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Editor's Opinion

THERE is nothing like uncertainty to impact confidence - and the uncertainty surrounding activities at Warrington Town Hall is like nothing I have ever experienced before in more than four decades of reporting news in the town.

The current financial situation, the possibility of a big council tax rise and the uncertainty over local institutions like Woolston Neighbourhood Hub, is doing nothing to instill confidence.

It doesn't help when offers of help go ignored.

Add to this the fact that nearly All the key decision makers from the past few years have now left the building, it is no wonder public confidence is so low.

Unfortunately such low mood and confidence is causing people to lash out more on social media and target people like our Mayor, Mo Hussain, who I know first-hand has been working hard to promote the town in a positive light at every opportunity, without any political agenda.

I have asked for an opportunity to meet the Government envoys who have been sent in to balance the books, to try and put some meat on the bone on what the future holds.

I am also hoping to meet up with the new Chief Executive Sarah Smith when she takes up her post in mid-February.

With none of the old guard around it is likely to be a fast learning curve and a baptism of fire - but as always Warrington

Worldwide will try and provide a balanced view on what is going on.

During a recent visit to the town hall I managed to get an impressive shot of the Golden Gates at sunset from a different angle - and with the



help of Ai achieved this image - I wonder what it could signify for the future of our town?

The first Improvement and Recovery Plan was published as we were going to press - it highlights huge financial challenges and difficult decisions for the council.

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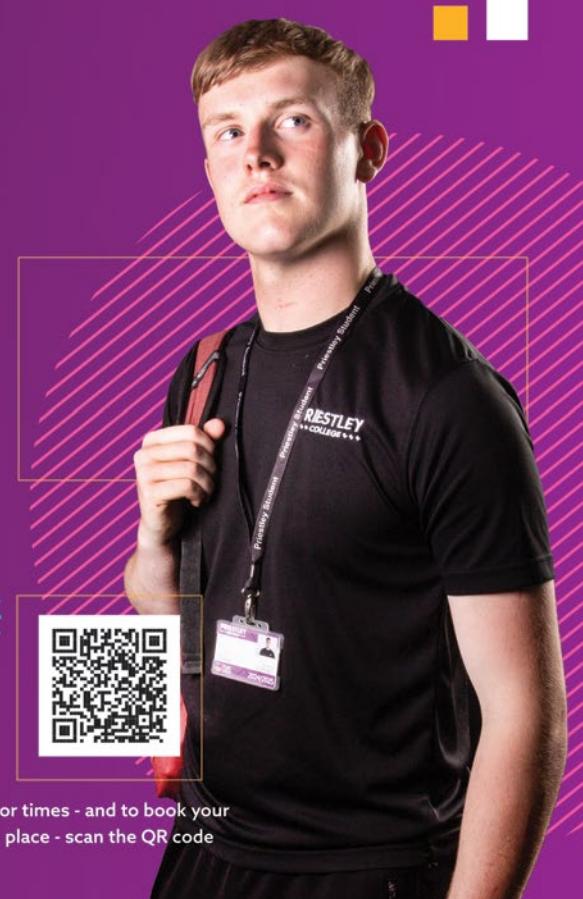
81% A-Level A*, A, B or C

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A* rate well above national average

100% pass rate in all T-Levels



MP says “I stand with Warrington’s Publicans”



Warrington North MP Charlotte Nichols joined the North Cheshire Campaign for Real Ale at the Albion on Battersby Lane for their regional meeting to discuss the current crisis facing pubs.

Charlotte who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pubs was invited to join North Cheshire CAMRA for their regional meeting following the branches successful 50th Anniversary celebrations in September.

During the meeting members had the opportunity to have full and frank conversations about the current crisis facing pubs and the work being undertaken to get the sector on to a stable footing.

At the meeting North Cheshire CAMRA members also elected Gillian Yates as their new Regional Director. Gillian is a former landlady of The Albion herself with years of experience in the Pub trade.

Charlotte said: “I know the changes announced at the Budget to business rates have caused

considerable concern in the industry, and this is something I have raised with the Government in a series of ongoing meetings in my capacity as Chair of the Pubs APPG, alongside supportive campaigning from colleagues in the Beer APPG and representations from the sector.

“We are hopeful of movement from the Treasury on this matter, as these conversations have been positive and constructive, and media reporting suggests that an announcement is expected imminently. Beyond the immediate issue this has created, I am hopeful we can move past years of chopping and changing of different, complicated reliefs that make it impossible for publicans and landlords to plan for the future”.

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Bridgewater Players – The Show Must Go On!

Tickets are available for the Bridgewater Players performance of "The Show Must Go On!" written and directed by Anna Fradgley.

The Bridgewater Players Drama Society, based in Thelwall, has been performing plays since 1952, initially formed by six people in 1951 in Lymm. In February, they will be performing their 200th production. And to celebrate, a play has been especially written by one of their members, Anna Fradgley, who lives in Lymm.

