The magazine for Connexus communities

Summer 2023

Getting to the bottom of custom

bottom of customer questions and queries

Adventurous things to see and try during the summer holidays

Mammoth plans

New owners for popular local attraction



WIN! £25 of Amazon vouchers

Take part in our special brain teasing pub quiz for your chance to win





Don't carry the worry of cancer with you

If something in your body doesn't feel right, talk to us. Tests could put your mind at rest. Until you find out, you can't rule it out.

Contact your GP practice.



Summer '23

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n this issue we share great local stories about how the Connexus Community
Development Fund has helped fund events and community groups.

We've also answered more customer questions in 'Ask Emma' and there are some tips on how to deal with condensation in the home. We also explore what Connexus' plans are for the future.

If you're looking for things to this summer, we've

included some fun activities and tasty recipes for you and your family to try.

There are also some great competitions to enter, including the much-loved gardening competition, with new categories and prizes as well as new puzzles and games. Enjoy!



Sophie Mellings Editor



Community

Storage boost for local workshop

A community workshop has received £1,260 after applying for funding through Connexus' community development fund.

Walters Workshop in Bishop's Castle was set up and run by volunteers, and repairs everything from broken vacuum cleaners to garden furniture for the benefit of the local community.

The money has been spent on new racking and shelving to help the workshop store items more easily. The group are also hoping to develop a website to promote Walters Workshop and communicate with a wider audience.

Brenda Alexander, a volunteer at the workshop, said: "The success of Walters Workshop has meant more and more items coming in for repair, but nowhere to store them.

"The funding has bought us some excellent new racking and shelving storage that will help Walters Workshop continue to support the local community."

Cool kits for the colts

Connexus' Community
Development Fund have
given a £200 grant to
Bartestree Colts junior
football teams, based in
Herefordshire. The grant has
provided better training
equipment and kits, which
can be expensive for clubs
and families to buy.





A weekend to remember

People from all generations turned out for a right royal knees-up to celebrate the coronation in May.

Communities across
Herefordshire and Shropshire
came together to celebrate King
Charles III's coronation, the
UK's first in over 70 years.
Connexus residents organised
celebrations at Independent

Living Schemes, Younger Persons Services, developments, and local venues. From street parties to barbecues, live screenings of the service and music, the celebrations went on across the Bank Holiday weekend. To support, Connexus pitched in with funding for some events.



What's the story? Residents at Upper Fee and Roman Downs received a £200 donation from Connexus contract partner Evans Construction. Upper Fee used the money to buy a brand-new set of balls for the scheme which residents can use in the communal lounge for games of boccia.

Hitting the reset button



It makes for grim reading, but national statistics show that almost two in five rough sleeper deaths were related to drug or alcohol poisoning (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

But what can be done to reach those most in need of support? RESET is a new and potentially lifesaving multiagency service to provide drug and alcohol treatment support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping across Shropshire.

Launched in March with a grant of £1.4m, the service has supported rough sleepers by providing drug and alcohol recovery support, mental health treatment, and ongoing support and daycare facilities. Domestic abuse support will be offered by Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service, operated by Connexus.

How a tragedy brought the issue of mould and damp to national

attention, and what landlords like Connexus are doing to fix the problem.

coroner's report which described how prolonged exposure to mould led to the tragic death of toddler Awaab Ishak shocked the country when it was released last year.

As details emerged of failings at the landlord involved, Secretary of State Michael Gove launched a blistering attack on substandard housing and said housing providers needed to do more to tackle the issue and not use a lack of finances or funding as an excuse to do nothing.

Customer concern

Many customers got in touch with Connexus following the news to express their concern, and to report damp, mould and issues with condensation. Something Sara Woodall, operations director at Connexus says it's taking very seriously: "It's concerning when you are living with mould in your home, and a case like Awaab's comes to light. The shock that many of our customers felt was shared by everyone at Connexus.

