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Editor's Comment



I recently spent several hours of my life viewing the Extraordinary meeting of Warrington Borough Council at the town's Parr Hall, when opposition Tory Cllrs. called for a vote of no confidence in the leadership of the controlling Labour group, while also calling for a review of the council's "high risk" investment strategy.

While I totally understand the need to hold the council to account, in particular some of the investments, especially Together Energy and Redwood Bank, this meeting achieved little and was a classic example of why a lot of people get turned off from politics.

Here we saw local politics at its worst, with various Cllrs. from all sides using it as an opportunity to attack each other's parties at a local and national level, without achieving anything, at great cost of time and money. Due to the size of the controlling Labour group, the opposition motions were never going to succeed – especially when we still don't know the full outcome

of the failed Together Energy investment.

This is exactly the reason people get turned off politics. At a local level everyone should be working together, to try and achieve the best outcomes for our town in unprecedented times.

I don't want to see my locally elected representatives spending time blaming each other, or their relevant parties for what is wrong. I want to see them working together to see how to make things better for us all. I am sure many others feel the same.

I understand the gloves coming off at a time of elections, but again I would rather hear positives rather than negatives. I would also like to see transparency and honesty and if mistakes are made for them to be highlighted and put right.

I'm sure most people enter politics and put themselves forward for election to help make a difference in the area they live and for their town.

Just imagine how much could be achieved by all working together and pulling in the same direction.

Everyone involved in local politics needs to take off the political blinkers and focus on

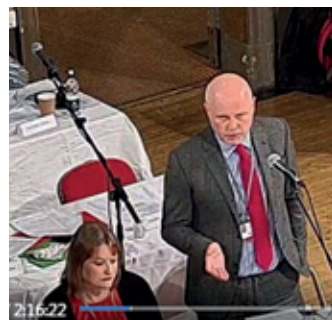
doing their best for not only the people who elected them, but also everyone else in their community.

As we now learn to live with COVID after two extremely difficult years, it is more important than ever our local politicians and community leaders work together for the good of our town, with plenty to be positive about on the back of the £22m Town Deal funding – Tory Government funding to a Labour Council.

This money will help fund a cutting-edge, purpose-built bus depot, a digital enterprise hub, a health and social care academy at Warrington & Vale Royal College, a health and wellbeing hub, an advanced construction & civil engineering (ACCE) centre, a remastered cultural hub at the Pyramid and a comprehensive active travel programme to encourage more walking and cycling throughout the town centre.

Meanwhile, if you want to see the outcome of the full council meeting in more detail see Page 18 – personally it is something I would rather forget.

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EX-army lorry driver hailed a hero after helping save life of stricken motorist

A QUICK-thinking Warrington lorry driver helped save the life of a stricken motorist on the M6 toll by positioning his truck to shield the man from oncoming traffic, then dragging him from his crashed car and giving him CPR.

Kirk Mount, 35, has been hailed a hero for his prompt actions as he travelled on the southbound carriageway of the M6 toll near Burntwood in Staffordshire.

Married father-of-two and former soldier Kirk works for Mark Thompson Transport, based in Warrington, and was driving a fully-laden 44-tonne truck when the drama unfolded.

A Range Rover was stationary in the middle lane ahead of Kirk, who thought the vehicle had broken down. He manoeuvred his truck near to the stationary car and gestured to the motorist to move to the hard shoulder.

Suddenly the vehicle moved off, then crashed into the central reservation and rolled backwards, before coming to a halt.

Kirk, who served in the Royal Artillery for seven years, positioned his lorry across all three lanes to slow down oncoming traffic, and jumped from his cab to investigate.

A couple in another car also stopped and the trio saw the Range Rover driver appeared to be suffering a medical episode. The doors were locked, so Kirk and the others smashed a window and then managed to open the driver's side.

Kirk found the man was unresponsive – he had no pulse and was not breathing – so he pulled him from the vehicle, lay him on the ground and started CPR.

Luckily a medical professional saw what was going on and had a defibrillator with him, which he used to assist in the life-saving drama. By the time the ambulance arrived, the man had a pulse and was breathing again.

He is understood to have suffered a heart attack and is expected to make a full recovery.

Kirk said: "It was a combined effort by several of us to save this man's life. It's really nice to hear he is recovering. It could have had such a different, tragic outcome."

"My military training kicked in when I saw what was happening. My first thought was to position my lorry to protect the driver and others approaching, to prevent anyone hitting his vehicle and causing further incidents. His car was in a very dangerous position."

"I was a bit shaken by it all, but glad to be able to help."

Kirk's boss Mark Thompson was full of praise for his actions.

He said: "What Kirk did was amazing."

"We had a call from the M6 toll team explaining they wanted to thank him too, as he was their hero."

"We're very proud of Kirk. It was a distressing and unpleasant incident, but Kirk kept his cool and used his military training to help ensure a happy outcome. We wish the motorist involved all the best."

James Hodson, M6 toll chief operating officer, said: "First of

all, we would like to pass on our thoughts and best wishes to the driver involved in the medical emergency."

"The M6 toll team would also like to praise the heroic actions of Kirk Mount, the Mark Thompson Transport HGV driver, who helped him at the scene."

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College students give feedback on T levels to Education Minister

STUDENTS from Warrington's Priestley College gave feedback on new vocational T-Level courses to the Minister for Further Education Michelle Donelan MP and Warrington South MP Andy Carter as part of a visit during National Apprenticeship Week.

Priestley College was one of the first FE colleges in the country to run T-Level vocational courses, which involve placements as well as college-based learning.

As well as hearing from students studying Digital Production, Design & Development and the Education & Childcare T-Levels the Minister also heard from Stockton Heath-based digital marketing agency Alcimi, who was one of the companies to offer placements to students.

National Apprenticeship Week celebrates and promotes the fantastic benefits which apprenticeships offer both learners and employers, spotlighting businesses who are investing in this life-changing education route. Since 2020, more than 46,250 apprenticeships have started in the North West.

Minister of State for Universities and Further Education Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP said: "It was fantastic to visit Priestley College to meet a truly inspirational group of students.

"By investing in our schools and colleges, whether it's through a T-Level, apprenticeship or university, the Conservatives are helping

young people fulfil their dreams."

Commenting on the visit, Andy Carter MP for Warrington South said: "I want every young person to get the best start in life and it's really clear that Priestley are doing a great job to prepare students in Warrington South for their next steps, either into an apprenticeship, beginning work or further study at University – or even a combination of all three.

"As business starts to return to a more normal way of operating, I hope many more employers across the town will consider joining the likes of Ben Sefton from Alcimi in offering placement to students. It came across very strongly how much both the young person and the businesses can benefit from these extended periods of work experience. The opportunity to follow on to an apprenticeship makes complete sense for many young people.