"Our society is going from strength to strength and I was privileged to have been asked

to direct our 200th production. "So I thought, why not write one, especially?" Anna explains. "The play is inspired by Oscar Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and is a farce about Woolton Drama Society who decide to put on the play for their 200th Anniversary Show. But their Chairperson dies suddenly, and things go from bad to worse. Without a budget to work with, because of financial embezzlement, they are having to

provide Victorian costumes from charity shops, using the set of their last production because all their property has been seized! And what's more, the vice-chairperson wants to turn Oscar Wilde's masterpiece into a musical, using Abba songs! And the mishaps do not end there!"

"We want the audience to really enjoy themselves. They'll have a night of laughter, musical intervention and a chance to shake their boas at the end! Let's celebrate together!" Anna continues. "Complimentary tea, coffee and biscuits are provided in the interval

and we now have a bar which sells wine, beer and soft drinks. Our charity for this production is 'Ataloss', bereavement support, so we encourage our audience to bring cash for donations and the raffle."

Show dates are Thursday 19th to Saturday 21st February. Tickets for the show can be purchased online at www.bwplayers.co.uk/ Price is £9 plus booking fee online, and £10 on the door. Pre-booking is recommended as tickets are already selling. Performed at Thelwall Parish Hall, Bell Lane, WA4 2SX. Free parking is available.



WARRINGTON

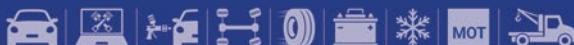


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Warrington confirmed as hub for Northern Powerhouse Rail

WARRINGTON is set to become a key transport hub for the North following the government's confirmation of its commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), with a new low-level station at Bank Quay.

As part of a wider announcement on Northern Growth, the government has confirmed plans for major investment in connectivity between Liverpool and Manchester and further afield across the north of England. The project will utilise a combination of new lines and upgraded infrastructure to transform travel across the region.

At the heart of these plans is a new low-level station at Warrington Bank Quay. This station will serve as a key hub on the Liverpool-Manchester route, positioning Warrington as a vital link between major cities, Manchester Airport, Chester, North Wales, and the West Coast Main Line.

For Warrington, this will mean:

- High-frequency services: 4-6 trains per hour between Liverpool and Manchester Airport via Warrington Bank Quay.
- Rapid journey times: potentially to reach Manchester Airport in 8 minutes, Liverpool or Manchester Piccadilly in 15 minutes, and

- Leeds in 45 minutes.
- Enhanced connectivity: Seamless integration between the new low-level station and the existing high-level lines.

Beyond transport, the investment acts as a catalyst for the large-scale regeneration of the Bank Quay area. Over the next 30 years, the project is expected to unlock:

- 10,000 new jobs and 1.7 million sqm of Grade A office space.
- Up to 4,000 new homes to support a growing population.
- 10km of new river trails and significant public realm enhancements.

Clr Hans Mundry, Leader of Warrington Borough Council, said: "This announcement is great news for Warrington and the wider Cheshire and Warrington sub region. By confirming its commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail and a new low-level station at Bank Quay, the government has recognised the key

role our town can play as a driver of northern growth.

"This investment will transform travel, deliver better connectivity and faster journeys and unlock thousands of jobs, and massive economic opportunities that will benefit our residents for years to come.

"We have worked tirelessly alongside the Elected Mayors and leaders from across the Liverpool to Manchester route to ensure

Warrington's voice was heard, and we're delighted that our vision for a primary hub station has been secured. We now look forward to working closely with the government and our regional partners to drive this project forward and to ensure the benefits are shared across the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority area with enhanced connectivity to Chester, North Wales and Crewe."

Prosperity Network ball takes charity fundraising for JUMP beyond £92,000



A charity ball has helped take total fundraising for Warrington-based children's charity JUMP to in excess of £92,000.

The money has been raised thanks to the Prosperity Network, founded by Warrington businessman Danny Inman.

JUMP charity Founder Christine Bentham said: "It is incredibly £92,665.52! This is the largest amount that any organisation, including Children In Need and other grant makers, have ever raised for JUMP in our 21 years."

"On the 14th Aug 2023, we received an email from Danny asking 'if there would be a partnership that we could work together on to benefit the charity.' Following an informal chat a few days later with Prosperity Network staff and approval from our Trustee Board several days later, the partnership was launched.

"Since then, Prosperity Network and their members have raised a total of 92,665.52, and one of their members provided free access to holiday accommodation for some of the families we support. No other funder has raised or granted this amount of money for us in our 21-year history.

"As a small charity founded and based in Warrington in 2004 in memory of Jacob Hawthorn to provide memory photography and events for life-limited children and their families, we weathered the storm of Covid and still continue to fight for funding from grant makers supporting children's charities. Prosperity Network has literally been the wind beneath our wings

the past few years, helping us to grow our family's memorable events programme and just several weeks ago, holding our own Pride of JUMP Awards. Our impact has been so much greater because of this partnership, and it gives us hope to continue to deliver our services for the coming year ahead.

