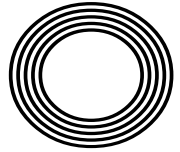


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BEFORE



AFTER



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



Editor's notes...

JANUARY 2024



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** Leigh Thorpe Bay. I trust your Christmas was fantastic. With my kids aged three and five, the holiday becomes truly magical. No one warns you about their rapid growth in this fast-paced world. It's a reminder to be present, and I strive to cherish these moments as much as possible.

I've recently been immersed in new documentaries about Ronnie O'Sullivan OBE, Robbie Williams and David Beckham OBE. Their expertise shines unmistakably and their charisma, dedication and work ethic are inspiring to see. Regardless of personal feelings, their mastery in their respective fields

is completely undeniable.

Success often intertwines with personal battles - demons, quirks and vices - which are the potential cost of fame. Yet I contend that these struggles serve as the catalyst to propel them forward. Through adversity, genuine potential surfaces.

As we begin the new year, let's channel our own challenges into the energy that creates success, rewriting the narrative of 2024. Here's to embracing hardships, finding strength, and crafting a triumphant story for you to be proud of. Happy New Year!

Nik Allen

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Photo credit: BBC Studios/Simon Partridge

Nice one NEVILLE

HOW GARY'S POST-PLAYING REINVENTION HAS WON HIM A SEAT IN THE DEN

When the worlds of the ex-footballer and business collide, the results are not always impressive. In the 1970s, a slew of former pros ploughed their retirement funds into the pub trade, with varying outcomes. Yet with the image of the modern game so much more polished, it follows that those who once acquired trophies and international caps are now looking to do the same in commerce.

The latest to chance his arm in the corporate space is Gary Neville, who this year is set to become the first ex-sportsman on the panel of *Dragons' Den*. The former England and Manchester United defender may only be lowering himself onto one of the prized five chairs as a temporary guest on the show, but in many ways, the 48 year old's televised reinvention from his usual work as a pundit on Sky Sports makes a lot of sense.

Despised by many an opposition supporter while playing, Neville these days gleans admiration and respect for his punditry – he offers clarity, honesty, intelligence and charisma as he surveys the game's issues, be they tactical events on the pitch, or political events off it.

An ability to conduct a broad sweep of issues, with an approach that displays succinctness and wit, is of course the perfect fuel for any business environment. Neville's starring role on the BBC's standout reality show is reward for an already impressive track record in business.

His first investment actually came as a 21 year old, when he put money into property development. Since then, his company, Relentless, has delved into hospitality, notably through two hotels – Hotel Football and the Stock Exchange Hotel – plus award-winning Leeds restaurant The Man Behind the Curtain.

“ YOU WILL NEVER REPLICATE THAT THRILL OF
WALKING OUT OF THE TUNNEL ON A MATCHDAY ”

He also owns a production company, Buzz 16, and his time travelling around the world as a footballer provided the perfect insight by which his GG Hospitality brand now looks to take client and consumer excellence forward to the next level.

“People sometimes ask me if I am more excited by business these days than I was being a footballer, and I can only answer that by saying they are entirely different specialisms,” says Neville.

“You will never replicate that thrill of walking out of the tunnel on a matchday, and when I retired, I made the decision to try to get as close to it as I could, so here I am. The good part of being in business is you don't need to run around a pitch every day!”

The *Dragons' Den* experience sees Neville – and fellow newbie Emma Grede, who made her name in fashion – put prospective entrepreneurs through their paces alongside established heavyweights Peter Jones CBE, Deborah Meaden, Touker Suleyman, Sara Davies MBE and Steven Bartlett, with the 21st series rumoured to begin on January 4, 2024.

With filming now wrapped, Neville can return to another side project, the award-winning chat podcast *Stick to Football*. Does the devoted husband and father-of-two, who also part-owns League Two side Salford City, ever crave a day off?

“For me, the thought of doing nothing is terrifying,” he laughs. “I actually admire people who can sit around and enjoy their retirement, because they must have more mental strength than me.

“I have to keep on, and it helps that I love the work I do, so why would I not?”

SQUIRRELS:

DON'T YOU JUST LOVE THEM?

On January 21, people around the world will be celebrating all things squirrel because it's Squirrel Appreciation Day. But will you be joining in the celebrations?

In the UK, squirrels can divide opinion. And it's not all about digging up spring bulbs.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

According to the nation's Wildlife Trusts, there are about 2.5 million grey squirrels in the UK. But there are only around 140,000 red squirrels. Red squirrels are native to the UK, while grey squirrels were introduced from America by the Victorians in the 1800s. The problem is that greys compete with reds for food. Grey squirrels also carry a virus known as squirrel pox. They're immune to it themselves, but it's lethal for their red cousins.

IS THAT ALL?

Grey squirrels also strip the bark off trees and raid bird feeders. Sometimes, they even raid birds' nests. And they can gnaw through plastic hosepipes and netting.

DO GREY SQUIRRELS HAVE REDEEMING FEATURES?

Both types of squirrel are intelligent and agile. Amazingly, they can leap 10 times their body length. Their eyesight is fantastic, and their double-jointed legs mean they can run up and down trees at incredible speed.

DO GREY SQUIRRELS DO ANYTHING USEFUL?

Grey squirrels help regenerate forests by collecting and burying seeds in both the US and the UK. But, on balance, grey squirrels certainly do more harm than good.

SO HOW CAN I HELP RED SQUIRRELS?

If you're lucky enough to have red squirrels visit your garden – and you don't have grey squirrels – here's how you can help them.

Leave out some hazelnuts in their shells, sweet chestnuts, sunflower seeds or pine nuts. You can also cultivate red squirrel-friendly plants such as brambles, dog roses, wild cherries and crab apples.



