

BIRCHWOOD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD AT PARKERS FARM COMMUNITY CENTRE,
DELENTY DRIVE, BIRCHWOOD, WA3 6AN
ON TUESDAY 17TH MAY 2016, 6PM

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

PRESENT: Chair – Councillor T. Hearldon
Clerk – Fiona McDonald
Deputy Clerk – Clare Caddock
Business & Finance Officer – Gary Crowe

16 Residents

041/16-17 **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS 2015**

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on the 26th May 2015 had previously been presented at the June 2015 Town Council meeting and signed as a correct record.

Copies of the Chair's Annual Report for 2015/2016 were available for anyone present who wished to see a copy.

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

042/16-17 **OPENING OF THE MEETING**

The Chair, Councillor T. Hearldon, opened the meeting at 6.00 pm and reported on the local activities of the Town Council during the 2015/2016 municipal year.

043/16-17 **CHAIR'S REPORT 2015/2016 – COUNCILLOR T. HEARLDON**

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

Chair's Annual Report 2015/2016

My first official engagement as Chair of Birchwood Town Council was to open the Birchwood Carnival, something which I was delighted to be able to do. The Carnival, held in June 2015 had an additional celebration which was the formal, official opening of the new play and fitness equipment in Birchwood Forest Park.

At the time of writing this report, the next phase of improvements within the Forest Park is on the agenda for discussion with Warrington Borough Council which will concentrate on the informal kickabout area. We aim for this to be a more user friendly multi use games area available for the community to use. The condition of the existing floodlights and wiring is being investigated to see if it is feasible for this area to be lit.

We are also working with the Borough Council with a view to refurbishing and making improvements to the Ranger Centre.

Although quite substantial funding from WREN was secured to enable Phases I and II to be delivered, funding for these phases is being provided by Birchwood Town Council and Warrington Borough Council.

During the year, we have provided some support to Your Housing Group with their bid for funding for a multi use games area located off Chatfield Drive, which will replace the defunct basketball court. Your Housing Group has recently received confirmation that their bid for WREN funding has been successful.

The Town Council continued with its programme of floral displays during 2015/2016, with bulbs being planted on the Garrett Field roundabout on Birchwood Park Avenue and within the Forest Park and some additional wildflower displays on Ordnance Avenue (close to Risley Moss) and the Traffic Island at Oakwood Gate. For this year a wildflower scheme is being re-introduced on Gorse Covert Road, between Inglewood and Rockingham Closes.

It has also been pleasing to see that a number of long standing local campaigns have either seen progress or have come to fruition in recent months.

The Town Council campaigned for many, many years on behalf of the community for improved passenger access at Birchwood Railway Station, so I am delighted to say that the improvements to the station, which included the installation of a new footbridge with passenger lifts to either platform as well as alterations to the station building layout and site are now complete.

Another large scale project which has been completed is the Birchwood pinch point works. This scheme has seen the introduction of traffic lights and other highways improvements on the dog bone island at the junction with Birchwood Park Avenue, a new bus gate between the Faraday Street roundabout and Ordnance Avenue and the Moss Gate roundabout has been converted into a signalised junction.

We would like to thank residents for their patience during the construction and commissioning of this project which will hopefully improve the flow of traffic around Birchwood.

We are now closer to the street lighting in Birchwood being upgraded as we are on the Borough Council's "invest to save" programme for 2016/2017. This is a project which looks at the structural integrity of current street lighting columns and the efficiency of the lanterns. Not all lights will be replaced, particularly if they have been changed recently, but the majority will be either upgraded or replaced.

We have also worked with a number of other organisations, including the Borough Council, to get the landmark Encounter Statue at Junction 11 lit, once again.

The Town Council has, for many years, campaigned for improvements to the Brook Footpath, which runs from Dewhurst Road right through to Birchwood Forest Park. I am delighted to be able to report that, having presented a funding bid to the East Area Board, Councillors were successful in securing some funding to enable improvements to be made to this footpath for the benefit of users; additional funding for this project will be provided by Birchwood Town Council.