Nick Uzarewicz from prosperitynetwork.co.uk said: "For Prosperity Network, community has always been at the heart of what we do. While we're best known as a property investment and education network, our real focus has always been about people supporting people. Learning together, growing together, and giving back where we can."

"Our partnership with JUMP Children's Charity began in August 2023 following an initial conversation about how we could support the incredible work they do. What followed was a long-term partnership that our team and members fully embraced."

"Since then, the Prosperity Network community has raised £92,665.52 for JUMP, with members also contributing in a variety of ways, which we're incredibly grateful for. Our partnership has become a powerful example of what can happen when a community rallies behind a cause that truly matters."

"Supporting JUMP is a symbol of what Prosperity Network stands for. We believe success means very little if it isn't shared, and we're proud to stand alongside a local charity making a real, lasting difference to families in our community."

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Spotlight on Local Business

Momentum, People and the Power of Community

By Laurence Barrow

As Barrow Electrical enters its 20th year in business, it feels like a particularly exciting moment to reflect on how far we've come and where we're heading.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned over nearly two decades is that real growth doesn't always arrive with noise or fanfare. Often, it comes through steady momentum, the right people joining the journey, and staying rooted in the communities that support you.

This milestone year has started exactly that way for Barrow Electrical — with energy, optimism and some important steps forward that I'm proud to share.

From a business perspective, we've had a brilliant start to the year. We've secured several new projects across our core sectors, strengthening our position in installations, facilities maintenance and integrated building services. Demand for reliable, forward-thinking electrical partners continues to grow, and it's encouraging to see long-standing clients expanding their work with us alongside new relationships forming. It's a fantastic way to begin our 20th year.

One of the most significant

developments this month is the appointment of our very first Contracts Manager. This role marks an important milestone in our evolution, allowing us to manage a growing project portfolio more efficiently, strengthen delivery, and put the right structure in place for continued growth. Investing in experienced leadership is essential to scaling the business the right way, and this appointment reflects that commitment.

As we grow, our values remain unchanged. Barrow Electrical has always been about more than projects and performance. It's about people — our team, our clients, and the communities we serve.

That's why I'm particularly looking forward to the upcoming Warrington Youth Zone Annual Awards. Barrow Electrical is proud to sponsor the event, and I'll be attending on the night to present a very special award. Warrington Youth Zone does outstanding work supporting and inspiring young

people across the borough, and it's a privilege to help recognise their achievements. Supporting initiatives like this is part of our responsibility as a local business that has grown alongside the town.

On a personal note, since my last article, the response to sharing my wife's illness has been truly overwhelming. The kindness, love and messages of support we've received following her brain cancer diagnosis have meant the world to our little family, and I want to sincerely thank everyone who has reached out.

As we move further into this

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milestone year, I'm excited about what lies ahead: new projects, new partnerships, and continuing to build a business that balances ambition with integrity. Barrow Electrical is evolving — becoming stronger, more structured and more capable — while staying true to the principles it was founded on.



Charlotte Nichols MP Warrington North

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Another record-breaking year for litter picking volunteers

THE Warrington Litter Networks have enjoyed another record-breaking year, collecting over 11,000 bags of rubbish for the first time.

The total number of bags collected was 11,170.5. This is a 28% increase on the previous record of 8,660 (in 2024).

Cumulatively (since 2019) 44,853 bags of litter have been picked by all of the Warrington teams.

The volunteers have also recycled 402,613 aluminium beverage cans since 2023.

Working with Novelis PLC of Latchford, this has raised around £6700 for the Orford Veterans Hub charity.

The Volunteers were delighted to be awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2025, it will be officially presented by the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire at Warrington Town Hall in early 2026.

As Bob Towers (of Winwick Litter Network) put it: "We had superb support from our Mayor, Mo Hussain and as you know, with the Council's support, we were awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service in November. We also continued our very successful charity can collection arrangement with Novelis in Latchford. In all we reckon over 400,000 cans have been recycled by our teams – outside of Council collected cans – in the past three years.

"We feel this makes Warrington very much a "stand out" town both

in the North West and also the UK as a whole. In good part this is due to the Council's strong levels of ongoing backing and encouragement, without which we could not follow through with our volunteering initiatives across the town".

Co-ordinator Tony Dixon added: "All round, these figures are another superb achievement. We need to thank everybody who has volunteered in every team.

"As I see it, we are looking forward to another year of mindful

litterpicking – and a progressively tidier Warrington. Look around you – it is happening. We will be participating in the Keep Britain Tidy "GB Spring Clean 2026" in March (and hope to overtake Bolton this year!). Pride is coming back. What we are doing says very good things about our town and our community.

"We greatly appreciate the support of Warrington Worldwide to maintain the public profile of what we are trying to do."

