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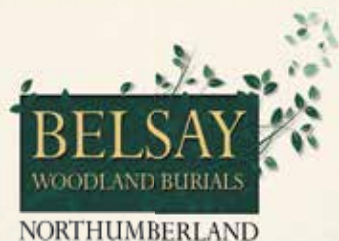


New Year start for £5.5m
retirement living scheme build

Community rallies to support
families hit by Storm Arwen

New Ponteland debt advice
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Nina skates her way into Team GB



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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

After the busy festive period, our whole team are taking a well deserved break so we'll be closed from Monday 3RD Jan. We'll be reopening at 5pm on Thursday 13TH Jan.

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Happy New Year!

If anyone was unable to get out to see the annual Christmas lights display on Coates Green, this lovely shot by our photographer Barry Pells brings them to your home!

Wishing all readers and advertisers a happy and prosperous 2022.

MP meets campaigners at closure threatened bank

Ponteland's MP Guy Opperman met campaigners at the town's Lloyds Bank branch, which has been earmarked for closure in February, to support their call for a reprieve.

Last month Pont News reported how local resident Christine Caisley had launched a national petition calling on the bank to stop the proposed closure – one of 48 nationwide.

Lloyds say a continuing decline in customer numbers has forced the nationwide closure plans and highlighted the nearest alternative branch in Newburn. But residents say this is over an hour away by public transport.

The retired clinical nurse's petition, which had nearly 500 signatures when we went to print, asks Lloyds to reconsider their decision given it is the last bank in Ponteland following the departure of Barclays, NatWest and HSBC in recent years.

People seeking face to face banking transactions will have the choice of Newcastle Building Society's branch on Broadway, Darras Hall, or the Post Office branches on Broadway or Merton Road.

Mr Opperman, also Pensions and Financial Inclusion Minister, has previously supported successful pilots of banking hubs to ensure access to cash and banking facilities for elderly and vulnerable people, but Lloyds have no such plans.

He said: "Lloyds have seriously let down local people by closing the last bank branch in Ponteland. I am extremely disappointed that the bank hasn't been able to come up with an alternative option that would safeguard access to cash and retain physical banking in the community. Please add your



Revd Capt Allison and Guy Opperman MP, pictured with Coun Caisley (centre).

name to Christine's petition – we must save this branch!"

Mrs Caisley, who is also a town councillor, added: "I have to do this as a concerned resident who is shocked Lloyds are prepared to close this only remaining bank in Ponteland. Lloyds say 'By your side' in their advertisement slogan. That's a joke."

Revd. Capt Paul Allison, Vicar of Ponteland, is also backing the petition. He said: "I would like to support this very important campaign to allow the resource of Lloyds Bank to remain within the heart of our community. There are many people in this area who need the resources and facilities of this very important bank to support them in their daily lives."

Christine Caisley's petition can be signed at chnng.it/6rVqsVjm.

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Demolition work on the old Athol House and an artist's impression of how the new Athol Court will look on completion.

Work set to start in the New Year on £5.5m retirement living development

Work is due to start on the build of a £5.5m retirement living scheme in Ponteland in the new year.

North-East housing association Karbon Homes has awarded the contract for its replacement Athol Court development to EQUANS.

The development will include 34 high quality apartments, with a mix of one and two bed homes available for affordable rent and shared ownership for the over-55s.

Zoey Hawthorne, Assistant Director of Development Delivery at Karbon Homes, said: "We're delighted to announce EQUANS as the lead contractor for this development and look forward to work getting started in the new year.

"We've worked hard to develop a modern scheme which provides high quality, affordable homes, incorporating the comments of the local community to ensure the homes meet their wants and needs."

EQUANS, the new brand for ENGIE's regeneration and services led activities, has a strong track record of working with housing associations to help deliver new homes across the region.

Will Kay, Regional Managing Director at EQUANS, said:

"We're delighted to bring our construction and regeneration expertise to this development and are pleased to be making this scheme a reality through our partnership with Karbon Homes.

