

CONNECT

The magazine for Connexus communities

Summer 2022

Ask Emma

Getting to the bottom of customer questions and queries

Ten Amazing Places

to see and visit this year

In your back yard

News and local stories from across Herefordshire and Shropshire

A Royal Knees up for the Jubilee





Cost of Living Payments

If you claim some benefits, you might be eligible for an additional **£650** from the UK Government, spread over two **Cost of Living Payments**. The first payment will be for **£326**, and the second payment of **£324** will be paid later in the year.

You don't need to contact anyone; your payment is automatic.

Find out what you will get and when you will receive a payment by searching '**cost of living support**'.*



gov.uk/costoflivingpayments

Find out more



*Eligibility criteria apply

4. Snapshot

News and stories from where you live.

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Customers and colleagues came together to celebrate in June.

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16. Recipes

Tasty, easy meals to try which don't cost the earth.

18. Sign-off

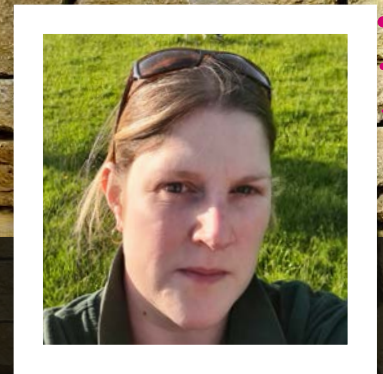
Hear from Connexus colleagues.

19. Competitions

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



In this Issue



Viewpoint

A new look for your magazine

A big welcome to the new look Connexus magazine, *Connect!*

After an intense consultation process and thanks to the amazing feedback you gave us, we've revamped both the style and the content to be much more interesting and about what matters to you.

Inside you'll find lots of new features, including fun things to do in Herefordshire and Shropshire that won't cost

the earth, recipes and word searches, plus information about what we're doing to improve things in your area.

We hope you love the new look and content as much as we do, and we'll keep working to bring you the best customer magazine around.

Samantha Baker
Editor



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, calling our number **03332 31 32 33** or messaging us on social media [@weareconnexus](https://www.facebook.com/weareconnexus)

Community

A garden for all to enjoy at Westlands

The idea for a new community garden at the Westlands Independent Living Scheme in Wem was first planted by residents two years ago, and has finally borne fruit!

Wem Town Council donated £500, Wem Rotary Club provided a shed, and residents raised funds by organising bingo and coffee mornings.

Evans Construction, on behalf of Connexus, built the

raised flowerbeds and resurfaced the garden area.

The transformation from stone boule court to raised flowerbeds at the Westlands scheme was declared open earlier this summer in a traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony by the Mayor of Wem, Councillor Peter Broomhall and attended by those living at the scheme and Connexus colleagues.

New kit for local group

A Wem-based community group that helps older people get online recently received new laptops donated by Connexus. GOAL (Getting Older People Online) runs free training sessions to improve computer knowledge for those aged 55 and over.



Learning at GOAL

Help to shape Connect



The children at Ledbury Primary School

Children honour Queen's Jubilee by naming street

Crowning the winning name of a Jubilee street naming competition was tough.

Alongside site contractor Jehu Group, Connexus teamed up with Ledbury Primary School to find the perfect royal name for a 93 home development site in Ledbury.

The names put forward were so impressive that not only did

Connexus name the street, it also named two homes on the site with the other names put forward.

The winning street name was Platinum Way, with one home being dubbed Duke House and the other Monarch House. Connexus gifted the school £150 Amazon vouchers for their sterling efforts.



We want this magazine to always reflect what's important to you and your community.

The best way to do this is shape the magazine's content in partnership with our readers. That's why we're looking to create an editorial team which includes customers to help produce future editions.

If you have an interest in your local community and would be willing to give some time to reviewing, suggesting or helping create future features we'd love to hear from you. To express your interest email connect@connexus-group.co.uk, get in touch on social media [@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus) or by using any of the other contact methods listed on our competitions page [19].



Baschurch FC with the new portable goals

📷 What's the story? Baschurch FC received funding from Connexus for new portable goals to use. Here's their under 12s side making full use of them! *Photo courtesy of Baschurch FC.*



A Royal Knees up

Staff and residents at Connexus Independent Living Centres and Young Persons Service joined in with the national Jubilee celebrations in June.

