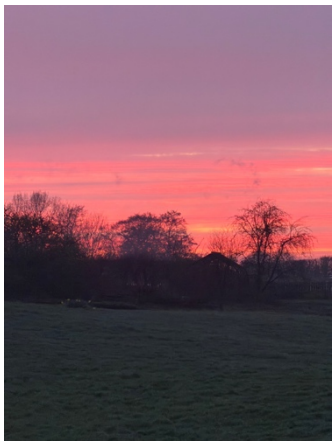
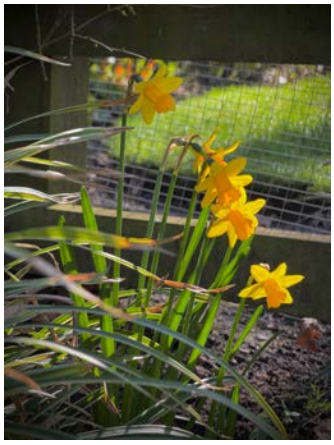
Marbury Ward Update - March 2026

Dear Parish Councilors

Over recent months we have kept our focus on the issues raised most often with us: protecting the rural character of the ward, pushing for highways and drainage improvements, supporting community-led projects and making sure that major infrastructure and planning decisions properly reflect local impact.

We continue to work constructively with officers and local organisations to secure practical results. This update highlights the main issues we are currently progressing and where Parish input remains especially valuable.





Key Updates:

Protecting Marbury's Green Belt and Rural Character

The Green Belt remains central to protecting the identity of our ward. It preserves the separation between villages, safeguards productive agricultural land and helps prevent inappropriate sprawl onto rural roads and into historic settlements.

With changes to national planning policy and pressure on future housing numbers, the redraft of the Cheshire West Local Plan will matter enormously. We are continuing to press for an infrastructure-first approach, priority for brownfield land and proper weight to be given to neighbourhood plans, farming interests and the cumulative effect of development on rural communities.

Council Finances 2026-27*

The Council's 2026-27 budget has been presented as 'balanced', but the financial position remains tight. Pressures in Adult/Childrens' Social Care and SEND continue to be significant and there is a wider concern that temporary fixes and optimistic savings assumptions are masking a more fragile picture.

For residents this includes a 4.99% increase to Council Tax from April 2026. With the huge increase in Taxation centrally, we find this even more disappointing and another year that the Labour Administration has applied the maximum increase before needing to ask residents' permission by way of a referendum. Cumulatively since 2016, when the Labour Group took charge of the Council, that's a £750 increase per year for a Band D property.

As well as voting against this increase, our Conservative Group proposed amendments to direct more visible spending towards highways, gullies, wider infrastructure repairs and fly-tipping prevention. Those proposals were not accepted, but we will continue making the case for stronger investment in the practical services residents notice most.

**Additional information/observations detailed in the Appendices*

HyNet and Wider Energy Infrastructure

The proposed HyNet hydrogen pipeline continues to affect a number of Parishes in and around the ward, including Sutton Weaver, Dutton, Little Leigh, Whitley and Antrobus. While we recognise the strategic importance of industrial decarbonisation, we remain concerned about construction impact, local road use, cumulative infrastructure pressure and the still uncertain, long-term funding model.

We are continuing to monitor the scheme closely and make representations where necessary. For parish councils, early visibility of route impact, traffic management concerns and local pinch points remains particularly important. (hynet.co.uk)

Devolution in Cheshire & Warrington

Devolution will bring a new Cheshire & Warrington Combined Authority, with the first mayoral election due in May 2027. In principle, devolved powers could create opportunities for stronger transport, skills, regeneration and infrastructure planning across the sub-region.

For parishes, the key issue will be making sure rural communities are not overlooked as new structures emerge. We will continue to press for arrangements that strengthen local voice rather than centralise decision-making further away from residents. We are already in regular contact with the Conservative Candidate, Ben Fletch, who will be arranging a number of 'pop-up' events to meet residents across the Ward.

Ben Fletcher Profile
www.cheshireandwarringtondevolution.com

Members' Budgets and Community-Led Projects

Over the last 12 months, Members' Budgets have helped support a range of locally backed initiatives across Marbury Ward. These smaller projects often make a noticable difference to village life and community resilience.

- **New village noticeboards** to improve communication and keep communities connected;
- **Traffic surveys** to build the evidence base for road safety improvements;
- **Community drainage works** to reduce localised flooding and standing water;
- **Restoration of historic fingerpost signs**, helping protect local character;
- **New and improved play equipment** and support for community facilities.

Where Parish Councils are developing new projects, please continue to keep us informed. Early conversations often help us identify the right route for support.

Member budgets will open again in April, so please do get your applications in early.
Member Budgets Applications

Antrobus Community Hub, Tea Room and Shop

After sustained work by the Village Hall team, Parish Council and local volunteers, it is exciting to see the long-awaited Antrobus Community Hub, Tea Room and Shop moving towards opening. This is an excellent example of community persistence, delivering something practical and positive for local residents.

Projects like this matter because they create more than a service: they create a focal point for village life, volunteering and informal support networks. We are grateful to everyone who has kept this project moving, and pleased to help navigate the planning system.

