

CONNECT

The magazine for Connexus communities

2023

Fun and games
.....
Your chance to win
£25 in vouchers in
our festive word
search.

Fabulous Festive Fayre

Three great recipes to try

Winning for wildlife

The 2023 Connexus
gardening competition
winners are announced



Innesfield hub

Hard work pays off for
residents as community
room gets a welcome
upgrade



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**JOIN
OUR
TEAM?**



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Find out what it's like to work at Connexus by scanning the code

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



Viewpoint

A Christmas cracker of an edition



Welcome to **Connect!** In this edition we have loads of great stories and things to try.

We meet a family from Baschurch and learn about their experience of moving into a new home. Our gardening competition winners have been chosen, and we have all the details.

We also check out the latest stories from where you live, including a new look community hub and modern, energy efficient homes built in Brockton following a fire.

Our feature on page 8, includes three budget-friendly and tasty recipes.

And why not challenge yourself with our festive word search for a chance to win £25 in vouchers? Check out page 15 for all the info.

Have a wonderful festive season and best wishes for the new year ahead.

Sophie

Sophie Mellings
Editor

Customers and colleagues from Connexus decorating the community hub at Innesfield, Hereford.

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.instagram.com/weareconnexus)

Community

Hard work pays off for Innesfield hub

Customers from a community group have been working with Connexus to create a vibrant and active hub at a housing scheme for older people in Innesfield, Hereford.

Customers and colleague volunteers recently got together to give the community room at the scheme a fresh lick of paint, which was kindly donated by building supplier Huws Gray. The community space also has new carpets, curtains, leather

sofas, a fully equipped kitchen, washing machine, dryer, and even two fridges donated from the old Connexus office in Hereford.

The community group, based at the scheme, boasts 20 active members, and they're eager to welcome more local people.

They believe in the power of friendship and support, with weekly sessions including bingo and coffee mornings fostering a sense of community.

Going wild

Community group Going Wild in BC was awarded £2650 from the Connexus community development fund. The group used the funds to provide opportunities for young people to engage with nature and climate in a meaningful way, like in the below photo.



Learning about insects

Gardening 2023 competition winners announced



Winners Mark and Sheila have transformed their garden

The winners have been announced in this year's Connexus gardening competition.

The winning community garden was Fairfields Court in Whitchurch, with runners-up being Roman Downs in Craven Arms.

The young gardener of the year was Ollie from Church Stretton (pictured with his parents Sarah and Adam inset).

Followed by runner-up Layla from Bishops Castle.

The winner of best indoor garden was Malcolm from Craven Arms, and runner-up Diane from Bishops Castle.

The winner of best individual garden was Mark and Sheila

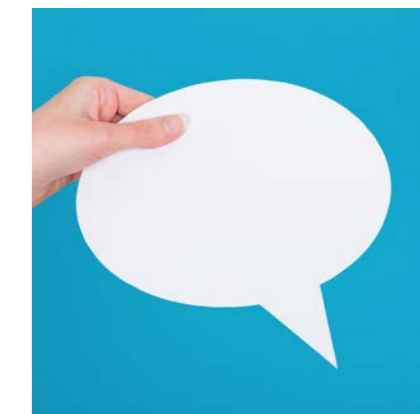
from Garway, who had totally transformed their garden. The garden was very overgrown when they started, but now they've added paths, a pond for wildlife, flowers for the various seasons, summer vegetables and chickens

for eggs. They said they both enjoy doing the garden and it had "taken a lot of work to get it to look like it does today, but it probably will have some changes in the future."

The runner-up for best individual garden was John from Baschurch.

Richard Woolley and Sian Davies from Connexus visited the winners and runners-up to present their prizes and take photos of their gardens.

Have your say



Customers can work with Connexus and be involved in consultations, surveys, community projects and focus groups.

And whether you have lots of time to give, or just a few minutes - there are lots of options for you to help us improve the service you and others receive.

