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Top of the league for Council Tax collection!

A RAPID rise in Council Tax collection rates means Staffordshire Moorlands is one of the top performing district councils in the country.

During 2002/3 collection rates have soared to 98.5 per cent. The increase has seen the authority claim an upper quartile placing in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) performance league.

We are now 51st of all 238 district councils, compared to 130 last year.

The Moorlands also boasts the highest Council Tax collection rate in the whole of Staffordshire.

This increase is due to a strong focus on collecting Council Tax instalments when due, thereby preventing the build-up of arrears.

But not content with the rise

– up nearly one per cent on last year (97.6 per cent) – the council's Local Taxation and Recovery Services are striving to reach a 99 per cent collection target for this financial year.

The council's direct debit payment system is the simplest way to pay Council Tax and is also the cheapest way for the council to collect Local Taxation.

A campaign earlier this year promoting direct debit payments featured a special trip to Alton Towers' new hotel.

Head of finance and revenues Cecilie Booth said: "Direct debit payment means

the cost of Council Tax collection is low and allows us to keep increases to a minimum. We can then utilise funding in other service areas.

"The Alton Towers scheme proved so popular that we're launching another initiative this month with a prize of free Council Tax for a year."

Business Rates collections also soared by almost three per cent in the last 12 months – from 94.3 per cent in 2001/2 to 97.2 per cent in 2002/3.

This level of improvement has seen the authority rise 26 places in the ODPM's league table, but at 205, the council remains in the lower quartile.

Further work is being undertaken to improve this position for 2003/4 – a collection target of 99 per cent has also been set.

To help meet these targets, the council has introduced a new Recovery Policy and is taking a range of actions to encourage people to pay instalments when due. Swift recovery action follows non-payment.

Anyone experiencing problems with paying their Council Tax or Business Rates should contact the council as early as possible. Leaflets are available to explain the recovery process.

Wardens go mobile to champion clean, green Leek

LEEK'S very own environment wardens are mounting mobile patrols to ensure streets and open spaces in the town are clean and green.

Council employees Becky Carter and Phil Derry have been handed a mountain bike to help speed up response times to community queries.

Since starting the pioneering council posts two months ago, Becky and Phil have made giant strides in combating nuisance, anti-social behaviour and improving the physical appearance of the market town.

Phil, who is already using the new form of transport, said: "We have made contact with many local people over the last two months and are available to meet and chat with anyone who has an environmental concern."

"However, the area that Becky and I cover has now grown so large – stretching the likes of Leek Cemetery to Haregate and Brough Park – that in order to respond to queries more speedily we have

needed this new set of wheels."

The two wardens are dedicated to helping make Leek's streets, car parks, parks and recreation areas safer and cleaner places. They have been issued with mobile phones and can report incidents immediately to responsible authorities, such as the district council, police or county council.

And Becky and Phil are already getting results: At Pickwood Recreation Ground they have discovered hypodermic needles and made sure they were immediately removed.

They have asked young people to stop cycling on paths within parks and have put in place "no cycling" notices on problem sites. Dog faeces on paths and grass areas have been reported to the council's "rapid response" team and have



ON PATROL: Warden Phil Derry takes to his bike to combat environmental hazards

been quickly cleaned up.

They have reported incidents of suspicious behaviour; overhanging tree branches and shrubbery; out-of-date licences on parked vehicles; and overhanging tree branches and shrubbery.

On the streets of Leek the wardens have regularly removed illegal advertisements from areas including Market

Place, Silk Street and Westwood Road. They have reported damaged brickwork in Kiln Lane and unsafe brickwork in Cruso Street.

The duo have also reported street lighting left on during the day in places such as Albert Street and Howard Close; reported abandoned vehicles; and provided help and information to visitors and residents.

**This publication is available in large print and other formats.
Call us on 01538 483538 or email: media@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk**

www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk

HAVE YOUR SAY - AND WIN CASH!

THE Messenger is unveiling a letters column in a bid to let YOU have YOUR say. And as added incentive, the best letter will earn its author £20! Friday, December 5 is the next deadline for submissions, which should be no longer than 200 words. The editor reserves the right to edit or omit letters, depending on pressure on space.

Send your letters to: The Editor, Moorlands Messenger, Strategy Unit, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Moorlands House, Stockwell Street, Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands, ST13 6HQ.

Dear Sir,

It is now just over a year since we in the Cheadle area have been using wheelie bins and kerbside recycling. I feel proud that we were given the opportunity to make a difference to our environment.

As more people are moving into our area all the time it is very important we do our bit to avoid the added pressures to dispose of our rubbish in land fill or through incineration. The only choice for the good of us all is to recycle.

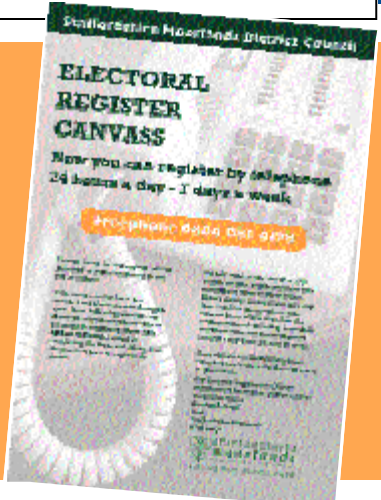
I find it hard to believe that people can not manage with the size of their wheelie bin. I am a mother of four and including my husband, we managed well with the small 140 bin until recently when our father in law came to live with us.

