

# Courier

30 November 2025 Issue Number 878

Published Fortnightly

## TIMBER!



Come on Mersea, this is an embarrassment to the island that our pole has been down for so long. The powers that be need to bang heads, look down t he back of the sofa and change up their Euros to erect our maypole back to its former glory.



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**Courier**

editor@merseaislandcourier.co.uk  
sales@merseaislandcourier.co.uk



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## THE COURIER SAYS...



With the budget now over, we can finally concentrate on life again and put the uncertainty of fiscal drag behind us.

Lights up hits Mersea this month so let's support local business as they have made an effort to put on a show for the punters.

The Courier is backing a campaign to re-erect our maypole, any support from locals is appreciated.



### MERSEA MEDIA LIMITED

Email editorial: [editor@merseaislandcourier.co.uk](mailto:editor@merseaislandcourier.co.uk)  
Email sales: [sales@merseaislandcourier.co.uk](mailto:sales@merseaislandcourier.co.uk)  
Telephone sales: 01206 862 881

#### COURIER DEADLINES

Courier 879 will be at 11.00am on Wed 10 Dec 2025  
Courier 880 will be at 11.00am on Wed 24 Dec 2025

*Contributions are welcome on or before the above deadlines, but no guarantee of inclusion or return can be given.*

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## MULTI-FAITH COMMITTEE TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY UNITY



Colchester City Council is pleased to announce the formation of a new Multi-Faith Committee, an initiative designed to bring together leaders from across the city's many faith communities to promote inclusion, mutual understanding, and shared support.

The announcement coincides with Interfaith Week 2025, a national celebration of dialogue and cooperation between different faiths. The Council is facilitating the initial coordination of the committee, but it will be shaped and led by faith representatives themselves. The committee will provide a space for faith leaders to meet regularly, share perspectives and work together to support the wellbeing of Colchester's diverse communities.

The idea for the committee was developed following a historic Council meeting in October, where representatives from Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities came together to offer prayers in remembrance of victims of the recent Manchester tragedy. It was the first time a multi-faith reflection had opened a Council session in Colchester, and it marked a significant moment of unity and shared purpose.

The Multi-Faith Committee will meet quarterly, with additional meetings convened if needed in response to specific events. One of its key roles will be to coordinate a joint response from faith leaders during times of difficulty or tension, including issuing public statements of support and solidarity. The committee will also work closely with Essex Police, who will be invited to join the group to help inform its discussions and strengthen collaboration.

In addition to its role in crisis response, the committee will encourage respectful conversations between different faiths, helping to foster deeper understanding and build stronger relationships across communities. It will support wider efforts to promote community cohesion and will play a central role in

organising events and initiatives that celebrate the cultural and spiritual richness of Colchester.

Councillor David King, Leader of Colchester City Council, said: "Colchester is a city of many faiths, and this committee will help us build stronger connections between communities. We are proud to support this initiative, which will be led by faith leaders and shaped by their shared values and vision. It will ensure that, when challenges arise, we respond together with compassion, clarity and unity."

Councillor Michael Lilley, Mayor of Colchester, added: "The multi-faith prayers at our recent Council meeting were a powerful reminder of the values we share. This committee will help us continue that journey, creating a space for dialogue, reflection and collective action."

Chairman of Colchester Mosque, Mohammed Mozir Uddin, shared his support for the initiative: "This Multi-Faith Committee is a welcome and timely step towards strengthening the bonds between our communities. As Muslims, we value peace, dialogue and mutual respect, and we are proud to stand alongside other faiths in building a more united and compassionate Colchester."

Ruth Stone, Lay Reader, Colchester and District Jewish Community, added: "We welcome this new initiative and look forward to working alongside our fellow faith leaders as we go forward together."

Colchester City Council is now inviting faith-based organisations and community leaders to register their interest in joining the Multi-Faith Committee. Expressions of interest can be submitted via email to [cabinetofficer@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:cabinetofficer@colchester.gov.uk).

This Interfaith Week, Colchester reaffirms its commitment to inclusion, dialogue, and community spirit, and welcomes all faiths to be part of this important new chapter.



## COLCHESTER SKYLINE SPARKLES WITH ST NICHOLAS SQUARE 25M CHRISTMAS WHEEL

After a summer of success and praise from local businesses, Colchester's new St Nicholas Square is once again at the heart of celebrations. This time for Christmas.

The £1.6million space – which opened in July - will host a spectacular 25-metre Observation Wheel, giving residents and visitors a unique chance to see the city from the rooftops and enjoy views of Colchester's festive lights.

Organised by Colchester Events with support from local businesses, the wheel made its debut during the Christmas Light Switch-On weekend on Saturday in November, adding an extra sparkle to the celebrations. It will return from Tuesday 2nd December, running daily from 11.00am to 8.00pm, and will stay in place for most of December.

Tickets are available at the booth on the day: £5.00 for adults, £4.00 for children, or £15.00 for a family.

Cllr David King, Leader of Colchester City Council, said: "We knew our new St Nicholas Square could be used creatively, for music, and gatherings across the year, and this Christmas Wheel is the perfect example."



"St Nicholas Square was a huge success in the summer. It was a joy to see residents and visitors sharing good times in a great setting. It is just one example of the renewal and regeneration underway, with more to come."

Alongside the Observation Wheel, the Christmas Light Switch-On will feature live music, street entertainment, and festive markets across the city centre, creating a magical atmosphere for families and visitors.

The event marks the start of Colchester's Christmas celebrations, with activities and attractions designed to bring people together and support local businesses.

Vincent Geaves, manager at Our Colchester BID, said the Switch-On is designed to bring the community together: "Christmas in Colchester is about bringing people together to experience the joy of the season. The Observation Wheel is a fantastic addition that will make this year's celebrations even more special."

"We encourage everyone to come out, support local businesses, and be part of this wonderful occasion."





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# STRONG COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Following an earlier £12,500 donation in March, Colchester Crematorium recently gave another £10,000 to The Tom Bowdidge Youth Cancer Foundation, demonstrating its strong community commitment.

Both donations were made possible through the ICCM (Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management) Metal Recycling Scheme. This initiative repurposes cremation metals, such as implants and coffin materials, by recycling them to generate charitable funds that truly impact people's lives.

A cheque presentation was held on 11 November during the ICCM East Anglia Branch Meeting at Colchester Crematorium, with the Chair of Trustees and the Founder & CEO of The Tom Bowdidge Youth Cancer Foundation, Richard Bowdidge MBE and Nikki Bowdidge MBE, who gave a speech for the donation.

The charity received £10,000 through the scheme, to support their vital work with young people facing cancer.

Nikki Bowdidge MBE, Founder & CEO of The Tom Bowdidge Youth Cancer Foundation said: "Our mission is to support teenagers and young adults living with cancer, focusing on their wellbeing, emotional support, and providing the resources they need to face an incredibly difficult journey. The amazing support of Colchester Council



Colchester Crematorium's recycled metal raises another £10,000

through the ICCM Metal Recycling Scheme not only raises essential funds but also spreads awareness of the challenges young people face. These funds come at a crucial time for the Foundation as families battling cancer are pressed more than ever by the

financial strain of a teenager going through cancer treatment."

Councillor Jocelyn Law, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Public Protection said: "We are genuinely delighted that, by participating in the ICCM metal recycling scheme, we can

provide donations to these outstanding charities. They are dedicated to offering life-changing assistance when individuals and families are navigating their most significant difficulties. It is a source of great satisfaction for us to assist them in continuing their essential work."






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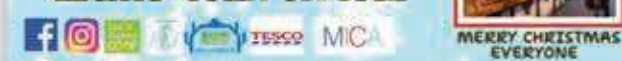


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## DID YOU KNOW...?

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But did you know we are a charity? We don't receive regular funding from the council or other public bodies. In- stead, we rely entirely on the income from our events, classes, bar, gym, and shop. Since the Covid pandemic, securing grants has become even more challenging.

Throughout the year, we offer a wide range of activities — there's truly something for everyone. Whether you love live entertainment, staying active, hunting for a bargain in our charity shop, or have visited the Barclays Hub, chances are you already know The MICA.