In 2024, involved customers have the opportunity to review Connexus policies including the repairs and maintenance policy, gas and heating policy, anti-social behaviour policy, the investments standard, plus lots more.

With feedback and involvement from customers, Connexus can make sure services are focused on what matters most to you.

If you would like to be involved and help share your service or find out more, visit [connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/be-involved)

A move back home to Baschurch after securing a beautiful new property

Michael, Abi and their five-year-old daughter Mylie are celebrating after moving into a brand new two-bedroom new build home in Baschurch, Shropshire.

The family, who waited for the right home to come up on allocations website HomePoint, are calling on others to persevere if they can, emphasising that the right opportunity will come with time.

Changing places

Their HomePoint journey began a few years ago, motivated by the need for a more family-friendly environment closer to their support network and where they worked.

The family successfully applied for their new home earlier this year and moved into the property in July. It is part of a small new Connexus development, a little distance from the A5, which connects nearby towns and villages to Shrewsbury.

Abi, who is from Baschurch originally, has slotted back into

village life and feels happy to be back in the place where she grew up. Her family live locally too, which is a huge bonus. Daughter Mylie, who started full-time school last term now enjoys a short walk from their home, and the family is eagerly anticipating the arrival of a baby girl soon.

Michael said: "Mylie is so excited for her new role as older sister and we've already picked out her name, Hallie."

"Our new home has brought so much happiness to us, providing warmth, safety, and a layout we love! It's so convenient. "My car broke down the other day and where we used to live that would have been an issue, but now we live in Baschurch I was able to take Abi's car, and she walked to work."

Living local

The impact of the move has clearly made a big difference, allowing them to spend more time with friends and family. The convenience of having local

shops and everything they need nearby is the icing on the cake.

Michael said the process of securing the property, as well as the standard of the home had ultimately changed their quality of living, adding: "Connexus kept us well informed, and our new home has changed our lives for the better. Words cannot describe how much of a difference the move has made - I'm so thankful. Now, all we need is finishing touches, like a couple more photos on the wall when the baby arrives."

To learn more about the properties Connexus has available visit connexus-group.co.uk/properties

A moving experience

"...Our new home has changed our lives for the better"



Developments

New homes for Brockton after fire



When fire broke out in a Brockton home in the early hours of a January morning two years ago, it took eight fire crews from across Shropshire and Wales to fight the blaze.

Thankfully no-one was hurt, but the catastrophic damage caused to the house and a neighbouring property meant they were unsafe and uninhabitable. A third house nearby became vacant shortly after the fire.

Now, three modern, fuel-efficient homes have been constructed in their place to help meet the demand for affordable housing in the

area. Constructed with a focus on energy efficiency, they feature air source heat pumps which provide safe and economical heating in an area without mains gas provision.

Working with developer J Harper & Sons Ltd, Connexus have built the houses with support from the local council and funding from Homes England.

All three have been offered as affordable rental homes, with one of them allocated to a returning resident. Work was finished in October, and an opening event was held recently to celebrate the completion with local councillors and the community.



Fabulous festive fayre this Christmas

Three straightforward recipes to try, including a crowd pleasing dessert, a throwback starter and a sumptuous quick gravy

The weather outside may be frightful – and prices in the shops aren't much better. But there's still festive cheer to be had with our simple recipes. Most use store cupboard staples to keep costs down.

Apple crumble

A really easy crowd pleaser that's great with custard or ice cream. This crumble is ready in 30 minutes.

Ingredients

- 180g plain flour
- 90g caster sugar
- 90g unsalted butter
- 3/4 apples (You can peel your apples, but it does give the crumble a nice texture with the skin)

Method (serves 6)

1. Set oven to 190c /gas mark 5.
2. Add the butter and flour to a bowl, and rub the butter into the flour using your fingertips. Make into a breadcrumb mixture.
3. Add sugar to bowl, and stir it in with a spoon.



