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Editor's Opinion

THERE comes a point when difficult conversations can no longer be postponed. For Warrington Borough Council, that point has long since arrived.

For years, concerns over the council's commercial borrowing and mounting debt were dismissed by some as political point-scoring. Those warnings now look less like opposition rhetoric and more like an uncomfortable reality.

The figures speak for themselves. The council has a projected budget gap of almost £179 million over the next four years, while ministerial envoys (at considerable cost) have been forced to step in with exceptional financial support simply to enable the authority to set a legal budget. Around £40 million of savings have already been identified, but everyone accepts that much deeper cuts lie ahead.

Every service is now under review as the council attempts to resize itself to live within its means.

No-one should underestimate what this means.

Behind every line in a budget report are real people. It means difficult decisions about libraries, community facilities, leisure provision, staffing levels, highways, environmental services and the countless local services residents often take for granted until they disappear.

The irony is that many of those hardest hit will be the very people who had no part in creating the problem.

To its credit, the current administration has finally accepted that the previous commercial investment model exposed the council to unacceptable levels of risk.

The authority has acknowledged that while the investment programme generated significant income over many years, falling asset values, rising borrowing costs and years of unaudited accounts have left the borough facing an unprecedented financial challenge.

But accepting responsibility is only the beginning.

Residents deserve complete transparency. They deserve to know what services are under threat, what alternatives are being considered and what the long-term recovery plan looks like. Difficult decisions are easier to accept when people understand why they are being made.

Equally, this should not become a blame game played out across party political lines. The focus must be on finding solutions rather than scoring points.

The envoys, who choose to remain invisible, remain overseeing the council's recovery, and their presence serves as a constant reminder of just how serious the situation has become. Warrington's reputation has taken a significant

knock, yet this remains a borough with enormous strengths – thriving businesses, world-class logistics, advanced manufacturing, a growing economy and resilient communities.

Those strengths should not be overshadowed by financial failure.

The road ahead will be painful. There will be service reductions that few people welcome. There will be difficult choices that no councillor ever wanted to make.

But there is one thing that would be even worse than making those decisions: pretending they can somehow be avoided.

Warrington has faced adversity before and emerged stronger. It can hopefully do so again. That will require honesty, transparency, political courage and, above all, a shared determination to restore confidence in the council's finances.

The time for denial has passed. The time for rebuilding has begun.

As always we will try our best to fly the flag for Warrington - but it is becoming increasingly difficult!



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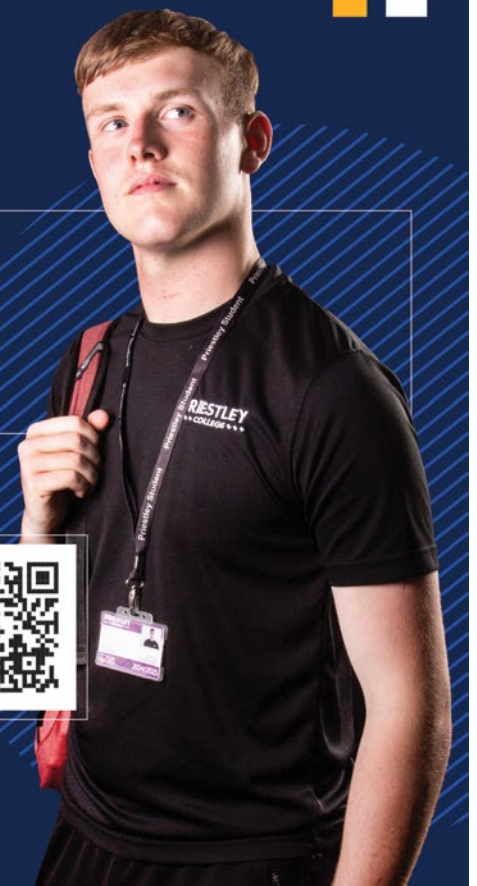
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Local teenager crowned Miss Teen Pageant Girl UK 2026 in hometown triumph

A 15-year-old community ambassador from Warrington has been crowned Miss Teen Pageant Girl UK 2026 in a remarkable achievement that came at only her second-ever pageant competition.

Isabelle "Issy" Thompson claimed the national title at the Pageant Girl UK Finals held at Warrington's Parr Hall, making the victory even more special as it took place in front of a hometown audience.