"In our organisation we're determined to improve how we deal with reports so customers can have confidence that when something is reported, it will get dealt with. A good quality home is a basic human right for everyone, and there should be no more excuses that providers can't deal with a problem in one of their homes. "



With that in mind Connexus has listened to customers on what guidance should be made available, as well as introducing a specialist contractor to assess different types of mould issues and diagnose them at an early stage.

"Mould has many different causes, and we need to establish very quickly what is happening. Every case is different," Sara says.

"If it's a fault with construction it can often require external work. If it's a build-up of condensation, it may need a repair or more ventilation. If it's an issue with maintaining the temperature of a home, then we can work with customers to get help and support.

"The main thing is that if you have an issue, please report it. If you aren't happy with the

response you receive, please let us know."

Addressing the cause

As well as dealing with reports directly from residents, Connexus is embarking on large-scale renovation work, tackling older homes where methods of construction and heating systems contribute to high moisture levels, damp, and mould. This year Connexus has pledged to spend £22 million on improvements to its

Tony Jones, head of asset management at Connexus, says that work is already underway to prevent mould becoming an issue in the first place. He said: "Through our improvement programmes, we're getting to grips with some of the

problems we have with our older homes many of which have a lack of good insulation, ventilation and the heating systems can be inefficient."

"...we need to

establish very

Retrofit work solves this by bringing homes up to a more modern standard. It often sees insulation installed, alongside new extractor fans, doors, windows, roofs, and other improvements completed at the same time.

"When improvement work like this is done, it improves the energy efficiency of the property which should help to reduce fuel costs and reduce the chance of condensation and mould within the property," Tony added.

To report an issue you can call 03332 31 32 33 or visit the website connexus-group.co.uk/mould

Tipper's Tips Dealing with condensation





When mould is caused by condensation, as well as getting in touch with Connexus to report it, there are things you can do to reduce moisture in the air.

Ian Tipper, a surveyor, has been helping customers for 20 years. He says spotting excess moisture early is important.

"When

condensation regularly forms on a surface, mould can grow. This often happens in bathrooms, kitchens, behind furniture and around windows. This can be bad for your home and your health," Ian says.

"If you're getting condensation, try ventilating your kitchen and bathroom after use, by opening a small window or using an extractor fan. Keep the door shut while vou do this.

"If you wake up and there's condensation on your window, leave it slightly open at night if it's safe, or open a window in the morning when you wake.

"Use trickle vents on your windows if you

have them too, they help. If you're finding mould n behind furniture, try and keep a small gap between that and the walls, to help air circulate.

"Avoiding high levels of moisture is also about balance, so even when ventilating your home, you should also make sure the temperature is consistent and warm - it should not drop below 15°C at any time. Ideally, the temperature would be between 16-18°C."

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Adventures in your own back yard

Get ready and get set for an action packed summer, with activities, things to try, and the return of a cinema icon.

If the nicer weather has you in the mood for adventure, you're in luck! We've pulled together a handful of adventure activities and things to do with friends or family this summer.

And if you'd rather just settle down with a good book, make sure to check out our short review of historical adventure novel The Mona Lisa Mystery on page 17. Let's hit the trail!

X marks the spot

Modern treasure hunt Geocaching combines outdoor exploration, technology, and a dash of curiosity, providing a fantastic experience for enthusiasts of all ages.

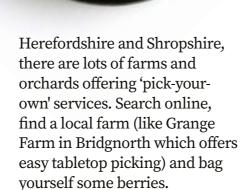
To begin your geocaching journey, start by downloading a geocaching app on your smartphone. Familiarise yourself with the rules and etiquette, then search for caches in your area.

Armed with coordinates and clues, venture into parks, urban areas, and hidden trails, using your problem-solving skills to locate cleverly concealed caches.

Uncover treasures, sign logbooks, and join a vibrant community of geocachers worldwide, all while discovering hidden gems in your own backyard. The Shropshire Hills **Discovery Centre offers** geocaching adventure trips, or you can find out about caches in your own area by visiting www.geocaching.com.