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MAIN

Wrap it up!



HOME & DIY

Reduce, reuse and recycle: the three Rs that can help you clear your home of the vast quantities of leftover Christmas wrapping paper, while at the same time doing your bit to help the environment. Check out these four creative ways to make use of unwanted gift wrap.

1. Beautiful bunting or baubles

Whether you have traditional Christmas wrapping paper, kids' character paper or a metallic variety, you can easily create your own bunting using just a pair of scissors and some string, or get a bit more creative and make some DIY baubles (watch online videos for instructions). Perfect for New Year, a 2024 birthday party or even for simply jazzing up a coffee morning.

2. Cute confetti

How often have you had to make a last-minute dash to a card shop to buy confetti for a party? Why not make your own instead by simply shredding leftover wrapping paper or even

cutting out shapes using a cutter.

3. Perk up serving trays or drawers

Festive wrapping paper is perfect for injecting some life into an old, boring serving tray. Alternatively, bring some life into your cupboards and line your drawers with gift wrap and feel uplifted each time you open them.

4. Magical magnets

A great idea for kids: cut out a small circle of your chosen piece of wrapping paper, affix to the bottom of a flat marble, add a magnet and stick to your fridge for a festive feel all year round.

How to reuse your wrapping paper

If you are keen to reuse your Christmas wrapping paper, and your kids haven't destroyed it beyond repair, you can iron the paper before you use it to transform it back to its original glory. Make sure you set your iron to the lowest setting and cover the paper with a towel before applying any heat.

Photo credit: centsationalgirl, offbeatandinspired, heartorganizing, thoughtfullysimple, youaremyfave.com, instructables.com, momshavequestionstoo



Pantone Colour of the Year 2024:

PEACH FUZZ

Every year, the design world waits with bated breath for Pantone to declare its colour of the year. For 2024, the 25th anniversary of this renowned announcement, the colour is the delicate Peach Fuzz.

What does Peach Fuzz look like?

Peach Fuzz is a soft peach tone that is nestled somewhere between pink and orange. Described as gentle, velvety and hardworking, this is a versatile shade that is guaranteed to dominate the catwalk and the world of interior design. As a tone that strikes the perfect balance between cool and warm, it can be used to either brighten a space or make it feel cosier. Pair with muted sage greens, soft blues and earthy tones for best results.

Why was this colour chosen for 2024?

This shade was selected as a direct response to the nation's need for nurturing and compassion during times of turmoil, as well as our desire for a more peaceful future. Pantone colour specialist Leatrice Eisman said: "It's a warm and cosy shade, and it's very tactile. We feel that at a time like this, tactility is really important – to touch other people and gather them into our homes."

How to incorporate Peach Fuzz into your home

Paint the ceiling: If you want to try this colour trend without committing to a complete room overhaul, why not paint your bedroom or living room ceiling in this soft shade? Keep the rest of the walls neutral to ensure balance.

Choose new soft furnishings: Arguably the simplest way to incorporate a new colour into a room in your home, look out for peach-coloured throws, scatter cushions and rugs.

Invest in a new statement piece of furniture: For those who want to go all out with this stunning shade, invest in a new piece of statement furniture such as a peach sofa, an armchair or a display cabinet.

Paint your kitchen cabinets: If you are on a budget and want to update your kitchen, then giving your cabinets a fresh coat of Peach Fuzz paint is definitely the way to go.



Photo credit: Stacy Zarin Goldberg via eidecor.com, dulux.co.uk, iot.com, @Sylvia via adinteriors.com.au



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HOME & DIY

The wonders of WOOD



Would you like to add more wooden finishes to your home? Here's how to mix different wood shades that will make your interior the envy of all your family and friends.

USE COMPLEMENTING UNDERTONES

While it is completely fine to match different shades of wood in one space, if you want to stop a room from looking chaotic and badly thrown together, it can be a good idea to use complementing undertones. For example, you can use a lighter and darker shade of wood as long as they both have the same undertones, i.e. warm or cold.

ADD A BUFFER

If you are worried about mixing different shades of wood, then you may want to add a buffer item between each element. For example, if you have wooden flooring in one shade and a wooden table in another, try adding a rug in between the two as a visual barrier. Also, any white item or decorative feature will instantly help to break up multiple wood tones.

GO WITH THE GRAIN

If the different woods you would like to use all have a prominent grain, then try keeping the patterns similar so that the mood of the room is retained. For those who favour a larger or open grain, do not mix more than one of these together as it can feel like they are competing for attention.

DON'T GO TOO WILD

When it comes to mixing different shades of wood in your home, less is most definitely more. Try to focus your efforts on adding just a few different shades of wood to start and then repeat throughout the room. As a general rule, opt for two or three shades of wood per room at the most.



Photo credit: studio-mcgee.com



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LOCAL FEATURE

Exploring Langton's 18th-century splendour

Langtons House in Hornchurch offers the perfect combination of history and luxury, whether you're planning your next big event or an afternoon walk.

The wonderful thing about visiting manor houses is that they enable you to leave the stresses of the 21st century behind and escape to a simpler time. Langtons House is a perfect example of this, especially as it is nestled within six acres of stunning gardens and boasts its own ornamental lake.

A Grade II listed 18th-century structure, the property retains many of its original features, including Georgian windows, ornate fireplaces and decorative ceilings which preserve their original moulding. From the outside, it is impressive and imposing, while inside it still exudes luxury and decadence.

The residence was owned by the Massu family, who were Huguenot refugees originally from France. They had achieved prosperity

as silk merchants in the City of London.

