

Insight magazine

February / March 2026



Above signs new five-year lease at Europa Boulevard

Local business woman launches peer support network
Boosting Warrington's business community

**Warrington confirmed as hub for
Northern Powerhouse Rail**
A key transport hub for the North



■ Paul Smith, Station Director Mix 56, Ryan Green Cadent Engineer, and Paula Steer Director of Cadent North West.

Cheshire's Mix 56 Partners with the UK's largest gas distribution network

Cheshire's Mix 56 has announced a new partnership with Cadent, the UK's largest gas distribution network. The partnership will spotlight Cadent's expanding programme of community engagement across Cheshire.

The collaboration will focus on sharing positive, practical stories about how Cadent supports local people, community hubs and vulnerable customers in towns and villages across the county.

Through this new partnership, Mix 56 will use its on-air output, news coverage and digital platforms to highlight Cadent's work in areas such as community safety, fuel

poverty support and education around gas and energy. Features will include regular interviews, community bulletins and campaign bursts that bring to life the projects Cadent delivers with local partners, including initiatives similar to its Centres for Warmth model in the North West.

Listeners will hear more about local schemes that help residents stay safe, warm and informed, with clear signposting to support and advice. The partnership aims to ensure that communities across Cheshire understand what help is available, how Cadent is investing in local infrastructure and how to

get involved in community activity linked to its programmes.

Paul Smith, Station Director at Cheshire's Mix 56, said:

"This partnership is all about putting community stories centre stage. Mix 56 is rooted in Cheshire, and Cadent is playing a major role in supporting local people and projects. Together, we'll use our airwaves and online channels to highlight the work being done on the ground and make sure our listeners know about the support and opportunities available to them."

Paula Steer, Director of Cadent's

North West Network, said:

"Our primary job here at Cadent is to ensure a constant and safe supply of gas to keep people warm in their homes, across Cheshire, as well as provide your gas emergency service. We're also a key player in making the energy you need cleaner and greener. We provide vital services and are proud to do so. This new partnership with Cheshire's Mix 56 will be a great way to introduce you to the team which makes this happen, as well as raise awareness of projects – supported by us – which help people with cost of living, energy efficiency or other challenges."

The Causeway appoints new Business Development Manager

The Causeway, formerly known as St James Business Centre, on Wilderspool Causeway in Warrington, has appointed Ashley Alderson as its new business development manager.

This strategic appointment marks a new chapter for The Causeway as it re-positions itself as a leading digital hub for enterprise, innovation, and collaboration in Warrington.

Ashley brings a wealth of experience in driving business growth and supporting organisational development, having worked extensively with businesses across multiple sectors. His proven track record in fostering partnerships and delivering impactful growth strategies will play a pivotal role in strengthening The Causeway's position as a catalyst for economic development in the region.

In his new role, Ashley will work closely with national and regional leaders, with a particular focus on the digital and creative industries, to support tenants and attract new businesses to the centre. His objectives are to enhance the tenant experience whilst ensuring The Causeway contributes fully to the wider economic landscape of Warrington.

A key part of Ashley's remit will be the introduction of networking events designed to bring together industry leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs. These events will feature high-profile speakers and sector specialists, offering invaluable insights and fostering knowledge exchange. By creating these platforms, Ashley aims to build a vibrant community where businesses can connect, collaborate, and thrive.

"I am honoured to join The

Causeway at such a transformative time," said Ashley Alderson. "My goal is to create opportunities that empower businesses to grow and succeed, while positioning Warrington as a centre of excellence for innovation and enterprise."

The Causeway remains committed

to supporting businesses of all sectors, and Ashley's appointment underscores its dedication to driving growth and creating a dynamic environment for success.

For more information about The Causeway and upcoming events, please contact aalderson@thecausewaywarrington.co.uk



From the Chief Executive

Stephen Fitzsimons —

2026 is already proving to be a year of immense upheaval and change. At the local level, we await the arrival of two Chief Executives who will have a significant influence on the economic future of Warrington.

Sarah Smith will take the reins at the Council and Nick Walkley for the (Cheshire & Warrington) Combined Authority. Both have impressive track records of delivery, with Nick in particular especially relevant for our agenda, having experience in construction and house building through Homes England. We will be meeting them both in their first few weeks to press home the importance of commerce for Warrington's prosperity.

Internationally, Donald Trump continues to cause chaos with an increasingly erratic set of objectives. Some still admire his

strongman approach and wish that his "America First" principles could be applied in the UK. Perhaps the headlines do suggest a level of success, with US economic growth of 4.3% eclipsing our underwhelming 1.4%. However, protectionism, blackmail and coercion all damage trust in the long term. Canada has quickly grown overseas trade by 14% - more than the value lost from its next-door neighbour. The European Union and the UK will be looking to establish some space between themselves and their formerly reliable trading partner. Add in some disgraceful comments about NATO troops disengaged from the action in Afghanistan and our economic future will feature the US less and less.

On a more positive note, the recent confirmation of Northern Powerhouse Rail was most

welcome. It is nearly 200 years since the world's first passenger railway line started construction just north of Warrington, between Liverpool and Manchester. Fast forward to today and the journey isn't much improved since Stephenson's Rocket first made it! The last mile through Manchester at Castlefield is especially problematic, causing delays and cancellations as far away as Chester and North Wales. £45bn has been set aside and 2030 can't come soon enough to make these urgent improvements. Crucially for Warrington, it unlocks the regeneration of Bank Quay Station, potentially creating 10,000 new jobs and 4,000 homes.