We take shoes to the shoe fare in Cheadle; my children use cereal boxes to make models or decorations; papers are also put into boxes, and just recently we have had lots of fun making origami projects out of all that paper rubbish none of us want.

In fact the only things needed to be collected in wheelie bins are food scraps and packaging. Everyone should agree that the green waste collection is a God send, so thank you all in the recycling office, well done.

Maria Dempsey, Kingsley Holt.

Electoral registration is just a phone call away!



RESIDENTS across the district are being given the chance to dial away the stress of registering for the electoral roll.

The council has established a dedicated freephone line – 0800 081 0178 – to confirm registration details in a matter of minutes.

The special hotline complements registration canvass forms which are being delivered to every household by the end of the month. If details on the form are correct and require no changes, registration can be confirmed on the fully-automated system 24 hours a day, seven days a week!

The council has teamed up with Electoral Reform Services (ERS) to offer the innovative project which is being rolled out to 105 councils across England, Wales and Scotland.

Councillor John Redfern, cabinet member for accessible services, said: "The freephone registration system means updates are immediate and more accurate, it also means that there are significant reductions in the costs of the

canvass."

However, if details on the posted forms are incorrect, the leaflet must be completed and returned as soon as possible to the district council.

The freephone system also accommodates new "opt-out" rules introduced last year which allows users to add or remove their names from the edited version of the register used by mailing companies.

Councillor Redfern explained: "Under new regulations there will be two versions of the electoral role. One will be a full register listing all names which can only be used for voting purposes, law enforcement and credit checking, and an edited register for general sale, including mailing companies."

Forms with incorrect details should be amended and returned to: The Electoral Registration Officer, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Moorlands House, Stockwell Street, Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands, ST13 6HQ.

Your chance to help protect the environment and improve quality of life

EIGHTY Moorlanders keen to improve the quality of life across the district attended a special conference last month.

The successful event was staged to tackle local environmental issues, examine community needs and look at ways to deliver sustainable economic progress as part of a new council-backed Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Action Plan for the Moorlands.

Local Agenda 21 has evolved out of Agenda 21 – a global action plan for the 21st century, geared to reducing environmental degradation

across the planet, tackle poverty and achieve sustainable development.

The UK is committed to the aims of Agenda 21 but two thirds of all action needs to be taken at a local level. One of the basic aims of LA21 is to involve local people and groups in deciding and taking action on key environmental and sustainable priorities for their area.

In 2000, communities across the Moorlands were instrumen-

tal in producing an LA21 Action Plan. The review of the LA21 Plan will give residents, local organisations and groups the opportunity to discuss topics across six broad headings – energy; pollution; wildlife and countryside; waste and recycling; transport; and social issues.

Council leader Ron Locker explained: "LA21 is an integral part of the council's commitment to sustainable development and our aims of protecting and enhancing the environment, promoting a vibrant economy, improving employment opportunities and making local people's working lives more rewarding.

"We are keen to encourage the people of the Moorlands to get involved and have their say. LA21 is committed to actively involving local people in protecting the local environment, ensuring that the needs of everyone in the community are met and people feel safe and healthy."



Partnership gives £10,000 to help Moorlanders improve the environment

COMMUNITY groups across the Moorlands are being urged to claim up to £500 to develop projects which help enhance the environment.

Staffordshire Moorlands Council has joined forces with the Britannia Building Society to each make £5,000 available for a series of small grants to fund Local Agenda 21 projects.

The special partnership forms part of the council's commitment to sustainable development – the drive to encourage a better quality of life for all by achieving social and economic progress while protecting and enhancing the environment. Local Agenda 21 is the name given to the action plan for the twenty first century that has been developed by the Moorlands community to help achieve sustainable development.

Grants are available for neighbourhood groups, schools or youth and community organisations to carry out environmental improvements in the district.

Funding of between £50 and £500 is available for up to 75 per cent of the total project costs.

Each applicant must then identify a minimum of 25 per cent in match funding but this can be met by counting in the time of volunteers.

Eligible schemes must:

- Improve the quality of life in the local area.
- Deal with key environmental issues.
- Involve the people it seeks to benefit.
- Achieve lasting benefit within six months.
- Be based in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Council leader Ron Locker said: "The grant scheme gives a special opportunity for local groups to help improve the environment in which they live.

"The council is delighted to have joined forces with Britannia Building Society and welcomes the company's gesture to match our contribution to the scheme.

"It can only be of benefit to the district to engage the assistance of a local company which

is committed to sustainable development in helping to encourage groups to enhance the environment.

"Now it is important for local people to take up the incentive and apply for funding."

Britannia's Group Chief Executive Neville Richardson added: "We are delighted to be involved with the grants scheme, which for us is represents a natural progression of our significant involvement with the local environment action plan.

