

50 first dates for Salisbury's most eligible water voles

Salisbury's most eligible bachelors and bachelorettes have been moved to an exotic location and will meet 50 potential lifemates with hopes romance will happen.

But this is more 'Vole Island' than 'Love Island'. And instead of a sun-kissed location in Spain, a dozen water voles from Salisbury have been living on a farm in Ringwood for the past 5 months. They swapped city life for the country before construction started on the Salisbury River Park flood defence and regeneration scheme. Now everyone hopes they will find true love when they meet 50 new bachelors and bachelorettes that were bred in captivity.

The water vole population in Ringwood was severely affected by mink in the past. But with the mink population now in control, in time it is hoped the water voles will breed once they get past their territorial instincts.

Mike Porter of the Environment Agency said:

One of the Salisbury River Park's aims, aside from reducing flood risk and regeneration, is to improve the environment for biodiversity.

So it is very encouraging to see that spill over to this location where the voles are healthy and happy in their new forever home and, in time, will grow in numbers and spread afield.

'Release pens' are wooden cages that the water voles will live in until they get used to their new environment and explore

Water voles are a legally protected species and also Britain's fastest declining mammal. A small population was found during survey work for the Salisbury River Park scheme. The scheme will deliver long-term benefits through habitat improvements for city wildlife, including water voles. However, a small number had to be were moved prior to construction. The scheme is providing ideal habitat for water voles and it is expected that the works area will be colonised quite quickly by voles from neighbouring populations.

Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Waste, Street Scene and Flooding at Wiltshire Council, said:

One of our priorities is for Wiltshire's natural beauty and environment to be protected and maintained whilst improving the

natural and built environment and enhancing the city flood defences.

The unique habitats, landscape and wildlife play a key part in the county's visitor economy and the wellbeing of our residents. The translocation of the voles was a vital part of the project to help maintain the local vole population in this part of the river. We look forward to seeing them around the site again in the future.

The Salisbury River Park project is a collaboration between the Environment Agency, Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council and Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership. But moving water voles to another part of the Avon catchment, along with boosting their numbers, needed extra help and advice from Atkins, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and Derek Gow Consultancy.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has been working with the private landowner on this site to improve the habitat ready for the voles. These habitat improvements will also benefit a whole range of other water meadow species in the Avon Valley, including threatened wading birds and invertebrates.

Some of the water voles didn't need release pens and couldn't wait to dive into the nearest watercourse

Jim Girgis, associate ecologist at Atkins, said:

This translocation would enable the population to thrive in suitable habitat as well as aid in restoring key links between known populations in the Lower and Upper Avon.

This is a really important project in terms of supporting the indigenous population of water vole in this area, which bring great benefits to the local eco-system, and it's also another good example of ensuring the best possible outcome both for the scheme and sustainability of the local environment.

Water voles were carefully removed from their transport cages to their release pens

The Salisbury River Park is a £27 million transformational scheme to reduce flood risk to over 350 homes and businesses in Salisbury. It will also create 2 hectares of enhanced riverside habitat for the benefit of wildlife, remove obstructions to allow fish migration to continue upstream and create 13 hectares of high quality public open space. Another benefit will be enhanced foot and cycle paths that benefit residents and visitors.

Construction began in July 2022 and it is expected main construction works will be completed in spring 2024.

You can follow the project's progress at www.salisburyriverparkphase1.com.

[SLC is Preparing for Payment](#)

Following a busy Clearing period (and we continue to process those applications), our attention is now turning to payment as we enter September.

It's hard to believe summer is over and the return to university or college is just days away. Over the next few weeks, we anticipate paying over £2.4 billion in Maintenance Loan funding to students and a further £2.8 billion in Tuition Fees to higher education providers on their behalf. It's a key milestone for the Operations Team here at SLC, as we fulfil our role as enablers of opportunity and students start the new academic year with their funding in place.

With more than one million student applications processed and ready to pay at this point, we are in a really strong position for the start of the 22/23 academic year. Students can find out their application status by checking their online account. All that's then left to do is register for their course at their university or college.

This year, we have been focussed on improving the application experience for students and our commitment to improving the customer experience continues as we move into payment. Just as students can track the progress of their student finance application via their online account, they can also view their payment schedule online as well. And if students need more support, there is lots of helpful information on how to do this in our [online guide to getting your first payment](#).

We also have some excellent short films on our SFE You Tube channels – including the one below which is dedicated to payment. And students logging into their online accounts will notice that they now have access to a new 'common questions' area, which provides instant answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about payment.

[payment film](#)

We know students will have questions. In the first instance, they should always access their online account and check our guidance before calling us. Our customer communications and customer experience teams have been working hard to ensure that all these resources are as informative, intuitive and as user-friendly as possible. But, our phonelines are very busy just now and students may wait for an answer that is already in their online account. It is almost always the quickest way to get information they need and allows our

contact centre team to help students with the most complex issues.

We would also recommend checking their online account to make sure their bank details are correct and that they have registered with their university or college – as funding can't be released until this has happened. Again there is more information available about this [online](#) and we are starting to email students, who will be receiving a payment, so that they know what to expect.

It's also important to note that not all students will receive their full entitlement straight away. If they [applied late](#), it may not be possible to fully process their application before term start. In these circumstances, SLC will award the Tuition Fee Loan and the minimum amount of Maintenance Loan before the start of the course, while we confirm household income and any other relevant details. Eligible students will get the remainder of their maintenance and any other funding entitlement as a top up payment as soon as possible once those details are confirmed.

