

Culcheth *Life*

Magazine

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IT'S hard to put into words what the family and friends of Birchwood schoolgirl Brianna Ghey must be going through following her shocking death at Culcheth Linear Park.

As a former Culcheth schoolboy who grew up in the area, I am struggling to comprehend how this incident, which catapulted our small rural village into national headlines, happened.

It is certainly not an incident I ever thought I would be commenting on in our local community.

With two teenagers currently awaiting trial accused of murder I can not write anything which could prejudice the case.

My thoughts are with Brianna's family and friends at this difficult time.

I sadly reported on the incident from within a few hours of it happening with various updates throughout the following week - not the kind of local news I enjoy reporting on.

The overwhelming outpouring of support from the local community, will hopefully bring some comfort to the family as they try and come to terms with their sad loss.

It was very moving to see so many people turn out for the vigil on the village green, followed by another vigil in Warrington town centre the following day, organised by the Warrington Transgender community.

Meanwhile a fundraising page set up by friends has raised well in excess of £100,000 and while this

is nothing compared to the loss of a young life, it will hopefully provide some support for her family during these dark and difficult times.

It is hard to write about anything

positive in the wake of Brianna's death during what are already difficult times for many.

But I am sure Brianna's memory will live on and hopefully justice will prevail.



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Teenagers set to face trial accused of murdering 16-year-old schoolgirl

TWO teenagers accused of the murder of 16-year-old Brianna Ghey at Culcheth on Saturday, February 11, are set to face trial in July.

The 15-year-old girl from Warrington and a 15-year-old boy from Leigh appeared at Liverpool Crown Court.

Brianna was found with multiple stab wounds in Culcheth Linear Park.

The two defendants, who cannot be identified for legal reasons, appeared in court via video link from youth detention accommodation.

The teenagers, both wearing dark clothing, only spoke to confirm their names and dates of birth and sat during the hearing each separately accompanied by a member of the detention centre staff.

Cheryl Mottram, prosecuting, said that July 10 is the date chosen for their trial, which is estimated to last three weeks. She said witnesses include three 15-year-olds and directions were made by Judge David Aubrey, KC, about their evidence.

The defendants were both further

remanded to the youth detention accommodation to next appear at the court on May 2 when they are due to enter their pleas.

After the hearing, Cheshire Police issued a statement in which DCI Adam Waller, who has been the Senior Investigating Officer in the case, said: "I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to the community of Culcheth for their support in relation to the investigation.

"We have been inundated with pieces of information from members of the community wanting to help and assist the enquiry. Many of our officers have been approached to offer their best wishes to us and, especially, to Brianna's family.

"I know that the family have also been overwhelmed by the messages of support, positivity and the compassion across the country and beyond - and the thoughts

of everyone at the Constabulary remains firmly with them."

Following her tragic death, the family of Brianna Ghey provided a moving tribute to the "beautiful, witty and hilarious" teenager.

The family tribute read: "Brianna was a much-loved daughter, granddaughter, and baby sister. She was a larger-than-life character who would leave a lasting impression on all that met her. Brianna was beautiful, witty and hilarious. Brianna was strong, fearless and one of a

kind.

"The loss of her young life has left a massive hole in our family, and we know that the teachers and her friends who were involved in her life will feel the same.

"We would like to thank everyone for their kind words and support during this extremely difficult time. We would like to thank the police for their support, and witnesses for helping with the investigation.

"The continuation of respect for privacy is greatly appreciated."





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Birchwood set for new £1.5m leisure and library hub to tackle health inequalities

A new £1.5m leisure and library hub to tackle health inequalities has been given the green light.

Labour councillors approved the capital investment of £1.5 million into Birchwood Leisure and Tennis Centre at a recent Cabinet meeting. Birchwood has been identified as an area with comparatively high health deprivation with the Oakwood area in the top 10% national health and income deprived.

The decision follows similar investments by the local authority into other parts of the town including Woolston, Orford, Great Sankey and Bewsey & Dallam.

The refurbishment of Birchwood Leisure and Tennis Centre will provide additional studio space, improved changing facilities, including accessible facilities, overall improvements to the internal and external fixtures and décor, re-covering of the tennis hall floor and relocation of Birchwood Library.

The improvements form part of the councils' strategic priorities and ambitions to promote physical and mental health. Wellbeing has become an increased focus for the Labour-run council over recent years, with a raft of policies focused on improving the lives of residents in the towns most disadvantaged communities.