"As part of the Minister's visit Mr Carter hosted a round table event with Senior Schools and College Leaders from Warrington, to allow the Minister to hear first-hand some of the opportunities and challenges in schools in Warrington.

Mr Carter added: "I try to visit a different school each week and provide feedback into the Department for Education on what's working and how we can make improvements across the

sector. Head Teachers and I had a really productive conversation with the Minister about how we improve standards in schools across Warrington to benefit every young person growing up in the town."



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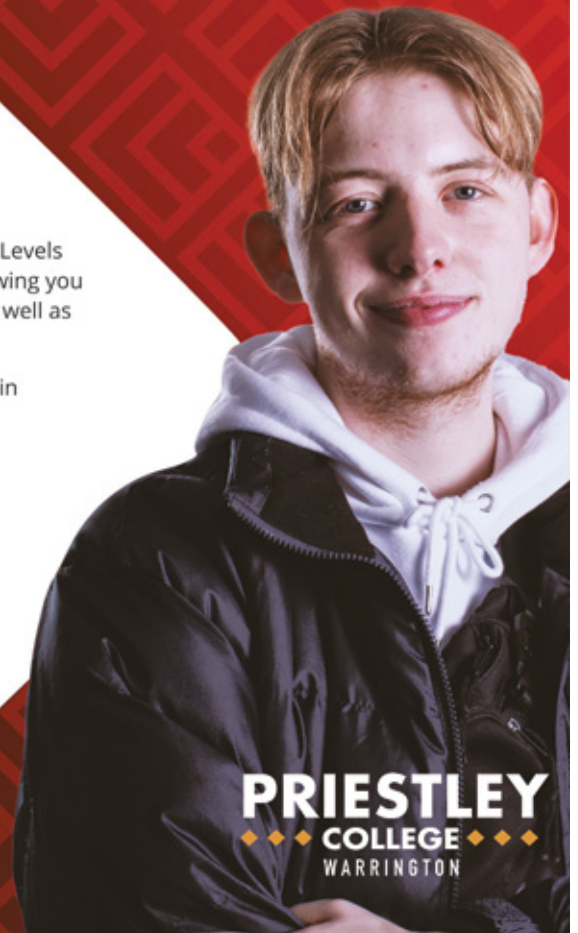
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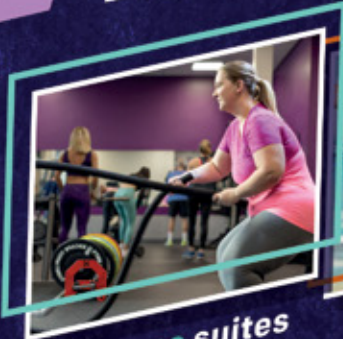
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Warrington's high street remains resilient

A new report has revealed that the resilience of high street spending in Warrington has seen the town outperform most other big cities and towns during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cities Outlook 2022, the annual health-check on the UK's largest economies, shows that Britain's biggest cities have lost almost a year's worth of sales during the coronavirus pandemic, with lockdowns and a lack of visitors causing a collapse in consumer spending.

According to the report, published by thinktank Centre for Cities, Central London lost the equivalent of 47 weeks of sales between March 2020 and September 2021, due to the impact of the pandemic. Birmingham, Edinburgh and Cardiff almost lost almost a year of sales.

In comparison, Warrington has performed well, losing only 11 weeks of sales – more than four times less than London. This places Warrington as the second-best performing of the UK's 62 largest towns or cities, in terms of reduced high street spending.

Focusing on the retail and hospitality sectors, Cities Outlook 2022 has analysed spending between March 2020 and November 2021, compared with the average value for weekly transactions in 2019, before the crisis hit.

Warrington Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Economic

Development and Innovation, Cllr Tom Jennings, said: "Warrington has a strong, resilient business sector, which – along with a continued desire from our residents to spend local and support local businesses – has put us in a good position to weather the impact of the pandemic.

"This latest analysis from Centre for Cities shows that in comparison to other major towns and cities Warrington's high street has continued to perform relatively well since 2020. This is good news for Warrington and can give us confidence as our town centre continues on the road to economic recovery."

The Cities Outlook Report 2022, follows on from Centre for Cities 'High Streets Recovery Tracker' at the end of 2020, which placed Warrington 2nd in the UK for COVID high street spend recovery.

Across the North West, central Manchester was worst affected, losing 41 weeks of sales between the first lockdown and Omicron's onset. Businesses in Wigan and Preston city centres are also among the worst hit. Burnley's city centre lost the fewest weeks of sales (8 weeks) making it the least affected in the country, followed by Warrington with 11 weeks.

Nationally, Covid-19 has cost businesses in city and large town centres more than a third (35%) of their potential takings since March 2020, with central London, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Cardiff worst affected. Across the 52 city and town centres studied, 2426 commercial units have become vacant during the pandemic, against 1374 between 2018 and 2020.

Warrington Chamber of Commerce CEO Stephen Fitzsimons said: "Retailers in Warrington will certainly not be celebrating being one of the 'least worst' in the North

West for lost trade. However, there are reasons to be positive, with footfall and car park volumes regularly exceeding 80% of 2019 levels. More striking is the visible regeneration that is occurring, especially on Bridge Street where buildings such as the former JJB store and Martins Bank finally have high-quality tenants after a decade of sitting empty.

"We know the high street is evolving and local entrepreneurs are ready to enhance the visitor experience for loyal Warringtonians."



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Extracting value out of new bus depot

by John Laverick - Warrington & Co

It has always been an aim for Warrington & Co to try and extract as much value out of an opportunity as possible, we don't always achieve it but sometimes it works in spades. Literally.

The new Bus Depot is a case in point. It is currently being constructed on Dallam Lane by Walter Carefoot & Sons, going well and proving to be a good example of what we try to achieve with our partners. It is a relatively large construction project at around £10m and with the recent success of securing funding to procure and deliver with our partners at WBC and WOB a 120 strong new electric bus fleet means that in its entirety this is a significant project and one which will have a massive impact for Warrington, its people, its public transport and its clean air.

During the recent ground breaking ceremony (at which the spade was used) it was good that the Mayor and local MPs were present, together with representatives from the various agencies from Government to highlight this evolutionary project, but for me, more than the sum of its various different funding streams

from the Department for Transport and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities. For me the really interesting part was to see that on the same day a group of students from the University Technical College were also paying the site a visit.

There are really two aspects of this that I think are important, the first is that we have companies operating in Warrington who are sufficiently engaged in both the community to spare time and resource to ignite the spark in a young person's mind who may be interested in construction (or buses) and the second is that it demonstrates to potential employers that there are significant numbers of young people in the Borough who will engage and deliver the talent that all businesses need to grow. It seemed to me that, what I hope was, an unusual day for the dozen or so students will stick in their minds and perhaps lead to future

careers.

