

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING
OF BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL,
HELD ONLINE, ON TUESDAY 15TH DECEMBER 2020, 6PM

Present: Councillor Reeves in the Chair
Councillors Atkin, Bowden (part of meeting), Breslin, D. Ellis, J. Ellis, Evans and T. Hearldon

Clerk – Mrs. F. McDonald
Deputy Clerk – Mrs C. Caddock
Business and Finance Officer - Mr. G. Crowe

One resident

Apologies: Councillors Fitzsimmons and M. Hearldon (dispensation) and the Police

226/20-21 **NOVEMBER COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor D. Ellis proposed, Councillor Atkin seconded, and it was resolved that: the Minutes of the November Council Meeting held on 24th November 2020 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Code of Conduct – Declaration of Interests

The Chair reminded members of their responsibility to declare any personal interest or prejudicial interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when the item is reached.

Councillor Evans – the Friends of Birchwood Forest Park

Councillors Breslin, D. Ellis and J. Ellis – Birchwood Youth & Community Centre Committee

Councillor Reeves – Birchwood Community High School

227/20-21 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

(a) **Police Report**

A Police report had been emailed to us by PCSO Stefan Titans prior to the meeting, which had been circulated to Members. The report details are as follows:

“Report to Birchwood Parish Council

- *This is the report for the month of December to date (13/12/2020).*
- *Burglary other than in a dwelling – one offence, an attempted break-in at a cargo haulage company. Alarm appears to have scared them off.*
- *No instances of burglary in a dwelling, theft of or from a motor vehicle, robbery or general theft.*
- *No instances of serious assault in the area.*
- *6x ASB incidents, including Covid incidents, arguments in the street, and a knock and run on someone’s door.*
- *The travelling community who had been moving around Birchwood and Risley appear to have departed the immediate area, their intentions and current location is not known at the time of writing.*
- *Officers are engaged across the Warrington area on foot and mobile patrol operations to increase visibility and community confidence across the Christmas period, particularly those areas with large shopping centres. Clearly, this includes Birchwood, and residents and councillors may be aware over the next few weeks of increased visible patrols in the area.*

- *One update of note is that the curious case of the acrylic fox/musical doormat situation may have been solved by PCSO Titans, who has begun the process of giving relevant advice to involved parties.*
- *PC Frith has also been continuing to work with housing and local social services to problem solve various issues of repeat callers and vulnerable persons with mental health issues. This work is ongoing, but the residents are receiving the support they need, and we would encourage people to continue to report any concerns they have about neighbours or persons in their community, particularly over the festive period.*
- *PCSO Titans has made contact with trolley angels and is looking to return as many as possible to their rightful owners given the recent build-up in the Oakwood area.”*

(b) **Resident’s Concern re: The Closure of Barclays Bank at the Shopping Centre**

A resident attended the meeting to raise their concern regarding the upcoming closure of the last local bank in Birchwood, Barclays Bank at the shopping centre. It is due to close in February 2021.

Councillor Atkin wondered whether there had been any consultation undertaken with the community.

Members and Officers do not recall the Town Council receiving any communication regarding this closure, and believe it would be a significant loss to the community.

Councillor D. Ellis commented that they could reduce the hours that the bank is staffed, as it is partly automated already. He believes that, as it is based in a small section of Asda, it cannot have large overheads.

Members raised concerns that this closure would be detrimental to local residents, and also to a number of local groups and organisations that use Barclays Bank, as they have a community account that is free of charge to use.

The Chair suggested that we could ask the local MP, Charlotte Nichols to support the community in requesting that it stays open.

Councillor Atkin quickly looked for information online; he said that the figures given by Barclays is that this small satellite bank has 81 customers who use it exclusively. He found an email address to contact Barclays, which he said he will copy to the office.

Action Clerk’s office to write to Barclays Bank requesting they reconsider the decision to close this branch.

228/20-21 **FILLING CASUAL VACANCIES / CO-OPTION**

As requested at the November meeting, the Clerk had prepared a draft Co-option Policy, a draft Co-option Application Form and a draft notice of a Co-option Vacancy.

The Chair stated that it is useful to have a specific policy in place; it ensures that the process is clear and transparent.