Birchwood Tennis Centre is one of only 52 publicly accessible community indoor tennis centres

in the country and the only centre publicly available within 15 miles. The improvements to the Leisure Centre could see the Birchwood host national tournaments for wheelchair players and camps for visually impaired players.

Cllr Russ Bowden, Leader of the Council said: "This is what a Labour-run council does. This is what real levelling-up looks like.

"We invest in our future, we invest in our infrastructure, and we invest in our communities.

"Our residents health and wellbeing is one of our top priorities as a council.

"Healthier communities benefit the whole town. Improved access to leisure and wellbeing services is crucial to delivering improvements to public health.

"The wellbeing of our residents is vital and our investments into the town's leisure and wellbeing services shows how serious we are about tackling inequalities across Warrington.

"I made a promise that the proceeds from selling land at the former St Oliver Plunkett primary school would be invested back into Birchwood by creating a neighbourhood hub and I am proud that we are delivering on that promise."



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Plan to replace shopping centre car park with mixed commercial and residential development

A PLAN to replace a shopping centre car park at Culcheth with a mixed-use commercial and residential development has been submitted to Warrington Borough Council planners.

The proposals by Shavit Haminim Capital Limited involve replacing the existing CPS car parking area at the junction of Jackson Avenue and Common Lane with a two-storey mixed-use building consisting of commercial units at ground floor level and three residential units at first-floor level, new public realm and ancillary works.

The existing area contains 22 car parking spaces, two of which are designated for disabled users. The existing vehicle route allows vehicles to enter from Common Lane and exit onto Jackson Lane.

The Proposed Development would require the removal of all of the 22 car parking spaces. In their place would be a two-storey building. The building line on to Common Lane would correspond with the existing eastern extent of the Sainsburys Supermarket. On the Jackson Avenue frontage, the

building line would respond to the extent of the existing building, the furthest extent of which is the entrance to the solicitors.

The southern and eastern extent of the proposed building would reflect the existing commercial units that front onto the car parking area. The building would be sited to allow for a pedestrian walkway between the Proposed Development and these existing commercial units. The proposed walkway would be approximately 8.3m at its widest point. The route would be well landscaped with areas of soft landscaping and trees. The intention is for a public space for people to interact, and benches would be provided.

At the ground floor level would be two Class E-commercial units. Unit A would be 108 sqm in area and have frontages onto Jackson Avenue and Common Lane, as



well as the newly created walkway. Unit B would be 66sqm in area and would have one frontage onto Jackson Avenue and two onto the pedestrian walkway. Between the two units on the Jackson Avenue elevation, there would be a bin store

At first floor level there would be three residential units accessed from a central hallway. Unit 1 would be a 1 bedroom 2 person (1B2P) unit measuring 51sqm. It would be dual aspect with a balcony measuring 5sqm. Unit 2 would be a 1B2P unit measuring 50sqm. It would be triple aspect and have two balconies of 5sqm and 3sqm. Unit 3 would be a 2B3P unit measuring 75sqm.

Whilst the Council considered that the scheme presented at

the pre-application stage would detrimentally affect the vitality and viability of the Culcheth Village Neighbourhood Centre this is disagreed with by the applicant.

They say the loss of car parking has been demonstrated to not cause a problem for those wishing to use the existing car parks.

They also say the Local Plan seeks to reduce dependence on car use anyway, and there is public transport access to the CPS Centre, adding that the new public space would enhance the existing CPS Centre rather than detract from it by creating a space for people to walk and sit.

The application is pending consideration by Warrington Borough Council planners.

Bookings now being taken for Community Day



LOCAL charities and community organisations are being invited to book a space at this year's Culcheth Community Day which is set to take place on Monday, May 1st.

The event is organised by Culcheth & Glazebury Parish Council and gives local charities

and community groups a chance to raise their profile and funds.

It will take place on the Village Green from 12 noon to 4:30pm.

For more information or to book a space contact local Cllr. Sue Bland on 01925 766641 or email susanbland55@gmail.com

WI members sing the music of the 60s

GUEST speaker Malcolm McFarlane spoke on "The music of the 60s" at the monthly meeting of Croft WI - and members were invited to sing along to some of the hits.

Malcolm, an author with published works on Bing Crosby, Perry Como and Rosemary Clooney, interspersed the songs with clips from major news and sporting events such as the first moon landing, the assassination of President Kennedy and the 1966 World Cup.

