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Life

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HENLEYLife

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WITH the days getting longer and the prospect of warmer weather to come, it's the time of year we start to embrace the great outdoors – whether that's in the garden or further afield.

Environmental group Greener Henley has relaunched its Nature Squared campaign, run in conjunction with the town council and the Henley Standard.

It has bold new ambitions to transform Henley into a network of pollinator-friendly habitats by increasing pollinator planting from 500 sq m to 5,000 sq m by 2030.

Keeping with the green theme, John Jacklin reports on the growing initiative in Sonning Common to create a "hedgehog highway" to ensure that these animals thrive.

Amanda Stewart previews some wine tasting tours this month, while The Plough pub tells of its recent garden award and we feature our homes and gardens guide.

This April is also a big month in the life of Gillotts School in Henley as headteacher Catharine Darnton steps down after 19 years. We speak to her about her time leading the academy.

This month's cover story announces this year's Henley Art Trail, which is back for the early May bank holiday (May 2 to 4) and is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Our women's health columnist, Dr Shilpa McQuillan, discusses urinary tract infections during the perimenopause and menopause while Daniel Banks, of the Flyte Bar is the subject of My Henley Life.

We hope you enjoy.

The Henley Life team

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legendary joyous musical *High Society* on stage; one of the most elegant musicals ever written in a revitalised new production at High Wycombe's Swan theatre this coming July, direct from London's West End.

Leading a cast of twenty-eight and following her critically acclaimed performance in Rogers & Hammerstein's *The King & I* in 2024, star of BBC's *Call the Midwife* **Helen George** returns

original work retains a relevant, fresh energy, while delivering a guaranteed dose of sheer and utter escapism. Kavanaugh is joined by renowned choreographer **Anthony Van Laast** and Musical Supervisor & Director **Stephen Ridley**, whose jaw-dropping work was last seen in *Kiss Me, Kate* at the London's Barbican theatre in 2024.

With the blessing of the Cole Porter estate, this *High Society* pairs the beloved sparkling array of pitch-perfect Porter tunes including *Just One Of Those Things*, *'Let's*

‘With the blessing of the Cole Porter estate, this *High Society* pairs the beloved sparkling array of pitch-perfect Porter tunes’

to the stage as leading lady, Tracy Lord. Famously performed by Grace Kelly alongside Frank Sinatra in the effervescent 1956 MGM film, George's lyrical vocals and sharp-wit comedy will plant her firmly as one of this year's must-see stars on stage.

A true jewel in the crown of cinema's Golden Age, this upcoming stage production directed by **Rachel Kavanaugh** (*Half a Sixpence*, *Shadowlands*) promises vigour and vitality to ensure that the

Misbehave, *'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*', *'Well, Did You Evah?*' and *'True Love*', alongside gems from Porter's wider work, all brought to life by a full orchestra, to create this definitive, highly anticipated must-see production.

Brought to you by the producers of the multi award-winning *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The King and I*, *High Society* is the "guaranteed gem" (*Metro*) that we all need this summer.



ABOVE: View of the Wycombe Swan main entrance

BELOW: Helen George leads *High Society* this summer at Wycombe Swan



Diary Dates

APRIL 2026

TUESDAY 7TH APRIL

Marty Wilde and the Wildcats

CROOKED BILLET, STOKE ROW



With hits from the Fifties through eight decades, singer Marty Wilde will be performing with the Wildcats – Neville Marten (guitar/vocals), Eddie Allen (guitar/vocals), Callum Houghton (bass), Adrian Nash (keyboards) and Neil Robinson (drums) – at the gastropub in Newlands Lane, Stoke Row.

With his 87th birthday coming up on April 15, the singer is releasing a new album, *Let's Rock This Place*, in a collaboration with Darrel Higham and the Enforcers.

Tickets for the Crooked Billet gig cost £45 as part of a music cover charge. For more information, call (01491) 681048 or visit thecrookedbillet.co.uk

WEDNESDAY 8TH APRIL

Mr Sleepy Bum's Dream Machine

KENTON THEATRE

An Easter show for children aged three to eight, Mr Sleepybum is the creation of character comedian Jody Kamali. Two years ago, Mr Sleepybum had a sellout run at the Edinburgh Fringe and has



since toured the UK, with a 12-show, off-West End run. This show is the sequel.

Tickets cost £12.50 and the shows, at 11am and 2pm, have a running time of 45 minutes. For more information, call the box office on (01491) 525050 or visit thekenton.org.uk

WEDNESDAY 15TH APRIL

An Evening with Kate Humble

KENTON THEATRE



Writer, traveller and broadcaster Kate comes to Henley for a special fundraising evening, supporting the Kenton Theatre. From being Ben Fogle's "telly wife" to hairy moments with hippos, the nature lover will be sharing tales from her projects and adventures from around the world and stories working in books and television.

Tickets cost £30 and the show starts at 7.30pm. For more information, call the box office on (01491) 525050 or visit thekenton.org.uk

THURSDAY 16TH APRIL

Alan Johnson: The Beatles, Harold Wilson and Me

KENTON THEATRE



Before he became a politician, Alan Johnson was a postman and before that, he wanted to be a pop star. The former Health, Home and Education Secretary will be talking about his life, from being orphaned as a child through to his political ambitions and dreams and a love of all things Sixties.

The show starts at 7.30pm and tickets cost £26.75. For more information, call the box office on (01491) 525050 or visit thekenton.org.uk

MONDAY 20TH APRIL

Nettlebed Folk Club presents Cara Dillon

THE VILLAGE CLUB, NETTLEBED



An award-winning Irish folk singer, Cara Dillon will be singing traditional songs learned while growing up in

County Derry. She won the All Ireland singing trophy at the age of just 14 and now creates her own fresh interpretations of global folk standards. She will be joined by her husband and musical partner, Sam Lakeman.

Tickets cost £25 in advance, £26 on the night. For more information, call 01628 636620 between 10am and 8pm or visit nettlebedfolkclub.co.uk

**THURSDAY 23RD APRIL TO
SUNDAY 14TH JUNE**

Jack and Sarah

THE MILL AT SONNING

Based on the beloved 1995 film, which starred Richard E Grant, Samantha Mathis, Dame Judi Dench and Sir Ian McKellen, Jack and Sarah is a heartwarming story about finding romance in the most unlikely places. Workaholic Jack



is thrown into the deep end to raise his baby daughter alone. When an au pair called Amy steps in, with the help of extended family, Jack starts to find a way through, but will the two see eye to eye?

For more information, call the box office on 0118 969 8000 or visit millatsonning.com

ONGOING EVENTS

TO SATURDAY 4TH APRIL

Cash on Delivery

THE MILL AT SONNING

Written by Michael Cooney, son of Mill supporter Ray, this fast-paced comedy is packed with mistaken identities and cover-ups. Eric Swan has taken thousands of pounds of fraudulent DSS money, helped by uncle George, but wife Linda remains oblivious. DSS Inspector, Mr Jenkins



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Turning the town **GREEN**



Campaigners square up to climate change by creating more space for natural world

BY JOHN JACKLIN

CONSERVATION volunteers in South Oxfordshire aim to turn the town green with a ten-fold expansion of a planting project that improves biodiversity and brightens up the streets.

Campaigners at Greener Henley have broadened their target for a scheme called Nature Squared from 500 metres squared to 5,000 metres squared. The project aims to invigorate wildlife and pollinating insects by creating areas for plants and greenery.

The relaunch highlights a significant change in the campaign as the communications manager for Greener Henley Julia Samyui-Adams explains: “We were looking mainly at people planting seeds previously and we know that was a stumbling block for some folks because they weren’t getting the result they wanted and seeing the plants they wanted.”

So last month the charity launched a so-called plant party in order that people who wanted to help could acquire plants

without growing them from seed. Julia says: “This party was about encouraging people by creating somewhere they could get plants.” She adds that the party was also about “joining people who can grow plants with those who can’t”.

Diana Barnett, the lead member of outreach work at Greener Henley, explains a reason behind the move to giving away plants not seeds. “We have been working on Nature Squared for a couple of years but giving away packets of seeds ... has been a slow process because a lot of the seeds are perennial and some people are a bit impatient, especially if you’ve got children who sometimes expect these flowers to come out instantly and waiting is quite boring.”

Nature Squared, which is a partnership between Greener Henley, the Henley Standard and Henley town council, is described as a nature recovery programme. It invites residents and organisations to plant one square metre of plants to create habitats that support bees, butterflies and other insects and will

‘Greener Henley wanted to “reach deeper” into the Henley community to get more people involved’



Greener Henley Nature Discovery Day at Mill Meadows



Volunteers at our Big Green Picnic, GBGW June 2025 (from left Nell Payne, Ian Reissman local councillor, Sharon Harper, Sara Kandiah, Diana Barnett, Kate Oldridge, Rebecca Fern)

form a nature corridor through Henley and beyond.