Becoming a MICA member isn't just about discounts it's about being part of something bigger. Members enjoy exclusive perks, early access to events, and the chance to support a centre that gives so much back to the community.

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# FLY-TIPPING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED AFTER 1.65 TONNES CLEARED FROM A12

Colchester City Council cleared 1.65 tonnes of waste from the A12 over three nights, beginning 27 October. The council made use of overnight road closures, enabling them to safely work at the roadside to collect a large amount of fly-tipped waste and littering.

Street Care and Safety operatives began with lay-bys that the council are responsible for, moving onto the four-mile stretch of A12 between Junction 28 and 26, London bound, for the remaining two nights. The fly-tipped waste consisted of old tyres, plastic bottles, paper and cardboard and old signage, adding up to the same weight as a large family car!

This effort complements Keep Britain Tidy's "Fight Fly-Tipping Fortnight" – a new campaign aiming to crack down on rogue, unlicensed, operators and help locals protect themselves and their community from fly tipping crimes.

Fly-tipping costs councils across England millions of pounds every year in clean-up costs, draining money that could otherwise be spent on essential local services. In Colchester, the council cleared up a total of 4,332 incidents in the past year, costing the council, and therefore local taxpayers, over £85,000.

The campaign asks residents to do

their best to protect themselves and their communities from criminal waste operators. It aims to shine a spotlight on criminal operators, who lure people in with cheap deals, only to illegally dump household waste on streets, fields and public spaces. Households can take a few steps to ensure their waste is disposed of properly: ask for a waste carrier registration number, check it on the Environment Agency's public

register here (or call 0300 065 3000) and check you'll get a receipt.

Cllr Martin Goss, Portfolio Holder for Waste, Neighbourhoods and Leisure, said: "Fly-tipping has an impact on all of us and is a deep source of frustration. Not only is it a blight on our local environment, it costs taxpayers thousands in clear up costs. This is money that could be spent on other important services.



Photograph Colchester City Council.

"Our teams work hard to tackle fly-tipping and littering, and they do a fantastic job, but we need our community's help to stop it at the source. We're asking people to check who they pay to take rubbish away. If a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is, and sadly it's our residents and communities who ultimately pay the price."

Fight Fly-tipping Fortnight will run from 10-23 November 2025, with local authorities across the country joining forces with Keep Britain Tidy to highlight the scale and impact of fly-tipping, educate residents on how to protect themselves and their communities.

Residents are also welcome to join local litter picking events with Colchester's Litter Warriors - a council-supported initiative that enables residents to help maintain a clean and green city by litter picking in their local areas. More than 600 Litter Warriors are already making a difference, and anyone interested in joining can register by emailing [community.volunteers@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:community.volunteers@colchester.gov.uk). Volunteers receive a litter picking kit and guidance on how to get involved.

For more information on fly-tipping regulations and how to report incidents, visit: [www.colchester.gov.uk/fly-tipping](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/fly-tipping).

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# MEN WALKING IN CAPE TOWN & LONDON

Bradley Rink & Gina Porter

**We studied the walking habits of young men in Cape Town and London – and debunked a myth.**

Being mobile means people can get access to opportunities and take part in economic and social life. Mobility, in all its forms, is critical for cities to thrive.

Recent studies highlight what most African city dwellers already know: walking is the main way of getting around, and essential for daily life. This is true for people who live in low-income neighbourhoods across the world. When people lack money for taxi, bus or train fares, walking becomes the only option even if the distances are great.

Yet, most African cities and many low-income neighbourhoods globally lack spaces for walking that are safe and appropriate.

While researchers place a lot of emphasis on road traffic, public transport and infrastructure, little attention has been paid to the importance of walking as a daily mobility strategy for low-income communities.

Even less is known about the walking experiences of young men. There often seems to be an assumption they are free to travel wherever and whenever they choose, that they're invulnerable. But what are the realities they face on the street, and what we can learn from them?

We're a team of human geographers and anthropologists working in collaboration with an international non-governmental organisation and a group of 12 peer researchers who are walkers: six from Cape Town and six from London. Our study aimed to learn more about the experiences of men like this, aged 18-35, in low-income urban neighbourhoods in South Africa and the UK.

We wanted to better understand issues of access and opportunity for communities that rely on walking. We also wanted to explore the potential of community-based research for improving lives.



South Africa's townships were built as black residential areas under apartheid

Our findings revealed what expected cultural and gender norms often mask: young men in these communities often walk with great fear and trepidation.

## The study

Our focus on young men was influenced by findings from an earlier study of young women in Cape Town. That study emphasised the particular concerns women have for the safety of their male counterparts who had to walk back home after accompanying the women to transit points.

We not only set out to foreground the walking experiences of young men; we also wanted to do research differently and with maximum potential impact for those involved. Peer research provides living knowledge, and also a chance to make meaningful change in transforming policy and practice. Peer researchers are, after all, experts in their own lives.

Through a five-day workshop we trained peer researchers in research methods, ethics and data collection. We gained an understanding of their communities through shared mapping exercises. The young men then set out to collect data independently, using

mobility diaries. Each of them also interviewed at least 10 other young men in their community.

Although their specific neighbourhoods aren't named for ethical reasons, the study areas were two township neighbourhoods in Cape Town and various boroughs in the east end of London. They were strikingly similar when it came to a sense of everyday dangers from high rates of crime, violence and deprivation.

## What we found

Young men in our study helped to undermine this myth of male invulnerability. They revealed how fear shapes their daily walking experiences and has an impact on their lives. As one participant said:

*I've been a victim of crime: at that time I felt useless, weak and vulnerable.*

More than this, their stories revealed how they use various tactics and strategies to stay safe. They walk with trusted others. They pay attention to their appearance and avoid displaying things like mobile phones and jewellery. They adjust their routes depending on

the weather, darkness and the presence of criminal gangs.

As one participant put it:

*I walk in the afternoon to the bus (to get to a job in a distant neighbourhood). It takes 10 minutes. It's not safe ... If I see criminals I pretend I'm tying my shoelace.*

Other peer researchers confirmed that even the simple act of appearing to tie a shoelace allows you to survey the street while not looking scared and protecting masculine dignity. If it looks dangerous, they said, you can pretend you've forgotten something and run back the way you've come.

Our findings illustrate the complexity of daily walks. While mediating danger on the streets and navigating the precarities of urban life, our peer researchers also reflected on the pleasures of walking. They sometimes found joy and relief in walking:

*I get to breathe fresh air instead of just sitting in the house ... thinking about being unemployed and stuff. I get to see people and be healed.*

Encountering the city on foot has benefits for physical and mental health.

## Why this matters

Safe, reliable mobility is essential for lives and livelihoods in the city. Our study identified ways that community stakeholders can support safe walking and therefore help with access to economic and social opportunities.

Lifting the veil on men's vulnerabilities allows community members and policy makers to understand the challenges across the gender spectrum.

But our research also matters because of how we went about it. The potential for change comes in the form of ongoing stakeholder engagement. Findings from the research were presented by the peer researchers themselves to community stakeholders and local government officials, people who have the capacity to improve infrastructure and safety.

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# TEN YEARS AT BLACKWATER VETS

For ten years at Blackwater Vets, I have learned a simple but profound truth: a community is not built by the pursuit of recognition, but by the quiet, steady commitment to make life a little better for beings who cannot speak for themselves. In that sense, these years have not been about achievement, but about contribution.

**The work was never ‘Mine’, It was always ‘Ours’**

There were days filled with calm routine, and days when chaos arrived before the kettle had finished boiling. But through it all, one constant remained: the unwavering dedication of a team who chose, again and again, to serve with compassion before seeking comfort.

Throughout these ten years, there is one value we have never compromised on: our responsibility to speak for animals who cannot speak for themselves.

At Blackwater Vets, inaction is never endorsed.