The teenager, who has quickly become known for her community involvement and ambassadorial work, impressed judges throughout the competition and secured the prestigious crown just six months after entering the world of pageantry.

Winning a national title at such an early stage in her pageant journey marks a significant accomplishment for the young Warrington resident,

who has demonstrated confidence, dedication and commitment both on and off the stage.

Pageant organisers praised Issy's rapid progression and standout performance throughout the finals.

Event founder Holly Pirrie said: "Huge congratulations to Isabelle on being crowned Miss Teen Pageant Girl UK 2026! What makes this achievement even more special is that just six months ago, Isabelle was completely new to the world of pageantry. To see her grow in confidence, embrace every opportunity, and do so well has been wonderful to see!"

"As a proud Warrington girl, it

was particularly lovely for Isabelle to win the title at finals held right here in her hometown. From the moment she stepped into her interview, the judges were blown away, and she continued to impress them throughout the competition.

"We are so proud of everything she has achieved and cannot wait to see what this next chapter brings for her as Miss Teen Pageant Girl UK. Congratulations, Isabelle – you truly deserve this success!"

For Issy, who was kindly

sponsored by The Hive WAI, the victory represents the beginning of an exciting new chapter as she takes on her national title and ambassadorial responsibilities over the coming year.

Having gone from pageant newcomer to national winner in just six months, the Warrington teenager has already proven herself to be one of the competition's rising stars, with her hometown crowning providing the perfect backdrop to a memorable achievement.



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Skyline Sizzle BBQ supports local young people



WARRINGTON Youth Zone was delighted to welcome more than 50 representatives from businesses across Warrington and the wider region to its annual Skyline Sizzle Business BBQ.

The event provided an opportunity for local businesses to network, build new connections and learn more about the life-changing work of Warrington Youth Zone, all while enjoying a fantastic summer BBQ in the heart of the Youth Zone.

Guests were inspired by the moving story of Dom, a local young person whose journey has been transformed through the support of Warrington Youth Zone. His personal experiences highlighted the lasting impact that the charity has on the lives of young people and reinforced the importance of continued support from the local business community.

Adding to the fun was a lively Beat the Goalie challenge, with participants putting their shooting skills to the test. A special thank you goes to Rylands FC for providing

the goalkeeper, who kept everyone on their toes throughout the afternoon. Mayor of Warrington, Cllr Sagheer Zaman joined in the challenge alongside guests from across the business community.

Warrington Youth Zone would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Birchwood Shopping Centre, whose generous support as the event's Silver Sponsor covered the cost of the delicious BBQ, helping to make the event such a fantastic success.

Jamie Patterson, Head of Fundraising at Warrington Youth Zone, said: "I am so pleased with the huge turnout for our Skyline Sizzle. To see the whole business community coming together in Warrington is fantastic and we really hope to welcome back our supporters very soon!"



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Healthwatch announce new joint leadership appointments

INDEPENDENT health champions Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton have announced new joint leadership appointments.

Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton have appointed Lydia Hughes as Joint Chief Executive Officer and Norman Holding as Joint Chair, marking an exciting new chapter for the two organisations as they continue to champion the voices of local people and drive improvements across health and social care services.

The appointments reflect a shared commitment to strengthening collaboration across Warrington and Halton, ensuring residents have

a powerful and independent voice in shaping the services they rely on.

As Joint Chief Executive Officer, Lydia Hughes will lead both Healthwatch organisations, working closely with local communities, partners and stakeholders to ensure people's experiences are at the heart of decision-making. Lydia brings extensive experience in leadership, community engagement and partnership working, with a strong track record of delivering positive outcomes for local

residents.

Lydia said: "I am honoured to take on the role of Joint Chief Executive Officer for Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton. Both organisations play a vital role in ensuring that local people's voices are heard and acted upon. I look forward to working with our dedicated teams, volunteers, partners and communities to strengthen our impact and help shape health and care services that truly meet the needs of local people."

Joining Lydia in the new leadership structure, Norman Holding has been appointed as Joint Chair of Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton. Norman brings a wealth of experience in governance, strategic leadership and community advocacy. In his role, he will provide oversight and support to ensure both organisations continue to deliver effective, independent representation for residents across Warrington and Halton.

