



Futures in focus

| The great outdoors



Contest on page 21



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Welcome to your summer edition of Futures in Focus.

Barbecues, beards, bulbs and branches. Where we've been this summer.

Lighter nights, warmer days and no excuses needed to light up a BBQ. Love it or hate it, summer is here.

We're celebrating the great outdoors this edition. From our own green fingered projects to the brilliant work community gardening groups do around where our customers live as well as lots of ways for you to get involved. Don't worry if you're more of a home bird, we've still got you covered with planting you can try indoors!

We speak to a customer who's won the World Beard & Moustache Championships for the third year running. "It's like Crufts but for guys with beards," need we say any more?

There's also a chance for you to win **£75 in shopping vouchers**, by taking part in our competition on page 21.

If you have a story to share or would like support with a community project, please get in touch with us at communications@futureshg.co.uk.



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Stand-up Sharon

Meet Futures' resident stand-up comedian, Sharon. We hope you don't mind her testing out her new material throughout this edition, she's hoping to bring a little laughter to your day. Stand-up Sharon says:

"I've started to plant my herbs in alphabetical order. People ask me how I find the time. I tell them 'it's next to the sage'."



Want the latest breaking Futures news?

Follow us on social media! Join us for #MythBusterMonday, #TopTipTuesday, #ThankyouThursday and other non-alliterative news and updates.

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 Futures Housing Group

'Futures in the community' news

We love giving back to the community and thinking of new ways to offer support.

Futures' fuel delivers food for families

Colleagues at Futures have supported foodbanks by topping up their work vans with petrol.

Thanks to a brilliant idea by Futures' Plumbing Engineer, Scott Bacon, we were able to buy a full shopping list for Hope for Belper.

Scott said: *"I looked on Sainsbury's website to see if we could get a company Nectar card, so all the points from the vans being filled up went into the same pot."*

Over the space of a few months, the points built up and it was decided the money should be used for local foodbanks in the communities around our customers' homes.

Scott said: *"Foodbanks are a lifeline for a lot of our customers. So while we have to fuel the vans anyway, the upside to that is indirectly we're putting food on the tables of families that are struggling to eat."*

Jo Lambourne, who's volunteered at Hope for Belper since it started said: *"We're incredibly grateful for this support. We wouldn't be able to run without donations like this, so we're very grateful."*

Scott said: *"It's a simple idea and a small gesture, but will make a big difference to someone."*



School choir performs for Futures customers

A school choir from Daventry's Falconers Hill Academy has performed for customers at Warwick Court.

The group of 20 children, all aged between seven and 11, performed a mixture of songs, including sea shanty 'Roll the old chariot' and a mash-up of 'Swing low, sweet chariot' and 'Oh when the saints'.

The event was organised by local charity Happy@Home which helps to reduce the feeling of isolation for older people in West Northamptonshire.

Caroline Malloy, Project Worker at Happy@Home, said: *"I thought it went amazingly. You only had to look at the smiles around the room and some of the residents were going all in with the actions."*

The visit was even more special for one audience member, Ronald, who used to work at the same school.

Ronald said: *"I joined the school in 1955. I did different roles but I was Housemaster at one point. I'm not sure how long I was there for in total, but I was there for ages. It was really nice having the choir come in. All the songs were good and I even joined in a little with the dancing."*

Lily, ten, said: *"My favourite part was showing the residents the actions and seeing them join in, it was really fun."*

Mrs Goodall, Choir Teacher said: *"They've been really, really excited to perform today and I know they'll go home with a big smile on their faces, ready to tell everyone. Hopefully we can visit again and do more singing for the community."*

Customers supported to get online

Futures' customers aged over 55, have been supported to gain confidence and skills in using the internet and digital devices, so the response to getting a message is no longer "WhatsApp, what's that?"

The team at our independent living service, Beep Assist, have worked with Business in the Community, which runs a digital inclusive programme called 'ClickSilver'. The four-session programme matches vulnerable and older people with volunteer mentors, who work one-to-one teaching the basics of using tablets, phones, or PCs.

