

THATCHAM NEWS

THATCHAM

Keeping in touch

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Pop along to St Mary's for a chat

CAMEO, which stands for Come and Meet Each Other, is resuming its weekly sessions at St Mary's Church in Thatcham from Monday (January 13).

Sessions run from 2pm to 4pm in the Meeting Room and aim to bring together those in the community who are elderly, bereaved or alone.

Visitors are invited to go along and chat to one another over coffee, tea and cake and have fun.

The group celebrated a considerable attendance at its Christmas party on Monday, December 9.

Visit a session or the church website for further information.

You can also contact St Mary's Church at <http://www.stmarysthattham.org.uk/cameo.html> to see what other group meetings and upcoming events are planned.

Six new shelters

SIX new bus shelters have been promised for Thatcham in the new year.

The shelters, four of which will have grass roofs, will be provided within Thatcham at a cost of £47,604.37.

They will be located along the London Road (A4), Henwick (eastbound), Lower Way (westbound, opposite Glebelands), Lower Way (westbound, opposite Paynesdown Road), Station Road (opposite Flagstaff Square) and The Moors (westbound, outside Nevil Court).

The project was made possible thanks to a grant awarded to Thatcham Town Council by West Berkshire Council's Bus Services Improvement Plan, provided by the Department for Transport.

The grant will provide a contribution to clean and maintain each of the shelters for five years.

Shoplifter caught again

A SHOPLIFTER, back to her old ways, has been caught again.

Rebecca Smith appeared in the dock at Reading Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, December 10.

The 38-year-old, of The Haywards, Thatcham, admitted stealing dog treats worth £154.45 from Pets At Home in Reading on November 3.

She has previous convictions for offences including assault and multiple instances of shoplifting.

District judge Samuel Goozee deferred sentence until February to establish whether Smith was suitable for a drug rehabilitation programme.

She was meanwhile released on bail with conditions.

Honour for services to young people

CEO's charity provides sports opportunities for disadvantaged

A THATCHAM man has been appointed an OBE in the King's New Year Honours List for his outstanding services to young people and education.

Mark Lawrie has worked in sport and education for more than 25 years and is currently the chief executive of StreetGames, a charity providing affordable and accessible sports opportunities to disadvantaged children.

Mr Lawrie, also the founding chief executive of Get Berkshire Active, said he was "gobsmacked" to receive the honour.

"I couldn't quite believe what was written in the first few lines," he told the *Newbury Weekly News*.

"I hope it will help me support the causes I care about even more."

"On behalf of the StreetGames Board, I congratulate Mark on his well-deserved honour," added StreetGames chairman John Cove.

"It is fantastic to see Mark's work validated in this public way as the commitment, innovation and efforts he makes above and beyond often goes unseen but are central to how he drives the organisation forward to make a real difference to children and young people's lives up and down the country."

Under Mr Lawrie's leadership, StreetGames has expanded its activities to support more than 1,600 community-based sports clubs and youth organisations nationwide through initiatives such as Doorstep Sport, which brings accessible and engaging sports opportunities directly to young people.

Mr Lawrie, who has lived in Thatcham since 2006 and Reading before that, explained the charity is currently working alongside Thames Valley Police to help train organisations providing sport activities in Reading and Slough with how to support the wider needs of the young people they come into contact with.

And discussing the benefits of the charity's work in helping to improve young people's mental wellbeing and reduce youth crime,

"... I know from all the work we've done how being involved in sport and physical activity can have such a positive impact early on in young people's lives and set them up well for the future



Mark Lawrie

he added: "The sport and physical activity the local organisations we support provide has a really significant impact on mental wellbeing."

"But one of the main aspects from a mental health perspective is having a trusted adult around for these young people who they can rely on, because very often for the young people we work with, their parents are having to work two jobs, so they don't have that much time to spend with them."

"And then from the criminal justice perspective, we've worked with Loughborough University for 10 years now, really carefully building evidence about how the work that sport can provide in communities has an impact on young people's identity."

"A lot of what used to be around was about diversion and keeping young people off the streets."

"But actually, what we know is if you provide sport and physical activity in the right way, you actually support young people to be pro-social rather than anti-social."

"They develop good communication skills, leadership skills, things that steer them away from other ways of behaving just through the nature of the activity they're involved in."

And speaking more about why he got involved in helping young people to start with, Mr Lawrie continued: "I trained as a teacher in Birmingham back in the mid-90s."

"A lot of the kids in the schools I was teaching in had nothing."

"Their parents worked really hard, but they couldn't afford to go on holiday."

"But I saw firsthand how sport

gave them that sense of success and purpose."

"I suppose I've got this belief, which probably comes from my mum, to be honest, about social justice."

"I want to see that access for as many children as possible."

"And I know from all the work we've done how being involved in sport and physical activity can have such a positive impact early on in young people's lives and set them up well for the future."



Mark Lawrie is the chief executive of StreetGames, a charity providing affordable and accessible sports opportunities for disadvantaged young people



Runners at last year's inaugural event

Are you fit for the 10k?

GET fit this new year by preparing for Thatcham's second 10k run.

The race ran for the first time last year, with 250 tickets sold out more than a month before race day.

And entries are increasing to 350 this year, with a junior section expected to run too.

The event is organised by race director Ben Schiffer-Harte (Lib Dem, Thatcham North East), with the backing of Thatcham Town Council.

"We had identified that there wasn't a running event of this magnitude in the town," he said.

"We wanted not only to raise money for charity [each year funds raised support the mayor's chosen charities] but also to improve and increase health and wellbeing throughout the community."

"Our race shirt was a standout success and something we will be including to hand out to race finishers, as well as a medal and much needed post-race snacks."

This year's charities will be Thatcham Youth (The Hive) and Cruse Bereavement, as chosen by Thatcham mayor Suzanne Adamantos.

The Nature Discovery Centre will also receive a donation due to providing parking and providing access to the lakes.

The race will be starting at 10am on April 6 at the Lower Way Playing Fields. Entry costs £22 (£20 UK affiliated runners).

Visit www.thatcham10k.co.uk for more details.

Last year's chosen charities and partners received more than £3,150.

And Roots Estate Agency was the winning corporate team.

The race receives continued support from sponsors Roots Estate Agency, Bella Luna Restaurant and Howden Insurance (Thatcham branch).

It has also secured sponsorship with the English Provender Company, based at Greenham Business Park.

Nature Discovery Centre closed for tree felling

A WEST Berkshire beauty spot will remain closed until the end of next week while work to fell diseased trees continues.

The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust is carrying out the essential tree-felling work at its flagship Nature Discovery Centre site.

Ash trees at the Thatcham reserve have been affected by ash dieback, a serious disease that weakens trees and increases their

risk of falling or losing branches.

BBOWT, which manages the site, said the work was being carried out "to ensure the safety of its visitors and protect the surrounding area."

BBOWT senior land manager for Berkshire Tom Hayward said: "We understand this will alter the appearance of the site, but we're committed to restoring it."

"We're conscious that these kinds of changes can be unsettling,

and we want to provide reassurance that this maintenance work will be carried out to safeguard the future of the site."

"We are working closely with our wonderful local volunteers to ensure that our replanting efforts include a variety of different tree species which will help to prevent future diseases, so that wildlife here continues to thrive for years to come."

The work began on Monday and

is due to be completed by Friday, January 17, scheduled at this time to help minimise disruption to wildlife.

While the work is carried out the Nature Discovery Centre, including the car park, paths and playground, will all remain closed.

BBOWT said plans were already under way to plant new trees, with the help of the local community, "ensuring the area remains a haven for nature and visitors".