

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD AT PARKERS FARM COMMUNITY CENTRE, DELENTY DRIVE, RISLEY ON
TUESDAY 27th MAY 2014**

PRESENT: Chair – Councillor Nelson
Clerk – Fiona McDonald
Business and Finance Officer (BAFO) – Gary Crowe
Deputy Clerk – Clare Caddock

12 Residents

1. Opening of the Meeting

The Chair, Councillor Pauline Nelson opened the meeting at 6.30 pm and reported on the local activities of the Town Council during the 2013/2014 municipal year.

The purpose of the Meeting is to comply with the Local Government Act 1972.

2. Minutes of Proceedings

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on the 28th May 2013 had previously been presented at the June 2013 Town Council meeting and signed as a correct record.

Copies of the Chair's Annual Report for 2013/2014 were available for anyone present who wished to see a copy.

This report will be published on the Town Council's website.

3. Chair's Report 2013/2014 – Councillor Nelson

The Chair welcomed residents to the meeting and reported as follows:

Chair's Annual Report 2013/2014

As my tenure as Chair of Birchwood Town Council comes to an end, I am delighted to announce that WREN has awarded the Town Council and the local community funding of £50,000 toward the costs of refurbishing the play and recreation facilities within Birchwood Forest Park.

The consultation began back in May/June 2013 with the Town Council having a stall at the Carnival to engage with the local community about proposals for the park in order to gauge their reaction and support for the project.

The feedback we received was positive and quite heartening, so the Town Council, together with Warrington Borough Council (the landowner) put a scheme together and submitted an application to WREN for funding to make up the shortfall in the amount needed to deliver the project. Both the Town Council and Warrington Borough Council are also providing significant amounts of capital towards the project which will see overgrown areas thinned out, improvements to the play equipment and play area and some informal fitness equipment being installed. The Town Council is hoping that in future years we may also be able to look at improvements to the informal kickabout pitch and the skateboard/BMX area.

The Town Council is looking for this project to commence on site as soon as is possible, particularly as this year sees the 30th anniversary of the park.

I am also pleased to report that after a lengthy campaign by Town Councillors, local people and other organisations, the long awaited improvements to Birchwood Railway Station are underway. This will involve the installation of a much needed lift, a new footbridge and other works to improve accessibility at the Station.

Other major investment in the area has come in the form of improvements/ enhancements to some of the footpaths and cycleways around Birchwood. This work has been possible because of funding available from the LSTF (Local Sustainable Transport Fund). The improved route begins at Birchwood Way and passes by Birchwood Fire Station, Admirals Road, Dewhurst Road and Birchwood Boulevard.

Phase I is completed and work on Phase II, which covers the route from Dewhurst/Admirals Road through to Birchwood Railway Station and beyond is due to start as soon as possible during this financial year.

Councillors have been working hard to have some further pedestrian crossings installed to aid road safety. As a result, there will be two crossings installed; one located near to ASDA assisting people crossing Dewhurst Road and the other close to the Railway Station, again helping people to cross Dewhurst Road.

In March this year, the Hillsborough Inquest, which is the largest Coronial Inquest in England and Wales, commenced at a venue on Birchwood Park. Over 20 sites were looked at before Birchwood was chosen. Part of the reason it was selected was that there was no Crown property large enough to hold the 96 Inquests and Birchwood has very good transport links and local amenities.

The partnership working between the Judicial Office for England and Wales, Cheshire Constabulary, Warrington Borough Council, Birchwood Town Council and MEPC Birchwood Park made sure everything was ready on time.

Although the local community had many concerns about how this high profile inquest would affect them on a daily basis, so far it seems to be running smoothly with little or no impact on residents.

The Town Council was very proud that Birchwood was chosen as the venue for such a high profile inquest. Apart from the fact that this is the largest inquest ever held, it reaffirms that Birchwood has much to offer.

During the year, we have had discussions with the Borough Council and the Police on many occasions regarding inconsiderate parking and speed limit reinforcement. As a result some parking restrictions have been introduced on Redshank Lane and Leacroft Road with some other areas being the subject of ongoing discussion.