An important aspect to the relaunch, Julia says, is that Greener Henley wanted to “reach deeper” into the Henley community to get more people involved. Kate Oldridge, executive director of Greener Henley, says: “Our mission is to get mass engagement on climate nature action and we are looking at 25 per cent of the local population, which in the Henley and surrounding area is about 5,000 people.

“So we want to activate 5,000 people to get involved, not just coming to one event and then forgetting about it, but really understanding it and buying into it, you know, actively involved. So that is a big mission for us now, activating the whole community.”

She adds: “Greener Henley is not political. We encourage people to join the charity from all political affiliations, across the spectrum and we work with a broad coalition of partners from across the town. So we want to be increasing our work.”

That involvement extends to schools, and this year 12 schools have become the first recipients of the Green Futures Awards, a Greener Henley programme that aims to acknowledge measurable and practical action on climate. The scheme recognises schools in embedding climate and nature action and education into their learning programmes.

The awards are on three levels: bronze recognises engagement and communication; silver supports practical climate action and its integration into the curriculum; while gold rewards strategic leadership through climate action planning and long-term thinking.

In this inaugural round, ten schools achieved bronze status: the Oratory Prep School, in Woodcote; Trinity primary in Vicarage Road, Henley; Sacred Heart primary, on Greys Hill; Shiplake primary; Emmer Green primary; Rupert House, Henley; The Henley College, Frieth primary; Kidmore End

‘Pledge for the Planet is a means for businesses and residents to get involved in a tangible way’

primary; and Badgemore primary. Gillotts was awarded silver, while Sonning Common primary received a gold award.

The awards programme extends to schools from nursery to secondary and colleges from areas across South Oxfordshire such as Benson, Caversham, Goring, the Hambleden Valley and Wargrave.

Kate says: “One of the things that we hear back from schools is that they really value the fact that this is a hyper-local scheme because what we are able to do is offer signposts to local projects and initiatives that schools can get involved in. And also schools can support and learn from other schools in the area that are doing things.”

Another popular platform for the Greener Henley team is a project called Pledge for the Planet, which is a means for businesses and residents to get involved in a tangible way, they say, to help nature for the long-run and on their own terms.

“Our pledges offer a wide variety of simple, do-able, inspiring actions, enabling people to pick something that fits well into their life – and registering a pledge takes less than a minute,” Greener Henley says.

Kate notes that it is people and groups with a big audience that are helping Greener Henley. “So it could be like Greg Searle, the Olympic gold medal rower, or Ollie Phillips, the former England rugby sevens captain, or the Henley Literary Festival.

“These people or organisations with big audiences are taking a pledge and then they’re sharing it with their audience so that we can get then thousands and thousands of people and hundreds of organisations activated across town.” The groups says the pledges are “designed to meet peoples’ current concerns, whether that is the health of our families, warm homes, saving money, clean air and water, or helping wildlife. No matter what your budget or individual circumstances are,

Cont’d



IN THE COMMUNITY: Businesses, schools and well known local residence getting involved with our opportunities to promote a greener Henley

there is a pledge for everyone.” The pledges, listed on the group’s website, cover such diverse topics as energy, fashion, food, nature, travel, resilience, river, resilience, speak up and stuff we buy. Freddie Van Mierlo, the MP for Henley, has taken a pledge to Learn To Love the Weeds, part of the nature category. The idea is that people come to recognise that plants some people might consider weeds can be food and habitat for wildlife and by reducing the use of chemicals to allow weeds to grow, biodiversity will increase.

Under the speak up tag, the Henley Literary Festival and co-founder Harriet Reed-Ryan have taken a pledge to spread the word about Greener Henley by sharing its promise with the followers of the festival via newsletter.

Mercers Solicitors on New Street, Henley, which has sponsored Greener Henley events has taken pledges including Get Wildlife-friendly, part of the nature section, and Switch to Renewables, which is part of the energy section.

The boat company Hobbs of Henley has taken pledges to Be flood ready and Care for Our River, under the resilience and river sections respectively.

Jonathan Hobbs, the managing director says: “I really enjoyed taking part in the two Greener Henley events as part of the panel contributing to local initiatives focused on sustainability and environmental improvement. Through the discussions, I hope I have contributed to shaping conversations around greener practices and encouraged collaborative action to support a more environmentally responsible and

flood resilient Henley on Thames.” At the ADVHQ Gym on Newtown Road, off Reading Road, the owners Adam and Rose Lubbock have taken pledges to Eat Plant Rich, part of the food section, which has included meat-free Mondays. Plant diets are said to use fewer natural resources. The gym has also taken on the Walk It/Bike It pledge, part of the travel section.

From June 6 to 14 Greener Henley will again be taking part in the UK-wide Great Big Green Week, which is a festival of

community action to tackle climate change and protect nature. The week of events brings together the likes of communities, schools, businesses, churches, mosques and others united in action to protect the planet.

Dr Will Hearsey, of the Hart Surgery in York Road, is a big supporter of Greener Henley. He

says: “Greener Henley is a vital and trailblazing example to other communities in its work to make the community and the wider population more climate aware. We know that the climate and the natural world around us has a proven impact on our health so, as GPs, having an organisation on our doorstep that cares so deeply and works hard to protect our climate and biodiversity is a real privilege.”

He adds: “I have really enjoyed taking part in the two Greener Henley events as part of the panel contributing to local initiatives focused on sustainability and environmental improvement in the community. I hope I have contributed to shaping conversations around greener practices and encouraged collaborative action to support a more environmentally responsible and flood resilient Henley.”

‘Greener Henley is a vital and trailblazing example to other communities in its work to make the community and the wider population more climate aware’

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Hedgehog super highway

Eco-friendly villagers band together to create safe route for gardeners' friend

BY JOHN JACKLIN

CONSERVATIONISTS have developed a hedgehog highway stretching across an area equal to 22 football pitches to create a safe route for the animals in South Oxfordshire.

The route, which will help gardeners as well as the animals, is just one of the notable achievements of the Eco SoCo group in Sonning Common since its resurgence after Covid.

Julie Shorter, of Old Copse Gardens, Sonning Common, relaunched Eco SoCo, which promotes nature and biodiversity in the village, two years ago.

"We set up the hedgehog highway because the animals are an endangered species, really struggling, so to have such an interlinked area is incredible," Julie says. The highway is a

network of small holes cut into fences that allow hedgehogs to move freely between people's gardens. "It means the hedgehogs can cover that land without taking in too many dangerous roads.

"We don't know how many hedgehogs there are in the area, but last year we carried out a straw poll on a village day. The view from people was that the numbers had really gone down because of the drought, as, obviously, the hedgehogs eat all the lovely moist things like slugs and worms.

"So when the ground is baked they can't get at stuff and can't even find water to drink. Last year was really tough, so we're trying to do what we can." Julie adds: "One of our goals





for this year is to find a happy band of more people who are willing to cut holes in garden fences, so that we can extend the highway.

"The hole is actually not very big. It needs to be the size of a compact disc, and then the hedgehogs can come and go from garden to garden looking for food - killing slugs for gardeners — looking for a mate, new territory and that kind of thing."

Eco SoCo was launched in 2019, but stalled after its founder Lyndsay Henderson moved away from the village and because of Covid.

Julie says: "I resurrected it in January 2024 and it has been going from strength to strength since."

"We were about 200 people on our Facebook group. We're over 600 now. So it's just growing. I think people feel like they know that nature's in trouble."

"We are all volunteers and how it really kicked off was that I was offered land to plant at Abbeycrest Care Home, in Kennylands Road. We thought this is serious now, we've got to call this project together and really start to make things happen."

"With that in mind we have a repair café every first Saturday of the month at Springwater Church, Blounts Court Road, Peppard. We repair everything ... if you can carry it, then we can fix it."

"We had one lady bring us a lamp that she bought donkey's years ago and had been trying to make it work and we discovered that it wasn't earthed. We completely refurbished it and made it safe."

"It could easily have done something nasty."

Another success story was repairing an ancient slide projector so that a family could show "their lovely old slides at a family reunion. They were just so delighted."

At the last official count the café had brought back to life 110 electrical items; 14 bicycles; 39 items of clothing, numerous rucksacks and handbags; 40 implements that have been sharpened and many pieces of jewellery fixed.