Pick a punnet

If you like time outdoors but aren't into searching uphill and down dale for clues to a geocache, there are easier options, especially if you're a foodie. Across



They taste way better than fruit from a supermarket, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you picked every strawberry or piece of fruit yourself. The growing season for most berry varieties runs from May until September.

Destiny awaits for Indy



Hold onto your hats and get ready for an actionpacked ride as Indiana **Jones returns in this fifth** instalment of the iconic franchise, Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny.

This time the intrepid archaeologist is battling the Nazis once more as he races against time to protect a mystical artefact with unimaginable power.

With some incredible 'de-aging' effects and the main story set against the backdrop of the space race, there should be something for old and new Indy fans alike.

This final instalment in the series is directed by James Mangold and features Harrison Ford, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Antonio Banderas, John Rhys-Davies, Toby Jones and Mads Mikkelsen. Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny is showing in cinemas from the end of Tune.

A garden adventure

Creating a tepee is a great family activity to try. Tepees like this can also be built inside if you don't have outside space.

You can buy them cheaply online or better make your own at home. Construct a frame from discarded sticks or canes and gather at the top with string. Wrap a large sheet around the frame and secure under the feet of each pole. You can secure to the frame with clothes pegs. Add a blanket as a groundsheet, and voilà! A perfect den. If you're using canes or sticks, be sure to put corks or caps on the end to keep them safe, especially with kids around.

Let there be light

Why not glam up your tepee with some fairly lights? Run them around the poles at the top and down the side of the entrance. You can also wrap them around the poles on the inside.

HAF you heard?

Families who claim benefits-related school meals for their children will once again be able to take advantage of free activities during the summer break.

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) is managed by local councils and delivered through schools, clubs, childcare providers, and other community groups.

The aim is to make holiday activities as accessible and inclusive as possible and sessions may include a healthy meal too. Previous HAF sessions have included pottery classes, martial arts and music workshops.

Both Herefordshire and Shropshire Council were still finalising their HAF programmes at the time of printing Connect. Their websites will carry full details of the programme, providers, and how to book a place.

Those living in Hereford should regularly check talkcommunity.org/ holidayactivities/ to find out more. If you live in Shropshire, visit shropshire.gov.uk/ schools-and-education/ holiday-activities-andfood-programmehaf/

Ask Ennin

Each issue customer services manager Emma gets to the bottom of your questions. If you have something you'd like answered, please email **connect@connexus-group.co.uk** or write to us at the usual address.

Q. The fence in my back garden was damaged in a recent storm. I reported a repair, but because of the damage was told it might need replacing under the new policy. What will that mean?

A. Fencing is normally the responsibility of the tenant unless it borders a public right of way or is part of a communal area. This includes regular maintenance such as repairing damage and making sure it's secure.

There are some things that Connexus will help with when it comes to fencing though. We will continue to repair fencing as long it is cost effective to do so. If we need to replace the whole



fence line, then our new fencing policy will apply. Under the new policy we will provide a single panel at the rear of your home to give privacy and install a chain link fence to mark the boundary between two rear gardens. If you have a corner plot, we can provide a rear and side fence and any gates that you need to reach your garden and home.



Q. Over the winter my radiators weren't getting up to temperature or keeping the house warm enough. What should I do?

A. If your radiators are less effective at keeping your home warm than they used to be, they may need some attention from our repairs team. If you have oil filled radiators, this may require us draining parts of your system or removing sludge that has built up over time. If you have storage heaters, these can become less effective and may not store heat like they used to. If you have any radiator or heating repairs, let us know as soon as possible. It's a good idea to do this during the warmer weather so we can visit when there are less call outs for emergency heating repairs.

Q. I have a gas service due on my boiler but I'm not going to be in for the appointment, can I rearrange it?

A. If you're not going to be in for your gas service or any scheduled visit, please call us straight away on 03332 31 32 33.



We will be able to rearrange it for a more suitable time. Gas services and other essential visits (sometimes called compliance or safety checks) are designed to keep you safe and Connexus has a legal requirement to complete them.

