

Endometriosis sufferer's long journey to becoming a mum

Sunday, March 27 marks Mother's Day – and for one local woman, this Mothering Sunday is a particularly special one.

Leanne Norman, 31, of Lakenheath, is celebrating the occasion with the baby she has longed for after struggling with endometriosis for nearly 20 years.

Endometriosis is a painful, inflammatory condition which affects approximately 200 million people worldwide and is responsible for around 50% of fertility issues in women. It takes on average eight to 12 years to diagnose.

It causes tissue similar to the lining of the uterus to grow over the ovaries and other organs including the bowels, rectum, kidneys, bladder, liver and spine.

Symptoms include painful, heavy and irregular periods that can have a severe impact on a person's quality of life; lower abdomen or pelvic pain; pain during or after sex; pain when going to the toilet; and fatigue.

This Endometriosis Action Month, mum-of-one Leanne shares the joy at being able to conceive after a 20-year struggle with the condition. By Danielle Lett

Often, endometriosis is misdiagnosed as a number of other illnesses, including IBS and urinary tract infections. There is currently no known cause, and surgery to remove it can damage the delicate fallopian tubes that take the eggs to the womb, making it a common cause of infertility.

"I was diagnosed with endometriosis when I was 14 and underwent numerous procedures over the years to remove the tissue and calm things down a bit, but it kept growing back," explains Leanne.

"Then when I was 18, I was hospitalised with an ectopic pregnancy and had to have one of my fallopian tubes removed."

Endometriosis can take years to diagnose as many women just

think the pain is normal and try to learn to live with it – but Leanne says that her mum pushed for answers early on because of her severe symptoms.

"I wasn't able to go to school sometimes because the pain was so bad. I was having numerous scans and keeping food diaries and constantly having blood tests. It was then decided to operate on me, which is when the endometriosis was diagnosed."

In the years following her diagnosis, Leanne began to manage her symptoms, and would experience more pain during her period. "Work colleagues always knew when it was the wrong time of the month because I would have my hot water bottle with me and a packet of painkillers," she says.

When she met her partner, Dan, she explained to him very early on that she might have problems conceiving.

After three years of trying to conceive with no success, the pair went to their GP who referred them for fertility testing at Bourn Hall Clinic.

"I had to have blood tests and scans at Bourn Hall, and then I was told that I would need to lose a bit of weight before we would be entitled to NHS-funded IVF. I only needed to lose eight pounds, so I joined a slimming group and quickly got that sorted."

The clinic's medical director, Dr Thanos Papathanasiou, says: "An early diagnosis of endometriosis is important as it enables women and their partners to better understand the condition and gain appropriate care. A particular concern is that often women are not aware that they have the option to freeze their eggs ahead of surgery, which provides the chance to preserve their fertility should they want children in the future."

Leanne however was fortunate that her ovaries were unaffected by surgery.

"After we were told we could have IVF, we had one appointment at Bourn Hall, then two weeks later Covid hit and our treatment had to be stopped because all the fertility clinics were told to close.

"This was disheartening, but luckily I was able to carry on working throughout the lockdown and it took my mind off our infertility struggles. Then in the July I fell pregnant naturally and had another ectopic pregnancy. Thankfully I wasn't as ill as I had been before. It was crazy, we had spent three years trying to get pregnant and then this had happened. However, it seemed that, although I was able to get pregnant, my body just couldn't get the embryos to where they needed to be."

However, once the clinic reopened, the couple were able to resume their IVF treatment, and Leanne fell pregnant just before Christmas 2020.

"It was absolutely amazing," she says.