Our apple crumble recipe is ready in 30 minutes

4. Cut out your apples into slices, and layer in an oven proof dish.
5. Add your crumble mixture to evenly on top of the apples.
6. Place in the oven for 25/30 mins for a golden top. Enjoy.

Classic prawn cocktail

The 1980s classic has made somewhat of a revival in recent

years. You can serve them in a wine glass or small glass bowls. They are a relatively cost-effective starter for Christmas Day and won't fill your guests up!

Ingredients

- 150-200g cooked and peeled prawns
- 200ml of mayonnaise
- 50ml tomato ketchup
- Pinch of black pepper



The ultimate 1980s starter, prawn cocktail, has made a comeback

- 1 teaspoon paprika (to garnish)
- 1 Iceberg or similar lettuce (cut into ribbons)
- 1/4 cucumber (cut into pieces)
- 2 tomatoes (cut into pieces)
- 1 lemon

Method (serves 4)

1. Cut the lemon in half. Take once of the halves and cut into thin slices. Leave the other half as it is.
2. Make the sauce by taking the mayonnaise and ketchup and mixing together in a bowl. Add a pinch of black pepper and a squeeze of lemon juice from the unsliced half from step 1.
3. Combine the cooked prawns with the sauce and put to one side. Prepare the salad by slicing the lettuce, cucumber and tomato into bite size pieces
4. Take four wine glasses (or glass tumblers) and fill them about halfway with the chopped salad. Take the prawns and sauce and spoon over the top of the salad in each glass. Finish with a light dusting of paprika and a piece of sliced lemon.

Best ever gravy

This gravy recipe only takes 10 minutes and tastes way better than using traditional granules. The use of beef and chicken stock creates more flavour.

Ingredients

- Two tablespoons of flour
- Two tablespoons of butter
- Beef stock cube
- Chicken stock cube
- 500ml boiling water
- Bay leaf
- Mixed herbs
- A little Worcestershire sauce

Method (serves 4)

1. Prepare the stock by crumbling both stock cubes into a jug. Add boiling water and stir until absorbed.
2. To make a more flavourful stock, instead of the chicken stock cube add 500ml of hot leftover cooking juices (or less and top up with boiling water) from the turkey to a jug and crumble in the beef stock cube.
3. Next, make a simple roux. Do this by melting the butter in a small saucepan and then adding the flour. Stir to combine. Once the mixture is bubbling, add in your stock slowly. Because it's hot, it will thicken quickly, so stir with a wooden spoon.
4. Add in the bay leaf, mixed herbs, and a dash of Worcestershire sauce. Keep on a low heat for five minutes until ready to serve. If it's too thick, add a little water to thin.

Tax credit changes

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are making a series of changes to Tax Credits.

This includes moving anyone currently receiving Tax Credits (but not also getting any Income Support, Income related Employment and Support Allowance, Income related Job seekers Allowance or Housing Benefit) over to Universal Credit during 2023/24.

This is being called a 'Managed Migration' and the DWP recently sent out a leaflet to anyone affected. The leaflet explains the process, but it's important to remember moving across to Universal Credit is not automatic and claimants will have to apply by a certain deadline.

Anyone affected will receive a migration letter which explains this in detail, and it's important the letter isn't ignored.

Any customers who aren't sure about the 'Managed Migration' process should speak to a member of the tenancy sustainment team at Connexus who can provide more information about the changes and any other benefit entitlements.



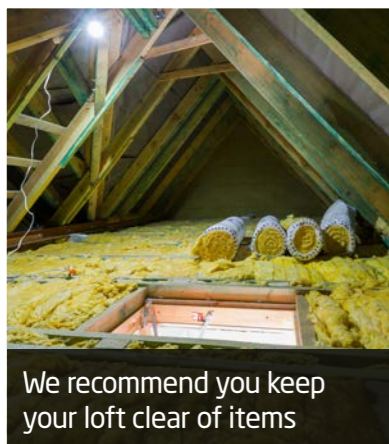
Ask Emma

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.