It was also great to see the Northern Nuclear Alliance (NNA) deliver some high profile events for Nuclear Week in Parliament. Employment in the sector rose by 16% at the last count for Cheshire



& Warrington, most of them at Birchwood Park. Amentum will be creating an additional 3,000 roles across the UK as it secures contracts from the likes of Rolls Royce. The NNA itself has increased membership by 60% in the last 12 months as the UK government embraces its clean growth agenda.

It's going to be a chilly few weeks, however St Patrick's Day is on the horizon so that will keep me motivated!

Take care,
Stephen

J&K Ross expands product offering with new cleaning and hygiene range

J&K Ross, the Warrington-based PPE and workwear specialists, have expanded their product offering with the introduction of a dedicated Cleaning and Hygiene range.

The new collection complements the company's well-established PPE portfolio, giving customers a way to maintain safety and cleanliness across their entire working environment.

The strategic move reflects J&K Ross' belief that protection is about more than what is worn. Clean, hygienic and well-maintained workplaces are an essential part of keeping teams safe, healthy and confident at work particularly in busy industrial, manufacturing and commercial settings.

The new range covers four key categories: paper, cleaning, wipes and skincare. Paper includes everyday essentials such as paper towels, blue roll and hygiene roll. Cleaning offers surface cleaners, floor cleaners, premium washing-up liquids, bleaches and degreasers for routine and deep cleaning. The wipes category features industrial,

disinfectant and hand wipes for quick, effective cleaning across tools, equipment and shared spaces; and skincare provides hand cleaners, protection products and sun cream to support comfort and wellbeing on the job.

All products are sourced from trusted industry brands including Espro, Kimberley Clark, Lucart, SC Johnson Professional and Dirteeze, each selected for their performance, reliability and workplace suitability.

On launching the new range Neil Wilcock, Managing Director at J&K Ross, said

"For over forty years, our focus has been keeping people safe at work. This new range extends that commitment. By bringing cleaning, hygiene and PPE together under one supplier, we're helping organisations simplify ordering, streamline deliveries and maintain high standards of safety across every part of their workplace."

The new product range will complement the existing range of PPE and workwear including safety footwear, hi-visibility jackets, vests and trousers, gloves, goggles, and

maternity wear.

Customers will benefit from personal service, practical product advice and quick delivery nationwide, backed by a team who understand the demands of real working environments.

Businesses interested in exploring the new range or requesting an introductory discount can contact J&K Ross on 01925 645645 or visit www.jkross.co.uk/products/Workplace-Safety/Cleaning-Hygiene



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Stephen Fitzsimons, Chief Executive

Local business woman launches peer support network

Warrington's business community is about to get a boost, as local business woman Sandra Tinker brings The Alternative Board (TAB) to the area, a peer advisory network designed to help business owners support each other and grow together.

Sandra, who lives in Antrobus, is launching TAB Cheshire to bring together small and medium-sized businesses across Warrington, St Helens, Northwich, Congleton and the wider region. The idea is simple: local business owners meet regularly in small, confidential groups to share challenges, swap insights, and help each other make better decisions, because running a business shouldn't mean going it alone.

TAB works by bringing together local SME business owners from different, non-competing sectors into small advisory boards. Members meet monthly to share insights, solve problems, and support each other's growth, combined with regular coaching sessions to keep momentum going between meetings.

With over 25 years' experience leading teams and driving change across major organisations including Bauer Media and The Guardian, Sandra brings a wealth of strategic insight and people-focused leadership to her new

venture. After years commuting to London while running her equestrian stud in Cheshire, she is now using her expertise to support local business owners and help set the region on an upward trajectory.

Sandra said, "Having worked in corporate environments for many years, I know the pressures that business owners face. It can be isolating carrying the weight of big decisions alone. I wanted to bring my experience home to Warrington and create a space where local business leaders can connect, learn from each other, and move forward with confidence. TAB's peer boards are the perfect way to make that happen."

Sandra plans to establish three TAB boards across the region, each including a charity member to ensure the network gives back to the local community.

As Chair of Governors at Kings Leadership Academy in Warrington, a Director of the British Hanoverian Society, and a Trustee for Remarkable Autism in Lowton, Sandra is well-known across the area. She holds two postgraduate coaching qualifications, and her approach is rooted in empathy, collaboration, and genuine care for helping others succeed – qualities that resonate strongly across Warrington's business network.

The Alternative Board (TAB) is a global organisation that has been bringing business owners together since 1990. Sandra's Warrington hub represents an important milestone in enhancing TAB's presence across the North West and reflects the growing demand for collaborative, supportive environments where business leaders can gain clarity, confidence, and accountability.

Members of Warrington Chamber of Commerce, WIBN, and local

business networks are encouraged to connect with Sandra to learn how TAB's peer advisory boards can help strengthen their decision-making and unlock new opportunities for growth.

For more information about The Alternative Board, or to express interest in joining a board, visit www.thealternativeboard.co.uk or contact Sandra directly at sc.tinker@thealternativeboard.co.uk



Barrow Electrical: Momentum, people and the power of community

As Warrington-based Barrow Electrical enters its 20th year in business, it feels like a particularly exciting moment to reflect on how far they've come and where they are heading, says MD Laurence Barrow.

The company has evolved, becoming stronger and more structured and capable, while staying true to its principles.

Laurence said: "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 was particularly looking forward to the Warrington Youth Zone Annual Awards. Barrow Electrical was proud to sponsor the event.

"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 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 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.





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The LSIP Business survey is now live!!!

Calling all Cheshire & Warrington employers!