"The repairs are free," Julie says. "But donations

are welcome to support Eco SoCo's environmental projects. It's part of the principle of reduce, reuse, recycle, because a lot of these things have still got life in them. We've been going for 18 months with the repair café and we've saved more than 800 items from landfill, which is remarkable."

As part of Eco SoCo's drive to promote a greener lifestyle, the group champions shops such as the hardware store Heath & Watkins, on Wood Lane, which offers refills on eco-friendly cleaning products for customers

who bring their own containers; One Stop, which collects used batteries; the Co-op, which takes soft plastics and crisp packets for recycling; and Sonning Common library, which collects pens, milk bottle tops, and hosts the Eco SoCo seed bank, where people donate and take seeds for planting in their gardens.

The results of another project are coming to fruition at this time of year. "We planted 10,000 bulbs and they are all bulbs

that come up in the spring for the early pollinators," Julie says.

"So they are such things as wild daffodils, crocus, and we've planted primroses and other spring flowers for when those insects start emerging and they are hungry. The sites include a park and five community orchards that we have set up ... lots of

different places in the village that got involved."

She adds: "The five community orchards contain old varieties of fruit trees from Oxfordshire and Berkshire that you don't see in the shops. We have got apples, pears, cherries, damsons, greengages and when they start fruiting they will be for the community to have free fruit."

"You can imagine, we're really into trees and are working with Oxfordshire County Council to get new trees on our village verges. We have also donated 100 trees as part of the Great Garden Tree Giveaway, and those are trees that people can grow in their gardens." Julie says: "We're working on a

Cont'd

'The five community orchards contain old varieties of fruit trees from Oxfordshire and Berkshire that you don't see in the shops'



tree trail in the village, which will hopefully launch this year. People can walk around, see the trees and be taught about tree folklore and tree medicine, and what the trees used to

be used for, like Viking longboats, and witches' brooms, and, you know, all of those sort of things. We've got Amanda Launchbury, a local artist, who very kindly agreed to illustrate the trail for us."

Eco SoCo maintains a community vegetable garden at Springwater Church and the food grown at the site goes into the food bank — again for the benefit of the village.

And for wildlife, Julie says: "Every year we hold free bird box building for children and for village gardens. The bird box is like a flat pack and the boxes are made by the people at the Shedquarters, so it is a great little joined up village project that has a real community feel to it."

Shedquarters is a social group for people who have an interest in such areas as woodworking, metal work, electronics, doing puzzles, playing dominoes or as they say "just chatting and drinking tea". This year the event is scheduled for June 28. "The youngsters absolutely love it, the children take the bird boxes home and put them in the garden, so that's very cool," Julie says.

Eco SoCo also stages talks and workshops on subjects as diverse as owls and gardening for climate change with a talk due on swifts and the importance of dark skies. Julie says: "We've shown a couple of environmental films, such as Wilding." The film is about a lowland rewilding project at Knepp Wildland in West Sussex, where 1,400 hectares of arable and dairy farmland has been transformed into a wildlife haven. High on the Eco SoCo agenda are the Rotherfield

'Eco SoCo maintains a community vegetable garden at Springwater Church and the food grown at the site goes into the food bank'



hedgehog highways



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Football Club grounds and Sonning Common Memorial Park, where Imogen Parker, an ecologist from the conservation charity Wild Oxfordshire, joined members of the football club, Sonning Common Parish Council and grounds teams from the two sites to work out a programme for enhancing biodiversity.

Julie adds: "We are a committee of about a dozen volunteers and pull on the rest of the community for volunteers. We are an unincorporated association, but we are going to go for registered charity status — which involves lots of paperwork. It will mean that we can expand our work even more and we

can apply for grants and that we can have a greater impact."

Julie believes that Eco SoCo is important "because nature doesn't really know whether it's on foot or horseback at the moment".

"People can help wildlife by putting out water, creating hedgehog holes and if they can have

an area where they don't mow — a no-mow strip running alongside a hedge, because that's one of the best things you can do for wildlife."

She adds: "It makes such a difference. If everyone could do things like that, it would be awesome. It's amazing what you can do when you put your mind to it."

<https://www.EcoSoCo.org.uk/>

Eco SoCo is supported by Community Action Groups, Oxfordshire; Oxfordshire County Council; Beville estate agency; the civil engineers Farrans; South Oxfordshire Housing Association; and Peppard Building Supplies.

Q&A with Henley-on-Thames-Based Family Lawyer, Tasha Bevan-Stewart



Where are you located?

You can find me at Blandy & Blandy's Henley-on-Thames office, at 24 Thameside, which is conveniently located in the heart of the town. I am also very happy to meet with clients at our offices in Reading and Wokingham and able to offer appointments in London or remote meetings.

What do you advise on?

I am a trained Family Law mediator and collaborative lawyer, with 20 years of experience in Family Law.

I specialise in assisting couples separating in a non-contentious manner, and I can advise on a wide range of Family Law issues. The main areas

of dispute following a relationship breakdown are usually child arrangements and finances. I also advise clients who are entering into a relationship and may want to protect their interests through a prenuptial contract or a cohabitation agreement.

Modern family lawyers focus on resolving disputes outside the courtroom as much as possible, and I embrace this approach. It is helpful in some cases to discuss issues round table, with lawyers present, in a collaborative manner. We might engage a mediator or arbitrator to resolve a dispute, or I may engage in direct negotiations with my client's spouse or their lawyer. I can also advise both parties to a divorce, in certain circumstances, where their interests are broadly aligned.

What is Resolution?

I and all of our Family lawyers are members of Resolution, a body whose members follow a code of practice that promotes a non-confrontational approach to matters and which considers the needs of the whole family. Naturally, we help and advise clients who are going through often one of the most difficult periods of their life. We aim to provide as much support as possible, which may include signposting them to other professionals, ranging



from accountants and financial advisors or counsellors and therapists.

How does Blandy & Blandy compare?

Blandy & Blandy is home to one of the most established and experienced teams of Family lawyers in the Thames Valley. We are very proud to be ranked as a top tier firm in Chambers UK Guide and The Legal 500, and I am also pleased to be individually recognised in both guides. We are committed to combining first rate legal advice with outstanding client care, strongly evidenced in the excellent feedback that our clients kindly continue to share. My colleague and I instruct the same experts and barristers and appear in the same courts as national and London firms, meaning that we are well placed to provide our clients with a more cost-effective service, without compromising on the quality of advice and the client care they will receive.

Get in touch

To discuss your situation, please email tasha.bevanstewart@blandy.co.uk call 01491 572 323.

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WOMEN'S
HEALTH

By Dr Shilpa McQuillan,
accredited menopause
specialist, GP and
community gynaecologist

When midlife has you planning your day around the nearest toilet

UTIs Are More Common During Perimenopause and Menopause — But What's Really Going On?

If you've started noticing more urinary tract infections (UTIs) during perimenopause or menopause, you're not imagining it — and you're definitely not alone. Many women find it confusing that they get more infections at this stage of life. The truth is, there are clear biological reasons for it. Recurrent UTIs during perimenopause and menopause are increasingly recognised

as part of Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM), a collection of symptoms affecting the bladder, urethra, and genital tract, due to fluctuating and eventual decline in oestrogen and other hormones around perimenopause and menopause.

I'm going to shed some light on how this drop affects several important systems at once:

Reduced Oestrogen Stimulation of the Bladder and Urethra

The urinary tract contains oestrogen receptors that help maintain elasticity, collagen, and glycogen. When oestrogen