Norman said: "I am delighted to be appointed Joint Chair of Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton. Healthwatch has a unique and important role in ensuring the views and experiences of local people influence the development and delivery of health and social care services. I look

forward to working alongside Lydia, our boards, staff and volunteers to build on the excellent work already taking place across both areas."

Simon Fogel, Group CEO for ECS, said: "We are pleased to welcome Lydia Hughes as Joint Chief Executive Officer and Norman Holding as Joint Chair. Together they bring a combination of strategic vision, leadership and community focus that will help ensure Healthwatch remains a trusted and influential voice for local people. We are confident their appointments will support the continued growth and success of both local organisations within the ECS family of Healthwatch contracted services."

Healthwatch Warrington and Healthwatch Halton remain committed to listening to local people, gathering insight on their experiences of health and social care services, and ensuring those views help shape better services for everyone.

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people using health and social care services. It listens to the experiences of local people, helps them find information and advice, and works with service providers and decision-makers to improve care and outcomes across communities.



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Nominations open for rebranded Warrington Business Awards Plus

Nominations are now officially open for the newly rebranded Warrington Business Awards Plus.

Organised by Warrington Chamber Plus, the highly anticipated event will take place on Thursday, 15 October at the Halliwell Jones Stadium.

The 2026 awards hold historic significance as they celebrate the landmark 150th anniversary of both the Warrington Chamber of Commerce and their key community partners, the Warrington Wolves.

Local businesses and charities across all sectors are invited to submit their entries to shine a light on the town's thriving economy.

The re-launched event features a comprehensive lineup of categories designed to recognise outstanding achievement, community spirit, and innovation:

- Business of the Year
- Small Business of the Year
- Business Man of the Year
- Business Woman of the Year
- Young person/Student of the Year
- Entrepreneur of the Year
- Outstanding Achievement
- Charity of the year? Community impact award?
- Employer of the year
- Lifetime achievement (This award will be decided solely by the WCP Board)

Sponsorship opportunities are also still available but going fast.

While enthusiasm for the ceremony is high, high-profile sponsorship opportunities are still open for organisations wanting to align their brand with this historic milestone.

Becoming a sponsor offers unparalleled visibility among the region's premier business leaders, innovators, and stakeholders.

To secure a sponsorship package or to request more details, companies should contact the event coordinators directly via email at business.awards@warringtonchamberplus.co.uk



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Spotlight on Local Business

Building success across projects, partnerships and community

By Laurence Barrow

It's been another incredibly busy and rewarding month, with plenty happening across Barrow Electrical, our local community commitments and Warrington Rylands 1906 FC.

At Barrow Electrical, the team continue to be extremely busy delivering projects across the UK. Closer to home, we're proud to be working on another iconic Warrington building, Parr's Bank Hotel. It's a stunning property with so much history, and it's a privilege to be involved.

Our work continues across a wide range of sectors, with LED upgrade programmes being delivered across numerous retail properties around the UK, helping clients reduce running costs, improve efficiency and increase profitability. Alongside this, our national power and data installations continue to progress, while our compliance teams remain committed to ensuring our clients' properties are safe, efficient and fully compliant.

The team have recently returned from the Isle of Man following further compliance works, and we've also been proud to support a fantastic charity in St Helens by providing our services free of charge. We hope the work completed will bring real benefit and help support the incredible work they do.

Outside of projects, it's been great to continue building relationships with clients and the wider business community. We enjoyed a fantastic evening sponsoring a Warrington Wolves fixture, welcoming clients and guests for some excellent hospitality.

It was a brilliant opportunity to spend time together away from the day-to-day running of business.

We were also delighted to attend the grand opening of the newly renovated Daresbury Park Hotel. I was genuinely impressed by the transformation and look forward to visiting again soon.

Community remains a huge part of what we do, and it was a pleasure to attend the Cheshire Community Foundation summer gathering at Cholmondeley Castle. Meeting so many inspirational people and hearing their stories was a fantastic reminder of the incredible work happening across our communities.

We also enjoyed the latest Warrington Chamber Plus meeting with Andy Carter, discussing the future of NHS services and the improvements planned for Warrington's facilities.

On a personal note, it's been a month full of special moments. I celebrated my birthday, while my eldest daughter Ruby turned 16 and enjoyed her prom. It really does make you realise how quickly time flies. We also had a brilliant family evening watching Take That at the Etihad Stadium, thanks to Cheshire's Mix 56 — an incredible show and a memory we'll all treasure.

