

# CONNECT

The magazine for Connexus co

Summer 2025

## More choice for you

Improving our  
repairs service

## Ask Emma

Your questions  
answered

## The Hungry Guy

Tasty recipe inside

# Matt Lloyd

World, International and British award-winning cheese maker,  
Shropshire's Matt Lloyd chats to Connect Magazine



Radio ECHO • **Big Spring Thing** • Upgrade journey  
**Recipes** • Complaints • **Stock condition surveys**





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**We always  
carry a photo ID.**

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For more information and for a list of contractors we work with for safety checks,  
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Find out more about  
our safety checks by  
scanning the code



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You could win £25 in vouchers in this issue's cheesy word search.



# In this Issue



## Viewpoint

# Welcome to our cheesiest edition yet!

**W**elcome to Connect! In this latest edition,

you can hear about the Big Spring Thing at our Independent Living Schemes and try a recipe from the chef, The Hungry Guy, who's been working with customers at our Younger Persons Service.

By popular demand, we have an insight into the upgrade process for kitchens in customer homes.

You can challenge yourself with the cheesy word search,

to find the missing word for a chance to win a £25 voucher.

We'd love to hear your feedback on Connect, let us know if there is anything in your community you'd like us to cover, email below or other contact details are on page 15.

Hope you have a great summer!

*Sophie*

**Sophie Mellings**  
Editor



Connexus chief executive Kate Smith presents a plaque to the team at Radio Echo



# Snapshot

If you have a local story you'd like us to cover, get in touch with the team by emailing [connect@connexus-group.co.uk](mailto:connect@connexus-group.co.uk), calling our number **03332 31 32 33** or messaging us on social media [@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus)

## Community

# On the air in Hereford with Radio Echo

**Radio ECHO is an online radio project run by Hereford based disability charity ECHO. The project has been supported by the Connexus community fund since launching in 2022.**

Connexus CEO Kate Smith recently visited to check in on progress and to talk about the new corporate plan *homes you can build a life in* (see page 14 for details).

Broadcast Tuesdays and Fridays, Radio Echo helps people learn how to use broadcast equipment and builds confidence in front of a microphone. Kate also presented the station with a plaque to commemorate the ongoing link between Radio Echo and Connexus.

You can listen online at [www.aboutfacetheatre.co.uk/radio-echo-podcast-gallery](http://www.aboutfacetheatre.co.uk/radio-echo-podcast-gallery)

## Future skills

Connexus has partnered with Shrewsbury Colleges Group and the Marches Energy Agency to provide a unique learning opportunity for construction students.

Funded by the Energy Saving Trust, the project will retrofit an empty Connexus bungalow in Shawbury into an energy efficient, low carbon home.



Students will learn essential retrofit skills



Improving our repairs service for you

## More choice for you

**Involved customers have been working with Connexus to improve the service received when reporting a repair. From the first call to the finished job, Connexus wants to provide a quality service.**

Customers calling to report a repair can now request a date and time that suits them best, instead of just being offered am or pm appointments.

If your mobile number is in the system appointments will be confirmed by text, a reminder will be sent on the day before and you will receive a text on the day when the trades person

is on their way to you.

If the repair needs more than one tradesperson, for example a plumber and a carpenter, every effort will be made to try and send them together so there's no need for a second appointment.

Connexus trades people will show you ID and offer to wear shoe covers to protect your floors. Remember no id no access – if you're concerned that someone is claiming to be from Connexus but may not be, please check with the customer services team by calling 03332 31 32 33.

## Life at Ludlow Grain Loft



The Grain Loft is helping Paul rebuild his life

**The Grain Loft has shared flats for those between 18 and 55 years old with low-level support needs, supported by Connexus' Ludlow Foyer service.**

Paul, originally from Shrewsbury, ended up rough sleeping for five months before Shrewsbury Ark helped him back on his feet and into the Grain Loft.

Paul shared: "Since moving to Ludlow a few months ago, I've enjoyed exploring the area and making it a home. My flat is really cosy, I share with another lad here. We're like a family, you stick together, we support one another life here is really supportive. This place has turned me around."

Residents are supported by a key worker, which can cover anything from advice on how to manage money to understanding forms and looking for work or education. The aim is to prepare residents for their next move.





# Big Spring Thing

Customers from independent living schemes in Herefordshire and Shropshire have been busy giving their communal gardens a freshen up this spring.

**A**s part of the 'Big Spring Thing', customers, Connexus staff and volunteers got together at Henffordd Gardens and Beech Gardens to tidy up outdoor spaces.