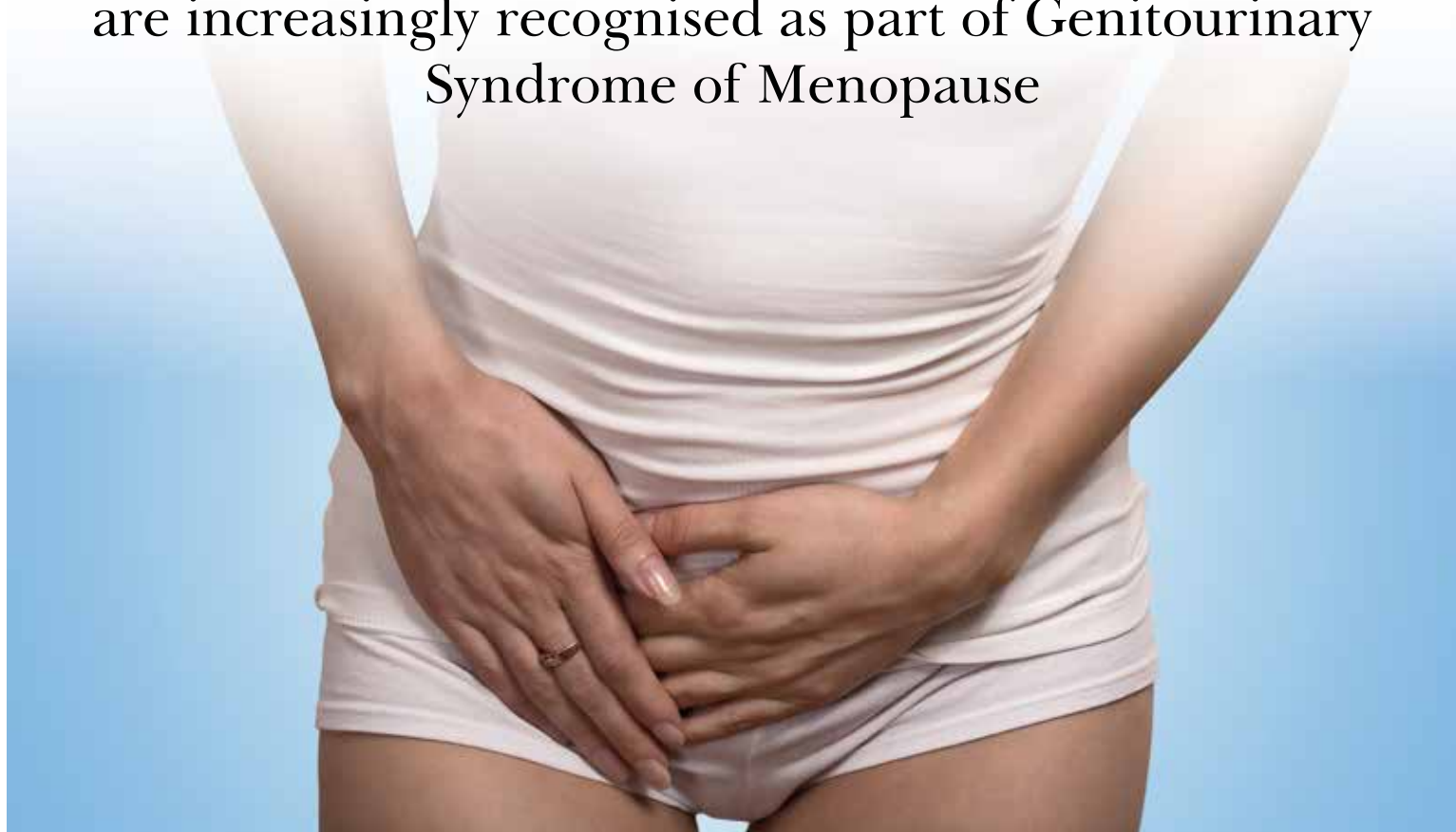
falls, the tissue becomes thinner, less elastic, and less well supported.

This means the bladder may not empty as efficiently, so urine stays in the bladder longer than it should, creating a perfect breeding ground for bacteria. The urethra (tube leading from outside to the bladder) also loses its natural folds that help it contract and relax properly. This makes it easier for bacteria to travel upwards and cause UTIs.

Loss of Oestrogen in the Vulva and Vagina

Oestrogen decline also affects the vulva and vaginal tissues. There is less

Recurrent UTIs during perimenopause and menopause are increasingly recognised as part of Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause



elastin, collagen, and hyaluronic acid (a substance that maintains moisture). This makes the tissues thinner, drier, and more fragile, and easier for bacteria to enter. Because the vulva and vagina are close to the urinary tract, these changes increase the likelihood of bacteria travelling from the vagina to the bladder, further increasing the likelihood of recurrent urine infections.

Reduced good bacteria

Glycogen acts as the “food source” for good bacteria (mainly Lactobacilli) in both the vagina and urinary tract. When oestrogen levels fall, glycogen production drops, leading to less Lactobacilli and a rise in vaginal pH. Normally, low pH helps maintain Lactobacilli, and vice versa, Lactobacilli keep the vaginal pH low.

This is a protective cycle that wards off harmful bacteria. When this balance is disrupted, bad bacteria can thrive and multiply, increasing the risk of both vaginal **infections** and recurrent UTIs.

The Gut–Vagina–Bladder Connection During Perimenopause

You may have heard of the gut microbiota and probiotics (which support your good gut bacteria). It is less commonly known that your vaginal and urinary tract microbiota are just as important. Both are deeply connected and influenced by what you eat, drink, and how your body is changing during perimenopause.

For example, diet choices play an important role. Perimenopause can leave you feeling tired, flat, or lacking motivation, and it's easy to turn to quick or comforting foods and drinks that are higher in sugar or processed foods. But these can shift vaginal and urinary pH, reducing those helpful Lactobacilli and allowing more “bad” bacteria to grow, which can increase the risk of UTIs.

Alcohol and caffeine also play a big role. You might find yourself drinking more caffeine to combat perimenopausal insomnia or reaching for a glass of wine to unwind. Both are diuretics, which make you urinate more often, and they can irritate the bladder lining, causing inflammation and worsening any urinary symptoms.

Weight changes are also common during this time. Declining oestrogen reduces muscle mass, which helps us burn calories. Increased abdominal fat can affect metabolism and insulin

resistance (how we process sugar) leading to tissue inflammation, and changes to both the gut and vaginal pH. This disrupts the balance of healthy bacteria making thrush and urinary infections more likely.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

Spotting the Hormonal Pattern

You might notice that your UTI symptoms come and go with your cycle or flare up around certain hormonal shifts. Tracking when your symptoms appear can help identify a cyclical pattern, giving your doctor valuable clues about what's really happening. Some women find that using continuous contraceptive pills or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) helps stabilise hormone levels and reduce those ups and downs that can trigger urinary or vaginal symptoms.

Supporting Your Microbiome

Staying hydrated, prioritising fibre-rich foods, limiting processed sugars and irritants, and including fermented foods (like kefir, live yoghurt, kimchi, and sauerkraut) can all help restore a healthier microbiota and support urinary and vaginal health.

Probiotics are another key tool, particularly those containing Lactobacillus strains, which can help maintain a healthy microbiota and reduce the risk of infections. Evidence suggests that taking targeted, evidence-based probiotic supplements, containing the right strains and in sufficient quantities, can support both vaginal and urinary tract health, complementing the benefits of a balanced diet. However, be mindful of marketing claims, not all probiotics are created equal. Their effectiveness depends on clinically proven strains, appropriate dosing, and formulations that avoid unnecessary fillers or bulking ingredients.

Use Topical Urogenital Oestrogen

For many women, topical oestrogen therapy in the form of creams, pessaries, or vaginal tablets, can be a game-changer. Applied directly to the vulva, vagina, and urethra, it helps restore local oestrogen levels, rebuild tissue strength, support Lactobacilli growth, maintain a healthy vaginal pH, and relieve



common bladder symptoms such as poor emptying, frequent urges, and recurrent UTIs.

When to Seek Specialist Help

If you've tried lifestyle adjustments, microbiome support, and hormonal strategies but are still experiencing recurrent infections, don't give up. Long-term improvement is often seen with a combination of lifestyle changes, hormonal support, and targeted medical treatments.

It's also important to avoid self-diagnosing or self-medicating. Many other conditions can mimic UTI symptoms, and getting the right diagnosis ensures you receive the safest and most effective care. A specialist can help identify what is driving your symptoms, and tailor a plan specifically for you. Remember, you don't have to navigate this alone — we are here to help.

Dr Shilpa McQuillan leads the Berkshire Menopause Clinic in Henley and is an accredited menopause specialist, community gynaecologist and women's health GP.

For more information, email info@berkshirermenopauseclinic.com or visit www.berkshirermenopauseclinic.com

CROOKED BILLET

March Kitchen

PAUL CLEREHUGH, CHEF/PROPRIETOR, THE CROOKED BILLET, STOKE ROW. 01491 681048



ST PATRICK'S on Tuesday 17th March, there's a Hooley at The Crooked Billet. Ceilidh band: tin whistle, Uilleann pipes, accordion, bodhran & fiddle. Menu stuffed with Irish specials — Dublin Bay Prawns, Coddle, Galway Oysters & of course the ubiquitous Irish Stew.

St George, St David & St Andrew all claiming they created the famous stew recipe. Wales has cawl: lamb or mutton braised with spuds & veg. Welsh lamb enjoys protected geographical indication status — they're rightly proud of their delicious sheep.

Scotland's Hotch Potch & also Stovies: same ingredients as cawl & Irish stew — vegetables, potato (why did the potato go to the doctors? It wasn't peeling well).