LSIPs are shaping the future of skills, training, and recruitment in our region — and we want your voice at the table.

At Cheshire & Warrington LSIP, our mission is to ensure that technical education and training truly reflect the evolving needs of local businesses. That's why they are asking businesses about their requirements to help them:

- Influence what skills and training are offered
- Help providers target gaps and avoid duplication
- Strengthen your sector's talent pipeline
- Make it easier to navigate funding, training providers, and support

Your insights will directly shape the skills system — making it work better for your business and our region.

Please complete our survey now!





Above signs new five-year lease at Europa Boulevard

Infrastructure and engineering company, Avove, has signed a new five-year lease at Europa Boulevard, Warrington, marking a significant step in the company's ambitious growth plans.

Operating from more than 20 offices, hubs and depots across the UK, this latest addition will further enhance Avove's national presence, allowing the company to build on recent momentum and continue delivering essential support to clients in water, wastewater and vegetation management sectors.

Extending to 5,000 sq ft, the new office space is strategically

located in Warrington, providing excellent transportation links for clients and colleagues, with easy access to the M62. The newly refurbished office space will support the firm's national operations, providing a welcoming environment for teams to collaborate.

The building is set against a scenic woodland backdrop, with walkways providing access to a nearby brook. In keeping with Avove's sustainability commitments, the building boasts an ECP rating of A, hosts a range of recycling facilities and provides EV

charging points and ample on-site parking for guests to benefit from.

Greg Williams, framework director said: "As we continue to grow and expand, it's important that we find modern and spacious office spaces to enhance our operations and deliver long-term benefits. We are a local employer, and with this new space located just 1.5 miles away from our existing office, it's a move that makes strategic sense, supporting both our clients and colleagues alike."

"This new facility not only reinforces our sustainability commitments, but it gives our teams access to

an inspiring environment that will help spark the innovation and creativity needed to achieve service excellence across key frameworks."

Avove say they are committed to transforming communities for the better, supporting clients in delivering industry-leading performance against their regulatory targets. It is a commitment that has helped the company earn a spot within the UK's top 100 contractors, cementing its position as an industry leading provider of infrastructure

A new chapter for The George and Dragon, Glazebury

Liverpool entrepreneur Connor Campbell is on a mission to redefine what a family pub can be. In August 2025, he took over The George and Dragon in Glazebury, bringing with him a clear vision to create a welcoming, family-focused venue built on exceptional food, genuine hospitality, and community pride.

From the outset, Connor was determined to challenge expectations. While pubs with play centres are often associated with convenience food and minimal attention to detail, he saw an opportunity to do something different. His focus was on fresh, locally sourced ingredients, elevated pub classics, and a customer experience that places equal value on families and quality.

Finding the right head chef was a crucial step in turning that

vision into reality. After a lengthy search, Connor appointed Rob, whose creativity and leadership in the kitchen have exceeded expectations. Responsible for bringing menu ideas to life, Rob has played a key role in raising standards and reshaping the pub's food offering. His impact has quickly made him a valued asset to the business.

"There's a long-standing stigma around pubs with play centres that food has to be basic," Connor explains. "But that's not what we're building here. We're creating a pub people genuinely love, where families can enjoy great food, warm hospitality, and an experience that feels thoughtful and well cared for."

At its core, The George and Dragon is about more than food and drink. Connor's ambition is to establish a true hub for the community

somewhere residents are proud of and actively want to visit. By investing in people, atmosphere, and consistency, the pub is fast becoming a welcoming space for families, friends, and neighbours alike.

With a clear vision and a strong team in place, The George and Dragon is entering a new chapter. One that demonstrates how local pubs can evolve while remaining firmly rooted in the communities they serve.





Lymm firm launches TaskEnergy to deliver sustainable energy solutions in social housing

Lymm-headquartered Key Integrated Services, a leading mechanical and electrical engineering company, has launched TaskEnergy.

The newly established company, led by industry specialists, will offer a range of sustainable energy solutions for local authorities and social housing providers.

"Given the nationwide focus on net zero, demand for the decarbonisation services will only grow as time goes by," says Mark Poulton, CEO at Key Integrated Services. "The team at TaskEnergy have a wealth of industry

knowledge and contacts and I'm looking forward to supporting them as they expand operations."

TaskEnergy's core offer includes gas appliance installation, maintenance and servicing, as well as a range of decarbonisation services from the design and installation of low carbon systems through to long-term compliance assurance and maintenance. The business has the capability to scale to customer requirements, ranging from 24/7 callouts up to delivering complete turnkey energy solutions.

The new business will be led by Laurence Coatsworth and Gareth

Whyte who have held senior roles at companies including H.E. Simm & Son and Sure Maintenance. Laurence has over 25 years' experience in the social housing sector, and at TaskEnergy he oversees the installation, servicing and maintenance of gas appliances for local authorities and social housing landlords. Gareth heads up the company's renewables team, and his day-to-day focus involves supporting clients as they move to less carbon intensive heating solutions. These include air, ground and water heat pump systems, battery storage as well as solar PV and solar thermal systems.

"We understand the social housing sector, including the challenges facing both tenants and housing providers", comments Gareth Whyte. "Our mission is to become the number one partner to local authorities and social housing providers for the provision and maintenance of compliant high efficiency gas systems and renewable energy solutions. In the long term this will help to make energy bills more affordable and help to tackle fuel poverty."

For further information about TaskEnergy, visit <https://taskenergy.co.uk>

Made Smarter architect awarded MBE in New Year Honours

Alain Dilworth, one of the original architects of the Made Smarter Adoption programme, has been awarded an MBE for services to business growth and digitalisation in the King's New Year Honours List.

