

# Twickenham & Richmond Tribune





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Richmond upon Thames College

RFU

Brentford Football Club

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# TickerTape - News in Brief

## South Western Railway

The lines between **Clapham Junction** and **Barnes** will be **closed all day** due to maintenance work.

**Queenstown Road** station will be **closed all day**. Please use other nearby stations.

Due to the diverted services, some services via **Wimbledon** will be **revised**.

- **London Waterloo to Reading** services will be **revised** to depart **London Waterloo** earlier and will be diverted between **Clapham Junction** and **Twickenham**. These services will call additionally at **Wimbledon, Kingston** and **Strawberry Hill**.
- **London Waterloo to Windsor** services will be **revised**.  
 An **hourly** service will be diverted between **Clapham Junction** and **Twickenham** via **Kingston** calling at all stations.  
 An **hourly** service will start from **Barnes** calling at all stations.
- **London Waterloo to London Waterloo via Richmond and Wimbledon** services will run between **Barnes** and **Kingston** via **Richmond** only.
- **London Waterloo to Woking via Staines** services will be revised and will start from **Barnes**.
- The afternoon and evening **London Waterloo to Kingston via Hounslow** services will **not** run.
- **Buses** will run between **Clapham Junction** and **Barnes**.
- In the **morning** and **early afternoon**, a **revised** service will run between **Barnes** and **Twickenham**.
- In the **afternoon** and **evening**, a **revised** service will run between **Barnes** and **Barnes** via **Twickenham** and **Hounslow**.
- **London Waterloo to Hampton Court** services will be **revised** to run **hourly**.

Seasons Greetings from



*The Tree Agency*

**The Tree Agency**

darryl parkin

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*Merry*  
**CHRISTMAS**

## Festive Greetings & Warm Wishes

Thank you for your support and for being part of our community.

As we look ahead to 2026, we're thankful for the opportunity to stay in touch and hope the coming year brings wonderful moments your way.

May this festive season bring joy, love and happiness to you and your loved ones.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

**With heartfelt appreciation**  
Bruce, Courtney and Iryna





# A Fait Accompli on the Thames?

## Richmond's Towpath to Become a Restricted Byway

By James Knight

This week's Transport and Air Quality Committee Meeting approval of its new Towpath Movement Strategy was framed as the start of a broad conversation with residents. Yet the committee meeting told a different story, one in which the most consequential decision – changing the Thames Path's legal status – was treated as an administrative tidying exercise rather than a major policy choice. Officers stated plainly that redesignating the route as a **Restricted Byway** was “*wholly necessary prior to consultation*”, reversing the usual democratic order in which consultation shapes a decision rather than follows it. In public law, sequencing matters because consultation must occur at a formative stage, which means a council should not narrow or predetermine the range of options before residents have been asked for their views.



This point was repeated several times. The Chair told the Committee that formalising cycling rights had to come first because consulting while the towpath was still a footpath “will invalidate a whole range of options” for future upgrades. In other words, residents will not be asked whether the Thames Path should become a legal cycling corridor at all – only how wide and how engineered that corridor should be. The core legal change has already been approved. That sense of pre-determination is not inferred: in Chapter 6, Table 4 of the consultants' report, the option of redesignating the towpath as a Restricted Byway is explicitly described as a “***fait accompli***”, language that implies the outcome was already assumed rather than genuinely open to consultation.

Council officers and the Committee Chair argue that redesignating the towpath is a pragmatic response to long-established patterns of use rather than a policy shift. Cycling already takes place along much of the route, they say, and formalising that reality would give the Council clearer responsibility for managing safety, securing funding and addressing maintenance problems that have proved difficult to resolve while the towpath remains a footpath in law.

The justification for redesignation becomes thinner still when set against the recent past. Cycling already occurs along much of the towpath under permissive arrangements, and this has never prevented investment. In 2016–17 TfL paid for major upgrades, including the concrete path beside Ham Lands, without any need for the route to become a Restricted Byway. The claim that funding now depends on formalising rights of way therefore does not withstand scrutiny. It suggests the legal change is driven not by necessity, but by a policy desire to recast the Thames Path as a major movement corridor rather than a riverside footpath.

The proposed change is far from trivial. Restricted Byway status permanently establishes rights for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and even horse-drawn vehicles. Once created, such rights cannot be withdrawn if cycling speeds rise or if conflict increases on the narrow, semi-rural stretches through Ham Lands and Petersham Meadows. Yet members were repeatedly reassured that “*nothing will change*” and that upgrading rights was simply recognising what happens today.

Although these design intentions are not spelled out in a single place, the Strategy and its technical appendices indicate an ambition for a **minimum three-metre width**, rising to **five metres wherever**

**space permits**, accompanied by a half-metre closely cut verge on either side. Achieving such widths along a constrained riverside corridor would require substantial vegetation clearance, altering the enclosure, softness and ecological value of many sections of the path. In places such as Ham Lands and Petersham Meadows, where the towpath's character relies on unmanaged edges and a sense of rural intimacy, the move toward wider, engineered corridors and closely mown grass would mark a significant departure from the landscape that residents recognise today.

### Unanswered Questions in the Council Chamber

What made the meeting more uncomfortable was that councillors pressed officers on issues that would ordinarily be resolved *before* a strategy is drafted, let alone endorsed. Fundamental questions about flooding, lighting, ownership, cost and long-term environmental impact were all acknowledged as unresolved. The Environment Agency has not confirmed the future height of river defences. Roughly half of the towpath appears to have unclear or unregistered ownership. A full condition survey has yet to be commissioned. The lighting debate remains suspended between personal safety concerns and biodiversity impacts. And the Council has not modelled the ecological capacity of Ham Lands, despite officers speaking enthusiastically about attracting "as many users on the towpath as possible".

### A Strategy Shaped by Traffic Priorities, not Heritage

The tone of the Strategy makes plain its origins in the transport function. Officers spoke of creating "consistent surfacing treatments" and "predictable construction", language more suited to a cycle superhighway than to a riverside path, with the part in Ham protected by an Act of Parliament requiring the land to remain open and natural in character. The Thames Path's National Trail status, which carries an explicit countryside conservation purpose, barely featured in the discussion. Comprehensive heritage or environmental analysis is promised only "at implementation stage".

This represents a curious inversion of process. Legal, environmental and heritage constraints would normally inform a draft strategy from the outset, not be retrofitted after key decisions have been effectively locked in. When councillors asked how the Richmond Petersham and Ham Open Spaces Act would limit potential works, officers were reassuring but vague, insisting there was no intention to "change the towpath experience". Yet elsewhere the Strategy proposes introducing bound surfacing along long stretches of what is currently riverside footpath, a change that warrants far more scrutiny in a protected landscape.

A further complication was barely acknowledged. The northern stretch of the towpath lies within the buffer zone of the Kew Gardens World Heritage Site, a designation that places strict obligations on the protection of setting, tranquillity and landscape character. The Thames Landscape Strategy goes further still, recommending that the wider Arcadian Thames, from Kew to Hampton Court, should in time be considered for World Heritage status in its own right. In such a context, proposals for hard surfacing, engineered edges and increased movement require a level of heritage assessment that the meeting did not exhibit. Decisions taken in haste on a transport footing risk undermining a river corridor that national and international bodies already regard as exceptional.



### The Assumption That More Use Is Always Better

A revealing thread in the meeting was the assumption that increased usage is inherently beneficial. Higher cycling volumes, heavier footfall and more year-round activity were repeatedly interpreted



as markers of success. Little attention was given to the possibility that greater traffic could degrade the experience for walkers or displace slower and more vulnerable users who rely on the towpath precisely because it is quiet and unpressured. Some residents also fear the changes could encourage high speed cycling, creating the same tensions seen in Richmond Park where sections of the road are now treated by a minority as a de facto racing circuit.

Ham Lands, a Local Nature Reserve with fragile habitats, has not been assessed for its ecological carrying capacity. Nor has the Council presented any modelling on the effects that bound surfacing may have on drainage patterns, soil structure or wildlife. The belief that intensification is automatically an improvement sits uneasily beside conservation duties that require harm to be avoided, not rationalised by reference to transport uplift.

The result is a Strategy that risks turning a rural riverside route into a busier, faster thoroughfare, with long-term consequences for the very people who depend on it for its sense of calm. Green, quiet spaces such as this are not incidental amenities: they play a vital role in supporting people's mental wellbeing, offering respite from urban pressures that cannot easily be replaced once lost.

### **Gaps in the officer's report**

The meeting highlighted several serious uncertainties. Roughly half the towpath has unclear or unregistered ownership. The Environment Agency has not confirmed the future height or design of flood defences. Lighting remains unresolved because of the tension between personal safety and wildlife protection. Costs cannot yet be estimated because the full condition survey is still pending.



Ordinarily, such gaps would be reasons to pause. Instead, members were told that the detail could follow later. That reassurance sits uneasily beside the Council's eagerness to create permanent legal rights now and consider the implications afterwards, raising the question of whether too much weight is being placed on the arguments of cycling pressure groups and too little on the needs and preferences of the wider local population.

### **Too Loose with process**

The Liberal Democrats do not lack ambition. Improving access and addressing long-standing maintenance problems are legitimate aims. But ambition must rest on sound process, and the meeting revealed a worrying laxity. A legally irreversible change was introduced as if it were a minor technical adjustment. Environmental and heritage assessments were deferred. The Strategy was advanced before essential evidence had been gathered. And the transport directorate led a project whose centre of gravity plainly lies in the environmental directorate.

Good governance requires clarity, discipline and respect for the landscape being altered. On each of those counts, the meeting suggested that something very important was missing. The Thames Path is more than a route. It is part of the Arcadian Thames, a landscape with many layers of legal protection and valued for its quiet beauty. Any attempt to reshape it should begin with a clear understanding of its history and its constraints, not with engineering diagrams. The issue is not whether the towpath can be improved, but whether irreversible decisions should precede the evidence on which they ought to rest.

You can access the committee papers and the webcast by clicking [HERE](#)



# Christmas Spirit

By Doug Goodman

The Landmark Arts Centre in Teddington was full of Christmas spirit last Saturday when The Teddington Choral Society presented its Christmas concert to a full house.