Wow, what a weekend! The UK came together in June to celebrate 70th year of The Queen's reign, making her the first British Monarch to celebrate a platinum jubilee, and residents at Connexus Independent Living Centres and Young Persons Service weren't going to miss out on all the fun! Supported by colleagues, residents young and old



celebrated together. Many Independent Living Schemes have shared community rooms for residents to enjoy group activities and get-togethers, which made them ideal locations for Jubilee parties. Some of these events were also opened up to the wider local community too, ensuring residents did not feel isolated during this joyful time of national celebration.

A huge thank you to everyone who got involved to make the Jubilee celebrations a success.

Snap happy

Lots of customers and colleagues sent in photos of the celebrations over the Jubilee weekend, which included all manner of street parties, Royal tea parties (with plenty of Victoria sponge!), bingo, buffets and BBQs.

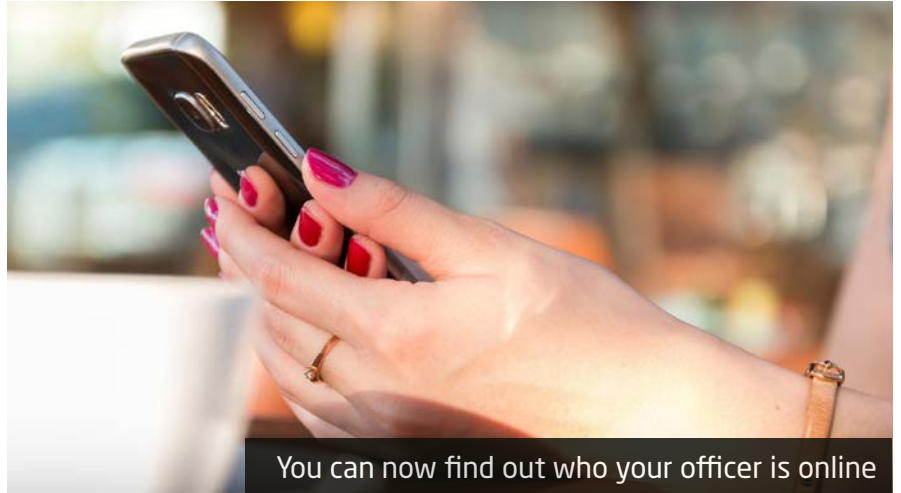
The pictures were shared on Connexus social media channels and had a great response. If you haven't had chance, why not check them out? Follow [@weareconnexus](#) on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Above and right. Celebrations at Connexus schemes involved customers of all ages. ►



New online service

Who is your housing officer?



You can now find out who your officer is online

A new service has launched which allows you to check who your local housing officer and other key contacts are.

The service is available on the Connexus website at connexus-group.co.uk/search-officers and lets you find out who your housing officer, tenancy sustainment officer and independent living coordinator is (if you have

one). The features have been developed in response to feedback, with customers saying it's handy to know who officers are as it can be difficult to remember.

Did you know? The customer services team are here to help Mon to Fri 8.30am to 5pm except Wednesdays, when lines open later at 9am to allow for training.

If in doubt, lock 'em out

To make sure that you and your family are safe in your home, Connexus carries out annual checks.

While it's important that the people carrying out this work are given access to do their jobs, it's also important that you are safe and you're sure the person at your door is genuine.

Sometimes Connexus will carry out the checks directly, sometimes it will be approved contractors carrying out work. Either way, they will have ID cards saying who they are and who they work for. Always check for ID, and if you're not sure, close the door and call us on 03332 31 32 33.

Ten Amazing Places

to see and visit this year

Longtown Castle from the air.



Raymond Orton/Shutterstock.com

The Knife Angel created by artist Alfie Bradley and the British Ironwork Centre

Looking for something interesting to do with the whole family?

Why not visit some of the great places in our area? With less

money in our pockets, these days out don't cost the earth.

“There’s been a fort on this site since the Roman era, and the current castle dates to around the middle of the 12th century.”

The British Ironwork Centre

Shropshire, SY11 4JH

A sculpture park might not sound like your kind of thing, but a gorilla made of spoons? A Knife Angel? A metal safari park? The British Ironwork Centre covers over 90 acres of land.

Perfect for a wander (or hire a golf buggy!) and there are activities for the whole family. Put your arm in the mouth of a shark, walk with elephants, meet Spiderman and SpongeBob SquarePants, or just take your dog for a leisurely walk. Entry is £5 high season, free in winter.