Dilworth has played a pivotal role in shaping and delivering Made Smarter since its inception in 2018, working closely with government and industry to design a national programme that helps manufacturing SMEs adopt digital technologies, strengthen leadership capability and improve productivity.

As Programme Manager for the North West adoption programme, delivered by The Growth Company, he oversaw the launch of the £20 million, three-year pilot initiative that established the blueprint for national rollout. He has since worked with the Department for

Business and Trade to develop the adoption model now delivered in all English regions.

In the North West, Made Smarter has engaged with more than 2,300 manufacturers, supporting over 400 technology projects that are forecast to create almost 2,000 new jobs, upskill nearly 3,500 roles and add £287 million to the regional economy.

Commenting on the award, Dilworth said: "This was completely unexpected and a lovely surprise, and I would like to thank His Majesty for bestowing this honour upon me. At the same time, I see this as recognition of the Made Smarter team, past and present, who have been fundamental in turning an ambitious idea into a programme that is delivering real impact for manufacturers across the country."

After a 25-year career in manufacturing, Dilworth moved into economic development with the North West Development Agency before joining The Growth

Company, where he has delivered a number of regional and national government-funded programmes.

To learn more visit: madesmarter.uk



Cheshire and Warrington tourism tops £4bn for first time since Covid

Cheshire and Warrington's tourism sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience, with the visitor economy surpassing £4bn for the first time since the Covid outbreak – recording 59.3 million visitor days in 2024 – even as businesses navigate significant financial pressures.

A new national economic impact report reveals the region's visitor economy was worth £4.32bn in 2024 – up 10.7 per cent on the previous year and matching the 2019 pre-pandemic figure. Total visitor numbers reached 59.3m, a 5.7 per cent increase year-on-year.

And although Warrington is not generally seen as the main tourist area in the region, visitor days in the borough increased by 12 per cent compared to 9.9 per cent in Cheshire West and Chester and 11.6 per cent in Cheshire East.

Overnight stays overall showed encouraging growth, with 3.8m people choosing to stay one night or more in Cheshire and Warrington – a 1.4 per cent rise on 2023 and surpassing the 2019 figure of 3.69m.

However, the data also highlights the pressures facing the region's hospitality sector. While total tourism employment rose 3.9 per cent to 39,473 people, serviced accommodation businesses saw a 4.2 per cent decline in jobs – from 4,769 positions in 2023 to 4,569 in 2024 – reflecting the challenging operating environment for hotels and guest houses grappling with increased costs, tax burdens and regulatory pressures.

The region's leaders acknowledged both the sector's strength and the headwinds it faces, emphasising that the forthcoming Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority – with its multi-million-pound budget and enhanced powers including skills and transport investment – will be crucial in

supporting businesses while building on the destination's world-class attractions.

These include Chester's Roman history and the world's oldest racecourse, Warrington's Gulliver's World theme park, and the UNESCO World Heritage site at Jodrell Bank's Discovery Centre.

Chester Zoo recently reported a record 2.13m visitors passed through its gates in 2025, while more than 200,000 people enjoyed the launch of Lapland UK at Capesthorne Hall in November and December, suggesting the growth continued last year.

Regional Performance in 2024:

- Cheshire East: Visitor days increased from 14.99m to 16.02m; visitor economy valued at £1.12bn (up 11.6 per cent); employing 10,479 people
- Cheshire West and Chester: Visitor days rose from 31.44m to 32.9m; visitor economy now worth £2.48bn (up 9.9 per cent); employing 22,441 people
- Warrington: Visitor days grew from 9.66m to 10.4m; visitor economy valued at £717.93m (up 12 per cent); employing 6,554 people

Jamie Christon, chair of Marketing Cheshire and CEO of Chester Zoo said: "Reaching £4bn and matching pre-pandemic levels demonstrates the fundamental strength and appeal of our destination. However, we're acutely aware of the cost pressures, tax increases and regulatory challenges facing our tourism businesses – particularly in the accommodation sector. As we work with the proposed Combined Authority, supporting our businesses through these headwinds while maintaining growth will be paramount. Our world-class attractions continue to draw millions of visitors, but we must ensure the policy and operating environment allows

tourism businesses to thrive and invest in their future."

Jean Flaherty, deputy leader of Warrington Borough Council and Marketing Cheshire board member, who leads for the visitor economy on the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Shadow Board said: "These figures show our visitor economy's resilience in challenging times. The £4.32bn contribution supports nearly 40,000 jobs, but we recognise businesses are facing significant pressures. The forthcoming Combined Authority will give us tools to support the sector – through better transport, strategic investment and a united voice on the challenges facing tourism businesses. We're committed to sustainable growth that works for both businesses and communities."

Sarah Callander Beckett, chair of the Destination Cheshire Tourism Forum and owner of Combermere Abbey said: "Breaking through the £4bn barrier while businesses face such significant challenges shows both the quality of our offering and the determination of our tourism operators. The diversity of attractions – from Delamere Forest

and Tatton Park to Jodrell Bank, BeWILDerwood and The Ice Cream Farm – continues to draw visitors.

"However, the decline in serviced accommodation employment is a concern that reflects the cost and tax pressures across the hospitality sector. Tourism leaders across Cheshire are working together not just to attract visitors, but to ensure our businesses have the support they need to weather these challenges."