Conducted by Musical Director Julian Collings with pianist Conal Bembridge-Sayers and the choir of 90, the evening's programme titled 'when icicles hang' included that Cantata by Rutter comprising arrangements of lesser known carols, Bach Chorales from BWV 140, 'A Winter's Night', composed by Cecilia McDowall and a cantata combining several popular carols. There were audience carols and seasonal readings.



Future performances by the Teddington Choral society: 15<sup>th</sup> December at St. James' Church Hampton Hill, invite you to join the carol singing; 28<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at All Saints Kingston, Spring concert; 11<sup>th</sup> July 2026 at The Landmark Centre Teddington, Summer concert; 5<sup>th</sup> December 2026 at All Saints Kingston, Christmas concert. Visit [www.teddingtonchoral.co.uk](http://www.teddingtonchoral.co.uk)





Dear Editor,

## CPZs

As the residents of this Borough are only too aware, this Council has a deep rooted dislike of having motorists on their roads. CPZs are creeping out into every corner and it will only be a short while before hopefully they eventually appear in the Leader of the Council's own back yard.

In the last week a new CPZ has been installed in the big housing estates off the Staines Road/6<sup>th</sup> Cross Road/ Hospital Bridge Road area. Right in the middle is the slip road (by the traffic lights) where you can find a post office, small supermarket, chemist and Bruce's Butchers – the home of the winner of the Boroughs Best Bangers. These shops are a lifeline for the area.

During the consultation for installing the CPZ a massive petition was launched, requesting that these shops should be protected. The Council gave assurances that they would honour the concerns of the residents by allowing a 20 minute limit on parking in the slip road adjacent to the shops. This has been ignored and the area is now subject to parking by Ringo, and not even a chance for local residents to use their Richmond Card for free half-hour parking as elsewhere in the Borough.

This betrayal is a disgrace and the Council needs urgently to revisit their harmful parking restrictions before these crucial and much loved shops are driven out of business. Napoleon once called this country "a nation of shopkeepers". Not if this Libem Council is in charge and has anything to do with it!

Best wishes,

Sue Hamilton-Miller  
Twickenham

**EVERY TUESDAY BANQUET DINNER**

Book your *Christmas Party* ...celebrate with us!

**£12.95 only**

**STARTER+ MAIN DISH+ SIDE DISH+ RICE/ BREAD**  
King Prawns £3 extra

**Limited Seats!**

**Regal Spice Twickenham**

FOR BOOKINGS, CALL **020-88939291**

# Spotlight on community safety: Council confirms permanent lighting for Twickenham Green

From Richmond Council

Twickenham Green, one of Richmond's most used parks, will now benefit from permanent improved lighting following a successful year-long pilot that earned strong support from the community and local police.

Motion- and daylight-sensor LED lights along the central path brighten when movement is detected and dim during quiet periods, combining greater visibility with energy efficiency and minimal ecological impact. In addition, lighting has been fine-tuned and bat boxes introduced to support local wildlife.

Councillor Katie Mansfield, Richmond Council's White Ribbon Champion, said: *"This decision shows we've listened to and acted upon community concerns about the lack of lighting on the green. While we will never forget the tragic death of Amelie Delagrange that prompted this work, our focus is on giving everyone confidence to use the park – particularly women and girls – and making these spaces welcoming, inclusive and safe for all."*



The Council continues to encourage people travelling or walking after dark to use well-lit public pathways and avoid using open spaces as shortcuts, as part of its wider efforts to support safety across the borough.

Councillor Mansfield added that the new and improved lighting is a tangible and visible step that sits alongside the latest borough-wide strategy, [launched in October](#), to prevent and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The strategy is *"a comprehensive approach to ensuring stronger local action to support and empower women and girls in the community"*.

While Richmond upon Thames remains one of London's safest boroughs, the Council continues to prioritise action on VAWG through a range of initiatives, such as awareness campaigns, White Ribbon walks, targeted training, provision of specialist support and interventions, and partnerships with local organisations.

*"No level of violence against women and girls is acceptable. That's why we are strengthening local action to support and empower those at risk,"* said Councillor Mansfield. *"Our goal is to ensure the borough is a place where everyone, including women and girls, feel safe."*

The permanent lighting [follows consultation](#) with residents and local police, who supported the scheme as a practical measure to improve lighting on the green. The Council will continue to monitor its effectiveness to ensure Twickenham Green remains a safe, accessible and welcoming space for everyone.



# THE ULTIMATE NYE PARTY

Countdown to 2026 with us!

Don't miss this exclusive  
New Year's Eve Disco by  
our regular DJ Marcus

**31st December | Doors 8 PM**  
**Teddington Constitutional Club**

Join us for:  
Music/Drinks and seeing in the New Year Together  
All Members welcome with a max of 3 Guests each  
Free Entry!



# Find local support and activities this Christmas time

From Ruils Independent Living

Local charity Ruils Independent Living has launched their annual list of local holiday resources and activities, for anyone needing additional support over the Christmas period.

The list includes a range of contact details and information for various services that are operating, as well as Christmas Day lunches and other social activities so no one has to be alone on Christmas.

[Download the Christmas Resources 2025 pack](#)

Ruils services will close on Tuesday 23 December at 5pm and will reopen on Monday 5 January 2026 at 9am.

If you need urgent support for non-emergencies, please get in touch with the Council's Adult Social Care team on 020 8891 7971, or with Achieving for Children on 020 8547 5008.

If you believe someone is at immediate risk, call 999.



# Get your items fixed and enjoy community spirit before Christmas

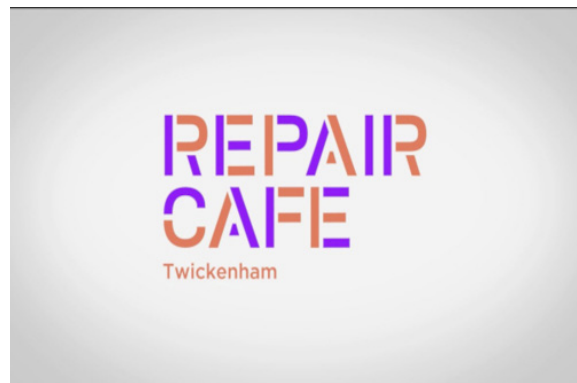
From Twickenham Repair Café

The Twickenham Repair Café are at it again on Saturday 20 December. Please go along, take something broken and join the fun.

All residents are welcome to take any broken item for repair, such as clocks, coffee machines, bikes and even garden shears. Get your old items fixed and give them a second life.

Event details:

- **Date:** Saturday 20 December 2025
- **Time:** 10.30am to 12.45pm
- **Location:** St Margaret's Church hall, Twickenham, TW1 1RL



The team are encouraging everyone to be festive with Christmas jumpers, antlers, tinsel and all that stuff.

The café takes place on the third Saturday of every month.



# Carers getting easier access to the support they need

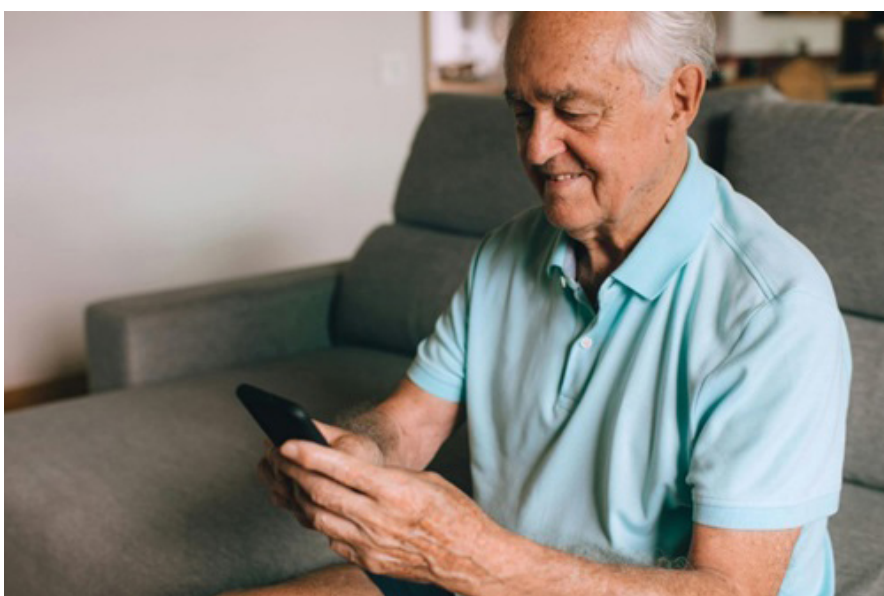
From Richmond Council

Unpaid carers can now tap into local support faster and easier and request a Carer's Assessment anytime, anywhere - straight from their smartphone or laptop.

A new service, powered by artificial intelligence, offers unpaid carers an easy way to discuss their caring situation and connect to the support they need. Accessible from a laptop or smartphone and available 24/7, the [AI carer's support service](#) provides a convenient way for carers to discuss their needs and receive personalised advice and support recommendations.

For many of the 6 million unpaid carers in the UK, caring has a significant impact on their physical and mental health. While many local organisations offer targeted advice and support, carers are often unaware of the help available to them.

Carers can use the free service at any time of day or night, to have a quick chat for immediate advice, or take more time to discuss their situation in detail through a Carers Assessment.



Councillor Piers Allen, Chair of the Adult Social Services, Health and Housing Services Committee and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, said: *"Caring for others is an honourable role, and one that many of us will have to play in our own lifetime. By making carer's assessments easier to access and local services recommendations more readily available, unpaid carers can connect to the right services to get help before reaching crisis point."*

The service asks questions to help explore the impact that being in a caring role may

be having on someone and identifies appropriate support. Carers can start a conversation and return when it suits them, picking up the conversation where they left off.

Richmond resident and unpaid carer, Andrea, who used the service said: *"I was pleasantly surprised by the AI's thoughtfulness and sensitivity. It gave me useful information, and I feel confident in the information it gave me."*

Find out more about the [AI carer's support service](#).