And, of course, anything which helps to improve the communities where so many of our staff and members live gets our full support."

Representatives from the District Council, the Britannia Building Society and the Local Agenda 21 Partnership Board will judge each application and projects must be completed within 12 months of the grants being awarded.

If you want to know more or would like to get involved please contact Philip Haddock, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Tel: (01538) 483569, e-mail: philip.haddock@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk

Birchall earmarked for landmark sports development

EXCITING plans have been unveiled to give a Leek football club its own home after 58 years.

And the club has vowed to throw open its proposed facilities to the community.

A benefactor, who does not wish to be named, has offered £300,000 to Leek CSOB FC so it can buy its own ground and ancillary facilities including a social club, changing rooms and training facilities.

In consultation with the council, various options and sites have been considered, resulting in Birchall Playing Fields being identified as the best site for new and improved facilities for the club and Moorlands sporting community.

The council's Cabinet was asked to support the proposal in principle at its meeting on Tuesday, September 2.

The proposal requires a leasing agreement between the council and Leek CSOB. The

council has not committed to the project but has enabled discussions.

Crucially, the proposal has had "in principle" support from the Staffordshire Football Association and Football Foundation. If the council supports the scheme, Leek CSOB would prepare a funding application to the Football Foundation for investment and facilities.

Key local sporting organisations including Leek Town FC have been consulted and have given support in principle.

Leek CSOB currently uses Harrison Park, Leek Town's ground, but the future of this arrangement is in doubt as Leek Town is considering developing a reserve team.

Said Cllr Keith Harrison, cabinet member for healthy

living: "Any improved facilities at Birchall would also be enjoyed by Leek Town and other clubs in the interests of football development."

Leek CSOB wants to become an FA Charter Standard Community Club to open the door to project grants from the Football Foundation. To achieve Community Club status, the club must have:

- at least 10 teams, ranging from youth to adult
- mini soccer provision
- boys' and girls' teams
- 3 - 5 year Football Development Plan.

The proposal also includes consideration of a new training athletics track to replace the current facility used by Staffordshire Moorlands Athletics Club.



CASHING IN: David Connell collects his reward from the council's Head of Strategy and Human Resources Sheila Walker

Retired teacher is top of class!

A RETIRED teacher earned himself £200 by having his say on a crucial council document.

Fifty nine-year-old David Connell, of Leek, came up trumps in a competition staged by the council to encourage residents to deliver their verdict on the authority's annual summary of its Best Value Performance Plan.

Sharp-eyed readers had to spot eight curlews taken from the council's logo and hidden in the Spring edition of the Messenger.

Seventy-nine readers picked up the gauntlet but it was Mr Connell's entry which was pulled from the hat.

He was among the three-quarters of respondents who reckoned the summary was well written, well designed and informative.

Mr Connell said he was a big fan of the council's kerbside recycling scheme, extended to Leek in March after its successful introduction at Cheadle last August and Biddulph last October. He also eagerly anticipated the unveiling at Leek of the wheeled bin and garden waste collections.

A real disciple of recycling, he uses two home-composting bins bought from the council – which has been selling bins at a third of their retail price for more than three years.

Mr Connell's only major concern was the absence of a recognised venue for the performing arts since the demolition of the old town hall more than a decade ago. But he was keeping fingers crossed that the Parkside Trust would secure the funds needed to build its community theatre on the edge of Brough Park.

The council has earmarked £200,000 for the trust, conditional on the other required money being found, and has released some of the money early to pay for architects' fees and other expenses.

Describing his winnings as a "pleasant surprise", Mr Connell said he would be spending the money on improvements to his garden.

Not only a keen gardener, he also enjoys walking in the Peak District and travelling generally. He is married to Christine, with whom he has a grown-up daughter.

The full performance plan is available from the council's Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek offices, and on its website at www.staffs-moorlands.gov.uk. It will also be distributed to partner organisations.

Explained chief executive Simon Baker: "The purpose of the performance plan is to compare what we achieved in 2002/03 against what we promised to do, and to set targets for 2003/04. It is the definitive record of the council's performance."

Councils reap rewards through joint ICT contract

DEPUTY Prime Minister John Prescott has set his seal of approval on a pioneering Information and Communication Technology (ICT) partnership between two local authorities.

The council has joined forces with and Lichfield District Council to appoint a private sector supplier of ICT support services.

The pioneering initiative saw the two councils shake hands with Birmingham-based ITNET, a market-leading IT consulting and business company.

The partnership has enabled both councils to cut costs while improving performance of their ICT infrastructures. And the arrangement will help the councils boost the number of services which can be accessed electronically.

The five-year contract, with a possible two-year extension, is worth £3m. The innovative nature of the project has been recognised by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, who awarded funding to the councils as part of the Government's commitment to local e-

government.

The councils appointed Stoke-on-Trent solicitors Kent, Jones and Done to act for both authorities.

KJD partner Dr Michael Servian said: "While this was a tricky one to bring home, it has been one of the best examples of joined-up thinking KJD has come across in public sector procurement".

ITNET has guaranteed five-star service levels to both councils.