England's Lancashire hot pot: identical shopping list. (St George famously fought the dragon & named his pub after it. St David put the dragon on his flag to look tough).

All four versions of this everyday peasant pot stew are basically the same. Lumps of lamb, holy trinity of leek, carrot & onion braised in water, sometimes with a stock cube, left in the pot for 3 or 4 hours to do its thing.

Henley Hot Pot — the potholes, I've never known our roads to be so suspension knackeringly bad. Potholes the size of saucepans. The economy's squeeze on pub profits. I'll apply to re-train in a tyre centre.

I'll make culinary amends to those cavernous potholes with Henley Hot Pot.

Irish Stew, Hot Pot, Cawl & Hotch

Potch diced up in their stewed state, the colour of muddy water, whiff of charity shop clothes rail. We'll punch some enthusiastic flavour into Henley Hot Pot, stealing inspiration from other countries' slow cooked mutton recipes.

France spoons persillade (parsley, garlic, olive oil) onto Navarin of lamb. Sri Lankan's mutton curry accompanied with fragrant coconut sambal. Tunisian lamb tagine & harissa. Tuscan stufato d'agnello with a greedy salsa verde dollop, Indonesia's mutton rendang — lime pickle.

Henley Hot Pot. Melt in the mouth mutton braised with white wine, lemon & herbs under a crispy potato shell. Green dynamite sauce to electrify your taste buds. Butcher Barry at Gabriel Machin's in Henley has the mutton.



Raymond Blanc



James Martin



Paul Clerehugh

CROOKED BILLET

Orkney sea trout in pastry with juniper

Ingredients (serves 4)

- 1 sea trout, weighing about 650g - 1kg, filleted and skinned
- 1 tbsp juniper berries, preferably fresh
- 100g butter, softened
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 225g pack shortcrust pastry (or use home-made pastry)
- 1 egg, beaten, to glaze

For the lemon hollandaise cream:

- 150ml whipping cream
- 150g unsalted butter
- 1 egg yolk
- Zest and juice of 1/2 lemon

Method

- Preheat the oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. Use tweezers or pliers to remove any stray bones from the fish fillets and season them on both sides.
- Bruise the juniper berries in a mortar with a pestle, then mix them with the softened butter, lemon zest and juice. Sandwich the two fish fillets together with the butter, spreading it evenly.
- On a floured surface, roll out the pastry large enough to enclose the fish. Lay the fish on the pastry, then fold over the sides and ends to make a secure and tidy parcel. Brush the edges with a little beaten egg and press them together to seal in the fish.
- Place the parcel on a non-stick baking tray. Brush the pastry with beaten egg and bake for 15 minutes. Then reduce the temperature to 150C/fan 130C/gas 2 and bake for a further 30 minutes.
- Meanwhile make the lemon hollandaise cream. Whip the cream until it stands in soft peaks. Melt the butter in a small pan. Whisk the yolk in a heatproof bowl, drizzle in the melted butter, whisking vigorously to emulsify the butter and egg in a smooth, creamy mixture. Add the lemon zest and juice. Season to taste and fold in the whipped cream.
- Remove the fish parcel from the oven and serve immediately, with the lemon hollandaise cream.

Chiltern Safaris

Henley's First Wine Tours 2026

BY AMANDA STEWART

WINE enthusiasts are being offered the chance to visit the numerous boutique vineyards in and around Henley, South Oxfordshire and the wider Chilterns.

The first of the Henley Wine Tours takes place on May 2 and offer people the chance to explore the stunning countryside, meet the owners of the vineyards, hear their stories and taste their wines.

The trips are being organised by Keith Hodgskiss, the founder of the food and drinks events group Chiltern Safaris, believes that the Chiltern wine industry "is a dark horse within the English and global wine world". He adds: "Establishing Henley Wine Tours is a big step for Chiltern Safaris and a natural progression for the blossoming Chiltern wine industry.

"I'm extremely fortunate to be in the position to be able to

showcase these vineyards to the public at a point where, each vineyard has matured to develop their distinct, signature tastes and are just now beginning to be noticed by industry experts and the wider community."

The Henley Wine Tours, along with the Northern Chiltern Wine Tours, have linked up with five vineyards and the itineraries include transport, a two-course lunch and, of course, tasting the wines.

The region's vineyards have been highlighted in a book called *Oxfordshire Uncorked*, which was published by the wine expert Marcus Rees.

The guide book invites wine lovers to embark on a journey around the winemakers of Oxfordshire and North Cotswolds, profiles each one and reveals how the natural landscape

Cont'd

'The region's vineyards have been highlighted in a book called *Oxfordshire Uncorked*, which was published by the wine expert Marcus Rees.





provides ideal conditions for top-class wine production. With tasting notes, visitor information and insights from the grape-growers themselves, it offers an in-depth look into each part of the winemaking process.

It also shines a light on the unsung heroes including Stanlake Park in Twyford, the oldest in the area, and relative newcomers such as JoJo's Vineyard in Russells Water. Marcus says: "I'd describe the book as a practical guidebook with information on location, facilities, tours, tastings and events, as well as a profile of each vineyard and helpful tasting notes and pictures of the range produced."

"We can be super-proud of the quality of wine coming out of Oxfordshire. There's no doubt that climate change has helped this and with warmer summers we can now ripen grapes enough to produce excellent wines — especially world-class sparkling wines that need relatively high levels of acidity."

"There was a gap in the market for a guidebook that brought together all these vineyards that very few people know about. Their wines are amazing and English wine is in phenomenal growth. It's incredibly exciting."

Marcus, 53, who lives in Wallingford, fell in love with Oxfordshire after studying English language at Oxford University. He said: "Back then, Mic Young, the superb runner of Lincoln College's bar, used to organise trips to the Oxfordshire countryside to visit real ale pubs and it was on these trips that I was struck by the beauty of places such as Finstock, Great Milton and Long Wittenham."

"After I left university I lived in Dorking, Surrey, for seven years, right opposite Denbies Vineyard, which is one of England's largest. I always remember having a burning desire to stay at their onsite B&B despite living only 200 yards away."

"For around 20 years, I used to make annual visits to France with my brother and a friend. We'd cycle around the different wine regions, then fill up the car with as much wine as we could from the producers we had met along the way. One year,

all of us pressed for time, we decided to have a short weekend near Hastings, instead cycling around a handful of small producers in Kent and Sussex. We were amazed by the quality of the wines we tasted and it was on that trip that I first realised just how good English wine could be, as well as how many vineyards were springing up around the country."

"After a few years in Buckinghamshire, I moved back to Oxfordshire in 2010 and have since lived in Witney, Minster Lovell, Charlbury and Wallingford. Wherever I live, I've

loved exploring the beautiful Cotswold and Chiltern Hills on my bicycle and it has always motivated me to know that I can find a good pint of ale en route at a pub or a brewery. But, increasingly, a chilled glass of wine at a local winery or vineyard has become an option too, and what an enjoyable one it is."

Oxfordshire has 15 commercial vineyards and wineries and the book includes essentials such as their first

vintage, its acreage and visitor and tour information, with each site description offering further insight into the story of the land, the wine and the people behind its production.

Among those to feature from the Henley area include Chiltern Valley Winery and Brewery in Hambleden, Fairmile Vineyard in Henley, Oaken Grove Vineyard in Fawley, Kidmore Vineyard in Kidmore End and Wyfold Vineyard. Marcus would spend two to three hours at each location and the owners would give him a history and a tour and his photographer, Paul Gregory, would take pictures.

He said: "Obviously, I visited all the vineyards and wineries featured in the book. Nearly all of them are run by passionate,



'We can be super-proud of the quality of wine coming out of Oxfordshire. There's no doubt that climate change has helped this... to produce excellent wines'

hardworking couples who often hold down another job on the side. All the vineyards in Oxfordshire are relatively small. Nyetimber in Sussex and Chapel Down in Kent now produce around a million bottles per year. That's tiny compared to some of the Champagne houses. But the largest vineyards in Oxfordshire only produce around 40,000 bottles. We are lucky to have them."

Marcus worked in a range of different jobs before settling in wine. After leaving university he became a tour guide and worked in a hotel. He later switched to retail and joined the Sainsbury's graduate scheme and became a buyer. Unable to get into buying beer and wine for the company he moved to Woolworths and then to Comet, buying fridges, washing machines and computers, travelling between the UK and Paris. After a two-year stint working as a brewer from 2012 he joined Oxfam where he stayed for eight years, sourcing Fairtrade goods such as coffee, chocolate and handicrafts.

