COUNCIL CAN’T COMMIT TO BROWNFIELD POLICY BEFORE REVIEW

WEST MIDLANDS MAYOR ANDY STREET IS CALLING ON DUDLEY COUNCIL TO RULE OUT BUILDING ON GREEN BELT LAND AROUND HALESOwen.

Campaigners fear the rural fringe will make way for development needed for the Black Country’s soaring population.

Dudley Council leader Councillor Patrick Harley said he could not protect open land in the area not be built on, as the council launches a review. The region needs thousands of new homes and facilities.

During the election campaign Conservative Mr Street said he was保护 defending green belt where possible and brownfield sites should be redeveloped instead.

Around 22,000 homes and 360 hectares for industry are needed in the Black Country by 2036, according to the Black Country Core Strategy. Campaign group Halesowen Abbey Trust fears countryside to the south of Halesowen — areas such as Lapal, Hayley Green and Lutley — will be used for around 6,900 homes and 75 hectares of industrial development.

The trust has been supported by Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris.

In a letter to Councillor Harley, leader of the Conservative-led council, Mr Street said: “I recognise the very considerable pressure all West Midlands local authorities are under to meet future housing needs. We are both committed to the policy of ‘brownfield’ first.”

“I support the views of the Halesowen Abbey Trust that the land they refer to in particular importance, providing a valuable local amenity as well as beautiful green space. I very much hope that Dudley Council will be able to agree that no ‘exceptional circumstance’ condition will be met, and that the land can continue to enjoy the protection it warrants.”

Dudley Council is launching a review of the green belt next month. Asked if the council would “agree” it will not be built on, Councillor Harley said: “Not at the moment, we haven’t finished the review. It has to go through the due process.”
Centre tells customers about campaign

STAFF have been digging deep to help our Feed A Family This Christmas campaign.

Walsall Training Centre, which provides courses and assessments for gas, plumbing, electrical or construction trade sectors is the latest business to back the appeal.

They have collected dozens of items of food as well as toiletries, clothing and toys, which will go to help those in need during the festive period.

Steve Edis, director of the training centre, said he was delighted to support the campaign.

“We try to support local food banks at this time of year, as we know there are a lot of families struggling at Christmas,” he said.

Readers have donated festive food such as mince pies, chocolates and Christmas puddings, as well as basics including canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, pasta and rice. Non-food items such as toiletries, baby supplies, new socks and small presents have also come flooding in.

Since the campaign launched on November 4, we’ve had support from an array of organisations and schools across the region.

PTP Training has backed the appeal along with Heathwalt Wolverhampton, while Sadders Shopping Centre in Walsall has come on board to collect donations.

180 people are steered into driving jobs by firm

ALMOST 200 people have found driving jobs across the West Midlands, thanks to the growth of a recruitment provider, with hundreds more drivers to be placed into work in the next 12 months.

Dudley-based Workforce Staffing established its driving division a year ago and has found jobs for more than 180 people, working with more than 120 of the region’s businesses.

The division, which employs seven staff at its branches in New Mill Street, Dudley, Birmingham and Redditch, has found jobs for workers in the Black Country, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

Joe Alekna, managing director of Workforce Staffing, said: “This has been an outstanding first year for our driving division and it is great that we have been able to place so many local people into jobs.”

Focus

“This is really only the beginning. We intend to double our current staff count over the next year and get 350 drivers out working across the region.

“Our focus is on connecting the right people with opportunities and our network of branches across the Midlands means we are ideally placed to fill vacancies – especially with the country’s biggest industry facing a shortage of 45,000 drivers.”

In 2018, the Workforce Group was voted as one of the UK’s top 100 businesses to work for in the Sunday Times 100 Best Small Companies survey. It specialises in supplying staff for sectors including logistics, transport, professional services, office, food manufacturing and manufacturing.

Faster broadband speeds are coming

HOMES across Dudley borough are set to benefit from faster internet access as the Black Country’s superfast broadband infrastructure is extended.

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the four Black Country local authorities are working together to extend superfast broadband infrastructure across the Black Country.

The initiative is part of a Government scheme to extend the availability of high-speed fibre broadband to 98 percent of homes and businesses in Dudley in less than three years.

Councillor Patrick Harley, Dudley borough council’s cabinet member for economy, said: “This initiative is long overdue.”

People can find out more visit www.blackcountrylep.co.uk/regional-growth/black-country-broadband-website.

Your generosity sees donations flooding in

YOUR incredible generosity in donating food to our Feed A Family This Christmas appeal will have a tangible effect for those in need across the Black Country.

Once again, thousands of items have flooded in to ensure people who, for whatever reason, rely on a food bank for a meal at Christmas time will not go without.

Our drop off points have been very busy during the four-week campaign, thanks to the amazing kindness of you, our readers, and the wider community.

To highlight just how important food banks and keeping them stocked up can be, the Express & Star visited The Good Shepherd Ministry at Darlington Street Methodist Church in Wolverhampton to speak with people who have been given a lifeline by the volunteers who put themselves out to ensure others don’t go without.

Helen Holloway, admin manager at the Good Shepherd Ministry, said: “The problem isn’t going away and unfortunately food banks are more vital than ever.

The Good Shepherd Ministry also offers those who show the most enthusiasm for taking any opportunity they can get a place on their Service Volunteers Programme.

One such person who has taken on this responsibility is Heriberto Garcia Vazquez, 52, who travels via bus from Birmingham every day to help out. He started out as a food bank server user but is now a major part of the operation. He said: “These guys are like my family and I love it. I don’t mind what they need me to do I will do it.”

Maxine Price and Stephen Dale, who are engaged and live in Meriden, were both eaten up by the love meal by volunteers during the Express & Star’s visit to the Good Shepherd Ministry on Tuesday and nothing but praise.

Maxine said: “The volunteers here are lovely, they are really here for people and make a difference. They have helped us in so many ways recently, not just with meals but with assistance that is crucial to our day to day lives.”

10% recipt & signature required with all lots
Man in crashed car had cardiac arrest

PARAMEDICS were called to help when a motorist suffered a damaged cardiac arrest in Halesowen as he careened into a wall.

West Midlands Ambulance Service was called to Stormbury Road in Halesowen at about 9.40am last Thursday and an air ambulance was also sent to the scene.

An spokesman said: “Ambulance crews found a man who was in cardiac arrest. He had been rapidly extricated by firefighters after the car had collided with a bush, a post box and a wall.” They managed to re-start his heart and he was taken to hospital in Birmingham.

Fly-tipping fines have hit £120,000

FLYTIPPERS in the West Midlands were fined a combined £120,000 in the past year – up from just £10,000 four years ago – according to new figures.

Local authorities across the region secured 295 fly-tipping prosecutions in 2016-17, up from just 67 in 2012-13.

Statistics released by the Government show a fly-tipping fines in the Midlands totalled £112,319 in 2016-17, a huge rise from 2012-13 when the combined fine was £4,004.

There were more than one million fly-tipping incidents in England in 2016-17, equivalent to 114 every hour.

Average house prices on the rise

THIR price of the average home in Dudley has risen by 7,500 in the last year, as demand for property continues to outstrip the supply.

Across the UK property prices have risen by 4.7 per cent to an average of £240,000, but this figure is hugely unbalanced by the price of properties in the South East.

In the West Midlands, on the border of the north/south property divide, the average is £136,351 and has risen 5.2 per cent.

The latest figures from HM Land Registry show Dudley property average £164,904, a rise of 4.8 per cent.

Santas on the run to boost hospice by £13k

THEY donned their red suits and Santa hats – and they raised £13,000 for charity.

Hundreds of joggers braved the testing conditions of heavy rain and cold to take over Mary Stevens Park in Stourbridge in a bid to raise funds for the Mary Stevens Hospice. 2017.

The charity dubbed the response to the Santa Jog as ‘overwhelming’ following its cancellation the week before as snow and ice hit the region.

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Scrabble is a success right from word go for these players

Report by Marion Brennan

JANET Street-Porter once described Scrabble as more addictive than cocaine and champagne.

The colourful broadcaster is one of many celebrity fans of the board game, a list that also includes Keanu Reeves, Madonna, Jonathan Ross, Sharon Stone, Charles Saatchi and Her Majesty The Queen.

With an estimated 30,000 games starting around the world every hour, it is the word puzzle that refuses to go out of fashion. While other board games come and go, Scrabble forge ahead, steadily selling two-and-a-half million sets every year.

