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Smith bids fond farewell

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Editor's Opinion



WARRINGTON is often held up as a success story of modern regional Britain and while there is no one more positive about our town than me – that narrative is beginning to fray, despite another upbeat Annual Property Review.

Beneath its economic growth lies a town grappling with deep structural challenges that raise uncomfortable questions about governance, inequality, and long-term sustainability.

The most pressing issue is financial. Warrington Borough Council's debt—once reaching around £1.8bn—has forced unprecedented scrutiny, with government-appointed envoys stepping in to oversee recovery efforts. What went wrong is now well documented: a high-risk investment strategy designed to generate income ultimately exposed the council to heavy losses, alongside a projected £130m budget gap over the next four years. This is not just an accounting problem; it is a political one. Residents will now face higher council tax and reduced services, raising the question of whether bold financial experimentation has undermined public trust.

Yet focusing solely on finances risks missing a broader paradox. Warrington's economy has grown faster than the UK average, driven by logistics, tech, and high-skilled jobs. On paper, it is one of the North's most prosperous towns. But prosperity has not been evenly shared. Pockets of deprivation, rising child poverty, and dissatisfaction with "levelling up" policies suggest that growth has been

uneven—and, for some, invisible.

This disconnect is perhaps most visible on the high street. Retail decline continues, with hundreds of shops lost over the past decade and ongoing closures highlighting the pressure from online competition and high rents. At the same time, Warrington faces significant structural change. The creation of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority and a future elected mayor signals a shift in how the area is governed. Meanwhile, a new Local Plan will shape housing, infrastructure, and land use for decades to come. These developments offer opportunity—but also risk further controversy, particularly around green belt use

and urban expansion with a lack of infrastructure to support it—in particular on the highways, which still suffer gridlock on a regular basis. One could argue that the new relief road has actually worsened traffic on Bridge Foot. There are some positive signs. Investment in SEND services, for example, shows responsiveness to local needs. But isolated improvements cannot mask systemic pressures. Ultimately, Warrington's challenge is not whether it can grow—it already has—but whether it can do so fairly, sustainably, and transparently. Without addressing governance failures and social inequality, its success story may prove more fragile than it first appears.



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Remembering Anne Leach – a heart of gold

THE family of a Warrington mum with a “heart of gold” who died from pancreatic cancer has shared her story to raise awareness of the exceptional care she received at St Rocco’s Hospice.

In November 2024, Anne Leach was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, marking the beginning of a journey that would show just how strong, loving, and remarkable she was.

Anne first came to St. Rocco’s as an outpatient, where she began to receive palliative support alongside her treatment. As her illness progressed, Anne was referred to the Virtual Ward, so her pain could be carefully managed, as she continued to move in and out of hospital. By the end of October, Anne was struggling to eat, along with other symptoms, and during one hospital stay, she decided it was time to write down her final wishes to share with her family.

Anne was 74 when she died, and two of her children, Tracey and Sharon, wanted to share their and Anne’s story and how she was a truly wonderful woman, “Mum had a heart of gold and an enormous love for life, her family, and especially her grandchildren.”

Anne and her husband Dave had been together for 45 years and married for 42. Anne and Dave moved to Warrington from South Wales, and together they created a busy, loving family of seven, raising five children. Family meant everything to Anne, and that love was felt by everyone around her.

“Mum was strong-willed, fun-

loving, and full of character, she adored travelling and had been to Thailand 18 times, often staying for a month at a time. She loved a dance and a singsong in the bars and would always seek out a bingo game wherever she went. She loved to sing, laugh, and make memories.”

Sharon discovered that Anne had been quietly sponsoring a Guide Dogs puppy, Clara, for many years, receiving regular “pupdates” that the family hadn’t even known about until they were looking through some files, which reflected her generous, thoughtful nature.

In June 2025, while Anne’s sister was undergoing treatment for breast cancer, the family organised a garden party. Anne’s sister travelled up from Somerset to surprise her. Both women were going through chemotherapy, and it was a joyful occasion for the family to be able to come together. This was such a memorable occasion as sadly it became the last time the entire family was together before Anne died.

At the hospice, Anne’s care was everything the family could have hoped for and more. In her final moments, Anne was gently repositioned to keep her comfortable. She was fast asleep, not in pain, holding hands with her family. She died peacefully,

surrounded by the people she loved most and the staff allowed the family to stay with Anne for as long as they needed, which brought them great comfort.

Anne’s funeral took place on Tuesday, 10th February, and all donations received were kindly given to St. Rocco’s in Anne’s memory. Tracey and Sharon would like to continue to support St. Rocco’s, and this summer, family members plan to volunteer for a day, helping to tidy the grounds and make cups of tea. Seven of them will also be taking part in the 2026 Colour Run event.