Gas service work is now completed by our in-house specialist team rather than a contractor.

Q. Can Connexus tenants have a barbecue in their garden?

A. It is okay to hold a barbecue – if we get the weather for it! It should be in your own garden or in an area that has been set up for barbecues. There are several things to remember though.

First, please consider the impact on neighbours. If they have washing out, please talk to them about a start time so they can get their washing in before it is affected by smoke.

Second, please consider the amount of noise being made, especially if neighbours have young children who go to bed earlier in the evening.

Third, please take safety measures to prevent fire spreading or anyone (including pets) burning themselves on the barbecue, which can remain hot for many hours afterwards.

Feedback

New satisfaction measures in place



Connexus is now required to collect specific satisfaction figures from customers about services.

Called Tenant Satisfaction
Measures, these figures allow
customers and the Regulator
of Social Housing to more
easily scrutinise how social
landlords like Connexus are
performing. The results will be
reported back for the first
time next summer. As of April
this year, there are 22

measures covering five areas including building safety and repairs. These are recorded through regular surveying and by monitoring services directly. IFF Research will help Connexus carry out surveys to support the collection of the measures. If they call, it will be from 0203 148 7635.

To find out more visit the gov.uk site, which explains more about the collection and reporting process.

Is Connexus listening?

Connexus' website includes a special section about the information it collects from customers and how it uses it to monitor services.

The section contains specific examples of actions taken and improvements that have been made as a direct result of customer feedback and complaints.

Satisfaction scores with key areas like repairs and lettings are also available to view and regularly updated.

Visit connexus-group.co. uk/customer-feedback-performance to find out more or follow Connexus' social media channels @weareconnexus for performance updates.



onnexus is on-track to deliver 93 goodquality affordable homes in Ledbury, Herefordshire. The

development will be completed in two stages, with the

first phase due to be completed by autumn 2023 and all residents expected to have moved into their new homes by spring

2024.
Reflecting local
housing need, this
development includes 41
two-bedroom houses, 44 threebedroom houses, six one
bedroom houses and two two-

bedroom bungalows. These properties will be offered with a mix of affordable rent, Rent-to-Buy and Shared Ownership. The development at Ledbury marks the first time Connexus

has taken on the role of main contractor,

after the original contractor went into

administration back in October 2022.

To coincide with the Platinum Jubilee last year, Connexus invited the

children of Ledbury
Primary School to run a street
naming competition for the
new development. In a fitting

tribute to the now late Queen Elizabeth II, the winning names were Platinum Way, Duke House and Monarch House.

14 more homes at Callaughtons Ash

Just over 50 miles north, in Much Wenlock Shropshire, work has started on the development of 14 new affordable homes at Callaughtons Ash.

The project marks the second phase of the development, following the completion of a first phase back in 2018.

Construction of phase two is expected to be completed in the first half of 2024.

Connexus and construction partner SWG Construction are

building the homes to suit a variety of needs and family sizes at the development. When completed the scheme will consist of eight two-bedroom homes, four three-bedroom houses and two one-bedroom apartments.

providing more muchneeded good quality affordable homes to the local community at Much Wenlock."