With the festive season in full swing, the 84-year-old game will surely feature on thousands of Christmas shopping lists. No doubt, in many households the box will be brought out Christmas Day evening or Boxing Day to exercise the brain cells and ward off snoozing in front of the TV.

Christmas and New Year is the time of year when a lot of excess waste is generated, which needs to be disposed of in a responsible way.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

ENTREPRENEURS across the West Midlands are being given the opportunity to win a slice of a £100,000 prize fund, designed to support development of technology that will help people in old age.

The first Centrica Active Ageing Challenge is looking for local start-ups with tech solutions that help meet the needs of an ageing society.

Successful applicants will be asked to pitch to a team of industry experts in March. Applications should be submitted by February 5. Visit centrica.com/innovation/active-ageing-website.

Concert marks 100 years since end of war

A CONCERT in Dudley will mark 100 years since the end of the First World War. The 1918 Memorial Concert is on March 24 in aid of the Mayor of Dudley’s appeal at Dudley Town Hall. The 70-strong Restoration Chorus and Stourbridge Chamber Orchestra will perform with soprano Louise Maguire. Tickets £12 via 01384 815912.

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Murder victim was too friendly, too trusting and he paid with his life

FRIENDLY Simon Johnson ignored the advice of pals to stop inviting people he met in the pub back to his home – and paid with his life.

Now teenager Damilola Johnson is facing a life sentence for his murder.

The 18-year-old plunged a knife four times into the body of Mr Johnson after the 41-year-old was woken while he and a 15-year-old youth stole plants from a cannabis farm at the home of the victim.

Damilola Johnson was unanimously convicted of murder and burglary by the Wolverhampton Crown Court jury.

A younger defendant, now 17, was acquitted of murder but found guilty of manslaughter. He had admitted the Wolverhampton Crown Court jury.

“The deceased was a naturally trusting man – too trusting, as it turned out.”

Discovered

The victim had lived alone in the three-bedroom semi in Cradley Road, Netherton, since ‘amicably’ parting with his wife and two children following the break down of their marriage in 2015.

Window fitter Mr Johnson was discovered when colleagues Max Richardson come to collect him for work around three hours after the murder took place on August 11 last year. The front door was locked but the living room window wide open with smears of blood around the frame.

Mr Johnson was a heavy cannabis user. After a chance meeting with Jack Griffin at the Wagon and Horses in Cradley Heath on August 5, he invited the teenager and his friends Clayton Pritchard and Abbey Hughes, all aged 18, to carry on drinking at the Cradley Road address. Griffin repaid the act of kindness by stealing the host’s mobile phone and selling it for £180 the following day.

Mr Johnson made the mistake of showing Pritchard the cannabis growing in an upstairs room opposite his bedroom. The teenager wasted no time in telling his friends, triggering a sequence of events that led to murder.

Mr Richardson recalled: “Simon smoked a lot of weed and had shown me the grow. It was 15 or so plants under lamps in a tent. He said he was not responsible for it, just renting out the room. He said it helped to pay the bills.”

Griffin and his two friends called at Mr Johnson’s home again on the evening of August 10. Mr Johnson and the three teenagers spent the evening drinking, smoking cannabis, playing video games and watching TV until he decided to go to bed, allegedly locking the front door and telling the trio of visitors to leave through the unlocked living room window. They each secretly took a cannabis plant, and others had heard about the cannabis.

Only the two burglars knew exactly what happened but the youth told Wolverhampton Crown Court: “Mr Johnson passed cannabis around and we smoked it. Damilola Johnson delivered the fatal blows after accidentally bumping into a bed and wakening the older man.”

Mr Johnson suffered a fractured skull and a heart attack during the early hours of August 11. The fingerprints of both defendants were found on a bin bag full of cannabis discovered alongside Mr Johnson when his body was found on the upstair’s landing by his workmate less than four hours later. CCTV film captured their escape after the killing.

Glove

A glove with traces of the DNA of Damilola Johnson and the blood of the victim was found discarded in a nearby street while a knife taken from the kitchen of the house – and thought to be the murder weapon – was discovered in the front garden of the house with the victim’s blood on it.

Two more knives were later found behind a garden wall in nearby Durham Road where they had been hidden by the 17-year-old defendant as he left the scene.

Mr Johnson had been stabbed four times – one blow almost severed his aorta – after being woken by the thieves. Each had a knife to strip the cannabis plants but one of these was used to end Simon Johnson’s life.

Damilola Johnson, of no fixed address, and the 17-year-old were remanded in custody until January 12 when they will be sentenced by Judge James Burbidge QC. He warned: “There will be significant sentences.”

Simon Johnson – died after being woken by thieves

Widow’s moving tribute

The widow of Simon Johnson has told of the impact of his murder on her and their two children.

The 41-year-old was knifed to death by Damilola Johnson, no relation, during a bungled burglary. The 19-year-old and a youth, aged 15 at the time but now 17, were stealing plants from a cannabis farm at the house in Cradley Road, Netherton, where the victim lived alone, on August 11 last year.

Roy Johnson, who separated from Simon in August 2015, said: “Those involved in Simon’s death did not just take his life, they took the people that we knew as a family. We will not forget them, and we will not forgive them.”

The last 16 months without Si can not be described in a few words but the world is an emptier, lonelier and scarier place for us now.

“The unimaginable and horrifying act of murder has become a harrowing reality for us and the impact of his death has reached, and continues to reach, far and wide. Our daughters, aged 18 and 11, have had their dad taken from them in a sudden, violent and violent way without a chance for a goodbye. That is something they, and I, will never recover from.

Difficult

“Telling our daughters what had happened to their dad was the most difficult thing I have ever had to do and there were many many, many difficult times since.

“We have been forced to deal with situations, experiences and emotions we didn’t think possible and although we know Simon would be so proud of us for the family, strength and courage we have shown, it’s no real comfort as he should be here.

“Simon and I had separated but we were both looking forward to the raising of our girls together and we had so many plans for the future as a family. He will be loved, missed and remembered always.”

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In my View

with Mark Andrews

A FEW years ago, NatWest bank had an advertising slogan which was, if nothing else, memorable. It seemed that every time you switched the TV on there was some customer groaning “my bank’s now a trendy wine bar.” The message was clear. Unlike other banks, NatWest realised that to serve customers you actually had to have a network of branches they can go to.

How times have changed. NatWest has just announced the closure of 197 branches, saying that more people are turning to internet banking, with the numb- er of people charging into branches falling by 40 per cent since 2014. Maybe so, but I guess if you keep closing branches – and cutting hours – then you are bound to see fewer people calling into them.

The company suggests that people may prefer to use a “banking app” instead. Now I don’t really know what a banking app is, but I’m fairly certain I wouldn’t prefer to use it. What happens if somebody nicks your dog and bone? How many passwords are we expected to remember?

I can see why banks want more peo- ple to move online. The latest closure programme will see staff numbers cut by 680, and think of all the money saved on rent, rates and utility bills. But what’s in it for the customer? The very thought of leaving my bank account at the mer- cy of the hackers brings me out in a cold sweat. The idea that I would have my life savings in an account protected only by a password I will struggle to remember seems utterly ridiculous, even if the inter- est rate is half a per cent higher.

Perhaps this should be a new adver- tising campaign. “My bank’s boarded up and covered in graffiti.”

In case you hadn’t noticed we had a lot of snow last week, I knew it took a few people by surprise, but these things tend to happen in December. It really isn’t that well, a few snowflakes.

What was supposed to be the coldest day in December. People by surprise, but these things tend to happen in December. It really isn’t that well, a few snowflakes.

So much wasted energy, so little brainpower. Perhaps there should be a new adver- tising campaign. “My bank’s boarded up and covered in graffiti.”

Travelling in a mate’s smart new car the other day, I noticed a steering-wheel lock on the back seat. Remember those? There was a time, in the days when car locks were dead easy to pick, when a bright yellow disc bolted to your steering wheel was a deterrent. Next, for a few years, car locks became really hard to crack; then they got too keylessly hi-tech for their own good. Today, thanks to the magic of the microchip, any scalps with the right electronic gizmo can drive off any lime he chooses. Hence the re- birth of the humble steering-wheel lock, the ultimate deterrent against crooks who are experts on computer programming but don’t know how to use a hacksaw.

On a visit to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Environment Secretary Michael Gove says leaving the EU might allow Britain to impose higher animal-welfare standards. For some, this is an upside of Brexit.

Surely, it’s a bit daft.