This is possibly the latest example of leveraging more out of what we do. Warrington & Co and the Chamber of Commerce already spend a huge amount of time actively pursuing this process of wider engagement with our partners across the region particularly around job opportunities and training but it is also good to see all the activities coming together to have a greater cumulative impact and for this activity to spread through other projects and initiatives within the Borough. One of the Town Deal projects is the Advanced Civil Engineering and Construction (ACCE) Hub hosted by Warrington and Vale Royal College and it is good to see that Carefoots will also engage in with the ACCE in order to develop this golden thread between young people, business and government funding.

Most of my working day is tied up with large projects and regeneration initiatives and sometimes we focus on the larger projects we deliver such as Time Square as they play significant long term roles in developing

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John Laverick

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Warrington. But sometimes it is the less high profile spin-off effects and the added value that is perhaps more important. This has a direct impact on people's lives and wellbeing and I think that this will be a greater focus for this year in particular as we focus on recovery from the impact of the past 2 years.

And just as a further reminder I'll finish with the hugely popular Apprenticeship and Jobs Fair. Previous years have attracted around 900 young people and it will again be run this year. It is scheduled for Thursday 17th March at The Engine Rooms, Birchwood.



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Eight-storey residential block approved for town centre

OUTLINE plans have been approved for an eight-storey block of up to 40 affordable apartments in Warrington town centre.

The development has been given the green light by Warrington Borough Council planners for land in Stanley Street – adjacent to the existing telephone exchange building.

Applicant Chesro Ltd, of Worsley, Manchester plan to build a mixed-use development, with self-contained apartments, two of which will be three-bedroom, 10 of which will be two-bedroomed and 28 of

which will be single bedroomed.

The ground floor will be taken up for commercial uses.

Site for the building is between Stanley Street and Wilson Patten Street and it has most recently been used as a commercial car park.

A number of three-storey, residential buildings which are Grade 2 Listed building are adjacent to the site.

The developers say the eight-

storey development provides an important opportunity to secure the enhancement of both the Stanley Street group of Listed buildings and the setting of the Palmyra Square Conservation area.

The heritage benefits to be

derived from the uplift in design and material quality and masking of the poor-quality facade to the telephone exchange building are considered to outweigh any minimal harm caused.



An artist's impression of the development.

ANDY CARTER MP

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Gin company calls time blaming Brexit and the pandemic

WARRINGTON'S award-winning 3 Pugs Gin has taken the tough decision to close down after a roller-coaster seven-years, blaming the impact of Brexit and the pandemic.

Originally launched in her garden shed seven years ago, Christine Ditchfield was joined by her husband Ste as they expanded to business premises at Penketh, inspired by two of the loves in their lives – pugs and gin.

Only last July they were visited by Business Minister Kwasi Kwarteng and Warrington South MP Andy Carter, who were promoting businesses at the heart of the COVID recovery.

But now they have taken the tough decision to close down due to spiraling costs.

Christine said: "Brexit and the Pandemic have certainly had a large part to play in our decision along with the gin market now saturated with so many different small distillers. However we are very proud of our achievements and are signing off with a fond farewell.

Announcing the tough decision on social media Christine said: "It's a Wrap"..... What a ride it has been, 2015 – 2022! we created a pugtastic brand, we have achieved many goals and awards, Inspiring Women Awards Entrepreneur 2019, London sprits Competition Bronze

2020.

"The pandemic and Brexit have a lot to answer for, but ultimately we decided that it was time for us and the pugs to slow down.

"With a massive THANKYOU from the bottom of our hearts we bid you farewell, the last bottle of Gin has been produced and it's time we hung up the stills.

"Wish us well for our semi-retirement, we are grateful to all of you that have supported us and if you see us around, taking it easy then say hello and let's celebrate the last amazing years.

"So as 3 Pugs Gin exits Stage Left, we shall be sat at the other side of the counter enjoying all the other gins that are out there.

"With much love and fondness Ste, Chris, Pepsi, TuTu and Mojo"

Christine added: "Brexit caused many issues, hikes in logistics, needing to increase orders to get best price as everything increased in price, cardboard for cartons increased by 16% but mainly transport costs and material costs such as bottles became too much, as we were unable to pass that cost on."



Business Minister Kwasi Kwarteng during his visit last year.

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New Litter Networks volunteers brave the elements to collect more than 70 bags of rubbish!

VOLUNTEERS from a new Warrington Litter Networks group braved the elements to collect more than 70 bags of rubbish in and around the Howley area of town.

Organisers James Witty, Julie Campbell and Hannah Austin leafleted 200 local houses, put posters in local businesses and wrote in the St Elphins school newsletter to raise local volunteers from Howley.

On their first litterpick recently, 15 volunteers braved the high winds and rain, and scooped up an amazing 71 bags of litter.

Grouped into three teams, they completed a circuit around the St Elphins area, finishing up with homemade tomato soup provided by the kind volunteers at the St Elphins Park cafe. All the bags were collected by Warrington Borough Council.

The Howley team is organised within the existing Fairfield and Howley litter network, which is on Facebook or via litternetworks.org

To sign up for a place please message the organisers using the Facebook page for "Fairfield and Howley Litter Network".

Once signed up, the volunteers communicate more directly using a WhatsApp group.

Once regular fortnightly Howley picks are established the group hopes to extend the process to include a local Fairfield team.

As James Witty puts it, "Sunday was a huge first step. We wanted to develop a local residents' litter team to tackle the historic litter problem and keep Howley and Fairfield looking its best. With such a great turnout and a haul of 71 bags on the first pick we have proved an important point to ourselves. It looks like this group is here to stay".

Tony Dixon, on behalf of the Howley Litter Group added: "More local litter picks will follow and more volunteers are going to be needed from both Howley and Fairfield to continue and expand the process."

*Warrington Worldwide is proud to have made The Litter Networks one of our Legacy projects with a £500 grant.



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Motorists warned again as Scotland Road bus gate amnesty ends!

MOTORISTS in Warrington are again being warned that bus gate cameras remain in force on Scotland Road in the town centre following the end of an amnesty introduced before Christmas after hundreds of confused drivers received fines.

The cameras were introduced in October 2021 but caused a storm of protest after motorists claimed poor signage led to thousands of fixed penalty notices being issued, with some receiving multiple fines.

Following the public backlash, the council suspended enforcement and paid back the fines.

A Warrington Borough Council spokesperson said: "Following the amnesty which was agreed before Christmas, enforcement was suspended and refunds issued to all motorists who had been issued with

penalty charge notices.