So far six Futures customers have completed ClickSilver, with all feeling more confident using technology, and less isolated by being able to easily keep in touch with loved ones at the click of a button. A further 19 are working their way through the programme.

One Futures customer said the programme has made her more independent: *"I felt lonely before starting ClickSilver. It was difficult for someone of my age to know how to use a tablet, so I used to rely on other people to do it for me, but now I can do things myself."*



Cutting-edge tools for greener grounds

Our new, finer grass cutting mower

We're a little excited to announce the latest addition to our mower collection.



The new 'Kubota ZD turn mower' comes equipped with a mulching cutting system, and the results have been amazing. This system is designed to hold the grass clippings longer, cutting them into smaller pieces before putting them back onto the lawn. This feature offers several benefits that have now transformed how we cut your grass.

Firstly, the mulching system leaves fewer clumps of grass behind, providing natural fertilisation for healthier growth. We also no longer need to mow the same area twice, saving us time and allowing us to cut grass more frequently.

Realising the incredible benefits of our new mower with the mulching system, we have decided to retrofit our older mowers as well, guaranteeing amazing results all round.

The 'Rise of the weedkiller'

Last year we officially made the switch to a safer and much more environmentally friendly weedkiller, called Foamstream.

You may have heard us mention Foamstream last winter and some of you might have seen the beast of a machine attached to a Futures' van. But now we're in summer and prime weed season, we wanted to show you Foamstream in action. Or should we say, "lights, camera, action!"

Futures previously used a glyphosate weedkiller mix. While this is a common type of chemical weedkiller, it can be harmful to animals, plants and even people.

Foamstream uses a mixture containing natural potato starch instead. It combines this with boiling water, which then comes out as foam. This acts like a blanket and effectively cooks the weeds - think what happens to spinach when cooked! The mixture goes down into the soil, killing the roots, without any toxic chemicals.

So don't be scared if you see the weedkiller on a street near you, or maybe you should be... [watch this video](#) to decide.



Stand-up Sharon

*Why doesn't Elton John like lettuce?
He's more of a Rocket Man.*



Looking after your green spaces

Grass cutting

We're continuing to leave grass cuttings in areas around your home to be more sustainable.

It's been a few years since we stopped collecting grass cuttings, so we just wanted to remind you why we do this. While we trim the grass as usual, instead of taking the clippings away, we leave them on the ground to break down naturally. It may look messy for a few days, especially in the early part of the year, but the clippings quickly disappear into the soil. This helps improve the long-term health of the soil and grass. Plus, we're reducing energy use and carbon emissions by not transporting the clippings.



Wildflower meadows

Since 2020, we've planted 13,000 square meters of wildflowers, along with 6,245 shrubs, 875 hedging yews, and 217 trees. These plants are doing an amazing job of absorbing about four tonnes of CO2 every year!

Not only have we received many compliments from people living nearby, but we have also spotted some rare insects in the area. It's wonderful to see the positive impact our sustainable wildflower meadows are having on both the environment and the local community.



Questions

If you'd like to find out more or have any questions, please fill in our [online enquiries form](#).

“It’s like Crufts.. ..but for guys with beards!”

Are you ready to step into the amazing world of competitive bearding? Yes, you read that right. Meet Futures customer Mick ‘the Chops’ Wallage, a competitive bearding multiple world title holder.



Mick travelled to Germany on 9 June to defend his world title at the **World Beard & Moustache Championships**, and he's done it again! This fantastic achievement marked his third successful defence of the title, having initially claimed it in 2017 at the competition held in Austin, Texas. That event even made it into the Guinness Book of Records as the largest beard and moustache competition ever. Mick then continued his reign by defending his championship in 2019 in Antwerp, Belgium, and now he has secured his third world title!

“

The atmosphere is great and everybody's excited. Personally I think I'm maybe just a bit weird - I don't get nervous. I'm more excited, I just want to go on stage and show off.



The championships left no room for imperfection, as seven judges examined each contestant's beard carefully and even a single stray hair could cost valuable points. In the last championships in Antwerp, Mick lost 0.5 points. However, fast forward to Germany in 2023 and Mick achieved a perfect score across the board, earning a full house of tens. Naturally, Mick is over the moon!