Longtown Castle

Herefordshire, HR6 0PY

A great place to take a picnic, with magnificent views of the Black Mountains and set in the beautiful Olchon valley. There’s been a fort on this site since the Roman era, and the current castle dates to around the middle of the 12th century.

As this is a ruined castle, access may be limited for safety reasons. However, when it is available it’s free to enter and open during reasonable daylight hours. ►►

Many of the places are easily accessible by public transport, but we've included postcodes to easily set the sat nav.

Cliff Railway

Bridgnorth, WV16 4AH

Where better to take in this historic area than from Castle Walk overlooking the town? There are steps you could take to scale the cliffs. But why not travel up in style, by taking England's steepest inland electric funicular railway? Bridgnorth was once one of the busiest river ports in Europe. These days it's a little quieter, the clear and unpolluted Severn a refuge for anglers, walkers and wildlife. It's also the terminus for the Severn Valley steam railway. Great for anyone who likes big old machines, or just a wander around the historic market town.



The funicular railway at Bridgnorth

Bromyard

Herefordshire, HR7 4DU

We honestly couldn't choose what to recommend first. Bromyard styles itself as the Town of Festivals, with events throughout the year. We also couldn't miss out the Time Machine, a sci-fi museum.

What about the galleries, the gardens and meadows, the half-timbered inns and the rolling countryside?

There's plenty to do if you just fancy a walk or a look around the shops, but it might be fun to check when the next festival rolls around and make a day of it. You shouldn't have to wait too long.

Queenswood Park

Herefordshire, HR6 0PY

Herefordshire's most popular outdoor visitor destination, Queenswood had to be on this list. We could spend ages describing the 123 acres of ancient woodland plus Herefordshire's largest lake, but we got excited about the "Gruffalo trail with statues for the kids", "wide tracks are wheelchair and push chair friendly", the "big natural wooden play area for kids" and that "dogs are welcome too"

Millennium Green

Ludlow, SY8 1EG

The Millennium Green is located at the foot of the cliffs below Ludlow Castle. A popular destination for locals



Classic cars parade through Bromyard



“There are steps you could take, but why not travel up in style?”

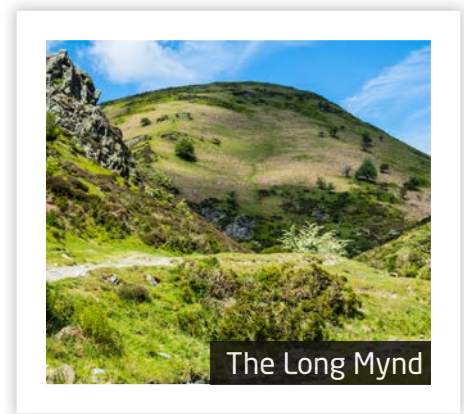
world with over 1,500 rare books including 229 medieval manuscripts. This includes the Mappa Mundi, a 13th century map of the world – the largest surviving medieval world map.

Devil’s Chair

Shropshire, SY5 0NG

On a clear day the 360 degree views are amazing. It can be a little tricky underfoot sometimes, but so picturesque it’s well worth the effort. The Stiperstones is a ridge line pushed up by tectonic movement and then the softest layers eroded away to reveal a line of tors. The Devil’s Chair is the tallest of these.

The car park is near the Bog Mine and Visitor Centre, convenient if you’d like to see the remains of one of the oldest mines in the area.



It offers breath-taking views of the River Wye in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

The riverside is very scenic, with the more active kayaking, canoeing or paddle-boarding down it, with man-made grade-two rapids at one spot.

Carding Mill Valley

Shropshire, SY6 6JG

Carding Mill Valley is the most popular and well known valley of the Long Mynd. There are

and visitors alike, it’s one of the few areas of the River Teme that can be freely and easily accessed and a great place for sunbathing, picnics or feeding the ducks!

The Linney Riverside Park is a few hundred metres away – with parking, toilets, picnic benches and a children’s play area.