The agreement involves ITNET supporting the councils' desktops, servers, networks and help desks, plus working with them to improve services still further.

Said Cllr John Redfern, Moorlands cabinet member for accessible services: "This public/private partnership highlights the benefits that councils can achieve when working in

collaboration.

"By joining together, we have been able to be in a position to gain significant economies of scale when undertaking a full tendering process.

"We are delighted that performance standards are built into the heart of the contract.

"ITNET has the proven skills, experience and flexible, cost-effective solutions we both need to ensure our ICT infrastructures run effectively and to ensure we can meet our e-government targets."

Said Tom Carroll, director of ITNET's public sector division: "We are confident the ITNET team will provide a high level of support to both councils.

"This unique arrangement truly reflects the benefits public sector organisations can reap through partnering with other public sector organisations and a third party supplier."

Website lets you surf and see

IMPROVEMENTS to the council's website means it is now easier than ever to access online information.

More than 60 services are available at the click of a button at www.staffs-moorlands.gov.uk.

You will find lots of useful information and links to services provided by the council and other organisations that can be of assistance to you during dif-

ferent stages in your life.

Whether you are a resident or a visitor there is plenty of information available to ensure you will get the most out of the area.

But our work to improve the site isn't over until we hear your

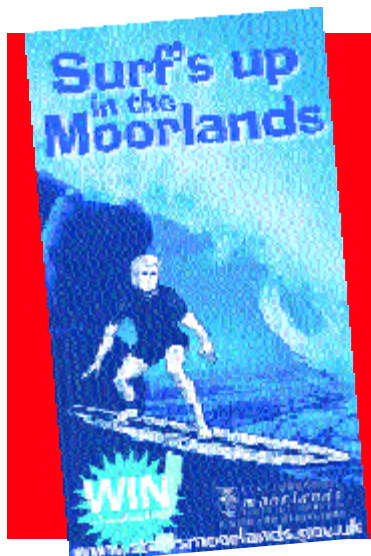
feedback.

Comment on how we can improve the website is available for browsers at www.staffs-moorlands.gov.uk/feedback and we will send you a free mouse mat with our compliments.

We are also staging a

special online competition at www.staffs-moorlands.gov.uk/competition.

All you need to do to be in with a chance of winning is simply rate the website and you can be entered into a free prize draw for a handheld PC.



Council does treble at Leek Show!

CIRCUS skills workshops, Indian head massage and a prize-packed charity draw were among the attractions offered by the council's three marquees at Leek Show!



Stoke-on-Trent showman **Neville Campbell** staged workshops in stilt walking, juggling and unicycling while handing out leaflets on the council's Summer Fun programme for holiday-making schoolchildren.

Council chairman **Christina Jebb's** marquee was the focal point for a string of competitions for her civic charities of the **Donna Louise Trust**, **Treetops Hospice** and **Fire Service Benevolent Fund**. Highlights included a brain teaser which challenged revellers to match the baby photographs with those of our present-day councillors.

An exciting prize draw offered spoils including a family room at the **Alton Towers' Splash Landings** hotel – plus free entry to the theme park; tea for two at the **House of Lords** and a **VIP tour**; and a limited edition sculpture by **Keith Sherwen**, of **Leek-based Inspired by Nature**.

Cllr Jebb's marquee also played host to holistic therapies including reflexology, Indian head massage and **Reiki** healing.

She said: "The event was a wonderful showcase for the Moorlands and attracted visitors from far and wide."

"It was particularly pleasing to see livestock make a triumphant return to the show after their enforced absence through **Foot and Mouth**."

"My marquee attracted many visitors and raised **£425.71p** for my two charities."

Another of the council's three marquees was devoted entirely to the **Community Safety Partnership**, a multi-agency group responsible for making the Moorlands safer for everyone.

Community Safety Support Officer Hayley Jones said: "The purpose of our marquee was to let the public know the sorts of activities underway to

make the Moorlands a safe place to live, work and visit. This was conveyed by displays from partner agencies including **Trading Standards**, **Staffordshire Fire and Rescue** and **Victim Support**."

"Lots of quizzes and prize draws took place based around peoples' understanding of drinking units, and issues such as perceptions of crime."

"We even had an alcohol free cocktail bar supplied by **Staffordshire County Council Trading Standards** to help to outline the danger of under age drinking."

"The Partnership would like to extend its thanks to all who manned the displays within the marquee, and to the public who visited us. It was enjoyable talking to people and finding out their concerns and fears; we aim to continue this interaction with more shows and events in the future."



Photo: Steve Massey



Photo: Steve Massey



Photo: Steve Massey

Open day puts shine on Biddulph

A POPULAR open day has helped show residents in Biddulph the wealth of Council services available to them in the town's new one-stop shop.

Market switch boosts livestock trade

A TUESDAY livestock market is helping traders and cattle owners recover from the legacy of Foot and Mouth.

Leek's livestock market is already receiving an increase in trade since switching from Wednesdays this summer.

The directors of Leek Auctions, who lease the Junction Road-based site from the council are pleased with trading since the move. According to the company throughput continues to rise, with 435 lambs on offer and more than 100 calves for the first time since the 2001 epidemic.