I was also fortunate enough to spend time with Ged Mason from the Morson Group, someone I

hugely admire both professionally and personally. Conversations with people who inspire you are always valuable, and I came away feeling incredibly motivated.

At Warrington Rylands 1906 FC, pre-season is now underway, bringing plenty of excitement around the club. It's been fantastic seeing the new signings in action, welcoming supporters back and seeing everyone reconnect after the summer break. Improvements around the ground continue, alongside further progress as we build towards an exciting future for the club.

Finally, the countdown is on for the North West Cancer Research Golf and Gala event at the incredible Fairmont Cheshire, The Mere. Having seen the venue and the transformation that has taken place, I genuinely believe it's going to be a very special occasion. With the launch of the newly renovated venue, the opening of Gordon Ramsay's restaurant and so many exciting things happening around the site, it feels like a real privilege to be part of such an important moment.

I honestly cannot put into words how humbled I am by the support we've received. The businesses and

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individuals getting involved have been incredible, from football clubs and rugby clubs to watchmakers, Dames and Sons. I'm nervously excited to see the day arrive and will share more in next month's column.

Plenty more to come.



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First female Chair of St Joseph's charity



HEALTHWATCH Warrington & Halton Chief Executive Lydia Hughes has made history after being appointed as the first female Chair of the Board of Trustees at St Joseph's Family Centre, succeeding long-serving Chair Richard Broadbent.

Lydia takes over the role at a significant time for the Warrington-based charity, which has been supporting children, young people and families across the borough for decades through a wide range of services designed to improve wellbeing, resilience and life opportunities.

Bringing extensive experience from the health, voluntary and community sectors, Lydia has led Healthwatch Warrington in championing the voices of local people and helping shape improvements to health and social care services. Her appointment marks a new chapter for St Joseph's Family Centre as it continues to develop its services and strengthen its impact across the community.

Lydia said: "I am honoured to have been appointed Chair of St Joseph's Family Centre. The charity has an outstanding reputation for

supporting children and families when they need it most, and I look forward to working alongside my fellow trustees, the leadership team and dedicated staff to build on its success and help shape its future."

She also paid tribute to her predecessor, adding: "Richard Broadbent has provided exceptional leadership and guidance during his time as Chair, and I would like to thank him for his dedication and commitment to the charity."

Richard steps down after serving as Chair during a period that saw the charity continue to expand its services while responding to increasing demand from families across Warrington. His leadership has been widely recognised for helping ensure the organisation remained financially resilient and focused on delivering high-quality support.



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On the other side, I'm proud to introduce the next generation — my son, Tom — who's now officially joined the team. Tom's a fully qualified, time-served fitter with experience in carpets, vinyl, laminate, and LVT. He's worked with many different fitters over the years, learning every part of the trade from the ground up. Tom actually started fitting carpets at just 14 and knew straight away it was the career for him. By learning his trade independently before joining me, he's shown that everything he's achieved has been earned through hard work and dedication. As a dad, that makes me incredibly proud.

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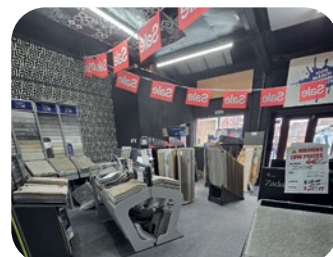
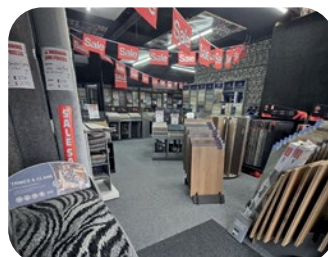
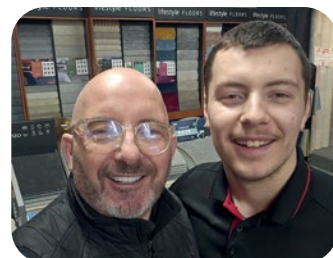
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Partnership project delivers vital flooding protection for Sankey Bridges

A new drainage system and pump station to tackle flooding in Sankey Bridges, Warrington, costing £964,000, has now been completed.