The AI Carers Support service is just one way for carers to have a conversation about support. Any carer who prefers to speak to a member of the Adult Social Care team can call 020 8891 7871 or email [adultsocialservices@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:adultsocialservices@richmond.gov.uk).

The new technology is part of a three-month trial and hosted by Richmond Council partner, Tovie, an AI services developer.

Funding for the project came from the Department of Health and Social Care [Accelerating Reform Fund](#). We are leading the initiative on behalf of the South West London Boroughs.

Information shared with the AI support service is stored securely and reviewed by experienced social workers to ensure any advice or support is fair, consistent and based on the user's needs. All information is handled in line with [data protection law](#) and our [privacy policy](#).

# COPING AT CHRISTMAS

Christmas can be tough. That's why it's important to know there's always someone you can talk to.



☎ 0300 123 3393  
ℹ Helpline  
🌐 [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)



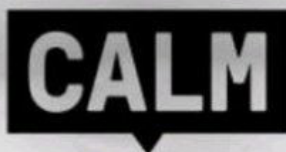
☎ Text SHOUT to 85258  
ℹ 24/7 text service  
🌐 [giveusashout.org](http://giveusashout.org)



☎ 116 123  
ℹ 24/7 helpline  
🌐 [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)



☎ Text YM to 85258  
ℹ 24/7 text service  
🌐 [youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)



☎ 0800 58 58 58  
ℹ Helpline for men  
🌐 [thecalmzone.net](http://thecalmzone.net)



☎ 0800 068 4141  
ℹ Under 35s Helpline  
🌐 [papyrus-uk.org](http://papyrus-uk.org)

## Next week at Richmond Council

On Tuesday, 16th December, the **Licensing Sub-Committee** will meet to discuss the opposed application for The Base, (3 Liffords Place, Barnes) to extend its opening hours. The meeting will commence at 11 am and is being held virtually. Please click [HERE](#) for more details.

On Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, the **Planning Committee** will meet to discuss one of the most controversial planning applications this year – the conversion of the Shacklegate Allotments to burial land. The meeting will start at 7pm at York House, Twickenham. For more details, please click [HERE](#).

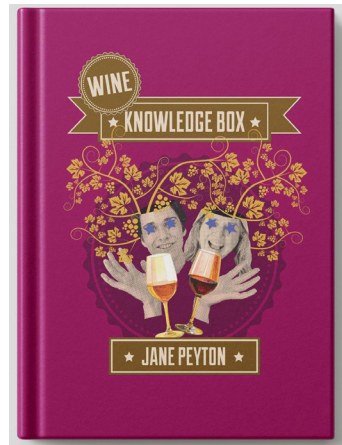
For guidance on how to participate at different types of council meetings, such as speaking or asking written or verbal questions, please click [HERE](#).



## Some Christmas Gift Ideas for Foodies

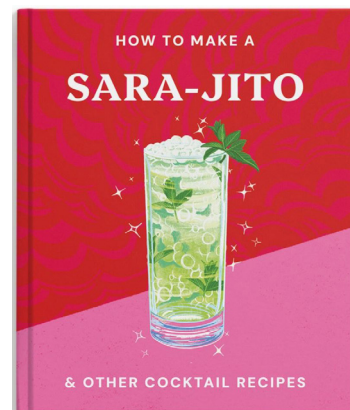
Time is marching on and if you haven't given enough thought to Christmas gifts, here are suggestions to consider for foodies - and many of them can be sent directly, making life even less stressful.

For wine, beer and cider lovers, Jane Peyton, founder of the School of Booze and former drinks educator of the year has released three new books to educate readers in fundamental knowledge about beer, cider, and wine: Beer Knowledge Box, Cider Knowledge Box, and Wine Knowledge Box. They are really well written and will give a greater depth of knowledge in a really interesting and succinct way. **The Knowledge Box** series of books are available from publisher [Elfado Island](#), the [School of Booze website](#), and from Amazon at just £10.99 for hardback or £6.99 paperback



Did you know that Laurie Colwin was known to wash dishes in the bath and that Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton's favourite drink was an Extra-Dry Martini? **The Writer's Table** by Valerie Stivers is a lovely book that brings together 50 favourite recipes from the world's most beloved authors, offering a glimpse into their kitchen rituals. Each recipe is paired with an introduction to the author and dish, alongside clear instructions and modern ingredients. Illustrated by Katie Tomlinson it's £19.99 for a lovely hardback that will be a most welcome gift for a literary foodie.

Still on books, you could choose a personalised foodie book from **Wonderbly**. Following the success of the debut 'How to make a name-tini' last year, Wonderbly has launched a full food and drink range featuring pasta, burgers and cakes. All the books from this range feature personalised recipes curated by professional chefs or mixologists and are tailored to the individual. Customers are able to create a book personal to the recipient.



Designed to make wine feel more approachable – and a little more fun – the **Wine Wisdom Desk Calendar**, published by **Carousel Worldwide**, covers everything from how to hold your glass properly, how to pronounce those tricky wine words, and how to spot a quality wine without guesswork. Delivering fresh, digestible nuggets of wisdom daily, the calendar will help wine lovers feel more empowered whether choosing a bottle, browsing supermarket aisles or fretting over a restaurant menu. The Drink With Me Wine Wisdom 2026 Desk Calendar is available at £11.99, from major retailers including Waterstones and Ryman.

A personalised bottle service at no extra cost from **Caorunn gin** makes sending a gift much easier. Available via Caorunn's [online shop](#), you can add a loved one's name and festive message to a bottle. Award-winning Caorunn Classic Gin, is a delicious London gin infused with a Celtic soul (with Scottish botanicals) Whether for a close friend, party host, or hard-to-buy-for relative, a personalised bottle is a great gift – and it'll arrive straight to their door. Caorunn Gin is available to buy at £30 via [Caorunn's website](#) but order asap for guaranteed Christmas delivery. Non personalised Caorunn is, of course, available in Waitrose, Ocado and other retailers.



## Stocking Fillers for Foodies

Whether you give a stocking packed with lovely gifts, or prefer to give just one or two special items this Christmas, here are some suggestions for foodies.

Mulled wine is synonymous with Christmas, so finding this little box of spices from **Steenbergs** will make life easy.

[Steenbergs' Old Hamlet Mulled Wine Spice Cube](#) (20g, £4.50, [steenbergs.co.uk](http://steenbergs.co.uk), Amazon, Cotswold Fayre), is ideal.

Perfect for home chefs who love doing things the traditional way, each 20g cube contains four muslin spice bundles, each for 75cl of red wine or juice and delivers all the warming flavours without sugar or additives. Blended in the UK with cinnamon, allspice, lemon peel, and cloves, these muslin pouches are home compostable.



**Tesco** has a fabulous range of great value festive nut selections for just £2.90 a 150g bag (£2.50 for clubcard holders). There are five different varieties: Belgian Chocolate Orange Nut; Sweet & Salty Belgian Chocolate; Salted Caramelised Nut; Hickory Smoked Nut and Belgian Chocolate Brazil Nut - and they are delicious.

If, like me, they're a fan of licorice, they will love this little bottle packed with flavour from Danish confectionery brand **LAKRIDS BY BÜLOW**. Designed to enhance dishes and drinks with a liquorice twist, this syrup adds a touch of gourmet craftsmanship to a wide range of recipes, from iced coffee and cocktails to desserts and savoury dishes. Available from [lakridsbybulow.co.uk](http://lakridsbybulow.co.uk) RRP £8.95.



Peanut butter is enjoying some really interesting additions nowadays, so either (or both) of these will delight any peanut butter aficionado.

**Tracklements Yumello Fresh Chilli Jam Smooth Peanut Butter** uses just a few, simple ingredients including high-oleic peanuts, prized for their naturally sweet, rich flavour and healthier fat profile. No palm oil, no refined sugar, no unnecessary additives. The smooth texture is deeply roasted and stone-ground, delivering a bold, nutty taste that's pure and unmasked. It's then paired with Tracklements award-winning sweet and hot Fresh Chilli Jam, with a gentle heat from fresh red chillies. RRP £4.99 / 215g available online from [www.tracklements.co.uk](http://www.tracklements.co.uk), [www.yumello.com](http://www.yumello.com) and fine food delis and farm shops nationwide.

Another rather whacky peanut butter (that is surprisingly delicious) is from **Butter Bike**, makers of bold, all natural nut butters. It has a limited edition Sage & Onion Stuffing Peanut Butter. Deep roast, hi-oleic peanuts meet sage, rosemary, garlic, crispy onion and a touch of flaked salt for a distinctive seasonal spread. Proudly made in the UK, this peanut butter is vegan, gluten-free, and packed with protein. At around £6 a 285g jar, there are some other delicious flavours too, like Gingerbread or Chocolate Orange. Available from selected farm shops, plus Selfridges, DELLI, Wholefoods London and Not on the High Street.







I've talked about the wonderful **Louisa's Honey** before, but thought it worth mentioning the lovely gift sets - a perfect way to let someone find their favourite honey. For around £18 you can try four 50g jars of various different honeys.

Available from Amazon, Elys Wimbledon or directly from Louisa's Honey [here](#)

Dubai Chocolate has been the chocolate craze this year and a rather special way of giving some that are not in a bar form is from [Farhi](#) – renowned for premium ingredients and indulgent handmade bonbonnières. They have launched Dubai Chocolate Truffles which are really delicious. £10 for a pack of six in a perfect little stick pack that will slip into the stocking nicely. From Farhi direct, Not on the High Street and Yumbles.com.