In the two years since Foot and Mouth, the council and operators of the livestock market have been forced to take a hard look at the way the facility is managed. A total of 4,220,000 animals were slaughtered as a result of the outbreak, but Leek Auctions has retained its interest in the market throughout this very difficult period.

The decision to change the market day was supported by the council and local Chamber

of Trade because of the changing circumstances in agriculture.

For information and advice for marketing contact (01538) 383344 or (01538) 383339. The selling times are as follows:

Calves	9.30am
Butchers Lambs (followed by Ewes)	11.00am
Finished Cattle	11.45am
Dairy Cows & Stores	12.15pm

Deputy council leader Linda Malyon, cabinet member for resources, said: "Leek Auctions will help to fly the flag for the Moorlands and moving the market will help boost the industry. It will help the district maintain its place as the leading market in the area and will help encourage people to buy local. I firmly believe in buying local produce and Moorlands beef is the best meat in the country."

The summer event, at Biddulph Council's Connect, in the town hall, featured displays from groups and organisations including Social Services, Countryside, Community Safety, Staffordshire Police, Biddulph Valley Leisure Centre and the Market Towns Initiative.

Visitors, including Moorlands

MP Charlotte Atkins, were well entertained by the Salt City Jazz Band and a children's face painter ensure younger sight-seers went home happy. The Greenway Moor Women's Institute worked tirelessly, all day, keeping the visitors constantly supplied with tea, coffee, squash and biscuits.

More than 200 visitors attended the event and were able to gain useful feedback about the services available in the Councils Connect building and Biddulph in general.

Each stand featured a short quiz with a prize supplied courtesy of local businesses in Biddulph and Biddulph Moor.



Karen Goodall, 40, from Cheadle.

I like to recycle and ensure that any newspapers I have are put in the blue collection bag.

I have three teenage sons who are dedicated to trying to eat me out of house and home and as a result we do create a lot of household waste. In Cheadle we had the wheeled bins and recycling boxes last year and everyone has adapted to them.

As a result, we sometimes have trouble fitting everything into the 140-litre bins. But I think the council's commitment to recycling is a great idea and one which we all should be supporting.



Linda Ford, 53, Michael Ford, 55, Forsbrook.

We moved to the Moorlands six months ago and think the wheeled bin and recycling service is first class. We have family in Milton Keynes who have been charged by their council for a similar service.

We fully use all of the recycling facilities available all of the time and people should be educated across the country as to what a necessary service this is. All authorities should be adopting the initiative and the service in the Moorlands is an example to us all.



Chris Brown, 47, Leek.

I live in a row of five maisonettes which unfortunately, for logistical reasons, cannot be accessed by wheeled bins. As a result, we remain on black sacks. I have previously been a critic of the council regarding planning matters, but I think the recycling initiative should be wholeheartedly supported.

The benefits of the system far outweigh the negatives, and although I appreciate it takes time for people to readjust to the changes, it is something which we all should embrace.

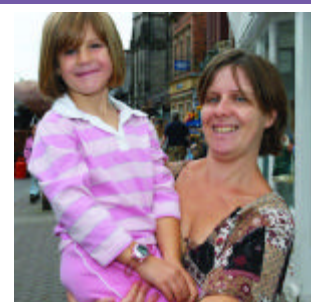


Roy Fowler, 69, Leek.

I live with my wife and often have our two young grandchildren visiting. We have a 140-litre bin but can only fit two bags of rubbish in.

We have a recycling box which we do not use, and also have a garden waste bin.

I don't agree with the introduction of wheeled bins in the town, but do think the idea of increasing recycling is right.



Anita Woodcock, 30, and Gemma Woodcock, 7, Cheddleton.

I [Anita] have both the black and brown bins and recycling box. We use all the facilities and put tins and bottles in the box.

I read a lot of magazines and make sure these are put in the blue bags. Gemma is also very good and we put her old clothes and rollerskates out for recycling.

Earlier this summer wheeled bins were introduced across Leek in a third wave of improvements to the refuse collection service in the district.

The kerbside scheme has already been introduced in separate phases in Cheadle and Biddulph and is designed to meet tough Government guidelines on reducing domestic waste and upping recycling.

Moorlanders have their say on wheeled bins roll-out



ACCLAIMED ART WORK: Leek's skyline is captured in oak

Fence feature shortlisted for national arts award

A STUNNING art work designed to help provide a therapeutic setting for patients at a Moorlands' hospital has been shortlisted for a prestigious national honour.

The Moorlands Garden Arts for Health project – which features a 20' long oak carving based on the skyline of Leek – will contest a special accolade at the NHS Estates Better Healthcare Awards.

The landmark initiative, based at Leek Moorlands Hospital's Saddler Ward, is one of four projects throughout the country to be shortlisted for the "outstanding use of arts in hos-

pitals" award at the ceremony.

It was selected out of 23 submissions – the highest number of entries in any of the categories to be contested at the showcase event.

Judges are visiting each shortlisted site to see the art work up close and consider aspects such as innovation, quality, environmental impact, value for money, staff and patient satisfaction, impact on

the community and patient/public involvement.