In September 2025, Warrington Borough Council announced a vital flood risk management project to protect 62 homes and businesses along Liverpool Road, Sankey Bridges.

The project, designed and project managed by the council's in-house engineering and flood risk management team, has now been completed, on schedule.

The collaboration between the council, the Environment Agency, and United Utilities addresses an urgent local need while enhancing long-term climate resilience. The council secured partnership funding totalling £946,000, with £546,000 coming from the Environment Agency (Flood Defence Grant in Aid) and £400,000 coming from United Utilities (Sustainable Water Fund).

Liverpool Road sits in a natural low point between Hood Lane and Marina Avenue, causing heavy rainfall to accumulate rapidly and inundate the drainage network, resulting in flooding. It is a recognised hotspot, with severe flooding recorded since the 1960s, and major events in 2007, 2018, and Storm Christoph in 2021.

The project has delivered a new drainage system along Liverpool Road and Hood Lane, including

drainage kerbs and an automated pumping station to capture and safely remove surface water. A dedicated power supply and backup overflow connection to the United Utilities network have also been installed to improve resilience.

The scheme also includes erosion protection works within the Sankey Canal and the resurfacing of the highway and footway between Marina Drive and Hood Lane. The road profile has been improved to help direct water more effectively into the drainage system, reducing the risk of flooding.

Key benefits of the project include:

- **Climate resilience:** Increased local capacity to manage future extreme weather events.
- **Infrastructure relief:** Diverts surface water away from the combined sewer network, reducing foul flooding risks.
- **Sankey Canal restoration:** Project provides a vital water supply to the Warrington section of the canal, maintaining a critical biodiversity corridor following the closure of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station.
- **Keeping Liverpool Road moving:** By reducing the risk of flooding, the project aims to ensure Liverpool Road stays open and travel disruptions are minimised.

Cllr Hans Mundry, Leader of Warrington Borough Council, said: "It's great news that this project has been successfully designed and delivered by our in-house team. We know the deep distress and anxiety repeated flooding has caused local residents for decades, exacerbated by the impact of climate change.

"We're committed to doing everything possible to minimise future flood risks. Because flood risk funding is extremely limited, I am incredibly pleased that our collaboration with United Utilities and the Environment Agency successfully secured £946,000 to deliver this

vital work. Combined with the road resurfacing, this project represents a massive improvement for the local community."





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Divorce Column

By Peter Wilkinson
Divorce Lawyer at Chambers Fletcher Solicitors

Parenting Plans – What Are They and Why Have One?

When parents separate, one of their biggest concerns is often what arrangements will be made for their children. In many cases, parents are able to reach agreement regarding child arrangements but would like those arrangements to be recorded in writing.

One option which can work well for some families is a Parenting Plan. This is a written agreement which can cover a wide range of matters, including with whom the children will live, arrangements for them to spend time with the other parent, arrangements for special occasions, handover arrangements, holidays and how parents will communicate with each other.

Whilst parents can, of course, record arrangements in a thread of emails or text messages, a Parenting Plan has the advantage of bringing everything together in one structured document. It encourages parents to think carefully about matters they may not otherwise have considered and provides a clear point of reference if disagreements arise in the future.

Having child arrangements recorded in a Parenting Plan can help to minimise misunderstandings, reduce the scope for future disagreements and provide greater certainty, not only for the parents but, depending upon their age and understanding, also for the children.

Whilst a Parenting Plan is not the same as a court order and is not in itself legally binding, it may prove helpful if court proceedings later become necessary, as it provides a clear and comprehensive record of the arrangements that were agreed. Because both parents have carefully considered and signed the Parenting Plan, there is less scope for disagreement about what was intended than there may be with an exchange of emails or text messages.

Whilst there is never a 'one size fits all' solution, where parents are able and willing to communicate and work together for the benefit of their children, a Parenting Plan can be an effective way of recording their agreement and providing a solid foundation for successfully implementing those arrangements.

For expert advice and assistance regarding divorce, financial matters or child arrangements, please get in touch. Whatever your family law situation, we can help.

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Crowdfunding continues as sun shines on festival



CROWDFUNDING is ongoing to secure the future of next year's Stockton Heath Festival which was blessed with sunshine at this year's event.

Volunteer organisers of this year's Festival put on a great show of art, culture and heritage attracting 1000s of participants to over 50 events spanning four days.