Councillor Atkin **proposed**, Councillor D. Ellis **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that the Co-option Policy be approved.

Action Clerk’s office to publish the Co-option Policy on the Town Council’s website.

229/20-21 **YOUR HOUSING GROUP (YHG) – UPDATE**

The Clerk stated that she received a schedule of the coppicing work that YHG will be undertaking in the next few weeks. She added that she noticed that all the scheduled work is for the Oakwood area, so she asked about the Locking Stumps and Heathfield areas.

The Clerk said that we have been informed that the resources are not available for the Locking Stumps and Heathfield area for this year; however, we have been informed that these areas will be added to next year's YHG coppicing schedule.

Councillor Atkin *declared an interest* prior to asking a question, as he lives nearby one of the YHG areas in Gorse Covert. He asked whether there will be any coppicing undertaken in the areas owned by YHG in Gorse Covert.

The Clerk said that she will ask YHG to add this to their list for next year.

Action Clerk's office to ask YHG to add Gorse Covert to their coppicing schedule.

230/20-21 **UPDATE ON MEMBER'S REFERRAL FROM MAY / JUNE 2020**

At the May 2020 meeting, Councillor D. Ellis had submitted a proposal, "*. . . to submit to Warrington Borough Council, to combat rat-running along Locking Stumps Lane, Lords Lane and Glover Road and make Locking Stumps a low traffic zone.*"

At the October meeting Members agreed that the latest reply, in ongoing correspondence with WBC, was unsatisfactory. It was proposed that Councillor D. Ellis ask WBC to re-assess their findings, in relation to the specific question asked, and not send, what appears to be, a standard response about collision data and Cheshire Police being responsible for enforcing speed limits.

Councillor D. Ellis has written to WBC again, regarding the above issue. We await a reply.

231/20-21 **UPDATE ON PLANNING MATTERS**

(a) Application No. 2020/37719 North Cheshire House, Kelvin Close, Birchwood, WA3 7PB. Variation of Condition 2 (approved plans) and Condition 4 (car parking spaces) on previously approved application 2017/31859 (manufacturing and storage of aluminium frame windows).

No further update is available at the present time.

(b) Application No. 2020/37866 Land adjacent to units 720 and 730 Birchwood Boulevard, Birchwood, WA3 7PS. Proposed drive-thru coffee shop.

The Clerk has spoken to the planning department regarding this application. At the present time there is no further update or Officer recommendation.

232/20-21 **TRAVELLER ENCAMPMENTS**

The Clerk reported that concerns continue to be raised by residents re: traveller encampments within Birchwood, and Silver Lane (near the Noggin) which is technically within Croft Parish.

We have been copied into correspondence sent to the Chair of Croft Parish Council regarding the specific issues of traveller encampments on Silver Lane.

The Clerk said that she has spoken to the Clerk of Croft Parish Council. They are also holding their December meeting tonight and have invited someone from the Borough Council to address this issue at their meeting.

The Clerk understands that several residents of Birchwood are expected to 'attend' Croft's online meeting. She said that she hopes to receive an update from Croft's Clerk regarding discussions that take place at that meeting.

233/20-21 **STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Councillor D. Ellis said that he did not have any specific updates for this meeting.

234/20-21 **FLOODING – ROBERT’S FOLD**

The Clerk updated Members on the steps that have recently been taken to try to solve the ongoing issues of flooding not only on the Robert’s Fold footpath, but also in residents’ gardens.

A surveyor did visit the area and spoke to a resident, but there is still some debate over who has responsibility for dealing with the issue.

The Borough Council will now be liaising with Torus Housing directly.

The Clerk suggested that any resident who is a tenant of Torus could also ask their Housing Officer for support in dealing with this issue.

The Clerk said that she will follow this up with Councillor D. Ellis, who has been in contact with one of the residents.

Action Clerk’s office to speak to Councillor D. Ellis separately regarding this matter.

235/20-21 **POLLING STATIONS**

The Town Council received notice from the Borough Council that our meeting room is not considered to be Covid-secure and therefore not suitable to be used as a polling station for the May 2021 elections, due to its small size, and single way in and out of the building.