Team (and landmark event) breakdown:

- 8,209 bags from Tuesday Litter Team
- 28 bags from Sunday LT

- 582 from Fairfield & Howley LT
- 170.5 from Orford LT
- 263 from CUMC Westbrook
- 544 from Winwick LN
- 491 from Poulton with Fearnhead LN
- 140 from Lymm LN
- 102 from Stockton Heath LN
- 75 from Croft LN
- 51 from TReco, Locking Stumps
- 127 from the First Mayoral pick
- 228 from Thomas Morgan pick
- 125 from Jill Dance's 24 hour Litterbug pick.

(LT = Litter Team , LN = Litter Network
CUMC = Clean Up My Community
TReco = Thomas Risley Eco group)



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Tony shares the excitement, "It's fantastic to work with Craig again. Love Carpets offers better prices, quicker turnaround—fitting within two days—and exceptional service. I'm amazed at what an independent business can offer."

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College championing community connections



Warrington & Vale Royal College is pleased to share its continued commitment to working within the communities it serves by offering a wide range of adult courses at local venues across Warrington.

These courses offer accessible learning to meet the needs of local residents.

A recent success story is the growing number of courses being delivered at the Westbrook Centre, local to its Warrington campus. The centre has been buzzing with activity and engagement during recent sessions, creating a vibrant learning environment for those who choose to attend.

As part of this community engagement, the college is providing dedicated support to residents from Hong Kong, through a series of tailored English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) conversational classes. These sessions are designed to help

residents build confidence in their English language skills, supporting them as they settle into life and work in the UK.

Tim Evans, Curriculum Manager for Adult Community Learning and ESOL, says: "It's inspiring to see local residents gaining confidence and forming connections through these classes. We're proud to play a key part in helping them feel at home in the community."

Looking ahead, Warrington & Vale Royal College is excited to continue working with the Westbrook Centre and other community venues to deliver positive impact and accessible learning opportunities for all.



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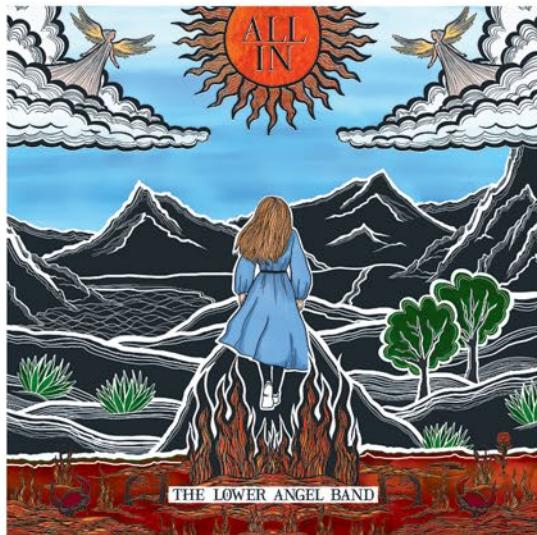
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'All In' - The Lower Angel Band's debut album is officially here!



Congratulations to Vicky, Nick, Chris, Matt and Sam for a wonderful release.

The album has had a great reception so far and we can't wait to watch it grow even more. Be sure to listen now on all music streaming platforms! The album release show at Warrington Irish Club was also a huge success!

Thank you to everybody who came out to support. Hearing the album live with strings is something really special - definitely a night to remember! If you loved the gig, or are desperate to catch The Lower Angel Band live, keep your eyes peeled for their 2026 tour dates... announcement coming soon!



Download the album here.

New releases from Amberson's, George Gallagher and Luna Drift on the horizon.

The **Ambersons** album is almost finished and ready to go! Last month Midge, Andy and Phil were invited to a live interview with Jim at Cheshire's Mix 56 radio where they played three acoustic songs live and spoke about their history, the album and future plans. You can listen back to it on the Cheshire Mix website under Jim O'Connor's profile. Next Saturday, 7th February, the band (pictured below) are playing Brickhaus in Warrington with Belmont and the Stocks, Containers and Red Jaspers. You can still grab a ticket on Skiddle so don't miss out!

George Gallagher's brand new original single 'Going Home' is now available to listen on all streaming platforms! The track is a phenomenal representation of George's talent - deep, emotional and soulful.

The official music video is also available on Ameritz' YouTube channel - make sure to watch to see a stellar performance from George, and some amazing Liverpool city drone footage captured by Chris at Team Ameritz. There's so much more coming from George in 2026 so make sure you keep up with Ameritz and George's socials - you don't want to miss it!

Manchester's **Luna Drift** are having the finishing touches put onto their debut album and should be ready to release their first single in the very near future. The band have two gigs this month, the first at London's The Fiddler's Elbow on 14th February and then 28th February at The Kings Arms in Salford.

As always, follow Ameritz on Facebook and Instagram to keep up to date with what's going on with our artists. It's the first place you will hear about releases and live shows.



