February 2026

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ORACLE

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Thorpe Bay, Southchurch,
the Garrison & Shoeburyness Area.
Circulation: 7,000



ENVIRONMENT

Southend's Hidden Waterways Polluted!

SPOTLIGHT

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

Residents of Leigh and Hadleigh are continuing their fight to protect the Greenbelt

COMPETITION

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LOCAL ISSUES

Transparency Under Scrutiny!

Why Are Other Councils Stricter Than Southend on Declarations of Interest?

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WELCOME

February is often associated with love, but love for our town means more than cards and chocolates - it means care, accountability, and standing up for what matters.

This month, a concerned local resident has written with strong views on the importance of robust anti-corruption procedures within our local council, reminding us all that transparency and trust are not optional, but a legal and moral duty.

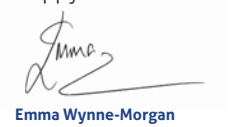
Southend Against Sewage return with a compelling and sobering article on the five key brooks in South East Essex affecting Southend. Their findings reveal elevated levels of phosphates, nitrates and E. coli, painting a worrying picture for public health and our environment.

Martin England, Head of Save Hadleigh Farmland Group, provides an update on the ongoing battle surrounding the Salvation Army Farmland, a fight many residents continue to feel deeply connected to.

Don't forget, this month's **Oracle competition** includes **a pair of tickets to *LAUREL & HARDY***, celebrating the most influential comedy partnership of all time with a new 100th anniversary touring show, presented by Neil Brand. Appearing at Palace Theatre, Westcliff on Sunday, 19 April 2026. Competition ends 28 February 2026.

As ever, this edition reflects the passion, vigilance and voices of our community.

Happy Valentines!



Emma Wynne-Morgan
Publisher

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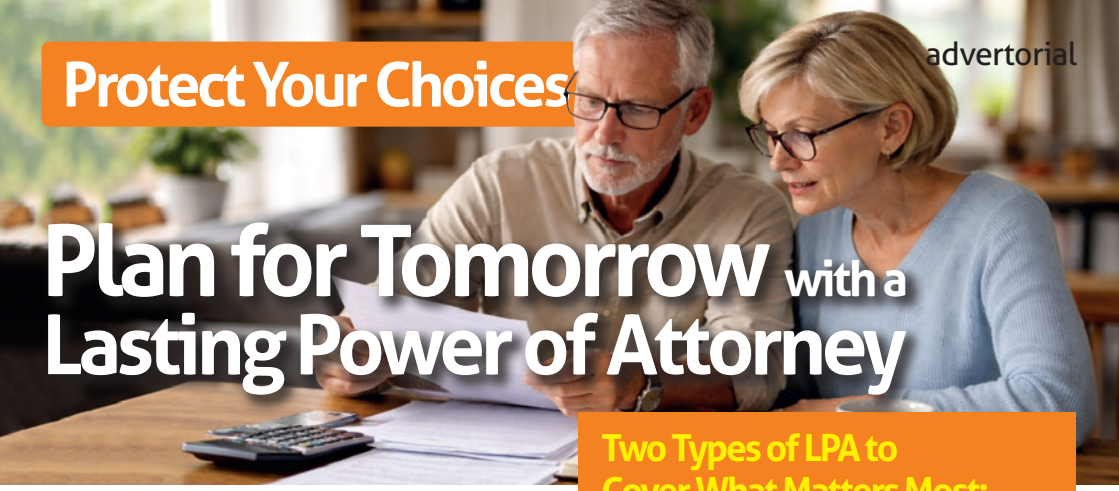
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Why are Southend Council's Councillor anti-corruption procedures less stringent than their neighbouring Councils?

I Refer to the fact that Southend Council seem to be lax when it comes to deterring potential Councillor corruption, compared to their neighbours at Rochford District Council and Castle Point Council.

I came to this conclusion after noticing on our Council's public website that some of our 51 elected Councillor's 'Declaration of Interest Forms' were missing and many of those displayed on the website showed that some Councillors had not answered some of the mandatory questions and left them blank.

This is not the first time I have had to remind our Council of their legal duty to ensure that such documentation is complete and available to the public on their website. i.e. In 2016, I raised this subject via my local Councillor and in 2023, I addressed my concerns directly to the Council's Chief Executive Officer which seemed to fall on deaf ears, as it coincided with him suddenly resigning on Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) terms, without there being any public explanation for his departure.