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Council to exit Redwood Bank investment for "substantial loss"

WARRINGTON Borough Council has given approval to exit its controversial investment of over £30m in Redwood Bank, following a decision by Cabinet, for a "substantial loss."

The council had received a formal offer to sell its interests in the bank for a confidential financial return.

At the meeting in early April the Cabinet discussed and approved the sale of the council's interests in the bank.

Members heard this would realise a substantial financial loss compared to the initial investment the council made into the bank in 2017. However, in exiting the bank – subject to regulatory approval – the council would be protecting itself from any future risks, and would be exiting from one of its more complex investments.

This is particularly significant, as the council continues to work hard to reduce both its debt level and the complexity of its commercial portfolio, with support from the council's government-appointed Ministerial Envoys. The council has already agreed to sell off Birchwood Park and is looking at other investments to sell as it bids to plug a budget shortfall and £1.4 billion of debt.

Cabinet member for finance, assets and investments, Cllr Denis

Matthews, said: "I believe that this is a decision in the best interests of the council at this time. We have huge financial challenges and a significant task in ensuring we can become a sustainable organisation. Focusing our resource and effort on this goal is critical.

"As we have previously acknowledged, we need to simplify our commercial portfolio, while reducing our overall level of debt to a more manageable level. Continuing to adopt this approach will enable us to prioritise our resources on providing services for our residents and working towards financial sustainability.

"Ultimately, we need to keep making measured decisions about our overall commercial portfolio to ensure we can become a modern and efficient council that provides the best possible services, while living within our means."

The investment in Redwood Bank was one of the key reasons why the council was unable to sign off its accounts, following a legal challenge by retired accountant, the late Richard Buttrely.



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Dental Practice celebrates 20 years of serving the community

GRAPPENHALL Dental Practice is proud to be celebrating its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of providing high-quality, affordable dental care to patients across Grappenhall and the surrounding communities.

Since opening its doors in April 2006, the practice has grown from a small local clinic into a trusted and well-established dental provider, known for its commitment to patient care, clinical excellence, and a friendly, welcoming environment. Over the past 20 years, the team has treated thousands of patients, who have remained with the practice for generations.

A key part of the practice's philosophy has been making dental care accessible and affordable. While not an NHS practice, Grappenhall Dental Practice offers pricing that is comparable to NHS rates, helping ensure that high-quality dental treatment remains within reach for as many people as possible.

"Reaching this milestone is a moment of real pride for everyone involved," said Principal Dentist and owner Dr Andrew Brown. "We are incredibly grateful to our patients for their continued trust and support over the years. Our focus has always been on delivering high-

quality, patient-centred care that is also accessible and affordable, and we look forward to continuing that for many years to come."

NHS dentistry has failed the community of Warrington over the past 2 decades but thanks to Dr Brown and his team the people of Warrington have had access to affordable care.

They are also very proud to still be seeing children under 16 free of charge for 20 years after promising this to families that were unsure about leaving NHS dental care. (conditions apply)

The practice also prioritises convenience and responsiveness, offering same-day emergency appointments whenever possible to ensure patients receive prompt care when they need it most. In addition, fully accessible downstairs surgeries are available, making the practice welcoming and practical for patients with mobility needs.

As part of its continued growth and investment in patient care, the practice has recently installed

a fourth surgery, significantly increasing capacity and allowing the team to welcome more new patients than ever before.

Throughout its history, Grappenhall Dental Practice has embraced advancements in dental technology and techniques, ensuring patients benefit from modern, effective treatments. From routine check-ups and preventative care to cosmetic and restorative procedures, the practice continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of its community.

"Our patients are at the heart of everything we do," added Andrew. "This anniversary is not just about celebrating our history, but also about looking ahead—expanding our services, welcoming new patients, and continuing to provide the highest standard of care."

Grappenhall Dental Practice remains committed to maintaining its reputation for excellence, investing in its team, and delivering a positive dental experience for every patient.

Grappenhall Dental Practice is a long-established dental clinic based in Grappenhall, Cheshire, offering

a full range of dental services including preventative, general, and cosmetic dentistry. The practice is dedicated to providing personalised, affordable care in a comfortable and professional setting, with accessible facilities and flexible appointment options.



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Spotlight on Local Business

We won! Next stop, Buckingham Palace

By Laurence Barrow

What a month it has been – and one we are incredibly proud of. We’re delighted to say that Barrow Electrical has won the High Sheriff Award for Excellence in Enterprise. A fantastic achievement for everyone involved with the business and a real reflection of the hard work the team continues to put in day in, day out.

To top it off, we’ve now been invited to attend the King’s Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May, which is an amazing opportunity and something we are all really looking forward to.