Volunteers and Marbury Country Park

Volunteers continue to make a real difference at Marbury Country Park and across the ward more widely. Their contribution helps keep valued local spaces welcoming, cared for and well used. We are working with council officers to ensure that facilities provided to support Officers and Volunteers are maintained to a better standard and also looking at how these are funded alongside budgets directed at the public areas.

We also remain concerned about proposals to stop locking the park gates at Marbury, proposed as a budget-saving measure. In our view, prevention is usually more cost-effective than dealing with the consequences of anti-social behaviour, misuse or unauthorised access after the fact. We are in dialogue with Officers on this issue.

Mobile Signal, Fibre and Digital Connectivity

Patchy mobile coverage and uneven connectivity remain recurring concerns in parts of the Ward. Better digital infrastructure is now essential for residents, businesses, home working and public safety - particularly in rural areas where poor signal can leave people isolated.

We are continuing to support practical improvements where opportunities arise and will keep backing schemes that improve coverage while delivering clear local benefit. This includes new mast planned in Anderton - not only improving coverage but bringing investment into the Parish.

Highways, Drainage, Parking and Verges

Road condition, drainage, parking pressure and verge damage remain among the most common issues raised with us. We have continued reporting defects, carrying out Ward tours with officers and pressing for scheduled work where concerns are recurring or safety-related.

Outside the usual programme of works, we have recently secured time from the Street Care team / Contractors to trim branches in trouble spots across the Ward and also start to clean the bus stops on key routes like the A559.

For 2026, we are especially keen to work with Parish Councils, housing providers and officers on two persistent themes: problematic parking and the deterioration of verges. Good local evidence - photographs, dates, patterns of use and specific safety concerns is often what helps move an issue up the list.

DIAL-A-RIDE is rebranding to Plus Bus

This borough-wide service is starting on the 1st April 26 and will be operated solely by Changing Lives Together (CLT) it was previously split between 22 contractors.

- Service eligibility includes:
- Over 80s
- Disability Living Allowance / PIP / Attendance Allowance
- Health-related public transport barriers
- With lack of local transport provision

More information on the link

Current Consultations

Title	Link	Brief summary	Why residents may engage
Planning policy consultations	Open page	Planning policy portal covering consultation on the new Local Plan, including Issues and Options on housing, growth, transport, infrastructure and countryside policy.	A key chance for residents and parish councils to influence long-term development across the borough.

Ward Survey

We are currently in the middle of distributing a **Ward Survey** to every house in Marbury – this is a chance for residents to have their say, state priorities and raise any concerns. Surveys are accompanied with a pre-paid envelope.

Return rates are roughly 20%, which is really good – we'd encourage all residents to complete them - deliveries will be completed over the next month.

(It has also been a good opportunity to report any road and pavement defects as we walk/cycle every road, street and lane in Marbury)

Village Events and Local Engagement

One of Marbury Ward's great strengths is the range of events, volunteer activity and civic pride across our villages. From fêtes and parades to local fundraising and events in our village halls, these events strengthen community identity and keep valued facilities viable. **Please do keep us posted on dates and events so we can attend and share across the Ward.**

Thanks again for your continued partnership and all that you do for your communities.

With best wishes

Cllrs Lynn Gibbon, Phil Marshall & Norman Wright

Report it | Cheshire West and Chester Council

Ward profiles | Cheshire West and Chester Council

Out of hours contact information | Cheshire West and Chester Council

Appendices:

More on Council Finances / Budget 2026_2027

Presented and voted through by the Labour Group, Cheshire West & Chester's 2026-27 budget is being presented as 'balanced' and even capable of adding £3m to general reserves, alongside £33m of savings. However, the underlying position paints a far more fragile picture.

• **Financial resilience:** The council's own reporting forecasts a £6.9m in-year overspend for 2025-26 after mitigations, with the General Fund potentially falling to £18.3m - below the council's stated prudent range. Even if £9m is restored over three years (£3m in 2026-27), the balance is still projected around £21.3m by March 2027, leaving limited headroom if pressures repeat.

• **Repeat deficits and one-off fixes:** Recent 'balanced budgets' have quickly turned into deficits (e.g., 2024-25 ending in deficit, then 2025-26 forecast deficit), with shortfalls reduced by relying on capital financing underspends and other one-off measures - actions that do not address the structural gap.

• **Key cost pressures:** Adult Social Care remains the biggest driver of overspend, with costs rising faster than budgets. SEND is the next major risk: the High Needs deficit is forecast to reach £44.6m by March 2026 and even under optimistic assumptions there could be an £11.5m residual hit when the statutory override ends.

• **Delivery risk:** Savings slippage and non-delivery are anticipated, raising the likelihood of mid-year 'corrective actions' (re-phasing, recruitment freezes, deferred projects) that can produce paper improvements without real service stability.

In contract, under **Conservative Administrations in Cheshire West & Chester** there was never a year-end deficit and even under Labour control with a Conservative Government nationally, the council did not finish the year in deficit.

The recent pattern of deficits under Labour locally & nationally clearly highlights the need for tighter financial discipline, realism about risk and budgets that can withstand a Q2 stress-test rather than relying on optimism and diminishing reserves.

Full Budget Report available on the **Link**