Everyone helped to make the gardens more inviting for the warmer months, from planting vegetables and flowers, to scrubbing and pressure washing garden furniture and shelters, and making sure paths were weed free. Resident Daniel Thompson, said: "I had an amazing day, my favourite

part was helping to plant, it brought back good memories."

The events were a great opportunity for customers to connect and enjoy the shared spaces. Lyndon Barrington, resident said: "we had a great day, we managed to get a lot cleaned and got some planting done in the sun." For those unable to get outside, independent living coordinators arranged indoor pot planting so everyone could take part and feel included.

For more information on independent living visit: [connexus-group.co.uk/independent-living](http://connexus-group.co.uk/independent-living)



Residents and staff potting plants indoors



Residents, Connexus staff and



Residents, Connexus staff and volunteers at Henffordd Gardens in Hereford



Resident adding some plants to the garden



contractor volunteers at Beech Gardens in Ludlow

## Your home

# Keeping your home in top condition



Spotting issues early can prevent problems in the future

**Stock condition surveys are checks done on the condition of your home which help Connexus plan any work that might need doing in the future.**

The surveys start with a visual check of the structure of the property, such as the walls, floors and roof. Then internals such as heating, plumbing, wiring, wall and roof insulation. Fittings such as the kitchen, bathroom, doors and windows, are also inspected.

Surveys are carried out every three years by qualified surveyors to spot problems early, so they can be fixed before they become more serious.

Stock condition surveys are an important part of keeping your home safe and well maintained. It is important that surveyors are allowed access to your home to carry out the survey.

### Your Stock Condition Survey

Connexus will notify you when your survey is due, with an appointment date and time. If the appointment is not convenient, you can contact us to reschedule.

### Prize Draw

As a thank you for allowing the surveyor to complete a survey at your home, customers are entered into a monthly prize draw for a £100 Amazon voucher, and the winners will be published in Connect magazine.

### Recent winners:

Ms Mannion from Market Drayton; Miss Symonds from Westfields; Mr & Mrs Allcock from Market Drayton; Miss Battershill from Hereford and Miss San Antonio from Whitchurch.



# A grater calling

**World, International and British award-winning cheese maker, Shropshire's Matt Lloyd chats about his love of cheese and wanting to share his skills with others.**

**I**t all started with a Christmas gift in 2019 from his sister-in-law. Matt explains: “with a simple thermometer, a cheese cloth and a stock pot I made my first batches of cheese on the cooker in the kitchen!” These humble beginnings were enough to get him hooked. He started researching the science behind cheese, how microbes and bacteria interact to create flavours and different types of cheese. Matt can talk about it for hours!

“The first cheeses I made were simple mozzarellas and paneers for curries as it was popular with my friends and family. Because I’ve also got a full-time job I only make cheese at the weekend, but people were asking for more

and I was enjoying it, so I kept making it.”

As well as making the cheese, Matt continued his research into different types and experimented with Halloumi styles, as well as smoked and blue cheeses. “I was fascinated by the science. It’s interesting to be able to turn something so humble as milk into so many different textures and flavours. Cultures, temperatures, stirring techniques, different pressing times and how you mature cheeses all have different effects on the end result.”

## Putting his best cheese forward

Through research and experimenting, Matt started creating his own signature

flavours. It was his friends, always on hand to taste test, who encouraged him to enter into a competition. Matt said, “I was a bit hesitant – it’s a big step from your friends and family trying your cheese to having it judged by experts and compared with the produce of large makers who’ve been in the business for many years, but I thought, what have I got to lose?”

So in 2023 Matt entered the International Cheese and Dairy awards, which receives around 5500 entries from around the world. Despite more experienced competition, Matt won Gold for Best British Soft Cheese with Flavourings, and the Best International Novice award.

“I was amazed! I couldn’t believe I’d won against



international, established cheesemakers.

It was fantastic!"

Encouraged by this success, Matt turned his garage into a cheese studio and established The Rennet Works.

"I've always enjoyed cooking but making cheese really captured my imagination. I love experimenting and developing new styles and I wanted to see if I could find a market and sell it, so I set up the company and I've found a few local delis who agreed to stock my cheese.

"Sustaining Shropshire have been a great help in getting the business going as well. I took a free night class in business start-up at Harper Adams University where I studied subjects such as marketing and business planning.



I would strongly suggest getting in touch with them if you have any budding business ideas!"