The law (Localism Act 2011) requires elected Councillors to declare within 28 days of them being elected their pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests and act as a deterrent to them from committing any corrupt activities within the Council's business.

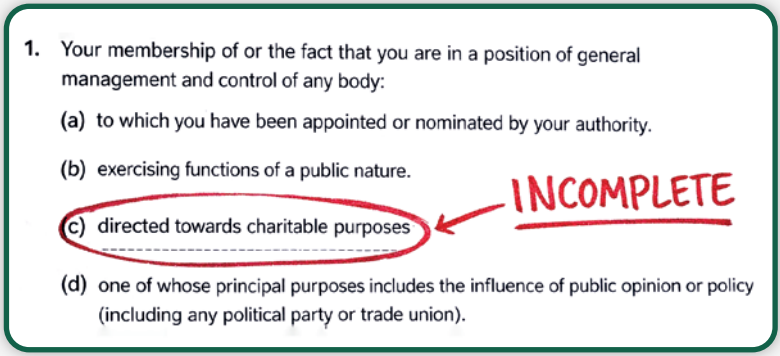
Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Council's Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority.

When after four months I had not received a response from our Council regarding my recent concerns about this subject, I referred to our Council's Constitutional Document, which sets out how our Council operates, how decisions are made and procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

It was at this stage of my research when I noticed the Constitutional Document clearly defined what information Councillors were expected to register when declaring their interests. Reference: The Code of Conduct for Councillors, Table 2, Other Registerable Interests.

Charitable Declarations Removed

However, the mandatory requirement to register any involvement with organisations directed to charitable purposes was not being reflected in the recently revised Councillor Declaration of Interest Forms, which are being displayed on the Council's public website.



Continued from previous page

Council Response Leaves Key Questions Unanswered!

I subsequently raised this issue with our Council by asking them if this meant that Councillors who belonged to organisations like freemasonry should declare their interests and received the following reply: 'It is the personal responsibility of each elected Councillor to register any interests they may have in compliance with the Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Monitoring Officer may advise Councillors but any decision rests with the Councillors themselves.'

I did not believe this response clearly answered my question, especially as the current Councillor Declaration of Interest Forms do not draw Councillor's attention to the fact that they are required to register any involvement they have with any organisations directed to charitable purposes.

Neighbours Set Higher Standards

Further research has highlighted that our neighbouring councils Rochford District and Castle Point do require their Councillors to register any interests they have with organisations directed to charitable purposes.

On checking their websites, I found their Councillors appeared to be open about their interests, from giving answers that they were members of freemasonry to belonging to scout associations.

What I don't understand is why Southend Council for years have been so lax, when it comes to their Councillor anti-corruption procedures compared to their neighbouring councils, whose procedures are far more robust and designed to demonstrate a Councillor's openness and transparency when conducting their council duties.

Transparency Prevents Future Conflicts

If in the future we have another example of a Councillor accusing a fellow Councillor of representing a housing developer, rather than his residents, as in 2016, over planning consent on a Shoeburyness flood plain. It is important that Councillor's personal interests are clearly defined when such accusations are being made. The last thing we want is our Council's business decisions to be unfairly influenced by an unelected third party.

Legal Loopholes Undermine Accountability

Unfortunately, our previous Government's decision to abolish the Standards Board and replace it with the flawed Localism Act 2011, now gives Councillors a potential legal 'get out' clause, if they plan to commit an offence and risk not being detected for three years after committing an offence. This could be a temptation when multi-million-pound council contracts and planning consents are at stake. The Localism Act 2011, Chapter 7, Section 34, Offences (7) refers.

This potential legal 'get out' clause needs to be removed by Central Government action, hopefully, supported by our two local MPs.

These changes are required if we are to protect the reputations of the majority of our local Councillors and Council officers, who are trying to do a good job and up hold our democratic values.