- We do not look away from discomfort.
  - We do not minimise subtle signs of pain.
  - We do not wait and hope it resolves.
- Instead, we guide caregivers gently but clearly to notice the quiet, easily overlooked signs of suffering their companions might experience. Stiffness mistaken for ‘slowing down,’ reluctance mislabelled as ‘stubbornness,’ or subtle changes in behaviour brushed off as ‘age.’
- We stand beside our clients to empower them. Our work is a partnership rooted in responsibility: when animals cannot express their discomfort, we must become their voice.



That is the heart of who we are. To the staff those who stood beside me in the late-night emergencies, the delicate surgeries, the difficult conversations, and the joyous recoveries’ you have embodied the idea that work is not a burden carried alone. You have shown that shared tasks transform into shared purpose.

Your kindness towards our patients and your generosity toward their worried humans have been the very heartbeat of this place.

- We did not avoid struggle; we accepted it.
- We did not chase praise; we built trust.
- We did not try to be admired; we tried to be useful.

**To our clients: A relationship between equals**

The philosopher in The Courage to Be Disliked\* reminds us that true relationships are horizontal, not vertical partnerships, not hierarchies. And for ten years, that is what our clients have given us: partnership.

- You trusted us in moments of fear.
- You let us share in your joy when recovery came.
- You allowed us to stand with you in grief when it did not.
- You brought us your beloved companions sometimes tiny, sometimes towering and asked us to help. The depth of that trust is something we never took lightly. Thank you for walking the long paths of treatment, healing, and sometimes farewell with us. Thank you for your patience, your openness, your humour, and your willingness to believe in us.

Your support has shaped not only our work, but our sense of purpose.



**What these ten years have taught me**

They have taught me that:

- A veterinary practice is not built from bricks, equipment, or certificates, but from relationships
- A community grows when each person contributes without demanding credit
- The most important work often goes unnoticed, yet it changes everything
- And that caring, honest, wholehearted caring is not a technique, but a way of being.

In this sense, Blackwater Vets has not simply been a workplace.

It has been a living example of what becomes possible when many people choose to share responsibility for the well-being of others, day after day.

**Looking back with gratitude, Looking forward with courage**

As I reflect on this decade, I do so with deep gratitude for every staff member who offered their steady hands and steady hearts, and every client who entrusted us with the care of their cherished animals.

The courage to be disliked is, at its core, the courage to live according to one’s principles rather than the pursuit of approval.

If these ten years have meant anything, it is because we acted not to be praised, but because the work mattered.

Thank you for your trust, your partnership, your kindness, and for allowing Blackwater Vets to grow into a place where purpose has always mattered more than applause.

Here’s to the next chapter, with humility for what we’ve learned and courage for whatever comes next.

Wendy has been the steadiness behind every unpredictable day. She’s my right hand, the person who quietly irons out problems before they become crises, who knows how this place ticks and keeps it ticking. To say I wouldn’t have done it without her is only to tell the most obvious truth: Blackwater Vets would look very different without Wendy’s steadiness, judgement, and care.

What matters to me and what has meant a lot personally is that Wendy would recommend this workplace to her daughter Lauren because she loves it. That’s not a throwaway line; it’s the highest compliment. It means this place has given Wendy something worth passing on: a sense of purpose, belonging, and an honest pride in the work. Thank you, Wendy, for every time you steadied the ship and for everything you’ve given it.

Welcoming Lauren as the newest member of staff has been a special kind of joy. She brings curiosity, eagerness to learn, and a perspective shaped by her training in animal physiotherapy. That she chose to join us and that Wendy would heartily recommend the place to her feels like the passing on of something good. Lauren, we’re glad you’re here.

Holly sensitivity matured into confident care. Holly arrived with a gentle sensitivity that she has turned into a real strength. Over three years she has grown into a confident veterinary nurse assistant and receptionist whose love for the job is visible in every interaction.



Her two cats are her north star, and they show in the way she cares for every animal that comes through our door. Holly, your growth has been one of the bright threads of this decade.

Joanna fits into the team as if she had always been part of it. Positive, practical and quietly reliable, she keeps the background running smoothly so the front line can breathe. Her contribution is the kind that keeps us functioning’ unspectacular to some eyes, indispensable to us. Joanna, thank you for making the day-to-day possible.

Though she joined us only recently, Chloe has already made a meaningful impact. As a locum Register Veterinary Nurse, she stepped into our rhythm

with ease helpful, capable, and quick to support wherever she is needed. Her adaptability and professionalism have strengthened the team from day one.

Chloe, thank you for your help, your flexibility, and the positivity you’ve brought with you.

To Wendy, Lauren, Holly, Joanna, Chloe and every staff member who has carried this work with heart;

To our clients, who have walked this road beside us;

And to the animals who have taught us humility, patience, and empathy’.

Thank you.

**Dr Ola Jankowska.**

*\* The courage to be disliked by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga.*



Helping pet owners of Mersea Island and surroundings to maintain the well being of their beloved family pet, through provision of veterinary care and education on responsible ownership



# THE TRUTH ABOUT VIKINGS & MEAD MIGHT DISAPPOINT MODERN ENTHUSIASTS

A group of friends sit around a table sharing stories and sipping mead. The men sport beards and the women sip from drinking horns – but these aren't Vikings, they're modern-day hipsters.

The 21st century has seen a revival of mead, a fermented alcoholic drink made from water and honey. In the past 20 years or so, hundreds of new meaderies have sprung up around the world.

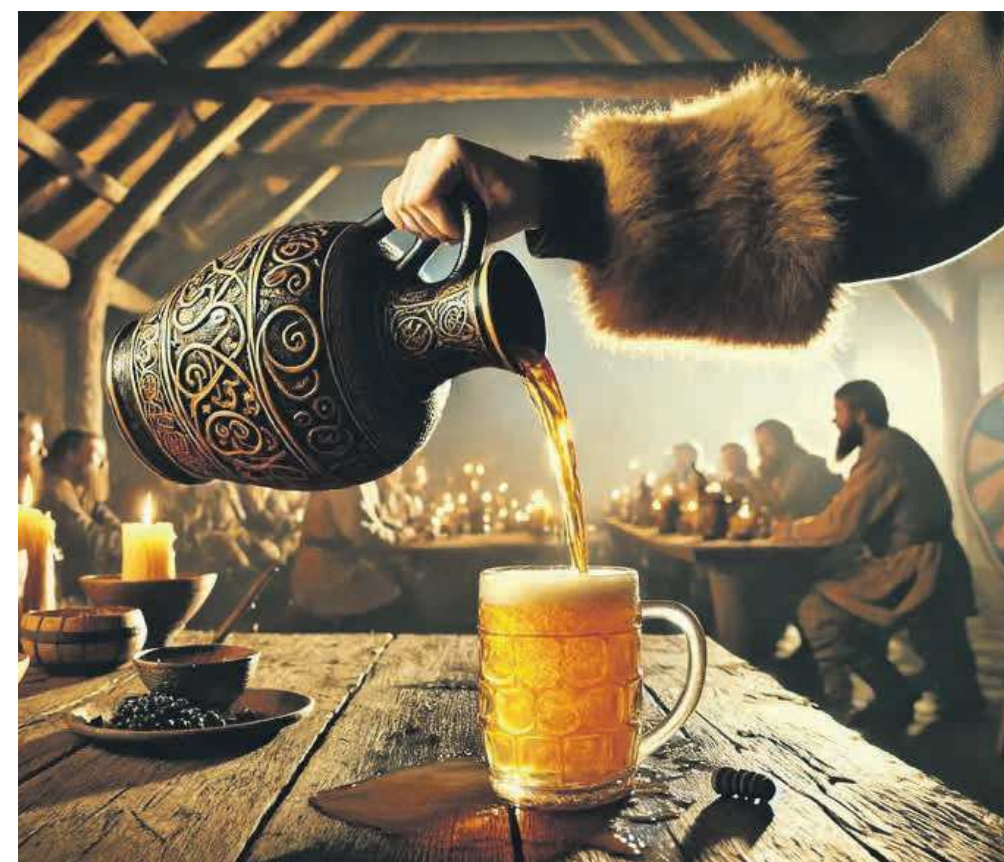
These meaderies often draw on Viking imagery in their branding. Their wares are called things like Odin's Mead or Viking Blod and their logos include longships, axes, ravens and drinking horns. A few even have their own themed Viking drinking halls. This is part of what might be called the "Viking turn", the renewed pop culture vogue for the Vikings in the past 20 years, which has made them the stars of a rash of films, TV shows, video games and memes.