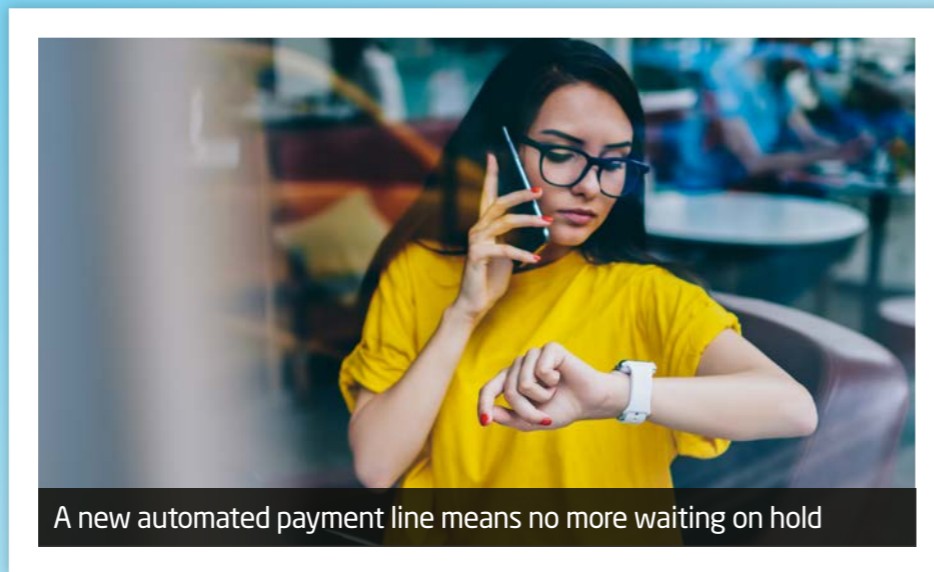
Q. When is the best time to contact Connexus?

A. If you wish to call us, our quieter times are on a Tuesday afternoon (2pm-4.30pm), Wednesday morning (9.30am-12pm), Wednesday afternoon (2pm to 4.30pm), Thursday morning (9am-12pm) and Thursday afternoon (2pm-4.30pm). However, you can contact us at any time by email or over social media. We will respond during business hours.

Our general enquiries email address is info@connexus-group.co.uk. Most customers use Facebook to contact us on social media, simply visit [facebook.com/weareconnexus](https://www.facebook.com/weareconnexus)



We recommend you keep your loft clear of items



A new automated payment line means no more waiting on hold

and select the 'message' option. Why not follow us too for the latest news and information?

Q. Can I report a repair after 5pm, if so how do I do that?

A. We operate an emergency repairs service only out of hours. If you have an emergency repair, please call us on 03332 31 32 33.

If you have a non-emergency repair, you can report this to us anytime convenient for you. You can do this online using our special online form at [connexus-group.co.uk/form/report-a-repair](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk/form/report-a-repair) - the form allows you to add photos, which will help the

relevant team understand more about the repair and order parts in advance. You can also report repairs by emailing us at repairs@connexus-group.co.uk. Include as much information as possible, including name and full address.

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

A. Yes. To keep you safe we do need to carry out regular safety and compliance checks. This can include checking things like gas appliances and the electrics

in your home. Checks like this require a visit but shouldn't take too long. Connexus offers flexible appointments and are happy to talk to you about this.

Q. I've received a letter about paying over the phone using a payment reference number? Why did I receive this?

A. We've recently written to all customers who regularly pay their rent or service charges over the phone to let them know about the launch of a new automated telephone payment service.

The service is quick and easy and can be accessed by calling Connexus and selecting the new payment option from the menu by pressing # when prompted. If you are unsure of your payment reference number or didn't receive a letter and wish to use the service, please contact us by calling 03332 31 32 33 or direct messaging us on social media.

The new service is available 24/7, so you'll no longer need to call in hours or wait on hold to speak to someone to make a payment.