In 1929, the Massu family generously donated the house to the Hornchurch Urban District Council. This gift came with the stipulation that the building be dedicated to council-related activities and that the six acres of land remain accessible to members of the general public.

Just shy of a century since the Massus passed on this magnificent property, Langtons House remains a favourite destination for both locals and those from further afield.

With four ceremony rooms – East Room, West Room, Langtons Hall and The Orangery – it is a fabulous destination for any big event.

More than that, though, it holds perfect echoes of a decorative past. With lottery grants allowing restoration to parts of the house such as The Orangery in recent years, the house you see today is just as magnificent as it would have been in days gone by – a building and estate locked in the traditions of the past, while looking ahead to an elegant future.

Photo credit: Sharnae Mason Photography




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'The county has given me everything'

He is a pioneer of modern culture, launching 1,000 bands and singers, endowed with an encyclopaedic knowledge of music, and at the same time acting as a proud custodian of Essex. He is Steve Lamacq.

Many are surprised to find Steve Lamacq quite diminutive in height. Mostly because the DJ, who has pioneered new music across BBC radio over the past three decades, possesses true giant status in the music industry.

Outside the cast of *The Only Way is Essex*, the now 59 year old is perhaps the proudest and most vocal advocate of his home county (notwithstanding the fact he was born in Hampshire!). Rarely one of his Radio 6 Music shows goes by without mention of the influence Harlow had on him, or growing up in Halstead, or the emotion attached to his beloved Colchester United.

It all began back in the Harlow Square music venue in 1978. Lamacq credits the band The Lurkers for inspiring him to pursue a career in music; something he furthered when studying journalism at the new town's college, before getting a job at the *West Essex Gazette*.

Pirate radio, Greater London Radio, *NME* magazine and even *Top of the Pops* followed (although on reflection Lamacq was perhaps much too alternative for the mainstream commerciality of the Top 40).

The radio star's talent comes through perseverance. Even now, as someone indelibly front-of-stage as one of the most approachable, knowledgeable and influential forces in a rapidly evolving record industry, his passion is as great as ever.

"For me, the elixir of music is seeing a band live," he says. "It could be in front of 10 people or 10,000 – it is an experience that always excites me."

Essex certainly needs to feel proud of one of its greatest exports.

Steve says: "The county has given me everything and I'm never held back in my admiration for it."

Nor us for you, Steve.



Photo credit: BBC/Ray Burmiston



LOCAL FEATURE



WHAT'S ON

YOUR LOCAL EVENTS

BOB COLLUM & THE WELFARE MOTHERS WITH TOM BURGESS
 Twenty One, Western Espalanade,
 Unit 21, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 2EH
 Friday, January 26, 7pm – 11pm



Photo credit: The Bob Collum Band

Join Oklahoma's Bob Collum and his wonderful accompaniments for a night of live Americana rock music.

Tickets cost £5 in advance and are available online from www.shorturl.at/NU679 or will be available for £8 on the door.

LEIGH TANGO 10/50 CELEBRATION MILONGA
 The Royal Hotel, 1 High Street,
 Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1JE
 Saturday, January 27, 7pm

Leigh Tango is hosting performers Samantha Dispari and Santiago Fina, as well as DJ Simon Haddock from Tango 178, as part of the group's 10-year anniversary celebrations at The Royal Hotel's famed ballroom.

To register your interest or buy a ticket for £15, email leightango@hotmail.com

KATIE NICHOLLS AS AMY WINEHOUSE – ALIVE! AT THE BOATYARD
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SPEED DATING AT YE OLDE SMACK
 Ye Olde Smack, 7 High Street,
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 Wednesday, January 31, 7pm – 10pm

An event aimed at singles ready to mingle, Ye Olde Smack is once again hosting a chance to meet like-minded individuals in search of romance.

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THE LISTENING ROOM
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All are welcome to attend the Listening Room on a pay-what-you-can basis, with all profits going towards the town council chairman's charity.

Anyone is welcome to perform on the open mic, and there will also be featured artists each month.

For more information about attending, get in touch with the council on 01702 716288 or email council@leighonseatowncouncil.gov.uk



Photo credit: Leigh Community Centre

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OUT WITH THE OLD

January is a great time to engage in some post-holiday wardrobe organisation. If you received new clothes for Christmas or have stocked up on some sales bargains, now's the time to let go of those ill-fitting items and things you haven't worn for ages.

1 EMPTY your wardrobes, drawers and cupboards and pile all your clothes, shoes and accessories onto your bed. This will give you an idea of just how many clothes you have and help you think about what you actually need.

2 TRY everything on, even your underwear. If it doesn't fit well, isn't comfortable or you don't like it – it's time to let it go!

3 SORT all your clothes and accessories into three piles: 'yes', 'no' and 'maybe'.

4 PUT the 'yes' pile back in your wardrobe, drawers and cupboards. Treat yourself to some new coat hangers and group similar items together. Also, organise your drawers with dividers, making everything easier to find.

5 CATEGORISE the 'no' pile into three groups: sell, give away and recycle. Sell gently used items through local pre-loved clothing stores or online. Give away things to friends, family or a charity shop. And recycle items at clothing or shoe banks, which you can find at council recycling centres or in the car park of some big supermarkets.

6 PLACE 'maybe' items in a bag or box in a spare room or cupboard. Set a reminder for six months. After this period, if any items remain unworn, move them to a new 'no' pile for selling, donating or recycling. Things you wear can join your 'yes' collection.

A new year clothes declutter is therapeutic as well as rewarding. Best of all, you'll end up with a tidy and organised wardrobe filled with your favourite, well-fitting pieces that bring a sense of clarity to your daily routine.