"Further to this, all affected motorists were written to, explaining the location of the bus gate and the reasons for its introduction. A leaflet was included with this letter, which clearly set out what routes should be followed to access destinations such as Town Hill and Prince Henry Car Park for the Cockhedge Centre, and other nearby areas.

"Enforcement of the bus gate has remained suspended to allow time for all of the refunds to be issued

and for motorists to receive the above information in order that they do not drive through the gate in future and do not receive any further penalty charge notices.

"Monitoring has been undertaken of numbers of vehicles passing through the bus gate who should not. Previous numbers have fallen substantially, as a result of the information issued to motorists and the installation of further signage and road markings (to supplement the original signage which was fully compliant with legal standards). Therefore, the decision has been made to start enforcement at the bus gate again. Initially – for a short period – warning notices will be issued, with full enforcement commencing in the near future."

The controversial bus gate was introduced to assist with the removal of through traffic from Scotland Road. It forms part of the council's wider plans to reduce congestion, make the town centre a more attractive place for walking and cycling and to improve access for buses, by the removal of traffic rat running through the town centre.

The implementation of the bus gate means there have been some changes to access routes to and from such places as the Prince Henry Square car park, Town Hill and the main Cockhedge Shopping Centre Car Park, located off the A49 Brick Street / A57 Midland Way.

Prince Henry Square car park should now be accessed to and from the north via Winwick Street passing Warrington Central Station and Town Hill should be accessed to and from the south via Dial Street and Buttermarket Street.

In addition, the main Cockhedge Car Park now cannot be accessed via Scotland Road but instead

via the A49 Brick Street / A57 Midland Way accesses, or via Dial Street and Orford Street.

Warrington Borough Council is reminding all motorists to be aware of the Scotland Road bus gate and has installed additional signage and road markings to further re-enforce the message to motorists that only buses, taxis, cyclists and emergency vehicles should be using the bus gate. This is in addition to markings and signage normally recommended nationally.

The council is urging motorists who use this route in future to ensure they are familiar with the direction they need to travel in order to access Town Hill / Prince Henry Square car park / at the front of the Cockhedge Centre and the main Cockhedge Shopping Centre car park.

Only buses, taxis, cycles and emergency services vehicles can use the bus gate. The new automatic number plate recognition cameras will capture the registration plate details of all vehicles driving illegally along the bus gate. Owners of these vehicles could receive a Penalty Charge Notice of £60 reduced to £30 if paid within the first 14 days.

The installation of the Scotland Road bus gate cameras is part of the council's ongoing work to support sustainable transport in Warrington. It aims to deter unauthorised vehicles, increase bus punctuality, reduce congestion and improve air quality.

Bus gates help provide a more reliable bus service and increase passenger numbers by enabling buses to have a more reliable journey along some of Warrington's most congested roads.



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BAS also specialise in vehicle adaptations for disabled drivers and passengers and have a wide range of products, which are available to both Motability scheme and private customers.

The company's motto is 'life without boundaries' and they are passionate about driving being accessible for all, regardless of a person's disability.

As a result of this they launched their 'driving school packages', which were created to encourage driving instructors to equip their vehicles with the adaptations required to teach people with a

range of disabilities.

The packages combine multiple adaptations and they offer a discount compared with purchasing the adaptations separately.

In addition to supplying and fitting the products, BAS will provide full product demonstrations and continued support to instructors on functionality and usability.

They will do everything possible to ensure that the instructor feels completely confident teaching with these adaptations.

MD Bill Bradley said: "We all know that driving shouldn't just be a privilege for people without disabilities, it should be accessible for all and with the BAS driving school packages, there really has never been an easier time to make this the case!"

For all your driving instructor needs you can trust BAS, whether it's for dual controls or a wider range of adaptations, they have you covered! Visit their website www.basnw.co.uk or contact their office on 01925 640730 today to find out more!

New book by local author casts new light on what it is to be human

AT a time when the world realised that it is not immortal, a new book from Warrington's Mark Olly, has brought an entirely new view of what it means to be human.

Crystal Skulls & Human Heads also speculates on what the planet really is, how something as simple as a few grains of sand revolutionized civilization, how extinction is simply a part of nature and how the whole of life we so comfortably fit into may not be quite what it seems.

Nature, science, and technology combine to show the past, present and future like never before, a life-and-death passage through realms largely unknown to us, but not to those ancient giants of intelligence who came before us.

Mark, author, TV presenter, archaeologist, historian, etc, seamlessly combines the disciplines of archaeology, geology, science, and human studies, to push the boundaries of human existence wider in both directions and increase our appreciation of just exactly what the human race could potentially be capable of achieving.

Far from being an end in itself,

the book takes the reader on a magical mystery tour like no other, enlivens the mind, reaches some startling conclusions, and may just change the way we see our future.

The former Appleton Hall Grammar School pupil has published a number of books, including "Celtic Warrington and Other Mysteries", "Revealing the Green Man," and "The Life and Times of the Real Robyn Hood."

His new book from Flying Disk Press is available from Amazon and all good book shops from March 1.



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Safer Streets campaign to tackle violence against women and girls

A Safer Streets campaign has been launched in Warrington by Police and Crime Commissioner John Dwyer, helping to tackle violence against women and girls.

The campaign has been launched on the basis that everybody has the right to go about their daily routine without fear or prejudice.

Since the tragic murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa in London, the debate around how the police and other services should tackle crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls such as stalking, harassment, sexual violence and domestic abuse has featured prominently in the national conversation.

A documentary filmed here in Cheshire, 'Stalkers', hosted by Stacey Dooley, highlighted the dangers faced by women and girls and the work ongoing in Cheshire Constabulary's Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) to protect them. The HRU helps victims to recover through practical support and Special Victims' Advocates.

Mr Dwyer heard first-hand about how the concerns raised across the country were no different here in Cheshire. In his Police and Crime Plan he outlined his commitment to tackling violence against women and girls through continuing to fund the HRU and providing more community-based support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence through Independent Domestic Violence

Advocates (IDVA) and Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) schemes.

Since taking office, the Commissioner has applied to the Home Office for extra funding to help tackle violence and intimidation against women and girls in Cheshire.

In November 2021, the Commissioner was successful in securing £550,000 for the Warrington Safer Streets project, which sees a number of initiatives being rolled out to help make residents and visitors to the borough feel safe.

Enhanced CCTV and street lighting will be added to the town centre, complementing neighbouring streets which have already been given the same enhancement. There will also be a 'safe taxi' scheme and an awareness and learning package for taxi drivers and other guardians to promote active bystander intervention – encouraging people to challenge inappropriate behaviour when they see it.

Pupils across Warrington will also be educated on how to spot and challenge unacceptable behaviour towards women and girls, and additional training and support will be provided to police

officers to enable them to identify perpetrators at an early stage.