With some hailing the Festival as 'the best yet' and 'varied with a good mix of activities', several events were sold out well in advance of the Festival weekend, and the volunteer organisers are delighted to hear many visitors are looking forward to next year's event.

The 2026 programme carried a transport theme brought to life by model railways and aeroplanes, boats and bicycles, and vintage and current emergency vehicles. Local schools had work displayed in the Art Exhibition - including the mascot competition which inspired the Festival character Heathy.

Entertainment included The Pickwick Papers, dance groups, Soul Federation, popular fun dog show, Dolly Parton tribute, local musicians and artists, sell-out comedy night, heritage talks and walks, and bands Pink Pumps and Purple Umbrella. There was plenty for children to take part in such as Messy Babes play, pottery, Kiddy Cook, and free art and craft sessions for all ages. The artisan market of over 50 stalls featured many local traders offering a great selection of gifts, crafts and produce.

Congratulations to the Art Exhibition winners. From the judging panel: Le Mons by Christine

Conreen, and the public chose Miles in Autumn by Neil Robertson to win the Tudor Pole prize.

Since 2008, the Stockton Heath Festival has become an anticipated and loved annual event. It is a proud, independent charity, organised by a small core of volunteers supported by Trustees, grants, sponsorship and donations.

Unfortunately, rising costs and reduced funding support has squeezed finances in recent years meaning the future for 2027 and beyond is in doubt unless we act now.

This Festival belongs to Stockton Heath - and so does its future. The volunteer organisers would love you to support the Crowdfunding Campaign and donate what you can toward the £5,000 target here: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/stockton-heath-festival/>

In the words of Bafta-winning writer and Festival patron, Tim Firth: "Few places the size of Stockton Heath could pack so much into one long weekend: classical concerts, contemporary bands, stunning artwork and more."

The 2026 Festival was run in association with Cransley School, and the organisers would like to thank business sponsors and individual donors, grant providers, local press and radio, and volunteers for contributing to another successful weekend.

Without the community coming together this vibrant independent Festival simply could not continue.



Spotlight on Local History with James Balme

A Ramble to Historic Great Budworth

It was a pleasant early summer afternoon when I wandered into the picturesque village of Great Budworth.

Standing just nine miles to the south of Warrington I had read so much about this chocolate box village in the past but the history of its creation had passed me by. I knew that the name of Great Budworth was derived from the Saxon term 'Bode Wurth' meaning 'a place by the water'.

My first stop had to be the imposing church of St Mary and All Saints' that stood proudly on the high ground overlooking the village and greeted any would be visitor to the village. But how old was the church and what was the history of this clearly archaic structure?

The earliest documented history of Great Budworth appears in the

Domesday book when it mentions that a priest was in residence. The church was given to the Augustinian Canon of nearby Norton Priory back in the year of 1130AD by William FitzNigel, Constable of Chester and Baron of Halton. The lord of the manor during the reign of Henry III was Geoffrey De Dutton and he donated to Norton Priory a third of his land to endow masses for his soul. It was after the dissolution of the monasteries that King Henry VIII granted the estate to a John Grimsditch.

But what about the village that we see today on our travels through Great Budworth? It's documented that a school existed here in the

year 1578 and for several centuries the village was owned by the head of Arley Hall who would regularly collect rent from the villagers, but it was Rowland Egerton-Warburton of Arley Hall who in the 1850's paid for the restoration and further improvements to the church. He then also undertook to 'Render it Picturesque' to make it more pleasing to Victorian eyes.

To help in his task Rowland Egerton-Warburton decided to commission architects including a Mr John Douglas. It was John who was to restore some of the cottages as well as his notable work in remodelling the old Georgian inn we know today as the George and Dragon, adding tall rubbed chimneys as well as mullioned

windows and a steep turret.

The village that we see today is the culmination of centuries of building, loving restoration and a village that is proud of its heritage deep in the heart of Cheshire, why not take a look for yourself I guarantee you won't be disappointed. Make sure to go and see the stocks outside the church, the restored Georgian Inn and of course pay a visit to the Old Schoolhouse built circa 1600AD that still stands today in the churchyard.

You can view my history video feature 'Historic Great Budworth' for free by simply visiting my history channel at youtube.com/typresenter4history and searching for Great Budworth.