Kids at a primary school in Telford who got their PE kit were invited to take part wear- ing their underpants. At least one parent com- plained but the authorities insisted that all the pupils enjoyed the lesson. I bet. I recall with a shudder being sent into the school swimming bath naked, aged 12, having carelessly left my trunks at home. Everyone enjoyed that, too.

Except me. I really must sort out that claim for post-traumatic stress.

I’m 53 and presumably allowed to choose his own clothes. So whatever possessed Prince Edward to pose for a formal photograph at his home, Bagshot Park, wearing a bow tie, velvet smoking jacket, tartan trousers and mono- grammed slippers? Most odd.

Classy response to my item on the snowflake generation from a reader who points out: “I don’t object to the term Snowflake. We’re see- ing at the moment what they can do when they get together, aren’t we?” At the time he wrote, a few million snowflakes flexed their muscles and paralysed the nation. But then they very quickly got overheated and ran away.

Our changing language. According to the BBC website, “The snow showers have swepted across into London.” Meanwhile, Mail Online reports someone being “murdered to death”.

We are still a long way from being a fully on- line society. The Office for National Statistics reckons nearly half of single pensioners have no internet access. And it’s a fair guess that many of these older folks are claiming benefits, or at least trying to. Any Answers (Radio 4) took a call from a woman who, having no internet access in her home, had to use a computer at her local library to apply for benefit. When her passport and driving licence were not accepted for identifi- cation purposes, the system advised her to download an app to her smartphone. Seriously. That was my angriest moment of the week and I dare say some of you shared it.

My sympathy for starving songbirds evapor- ated in the first 48 hours of Ye Great Freeze. If the little idiots would only eat, instead of posing and posturing at each other, they would fare a lot better. Robins bully blackbirds who bully tits and posturing at each other, they would fare a lot better. Robins bully blackbirds who bully tits.

serious, though, it seems the com- pensation craze is the latest fad. Often we hear of members of the public making spurious claims for minor incidents – or in some cases no accident at all – just to cash in. More astonishingly, cash-strapped authorities are paying out.

G defy Council, for example, paid out nearly £6 million in personal injury claims over the last three years. These, stag- eringly included £43,000 to a child who needed surgery to remove a splinter after sitting on a playground bench.

There were also £630,000 to a claimant who broke a leg by jumping over the gate at a locked car park and another payout of £18,000 for someone who fell badly at a pavement damaged during works. And let’s not forget the £18,000 for the school- boy hit by a javelin during a PE lesson.

A police officer even received £12,000 after being bitten by a flea, while in Au- gust a woman was hit by a taxi in an illegal attempt to cash in. The taxi firm’s boss admitted that without the dashed façade of an official response – a letter or a phone call – we cannot pro- tected against a potential payout.

John O’Connell, of the TaxPayers’ All- iance, said the ‘compensation culture’ di- verted funds from public services such as social care and road maintenance.

Too right. With the NHS in dire straits, care homes closing and important trans- port links axed, one can see his point. But these claims fail to cut it. We know they are false without a thought for what tax- payers’ money is spent on. We all know how the Boy Who Cried ‘Wolf’ ends. We can only hope the proposed new laws will stop these ‘injured parties’ really are hurt.

Mark Shipp

Banks – not wine bars but reason to whine on

Unlocking the way to deter car thieves

Banks don’t know how to use a hacksaw
DUDLEY, under Pete Lowe and his Labour Government, did the Conservative Government’s bidding and slashed the hours that our libraries opened. We used to be able to get into a Halesowen library up to 7pm. That was all stopped.

Then I read that libraries in the borough are used by 18 per cent of the people and the percentage has fallen. On the face of it, it may look like a bad headline, but as my old dad used to say, “Look deeper, kid, and you’ll find it is hardly surprising.” If the politicians cut the hours that Buckingham Palace was open – currently having a refurbishment costing £350 million – you can bet that visitor numbers would fall. It is obvious, isn’t it?

Over the years, we have seen the library – a hub of this community – being run down with a reduction in staff, floors for library use and in its stock. There has always been in place a draconian management.

I do admire the hard-working staff who do their best to remain positive. It is to the dedicated staff we should look for guidance for improvements, because they know the library and its users.

Councillor Ken Finch warns us of the dangers of having volunteers running centres and such like. A Labour councilor! From the very party who cut the hours and gave libraries away to Greenwich Leisure. I remember the Labour Council Leader at the time saying it was exciting!

Take a real Labour man, Jeremy Corbyn, who is against such cuts, and he would agree that the Labour council made wrong decisions in office time after time. The emphasis is too often on the negative. Why not open new libraries? Let’s educate our children and adults since we never stop learning and we progress. The money is always there for war, but not for libraries, leisure centres and the NHS.

I HAVE read a large number of complaints on social media about getting off roads during the cold spell. I even read one that said it was not good to leave people unable to get off their drives for two or three days.

Come on people, how on earth can you expect councils to grit every road in the borough?

Main roads and bus routes have to take priority. It is hard to get about, I know, but we are all in the same boat that live in side roads. It’s tough but we only get snow now and again.

The options are stay in, risk going out, clear it yourself, or move to a main road in preparation for the next lot of snow.

The council cannot achieve the impossible and it is hard to get about. It is obvious, isn’t it? They know the library and its users.

To Greenwich Leisure. I remember the story, write to The Editor, Chronicles, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

DEIRDRE WOOD
Cotley

New deal sounds like extortion racket

EXTORTION Rackets can take many forms, for example:

a) “We’ve made ya an offer ya can’t refuse. We’ve sent ya a note and the little finger. Hand over the £40,000 and you’ll get tha kid back as long as ya don’t bring in da cops.”

b) “Okay so you’ll pay the £40 billion in readiness and maybe we’ll give ya the worthless trade deal as long as ya don’t tell ya taxpayers about tha cash.”

Both are perfect examples, the only difference is the number of zeros on the payment.

JOHNNY JAMES
Worlsdy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>Opening Times</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesbury</td>
<td>Mon-Sat 9am-9pm, Sun 9am-7pm</td>
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**Open: Mon-Sat 9am-9pm, Sun 9am-7pm**

**Branches:**
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  - 75 Bridge Street, Wednesbury WS10 0AH. Tel: 0121 505 5898
  - 109 High Street, Blackheath B65 0EG. Tel: 0121 559 1970
  - 30 Fenton Street, Smethwick B66 1HR. Tel: 0121 565 5284

**BEST PRICES ALL YEAR ROUND**

**Wines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Famous Grouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smirnoff Vodka</td>
<td>£15.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courvoisier</td>
<td>£16.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gordon’s Gin</td>
<td>£10.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bell Whisky</td>
<td>£10.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baileys 70cl</td>
<td>WOW! ONLY £9.99</td>
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**Beers**

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<tr>
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<td>Stella 284ml, 12 pack</td>
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**Fresh Milk**

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**Sugar**

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**Selection Tubs**

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**OFFERS END 24TH DEC 2017**

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<th>Offer ends</th>
<th>24th Dec 2017</th>
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Cannabis factory burglary bust

A man who had fallen on hard times allowed his home in Wordley to be used as a cannabis factory.

Jason Bray, aged 41, got chatting to a man outside a pub soon after taking the house on the three-bedroomed property in Birsey Road.

He allowed it to be used for growing cannabis plants on the understanding he would receive payment when the drugs were sold. Wolverhampton Crown Court heard. But he was caught after a burglary at the house – reported by neighbours – during which some of the plants were stolen.

Mr Mark Phillips, prosecuting, said police were alerted to the break-in in May and discovered a cannabis factory in full operation inside. Seventy-one plants in the early stages of production were found along with 50 empty pots, those which had been stolen in the burglary.

Value

The total potential street value of the crop was estimated to be between £35,000 and £100,000.

Investigating officers found a council tax bill addressed to Bray at the property. In the meantime he had contacted a solicitor and voluntarily went to the police station to own up to his part in the operation.

Mr Henry Skudra, defending, argued Bray had taken no part in the running of the operation and had been suffering from depression following a series of family tragedies and had started smoking cannabis after losing his job.

“This was a poor reaction to a set of adverse personal circumstances,” said Mr Skudra.

Bray, of Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, who admitted allowing his home to be used for the production of cannabis, was given a 12-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months. He was also ordered to carry out 120 hours unpaid work and pay £100 towards costs.

More than 1,000 empty homes despite crisis

MORE than 1,000 homes across Sandwell are empty – with almost 300 vacant for at least five years, new figures show. Hundreds of private properties were classed as ‘long-term vacant’ including 83 which have not been lived in for 10 years.