Colin Potts, chair of Destination Chester added: "Chester's performance – with 30.59 million visitors and a £2.48bn contribution to Cheshire West and Chester's economy – shows the city's enduring appeal. Our blend of 2,000 years of history with contemporary attractions and world-class hospitality continues to resonate. However, we cannot ignore the pressures on our sector and as we celebrate this growth, we must also advocate strongly for policies that allow tourism businesses to invest, employ and continue delivering the experiences that make Chester one of Britain's most loved cities."



Local businesswoman appointed Chair of national franchise body

Warrington-based Home Instead's COO Ruth Brown has been appointed to one of the most influential roles in UK franchising.

Ruth, Chief Operating Officer of the Stretton-based home care company, Home Instead, has been named Chair of The British Franchise Association (BFA) board following a vote at the organisation's annual general meeting in December 2025.

Ruth becomes only the second woman to hold the position since The BFA was formed in 1977, marking a significant milestone both for the association and for women in business leadership.

She succeeds outgoing Chair Paul Thompson, founder of Water Babies, and will represent thousands of franchise businesses across the UK during her tenure.

Catharine Chalton, Owner of Home Instead Wirral North, Wirral South and Chester, was reappointed as a franchisee board member and re-elected as the franchisor and franchisee representatives on the board of the European Franchise Federation.

Ruth has been a key part of Home Instead's leadership team during a period of sustained growth, helping to support local franchise owners to deliver high-quality care, create jobs and make a positive impact in their communities.

Speaking about her appointment, Ruth said: "It's a real honour to be appointed Chair of The BFA. Franchising plays a vital role in local economies and communities, and I'm proud to represent a sector that creates meaningful jobs and supports small business owners across the UK."

Pip Wilkins QFP, CEO of The BFA, said: "Ruth brings a wealth of experience to the role, and her leadership within Home

Instead has been exemplary. Her appointment is fantastic news for the association and the wider franchise community."



Local estate agency builds for growth with support from HSBC UK

Warrington independent property specialist Belvoir Sales & Lettings is laying the groundwork for further growth following a change in ownership, after securing a six-figure funding package from HSBC UK.

Belvoir Warrington, now led by director Lauren Hughes, plans to expand its sales operations and strengthen its presence in the North West. The business is focused on expanding its sales team, including bringing in an in-house sales negotiator and lister, while outsourcing specific tasks to improve productivity and service delivery.

Since the HSBC UK funding was secured, the town's Sankey Street branch has already recorded a strong performance, with a eight per cent uplift in lettings year-on-year and 72 per cent of its portfolio now covered by a rent guarantee policy. Looking ahead, Belvoir aims to grow turnover by 10 per cent, representing a significant year-on-year increase.

This renewed growth strategy follows on from a recent acquisition of the estate agency branch from founders Gary and Amanda Pemberton.

As part of the acquisition, all seven members of Belvoir Warrington team were retained, safeguarding local jobs and providing the foundation for future growth.

Lauren Hughes, Director at Belvoir, said: "This is an incredibly exciting new chapter for myself and Belvoir Warrington. With the support from HSBC UK, we've been able to position the business for

sustainable growth, whilst also ensuring we continue to invest in our people. My focus is on expanding our sales offering, driving efficiency, and continuing to deliver the high-quality service our clients expect. We've already seen encouraging results, and I'm confident that the business will go from strength to strength."

Arti Patel, Client Manager at HSBC UK, added: "We're proud to support Lauren and the entire Belvoir Warrington team as they drive towards the next stage of growth. The branch's plans to expand and enhance operations reflect the strong potential of the local property market, and we look forward to seeing the business continue to flourish under Lauren's

leadership."

Belvoir Group, one of the UK's largest independent property franchises, currently operates more than 170 franchise offices nationwide, and specialises residential lettings, property management, residential sales, and property-related financial services.



Board the Living Well Bus for your cervical screening

The Living Well bus, delivered by Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, will be providing mobile cervical screening tests in Warrington, over the next few months.

The bus will be offering drop-in cervical screening tests, previously known as a smear test, for people who have missed an appointment, are overdue an appointment or are due to have a test but haven't managed to book an appointment yet.

The bus offers a convenient, private and accessible way for people to go for their cervical screening, without the need for an appointment.

The test should take less than five minutes, carried out by female staff, and the whole appointment should only take around 10 minutes. You can bring someone with you to your appointment, such as a friend, family member or chaperone, to make you feel more comfortable. The bus is also accessible to wheelchair users.

Dates and Locations:

Tuesday 24 February and Friday 20 March, Birchwood Shopping Centre, Dewhurst Road, WA3 7PG - 10am - 4pm

Please note: No other health checks that regularly take place on the living well buses will be available on these specific dates. These are designated sessions for the cervical screening service.

Cervical screening is a test to check the health of the cervix and help prevent cervical cancer. The test looks for certain types of human papilloma virus (HPV) that can cause changes to the cells of your cervix that could develop into cancer, if left untreated. It's not a test for cancer, it's a test to help prevent cervical cancer. Cervical screening is offered to women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 and helps to save thousands of lives each year.

Cabinet member for health, wellbeing and social care, Cllr Maureen McLaughlin, said "Last year, the Living Well bus came to Warrington to provide cervical screenings, and it was a huge success, helping many residents get screened easily and

conveniently. I hope this year many more people can access the service.

"If you're due or overdue, don't miss this chance to drop by the bus on any of the four dates it's in Warrington. It only takes a few minutes to get screened and it could save your life."

"If you can't make it, please book

an appointment with your GP or visit a sexual health clinic to get your test done."

