the corner, July is one of the busiest months on the roads. Whether you're planning a staycation, heading to the coast, or simply enjoying longer evenings out and about, now is the perfect time to make sure your car is ready for the warmer weather.

One of the most important checks during summer is your tyres. Hot roads and long journeys can increase tyre wear, so make sure your tread depth is legal and that pressures are correct before setting off. Underinflated tyres can affect fuel economy and handling, especially when the car is loaded with luggage or passengers.

Keeping your engine cool is equally important. Check coolant levels

regularly and keep an eye on dashboard warning lights during long drives. Summer traffic and motorway queues can put extra strain on vehicles, particularly older cars.

Air conditioning is another area many drivers overlook until the first really hot day arrives. If your system isn't blowing cold air, it may need regassing or servicing. A properly working air-con system also helps demist windows during sudden summer showers.

July is also a great reminder to keep your windscreen clean and washer fluid topped up. Dust, pollen, insects and glare from the sun can all reduce visibility, especially during early mornings and evenings.

For electric vehicle owners, summer can actually improve battery efficiency compared to colder months, making it an ideal season for longer journeys. However, popular charging points can become busy during holiday periods, so planning ahead is always worthwhile.

Finally, don't forget the basics before any trip, oil, lights, brakes and battery checks can all help avoid unnecessary breakdowns. A little preparation now can save a lot of stress later and help keep your summer journeys safe, comfortable and enjoyable.

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## Southern League Premier Central Line-Up Confirmed for 2026/27

The make-up of the 2026/27 Southern League Premier Division Central has now been confirmed, subject to any final appeals, and it promises to be another highly competitive campaign with several fresh faces joining the division. Among the headline additions are Leamington and Peterborough Sports, both returning to the division following relegation from the National League North at the end of the 2025/26 season. Their arrival adds further experience and quality to an already strong league set-up.

There will also be two new clubs arriving from the Northern Premier League Division One Midlands. Anstey Nomads secured promotion as champions, while Racing Club Warwick earned their place after victory in the play-off

final at Belper. Both sides are familiar opponents from recent cup competitions. Anstey defeated us in the FA Trophy last season, while Warwick were beaten in the Birmingham Senior Cup.

Leighton Town return to step three football after winning the Southern League Division One Central title. The Bedfordshire club were previously league rivals between 2006 and 2008 during our time in the Southern League Midland Division before promotion in 2008.

Also returning are Hitchin Town, who bounced straight back to step three after winning the Southern League Division One Central play-offs

just one season after relegation. Completing the changes are Rushall Olympic, who move across from the Northern Premier League Premier Division following league restructuring. Meanwhile, Quorn FC are expected to move in the opposite direction.

The new season is scheduled to get underway on August 8.

To find out more about the new season, fixtures and tickets visit Stourbridge FC website - [www.stourbridgefc.com](http://www.stourbridgefc.com)

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