Amanda Knowles, head of

said: "We are delighted to be

development at Connexus,

Eco project delivers

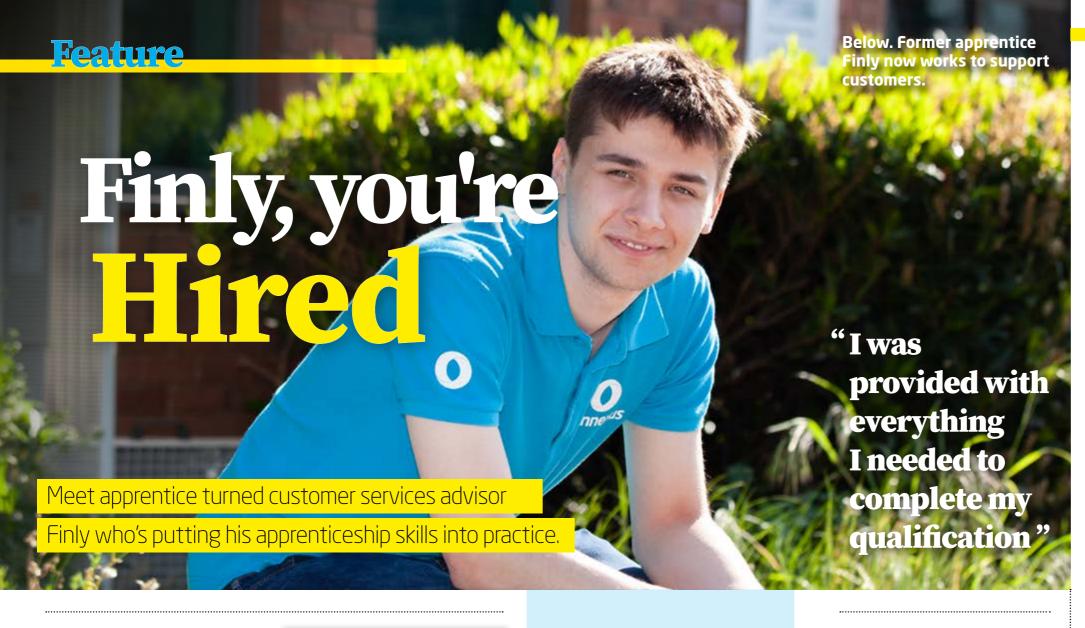


Work completed as part of Connexus' Warmer Homes Project (part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund) has improved the energy efficiency of over 230 homes.

In Hereford, improvements have been made to flats in Hunderton Road, including wall insulation, roofing, doors and windows. "Since the new insulation, the house is getting much warmer and I no longer use my electric fire," said Mr Da Silva, a local resident.

In Ludlow, Shropshire, contractors at the Sandpits development found solutions to air tightness and insulation in properties that do not allow the installation of traditional cavity wall insulation. Lessons learned from the project and new funding will help to improve more homes in the future.





wenty-year old Finly is celebrating after landing a job at Connexus following the completion of his apprenticeship.

Twenty-year old Finly is celebrating after landing a job in the customer services team at Connexus following the completion of his apprenticeship.

Finly started in 2021 as a customer services practitioner apprentice during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. University wasn't for him, and as he wanted to earn while he learnt, an apprenticeship was the perfect option.

Being an apprentice meant Finly had to balance attending



college and completing assignments while working at Connexus.

Finly said: "I did two days in the office on reception, two days on the customer service phone line from home and one day for my college work.

"I was supported by my line managers Laura and Chris, colleagues, and my tutor from

A leg up on the ladder

Apprenticeships can be an effective way to begin working life, offering a leg up onto the career ladder.

In rural areas which can have limited transport links and employment opportunities, they are a great way to learn on the job and get to grips with how an organisation works.

If you'd like to know more about apprenticeship opportunities at Connexus, visit the website connexus-group.co.uk/apprenticeships

Riverside training in Hereford. It was a brilliant way to start working life.

"Connexus was flexible with which days I carried out my duties, and all my college work I did in work time. I was provided with everything I needed to complete my qualification; the coursework really suited me as exams weren't for me.

He added the transition to full time employment was "a shock to start off with" but the change had been smooth and the apprenticeship had given him the skills, experience, and knowledge to work in the business full-time.

Shropshire Hills

Mammoth plans for the future



A deal has been struck to transfer the ownership of Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and lease 12 hectares of surrounding meadow land to a local charity.

The centre has been owned by Connexus since 2014 and managed by local charity **Grow Cook** Learn. The deal sees outright ownership transferred free of charge from Connexus to the charity, and 12 hectares of local meadow gifted to Craven Arms Town Council, which will lease it to Grow Cook Learn.

