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# Happy New Year

Wishing you all a very happy 2024.

**Here's hoping you've survived the mayhem of Christmas and are ready for a healthy and happy 2024.**

If your aim for 2024 is to experience more fun events then see what's coming up on page 6, or if you've decided 2024 is the year to get round to updating your house or fixing all those jobs you never get round to, we have a wide range of local businesses in here who can help.



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# community events

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**27 January, Knowle**

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## The Full Monty

**30 January – 3 February,**

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As in the 1997 smash hit film, this brand-new production is a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs, laughs and heartbreak. Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the film on a major national tour. Book now to relive the music of the 90's and have a great night out in the

company of our group of lads as they work to put on the show of their lives. Tickets from [www.atgtickets.com](http://www.atgtickets.com) this Elton tribute act truly offers an authentic performance that will leave guests captivated. [www.thelakeatbarston.co.uk](http://www.thelakeatbarston.co.uk).

## Las Vegas Nights - tribute to Swing

**9 February, The**

**Lake at Barston**

Featuring Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Bobby Darin, Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole, Perry Como, Matt Monro, Tony Bennett and many more! Looking back to the days of the Rat Pack and MGM musical to modern giants such as Michael Buble and Robbie Williams, Legends of Swing takes you on a journey with Hollywood's greatest superstars. To book tickets call 01675 444890



## Valentine's Day Romance with Young Lionel

**14 February, Nailcote Hall**

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## **Tax Year End – 5th April**

As a lot of people know, the HMRC tax year end was on 5th April. If you are a business owner or earn income that isn't taxed at source you will need to send HMRC a personal tax return. The deadline for sending the return in and paying any tax is 31st January next year, but don't leave it until then! Please contact us as soon as you can so we can prepare your return for you in good time, with no rush. This will give you peace of mind that the return is correct and know how much tax you will need to pay.

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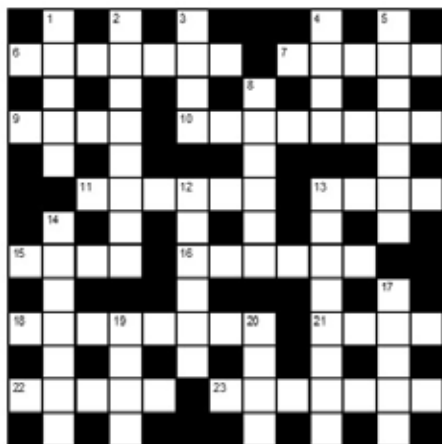


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## crossword



### Down

- 1 Undulating landscape (5)
- 2 Chortle, titter (8)
- 3 Imprisoned, incarcerated (4)
- 4 Perfect, spanking-new (4)
- 5 Toasted fruit-bun (7)
- 8 Thinly dispersed (6)

- 12 Call forward with a gesture (6)
- 13 Adjacent lines indefinitely equidistant are said to be \_\_\_\_\_ (8)
- 14 Responsive to medical treatment (7)

- 17 Turkish meat dish cooked on a skewer (5)
- 19 Floppy (4)
- 20 Part of the underside of a boat used for stability (4)

## clues

### Across

- 6 Trailblazer, trendsetter (7)
- 7 Sacked, given P45 (5)
- 9 Wooden shoe (4)
- 10 Measuring rod, inept person (8)
- 11 Belongs to a club (6)
- 13 Jab, prod (4)
- 15 Cat (informal) (4)
- 16 Glace, sour, Morello (6)
- 18 Valve in the loo cistem (8)
- 21 Did not tell the truth (4)
- 22 Oozy goo! (5)
- 23 High military rank (7)

answer on page 30



## how to play sudoku

### It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 30





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# Have a Nap-py New Year!

Enjoy the benefits of a good nap in 2024

In a society where napping is often misconstrued as laziness, there's a growing body of scientific evidence underscoring the benefits of this habit. I love a nap, and I've witnessed firsthand the advantages that a brief midday sleep can offer, aligning with the latest findings from sleep science.