Since the rowdy banquet scene in the 1958 film *The Vikings*, wild, boozy feasting has been a staple of the hyper-

so, for good or ill, they have tended to be conflated.

Most of Beowulf's action plays out around mead-halls – the power centres of lords such as the Danish king Hrothgar, where the leader would entertain his followers with feasts and drinking in return for their support and military service. This relationship, based upon the consumption of food and drink, but inextricably bound up with honour and loyalty, is the basis of the heroic warrior society that is celebrated by the poet. Not surprisingly, therefore, episodes in which mead is drunk are frequent and clearly emotionally loaded.

A second high-profile appearance of mead comes in Norse mythology. At the god Odin's great hall, Valhöll, the Einherjar – the most heroic and honoured warriors slain in battle – feast and drink. They consume the unending mead that flows from the udders of a goat named Heiðrún who lives on the roof. Norse myth, it should be noted, is sometimes quite odd.



English medu, (mead), and compound words derived from it appear far more frequently in strongly emotive and poetic contexts such as *Beowulf* than in practical ones such as laws or charters.

This contrasts strongly with the pattern of usage of other words for alcohol such as ealu (ale), beor (counter intuitively probably "cider") or win (wine), which are far more frequently used in a functional and practical way. This led Fell to believe that the concentration on mead in the likes of *Beowulf* was a "nostalgic fiction". Mead, she concluded, was a fundamental part of an idealised and backwards-looking imagined heroic world rather than something customarily drunk in the course of everyday life.

In 2007, a PhD candidate at the University of York demonstrated the same point in the Scandinavian sources: mjǫðr ("mead") is far more common in the corpus of Eddic and skaldic poetry than it is in the saga stories of everyday life. Equally, both the word mjǫðr and compound words derived from it are used far less frequently in the sort of practical and purposeful contexts in which öl and mungát (the Old Norse words for ale) are plentiful.

The strong impression in both England and Scandinavia is that, by the time sources like *Beowulf* were written from the 10th century onward, the plentiful drinking of mead by a lord's retinue was largely symbolic. It represented the contractual bonds of honour in an idealised warrior society.

This was more a poetic image than a reflection of frequent real-life practice. The standard drink at feasts, let alone at normal everyday household meals, was far more likely to be ale.

Mead was once a highly prized drink – probably the most desirable beverage well before the Viking age, as its honoured place in Valhöll and Hrothgar's hall suggests. However, honey's scarcity made mead expensive and hard to source in northern Europe. By the Viking age, exotic Mediterranean wine, mentioned as Odin's drink in the *Grímnismál*, may have begun to replace mead as the elite's preferred choice.

So what, then, for modern mead-drinking Viking enthusiasts? The point is not, of course, that Vikings or any other early medieval people never drank mead – some clearly did, if not perhaps quite so often as is sometimes alleged – but rather that it served more as a symbol of a story-filled heroic neverland. But that is arguably exactly how many of today's mead-drinkers also use it.



Drinking horns on display at a Viking-themed pub in York

masculine pop culture Viking. This theme continues in the 21st century, from the History Channel's *Vikings* TV series (2013-present) to games like *Skyrim* (2011) and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* (2020).

But while modern media suggest that Vikings drank mead as often as water, history tells a slightly different story.

Three stories are foundational for the Viking association with mead. The first is the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, which survives in a single manuscript written in Old English and now in the British Library.

The story it tells is set in southern Sweden and Denmark in the early 6th century, so the warrior culture and lifestyle that *Beowulf* idealises are actually of a period considerably earlier than the Viking age (usually dated from the later 8th century onward). It does share a great deal of its substance with later Viking notions of the good life and

Lastly, another important myth tells of Odin's theft of the "mead of poetry". This substance was created by two dwarves from honey and the blood of a being named Kvasir, whom they had murdered. The mead bestows gifts of wisdom and poetic skill upon those who drink it.

The whole myth is long and complicated, but it culminates with Odin swallowing the mead and escaping in the form of an eagle, only to excrete some of it backwards when he is especially hotly pursued.

These are striking and impressive episodes that clearly demonstrate the symbolic and cultural significance of mead in mythology and stories about heroes of the Viking age. But that is far from proof that it was actually consumed on a significant scale in England or Scandinavia.

As far back as the 1970s, the philologist Christine Fell noted that Old

# MERSEA

## Lights Up

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Your local Estate Agent for all your property needs.  
01206 382 382

**Mersea Island FISH BAR**

Have fun at Mersea lights up.  
Drop in for Fish and Chips eat in or take away.  
Open till 8.30pm

**Mersea Lights Up ISLAND DANCE ACADEMY**

We are performing at 12  
Come and see us!

O so party!

Come down and support this event!  
We will be selling all your favourite Christmas pocket money toys, gifts and more!

**AV-Style GROOMING**

AV-Style Grooming says enjoy the fun & stands at the Mersea lights up. Snip! Snip! Scissors & comb get a haircut before you go home. Open till 6.00pm

**Courier**

Wishing everyone an amazing evening at Mersea Lights Up.  
Telephone Sales on  
01206 862 881

**WEST MERSEA WATER PARK**

We are really looking forward to being a part of lights up, we have some amazing merchandise and gift vouchers to purchase along with a fun game to play against your friends or family, we look forward to seeing you there!

**Premier**

In support of Mersea lights up.  
Your local convenience store for all your essentials  
Open 9.30pm late.

**WENDY'S FASHION HOUSE**

Come down and support this wonderful community event.  
I'll be selling ladies clothing & accessories & home fragrance gifts.  
Find me on Facebook 07710230211

**Serene Glow Candles & Home Fragrance**

Beautiful selection of handcrafted candles, wax melts, and home fragrance gifts perfect for adding a touch of serenity to your space this season. Visit our stall.

**GAME ESTATES**  
PROPERTY SALES & LETTINGS

Have fun and games at the Mersea lights up.  
Come and see us for property sales and lettings enquiries.  
01206 384810



# Love Came Down

*Advent and Christmas in the Benefice of West Mersea, East Mersea, Peldon and the Wigborough's*

*Advent and Christmas Services and events in the Benefice of West Mersea, East Mersea, Peldon and the Wigboroughs*

*Sunday 30th November*

*Advent Carol Service*

6.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea  
A choral led traditional service using words from the Book of Common Prayer, with the theme of Advent, from the prophecy.

*Wednesday 3rd December*

*Messy Christmas*

4.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea  
Our favourite Messy Church of the year! Crafts, celebration, games, story and a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings – what more could you ask for? Fun for all the family.

*Tuesday 9th December*

*Carols at the Dog and Pheasant*

7.30pm @ Dog and Pheasant pub, East Mersea  
Come and join us for Carols in the pub and an opportunity to raise money in aid of the Catherine Bullen Foundation.

*Saturday 13th December*

*Scout Groups of Mersea Christmas Celebration*

4.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea  
Not just for Scouts! A carol service by our scouts of all ages, for scouts of all ages – come and join us to sing carols old and new...and stay for festive treats afterwards, of course!

*Sunday 14th December*

*Christingle Service*

11.00am @ St. Stephens, Great Wigborough  
A Sunday morning prayer with a zesty twist as we explore the tradition of Christingle.

*Messy Christingle Service*

3.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea  
This year we're doing Christingle Messy style! Come and join us for this special service ending with a party tea.

*Nine Lessons and Carols*

6.30pm @ St. Mary's, Peldon

A traditional service of well-known carols that, along with our bible readings, tell the story of Christmas.

*Monday 15th December*

*Sunbeams Christmas Nativity and Party*

9.30am-3.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea

As well as all our usual toys, games and fun, we'll be having our Christmas party and a short baby and toddler focused nativity – all babies, pre-schoolers and their well-behaved grown-ups welcome!