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**Chambers
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Divorce Column

By Peter Wilkinson

Divorce Lawyer at Chambers Fletcher Solicitors

An Amicable Divorce - is there any such thing?

Sometimes people ask whether there is any such thing as an amicable divorce? The short answer is yes — but it's important to be realistic about what it looks like.

Divorce is rarely easy. It's an inherently divisive process. Even where both parties agree that the relationship has come to an end there are often strong emotions involved - sadness, hurt feelings, anger, blame, anxiety about the future, worries about money, housing and arrangements for children. An amicable divorce should not be understood as a process without these emotions or without difficulty, but rather one in which difficulties are addressed respectfully, sensibly and constructively rather than combatively. In practice, being amicable is less about how people feel and more about their mindset and behaviour. It involves communicating openly, providing full and honest financial disclosure and focussing on realistic resolution rather than revisiting past grievances.

Some suggest that involving solicitors might inflame matters, but in practice taking early legal advice can help manage expectations, clear up misunderstandings and provide a clear framework for negotiations. This can help people in making informed decisions. When people understand their legal position discussions can often be more realistic, more focussed and this can assist in reaching a fair resolution more efficiently and cost effectively.

Where children are involved, an amicable approach becomes especially important. While the adult relationship may be ending the role of parenting continues. Keeping conflict to a minimum and prioritising the welfare of the children can help promote stability and support healthier co-parenting in the long term.

It's also important to note that 'amicable' doesn't mean requiring one party to be a pushover and accept an unfair outcome. It's not about being soft. Pursuing a fair outcome can be done robustly while remaining respectful and constructive, provided the focus remains on reasonableness and resolution rather than recrimination.

So, is an amicable divorce possible? Yes — with the right mindset and the right guidance, on both sides.

For expert advice and assistance regarding divorce and related matters please get in touch — whatever your circumstances we have the experience and expertise to advise, guide and support you.

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"Inclusion starts with us" – supporting neurodiverse children

A 14-year-old pupil at Warrington's Sir Thomas Boteler CE High School, has launched "Inclusion Starts With Us" — a mission dedicated to supporting neurodiverse children and celebrating the people who make everyday life kinder, calmer, and more accessible.

Nathan Jack's journey began with a simple idea: creating sensory bags and visual supports to help children manage anxiety, routines, and overwhelming environments. What started as one young person trying to help others like him has grown into a community wide initiative rooted in empathy, courage, and inclusion.

This year, his mission has taken a big step forward with the launch of the Inclusive Awards Night — an event designed to honour children, families, groups, and businesses who make a real difference.

The Inclusive Awards Night features six heartfelt categories, each celebrating a different kind of everyday hero:

- Kindness Award — For young people whose compassion leaves a lasting impact.
- Heart of Gold Award — For young carers who show patience, love, and quiet strength.
- Brave Steps Award — For individuals who push past personal barriers and take courageous steps forward.
- Guided Light Award — For those who guide, support, and uplift

others every day.

- Unity Squad Award — For teams and groups who embody inclusion, teamwork, and emotional leadership.
- Open Doors Award — For businesses, families, or individuals who remove barriers and create opportunities for vulnerable people.

The event has been embraced by local businesses who believe in Nathan Jack's mission and want to help shine a light on inclusion, including Mark from Warrington Eats, The RGs, More Than Men, Phone Whispers, Yellow Tree Crafts, and Marc Entertainment.

Their support ensures that every nominee, every family, and every child feels valued and celebrated.



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Menopause should not be something women simply have to endure

By Dr Stephen Coogan MBChB MRCGP, Founder and CEO, myGP Clinic

Menopause is still widely misunderstood. For many women, it is thought to begin when periods stop and to be something they simply have to endure. In reality, the physical and emotional impact often starts years earlier, during perimenopause, while women are still working, raising families, and caring for others.

When symptoms are dismissed as stress, ageing, or "just part of life", women are left struggling without proper support — not because help does not exist, but because menopause is too often treated as something to be endured rather than properly understood and supported.

Menopause itself is a single point in time, defined medically as twelve consecutive months without a period. Perimenopause, however, can last several years and is marked by fluctuating hormone levels. During this phase, periods may remain regular, become irregular, or change in flow. Because many women are still menstruating, the link between symptoms and hormonal change is often missed, leaving women uncertain about what is happening to their bodies.

The symptoms of perimenopause and menopause extend far beyond hot flushes. Many women experience poor sleep, anxiety, low mood, irritability, difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, joint and muscle pain, reduced

libido, vaginal dryness, worsening migraines, and changes in weight and energy levels. These symptoms can significantly affect daily life, work performance, and confidence, yet they are frequently minimised or normalised.

Much of the uncertainty around hormone replacement therapy stems from alarming headlines more than two decades old. Those early reports suggested links between HRT, breast cancer, and heart disease, and understandably created lasting concern. What is less well known is that our understanding has evolved. We now recognise that the balance of benefit and risk is different for each woman and depends on timing, duration of use, and individual health factors. Unfortunately, outdated messages still influence many conversations today.