Research on napping has historically been mixed, with some studies highlighting its cognitive and mood benefits, while others pointed to potential health risks, especially in older adults. This ambiguity made experts cautious about recommending naps. However, recent studies have refined our understanding, suggesting that the ideal nap duration is approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

The need to nap is driven by two physiological processes: homeostatic sleep pressure (HSP), which builds the longer we stay awake, and circadian rhythms that naturally induce sleepiness in the afternoon. Whether someone is a habitual napper or not also depends on genetic factors influencing these processes.

Short naps have been shown to significantly enhance certain cognitive functions, such as memory, information-processing speed, and vigilance. Research



at the National University of Singapore emphasizes the mood-improving effects of napping, noting that even a brief 10-minute nap can be refreshing. A nap lasting around 30 minutes is considered optimal, as it predominantly involves light sleep, making it easier to wake up refreshed. The researchers advise against napping after 5 P.M. to avoid disrupting nighttime sleep patterns.

While longer naps can provide more extended cognitive benefits, they also have downsides. Moving into deeper sleep stages can lead to sleep inertia, a state of grogginess upon waking, which many of us find unpleasant. Moreover, naps exceeding 30 minutes have been linked to health issues like obesity and metabolic syndrome. This association, however, is probably more indicative of

underlying health conditions rather than being a direct result of prolonged napping.

Interestingly, excessive napping can also be a symptom of illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease or increased brain inflammation. If you regularly need lengthy naps (over an hour) or multiple naps per day, you might have a health problem and should consult your GP.

After looking at the research, I don't feel guilty about my 20-minute naps anymore. They leave me feeling alert and productive, which aligns with the scientific understanding of the benefits of brief naps. When done correctly, napping can be a valuable tool for enhancing cognitive function and overall well-being. I would go as far as to say that in today's fast-paced world, napping is a valuable survival tool.

# Fact or fiction?

## Common relationship questions

Dipika Mistry, Legal Director at law firm Shakespeare Martineau in Solihull answers some of the frequently asked questions from couples across the country.

### 1. We're not married, but we've been together years – will I get 50%?

This is such a common misconception when unmarried couples part ways, but there is no such thing as a 'common law wife/partner'. If you choose not to marry then do consider a living together agreement to protect your best interests and ensure that if you own a home together that your name is included on the deed.

### 2. Can I get divorced if we have just drifted apart?

Yes – from 6 April 2022 'no fault divorce' has been introduced, which means parting couples no longer have to prove their marriage has irretrievably broken down due to one of the five 'divorce facts': adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, or separation of at least two years or in some cases five years. Instead, they can apply for divorce jointly, without assigning any blame on one party.

### 3. Do I have to give my engagement ring back if we split?

If you break up with your partner, you may feel a moral obligation to return the ring - however, unless it can be proved that the ring was given conditionally, the law states that it is an absolute gift, meaning you do not have to return it to your ex.

### 4. Is my prenuptial agreement (pre-nup) legally binding?

No. A pre-nup is not legally binding in English law, however, they are becoming increasingly upheld provided that they are entered into fairly and on a voluntary basis and both parties have received independent legal advice before doing so. Pre-nups do not overrule a court's decision on financial arrangements on divorce but they do carry some influence.

### 5. I want to get divorced, but I don't want to go to court, what can I do?

Collaborative law is a great option for couples who are amicable and want to avoid going to court. This is where both parties each instruct a collaboratively trained lawyer and work together to find a suitable divorce settlement, including financial and child matters.

**Separation and divorce can be highly stressful and emotional, so it's important to have a trusted advisor by your side.**



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# a good read

By Natasha Donovan

## Perfect

by Rachel Joyce

Perfect by Rachel Joyce is a beautifully written novel that delves into the intricacies of human nature, exploring themes of guilt, regret, and the search for redemption. Set against the backdrop of a quiet English town in the 1970s, the story intertwines the lives of its characters, primarily revolving around a young boy named Byron and a pivotal moment that alters his life forever.