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Photo credit: BBC Studios/Lambert Mark Mainz

Television's FAITHFUL FRIEND

Claudia WINKLEMAN...

Talented, attractive, charismatic and perfectly grounded – is Claudia Winkleman terrestrial television's elegantly-cloaked saviour?

Many of us may know someone who has ventured off for a murder-mystery weekend at a remote, windswept, crumbling castle. The concept is as old as, well, the castle itself, in some cases, but the BBC's decision to reinvent the challenge in the form of a reality show has not just done wonders for its tumbling ratings; it's also given the usually chatty Claudia Winkleman a whole new, almost silent persona.

The host of *The Traitors*, whose first-series success has led to the concept being brought back at the start of 2024, has revealed how the show's producers were insistent on her keeping quiet during tense moments, something that didn't come naturally to the perennially chatty host of *Strictly Come Dancing*, *The Piano* and *Best Home Cook*.

"As a presenter, I've always had to mould myself to new environments, situations and such, but I've always got through the discomfort by being outwardly vocal and chatty," the 51 year old admits.

"To be told I had to zip it was something quite new, and actually took a bit of getting used to, as I'm the sort of person who doesn't like nervous silences... yet the show is built around them!"

The first series of *The Traitors* worked itself into a spectacular crescendo almost a year ago, and the expectations are that its return will further revive the kind of entertainment across main channels that appeared to be at risk of running out of ideas.

Winkleman, to her credit, has been the glue that's prevented the terrestrial TV schedule from slipping into total oblivion. Her time on *Strictly* now totals a decade, and she has also hosted *The Great British Sewing Bee*, plus a host of one-off productions on both the Beeb and Channel 4. She also fronts the Saturday mid-morning show on Radio 2.

The star, who is the daughter of author and journalist Eve Pollard OBE gained her small-screen break when featuring on the likes of *Holiday* and *This Morning* in the early 1990s. She then progressed to the likes of *Fame Academy*, *Comic Relief*, *Eurovision* and a number of panel shows.

"I feel lucky to have had so many opportunities over the years, and I do feel we produce so much high-quality entertainment in this country. We are the envy of the world in that respect."

It helps, of course, to have presenters as charismatic and versatile as Winkleman, who with her journalist hat on has written for the likes of *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent*, *Metro*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Tatler*.

The mother-of-three, who has been married to producer Kris Thykier since 2000, has also been vocal when it comes to charitable and public health issues; not least in 2015 after her daughter Matilda was badly burned when a Halloween costume she was wearing caught fire. Winkleman's subsequent campaigning led to a change of the law.

"Career aims are great," she concludes, "but family has always been everything to me, and I would give up everything I have achieved, in a heartbeat, in order to protect them."

Perhaps the one 'traitorous' act we could forgive...





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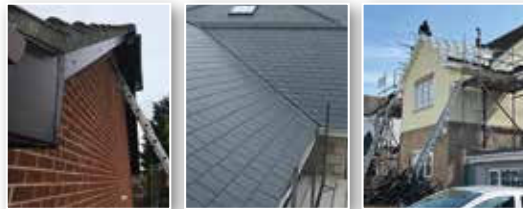
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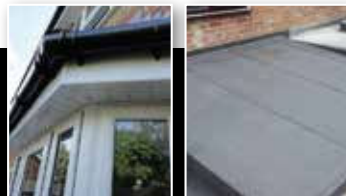
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GARDENING

Plants to PLEASE YOUR PETS

If you have a dog or cat, you need to be mindful of the plants you grow in your garden as some can cause them harm. Discover the prettiest pet-friendly plants for your outside space below.

SNAPDRAGON: Snapdragon is recognisable by its tubular flowers that come in an array of bright colours. A short-lived perennial, all elements of this plant are safe for dogs and cats to consume.

BEE BALM: The flowers of bee balm plants are often compared to fireworks, with their unique appearance making them a popular choice for many UK gardens. A magnet for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds, bee balm is also safe for pets.

CRAPE MYRTLE: Providing colour all year round, crape myrtle is non-toxic to both cats and dogs and requires little attention once it is established. There are many varieties to choose from, with options to suit gardens of all sizes.

CORAL BELLS: Coral bells come in a variety of colours and shapes and are known for their high tolerance levels. Non-toxic to pets, these can be planted anywhere in your garden.

FUCHSIA: One of the most popular flowers for hanging baskets, fuchsia is completely safe for cats and dogs and is also a firm favourite of hummingbirds.

CAMELLIA: Camellia is a showy flower that guarantees to brighten up your garden, and all parts of this plant are harmless to pets if ingested. Use in foundation plantings, hedging and screening for best results.

SUNFLOWER: Annual sunflowers make a cheerful addition to any garden and, fortunately, they are non-toxic to both cats and dogs. In fact, some dogs enjoy the nutty taste of their seeds and cats are often attracted to their leaves.

PLANTS THAT CAN BE HARMFUL TO PETS:
Aloe vera | Carnations | Chrysanthemums | Dahlias
| Irises | Lily of the Valley | Peonies | Delphiniums |
Tulips | Tomato Leaves | Autumn Crocus.





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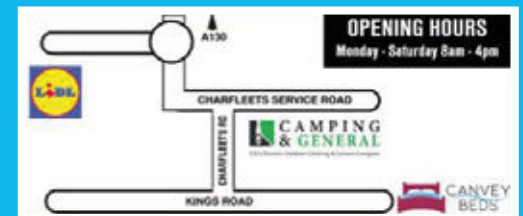
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MONEY MAYHEM

Budgeting is hard enough, but for people with an irregular income, it can seem almost impossible. Whether you are self-employed, working a zero-hours contract, or claiming Universal Credit, the below top tips will help you manage your money from one month to the next.