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Similarly, at Grappenhall Manor, life feels uplifting and homely and the place is alive with activity and connection. At the heart are Home Manager Charlotte, Deputy Manager Jessica, Head of Care Anna, Wellbeing Coordinator Leah and Head Chef Toby.

When you choose Lovett you're choosing a place that sees your loved one as their own, an individual who still has everything to give, and everything to gain, and teams across both homes are highly focussed on making a difference for the elders within their individual communities.

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Community support will decide the future of Warrington Walking Day

WARRINGTON'S treasured Walking Day tradition can only survive with the continued backing of churches, volunteers and the wider community, says Deputy Council Leader Jean Flaherty.

Speaking to Warrington Worldwide at the Walking Day Reborn heritage celebration, Cllr Flaherty thanked everyone involved in staging the event before highlighting the launch of a major heritage project made possible through funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

She said that while the grant would help celebrate and preserve the history of Walking Day, it was not enough on its own to guarantee the tradition's long-term future.

"Today's event is much more than a celebration," she said. "It is an important milestone in protecting one of our town's most treasured traditions – Walking Day."

The funding will support a heritage project celebrating the history and significance of Walking Day, with organisers inviting residents to share memories, photographs and stories to help create a special exhibition due to be unveiled as part of next year's celebrations.

Cllr Flaherty said: "Over the coming months, we want this project to be shaped by the people who know Walking Day best – you. Every story helps us preserve this tradition for future generations."

She explained that delivering this year's event had been a key requirement in unlocking the Heritage Fund grant and said part of the funding would also support the Walk of Witness in the town centre next year.

However, she stressed that grants alone could not safeguard the event.

"While this funding gives us a fantastic opportunity to celebrate our heritage, it is important to recognise what it does not do. It cannot secure the future of Walking Day on its own," she said.

"The long-term future of Walking

Day depends on something much more important than any grant. It depends on all of us."

Calling for continued commitment from the community, Cllr Flaherty urged churches, volunteers and supporters not to let their involvement end with this year's event.

"If we want Walking Day to continue for our children, our grandchildren and future generations, then today's support cannot be a one-off," she said.

"We need communities to continue turning out. We need churches to remain committed. We need volunteers to step forward. We need people to support future events, to give their time, their energy and, where they can, their financial support."

She added: "If Walking Day matters to you, please don't let your support end when today's event finishes. Come to future events. Encourage others to get involved. Support fundraising efforts. Help your church or community group wherever you can."

The heritage project will now begin gathering memories and historical material from local people, with the aim of ensuring Warrington Walking Day's unique history is preserved and celebrated for generations to come.

Cllr Flaherty concluded: "The future of Warrington Walking Day is not someone else's responsibility. It belongs to us all. We have the opportunity to ensure that this remarkable tradition continues to bring our town together for many years to come."

The format of this year's event changed after Warrington Borough Council cancelled the traditional event to save the £70,000 road closure and security costs due to ongoing austerity measures.



Family keep the spirit of traditional Warrington Walking Day alive

THE spirit of Warrington Walking Day stood firm as five dedicated sisters and their brother took to the streets to keep the town's historic tradition marching forward.

Sisters Patricia, Pauline, Maria, Bernadette, and Carmel (née McKeown), alongside their brother Patrick McKeown, refused to let the historic community highlight fade.

Stepping out as the proud vanguard of the event, the McKeown siblings represented decades of local heritage.

The family's walk maintained the classic hallmarks of the historic event.

The procession officially

commenced from Bank Park at exactly 10:30 am. Three traditional pipers led the way, filling the park and town centre with music.

Approximately three dozen community walkers joined the family along the route.

Warrington Walking Day has brought the community together since its founding by its original creators in 1834. While broader participation has shifted over the generations, the McKeown family's

walk ensures that the values of community unity, tradition, and local pride remain firmly active in the heart of Warrington.

The McKeown family's poignant march serves as the perfect prelude to "Walking Day Reborn – Standing Together in Faith," a massive,

reimagined community festival taking place tomorrow, Saturday, 4 July 2026.

The official, near 200-year-old traditional parade was cancelled after Warrington Borough Council was forced to pull direct funding due to a financial crisis.