The narrative unfolds in two parallel timelines – the first follows young Byron and his friend as they embark on a quest for truth after witnessing a tragic accident, and the second, decades later, presents Jim, a middle-aged man grappling with mental health issues and the weight of his past. The dual timelines are elegantly woven, converging to reveal the interconnectedness of these seemingly disparate lives.

Joyce's prose is evocative and deeply emotional. Her portrayal of Byron is haunting; his youthful innocence is clouded by the burdensome weight of guilt and the adult complexities he struggles to comprehend. Jim's story is equally touching, presenting a life marked by isolation, yet seeking connection and understanding.

One of the novel's strongest attributes is its exploration of the concept of 'perfect' – challenging societal norms, personal expectations, and the often-unrealistic standards we set for ourselves (especially at this time of year). Through the imperfect lives of its characters, the novel underscores the idea that perfection is an illusion, and our flaws and mistakes are integral to our humanity.



## What to do with a Box

by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Chris Sheban

If your house is like mine, Christmas saw the arrival of at least one big box, and in the enchanting realm of children's literature, Jane Yolen's What to Do with a Box stands out as a delightful ode to imagination. With simple prose, Yolen captures the boundless potential of a plain cardboard box, turning it into a gateway to a myriad of adventures. Through her words, children are invited to sail roaring oceans, scale towering mountains, and journey to outer space, all without ever leaving their living rooms.

Integral to the magic of this book are Chris Sheban's evocative illustrations. He masterfully employs soft, dreamy tones and delicate lines to bring to life the whimsical world Yolen describes. Sheban's use of light and shadow emphasizes the contrast between reality and imagination. The fact that he draws the box with all the labels and markings still visible serves to reinforce the power of a child to see beyond what is real.

The story is a celebration of creativity, and the illustrations provide a visual foundation upon which young minds can build their dreams. In this regard, Sheban manages to tap into the essence of childhood wonder.

What to Do with a Box, is more than a story—it's an invitation. to dream, to play, and to remember that in the mind of a child, the most ordinary objects can become the most extraordinary treasures.



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# Beef Stroganoff with Herb Pasta



Pappardelle pasta makes the most perfect partner for creamy stroganoff, but you can also rice or any pasta of your choice.

**Preparation time:** 10 mins (+45 mins freezer time)

**Cooking time:** 20 mins

**Serves:** 4

## Ingredients

400g beef rump steak, trimmed  
1 tbsp butter  
1 tbsp olive oil  
300g small button mushrooms  
400g pappardelle pasta  
3 shallots, finely chopped  
1 tbsp plain flour  
300ml beef stock  
1 tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 tbsp tomato purée  
3 tbsp crème fraîche  
½ x 20g pack flat-leaf parsley, chopped.

## Method

Freeze the beef for 45 mins before you begin. This makes it easy to slice really thinly. Season well. Melt half the butter and half the oil in a large, non-stick frying pan. Turn the heat up and quickly sear the beef in batches until browned on both sides. Remove the meat and set aside. Repeat with the mushrooms, then set aside with the beef. Boil the pasta. Add the remaining butter and oil to the pan and soften

the shallots for a few mins. Stir in the flour for 1 min, then gradually add in the stock, stirring continuously to prevent lumps. Simmer to allow it to thicken for 5 mins, then stir in the mustard, tomato purée, crème fraîche and seasoning. Simmer for one more minute, then return the beef and mushrooms to the pan. Drain the pasta, toss with half the chopped parsley, season, then serve with the creamy stroganoff, sprinkled with the remaining parsley.

# Mindbenders

Can you find the hidden phrases?

Get It

Get It

Get It

Get It

M1Y L111F1E

try  $\frac{\text{stand}}{2}$

answers on page 30

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# New Year, new garden?

**Learn a new skill or hobby:  
When the outlook is cold  
and bleak pour a mug of  
hot chocolate and start  
planning for Spring.**

**W**e'd all like a dream garden right? But is your dream garden the same as your neighbour's? Probably not. Whether you're designing a garden from scratch or remodelling the one you have there is no 'one size fits all' garden design. Unless you can afford to have the professionals in - and they can be worth every penny - you'll need to apply a lot of thought to the process. We've created this brief guide to give you a kick-start.