With fabulously designed, highly distinctive cans, and even better contents, a can or two of delicious English sparkling wine from **The Uncommon** at just £6 for a 250ml can of white or rose sparkling (or both!) will be a welcome start to Christmas morning. Available from Waitrose or from Tesco (for a 18.7ml can at £4)

And of course, you should always put some chocolate coins at the bottom of that stocking, preferably with a satsuma (I don't think it's actually the law, but it's what our family has always done). High ethical producer **Divine Chocolate** has some lovely chocolate coins that are available at Oxfam shops - either a giant coin or a bag or smaller ones - for under £4



But maybe you just want to surprise an adult loved one with one rather magnificent gift in their stocking? Then consider this: **Laurent-Perrier** "Bubbles", a new Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé limited edition metal jacket. Since 2017, the iconic **Cuvée Rosé** bottle has been adorned each year with a distinctive metal jacket. With Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé, the Pinot Noir maceration technique gives the wine a refined blood orange-pink hue, with ruby reflections. A fragrant bouquet of freshly picked red fruits—raspberry, red currant, strawberry, and black cherry—unfolds gracefully. On the palate, the wine reveals a vibrant harmony of fresh fruit, complemented by floral and subtle spicy notes. The rrp for the Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé "Bubbles" limited edition is £87 (75cl) from Ocado or John Lewis and selection online retailers.

If you're lucky, you'll be invited to share it.

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# I'm Telling you now!!

By Bruce Lyons

They have all got the Jitters and we could be in for a tempting January.

Cost of Living, Lack of Growth, Sanctions, Inflation- the bad news never stops and whilst I am the last to suggest, spend now and worry about tomorrow next week - What I can say is if you work hard you need to take breaks and relax and you will be far more productive. I think we are going to see a very competitive market in January, and we will see more quality offers like the below and I'm going to be here telling you about them - watch this space!



## **Book by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December and save £566 per couple!**

The island of Tenerife is the ideal location to enjoy some sun and why not stay at the beautiful 5 star "Gran Luxe" Hotel Botanico in the north, recently reopened after extensive renovations. The hotel is located next to the Botanical Gardens and a few minutes from the Lago Martinez Casino and is highly recommended for its standards and quality of service. The stunning Oriental Spa Garden with indoor and outdoor pool, outdoor massage, hairdresser and private spa space offers opportunities for relaxation and rejuvenation. Dining choices include a number of à la carte restaurants including Oriental, Mediterranean or Spanish. What a choice! An idyllic space to enjoy a luxury holiday.

*Holiday includes return flights including one-piece of baggage per person, return, private transfers and 7-nights' accommodation in a Deluxe Garden view room on B&B, saving £566 per couple if booked by 31 Dec 2025.*

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# Are you following tradition?

By Deep Patel

~ Life Through the Eyes of a Twickenham Shopkeeper ~



This weekend will arguably be the most festive one so far when the majority of my customers are planning to put up their Christmas trees and really get Twickenham twinkling (apart for the weekend of Christmas of course) but something that interested me from the conversations I had with customers in my shop this week was regarding the reason why people followed through on Christmas traditions year after year...many regarding things they didn't even like, yet somehow "as it was Christmas" they suddenly loved them? I was interested in finding out more regarding this, I mean when I asked my customers why their Christmas dinner table "couldn't be without brussel sprouts" or why they have mince pies so regularly in the weeks leading up to Christmas the answers were mainly "because it's traditional"...I appreciated that, but it did make me think what makes something a tradition?

It took many hours of contemplation whilst shelf-filling and organizing the chocolate aisle in my shop (best way to work out life in my opinion) before I finally came to an understanding of why this was, a realization. What makes actually a "tradition" a "tradition"? It happens over a period of time, when we adopt certain behaviours ...these behaviours then become associated with certain seasons or events...they become synonymous with these time periods and then they become a part of the culture...repeated reinforcement leads to further strengthening of these "traditions" whereby eventually they become justified on that basis and no one even questions them, rather in fact these traditions gain so much power that many of us almost force ourselves to like something that we would never have it wasn't Christmas, and why? Just so that it "feels like Christmas" ...So in actual fact



it becomes a case of needing external things to make us feel that “it’s Christmas” to make us feel like we are being festive...the traditions we made become the owners and controllers of our minds and although we were the ones who planted these “seeds” and they were smaller than us...they grow to be huge overbearing trees that we are under now and in their control...the tables turn and they become in charge...so much so that without them even Christmas doesn’t feel like Christmas

I noticed in my own shop, mince pies sell well up until Christmas eve ...customers talk about how much they love them...but after Christmas? I can reduce them to 75% off and still no one buys them...the same goes for Christmas pudding...and so many other Christmas table foods...I am a vegetarian, but I asked my customers why they don’t eat turkey all year, but only eat it on Christmas day? Most customers replied that they don’t like the taste of it and it’s apparently dry and not a great texture and that they didn’t really like it at all. So why eat it on Christmas day when we are supposed to be treating ourselves to eat things we do like supposedly? I am of course not criticising any part of religious traditions at all, this is about food-based traditions and others which are nothing to do with the religious aspect!

So, through conversations regarding Christmas and “traditions” with my customers this past week, I realised that for so many people, most of Christmas is made up of subconsciously forcing themselves to “override” their normal preferences simply to make things feel “Christmassy” ...what are we like?! This realization made me think it’s about time we rose above this surely? Took back the power? Reprogrammed ourselves? Even saying this to myself made me feel strong and in control ...Then I sat back down on my stool behind my counter and (without realising) cracked open a box of mince pies and began eating them. And yes, I did want to make myself feel more Christmassy (subconsciously) I think ...and yes, I don’t even like the taste of them usually ...oh well, it was good my “realisation” lasted all of 30 seconds ...Happy “traditional” Christmas Twickenham...eat, drink, and...be traditional I guess?...

### **Remember...**

***“The little seeds that we plant today become the big trees that we end up living under tomorrow...”***

### **MY CREATURE-KINDNESS TIP OF THE WEEK...**

**STOP ANY INSECT KINDLY (GOOD KARMA):**

Sprinkle Olbas oil around places where you don’t want them to come (but NOT directly on them)...they will go without you having to harm them.

For ANY specific tip to stop any “pest” or insect KINDLY (for good karma/blessings), email me: [InsectLoversUnite@gmail.com](mailto:InsectLoversUnite@gmail.com) or join my Facebook page: “INSECT LOVERS UNITE”

## Cinderella

by James Rushbrooke

The Questors Theatre at the Judi Dench Playhouse, Ealing until 31<sup>st</sup> December

In the run-up to Christmas make time to see this production of *Cinderella*. Totally engaging, beautifully produced, it delivers sheer joy.

The story is set in the 1980s in a universe far far away, a stroke of genius that allows for Cinderella to have more agency in her choice of beau. With exaggerated costumes, big hair, neon-bright colours, director Rory Hobson was able to go full out brash, blousy and fun, with the corniest of corny jokes, and lots of audience interaction. Although scary enough for some raise-the-roof booing, there's an interesting double love story bringing out the "aahs" for the happy endings.



Cinderella's home has been moved to a run-down launderette, but the basic familiar story of a lost slipper remains. An over-story of a brother and sister separated by demons in a faraway familiar universe could have been a bit clunky, but it gave the script that necessary level of pathos, provided plenty of menacing moments and the kids loved it. And some fun puppetry, including a very cute demon, kept up the full-pelt pace.

All the costumes were magnificent. There were colourful, sparkly, scary or fancy outfits for the step-perfect choruses, and a mini Spandau ballet troupe. An enviable set of 80s outfits for Samantha Boffin's gloriously wicked Gloria von Glitz, was only bettered by the tour de force of the costumes which so perfectly characterised the ugly sisters.

Gold lamé will never be the same again!

The jokey knock-about between Frances Sherwin and Simon Higginson as Penfold and Bungle, and the gentle humour of Derek Stoddart's Bernie were stellar. Some lovely vocals from Adam Watt and Julice Liecer, whose beautifully sung Cinderella was perfect, humble but spunky. Sally Parker's delightfully grumpy fairy godmother would have won the day if it hadn't been for the double dose of pantomime dames provided by Rory Hobson and James Rushbrooke. (They should have a TV series of their own.)

But, if you want to get your kids away from the screens, and discovering or revisiting live theatre, take them here. If you haven't got kids, borrow some or just come along anyway.



Read Polly Davies' review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/12/06/cinderella-q/](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/12/06/cinderella-q/)

Photography by Carla Marker



## Messiah

by George Frideric Handel, text by Charles Jennens

Wild Arts at Smith Square Hall, Westminster and on tour until 18<sup>th</sup> December

Queen Anne's Footstool, its symmetry (plain in its neatness, to use Milton's phrase), the early 18th Century former church of St John's, Smith Square is still as gorgeously baroque as ever, with its ornate white Corinthian columns, and the glorious wackiness of its four towers. There could not be a more suitable setting for Handel's oratorio *Messiah*.

This is much more than a mere concert performance, for the sheer commitment, intensity, and focus that Wild Arts lavish on it bring it to full dramatic life. With no vocal scores there is continuous engagement. The eight excellent singers also function as the chorus and freely move around the building in a way that's effective and never arbitrary. Their movement gives every impression of being spontaneous. I'm not really sure that I want to hear *Messiah* done with a choir anymore.



Orlando Jopling directs a period instrumental ensemble, including with a couple of splendid baroque trumpets. His tempi are fleet and natural, although he slows down to emphasise the gravitas of the wonderful final series of Amens.

Admirable as they are individually, the singers achieve something wonderful together. The fugal intensity of *And with his Stripes* is magnificently realised. The aching discords of *Since by Man came Death*, sung across the transepts, are stunning.

*How beautiful are the Feet* and *I Know that my Redeemer Liveth* from pure-voiced Sofia Kirwan-Baez and Joanna Songi provide a wonderful range of tone colour, as well as a majestically exuberant *The Trumpet will Sound* from Timothy Nelson. Kate Symonds-Joy's clean-sounding mezzo in *He Was Despised* also contrasts well with Martha Jones, with fine further tenor support from Guy Elliott.

Tom Morris's minimal staging is admirably unfussy (singers and orchestra wear their own ordinary clothes), quietly reinforcing what the work is all about: God coming to earth, participating in human suffering and death, and triumphantly restoring humanity to life.

The splendidly voiced bass Edward Hawkins speaks a few introductory words before the overture to encourage us to contemplate the continuing relevance of the words. Then tenor Harry Jacques starts proceedings with an attention-grabbing *Comfort Ye*.

The feel is very much more like an act of worship than a concert, with applause held until the very end, when there's a standing ovation.