*Saturday 20th December*

*Blue Christmas*

3.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea  
Not everyone finds this time of year easy – for all sorts of reasons. If the celebration, lights and festivities all feel a bit overwhelming, this is the service for you. It's a short reflective service for those who may be struggling this Christmas.

*Messy Christingle and Carols around the Tree*

5.00pm @ St. Mary's, Peldon

Fun for all the family, come and join us for mulled wine, hot chocolate, mince pies, Christingle making and carols around the tree – how much more Christmassy can you get?

*Sunday 21st December*

*Nine Lessons and Carols*

3.00pm @ St. Stephens, Great Wigborough  
A warm and wonderful service of story and song, with an equally warm and wonderful welcome.

*Carols by Candlelight*

6.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea

An hour (or maybe slightly more) of well-known traditional carols by candle-light – a carol service like your Nan used to make.

*Wednesday 24th December –*

*CHRISTMAS EVE*

*Holy Communion*

10.00am @ St. Mary's, Peldon

A service of Holy Communion, as we look towards Christmas Day.

*Carols in the Churchyard*

4.00pm @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea

Come and join us for carols and community on Christmas Eve – if it's not part of your family tradition yet, it should be! (oh, and there's free hot chocolate and mulled wine too!)

*Christmas Eve Carol Service*

6.30pm @ St. Edmunds, East Mersea

A traditional Christmas Eve Carol Service in the beautiful setting of St. Edmunds.

*Carols and Communion*

10.30pm for 11.00pm start @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea

Come and join us early at 10.30pm for mulled wine, prosecco (non-alcoholic options provided) as we prepare to bring in Christmas Day together with a celebratory service of Holy Communion.

*Thursday 25th December –*

*CHRISTMAS DAY*

*Holy Communion*

9.30am @ St. Edmunds, East Mersea

A traditional Christmas Day Holy Communion, with a warm welcome.

*Christmas Celebration*

10.00am @ St. Peter and St. Paul's, West Mersea

It's Chriiiiiiiiiistmaaaaaaa! Come and celebrate! A family and when I say 'family', I mean EVERYONE, service of celebration and worship.

*Whether you have faith, a little faith, no faith or a different faith  
you ARE WELCOME; ALL ARE WELCOME.*

*HAPPY CHRISTMAS! May you know God's love, peace, joy and hope this Christmas.*

*With our love from the churches in the benefice (churchy language for area) of West Mersea, East Mersea, Peldon and the Wigboroughs.*

*If you would like to contact us, please email [admin@freshsalt.uk](mailto:admin@freshsalt.uk) or [rev.joparrott@gmail.com](mailto:rev.joparrott@gmail.com).*

*We'd love to hear from you. Xxx*

## BRAND-NEW KINDERGARTEN EXTENSION

St Mary's Kindergarten and Lower School, Colchester, is celebrating a new chapter of growth and opportunity following the official opening of its brand-new Kindergarten extension to enhance provision and created in response to increasing demand for places.

The new building was formally declared open during a special ribbon-cutting ceremony led by Lower School Head Girl, Orlaith, who joined St Mary's in the Kindergarten and School Governor, Craig Woods. An audience of families gathered eagerly to see inside the impressive new facilities for the first time.

Capacity at St Mary's Kindergarten has now been increased by 57%, enabling the school to welcome more children from its waiting lists. St Mary's has also seen a 24% rise in enrolment at its Lower School over the past year, reflecting continued interest in the school's nurturing and high-quality approach to an empowering education for girls. The Kindergarten features beautifully designed, age-appropriate learning spaces for children aged 2-3 and 3-4, supporting an inspiring introduction to education. Children can now join St Mary's Kindergarten at the start of the academic year in which they

turn three, allowing them to enjoy two full years in the setting before moving on to school.

During their time in Kindergarten, children benefit from a rich and varied curriculum that combines specialist early years teaching with new, teacher-led lessons in the year before school. Subjects such as French, Forest School, music and ballet further enhance their learning experience and help develop confidence, curiosity and creativity.

The opening ceremony on Friday 7 November offered families the opportunity to tour the new facilities, meet the Kindergarten and Lower School team and experience first-hand how the new environment supports St Mary's warm, curiosity-led approach to early education.

Mrs Nicola Griffiths, Principal of St Mary's, said: "It was wonderful to celebrate this exciting milestone with current and prospective families and the school community. The new Kindergarten extension is a bright, inspiring space where our youngest learners can grow, explore and thrive. We're proud to be able to offer more children the opportunity to experience the unique care and education that St Mary's is known for."



Lower School Head Girl, Orlaith (age 11 from Colchester) and School Governor, Craig Woods officially open St Mary's new Kindergarten extension

- St Mary's Senior School is the top non-selective school in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk based on GCSE Attainment eight scores released by the Government.
- St Mary's has been shortlisted for Independent Girls' School of the Year 2025 by the Independent Schools of the Year Awards.
- Following an Independent School Inspectorate (ISI) inspection in February 2023, St Mary's has been rated EXCELLENT across its Kindergarten, Lower School and Senior School.
- In the latest data published by the Sunday Times for prep schools, St Mary's Lower School was ranked 12th highest performing in England.
- Our end of KS2 SATs results in 2025 showed that 90% of Year 6 pupils met the higher standard for reading, 74% of Year 6 pupils met the higher standard in maths, 58% of our Year 6 pupils met the higher standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling and 42% achieved greater depth for Writing. As a comparison, this year's

- national averages of attainment at higher standard were 33% for reading, 26% for maths and 30% for grammar, punctuation and spelling and 13% for greater depth for writing.
- 55% of GCSE results at St Mary's in August 2025 were level 9-7 or equivalent (comparable to grades A\*-A), compared to the national average of 23% and up from 38% last year.
- Our excellent academic results demonstrate the effectiveness of single-sex education.
- St Mary's is a committed member of the Independent Schools Association, Girls' Schools Association, Independent Association of Preparatory Schools, and the Round Square organisation.
- Our school is dedicated to nurturing the talents and abilities of every pupil and celebrating their achievements. We encourage our girls to develop a wide range of interests, from sport and the arts to community and charity activities.



### Blocked sinks toilets & drains

If you're struggling with blocked drains, contact the experts.

We are on hand to fix your blocked drains fast and at a competitive price.



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**Inspection cover replacement service.**

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**We cover Essex & Suffolk.**

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# WEST MERSEA MUST BE HEARD

## HAVE YOUR SAY ON COLCHESTER’S FUTURE

By Cllr Carl Powling and Cllr R Davidson

Colchester City Council is preparing to consult on its Preferred Options Local Plan, which will shape development across our city and surrounding communities until 2041. This is a pivotal moment for West Mersea and we urge residents to engage fully.

The draft plan proposes an additional 300 homes on a new site at Dawes Lane, in addition to the 200+ homes already allocated in the previous Local Plan. This would bring the total to over 500 new dwellings in a town with unique geographical and environmental constraints.

We are not opposed to limited development that meets genuine local need, but we believe this scale of expansion is not sustainable without clear and enforceable infrastructure commitments.

### Key Concerns

We have raised strong objections to the proposed allocation, based on the following:

- Island geography and tidal flooding;



Cllr Carl Powling and Cllr R Davidson

Emergency access to and from Mersea is vulnerable and must be properly assessed.

- Environmental impact on the Blackwater Estuary: Crucial assessments have not yet been completed.
- Healthcare capacity: Local GP

practices are not accepting new patients.

- Public transport limitations: Connectivity remains poor, especially for non-drivers.
- Digital infrastructure: Internet access is still unreliable in parts of Mersea.

- Utility resilience: Water, sewage, and electricity networks are ageing and overstretched.
- Water supply and sewage capacity: As highlighted by Cllr M Parsons, there are serious concerns about the adequacy of water and wastewater infrastructure across Mersea and Colchester. These systems must be assessed and upgraded before any further development is considered.