Q. When are you closed over the festive period?

A. Our phone lines will close this year at 5pm on Friday 22 December 2023 and re-open at 8:30am on Tuesday 2 January 2024. During this time we'll only be taking emergency calls on our main number. If you need to make a payment, you can use our new payment line (details above), the app (details on back cover, or visit [connexus-group.co.uk](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk) where you can also find loads of helpful advice about your home or tenancy.

Complaints

New powers for ombudsman



The new powers can force changes to policies and ways of working

The Housing Ombudsman offer a free service to tenants and leaseholders to support them when making a complaint and offer advice if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

They can now force providers to change policies and working practices if they believe it would prevent service failures in the future.

Prior to the change, the ombudsman could only recommend improvements which a landlord was not duty bound to act on. The ombudsman said the new powers would extend fairness and protection for residents.

The change follows customer feedback that improvements 'did not follow a determination', and it's hoped that the added powers will help make feedback have a more direct impact on how services are delivered.

To make a complaint

Send a letter to Connexus, The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BW

Email hello@connexus-group.co.uk

Message us on social media: @weareconnexus. Always make contact using a direct message and include your full name and address

Call 03332 31 32 33

In-person Our colleagues can explain how to make a complaint

Online form - available on the Connexus website using the contact page (works on all devices including phones) [connexus-group.co.uk](https://www.connexus-group.co.uk)



Our best festive movie picks to see with friends and family this Christmas and New Year

Movies

Festive preview

If the thought of the festive period makes you want to sit in a dark room for a while, or you just need something to occupy the kids, why not head to the cinema?

First up on December 8 is **Wonka**, starring man of the moment Timothée Chalamet (Dune) in the chocolatier's origin story. It's by the same director that made the first two Paddington films, so expect it to be filled with fantastical whimsy. And



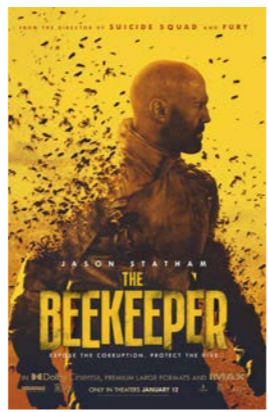
Hugh Grant as an urbane Oompa-Loompa called "Lofty". On the same day

animated sequel

Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget comes out, although if you have Netflix it'll be streaming a week later.

Boxing day sees a selection of new films – Adam Driver's name alone makes him ideal to lead the **Ferrari** biopic; there's a beautiful new Miyazaki (Spirited Away, Howls Moving Castle) animation called **The Boy and**

© Amazon MGM



the Heron; a sporting comedy **Next Goal Wins** from director Taika Waititi (that one good Thor film) where Michael Fassbender coaches the worst international football team in the world (American Samoa lost 31-0 against Australia);

and for action adventure fans, **Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom** sees Jason Momoa as King of Atlantis for more underwater battles.

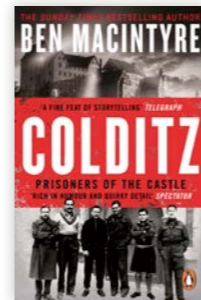
If you need more action in the new year, January 12 sees Jason Statham as an all action... **Beekeeper**? He punches a bunch of people in the trailer so it's probably what you'd expect from a Statham flick, but it does seem like they've run out of names.

Books

Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle

Ben Macintyre

Publisher: Penguin Books Ltd



The latest book from award winning author Ben Macintyre is **Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle**.

It offers a offers a captivating glimpse into life behind bars at one of the most notorious prisoners of war camps of World War Two. An iron cage for allied officers deemed an escape risk, Colditz was a foreboding mountain fortress without equal.

Focusing not just on escape attempts, it describes the mundanity of everyday life and the coping mechanisms of the prisoners, their orderlies, and captors. It reminds us of the class divides and cultural mistrust of the time, exploring through diary entries and poignant testimony the mutual respect shown between professional soldiers on both sides as war raged across Europe.