Sadly, dog fouling has been a common problem for the area, so during the summer of 2013 our maintenance team was out and about identifying areas where dog fouling was an issue and raising awareness of this anti social act. There was a marked improvement, but sadly of late the issue has once again become problematic. Although the majority of dog owners are responsible and 'scoop the poop', regrettably some others do not. My fellow Town Councillors and I would ask that if you are a dog owner that you clear up after your dog so that other people do not risk treading in it.

I am pleased to report that we have been able to recommence the bulky waste collection service by offering a fortnightly service. As part of the revised service, we have had to restrict the number of collections per household per year as the cost of waste disposal has escalated enormously over the past few years.

To make the area more colourful, the Town Council has decided to invest in some wildflowers for the area during 2014/2015 having left the area fallow last year.

Fisherfield Drive in Gorse Covert and the 'dogbone' traffic island have been selected as the wildflower displays have been more successful in these areas in the past. In other areas of Birchwood, the Town Council will be continuing with a programme of installing planters.

We have also been informed by the Borough Council that the majority of street lighting in Warrington will be either upgraded or replaced as part of the "invest to save" project. This project will look at the structural integrity of current street lighting columns and the efficiency of the lantern itself and replace as necessary. In Birchwood, this will be carried out during Year 3 of the programme, i.e. 2016-2017.

In addition to the more involved initiatives, the Town Council is involved day to day with many other activities such as: being a statutory consultee for planning applications, cleansing and litter picking, graffiti removal, landscaping and maintenance work to name a few.

Town Councillors go on regular walkabouts with Your Housing and the Police to identify any areas which may need some attention. For example, litter grot spots or areas prone to flytipping, graffiti, faulty street lamps, evidence of anti social behaviour etc. Any concerns identified are then passed on to the relevant organisation for appropriate action.

Much of the future work and ongoing community events within Birchwood are done against a backdrop of difficult financial times for residents and local businesses.

Birchwood Town Council's portion of the Council Tax will be £94.30 on a Band D property for the 2014/2015 financial year which represents an increase of just below 2% i.e. £1.85 pence per year per Band D property (approximately half a pence per day). This will enable us to continue providing a proactive added value service to our residents whilst also allowing us to make some improvements to valuable local amenities, such as the park.

I have enjoyed being Chair of the Council during 2013/2014 and having the opportunity to work with the local community on the things that matter.

The Town Council works with many partner organisations and businesses to serve the needs of the community and continues to provide an excellent service within Birchwood.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors, Town Council Officers and the Maintenance Team for their support during the last twelve months. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you all, and I wish my successor well during their term of office.

Councillor Pauline Nelson
Chair 2013-2014

4. **Community Issues**

(a) Birchwood Railway Station

A local resident has attended the meeting to raise concerns that the promised lift at Birchwood Railway Station had not been installed.

The Chair informed the resident that we believe the discussions with Network Rail are all but concluded and the work is due to be commenced in the next couple of weeks and is scheduled to be completed by September.

Some work due to subsidence to one of the platforms has had to be undertaken prior to other work commencing on site.

(b) Parking issues – Glover Road

Resident, Mr. Fitzsimmons, stated that cars are still parking in an anti social manner on the grass verges on Glover Road. Because there are no traffic markings in place, they cannot be ticketed by Traffic Enforcement Officers. Also, unless the Police deem them to be parking unsafely, they cannot be ticketed by the Police. He added that the grass is now being affected by these vehicles.

Mr. Fitzsimmons asked if the Town Council could consider building in some landscaping features, such as boulders or additional planters.

Action: Clerk's office to look into the possibility of additional planters being placed where the vehicles are parking on Glover Road.

(c) Parking Issues – Birchwood Shopping Centre

A local resident asked whether the shopping centre could be asked to turn the area where the Citizens Advice Bureau and Senior Centre used to be (currently empty land) into a car park; particularly for people trying to park for the medical centre. She stated that trying to park for the doctors is now very difficult.

There are some spaces near Aldi that were supposed to be for people parking for Birchwood Medical Centre, but these are now used by anyone, including users of the Tennis and Leisure Centre, leaving some people with medical difficulties, but not holding a disability badge, often finding it difficult to access the Medical Centre.

Resident, Mrs. Bolton, stated that the Town Council does not have any powers as this area is owned by the landlord of the shopping centre. Over the last few years with additional development at the shopping centre, more parking spaces have been taken away, whilst at the same time creating outlets that require additional parking – the prime example of this would be the Peacock public house which meant a loss of 100 parking spaces, but attracts more cars to the centre.