For more information on cervical screening please visit www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/cervical-screening/, and for more information on the Living Well Bus in Warrington please visit www.warrington.gov.uk/living-well-bus



Wain Group secures £140m funding to drive growth

Warrington-based Wain Group, one of the UK's largest privately owned residential developers, has secured £140 million in new funding from Lloyds and NatWest to accelerate its next growth phase.

The financing will help Wain Group to deliver its growth ambitions which include building more high-quality homes, regenerating land and investing further in sustainable development.

Headquartered in Warrington, Wain Group is made up of housebuilder Wain Homes and strategic land company, Wain Estates. It delivers around 1,400 homes each year and specialises in transforming land into thriving communities, creating long-term value for local people, businesses and places.

The £140m package, provided equally by both banks, reflects Lloyds' continued commitment to Wain Group and introduces NatWest as a new funding bank.

Together, their support will help Wain Group progress new developments and continue revitalising strategic sites, strengthening the business for its next chapter of growth.

Lloyds is both the Facility Agent and Security Agent, and NatWest was Hedging Bank.

Andy Campbell, Group Finance Director at Wain Group, said: "Securing this £140m funding package marks a significant milestone for Wain Group as we continue to scale the ambition of our work. It will enable us to deliver more high quality homes,

unlock further strategic land opportunities and strengthen our commitment to sustainable development across the regions we operate. We thank Lloyds for its continued support and are pleased to welcome NatWest onboard as we enter the Group's next phase of growth."

Chris Yau, Director, Housing & Sustainability and Regional Head of North West at Lloyds, said: "Wain Group is a major contributor to housing growth and regeneration across the UK and we're proud to deepen our

long-standing relationship by supporting this important £140m funding package. It reflects our broader commitment to enabling sustainable development, improving housing supply and backing strong regional businesses that are creating long-term value for communities."

Andy Clarke, Director, Corporate Real Estate Finance at NatWest said: "We are delighted to be supporting Wain Group with this facility, which will underpin the company's next phase of growth and enable the delivery

of high-quality homes across future developments. This funding package also reflects our wider commitment to supporting regional businesses, helping to build thriving communities, enable sustainable development, and increase the supply of much needed housing. We are looking forward to building on our current relationship with Wain Group over the coming years."

Lloyds and NatWest were advised by Addleshaw Goddard (legal) and JLL (property). Wain Group was advised by Hill Dickinson.



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.

Cllr 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."



Warrington Youth Zone celebrates the success of young people at annual Youth Awards

Warrington Youth Zone once again went above and beyond to deliver yet another memorable and heartfelt event, recognising the incredible achievements of young people from across the borough.

The Youth Zone is a modern, state of the art charity providing a safe, inspiring environment for young people aged 7-19 (and up to 25 with additional needs) to develop, thrive and aspire.

Each year, they support over 5,000 young people. The Warrington Youth Awards celebrated the diverse talents of its members, featuring three nominees and an overall winner across eight categories.

Every young person nominated showed immense bravery and confidence, standing up in front of an audience of over 250 attendees, including the local business community and dignitaries.

Each was acknowledged for their exceptional talent and achievements, and, although there can be only one winner, all the nominees were champions in the eyes of the Youth Zone.

Warrington Youth Zone were extremely grateful for all the companies and sponsors whose generosity allows us to continue to provide opportunities for young people.

Special thanks were extended to headline sponsors, David Wilson Homes North West, programme sponsor Birchwood Shopping Centre, and to all award and table sponsors who made the event possible.

Claire Jarvis, managing director at David Wilson Homes North West, said: "It was a pleasure to sponsor

the Warrington Youth Awards, as it's a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the achievements of young individuals in the town.

"We are proud of our partnership with Warrington Youth Zone. It carries out essential work to uplift young people and provide greater opportunities for their development, and we look forward to continuing to support its activities."

Dave McNicholl, CEO of Warrington Youth Zone, said: "We were thrilled that the event went so well. It was a real reflection of the amazing community spirit in Warrington with businesses, individuals and community groups there to support children, young people and families.

"I would like to thank everyone who supported the Youth Awards, and particularly those companies who were in a position to sponsor the event. Without their support, events such as the Youth Awards would simply not be possible.

"Finally, congratulations to every child and young person who was nominated for the awards. Every single one of you deserved to be recognised for your achievements."

The event took pride in welcoming the High Sheriff of Cheshire, Joëlle Warren, who praised the Youth Zone's vital role in the community, recognising the nominees for their talent, inspiration, and spirit.

The Mayor of Warrington, Cllr Mo Hussain, also spoke about the significant social value and positive impact the charity has on the town.

The evening was expertly hosted by two young hosts, Freddie and Katie, who demonstrated immense professionalism.

A current member of the Youth

Zone, Freddie, and previous member and former board member, Katie, did a superb job of maintaining the interest of the audience and keeping the event running smoothly.

Warrington Youth Zone is looking forward to continuing their vital work, and working with more businesses this year and beyond. If you are interested in supporting Warrington Youth Zone you can get in touch via email: info@wyz.org.uk



Warrington Youth Zone Associate Board member Natasha Williams who won the Home Grown Award with Laurence Barrow of Barrow Electrical who sponsored the award.

Lifetime Achievement Award for man with vision for Warrington Youth Zone

The man who had the vision to see the former Warrington Youth Club transformed into the Onside Youth Zone, helping to change the lives of thousands of young people and create World Champions, has received a Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition of 45 years voluntary service.