### Proposed Development Areas

Proposed development sites in West Mersea, Peldon, Abberton, Langenhoe, and Fingringhoe

### Abberton and Langenhoe

This map highlights the indicative locations for housing growth under the Preferred Options Local Plan. These areas are being considered for strategic development and may be subject to change based on consultation feedback.

### Questions That Must Be Asked

We encourage residents to submit evidence-based comments and ask the following:

- What infrastructure will be delivered

- to support development?
- How will environmental protections be enforced?
- Is this growth deliverable without harming community resilience?
- What guarantees exist for healthcare, transport, and digital connectivity?

### How to Participate

The consultation will run for seven weeks, starting late November 2025 and closing in early to mid-January 2026. You can respond via:

- Online: Visit the Colchester City Council Consultations Portal.
- Once the consultation is live, the New Colchester Local Plan will appear as an open consultation.
- You'll need to register on the portal to comment. If you're already registered, simply log in.
- By post: Colchester City Council (FAO Planning Policy) Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG
- By email: You are welcome to copy us into your response:
  - Cllr Carl Powling – carl.powling@colchester.gov.uk
  - Cllr R Davidson – robert.davidson@colchester.gov.uk

### Learn More

Visit the Colchester City Council Local Plan Hub:  
<https://www.colchester.gov.uk/local-plan/>

The City Council will be holding face-to-face consultation events at Colchester Town Hall on:

- Wednesday 10 December 4.00pm to 7.00pm
  - Saturday 13 December 10.00am to 2.00pm
  - Monday 15 December 10.00am to 2.00pm
- While we are unable to host drop-in sessions in every location, we remain available to support residents with their

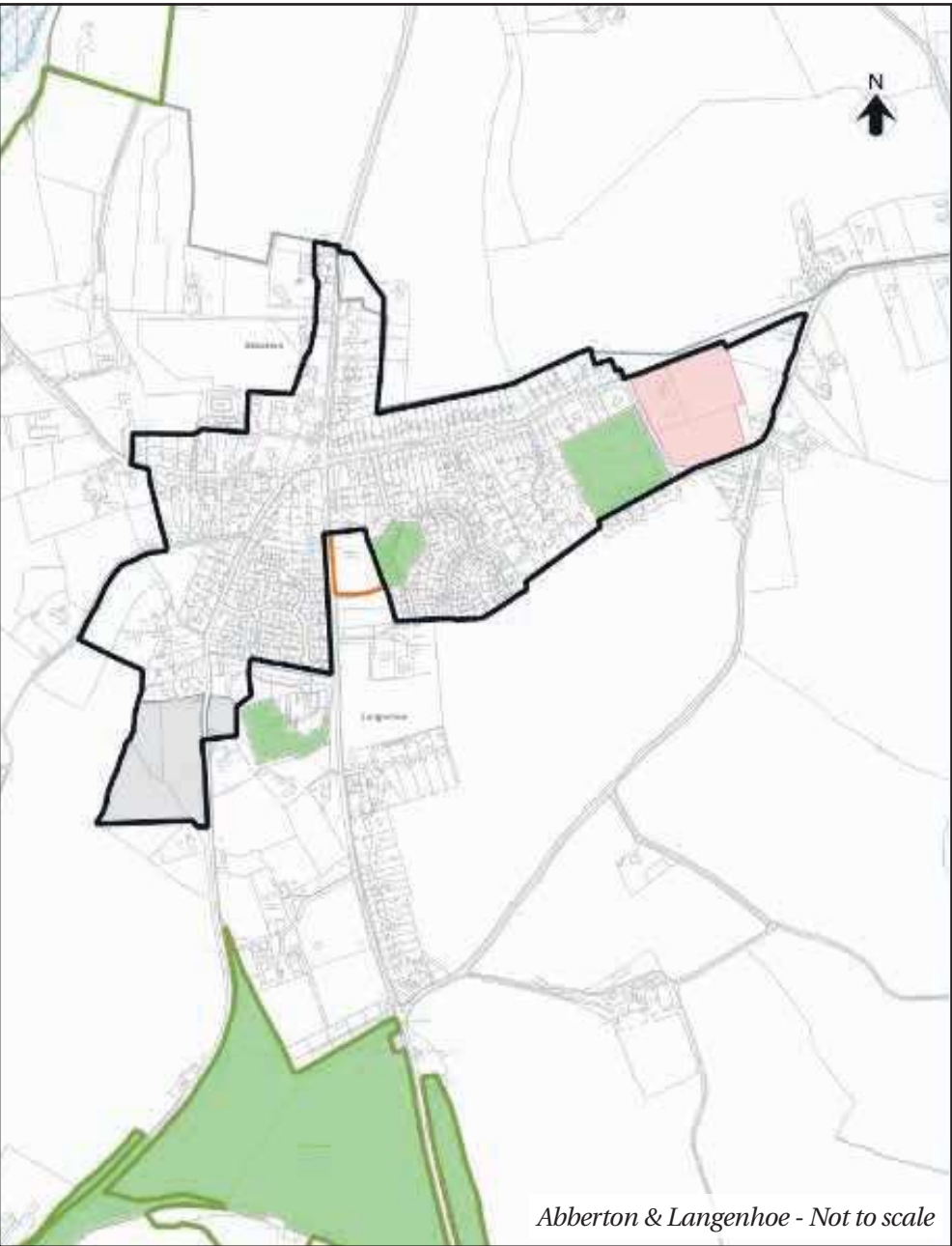
responses via email or phone.

This is a critical opportunity to shape the future of West Mersea and surrounding villages. Your voice matters. Your evidence matters. Let's make sure this plan works for our community.

**Stay Connected with Cllr Carl Powling**

City Councillor for Colchester and West Mersea. Email: carl.powling@colchester.gov.uk. Facebook: facebook.com/share/1KFDATT5DQ. Council Website: www.colchester.gov.uk.

Working for West Mersea, Pyefleet, and our villages ensuring your voice is heard.



Abberton & Langenhoe - Not to scale



West Mersea - Not to scale





PELDON

OIRO £700,000

rightmove

NO ONWARD CHAIN



**THREE - FOUR BEDROOM**  
Located on the popular, but quiet, Church Road Peldon is this Large 3 to 4 Bedroom Property. Immaculately presented but in need of some modernisation..

WEST MERSEA

OIRO £460,000

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PRICE REDUCED



**TWO TO FOUR BEDROOM**  
Situated in the popular Suffolk Avenue, Detached Chalet with a versatile layout giving Two to Four Bedrooms. Spacious Living and a Large Garden.

WEST MERSEA

OIRO £650,000

rightmove



**FIVE BEDROOM**  
Located on Oakwood Avenue, close to Beach and Amenities. A large Five Bedroom property offering the opportunity to enjoy the Mersea Island Lifestyle.

WEST MERSEA

OIRO £475,000

rightmove

PRICE REDUCED




**TWO BEDROOM**  
A Very Spacious Two Bedroom Detached Bungalow located on a 'Mersea Avenue' with No Onward Chain. In need of Modernisation but the property has fantastic potential.

MERSEA VILLAGE

OIRO £190,000

rightmove

NO ONWARD CHAIN



**TWO BEDROOM**  
In the heart of Mersea Village a First Floor, Two Bedroom Maisonette. Allocated Parking and Garage. Minutes from the Beach.

ABOUT US

**SELLBY HOMES** SELLBY HOMES is Mersea Islands Newest Independent Estate Agency. As we successfully progress we require more Properties to bring to the Property Market.

We welcome all Property types, contact us for a free Valuation.

Our Sales Fee is just 0.5% (on Sale Price) with 0% VAT.

If you are looking to Buy or Sell a Beach Hut or Mobile Home/Park Caravan we can help you too.

Our sales fee for Beach Huts is £800 and £1,000 for Park Homes/Caravans again with 0% VAT.

NOTICE OF  
LOCAL COUNCIL  
MEETINGS



The next ordinary meeting of West Mersea Town Council will be held at the Council Offices on Thursday 4 December at 7.00pm. The agenda will be published on their website [www.westmerseatowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.westmerseatowncouncil.gov.uk).