The competition spanned three days, during which time participants paraded individually before the judges. The event had representation from 28 countries, creating a vibrant atmosphere. Mick emphasised the warm and friendly nature of all involved, whether professionals or individuals from diverse backgrounds.



“

Yeah, two of the judges actually spotted me crying up there and we had a chat afterwards. But I was very surprised. I didn't think I would come away with a third world title so now I'm working on a fourth.

Mick shared insights with us into the intense judging criteria where categories followed specific written standards set by the World Beard & Moustache Association. In Mick's category, the beard needs to look as natural as possible, following precise measurements. Yet, beyond the technicalities, Mick loved the opportunity to show off his beard.

The moment of victory overwhelmed Mick with intense emotions as he welled up with tears of joy, while playfully pulling a goofy face and giving a thumbs-up to the photographers and press capturing the moment. It was an unexpected win for his third world title, and now he's already setting his sights on a fourth!

Looking ahead, **Mick's goals include bringing the British Beard & Moustache Championships to Derbyshire and excitement fills his heart as he anticipates the 2027 World Beard & Moustache Championships**, which will take place in Blackpool.



Stay safe this summer

While we may not need to put the fire on or plug in electric heaters yet, there are still many preventable fire risks in the summer too. We've rounded up some advice so you can keep warm, and stay cool, safely this summer.



Barbecues

We're all guilty of falling into different roles during a BBQ. We either take the lead and become (or attempt to be) the BBQ master, or we sit comfortably back, eagerly waiting to first hear "Who wants a sausage?" Experienced or not, it's important to grill safely.

- Never leave a barbecue, bonfire or firepit unattended.
- Keep children and animals away from the flames and keep well away from fences, sheds trees and other items that can easily catch fire.
- Never start or bring a barbecue, bonfire or firepit indoors.
- Don't use petrol or paraffin to light your fire. Only use fire lighters, or starter fuels on cold coals.
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby for emergencies.
- When you've finished, wait until the fire is completely cold and fully extinguished before moving it and putting ashes into a bin.
- Don't place disposable BBQs on grass or prop up on anything wooden. It must be on a flat, even surface.



Windowsills

It may not seem like an obvious fire hazard, but it's important to be cautious about what you put on or near your windowsill. A mirror or curved glass object can act as a lens and focus the sun's rays onto nearby flammable objects. This can scorch or cause things to burst into flames.

- Never put mirrors or glass ornaments on a windowsill.
- Keep flammable items, such as deodorants, hairsprays etc away from the window too.
- Even on a cold day, direct sunlight can reflect onto these items and the sun's rays get even stronger if magnified or focused to a small point.



Electrical items

This may not have been the hottest summer on record but there may still be times when you feel the need to use electric fans to try and cool down. These can also be a hazard if not used correctly.

- Always place the fan on a flat surface.
- Clean the fan when it's built up too much dust and fluff. Remember to unplug it before cleaning.
- Don't leave the fan on unattended.
- You can register all electrical items (new and used) online, so then you'll be informed if there's ever a problem or a product recall. [Click here to register your appliance.](#)

Join us as we tour your community

Since the start of 2023, our Neighbourhoods team has visited over 60 towns and villages on over 100 dates to meet our customers and their neighbours.

Our regular estate walkabouts are a chance for the whole community to give us feedback about where they live, and tell us if there's anything more we can do to help. It's also a time for us to carry out our own checks too. But we're really keen to hear from everyone who lives around our **10,300 homes** so we'd love for you to come and say hello on the next round of visits!