It comes as housing bosses continue to battle a mounting housing waiting list in the borough. Figures published under the Freedom of Information Act showed there are currently a total of 1,087 properties which have been empty for more than six months. Of these, 666 have been vacant for two years, 214 for five years and 83 for a decade.

Sandwell Council leader Steve Eling said the number of empty privately owned properties was ‘massively frustrating’, particularly as the authority faces a constant challenge to house families as well as having to find land to build new developments.

He said empty private homes were contributing to a ‘national housing crisis’.

Drifters bring decades of soul

VETERAN American soul group The Drifters will be performing at Dudley Town Hall on May 25.

The Drifters were founded in June 1953, by George Treadwell and Ahmet Ertegun, founder of Atlantic Records. Since their creation the band has featured over 65 vocalists.

Their hits include Saturday Night at the Movies, Under The Boardwalk, On Broadway and Save The Last Dance for Me.

For tickets call (01384) 812812 or see boroughhalls.co.uk website.
Dedicated carer Lynne wins national award

A SELFLESS carer has been honoured with a national prize – with her bosses saying she would crawl on broken glass to help others if she needed to.

Lynne Higgins, 47, from Nether ton, won the carer of the year award over 8,000 other people from across the UK for her dedication to her job caring for the elderly.

Mrs Higgins, who works across Dudley borough and parts of Sandwell, has been known to go the extra mile.

The mother-of-two was honoured in the Home Instead Senior Care awards. She once bought a cuddly toy dog for a client with dementia and delivered it to her house.

Family

Mrs Higgins lives with her husband Steve and two sons, 21-year-old Joe who has Wor- ter drought syndrome, a type of Cerebral Palsy, and 13-year-old Peter who has Autism and insulin controlled diabetes.

Mrs Higgins said: “It was amazing to win – I really did not expect to at all.

“To me, I don’t feel like I’m doing anything special, I just treat clients like they are my family – if you don’t treat them like family then they’re not getting the best care.”

Lynne Higgins, centre, with Home Instead owner Ian Williams and business development manager Susan Love

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**Slimline Simon loses third of body weight in seven months**

He used to be 25 stone and lived on a diet of takeaways, ready meals, crisps and biscuits. But in a quest to get fit and find love, 53-year-old Simon Sims decided enough was enough and lost an extraordinary eight stone in just 28 weeks.

The Steurbridge man joined Slimming World back in May and teamed up with consultant Pauline Whitehouse who had previously lost nine stone herself.

Mr Sims said: “I had to do something or my outlook did not look good. My weight ballooned to 25 stone, I lacked confidence, had no friends and my health was suffering. I walked past a Slimming World group at Chawen Hill Church in Pedmore, and I heard clapping and cheering and decided this was my opportunity to do something about my weight.”

“I have been a long term carer for my parents for the last 19 years. I lived on fast food, takeaways, ready meals and snacked on crisps and biscuits.”

Mr Sims bagged Mr Sleek 2017 at the Slimming World Ball at the Copthorne Hotel.

Mr Sims said: “Over the 28 weeks I have made some amazing friends and best of all I have just met a lovely lady who I have fallen in love with. I am so looking forward to the future, 2018 looks so amazing.”

**Sex assault instructor’s prison term is increased**

Report by Marion Brennan

A DRIVING instructor who sexually touched teenaged pupils has had his prison sentence extended after two more victims spoke up.

Gary Rolinson, who ran the Kingswinford-based 500+ Driving School, would touch his students on the thigh when they made errors, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

The first pupil, aged 17, blocked Rolinson’s hand, telling him: “I get the picture, there’s no need to do that.” When the instructor touched him on his genitals over his clothes, he grabbed his hand and told him to “pack it in.”

But the predatory instructor became “quite blatant” in his behaviour, making lewd comments even in front of a female pupil to whom they were giving a lift, said Ms Samantha Crabb, prosecuting.

He told the second pupil, who was just 16, that touching him on the thigh “helped with his clutch control.”

The teenager tried to treat his behaviour as a joke but Rolinson became embarrassed when he realised the young man was not going to report him.

One time he told him to stop the car in a country lane and asked him to have intercourse. The youngster felt the best response was to laugh it off but the instructor reminded him of the request during subsequent lessons.

Admitted

The defendant, now 62, last week admitted 10 offences of sexual touching involving the two young men between 2009 and 2014. His appearance at Wolverhampton Crown Court came almost two years after he was jailed for similar offences involving six teenagers during driving lessons between 2012 and 2014.

Following a 14-day trial Rolinson was found guilty of 13 offences of sexual assault and one of causing a person to engage in sexual activity.

On that occasion a pupil spoke anonymously about the devastating effect Rolinson’s behaviour had had on him.

He said: “I felt vulnerable and violated. Because I’m a boy I felt as though I couldn’t say anything. It was as if people would laugh at me or not believe me.”

Increasing Rolinson’s four-year sentence to five years emboldened when he realised the 2,800 drink-drivers caught in 12 months

MORE than 2,500 motorists have been charged with drink-driving in the West Midlands and Staffordshire Police force areas in the last year.

In the 12 months to May, there were 1,833 people charged in the West Midlands – 6.47 per 10,000 population – and 990 in Staffordshire – 8.89 per 10,000.

A total of 1,112 drivers were charged in the West Mercia and Staffordshire Police areas and warnings to anyone tempted to drink. and drive over the festive period not to do so as it could result in tragedy, prison and a road ban.

A total of 31 forces out of 45 provided figures.

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Whole lotta cash for Plant’s Aston Martin

LED Zeppelin frontman Robert Plant’s former Aston Martin is up for sale – and is sure to cost a whole lotta cash.

The Black Country rock legend bought the DB5 in the early 1970s and sold it in 1986 to a car collecting father/son team in the Midlands. The red DB5 is a 1965 model with 62,400 miles on the clock, and it has undoubtedly seen some Good Times (and) Bad Times.

In recent years the car has been restored and is now in ‘an exemplary condition’ according to Aston Martin specialists Nicholas Mee & Co who are selling it. Its colour is described as ‘Dubonnet Rosso’ while the interior is tan with four seats. A price for the motor is only available on request – with its seller estimating it could fetch more than £1 million.

Plant, 69, who was born in West Bromwich and went to school at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stourbridge, sold the car in the ‘80s. It was entrusted to Chapman Spooner for restoration work and has been owned by Nicholas Mee & Co since 2008. A description says: “This iconic car can most accurately be described as having received, ‘a Whole Lotta Love’.”

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Jokers go wild in Jack's Grand pantomime show

FE-FI-FO-FUN – expect some giant laughs at Wolverhampton’s big panto Jack And The Beanstalk.

It’s silly, it’s saucy and spectacular too, delivering all the traditional pantomime cliches with a local twist in a guaranteed Grand night out.

Jack And The Beanstalk, on at the Lichfield Street theatre until January 14, has got famous faces off the telly, lots of pop songs, joking mentions for local towns, a haisable villain, a flamboyant dame and... Super Yam.

Doreen Tipton’s latest panto stunt, after wowing the audiences in her debut on a mobility scooter in last year’s Aladdin, is to don a superhero outfit in a panto closing scene that nearly brought the house down.

Doreen (aka Walsall actress Gill Jordan) injects typically downbeat Black Country humour into a show that has no shortage of jokers.

Slapstick

Adam C Booth (perhaps best known as Keith Lemon’s TV "brother") is a highly energetic slapstick Simple Simon, whilst former Lichfield Garrick stalwart Ian Adams has some of the best lines and lots of amusing frocks as Dame Trott. But you may hope that some of their ruder double entendres fly over the children’s heads.

Pop and stage star Gareth Gates shows a nice knack for humour too as Jack. I like him crooning If You Leave Me Cow to Daisy after he exchanges her for a bag of beans. His scene with love interest Jill (Sarah Vaughan, in fine voice) which is constantly interrupted by brother Simon was a howl, only topped by Mother Nature, played by Grand favourite Lisa Riley, with Dame, Simon and Doreen’s chaotic 12 Days of Christmas.

The musical highlights, accompanied by hard-working dancers, included versions of Can’t Stop The Feeling and Rather Be.

Gareth’s big number was, of course, his chart-topping cover of Unchained Melody (the second top selling single of the noughties).

You always need some baddies and former The Bill actor Graham Cole fit the bill as Fleshcreep, main benchman for a giant who made a big, and I mean BIG, appearance in the second act.