Hereford Cathedral

Herefordshire, HR1 2NG

A place of worship for 13 centuries, the current building dates back to 1079 and has stained glass, architecture and art from a range of periods. Guides and volunteers are on hand to help you get the best out of it. There’s also the Chained Library, the largest library of chained books in the



The Devil’s Chair at Stiperstones

Symonds Yat Rock

Herefordshire, HR6 0PY

With the village of Symonds Yat split into two, the eastern half in Gloucestershire and only accessible by two ancient pull ferries, we thought it would be safer to bring you here, to the most iconic viewpoint in Herefordshire.

signposted and spontaneous walking routes all over the area. Known as ‘Little Switzerland’ in Victorian times, you’ll likely come across the wild horses on the plateau.

With these and all the sheep, if you’re walking these unfenced hills it’s best to keep dogs on a lead. Late summer is a great time to visit. ■



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 or write to us at the usual address.

Q. I'm worried about rising energy costs and being able to afford my bills this winter. Can Connexus help?

A. The rising cost of energy is affecting many of us at the moment. Anyone who is worried about being able to afford their energy bills should get in touch with their supplier immediately and explain their situation. Providers are required to help and can offer payment plans to spread the cost.

Connexus can help too – our teams provide support and guidance around benefits and funds you may be eligible for. We also work with partner organisations who may be able to help you. Get in touch by emailing hello@connexus-group.co.uk or calling **03332 31 32 33**. Further help from the Government for those struggling most may also be coming in the Autumn, so keep an eye out on our social media channels, where we'll share any details. There is more information on financial support and claiming benefits on our website.



Checks keep you safe

Q. I keep receiving letters asking to give engineers access to my home to carry out checks. Do I need to have these?

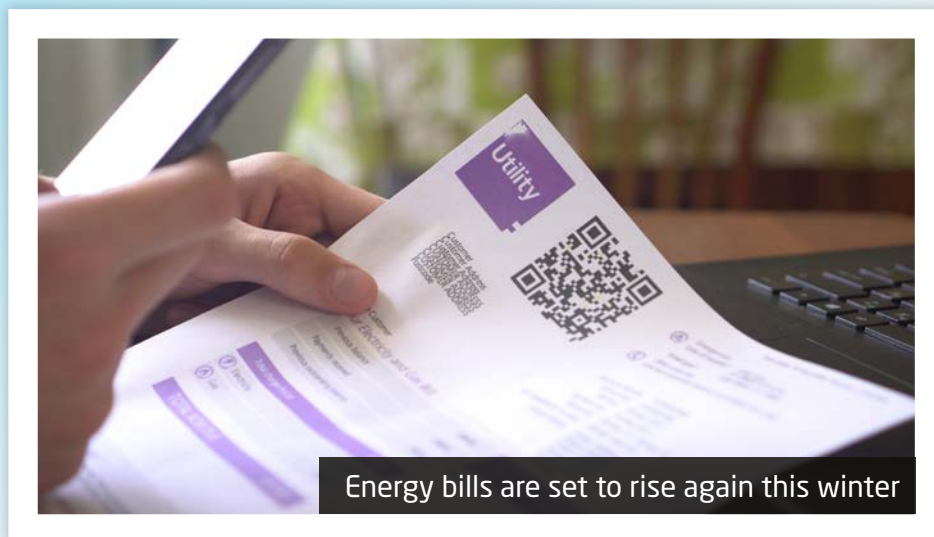
A. The answer is yes. To keep you and your families safe we need to carry out regular

safety and compliance checks like gas safety testing. For this type of test we do need access to the property. But don't worry, we offer flexible appointments and are happy to talk to you about this.

Q. I've noticed some of your properties are empty on my street? Why is that?

A. There are lots of reasons why some properties may be empty near you. We call these "void" and there are three main reasons for them.

Firstly, the property may have been left in a state of disrepair by the previous



Energy bills are set to rise again this winter



Some homes are kept empty to allow for repairs

tenant, meaning before we can re-let it, it'll needs lots of work doing. This process can take time and involve lots of teams or contractors.

Sometimes when we redevelop areas and need homes to temporarily move existing customers into we'll keep a property empty for this purpose.

Finally, we may look to sell an old property because the cost of improving them would be too much. Setting up a sale of this kind can take time.

Q. I've been a customer for ages and finally have free time to get involved with consultations, how do I do that please?

A. That's great news that you've got some free time and want to get involved. We encourage customers to work with us to shape the delivery of our services. There are lots of ways to get involved, ranging from focus groups, having your say in surveys or even becoming part of our scrutiny team.