From a business perspective, it has been another productive few weeks. We attended the Warrington Business Expo at the Village Hotel Warrington, which proved to be a great event. It was an opportunity to reconnect with familiar faces while also building new relationships with businesses across the region.

It was also great to spend time with the next generation coming into the industry. I had the pleasure of carrying out mock interviews at Birchwood High School, where the students were a real credit to the school. Alongside that, visiting Training for Electricians and speaking to their latest cohort of apprentices was equally

rewarding. The facility they have created is excellent, and it is inspiring to see such enthusiasm from those entering the trade.

Supporting the local community remains a big focus for us. Over the Easter period, we delivered eggs to both Warrington Youth Zone and Warrington and Halton Hospitals. Small gestures like this can go a long way, and it is always important for us to give something back where we can.



On the football side, it has been another strong month for Warrington Rylands. Securing a place in the playoffs is a brilliant achievement and keeps us firmly on track with our goals for the season. There is a real sense of momentum around the club, and with some exciting developments on the horizon, the future is looking very positive.

We have also strengthened our community links further, with the

club now hosting two men’s mental health groups each week. Seeing 40–50 people regularly attending and supporting each other is something we are extremely proud to be part of.

On a personal note, I was fortunate to enjoy a couple of trips down to London thanks to the fantastic hospitality of West Ham United and BoyleSports. It made for a memorable experience, especially sharing it with family.

After a busy period, it was great

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to round things off with some time away in Spain, taking the chance to recharge and reset before what promises to be another exciting few months ahead.

With plenty in the pipeline – both professionally and personally – we’re looking forward to what comes next.



Charlotte Nichols MP
Warrington North

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Rewiring Calm: How Solution Focused Hypnotherapy Supports ADHD

In my practice, I've recently been working with a number of clients diagnosed with ADHD.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is often associated with difficulties in focus and impulsivity, but its impact goes far beyond that. It can have wide-ranging effects on mental health, and while some individuals manage well, many experience additional challenges, particularly without the right support in place.

ADHD is commonly linked with an increased risk of other mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and substance misuse, where alcohol or drugs may be used as a way to cope.

Alongside this, many clients struggle with low self-esteem and persistent self-criticism, often stemming from years of feeling misunderstood or "not good enough." Emotional regulation can also be difficult, with heightened sensitivity, frustration, or overwhelm appearing quickly and sometimes intensely.

Over time, this can contribute to chronic stress, burnout, and difficulties in maintaining

relationships, both personally and professionally.

An important piece of the ADHD puzzle lies in the brain's relationship with dopamine, a neurotransmitter responsible for motivation, reward, and focus. In the ADHD brain, dopamine regulation can be less efficient, which may lead to difficulties in sustaining attention, seeking stimulation, or feeling motivated by everyday tasks. This is not a flaw, but a difference in how the brain processes information and reward.

Solution Focused Hypnotherapy (SFH) offers a gentle yet effective way to support clients in understanding these patterns. By combining neuroscience-based explanations with relaxation and focused techniques, clients can begin to regain a sense of control.

Hypnotherapy helps to calm the mind, reduce the build-up of stress, and "empty the stress bucket," creating space for clearer thinking and more balanced emotional responses.

From this calmer state, clients are empowered to take small,

manageable steps toward their preferred future - building confidence, resilience, and a more positive outlook along the way. If you're feeling stuck, overwhelmed, or simply curious about how hypnotherapy could help you move forward, I invite you to take the first step today.

Book a complimentary discovery video call to explore how this transformative therapy could support you. Get in touch now via my website or email and start your journey towards lasting change.



★★★★★

I highly recommend Rachel.

I was initially unsure about hypnotherapy and was nervous to take that first step, but from my very first consultation, Rachel put me at ease. She made me feel safe, supported, and understood from the start which made a huge difference.

Over the past six weeks, I've seen a real shift in how I manage anxiety and those overwhelming feelings. Each session is a calming, positive space to breathe and reflect. I'm so grateful I started this journey and would absolutely recommend Rachel to anyone feeling stuck or overwhelmed. It's truly been a turning point for me and I'm excited to carry on this journey.



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MP shows support for library volunteers



WARRINGTON North MP Charlotte Nichols visited Westbrook Library and Community Centre, along with local Councillors Kate Eglinton and Paul Warburton, to hear about the great work of local volunteers.

The library, which saw record visitor figures of more than 3,000 people in February, has recently moved to a community-led operating model with an expanded programme of opportunities. The centre now has a strengthened team of over 100 volunteers that will work closely with Warrington Borough Council and Livewire teams. This will mean that the library will continue to play an important role in supporting residents' wellbeing, learning, social connection and other local priorities.

The centre hosts various events and groups, including Rhyme Time, a Men's Coffee Morning, Reminisce Café for people affected by dementia, Frailty Fighters and a Lego Club. Community coffee mornings are also regularly held to promote social interaction and engagement.