By Dave Lee
Local Resident

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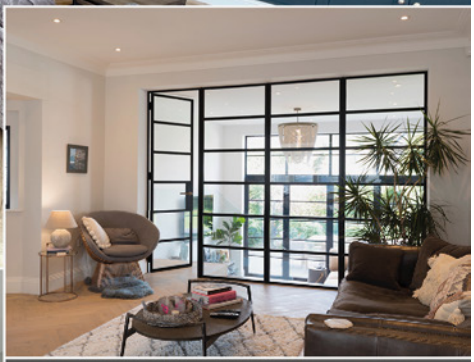
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Alarming Pollution Levels Discovered in Prittle Brook



Many people don't know that Southend has five brooks running through parks, alongside highways and underneath city streets.

The Eastwood Brook meanders eastwards out of our city boundaries, its destination, elsewhere. While the Muckinghall Brook descends from the north, towards the Thames in the south. A name change at the Thorpe Hall Avenue roundabout, transforms it to the Willingale Brook. The Shoe in Shoeburyness, goes almost unobserved until it cuts through a Lidl carpark. While the Prittle Brook runs from Daws Heath through the city and escapes out past the airport, to join the River Roach. One might be forgiven for rarely encountering any of these watercourses, for they lie almost entirely interred below street level.



These blue spaces not only had provided running water but recreation. Farm workers would jump in to cool down after working in the fields around the airport during the summer. All that came to an end in the late 1960's, as more houses were built and increasing wastewater was pumped into the brooks. These blue spaces were co-opted by the local council and water board as infrastructure, to assist in removing rain and wastewater. To this day they continue to move large quantities of water, helping to reduce flooding from Leigh to Shoebury.

Pollution Concerns Raised Locally

Last year, Southend Against Sewage were contacted by several members who shared their experiences of living close to Southend's various brooks. While some members were worried about flooding to their properties, others noticed the discolouration to the water and an accompanying nasty smell. We listened and decided that we had to take a look ourselves. Our own water tests in April and September revealed high levels of phosphates, nitrates, and E.coli. However, being a large area to investigate we decided to start with the Prittle Brook between Priory Park and Southend Airport.

Continued on page 18



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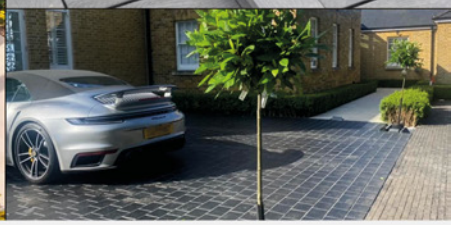
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Continued from page 14

So, equipped with E.coli tests and chest waders we set out to discover what was occurring on the Prittle Brook. We took E.coli tests at different locations. We expected that the results would be higher than in the sea, partly because the brooks contain runoff and wastewater, but the results were often 2,000 to 3,000 colonies/100ml. Which is 4–6 times above the Environment Agency current safety levels. More concerning, we found a large build-up of earth, wood, and accumulated detritus around the Priory Crescent (Three Tunnels) railway bridge. So extensive is this embankment, that two of the three tunnels are almost blocked off. The third was flowing but looked like it might be choked off in time.

A Forgotten Waterway

Close to the tunnels Anglian Water have a wastewater treatment facility. This facility manages Southends sewage requirements. Unfortunately, we found a culvert with running water pouring into the brook. Above the pipe, the facility can clearly be seen. Of course, the pipe could originate from another location, but wherever it's source, it returned several high E.coli results.



A little further up the brook a large tree had fallen, its branches holding back the steady flow. Rubbish had built up, caught on boughs, across the trunk and clinging to its crown. A sad picture of nature forlorn, a managed habitat forgotten.

We wrote to the Environment Agency with our findings, requesting the rubbish be removed, the tunnels cleared, tree felled away from the brook and culvert investigated for E.coli contamination. Finally, we included an offer in helping to clear the brook, with Environment Agency assistance. We are yet to receive a reply.

This relatively small section of Prittle Brook, has numerous problems. The brook while flowing, is slowly choking underneath our rubbish, silt, and waterborne debris. Such environments require management, but being unseen, feels forgotten.

Our hope is that with some care, much could be done to increase the health of this blue space and the creatures who reside within.

by Shah & Alex Haider
On behalf of Southend Against Sewage



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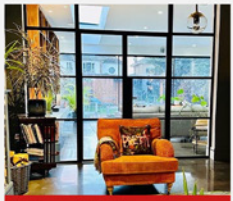
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The FIGHT Isn't Over!