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A Summer tax cut for families – and a big change in how businesses pay HMRC

It's not often we get to open this column with genuinely good news from the taxman, so let's make the most of it. This month, two developments worth knowing about: a temporary VAT cut that could make the school holidays a little cheaper for families (and busier for local attractions), and a proposal from HMRC that could change how every employer and VAT-registered business in the country pays its tax.

The Great British Summer Savings: VAT down to 5%

In May, the Chancellor announced a temporary cut in VAT from 20% to 5% on a range of family-focused activities, running from 25 June to 1 September 2026 – neatly covering the school summer holidays. The government has badged it the "Great British Summer Savings" scheme, and it covers three main areas.

First, children's meals. Where a meal is sold specifically as a children's meal – think the kids' menu at your local café or restaurant – it now attracts VAT at 5% rather than 20%. The key word is "specifically": a small portion that happens to appeal to children doesn't count. It has to be marketed, priced and presented as a

children's meal.

Second, children's and family tickets for cinemas, theatres, shows and exhibitions. Adult-only tickets stay at 20%, but here's a generous quirk: a family ticket that includes at least one child qualifies in full, adults included.

Third – and this is the broad one – admission to family attractions. Theme parks, zoos, farm parks, soft play centres, museums, aquariums, heritage sites and observation attractions all qualify, and at these venues the 5% rate applies to every visitor's ticket, whatever their age. Sport is excluded, as are pay-per-ride charges within an amusement park (the gate price qualifies; the individual rides don't).

For families, the benefit depends on businesses passing the saving on and many will, because it's a great marketing hook for a competitive summer.

For business owners in the hospitality and leisure trade, though, this is a compliance job with a very short fuse. Tills and accounting software need the new rate set up correctly, staff need to know which sales qualify, and everything has to flip back to

20% on 2 September. There are also wrinkles around advance bookings: if you took payment at 20% for a visit falling within the relief window, you can adjust the VAT and the government's expectation is that customers are refunded the difference. Annual passes and season tickets priced above a single-entry ticket don't qualify at all. If any of this applies to your business and you're not sure you've got it right, please do get in touch – a temporary rate change is exactly the sort of thing that trips up an otherwise spotless VAT record.

Paying HMRC: soon to be direct debit only?

The second development is quieter but potentially further-reaching. On 23 June, HMRC opened a consultation proposing that VAT and PAYE liabilities should be paid by direct debit – not as an option, but as a requirement.

At present, most businesses pay by bank transfer, choosing when to press the button. HMRC's logic is that many late payments aren't down to unwillingness to pay, but to missed deadlines and payments allocated against the wrong reference. A direct debit collected automatically



Thomas Coyne and Stuart Barr

after the VAT return or payroll submission would, in theory, solve both.

In practice, plenty of business owners will feel uneasy about handing HMRC the keys to the bank account. Cash flow timing matters enormously to small businesses, and there are legitimate questions about what happens when a payroll correction is needed, a VAT figure is disputed, or an amount is simply wrong before the money leaves the account. Under the proposals, paying by another method – even in full and on time – could itself attract a penalty. HMRC estimates around 2.4 million businesses and employers would be affected.

To be clear, nothing has changed yet. This is a consultation, open until 16 August 2026, and the details – exemptions, safeguards, timing – are all still up for grabs. That's precisely why it's worth engaging now. If you have strong views on how this would affect your business, respond to the consultation or let us know and we'll feed your concerns into our own response.

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New chapter as Neil Kelly transitions role after 20 years of leadership



WARRINGTON Wolves Community Foundation is proud to mark a significant and emotional moment in its history, as Founder and long-serving Chief Executive Officer Neil Kelly transitions into a new role.

Neil will become Head of Community, Identity and Heritage, with Lee Mitchell stepping into the position of Chief Executive Officer.

This transition represents far more than a change in role – it is a celebration of over two decades of leadership, impact, and unwavering commitment to the Warrington community.

For more than 20 years, Neil Kelly has been at the heart of the Foundation's journey. From its early beginnings to becoming one of the region's most respected charities, his vision and passion have helped

shape an organisation that now delivers life-changing programmes across education, health and wellbeing, disability, inclusion, and community engagement.

The Foundation's recently published Social Value Impact Report highlights the scale of that impact, with more than £8.5 million in social value generated in 2025 alone, delivering over £10 of social return for every £1 invested.

The transition has been carefully planned to ensure continuity, stability, and continued growth.

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