Ms Nichols said: "It was a pleasure visiting Westbrook Library and Community Centre with Councillors

Kate Eglinton and Paul Warburton. It was great to hear about the work that the local volunteers at Westbrook Library Friends CIC are doing to maximise its use following the successful campaign to keep it open.

"It is an important local venue and community asset. There are some exciting ideas for its future, and I'll be working hard with the local volunteers to make sure these plans come to fruition. It's undergoing a refurbishment over Easter thanks to the incredible volunteers, which will ensure more of the community can utilise the space for activities, events and wellbeing. I look forward to visiting again in the near future!"

The volunteer team are also keen to promote the centre's rooms that are available to hire out for a range of events or groups, which will help to make the centre more financially sustainable in the long-term.



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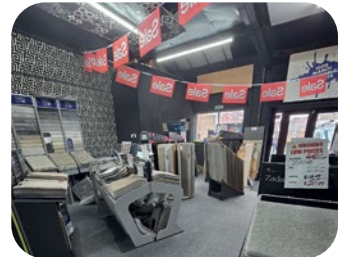
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Volunteers smash Great British Spring Clean litter-picking record

OVER the two weeks of Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean (GBSC) campaign last month, Warrington's Litter Volunteers completed 24 public team events and many more solo picks, creating a new record.

Warrington's previous GBSC record of 1,170 bags (from 2025) was smashed with a massive 1,571 bags. This is an increase of 34% on last year's record.

Warrington Litter Volunteers (WLV) includes all of Warrington's volunteer litter teams. In 2025, they were honoured to be awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service.

This year's campaign again focused on trails, parks and hotspots and was based on multiple teams working together.

The Parks included Orford Park twice, Victoria Park, Brickfield Park, Black Bear Park, Westy Park and Longford Pool Park.

The trails included Sankey Valley Park from St Helens Border to Gatewarth, and the Trans Pennine Trail from Heatley Bollin in Lymm to Spike Island in Widnes.

Litter heroes Ambassador Tony Dixon stated: "We had no huge showcase events for this year's Great British Spring Clean but we focused on team picks with up to 20 volunteers. This worked more effectively. During GBSC, we achieved three "centuries" (over 100 bags in a single day) and one "double century" much more efficiently. The total bag count speaks for itself."

He said the volunteers' drive and motivation had been incredible. Solo pickers picked over 50% of the GBSC total. The local movement continues to grow, and there are now almost 4,000 members of litter networks and litter teams in Warrington Borough. There are 55 trained volunteers with leadership potential. In January, there were 10 teams and there will soon be 13 teams.

Volunteer Bob Towers added, "During GBSC we have grown and broadened our team volunteer base with 30 new volunteers, support from Wolves PDRL Team, New Routes Litter Team and Warrington's Hong Kong Community. In addition, 200 primary school children and scouts experienced litter picking."

James Coates from Litter Networks continued, "The 'Warrington Litter Network' of 24 ward-based Facebook Groups has existed since October 2020. With the addition of the award-winning 'Warrington Litter Volunteers' it has been an absolute pleasure to witness a plethora of 'Litter Teams' from across the town come together to deliver Warrington's Great British Spring Clean 2026 with such an outstanding bag count being achieved."

WLV Team Leader Jill Dance

added, "WLV continues to be a powerful force for good as new teams grow across the town. Our streets deserve to shine and be given the TLC they deserve."

Many volunteers find litter picking to be an incredibly mindful and, a helpful recharge – for physical and mental wellbeing. Once people experience this, they do tend to engage and stay with their chosen team.

Tony added: "We would like to thank our Mayor, Cllr. Mo Hussain for his strong and practical support in 2025-2026. We have a close working relationship with WBC, particularly Ian Brackenbury, which we value very highly."

"WLV Teams are also grateful for the support for kit from Parish Councils (Appleton, Stockton Heath, Grappenhall & Thelwall),

Warrington Voluntary Action and Co-op Community Fund."

WLV have recycled 430,000 Aluminium cans (6 tonnes) since July 2023. In 2024, they began donating cans to the Novelis charity: 174,000 cans (2.5 tonnes) so far. In this way, WLV have helped raise over £8,500, which has helped support the Orford Veterans' Hub charity.

Want to get involved?

You can join a litter team at any time of the year. It can be any network or team that suits you. If you meet them out picking, please say hello and you will be welcomed. Online, you can find more details at litternetworks.org which contains Warrington's 24 local litter network Facebook pages. If you Facebook Message the authors of posts, you will be able to join a future pick.



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Divorce Column

By Peter Wilkinson
Divorce Lawyer at Chambers Fletcher Solicitors

No Fault Divorce

Divorce law in England & Wales changed in a big way 4 years ago—yet in my experience there are still people who are oblivious to it.