"The development will provide much needed affordable homes for older people in the area, and we look forward to getting started soon."

The new scheme will replace the former Athol House on Callerton Lane, which did not meet modern standards and was recently demolished. Karbon offered extensive support to the residents of Athol House to help them find suitable alternative homes.

It will cover a similar footprint to the original scheme, but given the proximity of the River Pont, will be elevated slightly above ground floor level to ensure flood safety. It will also be moved slightly further away from neighbouring properties to ensure no loss of privacy.

Karbon, which owns nearly 30,000 homes across the North-East and Yorkshire, has the support of Homes England in funding the costs of the project.

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New debt advice service launched

Citizens Advice Northumberland is setting up a new financial advice and debt management project in Ponteland.

The charity is working with the High School in the town to reach families in the area facing financial difficulties and provide local access to the support and advice they need.

A pilot project is now up and running in the Ponteland Community Hub, with drop-in sessions at Ponteland High School also planned.

CAN is also looking to train a member of the school's support team to act as an advisor to parents and guardians of children at the school, eventually opening up the service to the whole community.

A £3,000 Newcastle Building Society Community Fund grant has enabled the charity to get the project up and running, and will cover its costs for the next nine months.

CAN provides free, confidential and impartial advice across a wide range of topics and operates from ten different locations around the county.

It helps over 23,000 people deal with around 50,000 problems every year and manages bespoke projects in association with other charities including Macmillan Cancer Support, the Money Advice Service and the British Gas Energy Trust.



Rachel Turnbull and Thomas Monaghan of CAN with (centre) Charlotte Williams of NBS.

Thomas Monaghan, funding manager at Citizens Advice Northumberland, said: "Ponteland is generally recognised as an affluent community, but as with anywhere, there are pockets of deprivation that can go unseen and unresolved without proactive intervention.

"This project has the potential to help dozens of local families get themselves back onto an even keel, and the generous backing we've had from Newcastle Building Society has provided a real springboard towards getting everything going."

Charlotte Williams, manager at Newcastle Building Society's Broadway branch in Ponteland, added: "Citizens Advice Northumberland's focus on connecting communities with the right information and advice matches our own and we're very pleased to be part of something that will make a long-term difference to local people."

ADVERTISING FEATURE

Why financial planning needs to be designed to support your lifestyle

By David Lamb CFP™ MCSI

Many people invest their money to get the best returns possible and the financial services industry encourages this - it helps them sell more products.

But within a financial plan it is essential that your investments are designed to support your lifestyle.

The first thing to consider is an emergency fund. The textbooks will suggest holding capital to the equivalent of between three and six months' income which can be drawn at short notice.

However, in my experience, a more reasonable amount should be what feels comfortable to the individual, giving some consideration to the cost of an emergency that is not insured.

For those in work, I would suggest a minimum of six months' salary, to

ensure you can continue to fund your lifestyle should you lose your job. This will give you a comfortable period to find a new job.

After ring-fencing your emergency fund, consider what expenditure above normal income you may require in the next five years.

This money should be invested with relatively low risk, but possibly with longer notice period. These funds can be used for funding expenses that exceed normal income, such as holidays.

Longer term funds can be invested to achieve a higher return, depending upon your personal risk tolerances, to provide wealth for retirement or funding bucket list expenditure.

There may be other specific objectives, such as children's weddings, house deposits or university expenses. These

need more detailed planning to take into consideration:

- The cost today
- The future value of those costs
- When the money is likely to be required
- Inflation (but the Retail Price Index may not be a good inflation assumption). For example, education fees often rise at a higher rate than inflation.

Once you know the target value, and the assumed rate of returns on your investments, you can then calculate how much you need to save.

If you have a specific budget, you can calculate the returns required - and therefore the level of risk you need to take with your investments.

Score your financial planning at lambfinancial.co.uk



Contractors cut up a felled tree in Woodside, Darras Hall. Photo by Simon Tappin.