Macintyre's in-depth research digs deep beneath the well-publicised inmates, expertly colouring in the lines of comic book daring do. It builds towards a tense finale in which Nazi fanatics and advancing Allies race to claim some of the most prized prisoners in Germany.

Help and support

A helping hand for hoarding in homes



Hoarding can cause anxiety and stress, but help is available

It's estimated that up to 5% of adults in the UK may have symptoms of a hoarding disorder. Hoarding is not just about collecting stuff, it's about difficulties letting go which causes anxiety and distress.

Hoarding can start in teenage years and often advances with age. Where a collection will usually be ordered and accessible, a hoard is usually disorganised. This means it can affect not only individuals but also homes and neighbours.

Connexus works closely with customers, ensuring they get the right support, teaming up with other agencies to make sure everyone's needs are met. Support is the primary focus when dealing with hoarding, not blame. Only in extreme

cases will immediate action be taken, and then only to prevent harm or fire risk.

If you or someone you know needs a helping with hoarding support is available, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Connexus. You can also find out more information below.

Help with hoarding

Mind - about hoarding mind.org.uk/hoarding

NHS - hoarding disorder nhs.uk/hoarding

Call Connexus on 03332 31 32 33

Email hello@connexus-group.co.uk

Checking in



New chief executive Kate Smith

Connexus' new chief executive will be Kate Smith, who will join the organisation in late January 2024.

Bringing a wealth of experience, Kate has worked in the most senior roles at organisations in the housing sector over the past 15 years.

Kate joins Connexus as it continues to deliver the changes necessary to make the corporate plan vision and north star – “good quality affordable homes for all” - a reality.



Annual report 2023

The 2023 annual report, developed for customers, is now available on the Connexus website. It includes information about how services have been performing and the work that has been done listening and learning from your feedback.



Interim CEO Sara Woodall Making progress on what matters

I'm Sara Woodall, Connexus' customer experience director. I'm also serving as interim chief executive until Kate Smith joins us in January.

In the last issue we updated customers on the launch of our new corporate plan with its long-term vision to provide 'good quality affordable homes for all'.

We've been making steady progress since launch and are working hard on customer priorities included in the plan like improving customer service and the repairs service. Soon you'll begin seeing the results of this work.

When it comes to customer service, there will be new interactive channels to contact us through like WhatsApp and

a smoother online experience. There will also be easier ways to pay, more options to have your say and generally get involved with Connexus.

In repairs, we're changing how we work. Our teams now have access to materials at local storage depots and building merchants instead of one location, which should mean less time spent on the road and more time in customer homes completing repairs. Much more is planned of course, including new ways to manage and book appointments to support the repair work we are carrying out.

We'll bring you more information about these changes as they happen and in future editions of Connect Magazine. I hope you have a fantastic Christmas.

Festive word search

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

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

- GINGERBREAD
- MISTLETOE
- SNOWBALL
- TIDINGS
- FESTIVE
- TINSEL
- TURKEY
- CHESTNUTS
- PRESENTS
- REINDEER
- COAL
- SNOWMAN
- BAUBLE
- ELVES
- CELEBRATE
- STOCKING
- BALLOONS
- PUDDING
- SLEIGH
- SANTA
- ANGEL
- JOLLY
- IVY
- HOLLY
- SCROOGE

The word missing from the word search is

Name Address

The first correct answer drawn from entries will win £25 in Amazon vouchers. Draw closes Friday 16 February 2024. 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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Connexus website

www.connexus-group.co.uk

On social media

@weareconnexus

Next edition due summer 2024.



Well done to everyone who entered the pub quiz last time. The codeword was water. The winner of the £25 Amazon voucher was Barbara from Baschurch.



Why not pay your rent using the **allpay App**



The allpay App is free to download from your Apple or Android smartphone and enables you to pay your bills quickly and easily at the touch of a button.