Marcus left in 2023 because he had had enough of the corporate environment. Knowing about retail and beer and wine his first plan was to open a shop in Oxford, as yet unfulfilled, but that's when he came up with the idea for his book. He pitched his idea to the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and it provided a grant to cover the costs and he found a publisher.

Marcus said he enjoyed researching the book and hoped there might be more in the pipeline featuring other areas or covering the breweries of Oxfordshire. He said: "I've been to so many vineyards over the years — mostly in France. But I learned lots I didn't know about vineyard management, such



as the different training systems, the importance of pruning the canopy and letting in light, the two dreaded risks of frost and mildew, how farming methods have changed to become more environmentally sensitive and testing grapes for sugar and acidity levels.

"It was an eye-opener to find out how good the still wines are, even the red wines. Don't expect a heavy Rhone wine from Oxfordshire but if you prefer lighter-bodied wines such as Burgundy or Beaujolais, there are fantastic red wines including from Freedom of the Press near Minster Lovell and Brightwell, near Wallingford.

He added: "But the biggest eye-opener of all was how good the wines are — not a single bad wine at all, which would have been unimaginable 30 years ago."

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Mr Oliver Knight



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Academic excellence is central to all we do. We ensure pupils are immersed in meaningful knowledge and develop the intellectual confidence to engage with and contribute to the world around them. But education at Pangbourne extends far beyond the classroom.

Our ethos of exploration encourages pupils to step outside their comfort zones and embrace challenge. Through our adventure programme, they learn resilience, teamwork and problem-solving - developing the confidence to act decisively, even in unfamiliar situations. These experiences are not just memorable; they are transformative.

Equally important is our strong sense of community and the leadership opportunities woven throughout school life. Pupils learn to collaborate, to take responsibility and to support one another, growing into grounded, self-assured individuals.

At Pangbourne, we aim to develop young people who are intellectually curious,

outward-looking and ready to make a positive difference. They leave us not only well-educated, but well-prepared, equipped to navigate uncertainty and to live with purpose and authenticity.

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Mr Oliver Knight

The Head, Pangbourne College

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Top of the form

Catharine Darnton's 19 years as headteacher at Gillotts has proved a masterclass in running a school

BY JOHN JACKLIN



THE headteacher of a feted academy retires this Easter after two decades in the hot-seat and taking it to the top of the table for state schools in Oxfordshire.

Catharine Darnton, 55, has spent 19 years with Gillotts in Henley and has brought the school through the Covid lockdowns, its transition last year to joining the academy group River Learning Trust and achieving an Ofsted rating of “outstanding” in 2023. That is not to mention being the best state school in Oxfordshire for GCSEs during the last academic year.

Catharine, who announced her decision to leave in November, says: “That sentence about this being a school where pupils and staff thrive, that is what matters to me. It was really nice that somebody outside of the school recognised that, because what schools are made up from is the thousands and thousands and thousands of interactions that take place every, every single day.”

She adds: “We make our decisions to be an outstanding provider for what our children and our staff need, but nevertheless it was really, really nice to get that endorsement. From 2019, obviously there are some missing years for Covid, but we produced progress scores in the top 10 per cent of all schools in the country consistently. From 2013 we were in the top 20 per cent and then we got ourselves into the top 10 per cent and we have not gone back on that. So that was really the basis of the judgment.”

She adds: “How was I feeling when I found out we were outstanding? I phoned my first chair of governors who appointed me at that moment to tell them that we finally got there. That was a very, very special moment, but I don’t think headships really come with massive moments of jubilation.”

Those 19 years as have not diminished Catharine’s passion for education, and although she is leaving on a high, career wise she is not sure of her next step but on a personal front she will be devoting more time to life with her husband Richey Rea.

“I met my husband only one month before I became the head teacher,” Catharine, who graduated from Oxford with a degree in mathematics, says. “So he’s never known me as anything but a head. So I’m hoping that he is still going to like

me.” It was Richey, who had been a food technology teacher at Gillotts, that nudged Catharine towards Gillotts when the headship became vacant by praising the school.

“He was working in Lowestoft in Suffolk at the time that we met. And so when we moved in together, we actually have ended up keeping both our homes and we spend holidays in Lowestoft, but we have decided the point has come to sell both the two homes. And finally, having been married for 12 years now, to actually buy one house together, which feels like a big, big step forward.

“So we are going to buy a house just in North Suffolk, in the Waveney Valley. So that is the next plan, the house and then spend some time thinking about what I might do next.”

Catharine smiles as she notes tells how she has “booked a holiday in term time for October. I mean, that is radical. So my husband is Canadian and he wants to go to a school reunion and I would like to go to Canada. And I suddenly thought, ‘Oh, I can, I can, I can go’. We are going to go in the first two weeks of October. Yeah, that will be fun.

“We don’t have children, so that’s the other thing. We are kind of at a point in our lives where we could be a little bit more footloose and fancy free and a little bit less tied down.

“We didn’t meet until I was 37 and he was nearly 40. So it was a very different stage of life from now, so I was not expecting that, obviously, a month before I became head. That was not part of the plan, but he has been a fantastic support to me in doing this job.”

Despite 19 years of “solving all the various problems and challenges that head teaching brings you” Catharine adds: “I have got to the point at which I am still passionately interested in education and young people. But I really have got to the point where I would like to work fewer hours because I probably put in a 65 hour week.

“And also, it is relentless and unpredictable, so you know, you never know when something is going to happen to a child or a member of staff. And we are not the sort of school that says we are open from 8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, and out of those hours, please don’t bother us. You know, I have no expectation that my staff are looking at emails out of hours, but I tend to and if somebody needs something, then I

At Gillotts part of the long leaving schedule for Catharine has been ensuring a smooth handover for the new head Mark Bedford

will do it.” She adds: “I don’t think that I will get to the age of 65 and look back and think, goodness me, I wish I had gone on working 65 hours a week for a bit longer. I don’t know exactly what I want to do. I need some time to find it.

“It has been an enormous proportion of my working life spent in this school and an enormous proportion of my whole life. So it is more like closing a chapter of my life, not just leaving a job.”

Catharine, who lives in High Wycombe with Richey joined Gillotts as headteacher in September 2007. She had been head for four years at Wycombe High School after leaving the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, where she had spent three years and had led the development of Key Stage 3 maths. After graduating from Oxford she spent nine years teaching maths at Graveney School in Tooting, south west London. Her decision to join Gillotts was driven by its reputation as a “really good community comprehensive school”.

At Gillotts part of the long leaving schedule for Catharine has been ensuring a smooth handover for the new head Mark Bedford, an adviser to the Department for Education and history teacher.

Catharine says: “We’ve been meeting for the past five or six weeks, doing a gradual handover. We’ve done break duties and lunch duties together. I’m trying to really explain where the school is at because, with Ofsted back in the summer of 2027, it is important for the school that he picks it up from the point that I let go. “It was very deliberate to leave at Easter so that he gets time. If there are new things he wants to do in

September, he needs some planning time. But that means I’m going before Year 11 is finished, so I am definitely going to come to their leavers’ assembly.”

Catharine says that her leadership team will help with the continuity and handover. “My deputy head teacher [Edward Newbold], has been at the school one year longer than me. So he’s done 20 years. So we have worked together forever. Matt Druce, is one of my assistant heads, he’s done 11 years and Simon West, an assistant head, has been here all the time that I have been here.

He started as a learner support assistant has been head of science. They are absolutely fantastic.”

Catharine adds: “I’m very deeply embedded here, particularly with staff, some of whom, as I said, have worked here longer than I have, but for many of whom, this is much more than just a place of work.

“And sometimes there is great, great joy and triumph. And sometimes there is profound sadness. In my time here, we have had some very, very difficult times where we have had, not many, but we have had a few child deaths and we have had a member of staff who died.”

She says: “I have been doing assemblies to each year group and what I have been talking to them about is the fact that I, I hope that they have felt that I have cared about them each as individuals and that is the thing that I that they will remember.”

What of her original choice to join Gillotts and for it to become part of her life all those years ago? Catharine says: “It was the best decision I ever made.”



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Learning is at the heart of everything we do. Our dedicated staff inspire curiosity and foster a lifelong love of learning through engaging teaching and meaningful opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom. We work closely in partnership with parents, equipping families with the knowledge and confidence to support learning at home. Our latest initiative, "100 things to do before you leave Trinity" has already been warmly welcomed by pupils and families.