And the awards haven't stopped either: Matt just won Best Blue Cheese in

the UK for his

Shropshire Knight

cheese and in 2024 his handmade halloumi-style cheese, Hallouminati, won Gold at the World Cheese awards and the International Cheese and Dairy Awards, while his smoked Gouda-style took the Bronze award.

Matt added "I've been lucky enough to be recognised by the Academy of Cheese, and received the new cheesemaker grant 2024 with Chiswick Cheese Markets which paid for my formal training, and I was assigned a top cheesemaker as a mentor." Matt is continuing his studying with the Academy

**"It's an amazing process and I really want to share the skills."**

and is working towards his level two qualification.

And what next for The Rennet Works? Matt has been approached by big supermarkets who want to stock his cheese but he's not eager to expand that way. Matt said. "I want to keep the business boutique and specialist. I have quite a following and making specialist bespoke cheeses for individual customers is a big hit as well as supplying superior quality small batches to high class delis and the like. It's also important for me to make the business sustainable by keeping the distance from field to plate as small as possible.

"I'm also hoping to move to new premises this year, which will give me the space to expand production and hold cheese making classes so I can teach others. It's an amazing process and I really want to share the skills."

Following his success, Matt was invited to be a judge at this year's International Cheese and Dairy Awards in June 2025.

Matt can be found on Instagram [\*\*@the\\_rennet\\_works\*\*](#) or email [\*\*cheese@therennetworks.co.uk\*\*](mailto:cheese@therennetworks.co.uk)



Matt's Hallouminati took gold in the World Cheese awards





# Ask Emma

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](mailto:connect@connexus-group.co.uk) or write to us at the usual address.

**Q: I'm going away for two weeks and I'm worried that leaving everything standing might cause Legionnaires' disease. How can I prevent this?**

A: Water safety is especially important during longer periods of home vacancy. Standing water can promote the growth of the Legionella bacteria, the cause of serious illnesses (Legionnaires' disease and Pontiac fever) if inhaled through water droplets.

If you're away for more than a week, flush your water system when you return. Flushing the toilet with the lid down, and running any taps for at least two minutes (both hot and cold),

should do the trick. If you have a shower, run it for two minutes before using it. If the shower hasn't been used for over two weeks, remove and disinfect the showerhead by soaking it for at least an hour in a solution like Milton, used for cleaning baby bottles, before reattaching it.

If in doubt, there's more water safety information on our website: [connexus-group.co.uk/water-safety](http://connexus-group.co.uk/water-safety)

**Q: Can I make a payment to Connexus over the phone?**

A: Yes, you can pay by debit or credit card 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – just dial 0330 041 6497 (make a note of the authorisation code as proof of payment). You'll need your 19-digit rent payment reference number.

You can also call our Customer Services team and pay directly over the phone by debit or credit card. Simply call us on 03332 31 32 33, weekdays 8.30 to 5pm or 9am to 5pm on Wednesdays. It's safe and when it comes to entering your credit card details, from this summer you'll be asked to do this on the keypad

of your phone and none of your card information is heard by our team. Remember to check no one is able to see the numbers you're entering.

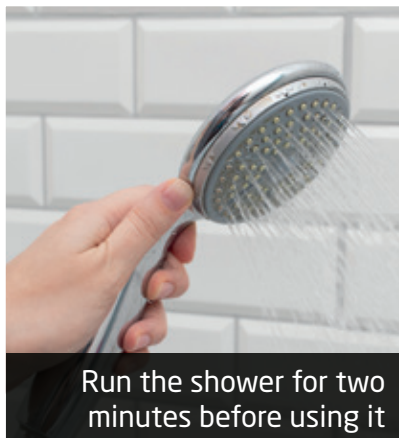


Paying by phone is safe & easy

**Q: When will my kitchen be upgraded and how do I find out?**

A: Kitchen and bathroom upgrades are planned based on stock condition surveys rather than age alone. We will contact you when your current kitchen or bathroom is due for an upgrade.

Letters are sent at the beginning of the financial year to let people



Run the shower for two minutes before using it



know about upcoming upgrades. Customers can refuse an upgrade if they are happy with their existing kitchen or bathroom, and the property is removed from the upgrade list for five years. If the upgrade is going ahead, Connexus will visit with a kitchen designer and discuss the process with you, including things like moving furniture to minimise disruption to you.