Community rallies to support families hit by Storm Arwen

The Ponteland community rallied to support families left without power for up to a fortnight following the devastating damage caused by Storm Arwen.

More than 240,000 properties across the North-East were left without electricity after the storm struck on the weekend of November 26-28, causing hundreds of recorded instances of damage to the region's power network.

They included hundreds of homes and businesses in Ponteland, Darras Hall and surrounding villages including Medburn, Whalton and Belsay. Wind gusts of up to 98mph caused severe damage to homes and outbuildings, bringing down trees and power lines, demolishing fences, blocking roads and leaving paths unpassable.

However, the community stepped up to help the many people left without heat and light as Northern Powergrid teams worked to restore power. Neighbours helped each other, families took in relatives and friends aided one another.

Ponteland's centre for help was Merton Hall, where affected residents could go for warmth, to recharge phones and relax with warm drinks, hot meals and snacks. Residents were also invited by Northumberland County Council to use facilities at Ponteland Leisure Centre, including hot showers, and many shops offered phone charging facilities and free food and drinks.

Volunteers at Merton Hall worked hard to provide a warm welcome to families, including overnight accommodation. Ponteland Town Council funded food served at the venue and many businesses helped out, including free

takeaways from Ponteland Tandoori and food donations from Gill's Fish and Chip Shop, the Lemon Grass café and many others.

Waitrose and Sainsbury's also gave generous food donations, while the Diamond Inn offered hot water, hot drinks and charging.

Residents who did have power brought a range of items to Merton Hall, from hats and scarves to gifts, samosas, homemade scones, mince pies and more. Surplus food plus tea, coffee and soft drinks were taken to the People's Kitchen in Newcastle after the hub closed, a week after the storm.

Meanwhile councillors toured the parish to deliver portable generators and offer other support.

Ponteland Mayor Coun Christine Greenwell, who is a trustee at Merton Hall, said: "The power cuts were devastating for many residents. They had no light and many had no heat at all. The scale of the devastation meant that no one had any real idea of when they would be reconnected.

"Some people did not want to leave their homes, hoping to be reconnected at any time. Many lost freezers full of food bought specially for the Christmas period.

"County Council representatives visited Merton Hall to explain what they were doing and the help that was available and police also came to try to reassure

anxious residents that extra patrols were taking place to ensure that dark streets were not targeted by opportunist burglars and thieves.

"But, as happened with the Covid pandemic, the people of Ponteland came together to help one another. Merton Hall was used as the hub for help and we were inundated with volunteers keen to give up their time to help one another and businesses stepped forward to help. I want to thank everyone who helped to make the lives of those affected just a little bit easier.

"Thank you also to the people who lent camp beds, air beds, sleeping bags and blankets and to the many who gave food. We have a wonderful community which always goes that extra mile to offer help when it is needed."

One of the areas affected by the power cuts was Runnymede Road, Darras Hall, where some homes had no power for a week.

Runnymede Road residents Alma and John Dunigan lost their power supply after a neighbour's tree fell onto and snapped four overhead electric cables.

Describing their experience as "a seven-day nightmare", Alma said: "We stayed put with no heating or cooking facilities in a home registering nine degrees for the seven-day period.

"Life was miserable, having to wear three layers of clothing and gloves with only torches for light during the long hours of darkness and the company of a wind-up radio for connection with the outside world. Friends on another power circuit supplied us with flasks for hot drinks and hot water bottles."

Pub forced to close for nine days

The storm did not just affect domestic properties in Ponteland - The Badger public house was without power for nine days, causing substantial losses to owner Mitchells & Butlers.

At first the pub was not affected by the storm, with power remaining on during Saturday November 27. But when staff arrived for work on the Sunday, there was no electricity supply.

The initial guidance from National Powergrid suggested it would be restored within 48 hours. But the pub did not get its electricity supply back until Wednesday December 8th.

