

Chair's Report 2022-23

It has been an incredible 12 months for the Town Council, and I would like to thank everyone in Birchwood who has contributed to supporting our community whether as part of an organised group or as an individual. Volunteers are very important in bringing activities and services to our community and the Town Council is very grateful for all your efforts. Without you, Birchwood would be very much the poorer.

During my tenure, the community celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II which was the first time in British history that a Monarch had achieved 70 years on the throne. Sadly, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II passed away on 8th September 2022 and the country mourned her passing. Several months later, on Saturday 6th May 2023, the community celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla with a number of local celebratory events.

The annual Birchwood Carnival, which is supported by the Town Council and other local organisations, is to be held on Sunday 11th June, and will be following the theme of the Coronation. Last year's event attracted possibly the biggest turnout in its history. The weather was glorious, and I think we were all thankful for life returning to some sort of normality.

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on some key successes during the year.

The play area in Locking Stumps has undergone a facelift; some new equipment has been installed and some of the older equipment has been refurbished. The Town Council worked in partnership with Warrington Borough Council to fund and implement this much needed improvement to the playground, and it has been nice to see children taking advantage of the new facilities.

We have also been working with the Borough Council on an appropriate memorial to acknowledge the contribution and sacrifice made by those who worked at the Royal Ordnance Factory, Risley during the Second World War.

The factory itself was like a self-sufficient town, with around 1800 buildings, road and railway networks, canteens, workshops, its own police and fire services and a workforce average of 22,000, most of whom were female.

The memorial and a panel with some historical information is to be installed within Birchwood Forest Park in the next month or so. We hope to add some further information boards in the future in other locations which could form the basis of a Birchwood Heritage Trail.

Congratulations should go to Locking Stumps Primary School which was a Nisa #ChairsForChats winner and was subsequently awarded £500 to purchase a bench.

As the land in Birchwood is owned by multiple landowners, the Town Council is working in partnership with the Primary School to find a suitable location for the bench and it will provide the balance of the funding required for installation.

We are in the process of identifying some other suitable locations within Birchwood to site benches. Speeding traffic has been highlighted as an issue of great concern to the local community. A short survey was carried out to identify the locations which were felt by residents to be of most concern, and we have also worked with our PCSO who carries out radar speed monitoring for advice. As a result, Councillors have resolved to purchase and install a number of Speed Indicator Devices in an effort to raise awareness and tackle this problem. We expect to install the first two devices in the next few months.

The Council has also worked with Your Housing Group and Warrington Borough Council to replace the unsightly concrete bollards which were installed around the perimeter of the Village Green and Powell Avenue with something fit for purpose and more aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

As a result, Your Housing Group installed metal barrier fencing and Warrington Borough Council have put together a scheme for replacement of the concrete bollards located on Powell Avenue.

The Council has been pushing for some refurbishment and general maintenance work to be carried out on the old railway bridge at Birchwood Station. This is a public right of way which was in a state of disrepair and had suffered from significant vandalism. Earlier this year, Warrington Borough Council undertook work to improve the footbridge and the visual appearance of the bridge.

The Town Council has provided funding towards the cost of the annual Service of Remembrance which is organised by Birchwood Lions and it has also awarded funding to a local tots group to purchase some sensory play equipment.

There have been a number of controversial planning applications, the most recent being the application for the redevelopment of the Trident Estate which has generated much local opposition.

The Town Council is supporting residents in their objections and will attend the Development Management Committee Meeting when the date is known.

Day to day, the Town Council Maintenance Team and Officers have been continuing to support the local community, assisting residents with queries and providing services to keep the local area clean and tidy.

The maintenance team remove at least two tipper loads of waste from the streets of Birchwood each week as well as carrying out many other duties such as gritting, removing flytipping, mowing, hedgecutting, maintaining planters, removing graffiti, scraping back footpath edges, reporting abandoned shopping trolleys and visually checking several local play areas each day. This list is not exhaustive as there are many other things that crop up on an ad hoc basis.

Last year, we purchased two new, fully electric Maxus EDeliver3 vans. While these were somewhat more expensive than diesel equivalents, they have shown significant benefits in terms of very much reduced fuel costs, and they lend themselves very well to the type of work which they are used for. As a result, they have enabled us to make a big difference to our carbon dioxide emissions as a council and set us well on our way towards our net zero target for 2030.

Councillors have facilitated meetings with Your Housing Group and Warrington Borough Council to tackle areas of concern such as street lighting and have met with the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss local Policing issues. They have also met with Livewire, the Police and Birchwood Shopping Centre to discuss how to deal with parking issues created on event days.

It has been a busy twelve months and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chair of the Town Council. It is my privilege to represent the residents of Birchwood, but I could not do it alone.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Town Council team and my fellow Councillors for their hard work and support. It is very much a team effort for which I am very appreciative, and I would like to wish my successor every success.

Councillor David Ellis