The next ordinary meeting of East Mersea Parish Council will be held at the Village Hall at on Thursday 11 December at 7.30pm. The agenda will be published on their website [www.eastmersea.org](http://www.eastmersea.org).

The public are able to speak at the start of these meetings and any Committee meetings, which are shown separately on their websites, and may remain throughout unless confidential items are to be discussed.

VACANCY

**Part-time Cleaning Operative for West Mersea Town Council.**

To unlock, clean and lock up the toilet blocks in West Mersea each Saturday - 3.5 hours per day.

For more information, please contact the Town Clerk by email: [town.clerk@westmerseatowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:town.clerk@westmerseatowncouncil.gov.uk) or by telephone: 01206 382128 option 3.

CRISP-MAS  
LIGHTS UP!

Mersea Water Park, join us from 4:30pm plenty of parking available in the field opposite.

The big light switch-on is at 5:30pm! Enjoy delicious food and drinks, with all proceeds going to charity.

We're also thrilled to have the amazing Paul Rocks performing live! Please bring cash and give generously in support of Cancer UK, a truly worthwhile cause.

We can't wait to see you there and make this our biggest event yet! Proudly supported by the wonderful team at The Fox Inn.

[https://www.facebook.com/donate/1092443312811594/?fundraiser\\_source=external\\_url#crispmaslights#mersea](https://www.facebook.com/donate/1092443312811594/?fundraiser_source=external_url#crispmaslights#mersea)

Please Support John and His Family

Please join us in supporting John and his family as they raise money for a cause that is incredibly close to all our hearts, Cancer UK.

Many people don't realise just how much love, time, and hard work goes into creating the magical Crisp-mas lights we all enjoy throughout December. These lights bring joy, sparkle, and special memories to so many and behind it all is John.

At 81 years young, John begins preparing at the end of October, climbing ladders to the very top of the house, making sure every decoration is perfectly placed.

Every single day he's out there, checking, fixing, creating something beautiful for the whole community to enjoy.

He even spends hours sweeping leaves and tidying the garden so the lights can truly shine.

This display is a gift from John's heart to all of us and now we hope you can join us in giving something back.

Please come along, show your support, and donate generously to this incredibly important cause.

Thank you, from John's family and all who love him.



INCIDENTS ON  
ESPLANADE

The two further incidents this month of vehicles leaving the road in the recent weather and crashing into fencing and

benches on Victoria Esplanade raise other issues.

These incidents support earlier requests for a crash barrier on the bend by the children's' playground there to prevent vehicles leaving road and then entering the playground.

Scouts

You are invited to

Mersea Island Scout Group

Christmas Carol Service

at

West Mersea Parish Church

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2025 at

Squirrels

BEAVERS

cubs

SCOUTS

EXPLORERS

WEST MERSEA FREE CHURCH

32 Mill Rd CO5 8RJ

Christmas Tree

FESTIVAL

Join us to view and vote

December Friday 12th 6 to 9pm,

Saturday 13th 10am to 5pm, Sunday 14th 1 to 4pm.

Free admission, refreshments and crafts.

Join us at any session to make your own Christingle.

donations this year to 'A Mersea St. Helena Shop Project'



MERSEA VILLAGE

OIRO £585,000

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NO ONWARD CHAIN



**THREE BEDROOM**  
Situating on the Village High Street is this newly refurbished 3 Bedroom Property. In our opinion, A Must See Property, Early Viewing Advised.

WEST MERSEA

OIRO £580,000

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NO ONWARD CHAIN



**THREE/FOUR BEDROOM**  
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BUT NOT SEEING THE  
RESULTS YOU WANT?

Break free from yo-yo dieting, cravings & food guilt- for good.

Hi, I'm Claire-  
Nutritionist & Food Relationship coach.

I specialise in helping you ditch unwanted overeating habits, rebuild your body confidence & feel good in the skin you're in.

If you:

- Feel stuck in yo-yo diet cycles & fighting against sugar cravings...
- Seem to always be on a diet, but struggle to stick to it...
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# BUBBLE TEA'S HAS A DARK SIDE FROM LEAD CONTAMINATION TO KIDNEY STONES

They've become as ubiquitous on British high streets as coffee shops – bubble tea outlets offering their Instagram-worthy drinks in countless flavour combinations. The Taiwanese beverage, a blend of black tea, milk, sugar and chewy tapioca pearls, has gained global popularity since its origins in the 1980s. But recent findings suggest this trendy drink may warrant closer scrutiny.

A Consumer Reports investigation revealed high lead levels in some bubble tea products in the US, echoing previous concerns about cassava-based foods. (No equivalent UK testing has been published.) The tapioca pearls – those signature “bubbles” – are made from cassava starch, and the root vegetable readily absorbs lead and other heavy metals from soil as it grows.

The tapioca pearls also pose other risks beyond contamination. Their starchy composition means that consuming large quantities can slow stomach emptying – a condition called gastroparesis – or, in some cases, lead to complete blockages.

Both can cause nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, and symptoms can be particularly severe in people who already have slow-moving digestion.

Even guar gum — a thickener often added to bubble tea and harmless in small amounts – can lead to constipation if you drink it often.

The drink's composition also affects kidney health. In 2023, Taiwanese doctors removed over 300 kidney stones from a 20-year-old woman who'd been drinking bubble tea instead of water. Certain components, including oxalate and elevated phosphate levels, can contribute to stone formation. However, this extreme case probably reflects exceptionally high consumption.

For children, the risks are more immediate. The pearls can be a choking hazard – a risk that is well documented by paediatricians. Adults are not immune to this risk.

According to media reports in Singapore, a 19-year-old woman died after inhaling three pearls when sucking harder on a partially blocked straw, while another woman narrowly avoided the same fate thanks to fast-acting bystanders.

## The sugar problem

The sugar content raises longer-term health concerns. Most bubble teas contain 20–50g of sugar, comparable to



or exceeding a can of Coca-Cola (35g). Research in Taiwan found that by age nine, children who regularly consumed bubble tea were 1.7 times more likely to have cavities in their permanent teeth.

In California, the drink is considered a contributing factor to the youth obesity epidemic, yet many young adults remain unaware of these risks. The high sugar and fat content increases the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, obesity and metabolic disease, while prolonged consumption may contribute to fatty liver disease – outcomes associated with any high-sugar product that spikes blood glucose and promotes fat storage in the liver.

Perhaps most surprisingly, emerging research suggests potential mental health implications. Studies of Chinese children who frequently consume bubble tea show an association with increased rates of anxiety and depression. Similar patterns appear in adults: research on Chinese nurses found that regular bubble tea consumption was associated with anxiety, depression, fatigue, job burnout and reduced wellbeing, even after controlling for other factors.

The same study linked lower consumption to reduced thoughts of suicide, though establishing causation remains complex.

## Strange scans

There's even a curious medical phenomenon associated with consuming bubble tea: tapioca pearls appearing on scans of patients admitted for unrelated emergencies.

Doctors treating people after car accidents or with appendicitis have found dozens of pearls visible in stomachs and digestive tracts. These can occasionally cause diagnostic confusion, as they appear denser than the surrounding tissues and have stone-like properties similar to those seen with kidney- or gallstones.

This doesn't mean bubble tea should be banned, but it does suggest we treat it as an occasional indulgence instead of a daily habit. And if you do indulge, consider skipping a straw. Drinking directly from the cup gives you better control, and allows your mouth's sensory receptors to properly prepare for what's coming.



High consumption of bubble tea may contribute to constipation

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# A HOME INSULATION FIASCO

## HAS LEFT TENS OF THOUSANDS IN COLD AND LEAKY HOMES OVER WINTER

Britain's flagship home insulation programme has received a damning verdict from the National Audit Office. Under the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme, tens of thousands of households have been left with faulty or even dangerous installations. It's a result, the auditors say, of weak oversight, poor skills and confused accountability.

This report is troubling not only because of the human cost but because it exposes a deeper failure of governance in how the UK tries to decarbonise home heating. It's a complex task that demands long-term stewardship, but is instead being left to the market.