Communities Stand Firm Against Greenbelt Development

By Martin England
Head of the SAVE HADLEIGH FARMLAND Group
savehadleighfarmland@gmail.com

It's a new year and the residents of Leigh and Hadleigh are continuing their fight to protect the Greenbelt, raising concerns about the Salvation Army Farmland.

Our united campaign group believe that the Salvation Army are still considering whether to proceed with the development on the Farmland, so we have delivered 1,000 leaflets to residents urging them to write to the Salvation Army with their concerns.

Pressure Mounts on Landowners

The Save Hadleigh Farmland residents group was set up in August 2024, to support the local community of Hadleigh, and Leigh on Sea, in the fight to stop the development of thousands of homes on the Greenbelt. The Salvation Army, which owns the historic land, are creating "suspicion" among residents by refusing to rule out development, following the exclusion of the site from the Castle Point local plan. The campaigners have received email responses from the charity that have no real answers, so put together a letter that succinctly makes their position clear and have sent it to the Salvation Army Commissioner, Paul Main, to press for a clear response on whether they intend to pursue development.



Leigh campaigner, Keith Murray stated that since the Salvation Army offered the farmland for development, the proposal has been resolutely rejected by local residents, Castle Point Council, Leigh Town Council, Southend City Council, Dame Rebecca Harris MP, and David Burton-Sampson MP, with all political party's united in opposition to development on this iconic landscape. This lack of clarity is making the Salvation Army unpopular, creating suspicion within a community that's always supported and embraced it, so it's a good time to remind them of the strength of local feeling about the potential building on this land

Since the group's formation, 8517 people signed a petition backing the group's aims, and thanks to those residents views, Castle Point Council had excluded the farmland site from its Local Plan. Our SHF group have continually warned the Councillors about their local plan, and after three years in the making, at a cost of £1.7 million,

Continued on page 28





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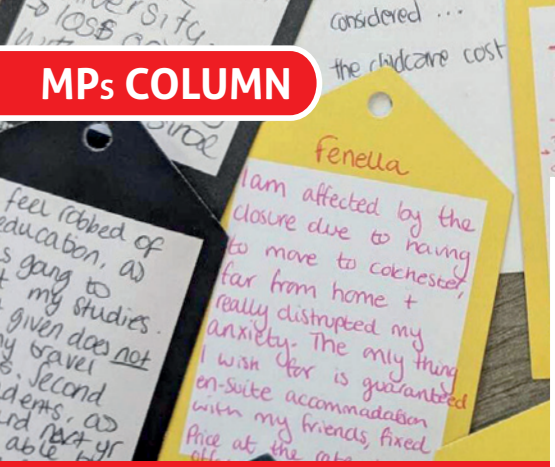
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Southend Campus Closure:

Standing up for our city in Parliament

December last year, the University of Essex announced its decision to close the Southend campus, a move that sent shockwaves through our city.

Staff, students and the wider community are now feeling the consequences of a decision with no assurances of what this means for their futures.

The closure raises serious questions about access to higher education and regional inequality. Higher education should never be a privilege reserved for the few. It should be open to everyone, regardless of background or postcode.

Real Lives, Real Consequences

That is why I recently secured an Adjournment Debate in Parliament on government support for higher education. It provided an opportunity to bring the real human impact of this decision into the national conversation. I spoke about Lulu, a first-year student whose studies have been thrown into uncertainty; Jane, a long-standing member of staff who has supported generations of students through university accommodation; and a lecturer recruited from Brazil who now faces a 60-day countdown to deportation if made redundant under the terms of her skilled worker visa.

Across the country, higher education institutions are facing unprecedented pressures following 14 years of underinvestment by the previous administration. The government has acknowledged this challenge, introducing inflation-based increases to maintenance loans and tuition fees, alongside plans to rejoin the Erasmus scheme, which together are expected to provide long overdue financial relief.

Calling for Further Support

While these steps are welcome, I continue to urge the Government to explore additional support. We can learn from international examples where strong partnerships between universities and industry drive innovation which provides more income stability through the commercialisation of intellectual property, supported by both public and private investment. As reforms to the Intellectual Property Office progress, it is vital that universities are fully considered. Beyond this, we should strengthen industry links for students through work placements and skills-based modules and seriously examine the reintroduction of university grants to reduce over-reliance on ever-increasing international student numbers.