So-called 'no-fault divorce' was introduced in April 2022. Under the old law, anyone seeking a divorce had to plead that their marriage had irretrievably broken down and then go on to evidence this by relying on one or more of five "facts": namely, adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, or a period of separation (either two years with consent, or five years with or without consent).

In practice, the old law often meant one party assigning blame but that has now gone. Although in many cases one party does feel that the other is to blame, under the new law there is no longer any need to point the finger. In fact, not only is there no need, there is no mechanism within the divorce process for doing so.

Today, a divorce application simply includes a statement by the applicant that the marriage has broken down irretrievably, and which statement is taken as conclusive. No detail. No blame. No argument.

The ability to contest a divorce has also been dramatically reduced. A respondent can only contest on limited grounds, namely no jurisdiction, invalid marriage, or that the marriage has already legally ended. In the absence of these the divorce will proceed.

But—and this is crucial—while under the new law obtaining a divorce is more straightforward, the same cannot always be said for resolving finances or child arrangements. These issues remain entirely separate from the divorce and are often where the real complexity lies.

No-fault divorce has made the process for legally ending a marriage simpler and, in many cases, less confrontational. But it is only one part of a much bigger picture arising from marriage breakdown and getting the right advice at the outset with respect to the whole picture can make a significant difference to the shape of things to come.

For expert advice and assistance regarding divorce and related matters please get in touch – whatever your circumstances we can help.

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Winwick Dementia café launch proves a huge success



A new dementia-friendly café in Winwick has made a fantastic start, with more than 40 people attending its very first session

The Forget Me Not Café, held at Winwick Community Centre, is a joint initiative between Winwick Parish Council and Warrington Borough Council, created to support people living with dementia and the families who care for them.

The opening session saw a brilliant turnout from across the community, with visitors enjoying tea, coffee, soft drinks and cakes in a warm and welcoming environment.

Local ward councillor for Burtonwood and Winwick, Cllr Stuart Mann, who also serves as a parish councillor in Winwick, attended the launch and praised the community response.

"It was lovely to see so many people come together for the very first session. Over 40 people through the door on day one shows just how needed this kind of support is in our community. Something as simple as a cup of tea and a conversation can make a huge difference."

Cllr Mann also paid tribute to the officers who helped bring the café to life.

"I want to personally thank Laura and Ange from Warrington Borough Council, who have been absolutely instrumental in getting this café up and running. Their hard work, care and commitment have made today possible."

The café will now run every Thursday from 10:30am to 12pm at Winwick Community Centre, offering a relaxed and supportive space for people living with dementia and their carers.

Plans are already in place to expand the sessions, with future activities set to include craft days, live music, quizzes, and opportunities to access health advice and support services.

Residents are being encouraged

to attend and spread the word, particularly to those who may benefit from the support on offer.

Volunteers are also welcome to get involved and help the café grow.

For more information, or to offer support, contact: Laura on 07971 030851 or Ange on 07977 943700

The Winwick café also forms part of a growing network of dementia cafés and support groups across Warrington, giving residents access to support throughout the week.

Across the borough, these include:

Monday: Monday Fun Social at Westy Community Centre (10:30am–12pm) and Love to Move / Music & Memory at the Salvation Army on Academy Street
Tuesday: Forget-Me-Not Café at St Paul's Church, Penketh (10am–12pm)

Wednesday: Reminisce Café at Westbrook Library (10:30am–12pm), Memory Lane Café at Grappenhall Community Library (1:30pm–3pm), Lymm Memory Café at Lymm United Reformed Church (1:30pm–3pm), and Dementia Activities Group at The Gateway on Sankey Street (1:30pm–3:30pm)

Friday: Forget Me Not Memory Café at the Sunflower Café in Culcheth (12:30pm–2:30pm), Fun Friday Social at Greenwood Community Centre (10:30am–12:30pm), and the Forget Me Not Café at Burtonwood Library (10:30am–12pm)

These groups provide a mixture of social interaction, music, games, gentle exercise and conversation, helping people living with dementia remain connected while also supporting carers.



Five hidden signs of Prostate disease

By Dr Ovais Qureshi MBChB, MRCP, IBLM, Chief Medical Officer myGP Clinic

I've been practising medicine for over a decade, and one pattern I see repeatedly is this: men arrive at my clinic having quietly lived with prostate symptoms without ever getting checked. They do this not because they're careless but because the signs are easy to explain away, and nobody had told them what to look for.

The fact most men don't know is that the prostate grows continuously throughout a man's life, and by his 50s, half of all men will have an enlarged one. This is why most men may put symptoms simply down to old age.