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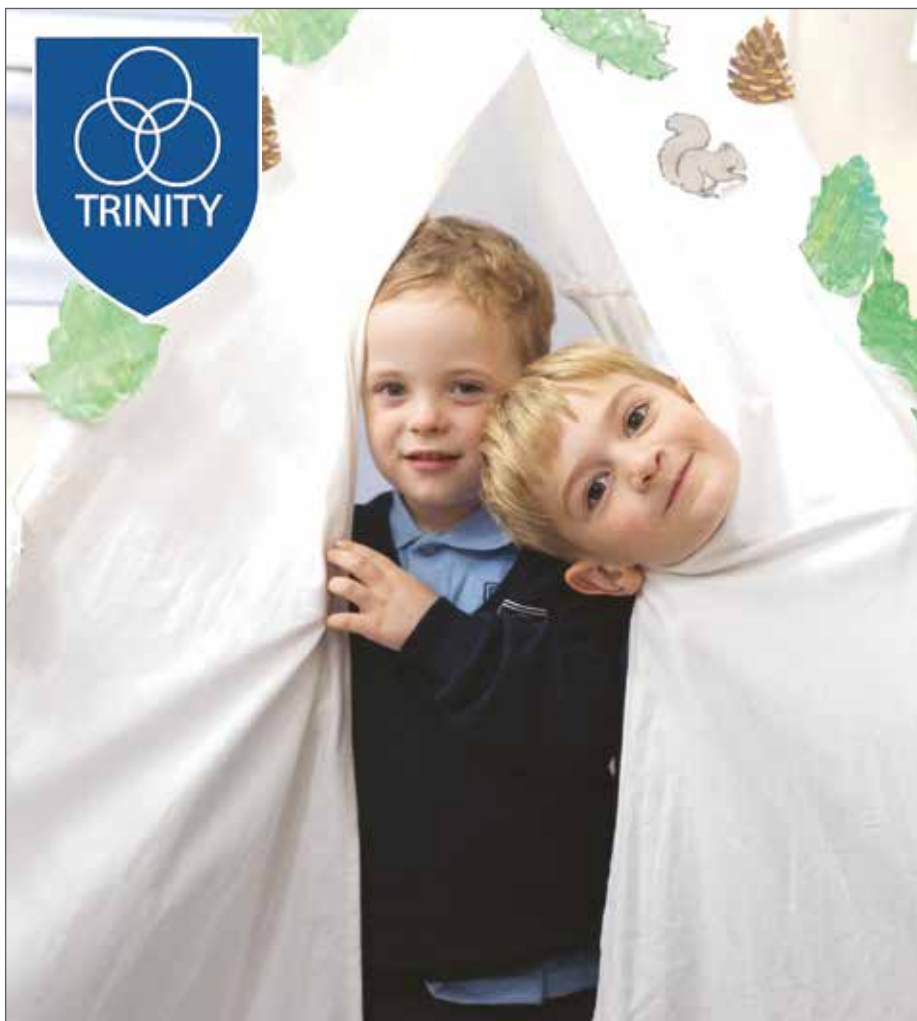
including trips, forest school, swimming lessons for pupils in Years 4–6 and a growing programme of after-school clubs.

We also encourage children to think about others through community links, such as visits to a local care home and involvement in the Mayor of Henley Award.

Our recent parent survey highlights the strength of our school community. Parents consistently praise our caring and dedicated staff, strong pastoral and SEN support, engaging teaching and clear communication. With trusted leadership and an ambitious five-year strategic plan, Trinity continues to grow as a warm, inclusive and nurturing place where every child can thrive.



www.trinityprimaryschool.org



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Expert Tips for a Fresh, Functional Space

THE kitchen is often called the heart of the home — a place for cooking, gathering, and making memories. Whether you're planning a full renovation or simple upgrades, these tips from our kitchen consultant Gary Evans of G D Evans Interiors is here to help you create a kitchen that's both beautiful and practical.

1. Maximise Storage and Organisation

- Install pull-out storage solutions and drawer organisers to make the most of your cabinet space and for ease of access.
- Consider open shelving for easy access to everyday items, store cookery books, display your best crockery and a modern look.
- Use vertical space by using tall wall units and adding top cupboards if space permits.

2. Upgrade Lighting

- Layer lighting with overhead fixtures, under-cabinet lights, and task lighting to brighten work areas.
- Choose energy-efficient LED bulbs for long-lasting, cost-effective illumination.

3. Refresh Surfaces

- Replace old worktops with durable materials like quartz or granite.
- Update backsplashes with tile, glass, or worktop matching quartz or granite.
- Repaint or refinish cabinets for a fresh look without the cost of replacement.

4. Modernise Appliances

- Invest in energy-efficient appliances to save on utility bills and reduce your environmental footprint.
- Look for smart features, such as programmable ovens or refrigerators with touch screens.

5. Enhance Functionality

- Create a kitchen island or breakfast bar for extra workspace and seating.



- Add a pull-out waste bin and recycling center to keep waste organised and out of sight.
- Consider a boiling water tap, some can also provide chilled and sparkling water for convenience.

6. Personalise Your Space

- Choose colours, materials, and décor that reflect your style and make the kitchen inviting.
- Incorporate plants or herb gardens for a touch of greenery and fresh flavours.

7. Plan for Safety

- Ensure proper ventilation to reduce smoke and odours.
- Install slip-resistant flooring and check that electrical outlets are up to current regulations.

Final Advice Before starting any project, set a realistic budget and timeline. Consult professionals for major renovations, but don't underestimate the impact of small changes. With thoughtful planning and creative touches, your kitchen can become a more enjoyable and efficient space for years to come.



If you require any further assistance, contact Gary Evans of G D Evans Interiors who are your local experts in kitchen, bedroom and bathroom design supply and installation on
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RJ White leads you through a clear, collaborative design process that turns inspiration into a practical and imaginative plan. Every sketch, layout, and planting decision is shaped with your input, ensuring the final design feels effortless, natural, and uniquely personal.

A standout part of the service is the company's ability to source exceptional plants from respected UK and EU growers. Each plant is carefully selected for its quality, beauty, and suitability to your garden's soil, light, and microclimate — giving you a space that not only looks incredible on completion but thrives long into the future.

From full redesigns to refined planting schemes and ongoing maintenance, RJ White's dedicated team delivers craftsmanship, reliability, and a meticulous attention to detail. Clients often describe

how supported they feel throughout the process, from the first idea to the moment they step into their transformed garden for the first time.

With a commitment to thoughtful design, premium planting, and a customer-first approach, RJ White Garden Services turns your outdoor aspirations into a living, growing reality.



Pub Garden of Dreams

ON a sunny afternoon, when you can't face any more housework or general admin, wouldn't it be nice to have a beautiful where you know you're going to have delicious food and an excellent cocktail (or two)? Well, we may be just discovered South Oxfordshire's pub garden of your dreams.

The phrase 'pub garden' might conjure images of crowded picnic benches and rowdy summer evenings, but rarely does it evoke a sense of horticultural excellence. Yet, tucked away at The Plough Shiplake is a hidden sanctuary that will gracefully dismantle any preconceived notions you may hold.

Affectionately named Hestia Garden, in honour of the goddess of the hearth and home, this space is a masterclass in elevated al fresco living. Overlooking sweeping English farmland, Hestia Garden offers a much-needed escape from the relentless pace of life in 2026.

Hestia was central in the extensive renovation project undertaken by owner Jill Sikkens in 2022. Driven by a passion

to save a much-loved community pub from developers, Jill possessed the vision to completely reimagine the landscape. By cleverly relocating the car park further along Plough Lane, the garden was moved to a newly elevated vantage point, perfectly positioned to capture breathtaking views across the rolling surrounding countryside.

Designed by Tabitha Rigden, Rigden Studio, the space utilises organic shapes, weaving native trees, architectural grasses and delicate blooms to create natural privacy between tables. The furnishings reflect the natural environment, featuring warm, earthy shades of rich green and burnt orange. Every detail has been considered, from the gentle, ambient lighting as the sun sets to the wonderfully immersive, yet unobtrusive, music playing throughout the space.

Naturally, the culinary experience matches this relaxed, comfortable environment. The seasonal, freshly prepared menu is served with such friendliness, it's delightfully easy to lose an entire afternoon. It certainly helps

that their expertly curated wine list and masterful cocktail offerings are arguably the best in the area.

Hestia Garden is undoubtedly visually stunning, but it is the spirit of genuine hospitality that truly sets it apart. It is a rare triumph to create a space that feels so perfectly designed and deeply considered, whilst remaining so warmly welcoming, down-to-earth, and quintessentially English.

I am still trying to uncover the secret of how they have achieved such a flawless balance. I suppose I shall simply have to keep visiting, glass of crisp rosé in hand, until I figure it out.