Credit to for another Garrick regular, Julie Paton, who was a touch of class as the operatic-voiced giant’s Harp.

If you’ve Bean you know, otherwise, give this panto a fo-fog-go. 

LEON BURAKOWSKI

The Lion King

The smash-hit story of Simba the lion and his Serengeti journey from runaway to ruler of the plains has been a sell-out success ever since it opened on Broadway in 1997 and at London’s Lyceum Theatre in 1999.

A theatre adaptation of a Disney classic, with music by Elton John and Tim Rice, a musical score by Hans Zimmer, arrangements by Lebo M and a plot loosely based on Hamlet, this multiple Tony and Olivier award-winning show has become the top-earning title in box office history, surpassing Lloyd Webber’s Phantom of the Opera.

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2 Days by Coach - School of Rock

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Motown the Musical

If ever a musical genre lent itself to theatre, it was the mass harmonics and wall-of-sound dramatics of Motown. Motown the Musical is the story of Berry Gordy, a former Detroit car worker living in an America riven by race riots, who scraped together a shoestring budget in 1959 to found a record label which became its own assembly-line of sensational hits. Featuring 40 classic songs including My Girl, Stop! In The Name of Love, Dancing in the Street, I Heard It Through The Grapevine and Ain’t No Mountain High Enough, this production won’t disappoint.

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Motown the Musical is produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber who has added 14 new songs to the score, which also includes all the original songs from the film.

School of Rock

Dewey Finn, a failed wannabe rock star, decides to earn a little extra cash by posing as a substitute teacher at a prestigious prep school. Not being as talented as performer nor great at marking essays, Dewey instead decides to create his own curriculum, turning his class into a guitar-shredding, bass-slapping, mind-blowing rock band.

Based on the Paramount film written by Mike White and starring Jack Black, this rocking stage musical is produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber who has added 14 new songs to the score, which also includes all the original songs from the film.

London Theatre Break
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Departing Monday 19 Feb
from Birmingham (BHX)
Price Includes...
✓ Return flights to Madeira incl. transfers
✓ 1 piece of hold luggage per person
✓ 7 nights all inclusive at the Hotel Raga, Funchal (breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea/coffee and cake and selected drinks during meals)
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Christmas TV

McIntyre magic

Paul’s love of dogs

Wild about bears

Your essential 8-page festive programme guide
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Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show, on at 8.30pm

6.00 Breakfast 7.25 Match of the Day (R) 9.00 Film: Planes (2013) ★★★ 10.00 The One Show (R) 12.00 Life in the Snow Gordon Buchanan meets animals that live in snowy conditions ★ 1.00 BBC News: Weather

The annual service from Birmingham College, Caroles
from King's, 5.45pm

6.15 Nature's Weirdest Events (R) 7.00 Island Parish Shetland (R) 8.00 BBC News: Weather

Bradley Walsh hosts, A Celebration of Celebrity Special, 5.00pm

7.00 ITV News Central; Weather: 7.00 ITN News Central; Weather

Child Genius vs Celebrities Christmas Special, on at 8.00pm

7.00 FILM: The Rugrats in Paris: The Movie (2000) Animated adventure with.data from Christine Cavanaugh. ★★★ 8.00 The Big Bang Theory (R) 9.00 Jamie's Quick & Easy Food (R) 9.40 Christmas Crunch With guests Antoine Du Beke, Danny Mac and Tom Fletcher. 12.40 Paul Hollywood: Great British Bake Off: Paul shares his favourite Mediterranean recipes on a trip to Cyprus. Last in the series. (R) 1.00 Jamie's Italian Christmas Jamie Oliver cooks a festive meal with a Milan twist. (R) 2.10 The Simpsons A corporation buys Springfield Elementary School. (R) 2.40 The Simpsons An adult Bart and Lisa return home for Christmas with their parents. (R)

Christmas Eve

3.30 The Simpsons (R) 3.35 The Bachelor (1997) Children's special, hosted by Andrew Flintoff.

5.20 The Snowman Animated Adventure, based on Raymond Briggs' festive-themed tale. (R)

5.50 FILM: Goldfinger (1964) ★★★

6.00 Milkshaked 9.20 FILM: Gone with the Wind (1939) A plantation owner falls in love with a plantation owner. (R) 9.40 Classic FM Live with Michael McIntyre, in a relationship with a roughshorn Southern gentleman during the American Civil War. Epic romantic drama starring Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable. ★★★ 1.35 FILM: Oklahoma! (1955) A farm girl falls between two suitors, a charming cowboy and a grumpy foreman, Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical Western, starring Garland, MacRae and Shirley Jones. ★★★
Christmas Day

BBC 1

3.00 The Queen’s Christmas Broadcast Cinderella (2015) ***
4.45 The Highway Rat
5.15 BBC News: Weather
5.30 Doctor Who
6.30 Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special
7.40 Call the Midwife Boxing Day sees heavy snowfall across the country and the adverse weather causes major disruption across Popular as roads become blocked and pipes freeze.
9.00 EastEnders Things are set to explode for Max as Stacey’s phone – with all Jane’s incriminating voicemails - is returned to her. Mick discovers the hard way not to cross Aidan Maguire.
10.00 Mrs Brown’s Boys Christmas Special Finale of two festive specials. Grandad is convinced the house is haunted, Cathy is looking for an internet date and Jennifer Saunders, the Two Ronnies, Ant and Dec, and Cagey and Barn are invited.
11.25 BBC News: Weather & Christmas Proms
11.49 Have I Got a Bit More 2017 News For You? An extended compilation of memorable moments from the sardonic quiz over the past year, with a variety of guests, panelists and wheelchairs joining captains Paul Merton and Ian Hislop.
12.30 Darcy Bussell: Looking for Fred Astaire (R) 1.30 Weather for the Week Ahead 1.35 BBC News

BBC 2

4.30 Dame Vera Lynn: Happy 100th Birthday
5.30 Signe Zone: The Queen’s Christmas Broadcast
6.30 The Morecambe and Wise Christmas Special
6.45 Winter’s Weirdest Events
7.45 Dad’s Army Frazier is unable to hide his delight when Captain Mainwaring’s disreputable brother gatecrashes a sherry party for local dignitaries. Classic comedy, starring Arthur Lowe. (R)
8.25 Upstart Crow Will’s new play is to be performed at the queen’s Christmas festivities, while the Shakespeare’s find themselves with some unwanted guests. Emma Thompson guest stars as Elizabeth I.
9.00 Tom Jones & Beverley Knight’s Christmas Album Tom Jones and Beverley Knight present a festive concert from Cardiff featuring a blend of traditional gospel cards and songs of spiritual intent by greats like Prince and Bob Dylan. First shown on BBC One Wales.
10.00 Judi Dench: All the World’s Her Stage (2015)
10.45 Josephine Tey: The Daughter (2017)
11.00 ITV News and Weather
11.15 The Holiday (2006)
11.40 Viewers get the Christmas taste of the Christmas Day features, while the Shakespeare’s find themselves with some unwanted guests. Emma Thompson guest stars as Elizabeth I.
12.30 Darcy Bussell: Looking for Fred Astaire (R) 1.30 Weather for the Week Ahead 1.35 BBC News

ITV

3.00 The Queen Her Majesty’s annual address. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004) The wizard wizard is alarmed to learn that his son is being sought by a dangerous, fugitive sorcerer is searching for him. The third book in the adventure series, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Gary Oldman.
3.50 Emmerdale Robert gets a taste of how different his life could be.
4.00 ITV News and Weather
4.30 Dual Acts: Christmas Special, on at 10.55pm Christmas Day 19Halesowen Chronicle  Thursday, December 21, 2017

Ch4

4.30 Dunno (1941) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Edward Wynn.
5.00 Home Alone (1990) Family comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin.
5.45 The Great Christmas Bake Off Part one of two. Former contestants Paul Jagger, Bexa Lynne-Pike, Seals Gbormittah and Val Stone faces three festive challenges in a bid to win the Christmas Star Baker title.
6.00 The Morecambe and Wise Story: Look Back in LaughOutDocumentary making use of old performances, chat show appearances and archive interviews to show the success of the comedy's careers.
6.30 Christmas Special Festive fun featuring some of the greatest moments of the greatest showman on the small screen, including Morecambe and Wise, Cathy Saunders, the Two Ronnies, Ant and Dec, and Cagey and Barn.
6.55 Steptoe and Son (1972) Harold marries a stripper – but makes the mistake of letting Albert tag along on the honeymoon. Comedy based on the TV series, starring Harry H enry and Wilfrid Brambell.
7.00 The Crystal Maze A team of fast food workers tackles the zones.
7.45 Four in a Bed
8.00 opener
8.30 The Crystal Maze A team of fast food workers tackles the zones.
8.40 Christmas Carol, starring Albert Finney and Alec Guinness. 11.05 FILM: Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (1954) Andy Solidus’ own wedding, starring Howard Keel and Jane Powell.