During the year there have been some changes to neighbourhood policing, with PCSOs now being required to report to Charles Stewart House in Warrington. This caused concern to Councillors who were worried about these changes and the effect they might have on the local community. The Town Council chaired a Public Meeting with senior Police representatives where the initial proposals were outlined and initial questions tabled; a follow-up meeting took place six months later.

The Town Council, which part-funds a PCSO for Birchwood, has ongoing dialogue with the Police on matters which are of concern to the community such as speeding, parking, off road motorcycles to name a few.

During the first quarter of 2016, the Town Council launched its new website and it continues to post items of interest on social media via Facebook. There are also regular Councillor Surgeries which are held prior to the Town Council meetings. This is an opportunity for local residents to raise issues of concern with a local Councillor.

We also continue to take part in, and encourage, local projects such as estate walkabouts with Your Housing Group and Warrington Borough Council and we have had some involvement with the Trolley Angels initiative which aims to reduce the blight of abandoned shopping trolleys on the community.

During the year a marked deterioration in the condition of the car park on Admirals Road was noted by Councillors. This was reported to the Borough Council who, in turn, carried out a survey of defects and ensured that the landowner rectified them.

Day to day, the Town Council works with many organisations and businesses to serve the needs and interests of the community such as commenting on planning applications which may have a detrimental effect on the community.

I have enjoyed being Chair of the Council during 2015-16 and being given the opportunity to work with some wonderful people on the things that matter.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors, Town Council Officers and the Maintenance Team for their continued support and hard work during the last twelve months. I have enjoyed working with you all, and I wish my successor every success during their term of office.

*Councillor T. Hearldon
Chair of Birchwood Town Council 2015/2016*

044/16-17 **COMMUNITY ISSUES**

The Chair invited questions or comments from residents.

(a) Brook Footpath

A resident asked who will maintain the Brook Footpath once any improvements have been made. They thought it would be better as a tarmac path, not gravel.

Resident, Mr. Bowden, replied that the section of the path which is to be improved is meant to be a 'country style' path, so it was unlikely that the Borough Council would ever have agreed for it to be replaced with tarmac. However, the surface will not be loose gravel, but will be compacted and as it is on Borough Council land, the Borough will ensure that the work meets their specifications. Mr. Bowden said that he also expects that Warrington Borough Council will have responsibility for any major maintenance works.

Mr. Bowden added that work will be undertaken, prior to any path work, on cutting back the tree canopy to ensure that there will be fewer leaves falling onto the path. This cannot be done until the end of the bird nesting season and once the majority of leaves have fallen.

The BAFO informed residents that he and the Clerk had attended a site visit today with Borough Council Officers. The first phase of the work will be to use a machine to scrape off the top layer of the surface to find out what the current state of the original stone path and wooden edging is. The surface to be put down will be compacted stone rather than gravel; it won't be quite as hard as tarmac but should last around 10 to 15 years.

The BAFO stated that it might not be possible to improve the whole of the 1.6km that needs improving as a full footpath resurfacing is likely to cost in the region of £50k. To put tarmac down would be almost double that cost. At present approximately £25k has been found; £17,000 from East Area Board funding and £8,000 from the Town Council.

The BAFO said that once the work has been done it is expected that the path will be easier to maintain. It might require some significant cutting back of trees and shrubbery every few years.

(b) Public Engagement

Resident, Mr. Ellis said that it was good to see that a number of major projects had been completed during the last 12 months. Now he would like to see more public engagement with the Town Council in order to drive a new strategy forward. He added that he would like to see more analysis of community assets within Birchwood to assess how and what residents could contribute.

Mr. Ellis said that a Strategy Document from Rixton and Glazebrook Parish Council had been circulated at a recent area board meeting and he would like to see Birchwood build a new strategy along similar lines.

(c) Bins

A resident stated that they would like to see more bins in the area, particularly an additional bin on Ordnance Avenue and at least another one on Admirals Road.

The Clerk stated that some new bins were currently on order; some were needed to replace ones which had been vandalised beyond repair and had previously been removed. She added that if residents wished to email in suggestions of locations, these would be taken into account. (We also have to get permission of the landowner before we can place bins in any particular locations.)