The first Number 1 hit of the decade was "The Story of My Life" by Michael Holliday, when Harold MacMillan was prime minister, an average house cost £2,500 and a gallon of petrol 23p!

A musical highlight was when

Sandie Shaw became the UK's first-ever Eurovision winner with "Puppet on a String."

The competition "A Record Sleeve from the 60s" was won by Lesley Lloyd, 2nd Pat Hewitt, and 3rd Pauline Hilton.

The meeting began with a minute's silence in memory of Elaine Grundy, a member for many years who had sadly died. She was fondly remembered for her tireless committee work and her kindness and friendliness, especially when welcoming members to WI meetings.

A card from Anne Lamming was read out thanking everyone for the flowers, cards and WI Denman brooch given to mark her time as President.

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Candlelit vigil to remember B

A large crowd gathered at a candlelit vigil in Culcheth to remember 16-year-old schoolgirl Brianna Ghey, who tragically died in the village.

In moving scenes, members of the public turned out in force to pay tribute to the Birchwood High School pupil who died from multiple stab wounds in the nearby Linear Park.

As well as lighting candles there were moving scenes as the village choir performed "Somewhere over the Rainbow."

Mayor of Manchester Andy Burnham, a former Culcheth resident, joined others in signing a book of condolence.

A two-minute silence was followed by a colourful display of silent fireworks.

The event was one of many vigils which took place throughout the country.

Commenting on the event local Cllr Wendy Maisey, said: "It was humbling to see so many people here on the Village Green in Culcheth albeit in very tragic circumstances.

"Brianna was obviously a special young lady, and it's incredible to think

that vigils are being held through out the country in her memory.

"I've received so many messages this week asking 'What can we do?' from our community in Culcheth and beyond.

"What we have witnessed this week has been a wonderful response from our community to a very tragic event.

"Let's keep that community spirit going and think forward as to how we can keep Brianna's memory alive."

At a vigil in Golden Square Warrington, the following day, Warrington North MP Charlotte Nichols said: "It is every MP's worst nightmare to be asked to speak to eulogise a constituent who has been murdered, and never more so than in the case of the murder of a child- it's something we all hope we will never have to do.

"Brianna Ghey's murder has left our community reeling, and I cannot

begin to imagine the agony her family, friends and loved ones are feeling right now.

"No parent should have to bury a child. No trans person should have to live in fear because of our prejudice or our complacency. No community should have to grieve as we grieve.

"I hope today can be some small act of love and compassion to all those who are hurting, just as the outpouring of kindness, solidarity and allyship from around the country and around the world, and all the thousands of candles lit have been some light in this time of darkness.

"I'm proud to represent a constituency and a town that is much more diverse than we're usually given credit for, and our latest census results have been proof of this, with just over 5000 respondents to the census who identify as LGBT+ including around 700 trans and non-binary people.

"But for all the progress we have made as a town and a society for LGBT people, and in tackling violence against women and girls, Brianna's shocking murder is a reminder of the inescapable reality that none of us- trans or cis, LGBT or straight, women and girls, or men and boys- are safe until we are all safe.

"Trans lives matter, and trans young people should have the fundamental rights to dignity and safety that should be universal human rights.

"I want to thank Cheshire Police and in particular our Borough Commander for Warrington, Adam Ross, for how swiftly they have apprehended and charged those believed to be responsible for Brianna's murder; for their support for Brianna's family and their liaison with me as Brianna's MP keeping me up to date with all the developments in her case; and for their work in the community including making sure last night's memorial and tonight's can be

conducted safely.

"While we will not have all the facts in Brianna's case until after the legal process has concluded, and we must all ensure we are careful not to prejudice those proceedings which could deny Brianna's family the justice she deserves, it would be remiss of me not to pass comment on the wider culture and context as we gather here today, when it comes to trans rights."

Ms Nichols went on to say: "I am committed in my role in Parliament to tackle violence against women and girls, and to ensure we uphold and protect the rights of trans people to live as their authentic selves in safety, removing the barriers which stop them from living their lives as they wish or being able to access support they need.

"But this is not the case across the board when it comes to Westminster.

"We're now on our 4th Prime Minister since the LGBT Action Plan was published in 2017, and still its recommendations have not been implemented, making this country fundamentally less safe for all LGBT people and trans people especially.

"This Government has repeatedly kicked the can down the road on banning conversion therapy, including trying to remove protections for trans people from the draft legislation.