A Long-Term Vision Needed

It is important that the future of higher education in places like Southend is shaped through constructive dialogue and long-term planning. Universities play a vital role in supporting local economies, developing skills, and widening opportunity, and with the right support they can continue to do so sustainably.



I will continue to engage with the Government and the university to advocate for a solution that benefits staff, students and for Southend as a city.

by Bayo Alaba
MP for Southend East and Rochford
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Continued from page 22

Castle Point Council has decided to progress the plan to the examination stage. There's no guarantee it will be found sound by government inspectors, with a housing target that's 53% of the Government's target, making an unsound plan with intervention a reality.

Protecting Openness and Nature

We want to engage with the Salvation Army, so they understand the residents feelings, that the local plan spelled out, there is no building on this site, and that current planning rules would object to any development. The Hadleigh Farmland is an important area of openness, natural beauty, public spaces and biodiversity, so our groups aim is to get this site protected with an environmental policy based on agriculture, nature conservation, ecological restoration, and connectivity for wildlife.



Southend Faces Wider Strain

This historical site is the birthplace of the Salvation Army's Hadleigh Colony, in 1891, as part of the first General of the Salvation Army William Booth's social reform project. The site borders on the Heritage England site for Hadleigh Castle, built around 1215, which was the subject of John Constable's famous landscape painting in 1829, with the Thames Estuary views, and borders the 387 acre Hadleigh Country Park, which hosted the 2012 Olympic Mountain Bike races.



The Salvation Army state the farmland has struggled for years due to poor soil quality, low yields, which makes farming unviable, with the area historically known as the "Badlands". The poor soil quality has been well documented over the last 130 years, even mentioned by Novelist, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, who wrote in 1900's, after visiting the Colony, about the unskilled labour, who he described as "wretched men, training them to produce amazing results from unpromising soil." The Salvation Army need reminding of their mission then and what those poor men achieved. Modern regenerative farming practices would solve soil infertility, still produce bumper crops, enhance our natural environment, and the protection of farming is so important to our food security.

Residents Demand Clear Decision

The message is clear, that any development on this site has been resolutely rejected by local residents, and as a charity this cannot be part of the Salvation Army's mission statement, which will affect their legacy. We urge the Salvation Army to end this unhappy episode by publicly announcing they no longer seek to develop this beautiful open space, and residents deserve a decision.

The SHF group have campaigned vociferously and will continue to challenge any future plans for development on this site, as we strongly object to any housing on this farmland.

To support the campaign, email savehadleighfarmland@gmail.com

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NPT and Trading Standards Uncover £12k Stash of Illegal Goods!

Proactive work by Southend Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) and the city council's trading standards officials led to the discovery of £12,000-worth of illegal products.

Three stores suspected of handling stolen goods were targeted, with a search at one shop on the edge of the city centre revealing illegal tobacco pouches, cigarettes, vapes and children's toys that didn't meet safety regulations. The items were discovered hidden in a cavity behind a false wall.

Stock Seized, Investigation Ongoing



The stock was seized and will be destroyed. The business owners will be interviewed under caution before a decision is made about whether the council will prosecute.

The work is part of the NPT's crackdown on shoplifting in the city. Officers are using forensic DNA marking on products that are frequently stolen so they can be traced back to the shops they originated from.

Shops are also being encouraged to sign up to a responsible retailer scheme where they will pledge to only buy products from reputable sources.

Stolen To Order Claims

A/Sgt Lois Greenlees leads the operation and believes that many items are being stolen to order:

"Retailers in the city are being repeatedly hit, and items are being offloaded quickly. You're not going to steal detergent or chocolate in bulk unless you're confident you've got somewhere to sell it on.

"This is all linked to drug use with people stealing to access quick cash to feed their addictions. By using DNA marking and targeting shops where we believe stolen items are being sold on, we're looking to cut off that market.

"Trading Standards have extensive search powers and by working together, getting support from retailers and making frequent spot checks, we are confident we can drive down offending."

Health Risks Highlighted

Cllr Martin Terry, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services, added:

"Illegal tobacco and counterfeit vapes are dangerous, harm people's health, and undermine honest local businesses. They're often linked to organised crime, which is why working in partnership with Essex Police is so important.