For many women, particularly during perimenopause or the early years after menopause, HRT can be a helpful option. It remains the most effective way to relieve symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats,

poor sleep, and mood changes. It can also support long-term health. Falling oestrogen levels are linked to weaker bones, increased cardiovascular risk, and changes in strength, energy, and metabolism. These changes are often dismissed as "just ageing", but they are closely tied to hormonal change.

At myGP Clinic, we increasingly

see women who have struggled to access clear advice and timely support during perimenopause and menopause. HRT is not right for everyone, but decisions should be based on good information and individual assessment, not fear or dismissal. Menopause is a natural transition, but women deserve to be properly supported through it.



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Children lead positive community call to protect Woolston Hub



Children and families were at the heart of a strong, positive show of community spirit, as local residents gathered at the Town Hall to stand up for Woolston Hub at the latest council cabinet meeting.

Despite challenging weather, traffic disruption, and the timing of the meeting, turnout was significant and notably family-focused. Children led the way with cheerful, sporting-style chants calling for a future where the community can play, learn, and belong together. The atmosphere throughout was peaceful, upbeat, and constructive, reflecting a shared commitment to protecting vital local services for current and future generations.

Earlier in the evening, local children took part in a symbolic and hopeful act of engagement, entering the Town Hall carrying two brightly decorated boxes to meet with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. The boxes contained almost 2,500 signatures collected from residents calling for Woolston Hub to be protected and for urgent mitigations to be considered. The moment powerfully highlighted the strength of feeling across generations and placed children firmly at the centre of the community's message.

A key moment of the Cabinet meeting came from Clair Anderson, a regular Woolston Hub user, who delivered a heartfelt statement and question that resonated strongly with residents and members of the Save Our Hub campaign.

In her address, Clair explained that Woolston Hub was not an occasional leisure option but a central part of daily life for many residents — particularly older people, disabled users, and those who depend on routine and local access for their physical and mental wellbeing. She described regular swimmers who relied on the pool for mobility, social connection, and independence, and spoke of growing isolation and distress following the closure.

Clair highlighted that the loss of Woolston Hub has affected far more than physical activity alone, impacting stability, routine, mental health, and community connection. She described the hub as a lifeline — one that supports not only individuals, but families and the wider community fabric.

She concluded by asking how the

Council can continue to describe the Equality Impact of the closure as "neutral" in light of the clear and ongoing effects on vulnerable groups, and what urgent action will be taken either to safely reopen appropriate areas of the site, subject to evidence and controls, or to publish the evidence explaining why this cannot be achieved at this time.

A campaign spokesperson said: "Seeing children lead the way with such positivity reminds us what this is really about — the future of our community. Clair's statement reflected what many residents are experiencing: this is not simply about a building, but about health, dignity, routine, and connection. We recognise the Council's responsibility for safety, and we welcome the opportunity for open and transparent dialogue to challenge assumptions, test the evidence, and explore solutions that may not yet have been fully considered. As set out in the motion, everything must be on the table."

Campaigners continue to call for:

- Transparency around health and safety assessments and supporting evidence
- Immediate consideration of mitigations for vulnerable users
- Exploration of partial or 'dry-side' access options where these can be demonstrated to be safe
- Clear publication of evidence where interim access is said not to be possible

Parish councils are now being engaged to help ensure community voices — including those of children and families — remain central to decision-making. The campaign has formally requested meetings with council leaders and relevant envoys to support this open, evidence-led approach.

The campaign remains committed to constructive dialogue, a positive public presence, and ensuring that both short-term mitigations and the long-term future of Woolston Hub stay firmly on the council's agenda.

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Westbrook Library reopens with extended hours and powered by volunteers

AFTER bouncing back from the threat of closure as part of council cutbacks, Westbrook Library and Community Centre has enjoyed a hugely successful first week of reopening under the stewardship of Westbrook Library Friends CIC.

Nearly 400 visitors were welcomed throughout the week, creating a vibrant, welcoming atmosphere throughout the building.

The library officially reopened to the public on Monday 5 January 2026, following the withdrawal of Warrington Borough Council staffing and the handover of day-to-day opening to the newly formed Community Interest Company. Book services continue to be managed by Livewire with support from an outreach librarian, but thanks to the dedication of over 100 registered volunteers, the library is now open six days a week with extended hours:

Monday: 9am–5pm
 Tuesday: 9am–5pm
 Wednesday: 9am–5pm
 Thursday: 9.30am–4.30pm
 Friday: 9.30am–4.30pm
 Saturday: 10am–3pm

The first week saw a real buzz as residents of all ages returned to borrow books, meet friends and take part in a growing programme of activities. New sessions launched include:

Rhyme Time on Mondays for babies and toddlers, followed by a

Coffee Morning.
 After-School LEGO Club on Tuesdays.