It's hoped the move will allow the new owners to apply for additional funding to deliver a range of ambitious projects in and around the centre, which will benefit the community and local wildlife. Grant Wilson, manager at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre said: "Acquiring the freehold and a long lease on the meadows is a really positive step for our charity.

"We have big plans for the future which we hope will help the centre to grow and attract more visitors. These include starting a regenerative horticulture project,

creating a wetland area in part of our meadows and refurbishing the shop and café areas. Our vision is for the centre to be something which the local community can take pride in, and which becomes a well-loved place to discover nature, relax with friends or learn about our food, history and the landscape."

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Easy eats

Home bake quiche

We've got a quiche recipe for you to try, perfect for a summer's day with a side salad. Yum!

Both recipes are made using the same base and method but with different ingredients. Once cooled you can pop in the fridge for another day. Can be eaten cold or reheated once.

Method (serves 6)

- 1. Set oven to 190c/gas mark 5.
- 2. Make your own pastry case or add ready-made pastry to a flan dish, grease with butter.

- **3.** Prepare filling ingredients, fry onions, mushrooms, garlic until soft.
- **4.** Place all the filling into the pastry case with half of the grated cheese, season with salt, pepper and herbs, then pour over egg and milk mixture evenly across the dish. Top with the remaining grated cheese.
- 5. Bake for 25-30 minutes until golden brown or until the filling is set - use a skewer or knife to check the quiche isn't runny in the middle. Let the quiche stand for a few minutes then enjoy!

Ingredients

Pastry and egg mix

- Ready-made pastry case
- 200ml milk and 2 beaten eggs mixed together in a jug
- 50g-100g grated cheese

Summer guiche

- 3 tomatoes
- ■1 small onion (finely chopped)
- 2 rashers of cooked bacon (cut up)
- ■1 small can of sweetcorn
- ■100g mushrooms
- Diced pepper
- Sliced tomatoes
- Black pepper and salt
- Fresh or dried thyme

Vegetable Mediterranean quiche

- ■1 red onion (finely chopped)
- Diced pepper
- Sliced tomatoes
- Sun-dried tomatoes
- ■1 clove garlic (crushed)
- Spinach
- Black pepper and salt
- Fresh or dried basil



Books

The **Mona Lisa Mystery**

M.A. Bennett

Publisher: Welbeck Flame



The Mona Lisa Mystery is the latest historical adventure novel in the **Butterfly Club** series of books from

Manchester born author M.A. Bennett.

The series follows the exploits of three Victorian children, Luna, Konstantin and Aidan as they travel forwards in time, pilfering technology and artefacts to speed up human progress.

This time the trio travel to 1911 and Paris, where they attempt the impossible, to steal the Mona Lisa from the wall of the worldfamous Louvre gallery - with a little help from master escapologist Harry Houdini.

Written at a rattle-along pace, with fantastic nods to the era and the real-life theft, it's characters and relationships are beautifully developed. For those looking to get younger readers interested in history, this book and the series are a great place to start.

The Mona Lisa Mystery from The Butterfly Club series is available from all good bookshops.

Horticulture

2023 gardening competition opens



The Connexus gardening competition is back for 2023, offering customers a chance to show off their green fingers and win some fantastic prizes.

Following on from last year's success, the categories have been simplified and should make it easier for those with amazing indoor plant collections to take part as well those with outdoor spaces. This year also sees the introduction of a young gardener award encouraging children and young adults to get involved.

Taking part is easy and just requires pictures to be taken of gardens, container displays or house plants. Photos can be submitted using the online form available at connexusgroup.co.uk/gardencomp or by sending photos to

Community Involvement, Connexus, The Gateway, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9BW.

If writing to Connexus, please include your name and the category the photos are being submitted for. The categories are: best indoor garden, best community garden, best individual garden and young gardener award.

There are love2shop vouchers to be won in each of the four categories. £50 for the winner and £25 for the runner up. The closing date for entries is midday on Monday 31 July 2023.

Winners will be picked by a panel of judges, with the winning gardens announced in autumn and featured in the next edition of Connect magazine. Good luck to everyone taking part in the competition.

