

**MINUTES OF THE MARCH COUNCIL MEETING
OF BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL,
HELD ONLINE, ON TUESDAY 23RD MARCH 2021, 6PM**

Present: Councillor Reeves in the Chair
Councillors Atkin, Bowden, D. Ellis, and Fitzsimmons

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

PCSO Titans

Two residents

Apologies: Councillors J. Ellis, M. Hearldon (dispensation) and T. Hearldon
Councillor Evans (IT difficulties connecting)

Prior to the formal commencement of the meeting, the Chair asked those present to take a moment of reflection on the anniversary of the first Covid pandemic lockdown, to offer sincere condolences to the family and friends of those that have been lost, and to acknowledge the unprecedented disruption that it has caused to the lives of all members of our community.

The Chair also extended thanks to all those who continue to look after our community in whatever capacity.

The meeting observed a minute's silence.

332/20-21 **FEBRUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Fitzsimmons proposed, Councillor D. Ellis seconded, and it was resolved that: the Minutes of the February Council Meeting held on 23rd February 2021 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.

Councillors D. Ellis – Birchwood Youth & Community Centre Committee

Councillor Reeves – Birchwood Community High School

Councillors Atkin and Reeves – Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Councillor D. Ellis – Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission

333/20-21 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

(a) **Police Report**

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

The following comprises the Police Report for the month of March 2021 to date. Also included are incidents from the second half of February not covered by the previous report.

- *There have been 2 reported instances of burglary in the area, on Lords Lane and Redshank Lane respectively. Investigations are ongoing.*
- *Additionally, we have received 1 report of suspicious persons trying door handles of residential properties.*

- *1 report of theft from motor vehicle in which access was gained to a vehicle and power tools were stolen, approx. value £400.*
- *2 reports of suspicious persons trying vehicle door handles, one of which resulted in entry being gained to the vehicle due to the vehicle not being properly secured. Nothing of value was taken from the vehicle.*
- *2 reports of criminal damage to a vehicle. One appears to have been inflicted using a BB gun or similar implement.*
- *4 reports of shoplifting from Birchwood Shopping Centre, one of which involves the same offenders targeting at least two shops and accumulating goods of a moderate value.*
- *1 assault involving a bladed article.*
- *1 report of assault by beating resulting from a dispute between youths.*
- *1 report in which a child stated they had been approached by a male in a van and told to get in the van.*
- *A reported domestic incident led to officers discovering small-scale cannabis production at the occurrence address.*
- *One incident in which a resident's window was smashed. This has been resolved informally between the victim and the perpetrator.*
- *We are continuing to see a moderate volume of domestic incident and harassment reports.*
- *Youth ASB in the area has been on the rise since schools returned to full capacity. On 13/03 police were called to Woolston Park following a gathering of youths ranging from 30-70 individuals. The youths were dispersed, however some of these may have continued to engage in ASB in Birchwood. We have recently received 2 reports of damage and ASB at the train station and the footbridge is again being littered with broken bottles and evidence of cannabis use.*

This concludes the Police Report for the February/March period.

The Chair said that Birchwood High School had sent out an 'alert' letter to their Learners regarding the report that a child had been approached by a man and told to get in a van.

PCSO Titans answered questions from Members and the Clerk relating to the above report, and regarding some other queries that had been raised locally.

PCSO Titans confirmed that he had issued an advisory notice regarding a vehicle causing an obstruction on a road in Oakwood. The driver had not appeared to park in the same location since receiving the note.

PCSO Titans stated that he was aware, via social media, of shopping trolleys being set on fire near the YHG container. It was not reported directly to the Police.

The Clerk stated that, as requested at the February meeting, she had invited a WBC Officer to the March meeting to discuss ASB at the railway station, and levels of street lighting, with PCSO Titans present.

Unfortunately, no WBC Officer was available to attend tonight's meeting. However, a WBC representative is happy to have a direct conversation with PCSO Titans regarding these concerns, with a view to arranging a site visit, if necessary.

PCSO Titans said that he will contact the WBC Officer and arrange to meet them.

PCSO Titans informed Members that a group of users of the Skate Park had spoken to him, to say that they would be happy to give the Skate Park a monthly clean, and wondered if they could be supplied with equipment to do this.

The Clerk said that the best course of action would be for PCSO Titans to speak to the Birchwood Forest Park Ranger, as WBC owns the land. They have spare litter pickers that can be used to do a clean-up, and they hold the insurance for the land. They can also arrange for the removal of any waste from the Forest Park.

