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Lockdown is Easing

By the time this edition is published, Covid-19 restrictions will allow us to interact more with other people. This is another welcome step back to life as we remember it.

Please also remember, though, that it is just one step and not an opportunity to throw off all caution. Many people will have good reasons to remain more cautious than you and their choice to do so should be respected.

Invest Safely

Last year UK consumers lost more than £78 million to fake investments. These scams can be very convincing, so **ALWAYS** take extra care before entrusting your money to a stranger's "safe-keeping".

If someone you do not know offers you an attractive investment opportunity, always use the *Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)* register to check whether the firm is authorised to provide investments and to verify their contact details. **If they are not there, it is almost certainly a scam.**

register.fca.org.uk

Watch out for fake social media posts, some of which use forged celebrity endorsements. Websites at the top of search engine results should be checked very carefully; just because they appear there does not mean they are genuine.

Always seek reputable, independent financial advice from someone properly regulated to provide it. **Never take advice from the company that contacted you.**

Taking these precautions could make all the difference between a safe investment and losing your life savings.

Want to Sell your House?

One of our Members received a letter addressed to 'The Occupier' at their home address. It was from a company offering to buy their house for cash. The estimated price quoted was very attractive, although the small print said that the actual price paid would depend on the company's own valuation.

This is not a firm offer but simply an advert aimed at people trying to sell their property, who might be tempted by a quick cash sale at a low price.

If you have received a similar letter and decide to find out more, it would be a very good idea to first get an **independent valuation from a reputable estate agent** so that you can compare it to any cash deal you are offered.

Ask yourself why a company would be interested in buying a private residence. Could it be that they simply want to sell it on for a quick profit?

The Birstall and Wanlip Neighbourhood Beat Team produces a monthly Newsletter written by our Beat Officer, Dave Jaeckels. It contains news about recent crime in our villages, crime prevention advice and other information about the Team's activities.

You can read it in full each month on our website:
www.villagewatch.co.uk/police

Caller ID is No Guarantee

Caller ID is a useful feature that tells us who is phoning us but it cannot be relied upon to tell the truth. Criminals are able to 'spoof' the telephone numbers of genuine organisations, such as banks, to mislead their victims.

As we have grown wiser and more suspicious of scam phone calls and text messages, the criminals are now using fake Caller ID to overcome our doubts.

If you have suspicions about a call, you are probably right. Do not be fooled into trusting what could well be a spoofed Caller ID on your display.

Protect Your Dog

Lockdown has led to many families acquiring pets for the first time and this has led to some unwelcome consequences. Animal charities and sanctuaries have been overwhelmed when, after the first flush of enthusiasm, owners have asked them to take unwanted pets into their care. Much worse are the number of pets that have been rescued after being abandoned. All domestic pets, common or exotic, have been affected but the majority have been dogs.

Last summer, the number of Google searches for "Puppies near me" was five times that for the previous year. Criminals quickly saw an opportunity to make money, especially from those prepared to pay for expensive breeds. Illegal puppy farms, smuggling from abroad and straightforward theft have been the source of many animals sold to unsuspecting purchasers. False paperwork about health, vaccinations and history can put the animals and their new owners at risk.

If you want to get a new pet, always go to a reputable dealer or established animal charity and never to fly-by-night rogue dealers.

Theft has become more common as the pandemic has continued. Owners are warned never to leave dogs unaccompanied in public places and to keep them on a lead to prevent them from running off unexpectedly. Professional dog thieves have devised clever methods of luring them away from their owners.

Owning a pet is a big responsibility and it is important to keep dogs under control in public places. Of course, the vast majority of dogs are not dangerous. Responsible owners know their dogs very well and are often upset when other people do not understand that they are harmless and very friendly.

A strange dog that is just being friendly, can still be very frightening to children and adults who do not know it, especially if they have had bad experiences with other, less well-behaved, dogs in the past.

Experience shows that dogs are capable of inflicting serious injury, albeit unintentionally, especially to small children. In the countryside, grazing and other farm animals are easily panicked by dogs left to run free in a field. Any dog that causes injury to a person or another animal can be seized and, in some cases, destroyed. The maximum fine that can be imposed by a Court is £1000.

Owning a dog can be a life-enriching experience; being a responsible owner can make it even richer for all concerned.