The unique carving was created by artist Anthony Hammond and was inspired by workshops with staff and patients from the hospital and pupils of Westwood and All Saints' First schools.

Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony at the Café Royal, London on Friday, 26 September.

Open invitation gives unique arts insight

MOORLANDS artists have opened up their studios in a special event to give members of the public a unique insight into how they work.

Established Tean-based weaver Stacey Harvey-Brown and Leek painters Erica Brook and David Hunt invited residents to explore their work-places and see how they create their art. The initiative also gave Moorlanders the opportunity to buy an original piece of artwork or even try their hand themselves.



ART ATTACK: Artists Erica Brook, David Hunt and Stacey Harvey-Brown help put the public in the picture

Seventeen artists throughout Staffordshire took part in the council-backed Open Studios event which was officially launched by the Earl of Lichfield.

Councillor Keith Harrison, cabinet member for healthy living, said: "Erica's paintings focused on colour shape and light, while Stacey's works included woven scarves, bags, cushions, pictures and hangings made from fabrics including silk and chenille.

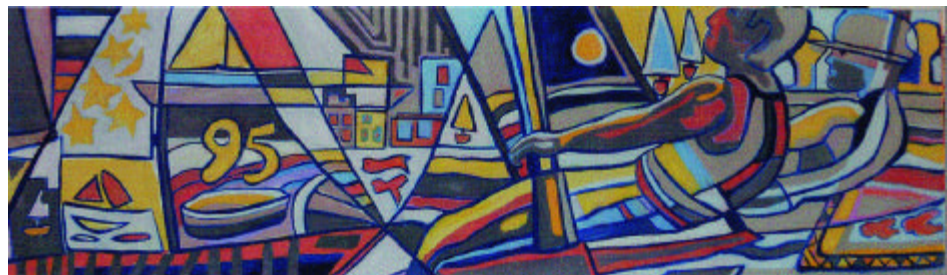
"David's natural-light paintings are created in a studio within one of the finest privately owned galleries in the Midlands – the Moorlands Arts and Antiques Centre, Leek."

The Open Studios initiative has been supported by a

£20,000 grant from Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency. Each of the 17 artists and craftspeople was selected by a special panel of judges to take part in the event, based on the standard and quality of his or her work.

Councillor Keith Harrison, cabinet member for culture, said: "Each Moorlands artist is an established professional and displayed a diverse range of work.

"The event helped to raise the profile of artists and craftspeople across the district and helped encourage interaction with the general public. By giving visitors the chance to see artists in their studios, it offered a unique insight into how they create their work."



Erica's "Sailing 2" painting focuses on colour, shape and light

Calling all artists!

ARTISTS from a Moorlands town are being urged to join a dedicated discussion group.

The Cheadle Arts Forum is open to individuals and groups in the town and surrounding area to help all artists, either established or amateur, who are part of a wider group or working alone.

Brought together by the council, the forum meets quarterly to discuss work, ideas or funding opportunities.

There is a very small membership fee of £2 per year to join.

The forum is looking for new people to become members and welcomes any form of artistic endeavour, including theatrical groups, teenage youth groups, mothers and toddler groups, poets, painters, potters and flower arrangers.

Each meeting provides advice and helps put people in touch with professional artists, funding bodies for arts projects and equipment or even finding a venue for exhibition space.

The forum can also inject some much needed cash into groups' own projects.

Committee chairman Ivor Lucas said: "We really want new people to come along and be a part of the forum. We would welcome a artists and groups representing a wide range of disciplines.

"If you get involved in art then we want to hear from you!"

"With help from the council, we can really put people in touch with worthwhile projects as well as inject some much-needed cash to the members' own ideas."

A special open event will take place on Saturday, 18 October at the Catholic Guildhall, Tape Street from 10am – 3pm. There will be plenty of activities for people to see and do and exhibitions from members of the forum.

Councillor Keith Harrison, cabinet member for healthy living, welcomes the measure.

He said: "The forum provides the chance to showcase some of the wonderful talent that is in Cheadle."



CHARTING THE FUTURE: Christina Jebb makes a horoscope reading

Chairman looks to the future to help deserving causes

THE MOORLANDS' first citizen is looking to the future to help deserving good causes.

Council chairman Christina Jebb, who is a trained horoscope reader, is aiming to boost her civic charities – the Donna Louise Trust and Fire Service Benevolent Fund – by offering a hands-on horoscope service.

Endon and Stanley-councillor Christina is offering to give special Western and Feng Shui-style horoscope readings to local groups and organisations.

The district's first citizen explained: "I have studied horoscopes for a number of years, I am also a trained hypnotherapist and Reiki Master. The Western system gives a detailed analysis of personal or professional life, whereas the more brief Feng Shui horoscope includes a compatibility score with your partner.

"For either reading it is

important to have details such as first and second names and date of birth. Whether you were born in the morning or afternoon also affects the charts."

Christina has chosen to raise money for the two charities throughout her year in office as council chairman. The Donna Louise Trust provides a hospice in Trentham for children with life-limiting illnesses. The Fire Service Benevolent Fund cares for the widows and families of firefighters killed or injured in the course of duty.