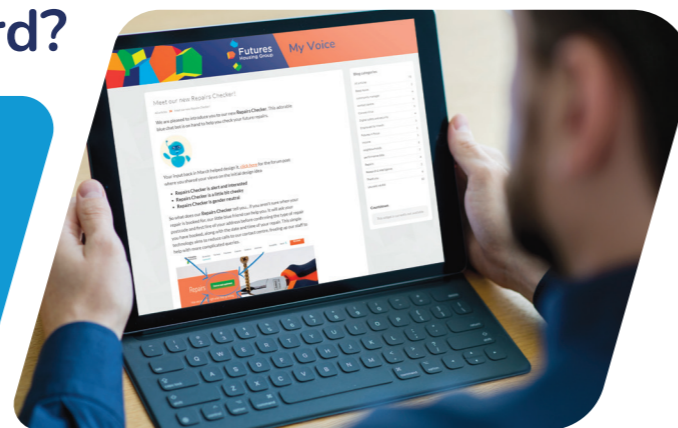
Like our previous dates, we'll be inviting our partners from councils and other local organisations along, so we can all work together to support your community.

We'll be covering **Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire**. Don't worry if your street's not listed, just find one near to you [here](#).



Want to have your voice heard?

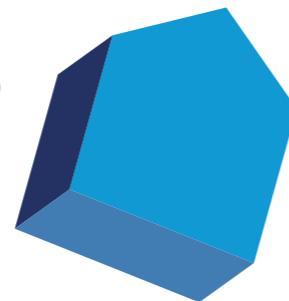
Join the vibrant community on My Voice, our online platform that gives our customers the opportunity to shape our services and have your say on the issues that matter to you.



So far this year My Voice members have been able to give feedback on a series of letters being sent to customers who are receiving energy efficiency upgrades at their home. You've been able to tell us what you like, what doesn't make sense and what changes you'd suggest.

It's not too late to join in this project, while chatting to other customers from across the East Midlands who want to make a difference in their community - and receive points that you can exchange for exciting prizes!

Visit <https://myvoice.cmnty.com> to join us today



We need your help!

Models wanted

Are you interested in being Futures' next top model?

We need people from all ages and backgrounds to be in our photos.

No experience required!

Do you have what it takes? Email us for more details.

Email: communications@futureshg.co.uk

Community gardening groups

Spending time in nature has been scientifically proven to improve our mental health. Of course, the unpredictability of British weather can sometimes hinder our urge to connect with the great outdoors. But, if you're keen to get outside and make some new friends, then maybe a community gardening group is for you?

Community gardening groups can not only improve your wellbeing, but are a chance to learn new skills, meet new people and help make the area where you live look just that bit nicer. Plus, you might even get some home-grown food out of it too!

We've got good relationships with several community gardening groups in and around the areas where our customers live, so we'd like to share with you some of the great work they do.

Ripley Wild Flowerers

This Derbyshire-based group aims to *'make the most of all the spaces in Ripley that can be used to grow wildflowers and help the environment. Making it a beautiful place to live (for us and the bees) and bring a smile to people's faces.'*

The group has just proudly won Ripley Town Council's award for 'best community garden' for the second year running.

A volunteer with the group, said: *"We've had a great time bringing more colour to various places around Ripley. Everyone who passes by says they really appreciate seeing flowers and the wildlife they encourage - instead of just seeing mown grass."*

"It's amazing to see how quickly the birds, butterflies and bees then arrive! Just a quick walk around any of our flowery sites would bring a smile to your face."

Futures has worked closely with Ripley Wild Flowerers on various sites around Ripley, including rotavating and sowing wildflowers. *"Futures' help has been invaluable as we only have a small number of active helpers,"* they added. *We also have less muscles so the sites with Futures have made a greater impact alongside our smaller patches."*

The passionate group meets most Monday afternoons and they are always looking for new volunteers. If you'd like to help, even by donating seeds or unwanted plants, or get stuck in, please contact them on their [Facebook page](#) here. Or head into Ripley Town Council's office on Grosvenor Road.



Southbrook Community Gardening Club

The Daventry based club is technically a seedling in the gardening world, as they've been growing since April this year.

Every Sunday people of all ages and experience are welcome to come along to the Southbrook community centre and plant flowers, vegetables and get crafting.