Read Patrick Shorrock's review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/12/11/messiah-wa-25](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/12/11/messiah-wa-25)

Photography by Steve Gregson

## Robin Hood

by Harry Michaels, additional material by Pete Firman  
 Crossroads Live at the New Wimbledon Theatre until 4<sup>th</sup> January

There was excitement and Christmas sparkle in equal measures in anticipation of the panto spectacle, *Robin Hood*. Starring Ashley Banjo, Jordan Banjo, Perri Kiely and the rest of Diversity, this was set to be a night to remember.

Who could forget being completely wowed way back in 2009 when Diversity burst onto our screens, winning *Britain's Got Talent*, securing first place over bookies' favourite, Susan Boyle. And their performance as the merry men of Sherwood Forest certainly didn't disappoint. From the moment the acclaimed street dance troop somersaulted onto the stage, Ashley Banjo's choreography was executed so precisely that the audience went wild with every gravity-defying move.



Ashley Banjo, as our hero Robin Hood, shows that he isn't a one trick pony. He gets fully immersed in the fun and frolics, along with Pete Firman, who provides a large dose of hilarity as Will Scarlet. Comedian Pete, also treats us to a number of magic tricks and continuously pokes fun at a couple of unwilling audience members. (First rule of panto: don't buy tickets in the front row!) His silly dance routines to popular floor fillers was a real highlight along with his topical jokes covering recent controversies such as

the member the royal family previously known as "Prince", the (\*!&k#!!) Budget, and the highly popular *Traitors* TV show.

Panto villain stalwart, Steve Arnott, as the Sheriff of Nottingham, ably carries the panto's minimal plot, along with the beautiful Lauren Hampton as Maid Marion, and the enchanting Amelia Walker, as the Spirit of Sherwood.

Arguably, this isn't the panto to see if you want to witness Crossroad's trademark special effects, or multiple costume changes and impressive amounts of sequins adorning a panto dame. But instead we had an hilarious, high energy rendition of "something else I'd rather be", along with a collection of super-cute little ones providing the crowd with side-splitting laughs at their innocent spoonerisms. Some of the adult jokes and banter between Pete and the Diversity boys will go over the youngsters' heads, but will leave the grown ups in stitches. If you're after a panto this season that delivers something different, this is one not to miss.



Read Thea Diamond's review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/12/10/robin-hood-2025](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/12/10/robin-hood-2025)

Photography by Paul Coltas



## Dead Man Walking

by Jake Heggie, libretto by Terence McNally

English National Opera at the London Coliseum

Rarely has a performance moved me so deeply that I left the opera house utterly speechless. Annilese Miskimmon's gripping *Dead Man Walking* is exceptional and utterly mesmerising.

This profoundly moving opera cuts straight to the heart, succeeding where so many contemporary pieces struggle. Its clear compelling story gains an immediacy that feels almost overwhelming. What emerges is raw, unsettling and profoundly humane.

It tells the true story of a Louisiana nun who becomes the spiritual adviser to Joseph De Rocher, a convicted murderer on death row for the killing of two teenagers. Sister Helen's own words echo through the opera: *"He is worth more than the worst thing he ever did."* Whatever one's views on the death penalty, this story forces us to confront our own ideas about humanity, forgiveness and redemption.



Heggie's score blends musical worlds with extraordinary skill: gospel, jazz, lyric opera and even a touch of musical theatre. It is accessible without ever being simplistic. In the pit, conductor Kerem Hasan, already a rising British Cypriot star, leads with assurance and fine technical command.

Michael Mayes is extraordinary as De Rocher. His chemistry with the perfectly cast Christine Rice as Sister Helen is tender, truthful and quietly affecting. In the climactic scenes before the execution, Sister Helen's plea *"The truth will set you free"* becomes a haunting motif woven into her vocal line, urging him towards honesty and peace.

One of the opera's most devastating moments comes when De Rocher sings *"Everything is gonna be alright"* in superb falsetto. Facing his imminent death, he breaks down and confesses. The mixture of resignation and longing for solace is almost unbearable to witness. When he expresses the hope that his death may bring peace to the victims' families, he turns to Sister Helen and tells her he loves her. Her gentle reply is *"I love you too"*.

Dame Sarah Connolly brings heartbreaking depth to the role of Joseph's mother, a woman trapped by circumstance and denial. As Sister Rose, Madeline Boreham, an emerging talent to watch, shows remarkable promise and elegance. Jacques Imbrailo gives a superb, deeply felt performance as Owen Hart, the father of one of the murdered teenagers.

It is an immense privilege to witness this production: a rare example of modern opera at its most powerful, humane and transformative.

Read Helen Astrid's review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/11/11/dead-man-walk](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/11/11/dead-man-walk)

Photography by Manuel Harlan



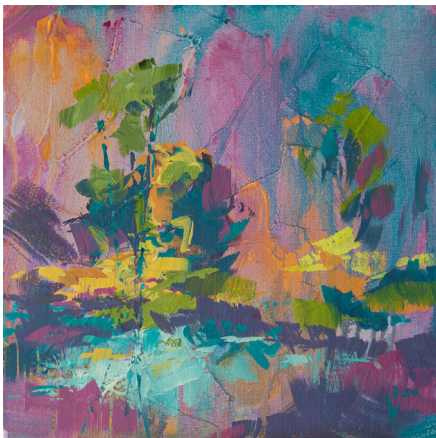
# Richmond Artists to Showcase their Work in Prime Local Office Space

From BobCat Gallery

A group exhibition of original and limited edition artworks from artists in Richmond upon Thames will take place at Premier House, Twickenham, from 16<sup>th</sup> December - 20<sup>th</sup> February.

Independent charity *Arts Richmond* has been given free use of this prime office space through The Artists Window. Curated by Catherine Sweet, local artist and Founder of BobCat Gallery, all works in the exhibition will be for sale and proceeds will benefit Arts Richmond's work to support drama, literature, music and visual arts across the borough.

Catherine says: *"It's a pleasure to be able to show local artists' work and support Arts Richmond in this way, with the generous support of local landlords who value arts and culture. This show will include a huge variety of local talent, including paintings, drawings, printmaking, sculpture and photography."*



*Boxborough 1* by Laura Parker



*Spring Tide, Venice* by Jo Ellis



*Cats* by Amanda Ribbans

This is also a wonderful chance to demonstrate how important art can be in a work space. Not only can art help to create a welcoming environment, evidence shows that the thoughtful inclusion of artwork in offices and other workspaces has the potential to improve employee wellbeing and reduce everyday stress, and may also positively impact employee productivity, creativity and commitment to their organisation."

The exhibition will be available by appointment (Monday - Friday), and a private view, festive celebration and Curator's Tour will be offered on Monday 22nd December between 4.30pm - 7.30pm. Free tickets are available via [www.ticketsource.co.uk/bobcat-gallery](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/bobcat-gallery)

Catherine will also offer a free tour of the exhibition for local business owners on Monday 12th January, sharing further insight on how to enhance their own workspaces with original art and details of affordable art rentals available across the area. Book tickets via [www.ticketsource.co.uk/bobcat-gallery](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/bobcat-gallery)

For more information, visit [www.ArtsRichmond.org.uk](http://www.ArtsRichmond.org.uk)



## Arts Richmond Winter Showcase

A group exhibition of original and limited edition artwork from artists across Richmond upon Thames.

Premier House, 58 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3QS

Viewings by appointment, Monday to Friday - email [contact@bobcatgallery.co.uk](mailto:contact@bobcatgallery.co.uk)

[ArtsRichmond.org.uk](http://ArtsRichmond.org.uk) | [@ArtsRichmondUK](https://www.ArtsRichmond.org.uk) - [BobCatGallery.co.uk](http://BobCatGallery.co.uk) | [@BobCatGallery](https://www.BobCatGallery.co.uk)

Image credit: Jill Storey





# Twickenham Nurse Wins RCN London Rising Star Award

From Barchester's Lynde House

Staff and residents at Barchester's Lynde House care home in Twickenham are celebrating because their much-loved nurse, Smita Patelia, has been named in the Royal College of Nursing London's Rising Star Awards.

The Rising Star awards recognise nursing staff from the capital's Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities who've made an outstanding contribution to the health and care of Londoners. A team from Lynde House attended the awards ceremony where Smita's achievements were celebrated, and she received her RCN Rising Stars Awards. The judges felt that Smita was an exceptional nurse and a shining star of the future.



Smita Patelia



Smita with General Manager, Alison McIntosh



Smita with daughter, Risa

Smita is an excellent nurse and role model to everyone at Lynde House. She has progressed from RN to Deputy Manager thanks to her clinical skill and underpinning knowledge plus the compassion and consistent, instinctive care she demonstrates daily to her residents and their family members. Smita puts so much into her job. She is highly skilled as a nurse, she works incredibly hard, and is highly professional. She has great empathy and understanding about how her residents and their families are feeling. She forms a strong connection to the residents. Her emotional connection is powerful while retaining a highly professional manner. She manages the balance between medical needs and emotional needs extremely well.

Lynde House's General Manager, Alison McIntosh, commented: *"I am so proud of Smita, she is an exceptional nurse. It is wonderful that she has been recognised by the Royal College of Nursing as a star of the future. She is already a star in my eyes and I feel very lucky to have her on my team at Lynde House. Everyone at the home is absolutely delighted for her."*

Lynde House is run by Barchester Healthcare, one of the UK's largest care providers, which is committed to delivering high-quality care across its care homes and hospitals. Lynde House provides nursing, residential and dementia care.



# Princess Alice Hospice launches free new community-based wellbeing programme in partnership with Places Leisure

From Princess Alice Hospice

Princess Alice Hospice is launching a new community-based wellbeing programme, in New Malden, in January 2026. Delivered by the Hospice's Wellbeing team, "Your wellbeing, your way" is a free, six-week rolling programme designed to support local people living with a life-limiting illness and those close to them, helping them live well for as long as possible.

At Princess Alice Hospice, our vision is that everyone in our communities should have the best possible care and support before, during and after death. To support this ambition, the Hospice is partnering with Places Leisure, part of Places for People Group, one of the UK's leading social enterprises, to deliver the sessions at the Malden Centre in Kingston.