**Q: I'd like to have more of a say in the services I receive. How can I get involved with Connexus?**

A: There are many ways you can get involved, depending on what suits you best. There is a quarterly customer involvement group, or you could take part in consultations or focus groups if the topic interests you, either online, by post or in person. We also have a scrutiny group who reviews how services are delivered, challenging us to improve, and reporting findings to our senior management team. And if you'd rather get involved in your local community, you can help out with projects like communal garden spaces, clean-up days, or local events.

Find out more at: [connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved](http://connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved)

We can make adjustments to our services to fit better with you. For example, avoiding particular times such as the school run or if you've got regular appointment. Find out more in the leaflet enclosed with this issue of Connect.

# Complaints

## Service improvements

**Feedback and complaints from customers are essential in making sure we provide the level of service you should expect.**

Connexus responded to 460 complaints in 2024/25. This was an increase of 30% at stage one, and 41% for complaints escalating to Review (stage two).

82% of complaints were upheld due to failures in service, compared to 85% last year. Response times have improved to 82% at stage one, and 98% at stage two.

It's helpful that more customers are telling us when we get it wrong, because we can learn from this.

The main themes of dissatisfaction were outstanding repairs, damp and mould, and not communicating effectively. There are several initiatives underway to improve what we do and, although it won't happen overnight, we are committed to making things better.

In May we will complete our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling code and compile our Complaint Performance and Service

Improvement report. Look out for the outcome of these on our website and in our winter newsletter.

Remember, if you feel our service is not up to standard, please tell us and if you need any help to make a complaint, see the insert with this magazine on reasonable adjustments.

Some of the changes we have already made:

- An improvement in record keeping, to reduce the number of times you need to tell us something
- A new Customer Charter, so you know both what to expect from us, and what your own responsibilities are
- Working out what processes are not being followed correctly, so we can fix them
- System updates so that we recognise when neighbours need to be told of work in a home nearby
- More training for colleagues on complaint handling
- Clarification for colleagues on the insurance process for public liability claims.





Whether you're having friends around and don't want to spend all evening in the kitchen, or just short of time, keep these Hungry Guy recipes close at hand!

## Flavour tips

- Flavour balancing is like a seesaw, and you want to find a harmonious balance that you enjoy. Everyone's tastes are different so make this personal to you.
- Try to balance the sweet, sour, salty and spicy flavours. Think about what ingredients you have in your cupboard that could be used for each flavour eg BBQ sauces, ketchup, mustard, vinegar, pickle juice, marmite, Worcester sauce, honey, jam, chutney etc.

## Cooking made simple

# Asian stir fry noodle pot

**Customers at the Ludlow Foyer have been learning cookery skills from The Hungry Guy, AKA chef Steve Guy. The sessions included meal planning, food preparation and how to make a healthy meal on a budget.**

Steve explained why learning to cook is important for young people: "For me, cooking is far more than simply feeding yourself, saving money, creating a routine for your day or being more nutritionally beneficial than the other options. It's a ritual, it's a social

event, it's a celebration and it's self-care.

"What comes with cooking is focus. It builds resilience, relationships, it's the foundation for building and sharing a community. It takes care, forethought and love. Something every single person in the world can and should benefit from."

For our Summer Connect magazine, Steve has shared one of the recipes the young people cooked during the sessions.



The Hungry Guy cooked up a storm at The Foyer

## Ingredients

- 1 bag of stir fry vegetables, or a selection of veg from your fridge for example: peppers, carrots, onions, green beans, baby sweetcorn, mushrooms
- ½ pack straight to wok noodles, cooked rice noodles or cooked noodles
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil





## For the salty, sweet & sour sauce:

- ¼ red onion or 1 spring onion, finely diced
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- ½ red chilli, finely diced, or 1 dash of hot sauce
- 3 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon honey, or sugar
- 1 teaspoon lemon or lime juice, or vinegar
- Salt & pepper, to your taste

## Method (serves 2)

1. Mix the sauce ingredients together in a bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning.
2. Add the cooking oil to a wok or frying pan on high heat
3. Once the pan is really hot, add the sliced vegetables or bag of stir fry veg and cook quickly, stirring constantly until the veg are softened but not fully cooked through
4. Add the noodles and mix well
5. Remove from the heat, add the sauce and stir (or toss) to get all the veg and noodles completely coated
6. Taste and adjust the vegetables and rebalance the sauce flavours with more salt, sour or sweet.
7. Serve immediately!

To find more of Steve's recipes visit  
[www.thehungryguy.co.uk](http://www.thehungryguy.co.uk)

## Your home

# The upgrade journey



A kitchen upgraded for a customer in Hereford

**A kitchen or bathroom upgrade can make a huge improvement to a home. Connexus typically upgrades kitchens every 20 years, while bathrooms are renewed every 30 years.**

Here's what to expect if you're due for an upgrade.