And whether you've got lots of time to give, or just a few minutes – there are lots of options. To get involved email hello@connexus-group.co.uk with your details.

You can also fill out a simple form available on our website or call us on **03332 31 32 33**.

Damp and mould

Service changes following feedback



Condensation and damp can cause mould on walls and ceilings

Involved customers have been reviewing how Connexus handles reports of damp, mould and condensation.

All can have a big impact on your home and your health, and it's a really important topic.

With this in mind, customers looked at what information is received and how reporting issues could be improved.

By sharing experiences and talking to other customers and teams of colleagues at Connexus, a number of recommendations have been made which

would help improve the service received.

Recommendations included more face-to-face visits, frequent and thorough property checks and creating better information so

that everyone can distinguish easily between damp, mould and condensation when reporting a problem. Something that's not always that easy to spot straight away!

The review has been supported by colleagues from the communities team (you can meet them on page 18!) with changes as a result of the feedback rolling out to services this autumn and winter.



New Beginnings

at Bath Street and Beattie Avenue

Two areas in Herefordshire have seen rejuvenation, revitalisation and happy customers moving into their new homes over the past few months.

At the historic Bath Street site, an £8m redevelopment, Connexus has been able to do something quite different by taking an historic city-centre building, and modernising it to offer stylish affordable living spaces, while retaining much of the buildings character. This coupled with some modern courtyard styling has created a real sense of togetherness, making good on



the promise of investing not only in developments but in communities too.

The site, which was formally opened in May this year by Councillor Ange Tyler, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regulatory Services and Community Safety, and Connexus Board Member John Barker, sees 74 new build apartments for both private and affordable rent. Residents have already started moving into the new properties, praising not only

the central location but also the atmosphere of the scheme.

Better new homes

Beattie Avenue (shown left) is a £9million redevelopment programme due to be fully completed in the coming months and consisted of two phases. The first phase, handed over in July 2021, and welcomed families new and old to the area with a mix of social housing and rent to buy bungalows and homes. This redevelopment replaced existing prefab bungalows with newer more energy efficient homes and has really supported first-time buyers to

Boost to improve homes



Connexus is spending over £14million this year to support its homes and communities.

Around £5.7m is being used to improve kitchens and bathrooms, complete electrical re-wiring, improve heating systems and install new windows and doors.

A further £6.5m will support more car parking facilities, flood management work, damp proofing and garage repairs. This is also funding to help meet the organisation's net zero goal, and £1.1m is to be invested in fire safety.

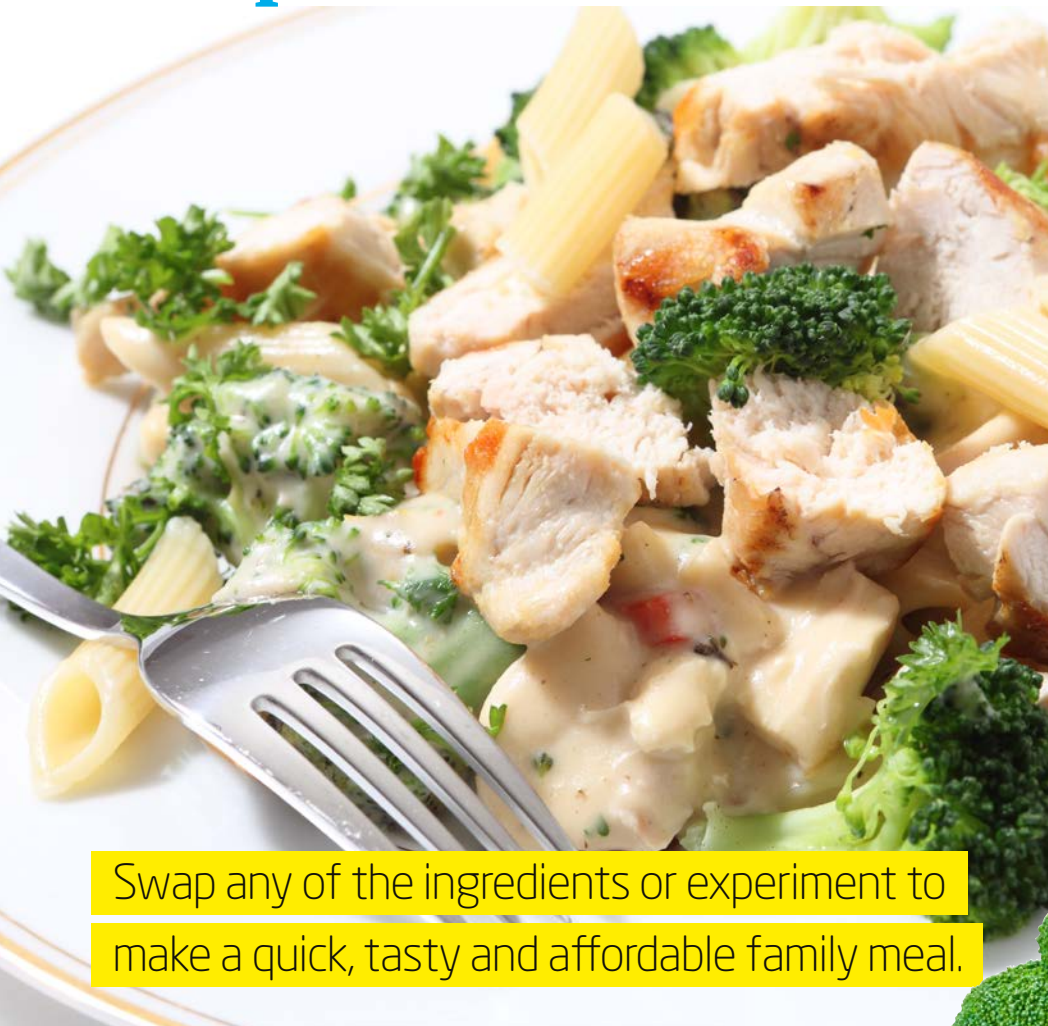
The budget also includes around £673k for small estate repairs such as tree surveying, adaptations and fencing. £216k is included for structural works like rebuilding existing retaining walls.