BUDGET FOR LOWER INCOME MONTHS

Although you may be tempted to set your budget based on the best-case scenario, this can leave you short. Instead, budget for your lowest income month as this will ensure you have all your essential costs covered. Then, if you have a good month, you can revise next month's budget or add to your savings.

MONITOR YOUR OUTGOINGS

You may not know exactly how much money you are going to have coming in each month, but you can work out how much needs to go out. By monitoring your outgoings, you can stay on top

of your finances and identify areas where you can cut back. Make sure you include your bills, food shopping and other essentials, such as travel costs.

PLAN AHEAD

If your income fluctuates at different times of the year – for example, you make more during the summer months or the run-up to Christmas is your busiest time – then make sure you put some of this income aside to help see you through during quieter periods. Also, don't forget to factor in times of the year when your outgoings are higher, such as when annual bills are due or in winter when your energy bills are higher.

HAVE AN EMERGENCY FUND

Rather than spend any spare income that you have during a good month, it is a much better idea to set up an emergency fund to get you through times when your income might be lower. Ideally, this should be enough to cover three months of essential outgoings. Set this up in a separate bank account, or you can save it in a money box.



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The start of a New Year usually goes hand in hand with making plans and looking at options for the year ahead. Potential thoughts of home improvements, renovations, moving or generally exploring your options to see what would be possible are all common thoughts at this time of the year which I can help you with!

About me: I'm Sammy, a local Independent Financial Adviser focusing on mortgage and protection advice within Harbour Financial. I have a wealth of knowledge and access to the whole of the market



which allows me to really search the market, compare lenders and find the most suitable options for my clients. I provide support from start to finish and take away a lot of the usual stress associated!

Mortgages

Following a lot of negative media attention around mortgages last year we've started to see some real positive changes in the market! Getting professional advice and exploring your options in the current climate can provide cost savings compared with just staying with the same provider, this ensures you are really getting the right product for you and your circumstances. Whether we're talking re-mortgaging,

additional borrowing, looking at moving or buying your first ever home. I can help navigate all these for you!

Protection Life Insurance / Critical & Illness Income

Protection: There are many variations available to protect you and your family from events outside your control and from life's unexpected curveballs. Whilst it can be a difficult thought, getting specialist advice and putting a policy in place tailored to your individual needs can not only provide financial security but also give peace of mind that you and your loved ones are taken care of.



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Did you know?

- Looking at re-mortgages between 3-6 months before your current rate expires can give the best chance to secure new options and finding the product right for you.
- It's important to review Life / Critical Illness & Income policies once these have been in place a long time to ensure these are still relevant and meet your needs.
- Having an appointment prior to viewing properties allows us to establish what you can borrow and determine your options.
- I provide a free no obligation initial discussion and can offer appointments both on Zoom or in person. I also offer flexibility with appointment options which include weekdays as well as a limited number of evening and weekend options weekly.





ENGLAND EXPECTS

With the group draw made, England are gearing up for potential success at Euro 2024, while Scotland also celebrate a return to the football elite.

Following the draw for the group stages of Germany 2024, England can now begin preparations for their European Championships campaign in earnest.

Their journey begins on June 16 in Gelsenkirchen, when Serbia are the opponents – the match representing a first meeting between the two countries.

Then, it's Denmark in Frankfurt – when the Danes will be looking to avenge their Euro 2020 semi-final defeat – before the group stage concludes in Cologne against Slovenia.

Three Lions manager, Gareth Southgate OBE, expressed mixed feelings about the draw, saying England will show absolute respect to their trio; yet also recognising the potential for tougher challenges that will surely follow in the knockout phase.

Their prospects post-group stage include possibly facing the third-placed team from Groups D, E or F in the last 16 – which could be Wales, should they negotiate a

route through a complicated playoff picture – then a potential quarter-final against Scotland.

The brief for England is pretty clear – win the thing. That may sound like a bold aim, but the Three Lions squad has never been laced with such talent, flair, resilience and mental strength – something tightened by impressive performances at the last three major tournaments.

The bookmakers make England pre-tournament favourites, followed by France, Germany (the hosts), Spain and Portugal. So the question is... is football finally coming home?

As for Scotland, they face a rigorous test of their credentials in Group A, beginning their campaign against host nation Germany on June 14.

Steve Clarke's men will also contend with an organised Switzerland outfit, and Hungary, who have reached the Euro finals for the third time in a row. The Scots have a history of starting big tournaments with a bang, reminiscent of their World Cup 1998 opener against Brazil.

For the Scots, their football regeneration means qualification is achievement enough, but don't rule out the Tartan Army upsetting the applecart along the way.

Photo credit: Colin Poultrrey/ProSports/Shutterstock



DRY JANUARY *mocktails*

Take the dreariness out of dry January with these delectable, alcohol-free concoctions, guaranteed to please even the most discerning palates. These recipes each make one drink.