Ch5

6.00 BBC 1
7.00 Six: The Musical West End star Ben Forster is Buddy, the human child raised as one of Salvation Army’s Casting in this musical stage adaptation of the hit 2003 film of the same name.
9.00 The Morecambe and Wise Story: Look Back in LaughOutDocumentary making use of old performances, chat show appearances and archive interviews to show the success of the comedy’s careers.
10.35 Britain’s Best Loved Double Acts: Christmas Special Christmas Special Festive fun featuring some of the greatest moments of the greatest showman on the small screen, including Morecambe and Wise, Cathy Saunders, the Two Ronnies, Ant and Dec, and Cagey and Barn.
10.55 Our Biggest Ever Sale Starts Boxing Day

Bed from £99
Wardrobes from £225
Sofas from £229
Rise & Recline Chairs from £139

Table & Chairs from £139

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Pictures for illustration purposes only
Documentary following polar bears, Snow Bears, on at 6.30pm


3.30 Doodles Live! Sketch show in which inmates catalogue the world around them.

3.45 Mary Poppins (1964) Disney musical fantasy about a housekeeper and a talking parrot.


5.50 ITV News and Weather


6.20 Reindeer Family & Me Gordon Buchanan goes to live with a family from the remote Sami culture in Finnish Lapland, and undertakes a journey across the frozen wilderness of the North.

7.00 Christmas (1998) Santa’s elf for a group of dinosaurs creates Christmas but it quickly escapes to terrify the tourists. Action adventure sequel, with Chris Pratt. ***

9.00 Coronation Street (R)


10.00 Two Doors Down – Christmas Special New series. Beth and Eric’s plans for a quiet festive least are thwarted when Cathy and Colin find their way to the French Alps is cancelled, and Christmas also turns up with her grandchildren.


11.00 House of Air (2015) A battle for germs on our planet.

11.15 The Kelly and Paddy Picture Show (R) ****

11.30 That’s Funny! (R)


12.00 The Great Christmas Bake Off Part one of two. Four contestants compete in a series of festive challenges.


12.45 Back to the Future Part 2 (1989) A teenager travels in time and gets stuck in the 1950s - where he has to make sure his parents fall in love.

1.00 Yuletide trek around Hong Kong.

1.05 FILM: Back to the Future Part 2 (1989) Animated fantasy, with the voice of Michael J Fox and Christopher Lloyd.


2.00 Child Genius vs Animal Genius (R)****

2.10 FILM: Shaun the Sheep: Squeakquel (2009) Animated adventure, with the voice of Julian Clary.


5.10 FILM: The Great Gatsby (2013) Romantic comedy, with the voice of Carell, Keira Knightly and Logan Lerman.

5.45 FILM: The Great Gatsby (2013) Romantic comedy, with the voice of Carell, Keira Knightly and Logan Lerman.

6.00 Battle of the Planets (R)****
Wednesday, December 27

BBC 1

BBC 2
10.20 FILM: The Princess and the Frog.

ITV
7.25 FILM: The Great Expectations.

CH 4

Prime Time
3.45 The Griffin (R).
3.45 Pointless (R).
4.30 Emmerdale.
6.00 Ethiopian odysseys. (R).
6.45 World’s Strongest Man.
7.00 The Chase Quiz show.
7.10 Horrid Henry.
8.00 Actor’s edition of the matchmaking show, in which Paul O’Grady gives a real-life Prince Charming a chance to find romance with either Cinderella, Snow White or Tinkerbell. (R).
8.45 SuperSpace: Anna Richardson and Sabrina Grant offer money-saving tips, and investigate some of the slashed prices and discounts from retailers that may not be all they seem.
9.00 Christmas Special: Madame Tussauds. (R).
10.40 Small Soldiers.
11.15 FILM: Sunshine.

Late View
3.00 Tenable. A team of five from Channel 4 answer questions about top 10 lists.
4.00 Tipping Point Game show.
5.00 The Chase Quiz show.
6.00 Paul O’Grady: For the Love of Dogs. The comedian returns to Battersea Dogs & Cats Home in London, meeting a British builder with a leg problem and helping to wash a smelly English mastiff.
7.30 Christmas Announcement.
8.00 Christmas Specials: Opera and Classical music.
9.00 Christmas Specials: Anna Richardson and Sabrina Grant offer money-saving tips, and investigate some of the slashed prices and discounts from retailers that may not be all they seem.
10.40 Small Soldiers.
11.15 FILM: Sunshine.

Early View
3.45 The Griffin (R).
4.10 Big Hero 6 (2014).
5.45 Pointless (R).
6.30 BBC News.
6.50 Midlands Today: Weather.
7.00 Star Trek.
7.30 A Question of Sport: Premier League Special. Sue Barker asks the questions in the light-hearted quiz, with Dion Dublin, Graeme Le Saux, Gary Lineker, Sarah Lancashire and Phil Tufnell. 9.00 The Miniaturist. Two-part adaptation of Jessie Burton’s best-selling novel.
8.00 Little Women. The March sisters must fend for themselves at home as Marmee is preoccupied with caring for her ailing husband, but the girls face an insurmountable challenge as Beth falls ill.
10.00 BBC News.
10.20 Midlands Today: Weather.
10.30 Mrs Brown’s Boys Christmas Special (R).
11.00 Not Going Out: Christmas Special (R).
11.40 Comic Relief 2017: Twas the Thanks After Red Nose Day. A compilation looking back at some of the highlights from the 2017 Comic Relief fundraising event, featuring a host of celebrities appearances and comedic routines.

Late View
3.45 The Griffin (R).
4.10 Big Hero 6 (2014).
5.45 Pointless (R).
6.30 BBC News.
6.50 Midlands Today: Weather.
7.00 Star Trek.
7.30 A Question of Sport: Premier League Special. Sue Barker asks the questions in the light-hearted quiz, with Dion Dublin, Graeme Le Saux, Gary Lineker, Sarah Lancashire and Phil Tufnell. 9.00 The Miniaturist. Two-part adaptation of Jessie Burton’s best-selling novel.
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10.20 Midlands Today: Weather.
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11.00 Not Going Out: Christmas Special (R).
11.40 Comic Relief 2017: Twas the Thanks After Red Nose Day. A compilation looking back at some of the highlights from the 2017 Comic Relief fundraising event, featuring a host of celebrities appearances and comedic routines.
Granville faces being left alone at Christmas, on at 8.00pm Thursday, December 28, 2017

**Early View**

**Selection of Real Ales including:**
- Bathams
- Burton Bridge
- Enville
- Holdens
- Wye Valley
and many more!

**World’s Strongest Man 2017**, on at 8.00pm Thursday, December 28, 2017

**Halesowen Chronicle** Thursday, December 21, 2017

**OVER CHRISTMAS**

**Boxing Day 12-12**

**New Years Eve - Regulars**

**7 - Late Karaoke & Disco**

**3.45 The Griffin’s Child**
**10.40 How to Train Your Dragon 2 (2014)**
**5.45 Parallels**
**6.30 BBC News**
**3.55 Inside the Factory**
**4.55 The Heroes of Teamwork (1965)**
**7.00 Thailand: Earth’s Holywars**
**4.45 Midlands Today; Weather**
**7.00 Celebrity Mastermind**
**3.20 Still Open All Hours**
**8.00 EastEnders**
**8.30 Six Robots & Us Part Two**
**3.30 Little Women**
**8.30 Little Women: Jo feels snubbed when Amy is chosen over her to accommodate Aunt Carroll’s daughter on a trip to Europe, so she packs and heads for New York to pursue her career.**

**8.30 EastEnders** Fi is sickened to discover how low her old friend has sunk. Linda is hell-bent on finding another local pub to manage and Brewster tells Kathy about the risk she has taken with her money.