This supportive, non-clinical programme is open to adults living with a life-limiting illness, their carers and family members. No medical referral is needed, and people can book themselves on one session or more, directly with the Hospice. The programme, starting on Wednesday 14 January, will cover:

- Week 1: Introduction to Princess Alice Hospice and the support the Hospice offers
- Week 2: Planning ahead and exploring aspects of future care
- Week 3: Emotional wellbeing strategies, including mindfulness and relaxation
- Week 4: Understanding and managing symptoms
- Week 5: Support for carers and family members
- Week 6: Break week before the programme restarts

By hosting this programme in a familiar and accessible community venue, the Hospice aims to reach people who may not yet know about the breadth of hospice services available to them. Creating a welcoming, local space, is a way of letting people take the time to focus on their wellbeing and feel supported in everyday life. The initiative also complements Places Leisure's existing "Forever Active" programme, broadening local wellbeing support by reaching a wider age group and specifically focusing on those living with a life-limiting illness.

Princess Alice Hospice and Places Leisure hope to expand this innovative pilot programme to additional leisure centres across the borough.

*Marie O'Loughlin, Contract Manager at Places Leisure says: "We are delighted to be able to support Princess Alice Hospice with their new "Your wellbeing, your way" programme. Together we aim to strengthen community connection, increase awareness of hospice care and empower more people across Kingston to live well, whatever challenges they face."*

*Rachael Basak, Head of Community Involvement and Support at Princess Alice Hospice, says: "This pilot is part of Princess Alice Hospice's commitment to build more connected, compassionate communities where people feel empowered to live well, grieve well and die well. This partnership helps bring our Hospice's holistic approach to care into the heart of the community, offering time and tools to help people feel supported to take care of their wellbeing, their way."*

**For more information and to book your place, please visit:**

<https://www.pah.org.uk/our-care/the-wellbeing-centre/your-wellbeing-your-way>





# Santa brings magic to families supported by Momentum

From Momentum

More than 100 children across London, Surrey and Sussex received a visit from Santa and his elves at the weekend (6 and 7 December), as he made a special trip from the North Pole to visit Momentum-supported families on their doorsteps.

Visiting Santa at his grotto is not possible for many families supported by Momentum, due to the severity of children's illnesses and side effects from treatment many of them are experiencing. The Doorstep Santa initiative means unwell children don't miss out - it also offers comfort to bereaved families preparing for Christmas without a child.

Santa visited families in style, rolling up in a Triumph Stag sports car, battling the rain with the roof down! As the day went on, Santa swapped the Stag for a roaring Harley-Davidson and he wasn't travelling solo, one of his elves rode alongside him on a Ducati decorated in lights and festive tinsel.

Each family received a thoughtfully curated bundle of gifts, which included something to enjoy together and special surprises for every child. The children unwrapped everything from LEGO sets, puzzles and sensory toys to arts-and-crafts kits, dressing-up costumes, books and gift vouchers. Families were also treated to a festive gingerbread house kit, a classic board game to play together, a chocolate selection pack, and a beautifully hand-knitted bauble.

Ismaeel, 9, was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) earlier this year and is receiving treatment at The Royal Marsden Hospital. Ismaeel and his family, from Southwest London, received a visit from Santa at the weekend. Ismaeel's mum said: *"Thank you so much for arranging Santa's visit for our family. The kids were so surprised and super excited. We've been in hospital this week for chemo and Ismaeel has been telling anyone who will listen all about it!! It was fantastic to see the children totally caught up in the excitement of Santa's visit - it helped us to feel like a normal family again for a moment. Due to our son's impaired immune system from chemo, we are avoiding crowded and enclosed places, especially over the winter months, to reduce the chance of him catching something and ending up back in hospital again. Momentum is so incredible for creating these special moments for families like us. We are eternally grateful."*

Sarah Woods, CEO at Momentum Children's Charity said: *"For many families we support, visiting Santa's grotto simply isn't possible - it could be a child who is immunocompromised and can't risk crowded public places, or a family facing Christmas after the death of their child. Our Doorstep Santa initiative means Santa always finds a way to meet these children, bringing the magic of Christmas directly to their homes."*

Sarah Woods continued: *"The demand for our help is rising fast, and we're determined to stand beside every family who is referred to us. As a charity with no statutory funding, we depend completely on other people's generosity. With Christmas only two weeks away, we're urging anyone who can, to support Momentum. Every donation made this December will deliver hope when it's needed most and fuel vital support for families all year long."*

Momentum Children's Charity supports families across London, Surrey and Sussex whose children are facing cancer or a life-challenging condition. The charity partners with local hospitals to offer personally tailored support to the entire family through our family support workers, both in hospital and at home.

**Help Momentum Children's Charity change a child's life this Christmas by making a donation on their website [www.momentumcharity.org](http://www.momentumcharity.org)**



# Microneedling - Fad or Fab?

By Alison Jee

I don't know about you, but I've always been rather wary of claims about beauty treatments that will take years off you. There's no way I'd have a face lift (I'm too much of a coward and don't have the money either), but when you have a special event on the horizon - a wedding perhaps, there are other options. With my daughter's wedding booked, I obviously wanted to look my best. Luckily I met **Seema Bhardwaj** a few months prior, and she said she could help with a course of microneedling. Seema is a qualified Microneedling instructor and she trains dentists, doctors and medics. She is also a trainer for Doctor (Dentist) **Brian Franks**. Now, I'm pretty bad with needles, but I was very pleasantly surprised at how painless the process was. And there's hardly any risk of cross contamination: Seema provides customers with their own set of microneedling 'heads' which they take home for safekeeping between treatments.

**So what is microneedling?** It's a cosmetic procedure. It involves pricking the skin with tiny sterilised needles. The small wounds cause your body to make more collagen and elastin, which heal your skin and help you look younger. You might also hear it called collagen induction therapy. There has been a degree of concern about some of the microneedling radio frequency (RF) devices, so I was wary at first, until I found out more about the technique used by Seema.



Seema's company, [Luxury Innovative Skincare Limited](#), (LIS) distributes and retails the **Onyx17** system. This uses radio-frequency, a minimally invasive, non-surgical skin rejuvenation technique, that can treat a variety of skin concerns such as uneven skin tone and texture, fine lines and wrinkles, large pores, and poor facial skin laxity.

**How does it work?** The RF energy is delivered through the focused tip of the microneedles, leading to far less trauma to the surrounding epidermis. This leads to significantly decreasing the discomfort and down time for the patient compared to conventional fractional lasers. Insulated microneedles are more effective and take care of both epidermal and dermal problems without the need for additional superficial fractional RF treatments (SFRs).

If needed, there's also an Acne pen that delivers energy into the pustules killing the acne-causing bacteria and reducing inflammation. ***This is great for teenagers and/or folk with acne scarring.***

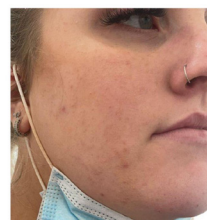
**How Long Does the Treatment Take?** There's no need for any topical anaesthetic cream prior to treatment, and the treatment takes 30 to 45 minutes, including after care.

**How Does the Treatment Feel?** Seema controls the energy, thus tailoring the treatment, and she keeps asking if you're in any discomfort. The area around the eyebrows (where obviously there is little flesh) was very slightly uncomfortable, but on the whole, the treatment was pain free and rather relaxing. There is a gentle prickling of the skin and a warming sensation.

**How Long is Recovery after Treatment?** Initially, you may experience a rash (transient erythema) on the treated areas for 3-4 hours. The downtime involved with treatments are significantly reduced due to it targeting the deeper layers of the skin. Acne patients don't need any down time. I hardly had any rash at all, but my skin was pink, and felt as if I'd been in the sun for a while, which in winter, was rather nice!



**Before**



**After**



**Before**



**After**



**How Many Treatments Does One Require?** The typical interval between sessions is once every 6 weeks.



Most patients see excellent results following 2-4 treatments, however, this may vary according to individual skin condition, and further treatments may be required once an assessment has been made. Serums can be used to take the treatment to another level. Acne patients can be treated weekly if required.

Seema started the process by a 'resurfacing' treatment. What this does is correct typical signs of ageing: pigmentation; wrinkles and dull, sallow appearance of the skin. It's a cream that improves one's complexion and removes dead skin.

Then the **RF microneedling** (with heated needles) took place, followed by serums. Seema also used an additional treatment

on me called **Mesoline Tight**, a range of science-based anti-aging products for aesthetic mesotherapy treatments. Specially selected ingredients target specific problems of the face, hair and body. Mesoline Tight is used to restore firmness and skin density. With every treatment skin becomes smoother, brighter and more plump, stretch marks become less visible, and fine lines and wrinkles are reduced. The key active ingredients: DMAE; Coenzyme Q10; Ferulic Acid; Silicon and Vitamin B5. Results, amazingly, are noticeable from the first session, but become more noticeable as treatment continues. For best results she recommends weekly application for four weeks and a top-up every 2-3 months.

She also used a **polynucleotide**. They are basically salmon and trout DNA and RNA, used to stimulate and rejuvenate the appearance of skin. Some say it is a subtle form of Botox, and is used in the under eye area and the folds between the nose and mouth (nasolabial folds). It gives similar 'plumping out' results to those of Botox, but without being invasive.

After this, Seema used the needles again, without any heat, to administer the serums back into the treated area.

**Million Dollar Questions: Does it Work and is it Worth it?** Without a doubt - yes!

I had people commenting on how good my skin was within a few weeks of my first treatment. These were people who knew me, but had no idea I was having microneedling. I would recommend it in a heartbeat, especially if you have a big event coming up.