Five signs I'd want you to take seriously

1. Your urine stream has quietly changed

Nothing dramatic - just a little weaker, or a little slower, maybe you have to wait a moment before it starts, or you feel as though you never fully empty. As this creeps up over months, most men assume it's simply ageing and carry on however it's a sign that your prostate is quietly enlarging and pressing on the urethra. I'd rather know about it early.

2. You're waking up in the night to urinate more than once

One trip per night is ok but if you're making two or three bathroom visits between midnight and morning, that's worth raising with a doctor. An enlarged prostate can reduce how much the bladder holds overnight. Not to mention that fragmented sleep does real

damage to your heart, hormones, and mental health over time.

3. Sex feels different

This is the symptom men most rarely mention. Pain during or after ejaculation, a noticeable drop in ejaculatory force, blood in semen, or worsening erections can all point to prostate inflammation or, in some cases, early cancer. Stress and age take the blame far more often than they should. If something has changed, please tell your doctor.

4. A persistent ache in your lower back, pelvis, or hips

If it doesn't improve with rest or painkillers, pay attention. Pelvic and lower back discomfort is a recognised symptom of prostatitis, and when prostate cancer spreads beyond the gland, the bones of the pelvis and spine are frequently the first place it travels. It's probably something else entirely - but this is exactly the kind of symptom I want my patients to mention, especially in combination with the other symptoms.

5. You just feel off

If you're feeling tiredness in a way you can't explain, make sure

you get this checked. A persistent, low-grade fatigue that sleep doesn't fix, combined with a quiet sense that something isn't quite right. As a GP, when a patient tells me they "just don't feel like themselves," I listen carefully. Your body often signals a problem long before the tests confirm it.

What I'd recommend you do

Go and speak to your own GP. A PSA blood test and a brief physical examination can tell us a great deal. If you're over 50, over 40 with a family history of prostate cancer, I would encourage you not to wait for symptoms before having

this conversation.

If there is any concern at all, your GP will refer you for an MRI. A multiparametric prostate MRI is now the gold standard for good reason it gives us a precise, detailed picture of the gland without going straight to biopsy. It picks up significant cancers early, rules out unnecessary worry when everything looks fine, and means that if a biopsy is needed, it will be targeted and accurate.

Prostate cancer detected early is nearly always curable.

The most important thing you can do today is simply book the appointment.



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Spotlight on Local History with James Balme

A visit to Norton Priory - The most excavated monastery in Europe

Close to Warrington in nearby Norton stands the historical remains of Norton Priory. The site is officially the most excavated monastery in Europe.

A visit to the ruins that remain today is a journey well worth making and one that appeals greatly to those who are interested in the medieval history of the area. I decided to visit once again recently having not been to the Priory for many years.

The weather was glorious and the remains of the monastery was bathed in warm spring sunshine. A visit here is always a peaceful one and there is a very calming atmosphere throughout the site. As well as exploring the remains of the monastery a visit to the special exhibition in the museum was a must to see the stunning artefacts on display found at Norton Priory over many past excavations. Even today excavations are still taking place on site and I've little doubt that they will continue in the coming years with many more historical objects unearthed.

Norton Priory Museum & Gardens, situated at Norton on the edge of Runcorn, is one of Cheshire's hidden gems and considered to be the most important monastic remains in Cheshire. The site was also once home to a medieval church. Today

the site comprises of the remains of the abbey complex dating from the 12th to 16th centuries, and also an 18th century country house. The Priory was established in the 12th century as an Augustinian foundation by William Fitz Nigel, 2nd Baron of Halton and was raised to the status of a mitred abbey in 1391. Two families have links to the site and these being the Dutton family and the Brooke family. The Duttons supported and engaged with Norton Priory as a monastic site up until the Dissolution of monasteries in 1536 during the reign of king Henry VIII. The Brooke family made Norton Priory their home and Sir Richard Brooke building a Tudor house at the site and incorporating part of the abbey secured the site as the home of the Brooke family between 1545 and 1921, when they left the site to move to a new home in Worcestershire.

Today Norton Priory boasts a world class museum where literally thousands of objects discovered at the site are on public display bringing the history of the priory to life. One of the most impressive objects in the museum on display

today is the double life-size St Christopher statue. It is very likely that this statue would have been commissioned to mark the site attaining abbey status in 1391. The priory was designated a scheduled monument on 24th July 1928 and later to be given Grade I listed status in April 1970. If you are visiting Cheshire then a visit to Norton Priory is a must for anyone who has an interest in seeing the wonderful remains and artefacts that remain at the priory to this day.

Over 700 history video features can be viewed for free with many other local history films shot around Cheshire and beyond by visiting my dedicated history channel, youtube.com/@Tvpresenter4history



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Comedy legend to appear at Lymm Festival

LYMM Festival is back – this year from 18 to 28 June, as usual, the full programme comprises over 50 events, with something for everyone including a comedy legend.