**10.00 BBC News**
**10.15 Midlands Today**
**10.25 Bruno Mars: Live in Harlem**
**11.10 U2 at the BBC** The band perform some of their biggest hits at Abbey Road Studios, alongside tracks from their latest album, album, Comedy, Songs of Experience, and chat to Cat Deeley about their 2018 tour. **12.25 Weather for the Week Ahead** 12.30 BBC News

**Steve Coogan stars as Alan Partridge in Alpha Papa,** on at 11.30pm

**Bradley Walsh hosts the quiz show, on at 5.00pm**

**Joel confides in Sienna about his kids,** on at 6.00pm

**7.20 FILM:** The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie (2004) Children’s animated adventure, with the voice of Tom Kenny. ★★★★★

**8.00 The Simpsons Home gets a new wife.** With the voice of Ricky Gervais. ★★★

**10.00 The Simpsons Marie plans the local police academy.** (R) ★★★

**11.00 FILM: Kidz Vs All: The Time in the World (2011)** Two children learn their stepmother is a secret agent and help her battle an evil genius with the power to control time. Family adventure, starring Jessie Alba and Jeremy Riven. ★★★

**11.45 FILM: Tenable** Thriller, starring Sandra Bullock and Jeremy Northam. ★★★

**3.45ジョイントNEW LOYALTY CARD SCHEME**

**Action from the second heat, World’s Strongest Man 2017, on at 8.00pm**

**6.00 Millshake! 9.15 Riding with Jane McDonald Highlights of Jane’s tour of Alaska, America’s largest state.** (R) ★★★

**9.30 The Gadget Show** (R) 10.25 FILM: The 7th Voyage of Sindbad (1958) Fantasy adventure, with Karin Mathews. ★★★

**12.15 FILM: The Vikings (1958)** A Norse warrior fights to claim the Northumbrian throne, unaware for his crown is really his half brother. Adventure, with Kirk Douglas, Claire Bloom and Janet Leigh. ★★★ 2.30 FILM: Jason and the Argonauts (1963) The son of Zeus becomes known for his unquenchable desire to kill monstrous enemies during his epic voyage in search of a magical golden fleece. Fantasy adventure, with Todd Armstrong and Honor Blackman. ★★★

**4.30 Andre Rieu: My Life in Music Profile of the Dutch violinist (R)**

**6.00 Andre Rieu: Christmas in London** A festive concert by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra, featuring songs as well as music by Jacques Offenbach, with Ukraine and Italian operettas.

**7.00 Winter in Alaska Documentary following fork-tailed drake geese and the American state, beginning with winter, where snow Depth is meared in feet rather than inches; (R) 5 News New Zealand 8.00 World’s Strongest Man 2017** Action from the second heat of the competition which featured Iceland’s Halgrimur Julsson, a man who has stood on the podium five times but has never been crowned champion; 5 News Tonight

**9.00 Flight (2012)** Premiere. A plane is hailed as a hero for bringing an missing passenger plane down safely – until it emerges he was drunk at the controls. Drama, with Denzel Washington and John Travolta. ★★★

**11.45 The Taking of Pelham 123 (2009)** Criminals hijack a New York subway train and threaten to kill all the passengers unless they are paid $10million. Thriller, remade, with Denzel Washington and John Travolta. ★★★

**1.45 SuperCasino Live interactive gaming. 3.05 Love/Hate The gang members live apart out of control.** (R) 4.00 Cruising with Jane McDonald A Lilliputian lope round the world, as Jane McDonald meets every nation and touches their cultures. (R)

**4.45 House Doctor A slightly neglected 200-year-old cottage.** (R) 5.10 House Busters (R) 5.35 Wildlife SOS (R)
That’s Entertainment

Theatre has planned a Grand 2018

PANTO season is in full swing but Wolverhampton Grand Theatre has already planned a bumper 2018 of top shows, including a new thriller, fresh adaptations of classics and the return of some old favourites.

Jack And The Beanstalk continues the family fun until January 14. Then the Grand gets the new year off to a dramatic start with the premiere of Ruth Rendell thriller Gallowglass (written as Barbara Vine) a story about a child’s kidnapping and obsession. It’s at the Wolverhampton theatre from January 18 to 20.

The National Theatre’s production of Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler, given a modern makeover by award-winning playwright Patrick Marber, visits January 23-27. The late 19th century masterpiece tells of the original desperate housewife, the conflicted Hedda, a woman caught in a loveless marriage. It is a powerful role for Lizzy Watts, who had a part in TV’s The Durrells as Larry’s girlfriend Nancy.

Spine-tingling ghost story The Turn Of The Screw, adapted from Henry James’ novel by Tim Luscombe, is on from April 10 to 14, then another classic tale of terror stars Quadrophenia actor Phil Daniels as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, May 1 to 5.

Grand musical highlights include blockbuster ABBA musical Mamma Mia! resident for three weeks, from February 6 to 24. Fans of can say Good Morning Baltimore again when Hairspray returns (February 26 March 3), and Willy Russell’s Blood Brothers makes a comeback April 16-21.

A top-notch cast, spectacular staging and great Gershwin tunes combine to make Crazy For You, with Tom ‘Strictly’ Chambers, Claire Sweeney and Charlotte Wakefield, one of the most eagerly-awaited shows of the year, on from May 8 to 12.

Joe Pasquale steps into the shoes of Michael Crawford as the accident prone Frank Spencer in a new stage version of Some Mothers Do ‘Ave ‘Em, based on the classic 70s TV sitcom. June is musical month with Beautiful the acclaimed Carole King Musical, with Bronté Barbe as the US hitmaker, coming to the Grand (12-16) as part of its first UK tour after West End success.

Then Hayley Tamaddon (so good in the touring version of Chicago) stars in the 1920s-set flapper musical Thoroughly Modern Millie (26-30).

The Jersey Boys are working their way back to Wolverhampton to bring the music of The Four Seasons from August 28 to September 8. The recent West End favourite Kinky Boots struts its stuff at the Grand from October 16 to 27.

And, by the way, if you are eager for further panto magic next year – the Grand has already announced that next festive season’s panto is Sleeping Beauty, and tickets are available now.

For further details about these shows and many more, including one-nighters and amateur productions, see grandtheatre.co.uk or call 01902 429212.

They got rhythm – Tom Chambers and Charlotte Wakefield in the George and Ira Gershwin musical Crazy For You.

Dancing Queens and Super Troupers will be heading to Wolverhampton Grand for the big ABBA hits in Mamma Mia!

Natural Woman - Bronté Barbé plays singer-songwriter Carole King in the acclaimed show about her life, Beautiful

In two minds – gothic horror as Phil Daniels plays Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.
Hyundai’s first foray into hot hatch market makes its case

By Jack Evans

This is Hyundai’s new hot-hatch – the i30 N. Aiming to tackle the likes of the Volkswagen Golf GTi and Honda Civic Type R, it’s the South Korean manufacturer’s first foray into the ever-growing sports hatchback segment.

There’s a lot going on under the skin of the i30 N, but it all works together to make it a competitive as possible in what is a very fought-over segment. Under the bonnet sits a turbocharged 2-litre petrol engine producing 275bhp and 309Nm of torque. The regular i30 N, which does without the clever differential or added exhaust trickery, makes do with just 247bhp.

In this case, we’ve been driving the more powerful version, capable of hitting 60mph in 5.9 seconds before hitting a top speed of 160mph.

A key part of the i30 N’s armament is its Drive Mode selector. This allows you to slacken off the suspension yet keep the car to your individual tastes. Usefully for the UK, it allows you to slacken off the suspension yet keep the car’s engine and exhaust in their sportiest modes – ideal for pothole-ridden British b-roads.

The fundamentals, therefore, are solid. The steering is accurate and allows you to easily place the car, and this is matched by an engine that delivers a cackle from the exhaust – immediately a good sign.

Hyundai has changed however; the metal gear stick is exclusive to the i30 N, but it all works together to make it as competitive as possible.

The i30 N is the manufacturer’s first foray into the ever-growing sports hatchback segment. Additional air vents and a large touchscreen as standard, as well as Apple Car Play and Android Auto. There’s also a five-year unlimited mileage warranty – and this covers track use, too.

Usefully for the UK, it allows you to slacken off the suspension yet keep the car’s engine and exhaust in their sportiest modes – ideal for pothole-ridden British b-roads.

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64 Nissan Micra Hatchback 1.2 Acenta Blue Only 12000 Miles
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64 Nissan Note 1.2 DiG-S Acenta Premium Auto Red 12000 Miles

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64 Ford Grand C-max Diesel Estate 1.6 TDCi Zetec Brown 17k
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64 Ford S-max Diesel Estate 2.0 TDCi 163 Titanium Blue 33k

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It is one of the best looking cars in the hot hatch segment

Up and running, the i30 N gets better and better

Sit behind the wheel of the i30 N and, in truth, you could believe that you were sat in pretty much any other Hyundai product. You get the sense that the money has been spent on making the car drive well and, thankfully, that’s exactly what it does.