Mr Dwyer said: "Tackling violence and intimidation against women and girls requires a collaborative approach and the Safer Streets funding supplied by the Home Office has helped the police, council and other partners tackle the issue on both sides of the coin.

It's vital that we work to protect women and girls from harmful behaviour, but that cannot happen without resolute action to prevent that behaviour from happening in the first place. We need to educate people that the perpetrator is always responsible for their own behaviour, with no exceptions.

"Using some of the initiatives mentioned above shows how well all the agencies involved have worked together to help tackle and prevent violence against women and girls."

The Safer Streets project in Warrington links in with work being undertaken elsewhere in the county. This includes the £300,000 investment the Commissioner secured as part of the Home Office's Safety of Women at Night (SWaN) fund.

This fund enabled Cheshire Constabulary to invest in technology providing a real time video call link between the call handlers in the Force Control Centre and victims

of crime. This technology aims to reduce the fear of sexual offending, improve the confidence that women and girls have in the police and justice system and make Cheshire's night-time economy safer for everyone.

Mr Dwyer concluded: "This technology demonstrates our commitment to making Cheshire as safe as possible. I want to see how it helps us protect women and girls and expand its use to other types of crime, if appropriate.

"It enables call handlers to send a secure link, direct to your phone, allowing them to view the incident instantly and give the caller quick reassurance.

"In the case of sexual assaults, if a victim calls the police immediately after an incident, the call handler can start recording a first account from the victim, enabling evidence collection at a very early stage, and may help to identify an offender if they are still in the area.

"There needs to be a concerted effort from all agencies involved to help improve the feeling of safety for everyone on our streets. As you can see, work is being undertaken but we can't rest on our laurels. I am committed to doing all I can to help and support victims, hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and educate the next generation on acceptable behaviour."

The Gruffalo is stomping its way to Parr Hall

THE Julia Donaldson family favourite, The Gruffalo, will be brought to Warrington Parr Hall's stage by children's theatre specialists Tall Stories.

One of the best-loved stories for young children is to be brought to life when The Gruffalo will be stomping into Warrington for four shows on Friday and Saturday, 10 and 11 June.

Children's theatre specialists Tall Stories will be transforming the Palmyra Square concert hall into the 'deep, dark wood' for a magical, musical adaptation of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's classic picture book.

Join Mouse as a search for hazelnuts becomes an unexpected and daring adventure to outwit the cunning Fox, eccentric old Owl and high-spirited Snake.

Will the story of the terrifying Gruffalo save Mouse from ending up as dinner for these hungry woodland creatures? After all, there's no such thing as a Gruffalo – is there?

With original songs, big laughs and monstrous fun, The Gruffalo is brought to life with charming puppetry and colourful costumes and sets and is suitable for kids aged three and over and their grown-ups.

The original and multi-award-winning Gruffalo picture book has sold more than 13.5 million copies and has been translated into 57 languages.

Tall Stories' stage adaptation

premiered in the UK in 2001 and has since performed in 16 countries and five continents – including twice at Sydney Opera House, twice on Broadway, 10 West End seasons and once at the National Theatre.

The theatre company, which

has almost 25 years of experience producing kids' shows, has worked with Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler on a number of other productions including The Gruffalo's Child, The Snail and The Whale, Room on the Broom and The Smeds

and The Smoos.

The Gruffalo is at Parr Hall on 10 and 11 June. Tickets are on sale now. Visit parrhall.culturewarrington.org/whats-on/the-gruffalo or call the box office on 01925 442345.



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Pebbles the “rebel” safely home after community rallies for rescue mission

by Wendy Johnson

THE owners of Basset hound cross ‘Pebbles the Rebel’ have described a rescue mission that brought their beloved pet safely home – thanks to social media, the community working together and the dedication of an expert trapping team.

Owners Stuart and Julie Peters, of Festival Avenue in Orford, were calling in on a family party in Birchwood but things took a dreadful turn for the worse as the eight-month-old cross spooked and fled.

The family gave chase but hours of searching proved fruitless. An anxious Julie then turned to social media and her plea for help attracted the immediate attention of animal lovers from across north Warrington.

Pebbles was initially spotted running towards Birchwood Shopping Centre. Still attached to her harness and lead, which she thankfully managed to shed, she was too quick to catch, and she eventually went to ground. This was the start of what her rescue team described as her ‘very own six-night mystery tour of the town.’

There were several sightings of the distinctive-looking pooch reported by concerned residents who joined in the search.

“People who saw her pointed in the direction she ran. We searched everywhere that night and continued to search 24/7. I took emergency leave from work and

my husband would go out when he came home from work. We drove around in the early hours and sat outside Birchwood Train Station and the shopping centre hoping she would emerge,” said Julie. “We had all sorts of help and the whole community of Birchwood was out looking for her. The amount of help we received was overwhelming.”

But if things couldn’t get any worse, they were about to as Pebbles was spotted dangerously close to the railway line at Birchwood. With Pebbles’ safety at risk, the Lost Dog Trapping Team UK Search and Rescue Network sprang into action and ‘Team Pebbles’ was set in motion.

“Sightings were coming in almost daily,” said team leader Nick Smith. “Rather than choosing to chill on a beach like most Pebbles, this one decided she was going to play chicken with the trains. She was seen jumping out of the way of trains to get to either side of the tracks!”

His team managed to trace Pebbles’ movements and they were able to lay a scent trail of ‘gravy’ from the trackside all the way to the safety of nearby farmland owned

by Woolston Nursery. Nick added: “Tracker Heather Cake is amazing at assisting any missing dogs locally, but not so good at choosing the weather conditions. She went out in freezing conditions, pouring rain and a hailstorm to lay this trail. It was a race against time really. Pebbles was dicing with death with the trains, roads and the M6 in spitting distance.”

Once Pebbles had slowed down from her ‘tour of the town’ and hunger getting the better of the wary canine, Nick said a humane trap was set up on the farmland site. He said Pebbles couldn’t resist the ‘awesome all-you-can-eat-buffet’

inside and on the early evening of February 4th she was finally captured unharmed.

Julie said: “We got Pebbles checked over and she was fine, just a bit dehydrated. She’s her usual bouncy self again, tail wagging and playing with her puppy companion Willow. We cannot begin to even put into words how much we appreciate the help and support of everyone. The whole community came together. The trapping team was amazing. They do this voluntarily in their spare time whilst they have families and jobs. They are absolute angels, and we are forever grateful.”



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Carers felt "isolated and alone" during COVID pandemic

CARERS in Warrington have felt isolated and alone during the COVID-19 pandemic according to a recent study.

There was also a lack of respite care in the town – and a lack of funding for carers to access respite care.