Highlights this year include a return of outdoor theatre, which has been a popular part of the Festival in the past, with a family-friendly theatre production from Illyria. They will be performing "The Three Musketeers" at Cherry Tree School on Thursday 25 June.

The event also welcomes a comedy legend to Lymm. Ricky Tomlinson – star of 'Brookside' and 'The Royle Family' as well as films including 'Mike Bassett England Manager', comes to the Statham Lodge Hotel on Tuesday 23 June. His show, entitled "Retirement? My A*se!", will cover his humble upbringing, his time as a political activist, and of course his experiences as a household name.

Tickets for both of these events are already on sale ahead of the full Festival programme which will be announced in mid-May.

Other events to look out for include all forms of music – from folk, classical and jazz to rock and pop – and Festival favourite Gerald Dickens, great grandson of the legendary Charles, will be back to deliver another of his brilliant one-man shows.

As usual, the first event is the FoodFest which takes place on Thursday 18 June, when the village

will have stalls from local restaurants and traders, together with a variety of street entertainment.

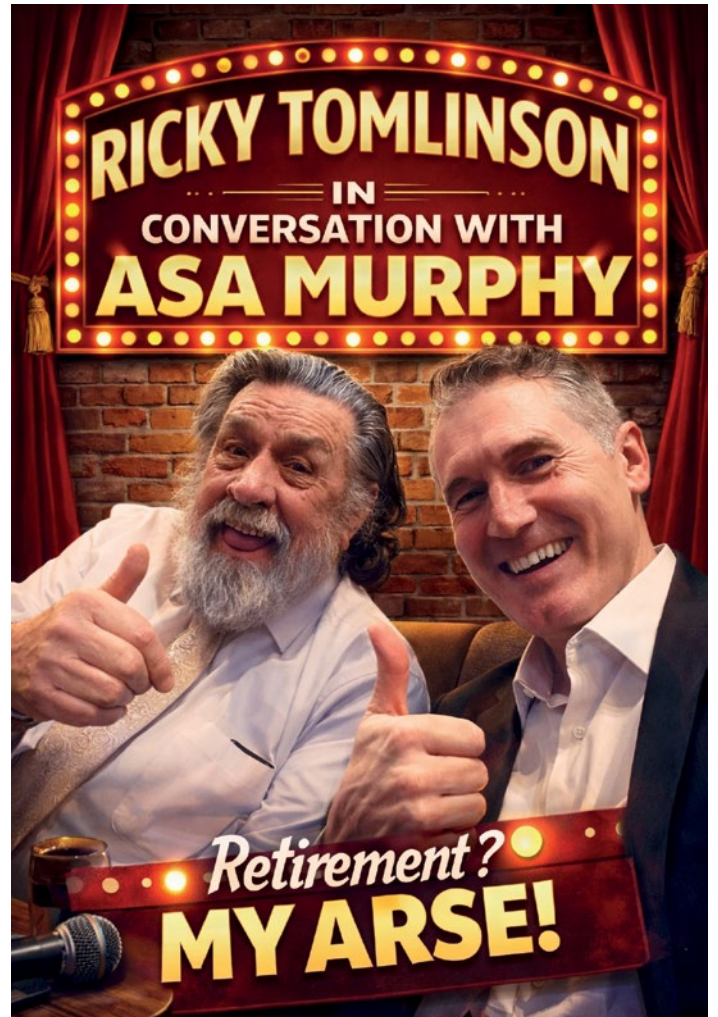
Lymm Historic Transport Day – will be on Sunday 28 June this year, with the usual amazing vehicle parade through the village, followed by a full day of exhibits and activities including canal boats and steam traction engines.

And there's some special visitors this year too including the Jeep from 'Jurassic Park', a flight simulator and Fred Dibnah's Land Rover!

For youngsters, Lymm Library will be running a programme of dinosaur-themed events and the regular Festival Family Fair will be on Saturday 20 June with a varied programme of activities and events.

And of course there is the Scarecrow Trail – themed this year on "Songs as Scarecrows". Lymm residents will be letting their imagination run wild as they turn well-known song titles into scarecrows.

Full event details are listed on the Festival website and in the guide which will be distributed throughout Lymm in mid-May. Many ticketed events sell out before they take place, too, so early booking is always recommended.



Lymm Festival

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HMRC Targets Directors' Loans in crackdown on Small Business Tax gap

HMRC has launched a major consultation that could significantly change how small companies report transactions with their owners.

At the heart of this is a proposed clampdown on directors' loan accounts and loans to shareholders (known as "participators"). While that may sound technical, the practical impact is straightforward: if you run a limited company and move money in or out beyond salary and dividends, these changes could affect you.

Why is HMRC acting?