General Manager Simon Cornwall said: "We had no power for nine days in all, which was obviously devastating. It's been a total nightmare for staff, who were on standby for days and have lost pay. We had to discard all the food we had prepped up for the Sunday service, which has cost us around £2,000, and a further £500 has been lost from the cask ales."

Simon said they were left in the dark in more ways than one, having to check daily for updates on the National Powergrid website with no contact from the company at all during the nine days.

Fortunately staff at the pub, which employs 27 people, were able to transfer all frozen food on the premises to a portable freezer at sister venue The Snowy Owl in Cramlington. But, as Simon explained, the financial impact of the extended power cut was huge.

"When you add lost revenue from one of the busiest times of the year for us, the total losses are estimated to be in the tens of thousands," he added.

Compensation payments

Northern Powergrid is offering compensation for anyone affected for more than two days. Households are eligible for £70 for the first 48 hours without power and £70 for every 12 hours beyond that. The firm is also offering additional welfare support payments to any domestic customer who was still off supply on or after Monday November 29th. This includes "reasonable costs" of alternative accommodation and food up to £15 per person per meal and contributions to other "reasonably incurred costs" such as back-up generators. For more information on compensation visit: northernpowergrid.com/storm-arwen



The Badger's General Manager Simon Cornwall

STORM ARWEN PUBLIC MEETINGS

GUY OPPERMAN MP

Following the devastating effects of Storm Arwen, I am organising public meetings across the constituency with representatives of Northern Powergrid, Northumbrian Water, Northumberland County Councillors and other key representatives.

The meeting will be a chance to make sure everyone receives the compensation they are owed, ensure there are community representations into the Ofgem investigation, and to discuss what more needs to be done so our community is better prepared for major disruptions in the future.

Dates and times for upcoming public meetings:

13th January 18:00 – 20:00, Darras Hall Primary School
14th January 18:00 – 20:00, Bellingham Village Hall
27th January 18:00 – 20:00, Hexham Mart
28th January 19:00 – 21:00, Allendale Town Hall

There will be a police presence for all events.

Please RSVP by visiting
guyopperman.co.uk/StormArwen
or call 01434 239 205



Your letters

Staff at a Ponteland pub are thanked for hosting a charity coffee morning in this month's postbag...

Thanks to the Diamond Inn for Alzheimer's fundraiser

Please pass on my thanks to the staff of the Diamond Inn for organising and hosting a fantastic coffee morning on Saturday December 4th to raise funds for the Alzheimer's Society.

There was a raffle with some very generous prizes donated by local businesses and Diamond regulars and there was also a wonderful spread of cakes and savouries.

The Alzheimer's Society uses its funds to finance research or give valuable support to families and individuals effected by the symptoms of dementia.

The Diamond plan to host another event soon. Please look out for it and give it your support.

Andy Ogleshorpe and Kim Websdale
Thornhill Road, Ponteland

February issue deadlines: The deadline for all copy and adverts for the February issue is Monday January 17th. Door to door distribution will be from Monday January 31st to Friday February 4th. Businesses should be aware that all bookings for advertisements must be paid in full by the deadline to ensure placement in the February issue. Please visit ponteland-tc.gov.uk/pont-news-and-views for online issues and all updates.

Letters on all issues are welcomed by Pont News & Views but the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. The Editor reserves the right to amend any submitted letters for legal or other reasons. All letters submitted should include the writer's name and address.

The Editor
Pont News & Views



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What's on...

Ponteland Wildlife Group

Ponteland Wildlife Group Zoom talks are held on the first Tuesday evening each month at 7.30pm. On Tuesday January 4th we have 'Everything you always wanted to know about slugs and snails but were afraid to ask' by Gordon Port, Natural History Society, and on Tuesday February 1st 'Projects on the NWT Reserves at Whitelee, Benshaw Moor and East Chevington' by Duncan Hutt, Head of Conservation, NWT, and our AGM. For information visit pontelandwildlife.wixsite.com

Ponteland u3a

Meetings and talks at St Mary's Parish Centre are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 2pm. Our next two talks will be on January 5th 'On the shoulders of giants - the progress of modern plastic surgery' by Sarah Pape and on February 2nd we have our AGM and faith tea. Speaker TBC. We welcome enquiries from anyone wishing to join Ponteland u3a - please call the membership secretary on 01661 824953.