Karen Metcalfe, who runs the club said: *"I've always enjoyed getting my hands dirty, so when I saw the garden at the community centre, I was very eager to get started. I have plans on how we can use various spaces available to us, so far we have a couple of raised beds that have produce beetroot, lettuces and potatoes."*

Going forwards Karen hopes to plant more homegrown vegetables, herb gardens a fruit corner and hopefully pass on her skills to others. Karen said: *"I'm a huge recycler, my own garden is almost all recycled or reused. I'd love to set up a type of green school, where children can learn to recycle, reuse and make garden crafts such as natural tapestries and bug hotels."*

"We're still in the early stages so are looking for more volunteers. I hope more local people join me in the near future, they can come for a couple of hours and get our hands dirty!"

The club starts at 12pm each Sunday. If you're interested, why not go along and help the group blossom?



Stand-up Sharon

I used to make lots of money clearing leaves from gardens. I was raking it in.

No garden? No problem!

Do you want to grow your own herbs and vegetables but think you don't have enough space? Think again. Thanks to these top tips, you could be harvesting your own by the end of summer!

Growing on your windowsill or balcony

Windowsills are the perfect place to grow herbs, mini veggies, and microgreens, as with the right amount of sunlight they act like a tiny greenhouse. Once grown, your crops are at arm's reach for cooking if you're growing on your kitchen windowsill!

Here's what you'll need:

- ✓ Plant pots
- ✓ Saucers for the plant pots (you can use plastic veg trays or yoghurt pots)
- ✓ Compost
- ✓ Vegetable seeds (see our list below for crops that grow well on windowsills)
- ✓ A sunny ledge or windowsill



Seed ideas:

- ✓ Herbs such as basil, thyme, mint, chives or oregano,
- ✓ Peppers
- ✓ Chillies
- ✓ Tomatoes
- ✓ Cress
- ✓ Microgreens such as beetroot or broccoli (you can find these in garden centres)
- ✓ Strawberries



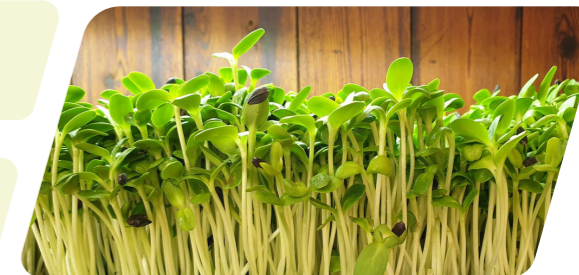
Growing veggies, herbs and microgreens

1 Get a small pot and put soil in. For veggies and herbs, plant the seeds 2-3cm down and cover well with soil. For microgreens, cover the soil with a thick layer of seeds – but don't cover these seeds in soil!

2 Leave the pot in a sink of water overnight so the soil can soak up the water.

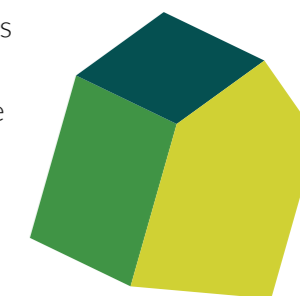
3 Place the pot on top of a saucer on your windowsill or in a sunny spot on your balcony.

4 Make sure to water frequently so the soil stays moist but not wet. Empty any excess water from the saucer to stop the roots from rotting.



The microgreen seeds should sprout within a couple of days. Wait until the sprouts are 3-5cm tall before eating.

Veggies and herbs will take different amounts of time to grow. Herbs will grow the quickest, and fruits and vegetables will take a bit longer. Check the seed packets you've used for a better idea of how long your seeds will take to grow.



What are microgreens?

Microgreens are the shoots and seedlings of vegetables that we would usually allow to grow to full size. They're packed with nutrients and often look a bit like cress but will taste like the full-grown veggies.

Shop bought herbs

We've all seen those pots of basil and mint at the supermarket and brought them home, only for them to die after a few weeks. Here's some tips on how to keep them lasting longer.

1 Take the herbs out of the pot and gently use your hands to remove the soil around the roots to separate them. There's often more than one plant in the same pot! This is one reason why they die so quickly, as their roots fill the entire pot and suffocate.