The junction of Admirals Road and Chatfield Drive was suggested, which is a litter 'hot spot' and also near the junction of Curlew Grove and Admirals Road.

The resident said that they think another bin is also needed on the Village Green, on Ainscough Road.

The Clerk stated that on a recent walkabout James Coates from Your Housing Group had said he would contact Your Housing Group's Landscape Manager with regard to requesting another bin in this location as it Your Housing land.

(d) Community Café – Birchwood Forest Park

A resident asked if there has been any update regarding requests for provision to be made for a community café at Birchwood Forest Park.

The BAFO said that Borough Council Officers are expecting the tender document to be returned to them soon regarding improvements to the Ranger Centre at Birchwood Forest Park. Part of the proposals included provision of a kitchen within the building.

Notices have been placed around the Forest Park, although the Town Council has not formally been notified about them, inviting interested members of the local community to create a Friends Group for the Forest Park. However, there has been no further movement to our knowledge regarding the provision of a café.

The resident stated that there is already a Friends Group set up on social media and they have several people interested in running a community café on the site on a not-for-profit basis, in order to raise funds to be put back into the local community for events, etc. They suggested whoever runs the café could also take responsibility for opening/closing toilets. The resident said they had met with Borough Council Officers on the site but had not received any follow up information about their proposals.

The resident added that they are concerned that a Friends Group coordinated by the Ranger Service might be utilised only for work maintaining landscaping in the park, rather than including the running of a café.

Following further discussion, Mr. Bowden stated that one of the key issues is that any Friends Group would need to be properly recognised as such, with a proper constitution, etc. before the Borough Council could formally work with them on any proposals. He said that he embraces the passion that the residents have for their proposals and suggested they move to form a properly constituted group and arrange to meet up in person, outside of social media.

(e) Birchwood Carnival

A discussion took place regarding the future of Birchwood Carnival and how it could be further developed.

Mr. Bowden said that he thinks the community should be encouraged to become more involved in delivering the carnival.

This matter was also on the agenda for discussion at the May Town Council Meeting, later in the evening.

(f) Damaged Audio Visual Equipment – Risley Moss Visitor Centre

A resident enquired if the Town Council could assist in getting some audio visual equipment repaired in the Risley Moss Visitors Centre. They quoted a figure of £1,000. If the equipment is repaired it would allow the history of Risley Moss to be shown to visitors, including groups of visiting school children to the site, which is a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).

The BAFO stated that this is the first the Town Council has heard about the damaged equipment and the inability to show the educational film.

Councillor T. Hearlton suggested that the resident encourages Risley Moss Action Group to apply to us for grant funding.

(g) Parking for Birchwood Medical Centre

Resident, Mr. Ellis said that he would like to see the issue of parking provision for patients visiting Birchwood Medical Centre resolved as parking close to the medical centre is insufficient.

(h) Bulbs Displays on Roundabouts / Wildflowers

A resident enquired who pays for the displays of bulbs on roundabouts as, in their opinion, they are not very good in Birchwood.

The BAFO stated that some of the areas are paid for by the Town Council and some are funded by the Borough Council.

A resident suggested asking local businesses to sponsor bulb planting on some roundabouts.

The Clerk confirmed that this is not currently done in Birchwood, but is in some other areas of Warrington.

A concern was raised that some of the bulbs might have been dug up and/or destroyed whilst other work was being undertaken in the area.

Resident Mr. Evans commented that the areas where wildflowers will be sown in Birchwood have now been prepared, including an area in Gorse Covert which was previously left for a year following an unsuccessful year when the ground conditions in the area had been unfavourable and the flower display had been poor.

The Clerk confirmed that the Town Council and several other parishes pay for the majority of their wildflowers.

A resident stated that they believe the Town Council should not have to pay for the bulbs and wildflowers as some other areas which are not parished have magnificent displays, paid for by the Borough Council.

As there were no further questions or comments from residents, the BAFO explained that all the comments and queries raised at the Annual Town Meeting will be noted and presented to the Council for further consideration and action where possible.

Councillor T. Hearldon thanked all residents for attending and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting concluded at 6.45 pm.