David Briggs MBE, CVO, KStJ, has dedicated over four decades to community and charitable work in Cheshire. He continues to serve as the President of Warrington Youth Zone (formerly Warrington Youth Club), a role he has held in various capacities since 1980.

The former Lord Lieutenant for Cheshire received a standing ovation after being presented with a special Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Youth Zone

Awards evening in front of a packed room of around 300 people.

Briggs oversaw the former Warrington Boys Club become the Warrington Youth Club as it moved into the Warrington Peace Centre, before becoming part of Onside with the new purpose-built Youth Zone.

Chair of the Trustees Mandy Kiddle, said he had ensured a "vision became a reality."

Asking people in the audience to tell 10 people, to tell 10 people about the amazing work of the Youth Zone Briggs added: "This place is really changing the lives of young people."

"Two of those young people have gone on to become World Champions, Luke Littler with darts and young actor Owen Cooper with

a Golden Globe.

"Warrington really is leading the way with young talent. Our ambition is to help more young

people become winners.

"Here we give them a choice from 25 activities every single day, giving them an opportunity to succeed."



£150,000 Bathgate funding helps entrepreneur launch “dream” fitness and wellbeing space

Warrington Chamber Plus members, Bathgate Business Finance have helped an entrepreneur fulfill her dream of launching a unique hybrid fitness and wellbeing space with a loan of £150,000.

Jennifer Hackett, from Wirral, first developed the concept for Nomad Gym & Wellness during her own fitness journey eight years ago. A regular gym-goer, who also practiced yoga and attended meditation sessions, she found herself travelling all over the city region to attend various classes, as no facility offered them all in one place.

Nomad founder, Jennifer, said: “I was frustrated by having to travel all over the city just to be able to do all the classes I wanted to, and it was crazy to me that no-one was putting the gym and other wellness practices together in one place. The idea for Nomad grew from that.”

After researching and visiting leading gym and wellbeing facilities in both the UK and US, Jennifer found that none were bringing the offers together and spotted a gap in the market. Building on her previous entrepreneurial experience - establishing a chain of beauty salons in the city at the age of 19, which she sold in 2008 - Jennifer started scoping potential locations.

She also developed a business plan to take advantage of a gap in the market within the North West area, and combine the best of physical fitness including equipment, instructors and classes, with industry-leading mindfulness, meditation, mental wellbeing and education under one roof, in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Several locations fell through before Jennifer saw a “for sale” sign go up outside Hoylake’s former library. Bathgate was introduced to Jennifer by her accountant Adam Brighouse, from DSG Chartered Accountants, to help develop the finance structure for her proposal to rent the building.

Although largely self-financed by Jennifer, additional funds were required to support the purchase of equipment and fit-out of the business. Bathgate was able to provide a £150,000 loan over five years from its own finance book, The Bathgate Capital Fund.

Jennifer continued: “The location was perfect because it is right in the heart of the community in Hoylake. The team from Bathgate were so excited about the concept and understood my vision from the start, and the fact it is also Wirral business was important, as I wanted to work with local suppliers, so we could create a thriving community together. They

were invaluable in helping us to put a robust finance structure in place for the businesses.

Despite facing stiff competition, with ten proposals from other potential tenants being submitted, Jennifer received the keys to the building at the end of 2024 and following extensive building work and a high-spec fit-out, Nomad Gym & Wellness is now open and welcoming new members.

Jennifer added: “Bathgate came in and did everything we asked them to and more. Not only did they provide the finance we needed to get the project over the line. I knew that I could call them if I had a question and they would pick up the phone and help, which they did.

“This was also my first venture back into entrepreneurship after I took an 18-year break to bring up my children. I’d lost a lot of confidence, but Paul and the team at Bathgate made me feel so comfortable and supported. Nomad has been my dream for eight years, and seeing my vision become a reality with their help has been fantastic. Now I just can’t wait to welcome people into our space.”

Nomad boasts a 2,000 sq ft state of the art open plan gym on the ground floor, with a separate 1,000 sq ft space dedicated to all things mind and wellness. It offers hour-long fitness, Yoga and Pilates classes, and recovery rooms offering red light therapy and compression boots. Memberships

start from £55 - £1.80 per day over the course of a month - and gym sessions and classes also available on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Paul Trickett, BDM at Bathgate Business Finance, said: “Jennifer’s passion for this project shone through from the start and we could see that she had identified a unique gap in the local market. Her understanding of the sector, clear vision for what Nomad would look like, and her community focus made her a pleasure to work with. We are so pleased that The Bathgate Capital Fund was able to quickly provide the finance needed to get the project over the line and we can’t wait to see where Jennifer takes Nomad from here.”

Adam Brighouse, Senior Manager - Corporate Finance at DSG added: “DSG Chartered Accountants have proudly supported Jennifer for over five years and I was thrilled to support her through the financial planning stages of this project as part of DSG’s corporate finance advisory services. Nomad Gym & Wellness has been structured with long-term sustainability in mind, and it’s fantastic to see that thoughtful planning come to life in a successful gym launch. DSG Chartered Accountants will continue to support Nomad Gym & Wellness as they grow, providing ongoing bookkeeping and VAT services through our Virtual Finance Office (VFO).”