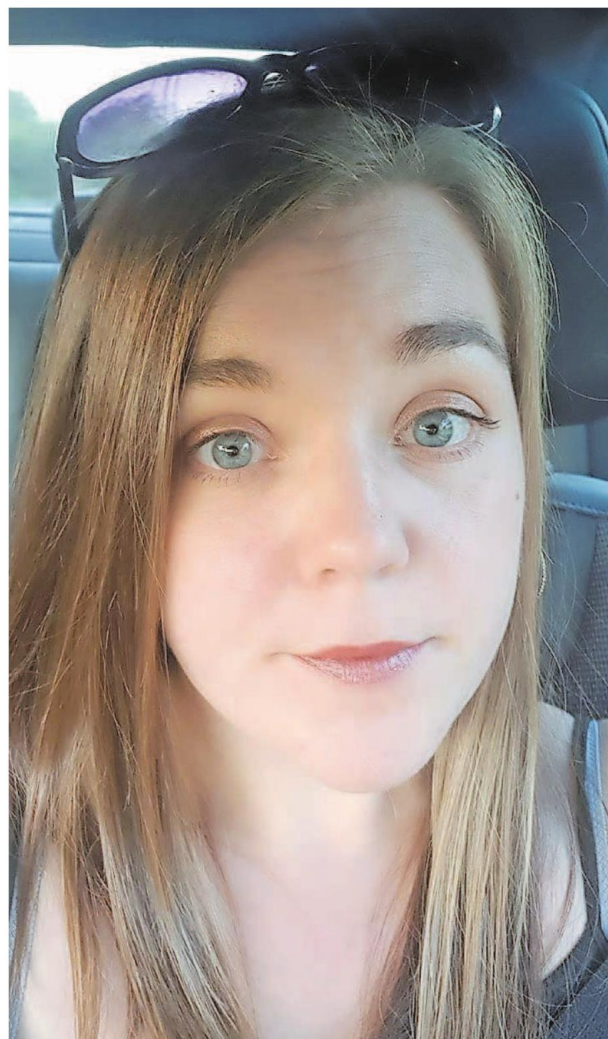
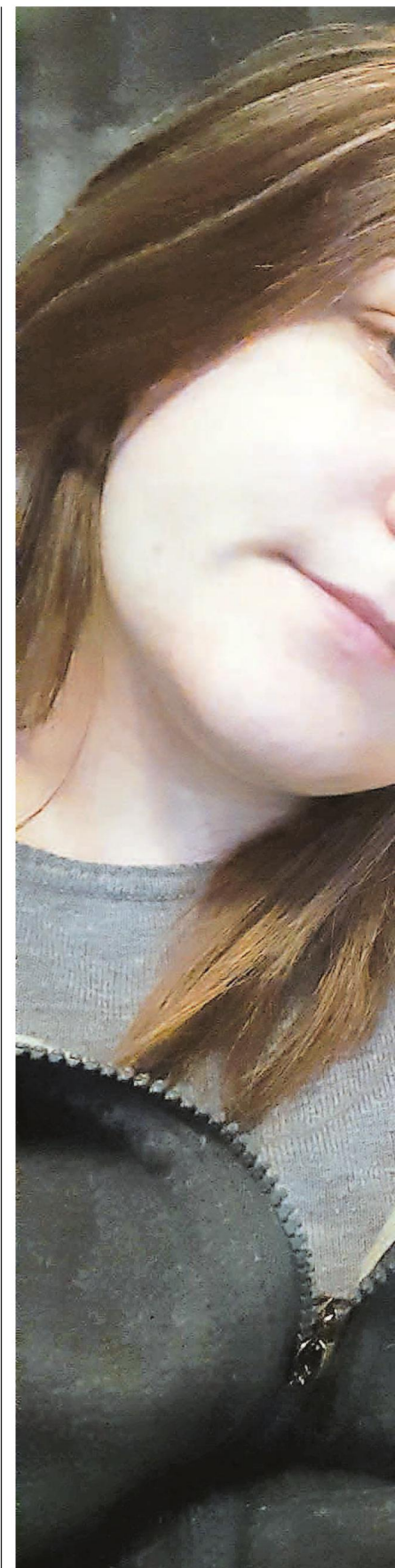
Leanne and Dan's wedding plans had also been put on hold due to the Covid restrictions, but they were finally able to tie the knot when Leanne was six months pregnant.

The couple's son Albie was born in August 2021 and Leanne cannot wait to celebrate her first Mother's Day with him.

"It didn't feel real at first when Albie arrived.

"I don't think it felt real throughout the whole pregnancy either.

"It was only after he was born that I thought 'I've done it, I've got



a baby!' It felt like quite an achievement for me because I never thought it was actually going to happen.

"I am so excited about Mother's Day – it is going to be a very special day for all of us!"

To find out more about endometriosis, visit bournhall.co.uk or endometriosis-uk.org



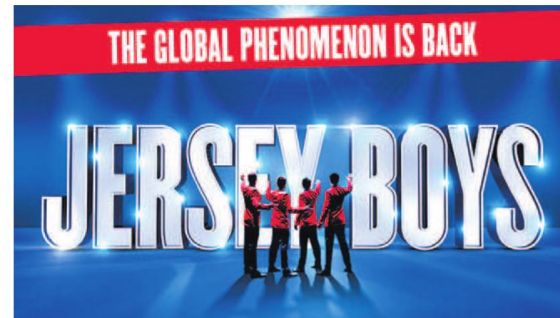
Endometriosis sufferer Leanne Norman with baby Albie

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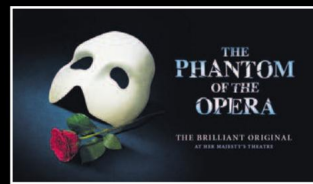
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