Summer has gone by so quickly and as we enter September, we welcome the new academic year. We wish all students, starting or returning to university, good luck for the year ahead.

Chris

Students can follow Student Finance England on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [You Tube](#) for all the latest student finance information.

Brave, inspirational and selfless acts recognised with new Home Secretary commendation

Individuals who have protected communities, carried out immense acts of bravery and championed the UK to be a better place have been recognised by the Home Secretary.

Priti Patel has awarded 110 people a new commendation, which honours individuals in policing, fire, community organisations, the civil service and campaigners.

Actions to help cut crime and the harm it causes, protect vulnerable people and communities, and respond to the threat of terrorism were all individually recognised by the Home Secretary at a ceremony at Lancaster House yesterday.

Bishop Webley receives his award from the Home Secretary

Individuals recognised include:

- Figen Murray, who campaigned for Martyn's Law following the death of her son Martyn Hett in the Manchester Arena attack
- Bishop Derek Webley for leading the Windrush Working Group
- members of Merseyside Police, who responded to the bombing at Liverpool Women's Hospital as well as recent tragic murders
- Detective Chief Inspector Stuart Blaik, whose work ensured justice was served for the family and friends of PC Andrew Harper
- Sheila Coates for her leadership providing frontline services to victims and survivors of sexual abuse
- the National Crime Agency team who worked with law enforcement partners in Europe to target a major criminal network suspected of involvement in the smuggling of up to 10,000 people across the Channel in the last 12-18 months, leading to the arrests of more than 40 people across Europe and upwards of 100 boats being seized

Policing leaders recognised include those who led on security for COP 26, the G7 Leaders' Summit in Cornwall and the Commonwealth Games, as well as those responding to illegal protests, the tragic deaths of Vietnamese migrants in Essex and tackling county lines.

Chiefs who helped tackle this year's wildfires and blazes last year in Greece, and helped a convoy of equipment reach Ukraine, were also given a commendation.

Medals were awarded to Border Force officers deployed into Kabul as part of Operation Pitting, one of the largest humanitarian evacuations in history, which brought over 15,000 people to safety in the UK.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

It is impossible for me adequately to express my gratitude to all those who have made truly outstanding contributions in keeping our communities safe or making our country a better place.

It is only right to recognise the exceptional efforts and courage of these people. This commendation says to the world that what they do is important, vital and absolutely valued.

The Home Secretary expressed her personal thanks to individuals who have selflessly given their time to advocate change for the better, such as members of the Windrush Working Group, whose insight and expertise contributes to the government's commitment to right the wrongs of Windrush, including advising on the Windrush Compensation Scheme, which has now paid out £40.5 million across 1,037 claims.

Civil servants recognised with a commendation include those responsible for:

- establishing the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine Scheme, which have so far brought 118,000 Ukrainian people to safety in the UK

- leading the Home Office response to the threat from Russian oligarchs and dirty money
- tackling organised immigration crime and removing people with no right to be in the UK

Awards covered a range of crime and policing, fire, counter-terrorism, drugs, security and immigration issues that the Home Office works tirelessly to deliver for the public on.

Government launches climate change consultation for pension scheme

News story

The consultation proposes more effective governance, strategy, risk management and targets for the assessment and management of climate related risks and opportunities for the Local Government Pension Scheme.



The government has launched a [consultation](#) today (Thursday 1 September) on new requirements for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) to manage and report on their climate-related risks, including the carbon emissions attributable to their investments.

The proposals include a requirement for LGPS authorities to calculate their carbon footprint, and to assess how different temperature rises could affect their assets and liabilities.

Authorities would also need to report annually on how well their assets are aligned with the Paris agreement.

The move seeks to improve the management of climate-related financial risk and brings the LGPS in line with requirements which are already in place for private pension schemes.

Minister for Levelling Up, Paul Scully MP said:

Managing risks and opportunities related to climate change is essential for the future of the financial sector. It will empower better decision making and ultimately help us on the road to net zero.

The UK is a world leader in implementing the recommendations of the Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosures, which are a key factor in greening the financial sector.

I am pleased that we are proposing to extend these requirements to the Local Government Pension Scheme, which has assets in excess of £300 billion and enormous potential to have a positive climate impact.

The consultation puts forward proposals which will require LGPS administering authorities to have more effective governance, strategy, risk management and targets for the assessment and management of climate related risks and opportunities.

The requirements do not encourage funds to divest from energy companies, which will be key to the transition to clean energy in the UK.

Government will invite people to respond to the consultation on the proposals raised.

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[Update to DBS customer contact centre services – 5 to 10 September 2022](#)

News story

Planned industrial action from contractors is set to affect DBS contact centre services.

Update to DBS customer contact centre services



Customers contacting the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) between 5 to 10 September 2022 by telephone, email, or webchat may face some disruption and delays. This is due to industrial action by staff working for one of our contractors, Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS). HGS is contracted to provide DBS customer contact centre services, as well as a number of other administrative functions.

During the industrial action, HGS is putting additional resources in place to try and minimise the inconvenience to customers as much as possible.

The industrial action is not expected to have any significant impact on turnaround times for DBS checks or barring decisions. Our core services will not be affected, and employers and customers should continue to access these as normal.

During the industrial action, the times of the customer contact centre will be reduced to:

- Monday 5 September to Friday 9 September: 9am to 5pm
- Saturday 10 September: Closed

Webchat services will still be available to customers in normal operating hours (Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm). Webchat becomes available to customers when they access online services such as applying for a DBS check, making a barring referral, or logging onto the Update Service.

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