This has been revealed in a study by Healthwatch Warrington organised to investigate the experience of those providing care during the pandemic.

The study also revealed a lack of availability of respite care provision in an emergency, while some also felt a stigma around respite care, saying accessing it would seem like failure.

Healthwatch Warrington organised an event at the Gateway to obtain feedback from carers and also received information through their Virtual Voices panel and website healthwatchwarrington.co.uk/

Feedback revealed a broad range of views from those involved in the study. These included a lack of respite care in Warrington, a lack of availability of respite carers in an emergency and a lack of funding for carers to access respite care.

There was also a stigma around using respite for a small group of people who felt that accessing this would make them seem like a failure. Carers felt isolated and alone as many of their activities and support were cancelled due to the pandemic.

A consensus was that those involved in care wanted more befriending services and wellbeing checks or even a simple welfare check to help them to feel heard and less isolated. They felt that "Carers Strain" was a big issue.

Healthwatch work in partnership with Warrington Borough Council Social Care and attend the Carers Partnership Board. Their report will now be shared with the local authority, so it will complement the ongoing work for the Warrington Carers Strategy. Recommendations will also be discussed.

Healthwatch CEO Lydia Thompson said: "We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the carers and their families for their vital participation, and our partners who enabled feedback."

healthwatch Warrington



Charlotte Nichols MP Warrington North

If you live in Warrington North and have an issue you need help with or would like to book a surgery appointment, please get in touch.

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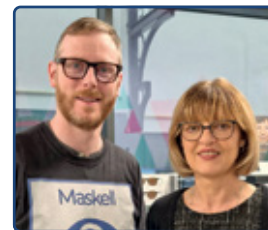
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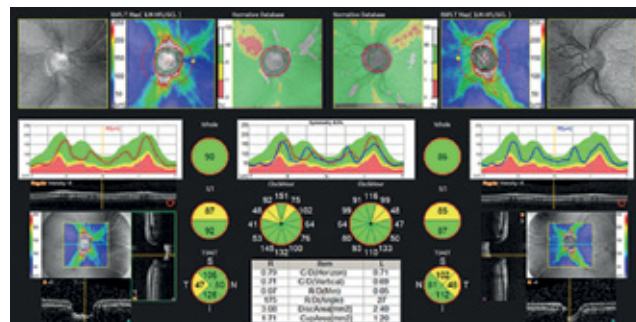
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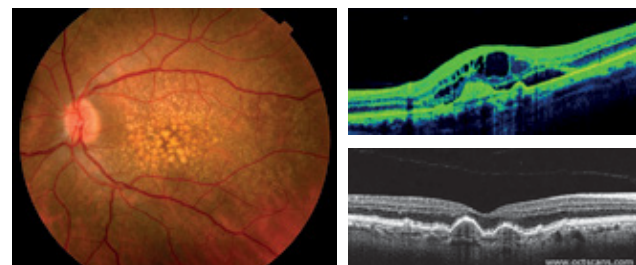
Secluded in a corner of Warrington Market is Maskell + Josephson The Optometrists. We're only a little practice. You could walk right past and not know we're here. You may already have! And if you have, you've missed out on the best eye examination around. We have the latest, state of the art equipment meaning we can look after your eye health (and more!) better than ever before. The best equipment is all well and good though, but it depends on who's using it, and who's looking at the results. In this case that would be our resident optometrist Graham Weir. He has over 25 years of experience in optics and teaches Optometry at The University Of Manchester. He's the man you want on the other end of the equipment.

Here are just a couple of the eye conditions that the equipment can help us detect earlier and monitor better than almost anywhere else.

Glaucoma - the leading cause of preventable blindness in the world. The optical coherence tomographer (OCT for short) can detect glaucoma up to 4 years earlier than traditional techniques. The most common form of this disease has no symptoms until the damage is quite severe. This is why glaucoma is known as "the silent thief of sight". The earlier it is picked up, the easier it is to treat.



Macular Degeneration – is a common eye problem affecting around 170 million people worldwide. Being able to take high quality photographs of the back of the eye, and using OCT scans can help with early detection of macular degeneration.



So, if you have a family history of eye problems, have concerns about your eye health, or just want the best eye check around then get in touch.

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Warrington Market crowned Best Large Indoor Market in the UK!

WARRINGTON'S award-winning Market is celebrating again after being crowned "Best Large Indoor Market in the UK"!

Announcing the award on social media the Market posted: "We're are thrilled to announce that we have just been crowned the Best Large Indoor Market at NABMA's Great British Market Awards!"

"A huge thank you to all of our staff, traders and most importantly our incredible customers who support all of our businesses, week in week out!"

Councillor Mick Barker, President of NABMA, said: "After over 30,000 public votes were received online, it is heartening to see passion and enthusiasm for markets across the country."

"Year on year this competition demonstrates the value and pride that towns and cities place in their local market and the innovation and diversity that applies in modern market management."

"This award goes to an already award-winning and much-acclaimed market. It is a new market that has demonstrated to the industry innovation in both design and operating. It functions around a quality food and drink offer which is supported by other ancillary traders offering great quality, professionalism and variety."

"This is very much a market of the future but provides a successful balance between modern and traditional retail. In addition, the integration and use of the adjoining market square has created a regeneration opportunity with the market as a focus supporting the revival of the town centre."

"The judging panel consider this to be a beacon of good practise and modern market management, alongside being a great ambassador

for markets present and future."

It follows on from Market manager Andy Ward scooping a prestigious national award last October.

Andy, who helped lead the market into its new home, was named Market Manager of the Year by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA).

It is the latest in a long list of awards in the history of the market which relocated to the multi-million pound Time Square Development, opening mid-pandemic.

It has since gone from strength to

strength with the popular Cookhouse providing to be a major town centre destination.

The main market is currently open 9am – 5pm, Monday to Saturday whilst the Cookhouse food hall is open 11am to 7pm Monday to Thursday, 11am to 11pm Friday and Saturday and 10am to 7pm on Sundays.

For more information about what's happening at Warrington Market, visit warrington.gov.uk/market, email markets@warrington.gov.uk or follow on social media @warringtonmkt



Labour leadership survive vote of no confidence

WARRINGTON Borough Council's Labour Leader Cllr. Russ Bowden and his Deputy Cllr. Cathy Mitchell, survived a vote of no confidence during an extraordinary meeting at the Parr Hall, called by opposition Tories.

A motion put by Tory finance spokesperson Cllr Ken Critchley calling for an urgent independent and open inquiry into the failure of the council's investment into Together Energy and an amendment from the Lib Dems, to commission an inquiry after administrators have provided initial findings, were also both defeated.