‘Naturally, the culinary experience matches this relaxed, comfortable environment’





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Henley Arts Trail

A bank holiday treasure trail of creativity

BY NATALIE ALDRED

HENLEY Arts Trail is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, with new venues and a total of 300 artists taking part.

Taking place over the bank holiday weekend of Saturday, May 2 to Monday, May 4, visitors are encouraged to visit the trail venues on foot or by train or boat.

There will be all sorts of creations, big and small, affordable to extravagant, along the self-guided trail in Henley and the surrounding villages.

From Greenlands to Oaken Grove Vineyard, The Henley Distillery, Greys Court and Leander Club, venues include 12 working artists' studios.

In a celebration of Henley's riverside setting, Hobbs of Henley will be running 12-seater cruisers from central Henley to the River House at Greenlands. Four of the venues have longer opening times.

Established in 2006, Henley Arts Trail is a not-for-profit organisation, helping artists to showcase and sell their work directly to the public. More than 25,000 visitors came along last year.



The 36 venues for the 2026 trail are as follows: 1 The Old Fire Station Gallery, Market Place, Henley; 2 Bijan's, Market Place, Henley; 3 Zizzi, Hart Street, Henley; 4 Kirsten Jones and Friends, the Relais Henley, Hart Street, Henley; 5 Leander Club, near Henley Bridge, Henley; 6 Artists at Eyot, the Eyot Centre, Wargrave Road, Henley; 7 The Castle House Creatives, 64 St Andrew's Road, Henley; 8 Graffix House, Newtown Road, Henley; 9 Jo Harris at Laurel Studio, 17 Newtown Gardens, Henley; 10 Sacred Heart Church Hall, Walton Avenue, Henley; 11 Harpsden Home Studio, 13 Harpsden Road, Henley; 12 Little Barn Studio, 1 Western Avenue, Henley; 13 Wisteria Gallery, Wisteria Place, 1 Deanfield Road, Henley; 14 Tizzy Cottingham Studio, 2 Highland Lane, Henley; 15 Kings Road Studio, 50 Kings Road, Henley; 16 The



This year's trail features a fascinating, eclectic mix of 36 exhibition spaces and a unique riverside setting

River House, Greenlands, Henley; 17 Oaken Grove Vineyard, Benhams Lane, Fawley; 18 Busby K Studio and Gallery, Timbers Farm, Timbers Lane, Nuffield; 19 The Maker Space, Gangsdown Hill, Nuffield; 20 Greys Court, Rotherfield Greys; 21 Blackmore Farm, Blackmore Lane, Sonning Common; 22 eARTh, the Bottle and Glass Inn, Binfield Heath; 23 Wendy Penrose and the Garden Gallery, Rose Cottage, Orchard Close, Shiplake Cross; 24 Shiplake College Great Hall,

Shiplake; 25 Shiplake Meadows, Meadow Chase, Reading Road, Lower Shiplake; 26 Shiplake Artists, Roughwood House, Manorwood Gate, Lower Shiplake; 27 The Henley Distillery, Hampstead Farm, near Henley; 28 Charvil village hall, 100 The Hawthorns, Charvil; 29 Esté MacLeod's Studio, The Ramblers, Beggars Hill Road, Charvil; 30 Whitley Arts at Dolphin School, Waltham Road, Hurst; 31 Stanlake Park Wine Estate, Waltham Road, Hurst; 32

Sally Castle and Guest Artists, Walnut Cottage, Ruscombe Lane, Ruscombe; 33 The Porcelain Pig, 19 Church Street, Twyford; 34 The Big Plant Nursery, Wargrave Road, Twyford; 35 The Coach House Studios, Yeldall Manor, Bear Lane, Hare Hatch; and 36 West Forest Potters, Knowl Hill village hall, The Terrace, Knowl Hill.

For more information, visit
www.henleyartstrail.com



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Daniel Banks

OWNER OF FLYTE BAR, HENLEY

DANIEL BANKS is the founder of FLYTE Bar, a speakeasy-style bar in the heart of Henley-on-Thames built around the idea of “flights” of wine, spirits and food.

A former Microsoft leader who moved to the area over 15 years ago, Daniel now channels his passion for craftsmanship and storytelling into several ventures, including BÖKEN Watches and Cask & Crown Whisky.

Whether through watches, whisky or hospitality, his aim is to create experiences that spark curiosity and bring people together.

With FLYTE, he has created a lively gathering place celebrating great drinks, local producers and the spirit of Henley.

1 What brought you to the Henley area and why do you stay?

About 15 years ago Microsoft brought me here from the Midlands. I planned to stay for a couple of years and then move on, but Henley has a habit of pulling people in. Between the river, the events, the pubs and the wonderful sense of community, not to mention my fiancé, it's very hard to leave once you've settled here.

2 What would you change about Henley?

If I could wave a magic wand, I'd encourage everyone in Henley to get out every single day. We've got wonderful pubs, restaurants and independent businesses, so it would be great to see it buzzing every day... especially FLYTE Bar!

3 How do you spend your leisure time locally?

Walking along the river, exploring the local vineyards and spending time with friends in town. Henley is the sort of place where you can plan a quick drink and somehow it turns into an entire evening.

4 What are your top three local haunts?

I'm a big fan of our local vineyards. Anywhere from Fairmile Vineyard through to the spectacular JoJo's Vineyard is always a wonderful way to spend an afternoon. And when I'm



in need of a great coffee, Anonymous Coffee just outside Henley is hard to beat.

5 Do you have a favourite song?

Pop on anything by George Michael or Fleetwood Mac and you'll find a little leg tap going on. Hence the music choices at FLYTE Bar!

6 Which film or play has inspired or moved you the most?

The Pursuit of Happyness has always stayed with me. It's a good reminder that persistence and belief in what you're building really matter.

7 If you could live anywhere else in the world, where would it be?

Somewhere with mountains, water and a great local food scene. That said, Henley already ticks a lot of those boxes in its own way.

8 Is there anyone, or anything in the area that you particularly admire, would recommend or think deserves a mention?

Henley's independent businesses and local producers deserve a huge amount

of credit. From vineyards and food producers to charities doing great work in the community, there's a lot happening locally that people should be proud of.

9 What did you want to be when you were a child?

I think at one point it was something fairly sensible like working in an office as a contract lawyer.. oh how the times have changed!

10 Which things do you wish you had known when you were younger?

To trust myself a little more and stick the course. Things rarely happen overnight, but if you trust the process and keep going, you usually end up exactly where you're meant to be.

11 Which three people would you choose to have dinner with, if you could?

Ricky Gervais, Gordon Ramsay, and Adele. Great food, superb music and even better comedy.

12 Where do you like to travel to on holiday?

Anywhere we can take the dogs along. A good countryside walk, a cosy pub and somewhere the dogs are welcome tends to make the perfect break.

13 What are your ambitions?

To continue building FLYTE and create a place where people can build real careers in hospitality. Too often the industry is seen as just a student job, but I'd love to help show that it can be a rewarding long-term career too.

14 Do you have any regrets?

Absolutely not. Every experience, good or bad, teaches you something. I'd rather look at things as lessons that helped shape where I am today.

Welcome to Reading Blue Coat



READING BLUE COAT is a co-educational independent day school for students aged 11–18, within a picturesque 46-acre campus beside the River Thames. We offer a challenging academic education, delivered by expert teachers in exceptional facilities, enabling students to achieve excellent results and progress to top universities and destinations.

Education at Reading Blue Coat extends beyond the classroom. Our broad and engaging co-curricular programme encourages students to explore new interests, gain valuable life skills and develop their individual strengths. Whether through music, sport, drama, or our distinctive Adventure

Education programme, students are challenged and supported to grow into confident, well-rounded young people, fully prepared for life beyond school.

We warmly invite you to our whole school Open Morning on Saturday 16 May, 9.30am - 12.30am. Come along and explore the academic and co-curricular opportunities Reading Blue Coat has to offer.

Our Sixth Form Open Evening is on Tuesday 13 October for parents and students keen to explore the A Level options available at Blue Coat. The evening includes student-led tours, a welcome talk from



the Headmaster — Mr Pete Thomas, an introduction to Sixth Form life from the Director of Sixth Form and an opportunity to discuss academic subjects with Heads of Department.



READING BLUE COAT

OPEN MORNING

Saturday 16 May

Founded in 1646, Reading Blue Coat is situated in a picturesque 46-acre campus along the River Thames. The school offers a welcoming community where academic excellence and a rich array of co-curricular activities allow our students to flourish.

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