The move is driven by the growing "tax gap" – the difference between the tax HMRC believes should be paid and what is actually collected. In 2024, the small business corporation tax gap reached £14.7 billion, representing around 40% of total liabilities. HMRC believes a significant portion of this shortfall is linked to how funds move between companies and their owners.

In its consultation, HMRC points to a "failure to distinguish between the company's and the participator's monies", highlighting how easily the line between business and personal finances can become blurred.

What is being proposed?

In essence, HMRC wants much more detailed reporting of transactions between close

companies and their participators. This would go far beyond current requirements. It would include not just obvious items like dividends, but also cash movements, bank transfers, asset sales and purchases between the company and its owners, and any other transfer of value. In practical terms, almost every financial interaction between a company and its shareholders could fall within scope.

Directors' loan accounts under the spotlight

Directors' loan accounts are very much in the spotlight. These have long been an area HMRC monitors closely. At present, if a company lends money to a shareholder and it is not repaid within the required timeframe, a temporary tax charge arises—commonly known as Section 455 tax. This can be reclaimed once the loan is repaid.

Under the new proposals, however, HMRC is seeking far greater visibility. Companies may be required to report the date and amount of repayments, details of any loans written off or released, and ongoing movements throughout the year. The intention is to ensure that the correct tax is paid at the right time, and that any reliefs claimed are justified.

Who will be affected?

In terms of who is affected, the answer is simple: almost all small limited companies. Under UK

tax rules, most owner-managed businesses are classed as "close companies", meaning they are controlled by a small number of shareholders or directors. The proposals would therefore apply widely across the small business sector.

They would also extend to corporate shareholders and group structures, which HMRC acknowledges could add complexity where there are significant intra-group transactions.

What is excluded?

There is one notable exception. Payments already reported through PAYE, such as salary, are likely to be excluded as HMRC already receives this information through its Real Time Information system. Beyond that, however, very little appears to fall outside the proposed scope.

Why this matters

While the stated aim is to tackle tax avoidance, the impact will be much broader. Directors' loan accounts are often used for entirely legitimate reasons, such as managing cash flow or dealing with timing differences between income and personal drawings.

The concern for many business owners is not the principle, but the practical burden. More detailed reporting will inevitably mean more record-keeping, greater scrutiny from HMRC, and less flexibility in how funds are moved.



Thomas Coyne and Stuart Barr

Even relatively straightforward transactions could require careful tracking, including dates, amounts and counterparties.

The bigger picture

Viewed more broadly, this is part of a clear direction of travel. HMRC is increasingly focused on close companies because of the overlap between ownership and control. Where the same individuals both run and benefit from a company, the boundary between company funds and personal funds can become less distinct.

HMRC believes this creates both opportunity for deliberate non-compliance and a higher risk of genuine mistakes.

What should business owners do?

For now, these proposals are not yet law. However, they send a strong signal about where things are heading. Business owners would be wise to take note. Keeping company and personal finances clearly separated, maintaining accurate and up-to-date directors' loan accounts, and avoiding informal or undocumented transactions will become increasingly important.

The reality is that the days of treating the company bank account as a flexible extension of personal finances are likely coming to an end.

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Tony Smith bids fond farewell

THE Halliwell Jones Stadium was filled with nostalgia and emotion as The Warrington Wolves Foundation hosted a special farewell event for the club's former head coach, Tony Smith, before his upcoming move to Indonesia.

After 25 years in British rugby league—eight of which were spent transforming "The Wire" into a powerhouse—Smith is trading the touchline for the tropics.

The 59-year-old Australian confirmed he and his wife are emigrating to Indonesia to be closer to their children, who are currently living in Australia.

The farewell event, hosted by Pete Emmett in the Greenall's 40/20 Lounge and organised by Foundation stalwarts Alex and Roy Chicken and volunteers, served as a reunion for the iconic 2009 squad that ended Warrington's 35-year trophy drought. Club legends in attendance included: Lee Briers, Adrian Morley, Mike Cooper and Paul Wood.

While Smith's career at Warrington was defined by three Challenge Cup titles (2009, 2010, 2012) and two League Leaders' Shields (2011 and 2016), his next chapter is strictly recreational.

The move to Indonesia offers a "six-hour flight" to visit his children rather than a 24-hour one, and Smith is eager to embrace a slower pace of life.

He has expressed excitement about pursuing hobbies far removed from the high-pressure

world of Super League coaching, including fishing in Indonesian waters and learning how to surf.

"I really enjoyed my nine years at the club," Smith told supporters. "I'd like to think the club has progressed... and is now in a position that means they can go on to bigger and greater things".

He said one of his greatest memories during his time at the club was the homecoming parade after the club won at Wembley during his first season in charge.

"I've never seen anything like it before. It was incredible and something I will never forget."



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