**What Other Things or Areas Can it Help?**

'Bingo Wings' can be helped considerably - as can necks with lots of creases and stomachs with folds of flesh (perhaps after childbirth or weight loss)

**What Does it Cost?** In all I had four sessions locally with Seema at LIS. More information is on the link [here](#) Costs are from £350. There's lots of information available about microneedling - have a look at this link [here](#)

**Special Offer for Tribune Readers**

Purchase a package of three RF Microneedling sessions from Luxury Innovative Skincare and receive a free serum treatment (worth £125) with the final session - mention the Tribune offer on booking. This offer is available for bookings until end of April 2026 (treatments can be any time in 2026, subject to availability)



**Before**



**After**

*This is the experience of a contributor to the Twickenham & Richmond Tribune and the publication is not endorsing the microneedling process.*

# St Mary's University

## St Mary's Staff Member Completes 250km Desert Ultra-Marathon with Support from Students

Michael Collins, Assistant Head of Sport Development at St Mary's University, London, has successfully completed one of the toughest endurance events: a 5-day 250km self-supported ultra marathon across the Namibian desert. Covering the distance over five days, Michael finished in an impressive 4th place, in an event that historically has close to a 40% dropout rate.



sweat rate and physiological response with temperatures up to 40 degrees and 51% humidity, with the weight he'll be expected to carry, enabling them to design a precise hydration plan to prevent dehydration and overheating during the race.

Physiology students also supported him in pacing strategies and recovery planning for repeated long-distance efforts across consecutive days.

Michael says: *"I was thrilled to give students this hands-on experience, which really paid off as they gave me a great plan. Their work meant I went into the race knowing exactly what to eat and when, how much to drink, and how to manage the extreme conditions. Their involvement helped me prepare physically, tactically and kept me mentally strong when things got tough out there."*

The race required participants to carry everything they needed on their backs – including food, sleeping equipment, and medical supplies – while navigating temperatures reaching highs of 54 degree, long stretches of sand dunes, rocky terrain and minimal shade.

A seasoned endurance runner with over 50 marathons completed, Michael described the event as, "Undoubtedly the hardest endurance event I've done in my life", citing the extreme heat, constant sand running, calorie deficit, foot injuries, and sleep deprivation as significant challenges.

In the months leading up to race, Michael worked closely with St Mary's students and staff across nutrition and physiology. Students created a day-by-day nutrition strategy in the University's labs, modelling calorie demand, hydration schedules and pack weigh optimisation.

In the heat chamber, students tested Michael's

[Dr James Fleming](#), Associate Head of School for Nutrition, said, *"It was a pleasure to help Michael prepare for this race. This is an outstanding example of how our academic programmes translate research and theory into real world impact. Students have a unique opportunity to apply their knowledge, and Michael's performance shows the strength of that collaboration. We look forward to standing alongside him once again as he prepares for his next extraordinary endeavour, the Marathon des Sables in 2026, and we cannot wait to support him every step of the way."*

The achievement highlights the University's expertise in elite-level sport performance, sport science and applied learning opportunities.

[Inside St Mary's: Race to the Extreme - Michael vs the Desert](#)



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London



# Two Outstanding Students Receive Jack Petchey Awards

From Richmond upon Thames College

This winter term we were pleased to award two of our outstanding students with [Jack Petchey](#) Achievement Awards.

Through being a part of the [award scheme](#), students and staff at Richmond upon Thames College (RuTC) are able to nominate deserving students to celebrate and acknowledge. The award winner receives a certificate, pin badge and a book about Sir Jack Petchey. With their classmates they also choose how to spend a £300 grant to enhance their class learning experience.

## Abigail's Positivity



Travel & Tourism student, Abigail Liggitt, won the award for being a hardworking and polite learner, whose dedication to her studies and positive attitude allow her to stand out among her peers. She consistently demonstrates a respectful and considerate demeanour, treating both her classmates and teachers with kindness and understanding. Abigail's ability to remain focused and determined in her work, while maintaining a cheerful and approachable personality, has earned her the admiration of those around her.

As a true role model, Abigail leads by example in all aspects of college life. She is known for her willingness to help others and her natural ability to work collaboratively. Her ever-present smiling face creates a positive atmosphere wherever she goes, and her upbeat energy is contagious. Abigail's combination of diligence, kindness, and leadership qualities makes her a standout student and a cherished member of her school community.

## Saveon's Supportive Nature



Saveon is a well-liked and respected member of the college community, admired by both his peers and teachers for his positive attitude and supportive nature. He has an innate ability to connect with others, making him approachable and easy to talk to, which is why so many of his classmates often seek his guidance and support. He is particularly well-regarded for his willingness to assist those around him, whether it's helping a peer understand a difficult concept or offering words of encouragement during challenging times. His kind and empathetic approach has fostered a sense of trust and camaraderie amongst his peers.

Academically, he consistently produces work of a high standard. His dedication to his studies is evident in the quality of his assignments, which are always thorough, well-researched, and thoughtfully presented. He demonstrates a strong understanding of the subjects he engages with, and his ability to apply this knowledge in a practical and meaningful way is commendable. His teachers often praise his commitment to excellence and his ability to remain focused and motivated in the classroom. What stands out most is his ability to balance his own challenges with his willingness to help others. He never hesitates to put the needs of his peers above his own, demonstrating a selflessness that is rare.

Amazing work, both!

[Learn more about studying at Richmond upon Thames College and the courses on offer here.](#)



# Red Roses World Cup Winner Ellie Kildunne Nominated for Sports Personality of The Year

The 26-year-old is the first ever female rugby player to be nominated for the prestigious accolade, and the first English rugby player to be among the frontrunners since fellow Rugby World Cup winners Jason Robinson and Jonny Wilkinson in 2007.

Kildunne has endeared herself to the hearts of the world this year via her world-class on-pitch talent and engaging personality off the pitch. Her famously coined lasso dance has inspired fans to proudly wear Red Roses cowgirl hats to cheer on the team throughout the year, while Barbie celebrated her role model status by creating a one-of-a-kind doll of her in a bid to inspire girls into sport.

Heading into 2025 as World Player of the Year, Kildunne was instrumental in England's title successes over the past 12 months. The Harlequin scored a hat-trick on her 50th international cap against Wales as England went on to win a seventh consecutive Guinness Women's Six Nations title in the spring.



Attention then turned to a summer of women's sport and the Women's Rugby World Cup on home soil. Kildunne dotted down for two tries in the tournament opener win over USA and proved influential with two stunning efforts in the semi-final against France. A player for the big occasion, she also ran in a superb try in the World Cup final against Canada as the Red Roses secured their first world title since 2014 in front of a world-record crowd of 81,885 at Allianz Stadium.

*"It's a great privilege to be shortlisted for BBC Sports Personality of the Year," Kildunne said. "Whenever you step out on to the field as a Red Rose, you understand the personal responsibility that comes with representing your country and what it takes to achieve something together. "Winning the World Cup with your best mates is a feeling I can't really describe. There are so many good people around me that have helped guide me on my journey over the past year and I am truly grateful to every single one of them. "The support from the fans has been incredible. The cowboy hats in the crowd, the amazing messages on social media, the handwritten letters, people turning out in their thousands to watch us... it's why I love this sport. There is now an expectation for us to keep going and keep striving for greater things. It makes me excited for my personal journey ahead but also what's to come for the Red Roses and women's rugby."*

The 2025 BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards - hosted by Clare Balding, Gabby Logan and Alex Scott - will broadcast live from the home of BBC Sport at MediaCity, Salford, on Thursday 18 December, from 7pm to 9pm on BBC One and iPlayer.

To vote for Kildunne as BBC Sports Personality of the Year for 2025, head to [bbc.co.uk/spoty](https://bbc.co.uk/spoty). The voting for the main award will open and close during the live show.





# Match Preview: Brentford v Leeds United

Written by Brentford Football Club

Brentford welcome Leeds United to Gtech Community Stadium on Sunday. Kick-off is at 4.30pm and the game will be broadcast live on *Sky Sports*.

Keith Andrews' side have lost just one of their seven home games in the Premier League this season, while Leeds have lifted themselves out of the relegation zone with impressive results against Chelsea and Liverpool.

Analysis, team news, match officials and more. Here's everything you need to know ahead of the Bees' latest test.

## Pre-match Analysis

Stephen Gillett, *Playmaker Stats*: Set-piece battle could spark Brentford's meeting with Leeds into life

Brentford and Leeds United's numbers suggest a dead ball might be what sparks this game into life.

Only the Premier League's top three sides have earned more home points than Brentford (16) in 2025/26, but the Bees face a resurgent Leeds outfit buoyed by an impressive 3-1 victory over Chelsea and a 3-3 draw with Liverpool at Elland Road over the past week.

Ao Tanaka's dramatic late equaliser against the reigning champions came from a corner, and Daniel Farke's men have been one of the league's standout set-piece sides this season - with only Arsenal (10) and Chelsea (9) having scored more goals from corners, free-kicks and throws than the Whites (8).

Add in Dominic Calvert-Lewin's spot-kick against Arne Slot's Reds and Lukas Nmecha's penalty versus Everton on the opening day, and more than half (53 per cent) of Leeds' 19 Premier League goals this term have come from dead balls.

Brentford have scored three set-piece goals of their own, but their main source of dead-ball joy has been from the spot. The Bees have been awarded more penalties (7) than any other top-flight side this season and converted five of them – and there's arguably no player in Europe you'd prefer charging into the box right now than Dango Ouattara.

Set to join up with Burkina Faso for the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco shortly, Ouattara has won more penalties (4) than any player across UEFA's top five leagues this season - and Brentford are making the most of the 23-year-old's elusive dribbling ability.

Leeds will be pleased with their set-piece return, but Brentford head coach Keith Andrews will still want his side to boost their own output.



The underlying numbers suggest chance creation isn't the problem, though: only Arsenal (8.41 xG), Crystal Palace (7.56 xG) and Manchester United (7.23 xG) have generated more expected goals from set-pieces than Brentford (6.80 xG), with 42 per cent of their set-pieces ending in a shot.

How each team scores their goals is revealing, but so is the timing of them. Leeds (5) rank joint-first for goals scored in the opening 15 minutes of Premier League matches in 2025/26, while only Sunderland can match Brentford's tally of five goals in second-half stoppage time.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin is featured in our matchday programme this Sunday, and his aerial battle with the Bees' backline promises to be a highlight. Only Everton's Thierno Barry and Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk have contested more aerial duels than DCL (100) so far this season, but the 28-year-old now faces Brentford's Sepp van den Berg - who ranks third in the division for aerials won.