Ponteland Senior Gentlemen's Club

On Monday January 10th we have Steve Cox's talk 'Trident callsign Beeline 068' in the Memorial Hall at 2.30pm.

Ponteland Village WI

The New Year brings new plans for members. The next meeting will be on Tuesday January 11th. Social distancing will continue to be in place; until further notice we will not be allowing visitors. The sub-groups such as the Walking Group, Dining Out, Walking for Softies and Book Club are continuing. For more about us, email pontelandvillagewi@hotmail.com or look for Ponteland Village WI on Facebook.

Callerton Garden and Flower Club

Our first meeting of 2022 will be held in the Memorial Hall on Wednesday January 12th at 2pm when Area Demonstrator Christine Ogle will be giving her interpretation of 'Recycle, Re-use'. Visitors welcome (£7).

Merton Hall coffee morning

Merton Hall and the staff from Newcastle Building Society's branch in Darras Hall are hosting a coffee morning on Monday January 17th between 10am and 1pm. Please call in to meet branch staff and have a cuppa and ask any questions you may have.

Ponteland Local History Society

At our meeting on Thursday January 20th at 7.30pm at St Mary's Parish Centre, Thornhill Road, we have a talk 'Pitmen, Politics and Primitive Methodism in South East Northumberland' by Dr. Winifred Stokes. Visitors welcome - £2.

Ponteland Friendly Stitchers

On Monday January 24th from 2.15pm to 4.15pm at The Studio (1), First Floor, Ponteland Leisure Centre we have a mini workshop by Kate Slaughter. Please contact me for requirement details. Membership of the group is open to all; everyone, whatever their level of experience, is welcome at meetings and workshops. You can become a member or come to a meeting as a visitor for £5. For further information contact Secretary Penny Ford at pontelandfriendlystitchers@mail.com

Knit & Natter Group

Knit & Natter on Tuesday afternoons from 1pm to 3pm at Ponteland Library. For more information contact Library Assistant Julie Ennis at ponteland.library@northumberland.gov.uk

Ponteland Ramblers

Ponteland Ramblers are a friendly group of local ramblers who organise walks in Northumberland or North Durham of usually about 8-9 miles on alternate Sundays and shorter walks on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. Visitors are welcome to join us for a few walks, without any obligation to join formally. For details of forthcoming walks, please visit our website ramblers.org.uk/ponteland

Dalton Carpet Bowls Club

At Dalton Village Hall every Monday between 7pm and 9pm. Come and give it a try in a friendly atmosphere - new members always welcome. Contact 07593 700332.

Ponteland Health Walks

Ponteland Health Walks meet every Tuesday at 10.30am outside Ponteland Leisure Centre. The free walks take 60 to 90 minutes on local footpaths. A good opportunity to walk safely, improve fitness and make new friends. Assistance dogs only please. Contact Gordon Allan on 07936 135469 for more information or just turn up, no notice required.

Ponteland Methodist Church

Sunday worship 10am and 6.30pm - all welcome. Monday 'Open Door' café. Tuesday Women's Fellowship and Boys Brigade. Thursday Toddlers, Men's Forum, Women's Focus. Saturday walking group. Various Bible study and House groups. Pilates. Zumba. Room hire. Contact anncooperx@gmail.com or call 01661 824347.

Ponteland Ladies' Choir

Ponteland Ladies Choir has restarted face to face rehearsals at our new venue Ponteland Community Primary School (next to the original high school) on a Monday evening from 7.30pm to 9.15pm (term time only). For further information please email pontelandladieschoir@gmail.com or contact Linda on 07771 536914 or Susan on 07710 418780.