"I'm very pleased with the outcome of this recent joint operation, where our Trading Standards officers uncovered nearly £12,000 worth of illegal products, including cigarettes hidden in roof insulation. These items will now be destroyed, and those responsible will face further action. Trading Standards have the powers to prosecute offenders, and we will use them where necessary.

"This sends a clear message: Southend will not tolerate criminal trading, and we will continue joint operations to keep these harmful goods off our streets."

Keep up to date with the latest news from Essex Police on **facebook.com/EPSouthend** and **@EPSouthend** on Twitter.

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Update from Essex Chambers of Commerce

First, Happy New Year to you! Whilst November's Budget did not impose any significant new taxes on business, which was welcome, we know that many businesses, especially in the hospitality sector, which is so important to Southend, are feeling the pinch and concerned about steep rises in business rates as well as the cumulative impact of other pressures already being experienced. The result is that business confidence remains in a slump.

Hope for Fairer Rates

The one chink of light is that the government does seem prepared to listen and on occasion respond to pressure – witness the rollback (U-turn) on pubs. We at the Chambers will continue to support the British Chambers of Commerce's pushback to government and the campaign for a proper, thorough reform of business rates so that the sudden, hefty increases that affect all businesses are removed. Ultimately a system that is more closely linked to turnover, profitability or some other measure of ability to pay must be the goal. Any ideas from readers on a fairer system would be gratefully received!

Mayor Plans Delayed Again

Since our last update the government has announced a two-year postponement of the introduction of a Mayoral strategic authority for Essex. We are disappointed that an election for a Mayor will not now take place in May this year. Although it does make some sense to elect a Mayor at the same time as the local government reorganisation is complete the timetable was government's own so the need to postpone could have been avoided.

Reform Still On Track

The postponement does not affect the process of local government reform which will go ahead as planned, with the aim of being completed by 2028. The consultation on this subject has now closed so we await with interest the government's decision on how many new unitary authorities will replace the existing fifteen upper and lower tier councils in Essex.

Change Brings Long-Term Benefits

Whatever the decision, the reorganisation will be an enormous and challenging task to complete whilst keeping service delivery on track – so we wish our local council and those across Essex good luck! We believe the change will, in the end, bring simplification and efficiency to local government service delivery as well as cost savings and better value for money for council tax and business rate payers.

If you have any comments or questions please contact **Iain McNab**, (Head of Policy) at ***iainmcnab@essexchambers.co.uk***

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Hints and ideas
for your Garden in February

Days to Remember

2nd February
Hedgehog Day

14th February
Valentine's Day

14th – 21st February
National Nest Box Week

20th February
Love Your Pet Day

On the plot

Seed potatoes are in stock now and should be chitted before planting to encourage strong, early growth. Chillies and early tomatoes can be sown this month for heated glasshouses, giving them plenty of time to establish before spring. February is also an excellent time to plant fruit trees, with a wide selection available, along with soft fruits such as raspberries, blueberries and currants. Take advantage of quieter days to give your greenhouse a thorough spring clean, removing algae, debris and old pots to create a healthy growing environment for the months ahead.

In the Garden

Evergreen shrubs can be pruned this month to maintain shape and encourage fresh growth. Roses, wisteria and clematis also benefit from pruning now, helping to promote strong flowering later in the year. Sweet peas can be sown indoors ready for planting out in spring, while summer-flowering bulbs such as lilies and nerines can be planted in borders or containers. Tidy up perennials by removing dead leaves and old stalks, and trim deciduous hedges before birds begin nesting. If conditions allow, give your lawn its first light cut to freshen it up after winter.

By the pond

February is a good time to clean pond filters and service pumps, ensuring everything is working efficiently before spring. Remove any dead leaves or decaying plant material from the water to maintain good water quality. Take a little time to observe your fish, checking their general health as they begin to become more active.

About the house:

Houseplants will appreciate being repotted this month, giving roots more space and fresh compost to support new growth. Citrus trees can also be repotted if needed. As amaryllis flowers fade, deadhead them to keep plants tidy and healthy. It's also a great time to explore our beautiful range of plant pots and houseplants currently in stock, perfect for refreshing indoor spaces.