Men's Coffee Morning, offering a relaxed and supportive social space.

Frailty Fighters, helping older residents build strength, stay active and reduce the risk of hospital admission.

A new Reminisce Café has also been launched – a social morning for people living with, and caring for those with, dementia – as well as several free college courses starting at the centre.

Westbrook Library Friends CIC is extremely grateful to Burtonwood and Westbrook Parish Council, who have awarded £10,000 towards the running costs of the library, helping to secure its future during this crucial transition to a community-led model.

One user commented on Westbrook Library Friends CIC's Facebook page: "It's been so amazing to see what you've all been able to achieve with the library – making it a proper community space. It's more than I could ever have dreamed for the library, and you've actually been able to put it into practice! I'm so impressed with all of the volunteers."



Westbrook Library Friends CIC was formed in response to proposals in March 2025 by Labour-run Warrington Borough Council to close the library due to lower usage figures and the cost of renting the building, which is the only library in the borough not owned by the council. The proposal sparked a passionate community campaign, including a public consultation that received more than 2,000 responses, a packed drop-in event attended by over 100 residents, a procession by local schoolchildren, BBC radio interviews, and even a question raised by a pupil at a full council meeting.

As a result of this overwhelming support, the council revised its plans and introduced a tiered

library system. Westbrook was reclassified to remain open as a reduced, unstaffed 'Tier 4' library, with a new community-led operating model designed to become self-funded over two years. Westbrook Library Friends CIC was registered in August 2025 as a not-for-profit Community Interest Company, enabling access to grants and independent funding and providing a formal structure to manage the library and develop its role as a community hub. Plans are already underway for further activities, partnerships and internal improvements to increase use of the building and generate income, helping to secure the long-term future of this much-loved community asset.



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Lower Angel Band flying high after sell-out gig and album launch



A Warrington band that met and formed in a local pub less than a year ago has released their debut album and performed to a sell-out audience at the town's Irish Club.

The Lower Angel Band, who formed after meeting up at the well known town centre pub, are now set to embark on a tour of the North West.

Their blend of folk style blues and country music has captured the hearts of music lovers in the town.

Now, following a collaboration with locally based Ameritz Music, it is hoped the band is going to go from strength to strength.

Dave Green from Ameritz Music said: "A brilliant night! A Warrington band named after an iconic pub. A very talented group of musicians and song writers. Now with a debut album of 10 original songs, reflecting life, love and this funny life we all live! "Historic,

momentous and beautiful music.

"More live dates and releases coming in 2026."

A spokesperson for The Lower Angel Band said: "Massive thanks to everyone who came down to our album launch at the Warrington Irish Club, we're still playing it over in our heads and can't believe we experienced it!

"We hope you all loved it as much as we did!"

"We can't say it enough, but a huge thanks to our supports, quartet, production crew and of course you fabulous audience members, we couldn't have done this without you all!"



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How Company Cars Will Be Taxed Going Forward

Providing a vehicle to an employee can be a valuable benefit, but it often carries a significant tax cost. Where a car is made available for an employee's private use, an income tax charge arises under the benefit in kind rules. Understanding how these charges work, and how recent changes affect certain vehicles, is essential for employers and employees alike.

Benefit in Kind Income Tax Charges

The taxable value of a company car is calculated using the vehicle's list price, reduced by up to £5,000 where the employee makes a capital contribution. This figure is then multiplied by a percentage based largely on the car's CO2 emissions.

For the 2024 to 2025 tax year, the maximum benefit in kind rate is 37 percent. Diesel cars that do not meet the RDE2 emissions standard suffer a further 4 percent surcharge. At the other end of the scale, zero emission vehicles attract a rate of just 2 percent.

Hybrid vehicles are taxed according to their electric only range. In 2024 to 2025, cars capable of travelling 130 miles or more on electric power are taxed at 2 percent. Vehicles with a range of 70 to 129 miles are charged at 5 percent, 40 to 69 miles at 8 percent, 30 to 39 miles at 12 percent, and those capable of travelling less

than 30 miles at 14 percent.

Petrol cars with emissions of 50 grams per kilometre or less also attract a 14 percent rate, with the percentage increasing by 1 percent for every additional 5 grams per kilometre.

These rates are set to increase over time. From 2025 to 2026, the 2 percent rate rises to 3 percent, while petrol cars with emissions of 50 grams per kilometre or less increase to 16 percent. By 2027 to 2028, these rates will rise further to 5 percent and 18 percent respectively, making company cars progressively more expensive from a tax perspective.

National Insurance Contributions

In addition to income tax, National Insurance applies to company car benefits, but only for the employer. Class 1A National Insurance contributions are payable on the taxable value of the benefit at 15 percent from April 2025.

Pool Cars

No income tax or National Insurance charge arises where a vehicle qualifies as a pool car. To meet this definition, the car must be used by more than one employee, any private use must be incidental, and the vehicle must normally be kept at the employer's premises overnight. In practice, these conditions

can be difficult to satisfy and are often closely scrutinised.