Sign-off

Office news



Connexus has been actively reducing the amount of office space it has, after a big change in how it works following the pandemic.

A central headquarters, formally the South Shropshire Housing Association office, has been established in the town of Craven Arms, close to Ludlow. The Legion Way office at Hereford, closed to the public since 2020 has now been sold, with the proceeds being reinvested into the development of new homes and services.

Edinburgh House in Wem (also closed to the public since the pandemic) has been earmarked for redevelopment. Plans to create 28 new homes and hub space for colleagues have been submitted, which will create much needed new affordable housing close to the town centre.

Teams previously based at Legion Way and Edinburgh House are now working from special hubs, from home, or in our communities. How teams work in neighbourhoods will be expanded and improved as part of the new Connexus corporate plan. You can read about this in CEO Richard Woolley's update (right).



This July we'll be launching **Connexus' next corporate** plan which will deliver on a new long-term vision of providing 'good quality affordable homes for all'.

The plan has been developed in consultation with customers who said they wanted to see services change for the better, especially when it came to maintaining and improving their homes and accessing services.

As a result of your feedback, the plan will include three customer priorities which are to transform the repairs service, provide major investment in homes and to improve customer service significantly. These priorities are supported by 'enabling priorities' designed to build a

positive reputation for Connexus and to make sure the organisation remains resilient in an ever-changing world.

With the new plan will come new leadership at Connexus. After 14 years with the organisation, four as chief executive, I have decided to pursue other avenues and leave the organisation after what has been a challenging but extremely rewarding time. The board will now seek to recruit a new chief executive over the coming months to take Connexus forward.

I'd like to say thank you to everyone I've had the pleasure to meet during my time with Connexus and previously with Herefordshire Housing. I leave confident that Connexus has a great future ahead.

Competition

Pub quiz



Test your skills with our pub quiz, with questions from the worlds of pop culture, geography, nature and history.

Complete the quiz and use the first letter from each answer to crack the codeword. To enter **send us the correct codeword** to be in with a chance of winning a £25 Amazon voucher.

- **1.)** What is the name of the fictional kingdom in "Game of Thrones"?
- **2.)** Who won Album of the Year at the 2022 Brit Awards?
- **3.)** Elon Musk is the CEO of which global car brand?
- **4.)** What is the only mammal that cannot jump?
- **5.)** Which US actor plays the title character in the movie franchise 'Deadpool'?

Tea break - just for fun

Quick sudoku

3 2 1 2 1

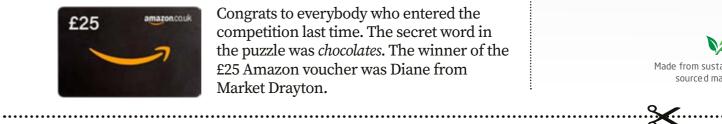
Anagram

REFLOWS WYATT

Fictional hotel and the last place you would want to stay.

Beezare Fact

Bees are found everywhere in the world apart from Antarctica.



Congrats to everybody who entered the competition last time. The secret word in the puzzle was *chocolates*. The winner of the £25 Amazon voucher was Diane from Market Drayton.

CONNECT

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Next issue due Winter 2023

Check out previous issues on the Connexus website.



The pub quiz codeword is..... Name Address

The first correct answer drawn from entries will win £25 in Amazon vouchers. Draw closes Thursday 31 August 2023. To enter, cut out this section of the page and send in an envelope to **Connexus, The Gateway,** The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BW or email us your answer (including your full name and address) to connect@connexus-group.co.uk - good luck! For full terms and conditions visit the Connexus website.



Help us keep your home healthy

Stock condition survey visits are essential to help plan future improvements and check the health of your home.

If you receive an appointment, please make sure you are in to let our property surveyor team complete the visit. If you can't make the appointment, please let us know by calling **03332 31 32 33** and we'll arrange a more convenient time.

To find out more visit www.connexus-group.co.uk/essentialvisits