COOL FRUIT MOCKTAIL

You will need:

A thick slice of cucumber (chopped) | 4-5 mint leaves (chopped) | 200ml water | About 7 raspberries (frozen or fresh) | 120ml sparkling lemonade (clear) | Ice cubes

How to make:

Bring the water to the boil in a small saucepan and add the cucumber and mint | Turn off the heat and leave for 2 minutes | Add the raspberries and squash them slightly | Strain the mixture | Pour 40ml of the mixture into a tall glass | Add the ice cubes and top up with lemonade

NO-ALCOHOL NEGRONI

You will need:

¼ grapefruit and ½ orange (unpeeled) cut into small chunks | 100g caster sugar | 3 crushed cardamom pods | A pinch of coriander seeds | 150ml cold water | Ice cubes | 25ml white grape juice | Grapefruit and orange slices for garnish

How to make:

Put the grapefruit, orange, sugar, cardamom pods, coriander seeds and 125ml of the water into a saucepan | Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes, then leave to cool | Strain the mixture and throw away the spices and fruit | Fill a tumbler with ice and the grapefruit and orange slices | Pour in 25ml of the syrup, the grape juice and the remaining water | Garnish with grapefruit and orange slices

TANGY FIZZ

You will need:

1 pear, peeled, cored and sliced | 4 dried apricots, quartered | 50g golden caster sugar | 3 tsp honey | A sprig of rosemary | 100ml water | 2 tsp apple cider vinegar | 100ml cold sparkling water

How to make:

Put the pear, apricots, sugar, honey, rosemary and water into a saucepan | Simmer for 10 minutes, then cool completely | Strain the syrup into a jug, add the apple cider vinegar and chill the mixture in the fridge for 30 minutes | Pour 25ml of the syrup into a champagne glass and top up with the sparkling water.



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Do you need a **PETNUP?**

An estimated one in four divorces now involves a dispute over a pet. If you co-own a pet with a partner or spouse, even if you are happy together, it can be a good idea to know your rights if the worst does happen.

WHAT IS A PETNUP?

A petnup is drawn up in much the same way as a prenup but is designed to specifically deal with pets. It typically includes elements such as ownership, custody, maintenance and other arrangements for your pet in the event that you get divorced or separated.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T AGREE ON CUSTODY

If you can't agree on who gets custody of the family pet, then you may want to consider mediation. This involves you and your ex-partner sitting down with a trained impartial mediator to try to solve the issue without having to go to court.

HOW IS PET CUSTODY LEGALLY DECIDED IN ENGLAND?

If you are unable to agree on who will have ownership of the family pet on your own or with the help of mediation, then the courts will check who has proof of ownership and rule in their favour.

They will look at:

- ✿ Who bought the animal?
- ✿ Who primarily cares for it?
- ✿ Who pays the vet bills?
- ✿ Whose name is the pet registered/microchipped under?

The only exception is if there is clear evidence that the pet was gifted to the other party.

THE WELFARE OF YOUR PET IS PARAMOUNT

Animals are sensitive to change and will be aware of any tension in the home, so you need to make sure you put their welfare first. Changes in living arrangements and routines can also cause upset and may affect their behaviour.



SIGN HERE:





GOOD FATS VS...

While fat used to have only negative connotations, we now know that not all fats are equal. Find out everything you need to know about dietary fats.

What are the different types of fat?

There are four main types of fat in our diets: monounsaturated fats, polyunsaturated fats, saturated fats, and trans fats. The first two are 'healthy fats' as they help to maintain healthy cholesterol levels. The latter are 'unhealthy fats' as they can raise the level of bad cholesterol in your blood. Too much bad cholesterol could potentially lead to a stroke, heart attack or vascular dementia.

Examples of foods containing these four fats include...

Monounsaturated fats: Peanut butter | Almonds | Cashews | Olive oil | Avocado oil

Polyunsaturated fats: Oily fish like mackerel and salmon | Rapeseed oil | Sunflower oil | Walnuts | Sunflower seeds

Saturated fats: Processed meat such as burgers, sausages and bacon | Hard cheeses | Whole milk | Butter | Suet

Trans fats: Fried foods | Some takeaway foods | Snacks such as biscuits and cakes | Pies | Hard margarines made with hydrogenated oil

How much fat should I eat?

Roughly one-third of your daily energy should come from fat, the majority of which should be unsaturated. This is approximately 70g per day for a woman and 90g per day for a man. Saturated fat intake should be no more than 10 per cent of total daily energy and trans fats no more than five per cent. Polyunsaturated fats should be limited to five to 10 per cent of your total calories and monounsaturated fats should make up 15 to 20 per cent.

You can find out the total amount of fat and the saturated fat content on the nutritional label on most foods. Trans fats can be labelled as 'hydrogenated fats' or 'hydrogenated vegetable oils' in the list of ingredients.



BAD FATS

Feel-good Fitness



Anytime Fitness Leigh-on-Sea has become a welcome addition to the community since its opening last September.

The former post office in Rectory Grove has had a healthy makeover into a new gym offering fitness classes, such as Pilates and Weighted Workout.

The club, run by local couple, Tony and Zoe Georgiou, has a feel-good community feel. "The most rewarding part is seeing members who have never stepped foot inside a gym

enjoying the space and coming to the club with so much more confidence," Zoe explains. "Families are also training together, which is great. And, for many busy locals, the convenience of walking to the gym and having a quick workout is a welcome break—especially for those working from home or in need of a bit of me-time. After many years in the making, seeing members working out in a place I used to visit as a child feels really, really good!"

anytimefitness.co.uk/leighonsea



Is a bad hip stopping you from doing everyday things?

Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital reveals the signs you might need a new one.

What is a hip replacement?

This is a procedure to remove your damaged hip joint and replace it with an artificial joint. It's used to treat hip pain, most commonly hip osteoarthritis, which is gradual wear and tear of the joint. During the procedure, the damaged joint is removed and replaced with an artificial ball and socket joint (a prosthesis). There are many different types of hip replacement and your surgeon will recommend the one that's best for you.

There are no set rules when it comes to hip replacement. While the surgery is commonly associated with older patients, in truth it's a life-changing procedure for anyone with a worn hip joint.