Resident, Mr. Bolton, suggested suggesting to the shopping centre that when areas are demolished that they are earmarked for parking spaces to redress the balance of those that have been lost to development previously.

Resident, Mr. Allman asked if the grass areas in the vicinity could be converted to car parking space.

The BAFO stated that many years ago permission had been obtained for parking spaces to be installed in the grassed areas. However, the costs were prohibitive as the cost quoted just to sort out the utility services situated beneath the grassed areas because of the shallow depth they were laid at, was around £50,000.

Resident, Mrs. Nelson suggested that we write to the shopping centre to ask if they would consider making the area opposite Bet Fred a car parking area (preferably for visitors to the medical centre and dentists) even if just for a temporary period until it is further developed.

There is an overspill car park currently being developed at the rear of Spencer House for the shopping centre.

Action: Clerk's office to write to the shopping centre regarding the above.

(d) Weed Control Concerns

A local resident raised her concerns about the apparent lack of weed control on footpaths and in the road gutters at present. She stated that nettles and brambles are getting out of hand on all pathways and there are still leaves that have not been swept from last autumn.

In reply, resident Mrs. Nelson stated that the weed control is the responsibility of Warrington Borough Council. The Borough also owns the footpath sweeper, but severe cut backs at the Borough mean that it has limited resources. The sweeper has to cover the whole of Warrington.

Resident, Mr. Higgins, confirmed that, unfortunately, the Borough Council is having to do more, with a lot less resources. He added that subsequently the Birchwood Town Council Maintenance Team has to pick up the work not being done by Warrington Borough Council and although we try to be proactive, we are also having to try to fit in a lot more to the already packed work schedules.

The Clerk stated that we believe the spraying for weed control has recently been brought back 'in house' at the Borough. We have asked for a spraying schedule.

The Town Council has to ask permission before we can undertake work on other landowners land and have the necessary equipment and training.

Two of the Town Council's Maintenance Team are trained to use pesticides for limited, hand-held applications, but not for applying whilst mobile on the quad bikes or similar used by the previous contractors and Borough Council staff, that would be necessary for spraying large numbers of streets and footpaths.

(e) Brook Footpath

A local resident raised concerns about the lack of maintenance of the brook and footpath running alongside it near Birchwood Railway Station. She asked if when work is done at the railway station to install the lifts whether the brook can be unblocked so that it runs more efficiently.

Resident, Mrs. Bolton, replied that the brook would be the responsibility of the Environment Agency. It is unrelated to any of the proposed works at the railway station.

Mrs. Bolton added that the Town Council is looking at trying to find funding to improve some of the sections of the 'Brook Footpath' that runs from Dewhurst Road, behind the housing estates in Oakwood, down to Keyes Close.

The local resident stated that the whole footpath is very tired and neglected.

Mrs. Nelson stated that the BAFO had recently walked the path with a contractor and nine sections have been identified that require attention.

The footpath is owned by Warrington Borough Council and the cost of improving it is significant. The Town Council is continuing to look at how this might be achieved.

(f) Waste Bins

The local resident said that she is fed up with other residents who leave their bins out on the footpaths after they have been emptied, not taking them in for days at a time, if at all.

Resident, Mr. Higgins, stated that he understands that there is a requirement for bins to be taken back off footpaths as soon as possible after they have been emptied.

If residents know of specific addresses where the bins are persistently left out, they can contact the Enforcement Officers at Warrington Borough Council and ask them to take action (usually in the form of an advisory letter in the first instance).

Resident, Mrs. Bolton said that she had heard on the news that regulations from 'Europe' are coming into force that will stop the current mixed collections that Warrington does of some recycled waste. Where we currently put glass, plastic, cardboard, etc. into one bin, there will have to be separate bins for all of these. She asked if this is going to happen.

Resident, Mr. Bowden stated that the position of Warrington Borough Council is that this EU Directive should not apply to us and the Borough is seeking dispensation to not abide by the directive. The mixed waste is currently taken to a waste sorting facility where these items get separated and it is more cost effective for the Borough Council to do it this way than to give residents even more recycling bins. It would also be impractical for many residents to have more bins and to arrange for all the different collections.

There were no additional matters raised by those residents present.

The Chair thanked all residents for attending and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting concluded at 6.58 pm.