Paul Trickett (Bathgate) Jennifer Hackett (Nomad) and Adam Brighouse (DSG). Picture: Andrew AB Photography

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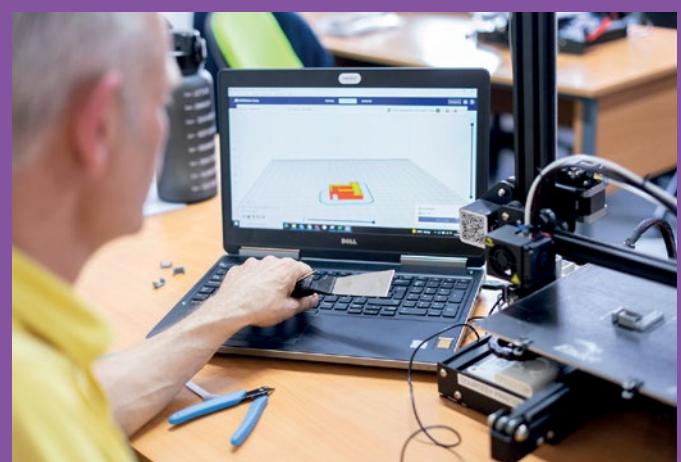
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Warrington placed in “elite” group of locations where household wealth has increased more than twice as fast as UK average

Warrington is in an elite group of “high growth” locations where household wealth has increased more than twice as fast as the UK average, according to a new report.

The Cities Outlook 2026 report, published by the Centre for Cities, says the town’s growth in living standards has significantly outpaced the national average over the last decade.

It places Warrington 5th out of 63 major towns and cities.

While national disposable income grew by 2.4 per cent between 2013 and 2023, Warrington bucked the trend of slow growth, seeing a substantial 5.3 per cent increase.

The report shows national economic output growth of 18.4% between 2013 and 2023. In Warrington, this stands at 41%. Warrington is the only location in the north of England with the highest disposable income, and the only place in this part of the country to have workplace wages above the UK average.

Warrington is also placed in the top 10 in the country for lowest unemployment rates and in the top 10 for the highest number of businesses.

Centre for Cities credits Warrington’s success, along with the other leading towns and cities, to proactive policy choices in key areas including skills development, transport infrastructure, housing, and robust support for local businesses. According to the think tank, these strategic investments have translated directly into higher household incomes and reduced levels of deprivation.

Centre for Cities identifies three key areas for delivering faster living standards growth:

- Strengthening local economies by fostering “cutting-edge” industries.
- Improving access to opportunity through skills support and better transport links.
- Removing constraints on housing and commercial space to allow growing towns to reach their full potential.

Borough Council Leader, Cllr Hans Mundry, said: “This report is excellent news for Warrington and its residents, providing independent confirmation that our town remains a premier destination to live and work. Ranking fifth in the country for growth in living standards, shows our town continues to punch well above its weight, demonstrating an economic resilience that sets us apart from many other large towns and cities.

“Our success is the result of a long-term commitment to creating a business-friendly environment and investing in the essential infrastructure that sustains a modern economy. By focusing on skills, transport, and sustainable housing, we have ensured that the town’s commercial growth translates into real-world benefits for our households and helps to lift residents out of deprivation.

“Looking ahead, these findings provide a strong foundation for a successful, thriving, and prosperous future for our borough. We remain dedicated to supporting



our ‘cutting-edge’ industries and ensuring that every resident has the opportunity to share in Warrington’s ongoing economic success. This report validates our strategic direction and reinforces our reputation as a key engine of growth for the region.”

Meanwhile, Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Shadow Board added: “Warrington’s success reflects our whole region’s strong foundations.

“This report is a real endorsement of our long-term approach to growth. It reflects the hard work of our businesses, communities, and partners, and it also shows the strength and potential of the wider Cheshire and Warrington area as we work together through the Combined Authority to deliver on our ambition to become one of the UK’s fastest-growing areas by 2045.”

Steve Purdham, Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington Business and Advisory Board concluded: “Our economy is powered by a remarkable combination of sectors; from world-class life sciences and global companies like AstraZeneca, to pioneering energy initiatives such as HyNet. This innovative, ambitious business community is driving growth not only in Warrington but across the wider region.”

The findings underline Cheshire and Warrington’s position as a regional leader, showing how sustained local action, strategic planning, and investment in residents can drive measurable improvements in income and opportunity across all our communities.



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No Brainer named a 'great place to work' year after year

No Brainer agency has been recognised as a 'Great Place to Work' – again.

The latest accreditation reflects the firm's focus on culture, wellbeing and creating an environment where people can do their best work.

The search-driven content agency, which is based just off Wilderspool Causeway, received an impressive overall score of 89 per cent.

This is based on direct employee feedback and measures the team's day-to-day experience in the workplace.

In the agency's latest results, particularly high scores were recorded for Justice (99 per cent) and Camaraderie (96 per cent), alongside strong scores for Support (92 per cent) and Respect (88 per cent).

No Brainer's cultural and wellbeing initiatives include regular team away days, a dedicated committee, recognition and rewards tied to its core values, and an annual training budget for every employee. It was first awarded Great Place to Work status in 2024 and has continued to be recognised as one of the region's top workplaces.

Lee Cullen, founder at No Brainer, said: "Achieving this certification

is a proud moment for us because it is based on what our team genuinely thinks and feels about working here every day.

"From regular team away days to wellbeing sessions, to having our own culture and wellbeing committee made up of people at various levels of the company, this is something we place a huge amount of focus on.

"We believe strongly that company culture is something you create every day, earn through the decisions you make and how you communicate, and how you look after the people that are behind the success of a service-based business like ours."

The team recorded a number of standout 100 per cent results in the rankings, including employees

agreeing No Brainer is a physically safe place to work, that they're offered training and development to progress professionally, that management is approachable, and that people are treated fairly regardless of age. This is in addition to 80 per cent of staff saying it is a great place to work – compared to the national average of 54 per cent.



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