It had been suggested that rather than ask local electors to go to Thomas Risley Church to vote, that Birchwood Youth and Community Centre (BYCC) might be a suitable alternative venue. It is large, accessible, and can accommodate a one-way system, with a front door for entry and a rear door as an exit.

Councillor D. Ellis, in his role as Chair of the Trustees for BYCC, said that he has been liaising with WBC and, following a visit by WBC, has agreed that it can be used for elections. BYCC will be put on the approved supplier list for WBC.

236/20-21 **CENSUS 2021**

The Clerk reported that she had a (remote) meeting with the Census Engagement Manager for Warrington and St Helens, regarding the Census that will be taking place on 21st March 2021.

Several documents were circulated to Members in their late papers regarding the Census.

The Clerk stated that there will be approximately 93 temporary jobs in Warrington relating to the Census, but some of the closing dates are very soon. She asked if Members would be happy for information about the Census and the temporary jobs to be put on our website and Facebook page.

Councillor D. Ellis **proposed**, Councillor Atkin **seconded** and Members **unanimously resolved** that the information could be published on our social media sites.

Action Clerk’s office to publish the Census information as agreed.

237/20-21 BIRCHWOOD RAILWAY STATION

(Councillor Bowden entered the meeting. He apologised for his lateness – he had been attending another meeting.)

(a) **Access from the path from/to Woolston**

The Clerk reported that a reply has been received relating to access at Birchwood Station on the Liverpool line side. This has been sent to Councillor T. Hearldon who raised the initial enquiry, and copied to all Members for information.

Subsequently, the Clerk has been corresponding further with Northern Trains Limited and WBC regarding actual ownership of the path and related potential liability issues, and has asked them to reconsider their refusal to open the gate to allow people with disabilities, mobility scooters, prams, etc., to access the lift, to enable safe passage across the tracks.

Councillor T. Hearldon expressed her disappointment at the response. She stated that WBC had put a significant amount of funding into making the railway station ‘fully accessible’, and it was only at the point when the new bridge had been built that the gate was closed.

Members discussed the issue in some detail.

Councillor Bowden said that he understood that an agreement had been made that once the new bridge and lifts were installed, then they would be fully accessible for anyone to cross the line, from either side of the tracks. He added that he would be happy to speak to WBC to ask them to enforce conditions with the station operator.

Members unanimously resolved that they would like Councillor Bowden to raise this matter with WBC, with a view to enforcing any conditions set at the time of approving the application.

Action Councillor Bowden to contact WBC about access at Birchwood Railway Station.

(b) **Vandalism**

The Clerk reported that emails have been exchanged regarding further vandalism of glazed panels on the WBC footbridge at Birchwood Railway Station. This was due to have been redesigned earlier this year. Our team has been out to clean up the glass.

WBC has said, *“We will arrange to have the damage repaired.*

With regard to the project, we have actually had a couple of contractors to site to determine scheme design.

Unfortunately, this has been delayed by Covid issues as specialist access arrangements were required for detailed examinations of the structure.

I will be looking to deliver a project in the New Year. I will update you with regard to timescales when I know more accurately.”

Councillor Bowden stated he thinks that it needs a radical solution, for example, removing the roof, to make the bridge an unattractive place to gather.

238/20-21 POWELL AVENUE – ACCESSIBILITY

At the November meeting, it was reported that we had asked if the blocks across Powell Avenue could be staggered to enable people on mobility scooters to access Delenty Drive more easily, as there were no dropped kerbs on the underpass side of the blocks.

The Clerk reported that temporary ramps were installed about two weeks ago.

NEW ITEMS RAISED UNDER THE CLERK'S REPORT TO THE COUNCIL

239/20-21 **WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

- (a) Sent/received – various emails / online reports following contact from residents re: flytipping, belisha beacon not working outside the high school, graffiti, and slippery footpaths around the Forest Park.

The Clerk stated that WBC has deployed a footpath/street sweeper around the footpaths in the Forest Park, which are now much cleaner.

- (b) To note that we have been advised that case WBC-STSV-275444278 – re: Japanese Knotweed near Junction 11 of the M62 – has been resolved and is now closed.

240/20-21 **YOUR HOUSING GROUP (YHG)**

- (a) Sent/received – various emails / online reports re: flytipping and overflowing bins.
- (b) To note that the Clerk continues speaking to / corresponding with YHG about various issues.