## Budget

Be clear about this. There's no point coming up with a grand design if you can't afford to carry it through.

## Time

If you work full time and have an active social life you'll need to think 'low-maintenance.'

Consult your family What do they want from the garden. Small children will want a space to play; the adults might want a space to eat and



entertain; you might want to grow your own veg, or herbs.

Is it possible? How big is the garden? How much sun does it get? It's no good planning lots of flowerbeds if the garden is in deep shade for most of the day. How can you compromise so that everyone is happy?

## What shape is your garden?

Each shape presents its own challenge. Square can be boring and needs to be broken up using lots of curves. Long and thin can be disguised by dividing it into imaginary rooms linked by a winding path. Slopes can be challenging, especially if they're steep but could be made into a feature by terracing or incorporating a waterfall.

## Firm up your ideas

Do you want grass or paving? How much should be devoted to borders or flowerbeds? Will you need a new fence or would you rather have a natural hedge. Will you need professional help with any hard landscaping?

## Make a scale plan

Measure all the major distances in your garden. It's a good idea to take them from a fixed point, such as the corner of your house. Try 1/4 or 1/2 inch = 1 foot if you're not metric and 1cm or 2cm = 1m if you are. When complete make several copies and draw all your ideas on to the plans until you come up with one you really like. Because it's to scale you can now carry out your plans with confidence. Happy Gardening!

## When Planning a Garden...

Look at the plants which thrive in your neighbours' gardens. Chances are they'll do well in yours too.

Don't be scared of garden designers. A good one can maximise the potential of your plot. You can still do all the work yourself at your leisure if the budget is tight.

Get help with hard landscaping if you don't have the expertise. You'll save money and heartache in the long run!

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### Solution to Mind benders

1. Forget it
2. For once (ones) in my life
3. Try to understand

**mindbenders**  
from page 27

### LOCAL COUNCILLORS **DORRIDGE & HOCKLEY HEATH**

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

**Sudoku Solution**  
from page 12

H	S	H		M	T										
P	I	N	E	E	R	F	I	R	E						
L	I	L	S	N	A										
C	L	O	G	D	I	P	S	T	I	C	K				
Y	G			A		A									
			M	E	M	B	E	R		P	O	K	E		
			C	R	E	S	A	E							
			P	U	S	S	C	H	E	R	R	Y			
			R		K		A	K							
			B	A	L	L	C	O	C	K		L	I	E	D
			B	I	N	E	L	B							
			S	L	I	M	E	G	E	N	E	R	A	L	
			E	P			L	L	B						

**Crossword Solution**  
from page 12



# Saqib Bhatti MP

Working for Meriden

## Get in touch



*It has been another year to remember with so much happening locally and nationally. This year we saw the nation celebrate the coronation of King Charles III. The joyous event brought communities together on a momentous day to welcome a new chapter of the British monarchy. It was also a year to remember for sports with the England women's football team making it all the way to the World Cup Final. Locally we have seen a host of wonderful local community events from fun runs to fireworks displays. I've enjoyed attending all of these events and look forward to another amazing year of community spirit.*

*This festive season I am particularly excited to visit our local shops and support the wonderful businesses in our community. From a wide range of shops to restaurants and cafes, our constituency is home to many exciting businesses, and I encourage everyone to show them support by shopping locally. On the topic of local talent thank you to all the local primary schools that have participated in my Christmas card competition! Picking a winner is always one of the hardest tasks I have to undertake with so many amazing entries and I am always blown away by the talent on display in our community.*

*Particularly at this time of the year, I am sure that you will join me in saying a prayer for those less fortunate than us and praying for peace around the world. As ever, my office remains open and we are conducting surgery appointments, so do not hesitate to book a slot. My contact details can be found below.*

***Finally, I would like to take this chance to say, from my family to yours, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.***

### Constituency office:

631 Warwick Road, Solihull B91 1AR



0121 711 7029



[saqibbhatti.org.uk](http://saqibbhatti.org.uk)



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