"The former attorney general, now Home Secretary, wrote to schools last summer encouraging them not to refer to trans pupils by their new names or pronouns, nor to make allowances on school uniforms in line with the child's identity- unless specifically required to do so by a doctor, effectively seeking to curtail social transition and affirming treatment in our schools.

"This month the Government blocked progressive reform of the Gender Recognition Act in Scotland,



Charlotte Nichols MP
Warrington North

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Brianna Ghey

Pictures: John Hopkins

voted for by MSPs of all parties after a six year period of debate and consultation, which makes it easier for trans people to have their gender legally recognised on their birth, marriage and death certificates.

"And the new Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party said just this week that they intend to fight the General Election on "culture war issues and the trans debate".

She added: "The media landscape and narratives they peddle about transgender people is absolutely toxic, and it's telling that there's been very little let up by the nationals this week despite what has happened. In fact, we've seen some of those newspapers and

media outlets deadnaming Brianna, harassing family and friends, sharing misinformation and failing to discuss these issues with sensitivity or compassion.

"I want to specifically thank the Warrington Guardian and Warrington Worldwide for the sensitivity with which they have covered Brianna's murder, the investigation, and the way our community and the country have come together at events like today's to remember Brianna.

"I hope the wider media will learn from them, and will do better and I will continue to hold them accountable as MP, for Brianna and for all our LGBT+ community."





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Freedom Fund makes awards to local community groups

TWO local community groups have been awarded £250 each from Freedom Fibre's Freedom Fund, a new community fund designed to support good and green community projects.

Croft Village Memorial Hall received £250 towards environmental projects in their grounds including installing bird and bat boxes, and Warrington Sunday Litter Team received £250 to purchase new litter picking equipment for their volunteer teams in Croft and Winwick.

Neil McArthur, Freedom Fibre's Chief Executive Officer, said: "I'm absolutely delighted that we have been able to make awards to these two worthy causes. Playing our part in the communities in which we are working is so important to us

- I can't wait to see these projects come to fruition!"

The Freedom Fund was launched in October 2022 to support community groups delivering environmental projects. The Fund will re-open again later in 2023 to provide support for an even greater range of community groups.

Freedom Fibre is currently rolling out its lightning-fast, full-fibre network to homes in and around Culcheth. If you are interested in connecting to their full-fibre network, please register your interest online.



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Bents crowned best garden centre in the UK

BENTS Garden & Home at Glazebury, has been announced as the winner of the GCA's Destination Garden Centre of the Year 2023 award, a title which recognises Bents as being the best large garden centre in the UK.

Bents were presented with the title by the Garden Centre Association (GCA) at a prestigious award ceremony held in Blackburn, and following an intensive annual audit, which records scores from over 200 garden centres throughout the UK.

It is the seventh time Bents has held the award, which recognises quality standards throughout the Centre, not only of products and departments, but also people and services. The annual audit is a pre-requisite to membership of the GCA, and takes place with no prior notice, ensuring standards remain high throughout the year.

Matthew Bent, MD of Bents Garden & Home said: "There many awards available within our industry, but this really is the big one. It is not one that requires a written submission or entry fee; instead the audit is something that is a fundamental requirement of our membership of the GCA.

"We have a great family of colleagues who work extremely hard at all times and this award is a fantastic way to thank them for all their input, especially after what have been a challenging few years."

Bents received a spot visit by the

GCA auditors in spring 2022 and recorded one of the top scores in the country, which saw them awarded Best Garden Centre in the North West. The Centre then received a further spot check in the autumn to be re-audited resulting in the UK's highest result and presentation of the prestigious industry award.

Amongst the categories to be acknowledged by the audit were the Centre's product range and quality, disabled facilities, sustainability, Garden Care department, Fresh Approach Restaurant, houseplants and seasonal plants

Tammy Woodhouse from the GCA said: "The GCA audit and subsequent awards are extremely important within the industry. Centres don't pay to enter or put themselves forward; our members are all visited by our inspectors with no prior knowledge of the exact date so we can ensure standards remain high at all times.

"We are delighted for Bents. It is a fantastic achievement and even more impressive when up against such strong competition."

The award also sees Bents being acknowledged as a Garden Centre of Excellence, one of only 10 in the country.

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Culcheth Library to close for revamp

CULCHETH Library is set to close temporarily from Saturday March 4, as part of an exciting redevelopment to modernise, refresh and encourage pride in the library.

The library, on Warrington Road, is the next in the borough to benefit from Warrington Borough Council's library investment and modernisation programme, and is set to reopen in the summer.