A second motion calling on the council to resolve to change its financial strategy to include lessons learned from the investment in Together Energy and an amendment from the Lib Dems, replacing the word "change" with "review" were also both defeated.

Defending the leadership of the council, Cllr. Bowden accused the Tory opposition of stoking fear with misinformation, saying the public of Warrington had given their vote of confidence at the ballot box last May.

"Leadership is not about accepting austerity, it is about making tough calls. The vast majority have been the correct ones. This leadership is a team trying to deliver the best for this town in difficult circumstances."

During the lengthy meeting, there were some heated debates with Lib Dem leader Cllr. Bob Barr accusing the Tories of organising a "lynch mob."

Cllr Critchley said he and many others had "very serious concerns regarding the due diligence processes and decision-making that took place when the council invested in Together Energy Ltd."

"This is public money that is being invested."

"Warrington Borough council is not set up to be a hedge fund or a high-risk venture capital organisation, the council exist to provide services to the people of Warrington. Not to speculate with public money, and I quote from the paper that went to Cabinet in September 2019,

"Together is seen as a minimum to long term play for the Council". The word "play" says it all.

"In less than 2 1/2 years of the "play" an initial investment of £18 million in preference shares giving and an accompanying £4 million credit facility had grown to a potential exposure to the council of £52 Million The eventual exposure is now to be determined by the administrator and the creditors of the company."

Cllr. Bowden said: "Perhaps the opposition is creating this debate to deflect all the disgraceful behaviour of the Prime Minister and his 'Down It' Street parties, when the rest of us were being respectful and compliant of the rules to be created in 2020 by the PM himself? Here we all made sacrifices and the Prime Minister has acted with contempt taking the Warrington public as fools. The Prime Minister apparently wants to create a 'New office of the Prime Minister'. I have an idea for him – why not call it the 'Department for Revelling Up'?"

"Sorry I nearly forgot despite the Conservatives arguing they are careful with the nation's finances, there is also the issue of the £500 million awarded to the VIP list of the supply of PPE during the pandemic. Procurement rules broken to support Conservative chums. To make matters worse £2.7 billion of PPE is to go to waste as they are deemed now 'unsafe'. Pure negligence. So please don't lecture us tonight on prudence."

"There will be no implications from the Together Energy situation of risks to reduce Council services or Council revenue budgets. Our opponents seem to know the cost of everything but the value of nothing. You the opposition don't want to reveal its 'costs everything' approach but rather create misinformation and spin to deflect attention away from the fact that the Tory Government has refused to fund this Council adequately. Our local Tories are all criticism and bluster but don't offer a solution!"

Meanwhile, Cllr Barr said: "I wish we weren't here tonight. I wish that the advice from my Group, that investing in Together Energy was too

risky, had been heeded."

"I wish that, despite our warnings, Together had not collapsed. A collapse triggered in part at least by irresponsible meddling in the Energy Market by the Conservative Government. We don't know what the outcome for Together Energy will be."

"While the Conservative Group and the MP for Warrington South push out what is expected to be a worst-case scenario, the administrators are trying to protect customers and creditors, including the residents of Warrington, and need to be left to complete their work without additional pressure."

"What I am most upset about is the behaviour of the Conservative group in calling this meeting before the outcome for Together is known. The slightest sense of fairness and decency would have held up this action until the administrators report. But no. The Conservative motions are all predicated on the worst possible outcome before it is known."

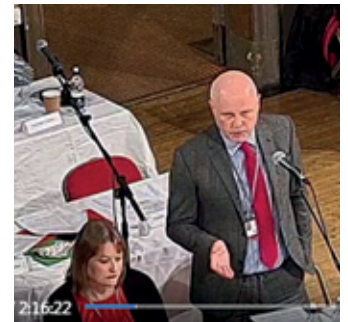
Commenting on Cllr Bowden's leadership Cllr Barr added: He, and his officers', investment strategy may prove to be defensible, but they have failed to defend it adequately, despite me pressing them to do so for over two years. He has allowed a narrative, led by social media, to paint what is almost certainly a totally false picture of Warrington's Investments."

"He has also allowed the myth of the so-called Warrington Debt to be believed throughout Warrington. He personally is no longer believed."

"He has allowed Warrington's reputation as a well-run Council to be destroyed in parts of the national press, taking their lead, and no doubt informed and encouraged, by our Conservative Group and their social media friends."

Proposing the vote of no confidence in the Labour Leadership team Cllr. Nigel Balding (Con), said: "The Together Energy debacle and the resulting potential losses of public money sit squarely with the political leadership of this council."

"It's this leadership that has



supported the high-risk, high borrowing, low return strategy and that, reportedly against the advice of senior officers ploughed ahead with the financially questionable together energy investment. Why did they disregard the advice of senior officers?"

He added: "I have concerns that the Cabinet, Council members and the Warrington public were potentially misled at this Cabinet meeting regarding the true circumstances of together energy, the truth of this will only be known when we see the part two papers that were presented to cabinet on the 11th of October. For this and other reasons, I support this motion of no confidence in the leader and deputy leader."

While all but two of the Lib Dems abstained on the vote of no confidence, Cllr Ryan Bate (LibDem) said he believed the residents he represented had lost trust in the council's leadership and in the public eye it was a straightforward vote of no confidence and he would not be voting with his colleagues but supporting the motion.

But the controlling Labour group voted against the motion which was lost.

While all three motions tabled by the Tories were defeated a 4th motion from Cllr Bowden calling for the council to write to the town's MPs to call for more funding from central government and for any opposition with an objection to the council's investment strategy to put forward an alternative budget, was approved.

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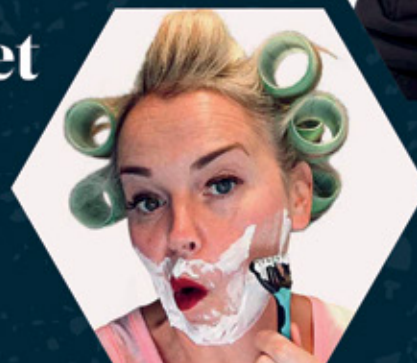


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Advertiser's announcement

Don't let your health go up in smoke

Smoking has some of the most harmful impacts on health and wellbeing – and people choose to inflict this harm by taking up smoking. People can choose not to smoke – it is hard to achieve but it can provide immediate and long term benefits. For National No Smoking Day on 9 March 2023 we outline seven ways your health will improve when you stop smoking.

Quit smoking to live longer

Half of all long-term smokers die early from smoking-related diseases, including heart disease, lung cancer and chronic bronchitis.

Men who quit smoking by the age of 30 add 10 years to their life. People who kick the habit at 60 add 3 years to their life.

In other words, it's never too late to benefit from stopping. Being smoke-free not only adds years to your life, but also greatly improves your chances of a disease-free, mobile, happier old age.