get onto the property ladder. Phase two, which sees all of the homes completed, means a further 44 families can now move back to an area they love, or discover a new community they will be part of.

And what makes this site so special? Connexus has been able to specifically adapt six bungalows to include wheelchair access giving customers a suitable home to many who have been waiting on the Council's Accessible Home's Register for some time.

◀ **Bath Street being opened by Cllr Tyler and chair John Barker.**





Ingredients

- 8 rashers (250g) of smoked bacon
- 2 chicken breasts
- 300g of fresh or frozen broccoli florets
- Salt
- 320g of dried pasta – spaghetti, linguine, penne or rigatoni work best.

For the garlic cheese sauce

- 300ml semi-skimmed milk
- 2 tbl spoons plain flour
- 2 tbl spoons salted butter
- 180g grated white cheese (or any cheddar)
- 2 tsp garlic paste/powder
- ½ tsp of dried oregano
- Salt and pepper

Swap any of the ingredients or experiment to make a quick, tasty and affordable family meal.

Easy eats

Creamy chicken and bacon pasta

This recipe can be adjusted to suit your needs – leave out the bacon and chicken for a vegetarian option and remove the garlic if you aren't a fan.

You can also experiment with different vegetables too and this recipe works with mushrooms and various greens like beans or leeks. The creamy garlic cheese sauce in this dish can be made at any time and frozen for when you need it.

Method (serves 4)

1. Cut the bacon into 1cm square pieces and fry in a little oil until the edges begin to brown. Remove from the pan, drain on a paper towel and set aside.

2. Bring a medium sized pan of water to the boil and add a large pinch of salt. Once boiling, add the chicken

breasts to the water and cover, boil for 20 minutes. The

chicken is cooked when there is no pink in the middle. If the chicken isn't cooked, return to boiling water. Set aside, keep warm.

3. Bring two pans of water to the boil, one large for the pasta and one for the broccoli. Add a pinch of salt to both. Cook the pasta for around 12-14 minutes until soft. In the last 6-8 minutes bring the broccoli to



the boil, reduce the heat and cover until cooked through.

4. Take a small pan and combine the butter and flour over a medium heat with a whisk to make sure the flour doesn't burn on the pan. When the flour and butter mixture



Flour and butter thickening

bubbles lower the heat and add the milk in stages. Take off the heat and whisk until the milk thickens. Add garlic paste/powder, oregano and cheese in stages. It should melt into the sauce. If not, put back on low heat. When it is sauce-like and coats the back of a spoon, add salt and pepper to taste. Add bacon pieces.