## Kitchens

Kitchen upgrades generally take around 10 days. A carpenter remains on-site throughout the project, with other trades visiting as required.

The process kicks off on a Monday, when the existing kitchen is removed. First-fix plumbing and electrical work is carried out, all waste is cleared, and the floor is re-levelled by Monday evening.

On Tuesday the carpenter fits base units, and on Wednesday the worktop is installed. By Thursday tiling is completed, second-fix plumbing is carried out,

and the sink and washing machine are connected. On Friday afternoon the kitchen is finished, with second-fix electrical work wrapped up.

The second week is for decorating: the kitchen is painted, and new flooring is laid. Final checks will be carried out to ensure everything meets the agreed specification for customers, and then the job is complete.

## Choices available

Kitchens come in four different colours, various tile designs, with options for units and doors.

Customers receive a digital design of their new kitchen layout, so it's easier to see what it will look like when it's finished. In some cases home layouts are changed to improve space usage, such as swapping kitchen and dining areas or relocating boilers.

The work is carried out by Connexus' in-house team, including carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and multi-skilled plasterers.



## Planning Ahead



The new corporate plan

**Connexus has launched its new five-year corporate plan, *homes you can build a life in*.**

Developed alongside customers, the plan introduces a new purpose, mission and vision for Connexus.

It also sets out four commitments which aim to deliver new homes and improve existing ones, drive efficiencies and improve services, invest in communities, and see the organisation become a leading voice on rural affordable housing issues.

Chair of Connexus Board Michele Ibbs said: “We aim to provide more than just bricks and mortar; we want to create homes that offer safety and security. Homes that wrap around our customers and their families, allowing them to thrive in the rural communities we serve.

“This plan will provide long-term stability for the organisation, allowing time to embed necessary changes and ensure a positive, lasting impact.”

You can read the plan in full on the website [connexus-group.co.uk/about/contact/corporate/corporate-plan-2025-2030](https://connexus-group.co.uk/about/contact/corporate/corporate-plan-2025-2030)



## CEO Kate Smith A shift in focus

**As you will have seen opposite, our new long-term plan for Connexus has now been launched. Called ‘homes you can build a life in’, it represents a big step forward and a shift in how we deliver our services.**

For our existing customers, we know there is a real need to get things right at the first time of asking, so that forms a big part of what we’ll be doing in the first twelve months of the plan – making sure our culture, people and systems support good communication and planning. Importantly this will help us when things don’t go to plan, so we can resolve issues quickly, without the need to chase us.

*Homes you can build a*

*life in* will also support our communities with up to 200 new homes a year, built in the places where there is local need. Where we can we’ll be regenerating areas too, bringing homes up to a modern standard or combining new homes with refurbished ones in the same place.

Away from the bricks of mortar we’ll be championing our rural communities, making the case for more and targeted investment in homes and local services. We hope that by working with other local organisations, and coming together as one voice, we can help highlight the unique challenges we face in our rural towns and villages.





## The cheese board

Inspired by our cover feature, here is a list of 26 words associated with cheese, but which one is missing from the word search?

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

WENSLEYDALE  
CAERPHILLY  
MOZZARELLA  
FETA  
CAMEMBERT  
JARLSBERG  
CHESHIRE

BRIE  
MASCARPONE  
EMMENTAL  
PARMESAN  
GRUYERE  
HALLOUMI  
COTTAGE

STILTON  
DAIRY  
CHEDDAR  
GOUDA  
PECORINO  
RICOTTA  
GRATER

PANEER  
CURDS  
SWISS  
EDAM  
WHEY

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@weareconnexus

Next edition due winter 2025.

Well done everyone who entered the winter word search. The missing word was **sledging**. The winner of the £25 Amazon voucher was Mr Mailes from Ewyas Harold.



The word missing from the word search is .....

Name ..... Address .....

The first correct answer drawn from entries will win £25 in Amazon vouchers. Draw closes Friday 15 August 2025. To enter, cut out this section of the page and send it 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.



# Find a home

From time to time, we will advertise directly via our website and social media immediately available or coming soon homes to rent.

To see what's currently available please visit **[connexus-group.co.uk/affordable-rent](https://connexus-group.co.uk/affordable-rent)** (or scan the QR code)

Most Affordable Rent homes are let through HomePoint.