Stopping smoking lets you breathe more easily

People breathe more easily and cough less when they give up smoking because their lung capacity improves by up to 10% within 9 months.

In later years, having maximum lung capacity can mean the difference between having an active, healthy old age and wheezing when you go for a walk or climb the stairs.

Ditch the cigarettes and feel less stressed

The withdrawal from nicotine between cigarettes can heighten feelings of stress.

As the stress of withdrawal feels the same as other stresses, it's easy to confuse normal stress with nicotine withdrawal, so it can seem like smoking is reducing other stresses.

But this is not the case. In fact, scientific studies show people's stress levels are lower after they stop smoking.

If you find that you're prone to stress, replacing smoking with a

healthier, better way of dealing with stress can give you some real benefits.

Stopping smoking gives you more energy

Within 2 to 12 weeks of stopping smoking, your blood circulation improves. This makes all physical activity, including walking and running, much easier.

You'll also give a boost to your immune system, making it easier to fight off colds and flu. The increase in oxygen in the body can also reduce tiredness and the likelihood of headaches.

Stop smoking for younger-looking skin

Stopping smoking has been found to slow facial ageing and delay the appearance of wrinkles.

The skin of a non-smoker gets more nutrients, including oxygen, and stopping smoking can reverse the sallow, lined complexion smokers often have.

Ex-smokers are also less likely than smokers to get gum disease and prematurely lose their teeth.

NHS
Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

A smoke-free home protects your loved ones

By stopping smoking, you'll be protecting the health of your non-smoking friends and family, too.

Breathing in secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer, heart disease and stroke.

In children, it doubles the risk of getting chest illnesses, including pneumonia, ear infections, wheezing and asthma.

They also have 3 times the risk of getting lung cancer in later life compared with children who live with non-smokers.

If you want to achieve these benefits by stopping smoking your GP can refer you to an NHS stop smoking adviser, or you can phone your local stop smoking service to make an appointment with an adviser. The Smokefree National Helpline is 0300 123 1044.

Quit Smoking Start Saving

Join the thousands of people who are quitting smoking.



Download the free NHS Quit Smoking app to get started.



Better Health
Let's do this



Financially yours

By David Watkinson

It may be time to consider whether you can reduce your tax liability

As we approach the end of the tax year then it is important to consider whether there are ways in which to mitigate your tax liability, either for the current year or for future years. We shall look at a couple of fairly straight forward things that may be available to you at various income levels.

For some of you then a very straight forward, and free, way of reducing your tax may be available through the **Marriage Allowance**. This may be worth £252 in the current tax. To be eligible then you must:

1. Be married or in a Civil Partnership,
2. with one partner being a non-taxpayer, ie earning less than £12,570, and
3. the other partner paying tax at basic rate, ie earning less than £50,270.

If all of the above conditions apply to you then the lower earner can transfer 10% of their personal allowance to their partner. Once the claim is made then the transfer will apply to future tax years. The claim can be backdated, but only for a limited number of years, currently tax years after 5th April 2017. From 6th April you will only be able to backdate your claim to years after 5th

April 2018. However, if you have not claimed before and are eligible for all years then **this may be worth more than £1,200!**

Applying for the **Marriage Allowance** is very straight forward. **As stated above, the claim must be made by the lower earning partner.** Before making the claim you will need:

1. Both your own and your partner's National Insurance Number, and
2. Proof of your identity such as your P60, passport details, recent payslips, or recent self assessment tax returns.

The easiest way to apply is to go online at <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/marriage-allowance>. Alternatively, you can apply:

- through the self assessment system if you are already registered,
- by telephone call to 0300 200 3300 ,
- by post to: Pay As You Earn and Self Assessment
HM Revenue and Customs
BX9 1AS
United Kingdom

The other tax reduction methods do have a cost and take the form of **tax efficient investments**,

We must therefore state that we are not authorised to give investment advice, and that you should seek the advice of an independent investment adviser. Also the value of investments can go down as well as up. Subject to these, let us go!

The first method is the much vaunted **Personal Pension Contributions**. The amount that can be invested in a pension is subject to various limits that we shall not discuss here. Contributions are made net of basic rate tax relief, so you pay £80 and receive an investment of £100, meaning that the tax relief is a bit out of sight but definitely there. Higher rate taxpayers will receive the balance of their tax relief in the form of a tax repayment or lower tax payments. To be eligible for tax relief in the current tax year the pension contribution must be made before the end of the tax year on 5th April.

Pension tax relief is available to everyone, **even non-taxpayers**. You can make contribution up to an amount equal to your earnings or £3,500, whichever is higher. So a non-earner can pay £2,800 into a pension and receive an investment of £3,500. However, a pension contribution can be extra valuable in a couple of



Margaret Black and David Watkinson

situations, due to the method by which it is calculated.

A **pension contribution** reduces the **taxable income** of the taxpayer, and there are a couple of circumstances when this may be very useful.

1. If you have children, then your eligibility for child benefit is reduced if you or your partner have taxable income above £50,000. If your earnings are slightly above this then paying this extra into a pension will reduce your earning to below that level and retain your eligibility for child benefit.
2. Similarly, if you are lucky enough to earn above £100,000 then your personal allowance will be gradually reduced until it becomes £Nil at about £125,000. Once again, paying your excess income into a pension scheme will reduce your earning to below the £100,000 limit and thus retain your personal allowance, or at least reduce the reduction.

WatkinsonBlack have considerable experience in all areas of taxation and business services, including providing a very cost-effective payroll bureau service. **If you want to arrange a no-obligation initial meeting on any taxation or accounting matter then please contact us. Our office is now open during all normal office hours.** Please note that these ideas are intended to inform rather than advise and you should always obtain professional advice before taking any action.

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Death of Wire "Superstar" legend Des Drummond aged 63

Picture: Eddie Whitham



THE Rugby League world is mourning the loss of Warrington's former flying winger Des Drummond, who has died at the age of 63.

The former international winger played 24 times for Great Britain, and also finished runner-up on the popular BBC TV series "Superstars." Drummond who was born in Jamaica was a legend at both Leigh and Warrington – winning a league title with Leigh in 1982.

"Des was a superstar whose brilliance created so many memories," Leigh said in a statement.

"He was a humble, modest and much-loved person."

Drummond made his name at

Leigh before moving to Warrington, captaining the side and winning the Regal Trophy against Bradford in 1991.

Warrington held a minute's silence for Drummond before their friendly with Wigan in a game for Stefan Ratchford's testimonial which Wigan won 6-14.

When Drummond finished second in 'Superstars' in 1983 – posting a 100m time of 10.85 seconds that would have seen him qualify for the 1984 Olympics.

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