Fuel Provided for Private Use

Where an employer provides fuel for private journeys, a separate fuel benefit arises. For 2025 to 2026, this is based on a fixed amount of £28,200, multiplied by the same percentage that applies to the car. This benefit is subject to income tax and employer National Insurance.

The fuel benefit can be eliminated if the employee reimburses the employer in full for private fuel using approved mileage rates. Partial reimbursement will not remove the charge.

Vans and Other Vehicles

Vehicles that are not cars but have four wheels are generally treated as goods vehicles, provided their construction is primarily suited to carrying goods. Vans are subject to a simpler benefit in kind regime, with a flat rate benefit of £4,020 for 2025 to 2026 and a flat fuel benefit of £769.

However, where a van has a second row of seats for passengers, it may be treated as a car. Case law has confirmed that if the carriage of passengers is more than incidental, the vehicle is likely to fall within the car rules.

Vans also benefit from more favourable capital allowance treatment and may allow



Thomas Coyne and Stuart Barr

recovery of input VAT, making them attractive where they qualify.

Vans can offer a significantly lower taxable benefit, but only where they are genuinely designed and used primarily for carrying goods. A second row of seats increases the risk of the vehicle being treated as a car. Employers should review vehicle choices carefully and seek advice before committing to new purchases.

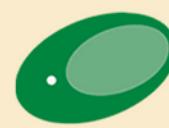
Double Cab Pick Up Trucks

Historically, double cab pick-up trucks have been treated as vans for benefit in kind purposes, provided they met the VAT payload test of at least one tonne. This position is changing.

From 6 April 2025, double cab pick-ups purchased or ordered on or after that date will be treated as cars for benefit in kind and capital allowance purposes, following the withdrawal of the payload test announced in the October 2024 Budget.

Transitional rules apply to existing vehicles. Pick-ups purchased or ordered before 6 April 2025 can retain their van status until disposal or 5 April 2029 if earlier. These changes do not affect their VAT classification.

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Spotlight on Local History with James Balme

The Barley Mow – A 16th Century Elizabethan Gem of Warrington

Walking around Warrington town centre today you could be forgiven for believing that most of the buildings are of modern construction mixed in with 19th century structures built during the Victorian period and into the early 1900s. But a wander into the old market place is like taking a step back into history.

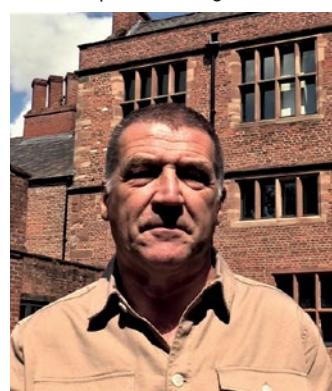
Whilst the majority of the buildings in the Old Market Place are of the late 20th century one building still remains standing as it was when first built in the year 1561 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The Barley Mow is recognised as being the oldest pub in the town centre. Located on Old Market Place the pub is recognised as an important timber framed Tudor structure of the highest quality. The Barley Mow was constructed on top of a red sandstone base. In 1975 the building was given Grade II listed protection status meaning that any future work or renovations to the building must adhere strictly to the protection order in place thus preventing any damage to the structure or appearance. Even today the inside of the building still retains its ancient atmosphere and original beams as well as its 17th century wood panelling.

The history of a market being held in Warrington dates back to the 13th century when King Henry III granted a Royal Charter to Sir William Fitz Almeric le Boteler 7th Baron of Warrington on the 20th October 1255 to allow a weekly Wednesday market and an annual three-day fair to take place in the town. But Warrington, then known as 'Wherington' was to receive two further charters. In 1277 a new charter allowed for a weekly market on a Friday and a winters fair on the feast of St Andrew. This was followed by a further charter in 1285 giving more freedom to the Baron of Warrington to hold more market days and fairs. Over the coming centuries the markets and fairs held in Warrington became well known attracting many visitors from far and wide. The Barons of Warrington earned a handsome income as the Royal Charters

allowed them to collect tolls at both the markets and fairs. But in 1856 John Ireland Blackburne who was the Lord of the Manor at that time sold his rights to collect tolls to the new Warrington Corporation thus ending many centuries of the tolls being collected by the Barons of Warrington.

Its amazing to think that a market has been held in Warrington since 1255AD meaning that the town can celebrate over seven hundred and seventy years of market traders serving the town. Next time you visit Warrington make sure you have a walk into market square to see the magnificent timber-framed Tudor Barley Mow dating back to 1561.

You can watch over 700 history video features covering Warrington and surrounds by simply visiting my history channel today. To access the many films and features available for free visit [Youtube.com/@tvpresenter4history](https://www.youtube.com/@tvpresenter4history). With over 4000 subscribers to my channel already why not subscribe yourself and join me as I explore more historical places throughout 2026.



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