The following signs may indicate hip arthritis or be symptoms of other problems. The best way to accurately diagnose the state of your hip is to speak to a specialist and have an x-ray.

1. Hip or groin pain

Pain around the hip or groin area can be one of the major indicators that there may be an underlying problem with your hip joint. Let's look at some of the different ways it can manifest.

Pain when walking

If hip or groin pain is preventing you from walking normal distances for you or completing your usual daily activities, then speak to a specialist.

It's important to remember that this can be relative to you. For some, being able to comfortably stroll a short distance to the post box or local shop is enough. For others, being unable to complete a five-mile walk is unthinkable. It all depends on your lifestyle.

You may find yourself compensating with a limp, relying on a walking stick, or even needing painkillers just to cope with the pain of walking or other activities such as climbing the stairs or getting into a car.

Pain during exercise

Soreness or pain during or after exercise which is stopping you from being as active as you normally would, be it jogging, swimming or other physical activities, can be a sign of hip arthritis.

The pain is usually localised between your hip and knee. If the pain is lower down towards the ankle the problem might be caused by back problems.

Pain at night

If hip pain makes it hard to fall asleep or you find yourself waking up because of the pain caused by your movements in the night – talk to someone about it. There are a number of hip or joint-related issues that could be affecting your sleep.

2. Stiffness

Difficulty putting your shoes or socks on is a common sign of stiffness in your hip, especially if one foot is more difficult than the other. You may also start to feel your hip joint clicking, popping or grinding in ways which impair your normal range of movement. If this is an ongoing problem, you should speak with a specialist.

3. The one leg test

If you can't stand on your problem leg for longer than a minute – even with the support of a door frame or table-top for balance, then you might have a problem with your hip.

There are some other exercises you can try at home to see if you could benefit from hip pain treatment. For instance:

- Lying on your back or sitting, can you bring your knee to your chest? Assist with your hands if you need to.
- Lying on your back, can you move your leg out to the side without moving your trunk?
- Sitting on a chair, can you place your ankle on the opposite knee and let the knee drop down as far as possible?

For each test, compare both sides of your body. You may find the test easier on one side than the other, and many people notice this.

4. No relief from other treatments

Most hip problems can be resolved without a full hip replacement. There is a range of treatments available, including physiotherapy and medication that may better address your symptoms.

If your hip pain is not severely limiting your daily life, or you have found ongoing relief from these less invasive treatments, then it indicates a hip replacement is likely not the right option for you yet.

At Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital our experienced team of orthopaedic surgeons are experts in lower limb procedures and provide quick access to hip replacement surgery.

How to book a consultation at Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital

If you are interested in hip replacement surgery or want expert advice from a professional, you will need to book a private consultation with one of our orthopaedic experts before proceeding with any treatment. To book a consultation, please contact our dedicated hospital enquiry team on:

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Online: **www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/brentwood**

Visit: Brentwood Hospital, Shenfield Road, Brentwood, CM15 8EH



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TRAVEL TREND:

FLAT PACK HOTELS



When you hear the phrase 'flat pack', a certain Swedish furniture store might spring to mind. However, when it comes to flat-pack hotels, it is budget hotel group Habitas that is the brains behind the operation. Find out more about this green tourism trend below.

WHAT ARE FLAT-PACK HOTELS?

Although the concept may sound gimmicky, 3D-printed flat-pack hotels boast deep-seated eco-credentials and are based on the principles of modular housing and prefabricated architecture. The building parts are manufactured in a factory and then flat packed and shipped to a destination to be assembled on site.

WHEN DID FLAT-PACK HOTELS FIRST LAUNCH?

The hotel group Habitas opened its first flat-pack hotel in Tulum, Mexico, way back in 2017, with the aim of offering burnt-out city dwellers a stylish yet simple place to stay and recharge. This first-of-its-kind hotel boasts 32 rooms built on elevated platforms, a thatched roof and canvas walls.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF FLAT-PACK HOTELS?

- There are many benefits to flat-pack hotels for the traveller, the environment and the hotel itself. Some of the most notable benefits are:
 - o Quicker to construct than standard hotels
 - o More cost-effective owing to lower labour costs
 - o Lower carbon footprint owing to less waste and the use of sustainable materials

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR FLAT-PACK HOTELS?

Not just a passing trend, Habitas has built its own factory in Mexico which can manufacture hotel parts. The parts are then flat packed, shipped, assembled on site and opened for guests in less than 12 months. Since the first flat-pack hotel, more have opened in destinations such as Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica and Bhutan.



Photo credit: ourhabitas.com



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DAY EXCURSIONS

FEBRUARY

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- 11th - Birmingham International Tattoo
- 13th - Gainsborough & afternoon tea
- 14th - Anglesey Abbey Snowdrops
- 15th - Bluewater shopper
- 20th - Natural History Museum
- 20th - Science Museum
- 20th - Victoria & Albert Museum
- 22nd - Tower of London
- 24th - Chippenham Park Snowdrops
- 28th - Ruxley Manor Garden Centre

MARCH

- 2nd - Norwich
- 5th - Polhill
- 6th - Ardingly
- 7th - Cambridge
- 7th - Ely
- 9th - Crufts
- 10th - Bicester
- 11th - Epping on market day
- 14th - Mystery Tour
- 17th - Festival of Railway Modelling
- 18th - Essex Countryside with lunch
- 19th - Milton Keynes
- 20th - Hever Castle
- 21st & 23rd - Stitch Festival
- 22nd & 26th - Ideal Home Show
- 24th - Columbia Road Flower Market
- 26th - Bluewater
- 28th - Margate or Ramsgate
- 29th - Broadstairs
- 29th - Canterbury
- 30th - Brighton
- 30th - Leamington Spa
- 31st - Camden Market