Creative writing classes

Suitable for both beginners and more experienced writers, these classes will inspire and encourage you to write poetry, short fiction and memoir and to share and develop your writing through stimulating workshop sessions in a friendly and supportive group. We meet on Wednesday mornings in members' homes/gardens in and around Ponteland (or on Zoom depending on current Covid regulations). Email claire@claire276.plus.com for more information or to arrange a free taster session.

* All of the above events are subject to change should additional Covid restrictions be brought in during the New Year period. We recommend you check with each group in advance before attending

Young boxer wins first competitive bout – and raises £300 for charity

A young boxer who thought he would never be able to take part in competitive sport due to a joint condition has won his first ever competitive boxing match.

Four years ago Ayaan Kadir was diagnosed with Osteocondritis, which can make bone underneath the cartilage of a joint die due to lack of blood flow and break loose, causing pain and hindering joint motion.

Undeterred, the Ponteland High School student started boxing with his younger brother Hamza as a way to keep fit, his boxing coach Clive Gibson tailoring exercises at F.I.T. Club in Newcastle so he would not damage his knee.

Ayaan took part in his first charity boxing match in 2019, raising £500 alongside Hamza. And after training and sparring throughout lockdown, Clive asked the brothers to take part in a charity fight night at Newcastle Civic Centre on November 20th.

After two months of solid training, Ayaan entered the ring for his first ever competitive boxing match and came out on top after three rounds of three minutes.

The 14-year-old, of Benwell, said: "When I heard my name announced, I'm pretty sure my eardrums popped from my family cheering me on. I never expected to hear Cameron Gray (best friend) scream so loud!"

Ayaan came home with a trophy, having raised £300 for the Nicole and Jessica Rich Foundation, which brings hope to families battling the life-limiting Batten disease. He hopes to take part in his next fight in March, Covid permitting.



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The Pont Tap's CAMRA entry

In an article in the December issue of Pont News about The Pont Tap being included in the Campaign for Real Ale's (CAMRA) Good Beer Guide 2022 we incorrectly captioned a photograph of owner Mick Barnes with local CAMRA member Nigel Williams.

The caption stated Mick was photographed with Paul Hillhouse, Chair of CAMRA's Tyneside and Northumberland branch, who was quoted in the article.

Our apologies for this error and for any embarrassment caused.

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***AER' stands for the Annual Equivalent Rate, a notional rate which illustrates what the interest rate would be if paid and compounded on an annual basis.

Newcastle Building Society Principal Office: 1 Cobalt Park Way, Wallsend, NE28 9EJ. Newcastle Building Society is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Newcastle Building Society is entered in the Financial Services Register under number 156058. You can check this on the Financial Services Register or by contacting the Financial Conduct Authority on 0800 111 6768. Call 0345 734 4345 or visit us online www.newcastle.co.uk



Pictured at the presentation are (l-r): Richard Walker, Derek Deans, Mark Wood, Ponteland Mayor Christine Greenwell, Leigh Richardson, Andrew Pile, Jackie Walker and Barry Hirst.

Appeal for new volunteers after Scouts awards night

Adult volunteers from Ponteland Scouts have been presented with awards in recognition of their support for the youth movement.

Ponteland Mayor Christine Greenwell made the presentations at the event at Morpeth Town Hall, also attended by the Northumberland County Scout Commissioner and Morpeth Town Mayor David Bawn.

However the 1st Ponteland Scout Group needs more adult volunteers to meet demand from young applicants wanting to join who are on a waiting list.

Barry Hirst, Group Scout Leader, explained: "Without our volunteers, Scouts wouldn't exist. Volunteering with the Scouts helps us continue to give our young people new skills and experiences. The more leaders we have, the more young people we can give opportunities to."

"Volunteers come from all walks of life and give as little or as much time as they can spare."

We can offer ongoing training, awards and recognition."

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at Ponteland Scouts, contact Barry at info@pontlandscouts.uk.