She added: "I am writing to a range of local companies to see if they would like to take part. The Western Horoscope is £10 and the Feng Shui Horoscope is £5 or £8 per couple."

Anyone wishing to take advantage of the special service should contact chairman's support officer Carol Colley on 01538 483467.

Appointments to strengthen council's management team

THE COUNCIL is set to unveil two new senior officers to boost its management team.

Andy Smith, 42, and Ian Poultny, 37, are set to become heads of the authority's environment and regeneration services respectively.

The appointments will

strengthen the council's management set-up and follows a thorough recruitment process.

Andy, from Market Rasen, has a 10-year career in local government and is an assistant director for the North East Lincolnshire Council.

He has managed street cleansing and refuse collection contracts and has an excellent record of improving services and reaching recycling rates comparable with those in the Moorlands.

A member of the Institute of

Waste Management, he holds a post-graduate diploma in management studies.

Andy is also a long-standing member of the Territorial Army, having served as a captain between 1979-1994. A father of two young children, his hobbies include orienteering, skiing and maintaining his vegetable garden.

Ian is set to join the council from private sector company Black Country Investment. Currently living in Stourbridge, he has worked as head of

inward investment at Dudley Training and Enterprise Council and has also worked for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

A trained town planner and member of the Institute of Economic Development, Ian also served a spell in the Armed Forces between 1984-87.

Councillor Linda Malyon, cabinet member for resources, said: "Both appointments show that we are bringing in different skills and new energy into an already enthusiastic management team. The regeneration

post is a new role brought about by splitting the former head of regeneration and housing role. Ian Young has already joined the authority from Stoke-on-Trent City Council as head of housing, and the dedicated roles highlight the importance of each area to the council's agenda.

"Head of environment is a vacant role and the service has been further boosted by the appointment of existing recycling officer Nicola Kemp as Waste Minimisation Manager."

Ramblers retreat to a smoke-free haven!



AWARD WINNING: Margaret and Gary Keeling receive their award from Cllr Harrison

A COUNTRY tea room and restaurant is celebrating after becoming the latest Moorlands business to land a prestigious smoke-free accolade.

The Ramblers Retreat, Alton has scooped a special platinum award from the council-backed Smoke Free Staffordshire initiative.

This means that visitors to the tea room, which specialises in home made meals and sweets, can wine and dine in clean, fresh and totally smokeless air.

The coveted prize is the campaign's highest accolade. It is only given to businesses which are smoke free at all times, have a written policy on smoking for staff and customers and have internal and external signage to show the policy.

Gary Keeling, who has run the Ramblers Retreat for 25 years with wife Margaret, believes that the measure is reaping dividends.

He said: "We decided we wanted to be smoke-free back in 1987 because of the potential fire hazard and complaints we have had from customers who did not like the smell.

"The move has paid dividends – we have better insurance discounts, the fire authority is happy and customers have welcomed the fact that their clothes, tablecloths and furniture do not smell of smoke."

The Ramblers Retreat joins two other Moorlands businesses which have gained the special platinum recognition. In April Alton Bridge Hotel, Alton and Mucelli's Restaurant, Cheadle were honoured with the award.

Gary added: "We are thrilled to have gained such recognition. The large majority of our customers are middle-aged, retired people who have embraced the no-smoking policy.

"However it was hard work at first – we did get kick back from people who felt put out by not being able to smoke while they

ate and drank.

"Should people feel the need to smoke, they can do so out of the premises, and we do have some chalet areas where they can congregate."

More than 100 town centre pubs at Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph have already been targeted as part of the Smoke Free Staffordshire campaign.

Awards are available across four levels – bronze, silver, gold and platinum – all of which are geared to improve the health and welfare of employees and customers.

Councillor Keith Harrison, cabinet member for healthy living, said: "This award recognises the sterling efforts the Ramblers Retreat has made to operate a no-smoking policy for so long.

"Their stance was introduced at a time when smoking in public places was not as much in the spotlight, so their perseverance is all the more commendable and has paid dividends."

Approximately 300 non-smokers contract lung cancer each year in the UK as a result of passive smoking. It increases the risk of cancer and coronary heart disease and can cause eye irritation, headache, coughing, sore throat, dizziness and nausea as well as making clothes smell unpleasant.

Councillor Harrison added: "Smoke free areas offer a more friendly environment, give more choice and research in Staffordshire shows that takings on drinks alone can increase by seven per cent.

"The campaign is geared at all public places within Staffordshire and focuses on the provision of smoke free times or zones. Some businesses may only need minimal changes to qualify.

"We are able to provide advice on improving ventilation, free signage such as wall signs, table tents and beer mats and free entry into the Guide to Smoke Free Staffordshire website – www.smoke-freestaffs.co.uk."

Craft fair gives chance to uncover must-have treasures

A CRAFTS fair is set to give Moorlanders a rare chance to sample limited edition arts and crafts work by the region's best contemporary artists.

The fair, which will take place at the council's head office in Leek in November, will showcase a wide variety of one-off

works, representing the finest in jewellery, glass, ceramics, sculpture, textiles and visual arts.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to meet and talk with the artists, see demonstrations and even discuss personal commissions.