The ECO was designed to make energy suppliers help households cut emissions and bills. Suppliers are the companies that buy electricity or gas from generators and sell it to you – the company named on your bills is your supplier.

In theory, the ECO means these suppliers meet government-set carbon or energy saving targets by funding insulation and heating upgrades for households, with regulators checking that installations qualify.

The ECO was preceded by two other schemes that operated on the same principle. For years, they worked reasonably well for simple and low-cost measures like loft or cavity wall insulation. But in 2013, the ECO was launched and expanded to cover more complex and expensive retrofits like solid wall insulation – an unprecedented shift.

### So, what went wrong?

The National Audit Office's latest findings confirm fears that this was an approach set up to fail. Many installations require major remediation, some pose immediate health risks. The problems are familiar: an under-skilled workforce, uncertified installers, weak regulation and oversight.

Individually, these problems could be fixed. The government could improve installer training, tighten audits and crack down on fraud. But together, they reveal a deeper problem: a misplaced belief that market-based tools can deliver foundational change.



Energy efficiency obligations such as ECO work well for standardised, low-risk actions, like swapping bulbs or improving boilers. But, as we warned back in 2012, they are less suited to complex, capital-intensive retrofits of millions of households that require lots of coordination and long-term financing.

The UK's energy efficiency governance still sits at arm's length from the realities in people's homes. Responsibilities are split confusingly between suppliers, Whitehall departments, auditors and local

authorities, and it can often seem like no one is really in charge.

That's why the failings highlighted in the National Audit Office report are not just implementation glitches or down to some "bad apple" installers. They're failings of a governance model designed for incremental change, not the transformation required for net zero.

### German lessons

If the UK really wants to retrofit millions of homes, it should look to what's worked in other countries. Germany's long-running KfW loan programme is one example. For more than three decades it has supported high-performance refurbishments through low-interest loans and grants. Successive German governments have recognised that the returns – in jobs, tax revenues, economic stimulus – have consistently outweighed the upfront cost.

By contrast, ECO has been repeatedly restructured, with shifting targets and funding levels that make it hard to plan ahead. Treating home retrofit as a short-term obligation rather than a long-term national project has left the UK far behind its peers.

Retrofitting homes is inherently local (you can't pick up your house and move it to a different area). Local authorities should therefore play a much stronger role in coordinating delivery, enforcing quality, and linking retrofit to other social goals such as tackling fuel poverty.

Getting councils involved would align retrofit with local priorities rather than distant central government targets. It could also rebuild trust among people who may understandably be wary of such schemes.

The UK's forthcoming warm homes plan is a chance to reset. The government should take a hard look at the tools at our disposal and think about what is needed to foster the creative and courageous policy needed to decarbonise our homes.



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## Sport

# BLOOD, BRUISES AND BELIEF

HOW ENGLAND'S WOMEN'S RUGBY TEAM EMBODY PHYSICAL & MENTAL ENDURANCE

Helen Owton

As women's sport surges on the global stage, hosts England have lit up the Women's Rugby World Cup. But the tackles, speed and power fans see on the field are only part of the story. What we don't see is what it takes – both physically and psychologically – to wear England's emblem, the Red Rose.

The psychology of rugby shapes every performance. Behind the scenes lie early mornings, lonely and punishing rehab sessions, playing through pain, brutal setbacks, private doubts and personal sacrifices.

Before the whistle blows and the crowd roars, players stretch aching muscles, re-tape old injuries and mentally lock in. The changing room becomes a crucible – a place of intense pressure and transformation – where focus sharpens, rituals are repeated and the “game face” goes on.

That game face is more than a stare. It's the product of years of physical and psychological battles. It's the mindset that lets an athlete walk into the arena with purpose and conviction, no matter what pain or setbacks they've endured.

Consider Emily Scarratt, one of England's most celebrated players. In 2023 a surgeon advised her to retire after a complex neck injury threatened her career. Opting for an artificial disc replacement near her windpipe was risky – any operation that close to the airway and spinal cord carries the danger of nerve damage or breathing complications – and career-defining because the operation's success or failure would determine whether she could ever play again.

Her February 2024 return wasn't just about regaining fitness. It was also about showing the mental steel that “game face” represents, blocking out fear and doubt to perform at the sport's highest level. At 35, she became the first England player to feature in five Rugby World Cups.

Abi Burton's comeback is equally astonishing. Just three years ago she was diagnosed with autoimmune encephalitis – a rare condition in which the immune system attacks the brain, causing inflammation and severe neurological symptoms – and placed in a medically induced coma. She woke four weeks later unable to walk, talk, read or write and more than 19 kg lighter. After years of rehabilitation, she made her World Cup debut against Samoa in 2025.

Rosie Galligan's road back was just as brutal. She nearly lost her legs to meningitis in 2019, then fractured an ankle in early 2020, which sidelined her for over a year. Told by medical specialists and coaches



more than once that she might never play again, she fought back to the delayed 2022 World Cup and is now a standout player for 2025.

These headline comebacks highlight something the public rarely sees: the daily grind of resilience. Managing concussions and torn ligaments, coping with the psychological toll of repeated setbacks; just staying in the game takes an immense toll and can lead to player burnout without strong support. Ellie Kildunne, ruled out of the quarter-final with head-injury symptoms, has spoken openly about the mental strength needed to survive the toughest moments, calling the internal battles “the hardest to win”.

So, while England may look clinical and composed on the pitch, every performance requires extraordinary emotional and mental strength. And the players are not doing it alone. Behind every recovery and every small gain is a network of coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, doctors and support staff working to keep the foundations solid.

None of this happens by accident. It's the result of years of sustained investment in the women's game: not just in players, but in the infrastructure around them.

Since 2009, nearly £50 million in National Lottery funding has gone into girls' and women's rugby.

The Impact 25 legacy programme – World Rugby's initiative to grow the women's game before, during and long after the 2025 tournament – is injecting a further £12 million to expand grassroots pathways: community-level coaching, clubs and player-development routes that help girls progress from school or local teams into elite rugby across England and the home nations.

Elsewhere the contrast is stark. Teams such as Samoa have had to fundraise just to get players on the pitch: a sharp reminder of the global inequalities that persist in women's sport. While England can rotate two professional squads, other national teams are simply trying to cover basic costs.

England's story shows what's possible when talent is matched with belief and when belief is backed with resources and support.

England's success hasn't come easy: it's the product of years of grit, resilience and bold investment. If women's rugby is to grow globally, England's blueprint may be a powerful place to start.

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

Date	Day	AM	Ht.m.	PM	Ht.m.
NOVEMBER					
29	Saturday	05:32	4.1	18:16	4.2
30	Sunday	06:42	4.1	19:33	4.3
DECEMBER					
01	Monday	07:56	4.4	20:41	4.6
02	Tuesday	09:02	4.7	21:44	4.8
03	Wednesday	10:03	5.0	22:39	5.0
04	Thursday	10:58	5.3	23:33	5.1
05	Friday	11:51	5.5	***	**
06	Saturday	00:25	5.2	12:42	5.6
07	Sunday	01:11	5.2	13:28	5.6
08	Monday	01:57	5.1	14:17	5.4
09	Tuesday	02:42	4.9	15:06	5.1
10	Wednesday	03:28	4.7	15:58	4.8
11	Thursday	04:17	4.5	16:52	4.4
12	Friday	05:10	4.3	17:50	4.2
13	Saturday	06:07	4.1	18:54	4.1
14	Sunday	07:14	4.1	20:01	4.1
15	Monday	08:20	4.1	21:04	4.2
16	Tuesday	09:20	4.2	21:56	4.3
17	Wednesday	10:10	4.4	22:42	4.5
18	Thursday	10:55	4.5	23:23	4.6
19	Friday	11:36	4.7	***	**
20	Saturday	00:02	4.7	12:17	4.7
21	Sunday	00:37	4.8	12:53	4.8
22	Monday	01:11	4.8	13:28	4.8
23	Tuesday	01:44	4.8	14:03	4.8



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