

IN BRIEF

Free training for firms

EAST SUSSEX: Businesses are being offered a free training programme to improve relationships with their customers.

The county council's Trading Standards team has developed a free training programme on The Sale of Goods Act.

Councillor Bob Tidy, lead member for community services, said: "Our training aims to simplify all the information that businesses need and present it in an easy-to-understand way, free of legal and technical jargon."

Businesses interested in finding out more should contact Maria Contreras on 01323 464257 ext 64254 or e-mail Maria.FatimaContreras@eastsussex.gov.uk.

Priority list

WEALDEN: Residents who are vulnerable or rely on electricity for medical equipment are being urged to sign up for additional support in the event of a power cut.

The Priority Services Register is a free service allowing chronically sick or disabled people who rely on electrical medical equipment to sign up.

In the event of a power cut, supplier UK Power Networks, which operates the register, will try to contact the affected customers.

Call 0800 169 9970.

Help wanted

EAST SUSSEX: A conservation organisation is looking for volunteers to help hand out water to thirsty runners at the Brighton Marathon this year.

The marathon takes place on Sunday, April 10, and 32 men and women have agreed to raise money for the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Elli Saunders, from the Trust, is organising one of the 12 sponsored water stations along the way and needs up to 40 volunteers to help out.

Anyone who is interested should call 01273 497559 or e-mail ellisaunders@sussexwt.org.uk.

Tree-mendous idea 'will boost tourism'

Luxury treehouse dwellings plan given 'green light'

By **Lucy Clapham**
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A PAIR of luxury treehouses – where adults can release their inner child – are hoped to become the latest attraction to boost the area's reputation among tourists.

The circular eco-lodges are set to be ready for guests by autumn after the project was granted planning permission and awarded a grant from the Wealden and Rother Rural Partnership, to help with their environmentally-friendly construction.

When finished, the unusual holiday homes, complete with kitchenette and sheltered balcony, will sit amongst mature trees on raised timber supports within the grounds of Fair Oak Farm in Mayfield.

Childish dreams

The treehouses, which sleep up to two, are said to provide accommodation for grown-ups "that want to fulfil their innermost childish dreams".

Wealden District Council has praised the project as an "excellent example" of the kind of attraction they want more of in the area.

Pam Doodles, portfolio-holder for community, said: "The provision of this calibre of facility, which promotes both the active enjoyment and understanding of the area and yet respects the special character of the High Weald, is just the sort of scheme that our tourism strategy seeks to support."

An independent report published in October said the district "lacked distinctiveness" and revealed 90 per cent of visitors only came to Wealden for a day, as its market towns were not good enough to encourage them to stay the night.



GREEN DREAM: Above, an artist's impression of the treehouses; below, how the bedrooms could look



On the back of this report the council pledged to "improve standards of accommodation".

As well as providing an alternative holiday stay, it is hoped the treehouses – which will be decked out with mod-cons including an LCD TV, DVD library and wireless broadband – will boost Mayfield's economy by providing jobs and supporting its shops.

Ian Ledger, who owns Fair Oak Farm with wife Penny, said: "It's fantastic to have support from

those that recognise the economic and ecological benefits a project like this has for our community, particularly from local residents and various other small rural businesses.

Balance

"If you can get the balance right and work together intelligently, small rural businesses in our community can thrive, not just survive, whilst protecting and enhancing the stunning environ-

ment of which we are lucky enough to be custodians."

Sustainable materials are being used to build the elevated homes' bathroom and kitchen facilities and the couple are also planning on introducing a wildlife habitat protection plan with them.

Owl enticement nests and bird boxes have already been set up in the grounds of the farm, which is home to three other holiday lets including a converted barn and cow shed.



CLAIMS DENIED: Bob Standley

Leader is challenged on salaries

THE leader of Wealden District Council has hit back at claims its top brass are vastly overpaid.

Councillor Bob Standley was this week challenged by the Wealden Labour Party to cut council bosses' salaries in a letter which stated that chief executive Charles Lant's £154,000 salary was "morally indefensible".

"Executive and director pay at Wealden council is out of control," said Wealden Labour's Sonja Le Vay.

"Let's be honest – rural Wealden is not a district which presents huge challenges to a local authority chief officer and this bloated pay package sends out the wrong signals."

Benefit

She added: "Council directors are on an average salary of £115,000 and all benefit from gold-plated, protected pensions."

"We are challenging Tory council leader Bob Standley to listen to his party colleague Eric Pickles. Mr Pickles has stated that the 'grave train for council chief executives' must stop immediately. Bob Standley should grasp this nettle now."

Mr Standley said Labour's claims were "wide of the mark".

"Wealden has in recent years removed a significant number of senior manager posts," he said.

"We have frozen the chief executive's pay and other senior managers' pay for the last two years, and there is no increase planned for them in 2011-12."