Press the engine starter button and you’re met by a rasping immediate growl – immediately a good sign. The major control weights are well-judged; pulling away from a stop requires little management of the relatively light clutch, while the gearchange – which uses the same housing as the i40 – is notchy and simple to operate. The fundamentals, therefore, are solid.

Up and running, the i30 N simply gets better and better. The steering is accurate and allows you to easily place the car, and this is matched by an engine that offers more than enough low-down grunt.

We’d argue that, with its variety of small exterior additions, the i30 N is one of the best looking cars in the hot hatch segment. Additional air vents and a large rear diffuser help the car stand out just enough without shouting too loudly about it.

As mentioned previously, the interior of the i30 N isn’t wildly different to that in the regular i30. There are just enough features to keep it feeling special, though. The plastics surrounding the window switches are scratchy – though we are being picky here.

Save for a few additional steering wheel buttons – most notably the drive mode selectors – it’s as you’d expect from the regular i30. Key elements have been changed however; the metal gear stick is exclusive to the i30 N, which does without the clever differential or added exhaust trickery, makes do with just 247bhp.

In this case, we’ve been driving the more powerful version, capable of hitting 60mph in 5.9 seconds before hitting a top speed of 160mph.

A key part of the i30 N’s armament is its Drive Mode selector. This allows you to slacken off the suspension yet keep the car to your individual tastes. Usefully for the UK, it allows you to slacken off the suspension yet keep the car’s engine and exhaust in their sportiest modes – ideal for pothole-ridden British b-roads.
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Halesowen Chronicle Thursday, December 21, 2017

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WOLVERHAMPTON’S sporting heroes took centre stage at the city’s Sports Advisory Council awards night.

The annual event gives recognition to clubs, sportsmen and women as well as the unsung heroes who put in hours of service behind the scenes.

The Sports Advisory Council celebrated its 50th birthday earlier this year and chairman Peter Holmes MBE, who has overseen every awards ceremony since its formation, was delighted to celebrate sport and to acknowledge the unselfish work of countless volunteers.

“It was a pleasant evening and it was lovely to see a group of people who don’t normally get acknowledged step into the spotlight,” he said.

“I still get a tingle when I see what these wonderful people have contributed to their sport. In many cases it has been anonymous.

“A lot of these people have been ignored in the past. I hope we are highlighting what they do. I hope people appreciate what we try to do and it is purely and simply about the anonymous workers getting their true recognition.

“What never ceases to amaze me is the fact that we are a sporting city. Sport is in the DNA of every true Wulfrunian. Somewhere in their DNA sport is in there. It’s in the DNA of every true Wulfrunian. Somewhere in their DNA sport is in there.”

Realise

“We have 18 centenary clubs in the city and in five years time we will have four more. I wish the council would realise this is in selling Wolverhampton. When people come into Wolverhampton, one of the first things they get into is sport.

“It’s the opportunity for them to integrate into life in Wolverhampton. It’s so simple, and yet we tend to ignore it. There are no barriers in sport, the only barrier is whether you can afford to take part.”

Councillor Steve Evans handed out the 11 awards at Fordhouses Cricket Club. Wolverhampton City of Merit has always on hand to help out with coaching and various other duties for her club and within the league.

The Disabled Athlete of the Year went to Richard Hammond, celebrating his 25th year as a member of Wolverhampton Special Olympics. He has trained with the swimming and gymnastic sections since the age of nine. He won two silver medals in the UK Special Olympic Games held in Sheffield in August to add to the two he won representing Great Britain at World Special Olympic Games in Athens in 2011.

The Coach of the Year accolade was picked up by Steve Peat. Peat was nominated by Wolverhampton Special Olympics after taking on a table tennis coaching role with the group. He quickly made his mark with Wolverhampton the only group from the West Midlands to claim a gold at the Games in Sheffield earlier this year. There was further cause for celebration for Wolverhampton Special Olympics after Jacky Silvester was named Volunteer of the Year.

Silvester has been coaching gymnastics and athletics for 32 years and is also head coach of the West Midlands Special Olympics, chair of the Wolverhampton Special Olympics and has coached at seven national summer games.

Wolverhampton City Netball netted another two prizes with Neve Egan scooping the Young Volunteer of the Year award and Anna Edwards the Veteran of the Year. As well as playing for Blaze, 11-year-old Egan is always on hand to help out with coaching and various other duties for her club and within the league.

Edwards still plays at the age of 67 for Zimmers and has clocked up more than 50 years on court since she started playing netball at Moor Secondary School. She has also turned out for Park Rebels and Sam and is a well-known and popular figure with clubmates and opponents alike.

Wolverhampton & Bilston Athletics Club were also honoured for reaching their half-century. The club was formed in 1967 when Wolverhampton Harriers and Bilston Athletic Harriers joined forces.

Over the years they have produced some outstanding athletes who have represented the club and their country on the world stage.

Javelin thrower Tissa Sanderson won Olympic gold at Los Angeles in 1984 while Gary and Kath Cook won silver and bronze in their respective 4x400m relay events.

The club has also been granted the Queen’s Award for outstanding work in the community and continues to go from strength to strength.

Ladybirds Netball Club were named Team/Club of the Year. They joined the Wolverhampton City Netball League in 1986 under the name of Wood Green High School.

After a few years of action they changed their name to Market Tavern after obtaining a sponsorship deal and have been playing under the Ladybirds guise since 1984.

Their on-court successes include winning the league’s Handicap Tournament, Open Knockout and Non-Knockout Cup.

Councillor Singh walked away with the Special Award of the Year. Singh has given outstanding support to the Sports Advisory Council and was a key figure in organising the 50 year celebrations in the summer.

Bollywood

Singh has an impressive sporting background having won numerous powerlifting titles and also spent several years as a stunt double in Bollywood films.

The final two awards were the RV Cook Memorial Trophy and HB Lane Memorial Trophy. The latter went to Alan Ryder, a member of the JW Hunt Cup committee, for services to local football, that has seen him involved at grassroots level as a player and secretary with clubs including Northcotte Old Boys, Red Dragons, Wolverhampton Transport, Wednesfield Town and Marston’s for more than 45 years.

The RV Cook Trophy went to Wolverhampton & Bilston AC’s Colin Thompson. He joined the club in 1959 as a runner and moved onto the committee a year later, becoming chairman in in 2004.

He instigated numerous initiatives that have helped the club grow. One of the highlights was when W&B were voted England Athletics Development Club of the Year in 2010.
The only way is Essex after Dodd winner

MATT Dodd fired Stourbridge into the last 32 of the FA Trophy on his 100th appearance for the club.

The Glassboys travel to Essex to face Billericay Town, of the Isthmian League Premier, in the second round on January 15.

On Saturday, Dodd downed former club Leamington by scrapping in off the post and via keeper Tony Breeden’s glove after Kyle Perry had nodded an Aaron Forde corner towards goal three minutes after half-time.

Breeden denied Forde a second from Luke Shauner’s centre just before the hour-mark. Bouncing with his legs, but the Brakes offered little hope of a leveller. It meant Leamington became Stour’s third National North scalp in cup competitions this season, but boss Gary Hackett stressed the importance of repeat performances in the league.

“I was delighted to see Matt Nick a goal after missing him for two or three weeks,” said Hackett. “I hadn’t been aware of it being his 100th game and it was a great way to mark the occasion.

“Leamington were every bit as tough as we expected them to be and made it scrappy but we deserved the win.”

We were very disciplined and kept a clean sheet. Everyone deserves a lot of credit because it was a strong all-round performance. Now we need to get back to addressing our league form.”

Stourbridge scooped £6,000 in prize money for winning and have moved within four stages of a Wembley final.

Heathens to race on in National Trophy

CRADLEY Heathens will race for the National Trophy next year.

The rugby club have entered the competition for the first time to ensure the world famous name survive into a permanent base.

Baker makes his world debut and takes on Belgium’s Andy Beaton, the current Belgium Masters and England Masters champion, in a first-to-three sets tie.

The match will open the evening session on Monday, January 8 and will be broadcast on BT Sport.

The Black Country throwers can’t toe the oche together until, at least, the semi-finals at Lakeside.

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