5. In a bowl or on a chopping board, shred the chicken with two forks.

6. Drain pasta and broccoli and place together in the largest pan. Add in the shredded chicken, cheese (and bacon) sauce and stir together.

7. Serve immediately. Enjoy!

How much does this meal cost to make? Based on average supermarket prices, the meal costs around £6-7 with meat (£1.75 /portion) or around £5 for a vegetarian version with just broccoli (£1.25 /portion).

Having your say

Taking part helps improve things



IFF Research may get in touch over the phone or by text

Feedback is important, and Connexus asks customers to participate in phone surveys throughout the year.

Connexus works with research company IFF Research to gather this information by telephone or by text, and they will always call you from this number: 02031 487 719.

You are under no obligation to take part, but if you're happy to share your views this allows Connexus to understand where improvements are needed and where customers are receiving good levels of service. Text messages and telephone calls from IFF Research on behalf of Connexus are not scams.

Prize draw! In it to win it

Connexus runs a special survey every few months for new customers who have moved into a home on a new development.

If you're a customer and have moved into a new home, after five months, Connexus will give you a quick call to ask some simple

questions about how you're finding it. You'll be asked things about the layout, quality and your experience of moving into a new Connexus home. Feedback is used to improve new homes in the future. If you take part, you're entered into a prize draw!

Meet 'n greet

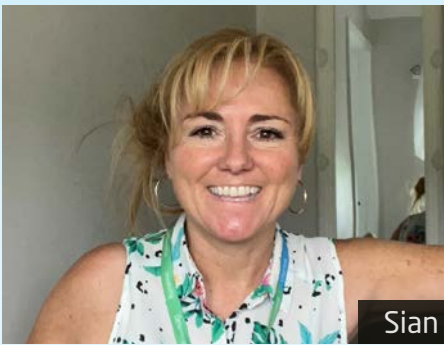


Jacqui and Max

Got an idea to help Connexus improve? Jacqui and Sian in the communities team are who to talk to. We tracked them down and found out a little more about them.

As communities manager, Jacqui champions the voice of the customer. She believes in treating people the way she would want her own family handled in the same situation.

She and her husband live with Max the dog, who keeps them busy. She's an avid runner and takes part in ultra-marathons!



Sian

Sian started in March, and says working at Connexus has opened her eyes to how much is involved in working with our communities. Having been a young homeless person and a survivor of domestic abuse herself, she says it's great to be somewhere that helps, as well as provides homes. Sian loves to dance, and teaches Zumba in her spare time.



CEO Richard Woolley

Our focus is you and yours

I know it is a difficult time right now with increased living costs and other financial pressures affecting all of us.

Where we can Connexus is trying to help, whether that be through targeted support from one of our teams or investing in insulation and other improvements which will make homes warmer and more energy efficient.

Our customers, their families and our communities will continue to be what matters most,

and we will do everything we can to support you.

To cement this focus, I've been out and about speaking to customers to get their thoughts on how Connexus develops over the next few years. This feedback will be used to develop our next long-term plan, due out next year.

If you've been involved, thank you so much for your input. We'll let you know more about how the plan is progressing in the next edition of *Connect*, due out in December.

Word search

Here is a list of 25 words associated with this time of year, but which is missing from the word search?

S	B	M	W	Z	S	A	N	D	C	A	S	T	L	E	O	B	X	F	M
D	G	I	Q	Q	F	N	L	U	P	P	A	S	O	P	T	J	B	L	B
E	W	S	Q	A	P	R	O	L	C	O	R	N	U	C	O	P	I	A	V
C	Z	T	W	R	E	W	C	X	T	I	A	I	T	A	S	Y	I	U	L
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D	X	U	P	U	R	L	O	V	S	V	Z	G	O	L	P	W	N	W	C
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SEASHORE
EQUINOX
APPLE
CHESTNUTS
PICNIC
BATHING
DECIDUOUS

SUNSHINE
SUSURROUS
COBWEB
SANDCASTLE
ACORN
PLENTY
FROSTY

BEACH
ORCHARD
MISTY
BLACKBERRY
FRUITFUL
CORNUCOPIA
FEAST

BOATING
CAMPING
OUTDOORS
HARVEST

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www.connexus-group.co.uk

On social media

@weareconnexus

Next edition due December 22.



Made from sustainably sourced materials



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 close Friday 14 October. 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.



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