The council's Arts Development team is presenting the fair as part of a project to develop the creative industries locally. A specialised training programme covering topics from book keeping to web design is to be offered alongside the fair and artists will be encouraged to

network and learn from each others' business skills. The project is supported by the Market Towns Initiative fund.

Councillor Keith Harrison, cabinet member for healthy living, said: "This retail event is just what we need to create a climate that attracts more artists

to work in the district and more visitors to the area.

"I take great satisfaction from knowing that any purchase I make is actually an investment in someone's career."

The event will take place at Moorlands House on Saturday, 22 and Sunday, 23 November.

Countryside queen showers riches on charities!

A TIRELESS community worker from the Moorlands has earned a prestigious national award for her contribution to country life.

Ipstones district and parish councillor Linda Malyon lifted the Barbour Country Person of the Year title in a glitzy ceremony at One Great George Street Hotel, Westminster.

In doing so, she outshone two other finalists plus scores of nominees from across the nation.

Cllr Malyon picked up a commemorative certificate plus £500 which, typically, will be shared

among Moorlands charities.

The magnificent seven to benefit from Linda's generosity are Guide Dogs for the Blind, Staffordshire Moorlands Talking Newspaper, Ipstones and Foxt Senior Citizens, Ipstones Luncheon Club, Young Stroke Club, Royal British Legion and Ipstones Millennium Playgroup.

Also included in Linda's spoils was a Barbour jacket worth more than £100 but, guess what, she is going to offer it as a charity raffle prize.

Speaking in the wake of the special gala event, she marvelled: "I was utterly shocked – I didn't expect to win the top prize because I thought the other finalists were more worthy. I nearly died!"

"The real glory is not mine, it belongs to all the unsung com-

munity folk of the Moorlands who make life better for their neighbours.

If the award raises the profile of the Moorlands and its voluntary groups, it will have been worthwhile," she enthused.

Linda was nominated by Bradnop resident Janet Thurman whose Threshing Barn country crafts business was recognised at last year's event, sponsored annually by the National Farmers' Union.

Janet explained: "I wanted to nominate Linda because she is the perfect candidate.

"But when asked if I could put her name forward, she told me that there were many more worthy nominees.

"Ask people of all ages in our village and across the district, and they will confirm her tire-

less, outstanding contribution and dedication to all aspects of rural life.

"Linda has held many public roles with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Ipstones Parish Council, yet many people do not see the help and care she gives to villagers in time of need.

"She is a dedicated fundraiser who has been involved with the Donna Louise hospice from concept to construction, has campaigned for vital air ambulance and first responder medical services, and has helped to raise funds for Ipstones Fire Station and local hospitals," she paid tribute.

Cllr Malyon, who is district council cabinet member for resources, has served the authority for 12 years. She is a

former council chairman and has chaired the Ipstones senior citizen group for 16 years and Ipstones Parish Council for eight years.

Said NFU Countryside spokesman Julian Christopher: "The Person of the Year award is the blue riband event in a ceremony which also includes honours for rural pubs, village schools and tourist attractions.

"More than 200 people across the country attended the event, which was judged by a panel including BBC Countryfile's Ben Fogle and Sunday Telegraph writer David Harrison.

"The standard of entries was extremely high, and a string of impressive candidates did not even make the short list," he stressed.



SEVENTH HEAVEN: Linda (front, third from right) helps local charities prosper

Katie treks to the East – with a little help from the council

SNAKE CHARMER: Katie receives her cheque from Christina with a helping hand from Arnie the Burmese python



A MOORLANDS teenager is about to fulfil a life-time's ambition to save endangered gibbons after a helping hand from the council.

Katie Weston, 18, dreams of becoming a vet and will later this year embark on a mercy mission to Thailand to look after the animals kept in captivity in Phuket.

To make the eight-week trip, council chairman Christina Jebb has helped kick-start a fundraising campaign to generate £1,300.

Katie said: "I will be doing volunteer work at a rehabilitation sanctuary which is dedicated to preventing the maltreatment and abuse of gibbons and providing care and attention to those in need.

"Many gibbons are captured from the wild and are kept in captivity to earn money from tourists. It is vitally important that tourists are aware of their treatment and do not give the owners money. As an English speaker, I will be helping to educate visitors, as well as assisting in the maintenance of the sanctuary food programmes."

The teenager is writing to local companies to help meet

the costs of the air fare, insurance and a large donation to the sanctuary. Councillor Jebb has handed her £150 to take the first steps of the globetrotting journey.

Christina said: "Katie asked me for help and I have been able to offer her some funds from my Chairman's Personal Allowance to act as a pump-primer for other companies and organisations.

"She is very committed and wants to go on to study at university to become a vet. This trip will provide her with invaluable experience for this."

During the summer Katie, who has just finished her A Levels, has been working as a volunteer at Blackbrook Zoological Park.

She said: "The park has many wonderful creatures such as kookaburras, limas and pythons and I have learned so much from my time there."

Anyone who would like to send Katie a donation can contact her via e-mail at katiweston@yahoo.co.uk.