WINTER/SPRING BREAKS 2024

2 nd Feb Potters 5 Lakes - 4 days	£399
11 th Feb Cotswold Snowdrop Weekend 2 days	£169
12 th Feb Warners Corton - 5 days	£240
26 th Feb Sinah Warren - 5 days	£346
10 th Mar Llandudno & Snowdonia	£375
15 th Mar Emmerdale weekend - 3 days	£275
18 th Mar - Bournemouth - 5 days	£398
18 th Mar - Warners Lakeside - 5 days	£260
25 th Mar - Eastbourne - 5 days	£445
EASTER 29th Mar - 1st Apr	
Hampshire & Surrey Gardens	£390
Yorkshire Dales	£375
ISLE OF MAN 5th Apr - 6 days	
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GUERNSEY & SARK 18th May - 6 days	
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HERITAGE OF SCOTLAND 19th May - 7 days	
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KIDS

The Sleep Treat

How to maximise your children's (and, subsequently, your own) sleep time, no matter what their age

We know all too well the benefits of a good night's sleep, yet when parenthood comes along there is an acceptance that it's one of the first things to fall by the wayside, followed closely by the sports car and the social life. Yet maximising sleep as a parent isn't just good for mums and dads – it's brilliant for kids too. And having a household where there's not a single family member clawing for the coffee or at the lid of the sweet jar is something we can all achieve by following a few key steps.

1. Regular as clockwork

Scientists have proven that kids love regularity and repetition – it's good for them. And sleep should be the very first exemplar of that, with set bed times only altered by the occasional treat (perhaps an evening out or a movie night). Getting your kids into a routine means not disturbing your own.

2. You are what you eat

Consider what you feed your kids in the lead-up to

bed time. Anything with sugar in should be avoided, while fizzy drinks are a similar recipe for insomnia.

3. Little screen, big trouble

TVs, tablets, phones and games, just like sweet treats, are brain stimulators, so expecting your child to switch off after a bout of LCD exposure is optimistic to say the least.

4. (Don't) let there be light

Dim lights, draw curtains and soften the mood in the lead-up to the bed time hour, creating a sleepy environment for all.

5. Ignorance is bliss

While ignoring kids who won't settle feels cruel, if you're constantly on call to cries from the cot or bedroom then they'll know they've got your number. The chances are a moaning child who claims they can't sleep will only complain for a short while before drifting off into a perfect slumber, allowing you to follow suit.



Paint IT BLACK

Are you thinking of splashing out on a new set of wheels, but can't quite decide between a blue Beamer or a silver SUV? Well, studies suggest your choice of car colour says a lot more about your personality than you may think.

GREY/SILVER

Grey and silver gives off a light air of wealth, taste and prestige, while the neutrality of the colours and their ability to camouflage dirt points to a busy, work-heavy lifestyle. As of 2023, grey is the most common car colour in the UK, with more than 25 per cent of British road users opting for this cool colour.

GREEN

It's easy to assume that driving a green car hints at an environmentally friendly outlook, and whilst it is suggested that those in green will be less inclined to fill up their tank with toxic nasties, the real reason behind picking an emerald automobile is that it reflects a gentle and patient nature. Either that, or you've just purchased a vintage Jag in beautiful British Racing Green – the iconic motor racing colour commonly associated with the UK.

BLUE

Owning a blue car doesn't mean you're a downbeat person – instead, it signifies that you like to promote an optimistic and stable image to the world. You might not be flamboyant enough to

go for a red or orange roadster, for example, but you're willing to find common ground with your more outlandish automotive associates.

RED

This classic car colour is usually associated with boy racers and other speedy scoundrels – and perhaps rightly so. Driving a red car is said to show you have high energy and an outgoing personality. With that in mind, it's little wonder red has long been the colour of choice for vibrant Italian vehicles such as the Ferrari.

BLACK

Whether it's an LBD or tuxedo reception, black has long been synonymous with sophistication and luxury. And when it comes to car colour, it tends to suggest in its driver a dignified personality that eschews over-exuberant displays of wealth, whilst still wanting to signal authority to fellow motorists. And just like the *Men in Black*, you don't mind a bit of mystery in your life, either.

ORANGE

You don't see many orange cars, and that's exactly why a carrot-coloured four-wheeler is representative of a driver who does their best to stand out from the crowd. If you're artistic, eccentric, fun-loving or trendy, an orange car is sure to turn heads... which is maybe why it's more commonly seen adorning futuristic supercars such as Lotuses or Lamborghinis.



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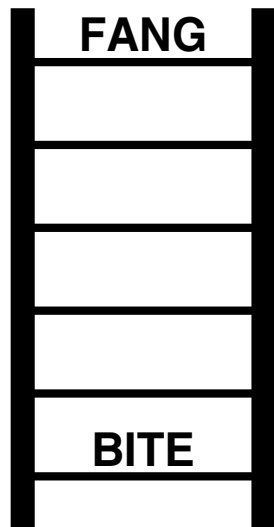
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- ▶ Braille is a tactile code that enables blind and visually impaired people to read using raised dots and dashes set onto paper.
- ▶ Braille was created in 1824 by Louis Braille, a French educator who lost his sight at the age of three when he was playing in his father's workshop. The sharp tool he was holding slipped and struck him in the eye, leading to an infection that caused total blindness in both eyes.
- ▶ Louis was inspired by the system of night writing, a military code used by the French army in the 19th century to communicate at night without speaking.
- ▶ The Braille Challenge takes place in North America annually. Competitors are tested on skills such as spelling, speed and accuracy, and reading comprehension.

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