In addition to refurbishing the library frontage, creating a new community space, and improving the interior decor and shelving, the refurbishment will also create a new community event space.

Moreover, the revamp is aimed at providing greater flexibility for library and community activities using internal spaces. This will also help to promote pride in the library, which will encourage more people to use this important community

resource. The plans for the redevelopment have been produced by Warrington Borough Council and LiveWire, which manages the library – in conjunction with the Friends of Culcheth Library group.

During the closure period Library users are invited to use their nearest library services at Birchwood Library or via LiveWire's online resources which include free e-books and e-audio items as well as a wealth of online reference material available to use at home.

To support customers during the closure, changes have been made to usual lending allowances:

Increased maximum allowance

from 10 to 20 items.

All items borrowed from Monday 13th February will be due for return on 1st August 2023.

As always items can be renewed online: <https://libonline.livewirewarrington.co.uk>

Rachel Ralston, LiveWire's Strategic Library Manager, said:

"As a result of the refurbishment at Culcheth, we look forward to having a roomier, more modern, and more flexible library in the future. LiveWire, Warrington Borough Council, alongside the Friends of Culcheth Library Group, have collaborated on the development of these plans."



Police appeal for witnesses following fatal collision on M62 at Croft

POLICE are appealing for witnesses following the tragic death of a lorry driver after a collision involving two HGVs on the M62 at Croft.

At 4.37 am on Tuesday 31 January, police were called to the collision at junction 10 Croft interchange.

One of the vehicles was on fire,

and one of the drivers sadly died at the scene.

The second driver was uninjured and helping police with enquiries.

Anyone who witnessed the collision or has dashcam footage should contact Cheshire Police on 101 or via the website quoting IML 1468300.



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The historic Raven Inn reclaims hundreds of years of history



THE painstaking work to restore and recreate the historic Raven Inn at Glazebury, saved from demolition by local campaigners, can now be revealed.

Earmarked for demolition until a successful campaign to save the pub, work is continuing to re-open the premises, hopefully in time for Easter!

Originally the Raven was the site of a water mill. It is firmly believed 'Lyttly Mylle' was repurposed as a hostelry in the 16th Century. Supporting this timeframe, the mill walls at the north end of the Raven are Tudor in origin. The beautiful brickwork has been revealed and will remain on display for all to admire.

Records show that In July 1770, the Tyldesley family sold, what was then referred to as "...the ancient hostelry, the Raven Inn..." and other properties to John Lyon. Lyon was responsible for greatly expanding the inn, 'wrapping' the new Georgian building around the old Tudor fabric.

Fast-forward to the latter part of the C20th, inappropriate use of modern building materials during refurbishment (plastic membranes and cement render) kept out the damp but also trapped damp in the building from the leaking roof.

But after the Raven was bought and saved in 2022, all membranes have been removed and the brickwork has been repaired with lime mortar pointing and lime render throughout. The brickwork can now 'breathe' and the building is drying out.

During the conservation and renovation work, brick pockets chiselled into the brickwork to take floor timbers were identified; their width & height, spacing and height from the ground were sufficient to recreate the original C16th timber beam arrangements by recycling nearly 100 Victorian ceiling joists (seen in the photo). Everything required was already on site.

Local campaigner Bob Eden, along with 'Lyttly Mylle' historian Van Hosteller, in Arizona, unearthed and evidenced the incredible history of the Raven, which Bob has enacted, directing, and overseeing the detailed, sympathetic preservation and restoration work.

Bob said: "We could have ignored the ancient story and delivered a functional magnolia box instead: all plasterboard and straight lines. This would have got the pub up-and-running before last Christmas. But that would have been a travesty; we had one chance to get this right: to recognise and reflect the history of this building for all to enjoy. The 'Saturday Crew' of volunteers have been working every weekend since last April, making this transformation possible. We could not have done it without their hard work and shared vision. We were also fortunate to identify local plasterers who specialise in the all-important lime".

Chair Peter Sturman added: "The thing that strikes me most is the sheer dedication of Bob and the Saturday crew, along with the very skilled tradespeople. You have to see people wire brushing the newly set lime mortar, and each and every brick, to create the clean authentic look, to appreciate just how painstaking this work has been".

It is still hoped the Raven will open in time for Easter, however as Peter says, "Taking Bob's example, we have to do this properly. We have lead times from various suppliers. There are some things we cannot control. We are all desperate to get our Raven up and running as soon as possible. Easter is going to be tight, but we have to have challenging deadlines".

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