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Want to learn something new in 2022?

People considering a career change or simply wanting to learn something new in 2022 are being urged to look at a range of training courses being offered by the county council's learning provider.

Northumberland Skills delivers training in business, management, arts, catering, construction, engineering, education, care, gardening, health and beauty – among many others.

Courses are available across nine locations in the county, including Hexham, Morpeth and Prudhoe, and there are also subjects which can be studied online from home.

Learners enrolled on one of Northumberland Skills' part or full-time courses have access to a host of free, flexible digital learning packages relevant to their area of learning and career aspirations to further boost CVs and confidence.

Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Children's Services, said: "There is no time like the present. If you are thinking about doing it, why not open up those conversations now and plan ahead for the new year."

The dedicated Northumberland Skills team can offer guidance and advice and can be contacted via the website at northumberlandskills.co.uk

Nina skates her way to Eastern Europe after Team GB qualification

A talented young figure skater is heading to Eastern Europe to compete in the New Year after winning a prestigious national competition and a place in Team GB.

Nina Alexandrov, 13, secured her place in the Team GB Development Squad, enabling her to compete internationally, after beating 40 other skaters in the Basic Novice category at the British Figure Skating Championships at iceSheffield on November 30th.

The Year 8 student at Ponteland High School is now training for competitions taking place in Slovenia next month and Latvia in April.

The win is much deserved reward for Nina's dedication, as proud mum Olga explained: "The majority of Nina's on ice training is on the weekends and before school, so from a very early age she learned how to organise herself very well.

"You need to go to bed really early when you need to wake up at around 4am to 5am six times a week. Then there is more off ice training and fitness after school. Normally she does about 13 hours of training on the ice and four hours off ice.

"Nina currently trains at three different ice rinks - Dundee, Whitley Bay and Billingham. Dundee is the rink where we train the most from Friday to Sunday. The rest of the week Nina trains between Whitley Bay and Billingham, where she is a member of the Tees Active Sports Academy."

Olga, a self-employed consultant in the oral health care products industry, and husband Dmitri, an international business manager in the biosciences sector, have encouraged Nina since a young age.

Olga said: "We always loved watching figure skating as a sport in our family. When Nina was three I took her to the local ice rink in Whitley Bay for

her first ice bear club session to give it a go. She absolutely loved it and just couldn't wait for her next session. That is pretty much how it all started.

"When Nina was six she started competing locally. Very soon we realised that in order to achieve something you have to invest more time into it and arrange more lessons.

"Nina loves figure skating. She won the British Championships in Basic Novice but she is moving into the next category of Advance Novice and later on will move up to Junior and Senior level where she will be aiming to get the score needed for the European then World Championship.

"Her wildest dream is to be at the Olympics which will be

amazing! She would have to work extremely hard to reach that level as there is only one place for all the members of Team GB."

Olga, of Stannington Place, Ponteland, said sporting prowess runs in the family – Nina's older brother Mark, a Year 10 student at Ponteland High School, used to train on the rink with his sister but now trains at Northumberland Tennis Academy and is Nina's biggest fan.

She added: "When you watch big figure skating competitions, it looks so easy, glamorous and effortless, all these jumps and spins. People quite often don't realise how much intense training and hard work both on and off the ice it involves.

"To win the national title would never be possible without a great team around us. Nina's main coach David Richardson at Dundee Ice Arena who we are very grateful for putting so much hard work into coaching Nina, Karen Brannen who teaches her at Whitley Bay Ice Rink and Nina's fitness coach Ross Graham at North East Athletic Development. These are the people behind Nina's success!

"And I must say I can't thank both of Nina's schools enough for helping her. Mrs Blain, headteacher of Ponteland First School which Nina was at until Year 6, Mr McGrane, headteacher of Ponteland High School and all Nina's teachers who have been very supportive in Nina's skating journey."



Nina with her coach David Richardson and competing at the British Figure Skating Championships.



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