241/20-21 **MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE**

- (a) Received – Various update/information emails from Warrington Voluntary Action; including information regarding the Census 2021.

- (b) Received/sent – emails re: abandoned supermarket trolleys.

- (c) Received / sent – email correspondence with Muhammad Gous re: HS2 Ltd Design Update and a reminder that the current consultation ends on 11th December 2020.

Mr Gous asked if Members wish to receive a presentation at a future date?

Members resolved that they would like to receive an update presentation regarding HS2.

Action Clerk's office to arrange a date and time for the presentation to be received.

- (d) Received – email from the Secretary to Culcheth Local History Group re: the historic boundary stone opposite Lowes' Farm Subway on Warrington Road.

242/20-21 **CHESHIRE POLICE**

- (a) Received - Various Neighbourhood Alerts.
- (b) Received – Stakeholder Update – 8 December 2020.

243/20-21 **CHESHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (CHALC), NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NALC), SOCIETY OF LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS (SLCC)**

- (a) Received – NALC Chief Executive's Bulletins.
- (b) Received – ChALC weekly e-bulletins with various attachments, details of training sessions, etc.
- (c) Received – from SLCC – news updates, training information, etc.

244/20-21 **PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED**

Various LGC magazines and e-mail briefings.

245/20-21 MEMBERS' REFERRALS

The Clerk stated that a late Member's Referral from Councillor D. Ellis had been approved via the Chair, prior to the meeting.

Councillor D. Ellis reported that, a few weeks ago, a local resident had mentioned, on local social media, he had seen that one of the old Royal Ordnance Factory (ROF) sites, in an area of Herefordshire, had put up a plaque to commemorate those who had worked in a very dangerous environment during World War 2.

Councillor D. Ellis said that his post attracted quite a lot of interest and many suggestions were made that Birchwood should do the same.

Councillor D. Ellis stated that he wanted to raise this as a possibility of something that could be done in Birchwood, which could probably be a relatively low budget item and that could be included in next year's plans.

The plaque in question was mounted on a largish piece of granite, but it could be mounted at the entrance to one of the existing bunkers, or at the Rangers Centre, or other suitable position, and it would provide additional historical interest for the area, as well as being a memorial to those who worked at ROF Risley.

Members discussed this suggestion.

Councillor Atkin **proposed**, Councillor Evans **seconded** and it was **unanimously resolved** that this is a suggestion that the Town Council would like to pursue.

Action Clerk's office to investigate options and costs for a plaque commemorating those who worked at ROF Risley.

246/20-21 CURRENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR COMMENT AND OBSERVATION AND OTHER RELATED PLANNING ISSUES

(a) **Warrington Borough Council - Development Management Committee (DMC)**

The DMC that took place on 2nd December 2020 had no items of specific relevance to Birchwood on the main agenda for consideration.

(b) **Enforcement Cases**

Lists of enforcement cases recently opened/closed have been received.

(c) **Planning Decisions**

- (i) Application No. 2020/37871 71 Woolmer Close, Birchwood, WA3 6TT. Lawful development certificate – single storey rear extension with mono pitch roof – front porch addition. **Approved**
- (ii) Application No. 2020/37962. Car parking areas adjacent to buildings, 1 & 2 Kelvin Close, Birchwood, WA3 7PB. Application for approval of reserved matters detailing landscaping following outline approval 2020/36968 (multi-storey car park & associated works). **Approved with conditions**
- (iii) Application No. 2020/37784 31 Falstone Close, Birchwood, WA3 6SU. Lawful development certificate – single storey rear extension. **Approved**

(d) **Planning Applications**

All plans can be viewed via:

<https://www.warrington.gov.uk/see-or-comment-planning-applications>

Certain applications are not Planning Applications; therefore there is no statutory opportunity to allow 21 days for comments, e.g: Non material amendment applications, Lawful development certificates (S192) and 28 day prior approval/determination applications. These types of applications are received for information only.

- (i) Application No. 2020/38316 42A Woodhouse Close, Birchwood, WA3 6QP.
Retrospective – single storey rear extension.

This part of the meeting concluded at 6.45pm.