There is a case to be made, however, that Brentford's Class of 25/26 are even more dominant in the air at the sharp end of the pitch. Igor Thiago (3rd), Kevin Schade (4th) and Dango Ouattara (7th) all rank inside the Premier League's top 10 forwards for aerial duels won this season, forming what is arguably the most formidable aerial trio in the division.

With two sides this dangerous from dead balls and in the air, one moment – one well-timed leap, one pinpoint delivery – may be all it takes.

### Scout Report

Dan Long, *Sky Sports*: Upturn in form lifts Leeds out of the Premier League relegation zone

Leeds United had two excellent seasons back in the Championship after they were relegated from the Premier League in 2022/23.

In 2023/24 - Daniel Farke's first at the club - they stormed into title contention with a run of 13 wins in 15 games between 1 January and 1 April.

They finally reached the summit on 17 March, but then stage fright took hold. Eight points from the final eight allowed Leicester and Ipswich to pull away and pip them to automatic promotion by seven and six points respectively.

Farke's former employers Norwich were put to the sword in the play-off semi-finals, but Adam Armstrong's strike after 24 minutes for Southampton at Wembley sent Saints up at Leeds' expense. Farke called for his players to "rest and use the disappointment as motivation for next season."

And that's exactly what they did. This time Leeds were top of the pile from Boxing Day until the end of the season, bar two weeks at the end of March and beginning of April, owing to draws with Swansea and Luton.

They finished with a flourish, too, winning each of the last six with 16 goals scored and just two conceded.

Farke had wrapped up his third Championship title in style and Leeds became one of the select few to reach a century of points in the division.

Leeds invested in the summer, keen to add the depth and quality that would help them to avoid another relegation. Strangely, though, after 15 games, they have the same record as they did in 2022/23: won four, drawn three, lost eight.



But with the table being as tight as it is right now, they were 12th at the same point in 2022/23 and are 16th in 2025/26.

Farke looked to be under pressure recently, most likely due to the run of six losses in seven between 4 October and 29 November. But, [as The Athletic's Ben Cross explained to us this week](#), he tweaked his formation to 5-3-2 in the second half of the 3-2 defeat at Man City, which has gone some way to breathing new life into this Leeds side.

In that game, they pulled it back to 2-2 from 2-0 down, before Phil Foden's 91st-minute winner.

Leeds won 3-1 at home to Chelsea, then came back from 2-0 down again, this time at home to Liverpool, and ended up drawing 3-3.

Those four points have moved them out of the relegation zone and fired a warning shot to those currently both above and below them.

## In the Dugout

Daniel Farke

Before venturing into coaching, Daniel Farke forged a career as a striker in Germany's lower leagues.

A prolific frontman in his day, he had three spells at SV Lippstadt, who are based in western Germany, close to his hometown Steinhausen.

After hanging his boots up, Farke became Lippstadt manager in 2009 and guided his team to back-to-back promotions from the sixth tier to the fourth.

Farke stayed at Stadion Am Bruchbaum for six years in all until, in November 2015, he took the job at Borussia Dortmund II, who were also in the fourth tier of German football.

In his first season, they finished fourth and in his second, they finished second, nine points behind champions Viktoria Köln.

When his contract was not renewed, Farke took the opportunity to move abroad for the first time and sign a two-year deal at Norwich.

He remained at Carrow Road for just shy of four-and-a-half years, managing 208 games in all competitions and leading the Canaries to the Championship title in both 2018/19 and 2020/21.

Norwich took just five points from their opening 11 Premier League games in 2021/22, however, and he was dismissed in November 2021, less than four months after signing a new four-year contract.

Two months later, in January 2022, Farke signed a two-and-a-half-year deal at Russian side Krasnodar, but he never managed a game and left in March, less than a fortnight after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

He subsequently returned to Germany to take over at Borussia Mönchengladbach but was sacked just one season into a three-year contract with Die Fohlen.

Farke was appointed at Leeds in July 2023 and took charge of his 100th game in April.



# London Councils welcomes new homelessness strategy

From London Councils

Responding to the government's new national strategy on homelessness, **Cllr Grace Williams, London Councils' Executive Member for Housing & Regeneration**, said:

*"London is grappling with the most severe homelessness emergency in the country. We estimate one in 50 Londoners currently live in temporary accommodation, with at least one homeless child in every London classroom. "Boroughs welcome this new national strategy from the government. We are particularly pleased that the strategy takes a cross-departmental approach, acknowledges the urgent need to get homeless families out of inappropriate temporary accommodation, and brings a much-needed funding boost for homelessness services.*

*"Reversing the rising tide of homelessness should certainly be a national priority and will not happen overnight. Further action will be needed and we remain extremely concerned about the unsustainable pressures on London boroughs' temporary accommodation resources. We will continue to highlight the challenges in the capital and work with ministers on tackling this crisis."*

London accounts for more than half of all homeless households in England. London Councils estimates that more than 180,000 Londoners – equivalent to one in 50 residents of the capital – are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. This figure includes one in 21 children in the capital, meaning there is at least one homeless child in every London classroom. More than 330,000 households are on waiting lists for social housing in London.

The cross-party group warns of the devastating impact on individuals, as well as the unsustainable pressures on local services. Boroughs in the capital collectively spend £5.5m every day on homelessness provision.

London Councils is committed to working with the government to tackle homelessness. Boroughs welcomed the government's decision earlier this year to extend the Local Authority Housing Fund (which provides funding to councils to buy homes for use as temporary accommodation), the uplift to the Homelessness Prevention Grant received by London boroughs, and up to £11.7bn of investment in housebuilding in the capital through the Social and Affordable Homes Programme over the coming decade.

London Councils and the Mayor of London have also launched the [Ending Homelessness Accelerator Programme](#), which has secured funding support from the government.

As policy priorities for making faster progress, London Councils is seeking:

- **Help meeting London's spiralling temporary accommodation bill.** The amount the government pays councils through the welfare system to subsidise temporary accommodation has been frozen since 2011, even though housing costs have increased hugely in the subsequent 14 years. Insufficient funding means temporary accommodation is more likely to be poor quality and further away from the borough, representing worse value for money, poorer outcomes for families, and less funding to invest in other services that all residents rely on. Increasing the subsidy so it is more in line with today's housing costs



is vital for sustaining boroughs' finances and enabling them to keep supporting homeless Londoners.

- **A boost to Local Housing Allowance rates across the board.** LHA rates also need to increase more widely to reflect the true cost of private rents. Too many low-income Londoners are struggling to find homes within LHA limits, putting them at risk of homelessness and adding pressure to local services.
- **Additional capital funding for councils to build or buy homes.** Building on positive initiatives like the Local Authority Housing Fund, the government should further increase boroughs' capital funding to build or acquire properties. This would improve both the quality and value of temporary accommodation, particularly by reducing local authorities' reliance on a sometimes volatile private rented sector, while also helping to meet long-term housing needs.
- **Action to sustain social housing finances and enable expanded delivery of homes for social rent.** London's social housing sector faces an ongoing financial crisis, with boroughs being forced to plan cutbacks in their council housing budgets at a time when additional investment is desperately needed. London Councils is calling for more support, especially through the government's upcoming decision on social rent policy and setting a 'rent convergence' rate. To ensure fairness and ensure boroughs have the resources they require to grow social housing provision in the capital, London Councils is asking the government to enable a social rent 'convergence rate' of at least £3 per week from April 2026.



## Government homelessness strategy

From Local Government Association

Responding to the Government's homelessness strategy, *National Plan to End Homelessness*, Cllr Tom Hunt, Chair of the LGA's Inclusive Growth Committee, said: *"This is an ambitious strategy – its goal of ending homelessness for good is admirable. It will help prevent homelessness, and support those who are homeless to find a home."*

*"There is still a lot of work to be done to deliver this, and the Government needs to ensure that councils are sufficiently funded and empowered to do so."*

*"Specifically, the Government must ensure there is greater accountability to ensure all stakeholders are involved and incentivised to prevent homelessness, ensure that these goals can be delivered, foster collaboration between partners and have evidence-based policy underpinning this."*

*"We look forward to working with the Government – as this strategy acknowledges, local government has a crucial role to play in turning this strategy's ambitions into reality."*



# Covid fraud cost UK taxpayer £10.9 billion, reveals independent report

From HM Treasury

Taxpayers lost £10.9 billion to fraud and error as the previous government's pandemic response left the front door open to fraud, an independent report reveals today. The Covid Counter Fraud Commissioner, Tom Hayhoe's, final report to Parliament finds many schemes - including Bounce Back Loans and Eat Out to Help Out - were rolled out with huge fraud risks and no early safeguards - costing the taxpayer millions.

Weak accountability, bad quality data and poor contracting were identified as the primary causes of the £10.9 billion pound losses - which were enough to fund daily free school meals for the UK's 2.7 eligible million children for eight years.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves appointed Tom Hayhoe in December 2024 to ensure mistakes of the past are never repeated, with this government already recouping almost £400 million of covid support cash.

**Chancellor, Rachel Reeves said:** *"Leaving the front door wide open to fraud has cost the British taxpayer £10.9 billion - money that should have been funding our public services, supporting families, and strengthening our economy."*

*"We have started returning this money to the British people and we will leave no stone unturned in rooting out the fraudsters who profited from pandemic negligence."*

The government has already actioned many of the Commissioner's early proposals. These include:

- A voluntary repayment scheme, launched in September, giving claimants until 31 December to pay up.
- Tougher sanctions powers through the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill, which became law on 2 December.
- Specialist fraud recovery teams to track down suspected fraudsters and recover taxpayer cash, from 2026.

**Josh Simons, Cabinet Office Minister, said:** *"We're taking more action to bring fraudsters to justice and make the state the hardest possible target: giving investigators new powers to take on cases, using artificial intelligence to speed-up counter-fraud work, and setting up a repayment scheme to claw back money into the public purse."*

The report highlights that counter fraud controls were 'inadequate' and only improved later in the pandemic. Hayhoe makes further recommendations to ensure the country is prepared for further crises that need an economic response from government - emphasising that future preparation and robust controls will provide the best value for money for taxpayers.

The government will consider the report in full and respond early in the new year.



HM Treasury



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