2 Once separated, put each plant in its own pot and cover the roots with soil.

3 Put the pots into a sink of water overnight so the soil soaks up all the water it needs.

4 Put your plant on a saucer on the windowsill or in a sunny spot on your balcony and watch it flourish! Make sure to water often, keep the soil moist but not wet.

Our tree-total year

Planting trees, wildflowers and shrubs is not only something we do because it looks nice. It's also a way to help the environment. We'd like to share some digits and details on just what we've planted recently in and around your communities.

Our grounds maintenance team has had another busy year and between April 2022 and April 2023 they planted **159 flowering shrubs, 375 hedging plants, 25 areas of wildflower meadow and 148 trees.**



159 flowering shrubs

Lavandula, otherwise known as lavender, made up 55 of the flowering shrubs we planted. It's a great pollinator and attracts bees, insects, birds, butterflies and moths. It even has seeds for birds!



375 hedging plants

Geranium macrorrhizum, more commonly known as cranesbill, offers a long season of pollen and nectar and made up **122 of the 375 total.** Bees, moths, butterflies and other insects love them!



25 areas of wildflower meadow

Did you know one acre of wildflower meadow on a summer's day, can contain up to three million flowers? These flowers can produce 1kg of nectar honey, which is enough to support nearly 96,000 honey bees, a day! We have **13,000m² of wildflower meadows** which is just over 3.2 acres. Meaning on a summer's day we're supporting up to 288,000 honey bees!



148 trees

You may remember **we planted 140 trees earlier this year** in honour of The Queens' Green Canopy Project. This is an initiative originally set to mark The Platinum Jubilee, and then extended due to Her Majesty's passing.

We planted 70 trees across Derbyshire and a further 70 in Northamptonshire, to not only support our passion of giving back to the community but our plans to do much more on the sustainability front.

But what did we plant?



Thorpe's Peach and Barnack Beauty

Thorpe's Peach is a sweet dessert apple tree and Barnack Beauty makes sweet and crispy apples, both native to Northamptonshire. We planted a variety of fruit trees for 70 for 70, but we purposefully chose to plant native trees where we could.



Bellidge Pippin, Lambs Seedling, and Newton Wonder

All of the above apple trees are native to Derbyshire and would make the perfect ingredients in an apple pie or crumble in the following years. Not only do native trees serve the current environment and wildlife better, but they're a nice nod to keeping things local.



Oak trees

We planted 26 oak trees due to their ability to capture and store carbon for long periods of time. They can actually live to over 1,000 years old! Plus, they're one of the most beneficial trees for wildlife and plants as over 2,000 species are supported by them.



Stand-up Sharon

Yet again, someone has added more soil to my allotment. The plot thickens...



Get prepped for winter

It might seem silly thinking about winter while it's warm outside, but now is the best time to prepare your home for winter.

How to test your central heating

- Turn the thermostat to constant and adjust it to the maximum temperature.
- Allow it to heat up for around ten minutes.
- Once you're happy it's working, turn it back to your normal settings.
- If it's not working, report a repair using the [customer enquiries form](#).



How to test your boiler

- Turn the hot water thermostat to the maximum temperature and run the hot water tap for a few minutes to let it heat up – be careful not to scald yourself.
- If the water comes through hot as expected, turn the thermostat back down to your usual setting.
- If it's getting warm, but not warm enough or not at all, report a repair using the [customer enquiries form](#).



Boiler flashing a warning code of 'E119' or 'E118'? This is a sign the pressure has dropped. Thankfully it's an easy problem to fix yourself and we have a handy video to explain how to solve it. Watch it [here](#). Doing these checks now before winter sets in gives you plenty of time to raise any issues with us well in advance, so we can make sure it's working properly before the time comes when you need it.

Managing damp, mould and condensation in your home

We don't want any of our customers to have to live with damp or mould and we don't want homes to be damaged through damp or mould either. We've created an advice leaflet full of information, tips and how we can support here. [Click to read here](#).

Spot the differences

£75 shopping vouchers

Eyes at the ready! Can you spot the differences in these photos? Email communications@futureshg.co.uk with how many you can find, for a chance to win a prize. PS there's more than ten!