Family & Friends

With Valentine's Day on 14th February, it's a lovely opportunity to treat someone special. The 2nd of February marks Hedgehog Day, a reminder to be mindful of wildlife in the garden. National Nest Box Week runs from 14th to 21st February, making it the ideal time to put up nesting boxes, a wide range is available in our Pets & Wildlife department. As the weather remains cold, continue to hang fat balls and keep bird feeders well stocked. And don't forget the 20th of February is 'Love Your Pet Day', a perfect excuse to spoil your furry friends.

Tip

When putting up nest boxes, face them between north and east to avoid strong sunlight and the wettest winds.

Pick of the month

- **House:** Anthuriums
- **Shrubs:** Roses
- **Climbers:** Clematis armandii
- **Fruit:** Raspberries, currants, blackberries and blueberries

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by Judy Barden

Next month's recipe: Lime marmalade Chicken

INGREDIENTS (CUTS INTO 16)

For the chocolate cake

- For the chocolate cake
- 175g/6oz butter, plus extra for greasing
- 200g/8oz light brown soft sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 140g/5oz self-raising flour
- 50g/2oz cocoa powder

For the rocky road

- 100g/4oz butter
- 300g/11oz dark chocolate, roughly chopped
- 3 tbsp golden syrup
- 12 marshmallows, halved with scissors
- 85g/3oz maltesers
- 85g/3oz raisins
- 50g/2oz walnut halves

For the chocolate cake, heat the oven to 180c/fan160/gas 4 and grease and line the base and sides of a 20cm/8inch square cake tin

Gently melt the butter in a large pan, cool for 5 minutes, then stir in the sugar, eggs, flour and cocoa and beat well. Spoon into the tin and level the surface then bake for 35 minutes until a skewer comes out clean.

To make the topping, gently melt the butter sugar and syrup together. Cool for 15 mins then stir in the marshmallows, Maltesers, raisins and walnuts. Make sure the chocolate is cool or the marshmallows will melt. Spoon on top of the cake and lightly spread to cover completely.

Leave to set in a cool place, then remove from the tin and remove the paper. Cut into squares and eat. Will keep in a tin/Tupperware in a cool place for 2-3 days or freeze.

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	7		2	8				9
8	2		5	1				7
4	5	9	6			2		8
6	4					9	7	
	3	5		4			2	
			3	2		5	4	
		7				1		4
2	6	4					8	
		3		6	5		9	

SUDOKU – Enter numbers into the blank spaces so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

GUESS THE MOVIE

Name the title of the movie from the description below.



Description:

Each attempt at escape leads nowhere new, forcing a life to be examined in full, stripped of shortcuts, until patience, empathy, and humility quietly rewrite the rules.

Name the movie:

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

CONUNDRUM – Unscramble to solve the clue.

G	R	A	C	Y	M	A	N	D

Clue: A sweet message sent to someone special (often with sweets attached).

NEXT

BUSY

WORD LADDER – Climb the ladder, changing one letter each rung to make a new word.

CROSSWORD

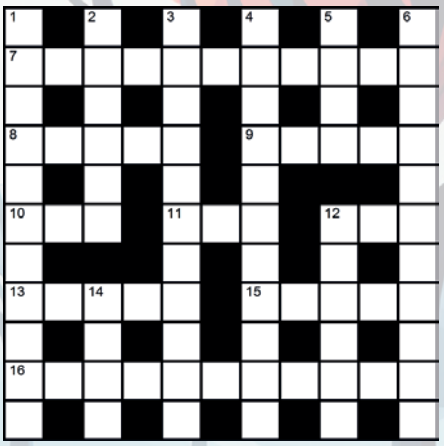
Complete the crossword from the clues provided below.

Across

7 Where rumours may be heard (2,3,6)
8 Deplete (5)
9 Lover of Juliet (5)
10 Consume (3)
11 Posed (3)
12 Mousse (3)
13 Simultaneous firing of artillery (5)
15 Respiratory organs (5)
16 Echo (11)

Down

1 Generous supply (4,7)
2 House of Charles I and II (6)
3 Scene of battle for e.g. Williams and Murray (6,5)
4 Raconteur (11)
5 Thin stratum (4)
6 Apparently (2,5,4)
12 Approach (2,4)
14 Molten rock (4)



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Richard Attfield 16
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Morley Garden Centre 44
GARDEN ROOMS
Room at the Back 12
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Billy's Tree & Garden Services 20
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