There were no more questions for PCSO Titans. Members thanked him for attending the meeting.

PCSO Titans left the meeting.

(b) **Resident's query re: play area near the Turf & Feather in Locking Stumps**

A resident asked Members if there are any plans to improve the play area near the Turf & Feather public house in Locking Stumps. They stated that it is currently quite run down, with only one swing and a slide.

This has been discussed at previous meetings. See Minute 224/20-21 (v) from the Budget and Strategy Meeting held on 24th November 2020, and Minute 260/20-21 from the Budget and Precept Meeting held on 15th December 2020.

The BAFO confirmed that there had been no budget in this financial cycle for any additional equipment on this small play area, behind the Turf & Feather pub in Locking Stumps. Any improvements will have to be undertaken in partnership with WBC as they own the land. There would also have to be consultation with residents.

At the November 2020 meeting, Members had resolved that they would like this to be considered as a community project during the 2021/2022 – 2022/2023 budget cycles.

In response to a query about whether WBC would be able to assist with such a project, Councillor Bowden said that he would hope that WBC would be able to work in partnership with BTC to deliver a project.

Budgeting would be a consideration as all previously available grant schemes, such as from Wren, Veolia and Biffa, are no longer available.

This is a project that will need to be discussed with any new Council after the May elections.

Councillor D. Ellis suggested that, as The Birches had been burned down and vandalised, which had been a project that the children from Locking Stumps Primary School had been involved with, that the children be consulted again on the types of improvements they would like to see, within the confines of the available area.

Councillor Bowden agreed that proper consultation and engagement with the children of Locking Stumps Primary School would be very important.

Action Clerk's office to make initial queries with WBC re: the possibility of the proposal progressing.

Action Formal discussions and resolutions to be deferred until after the elections in May 2021.

(c) **Off-Road Motorbikes**

A resident raised a concern about off-road bikes being ridden on the footpath in Locking Stumps that runs between the local shop and the residential estates.

The Clerk said that we will raise this with the local Police.

The resident was informed that the local Police ask residents to report such incidents to them on 101. If a pattern of behaviour then emerges, they can direct their resources accordingly.

Councillor Atkin stated that there is an online reporting option that can be used as an alternative to phoning the Police: <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/> A number of (non-emergency) issues can be reported to the Police via this page. In an emergency, always dial 999.

Action Clerk's office to contact PCSO Titans re: ASB relating to off-road bikes.

334/20-21 **YOUR HOUSING GROUP (YHG) – UPDATE**

- (a) The Clerk reported that we are continuing to receive complaints regarding the waste that has been uncovered whilst YHG contractors are undertaking coppicing works. The Town Council is not removing this waste, as it should be done by YHG as part of their contract.

The Senior Maintenance Operative met Darren Hardie and the local Property Agents to discuss the issue, and to illustrate how the late removal of this waste is attracting more tipping. Darren is issuing work orders to have this waste removed.

There was also a recent incident of flytipped waste left in a trolley near the container being set on fire.

The BTC team is still supporting YHG by removing other flytipped waste to their container.

- (b) A report was received of shrubbery near Mosslands impinging on footpath space. YHG will be dealing with this matter.
- (c) A request for a review of YHG's coppicing work was received, but had to be turned down due to the potential for breaking purdah restrictions.

335/20-21 **SMITHILLS CLOSE FOOTPATH**

The Clerk reported that we have received another complaint regarding the severely overgrown footpath from Smithills Close, towards Kelvin Close.

We have asked for an update but have not yet received one.

The 28 days for action to be taken by the landowner has now been reached. If they have not undertaken any maintenance works, the WBC landscape section can now undertake the works and recharge the costs back to the owners.

336/20-21 **MANSFIELD CLOSE FOOTPATH**

At the February meeting, it was reported that a request for the extension of a pavement on each side of the entrance to Mansfield Close in Oakwood, to join it up with the pavement on Admirals Road had been made.

This was passed on to the WBC Transport Planning Team.

We have been informed that WBC has included this on the list for prioritisation in future years. WBC stated that realistically *'the only way to escalate the programme would be if we could identify additional funding sources.'*

337/20-21 **GRASS CUTTING**

The Clerk stated that WBC should be undertaking the first grass cut of the season in the next few weeks, once the ground is dry enough. They have to do the first cut as their machines can deal with the long grass, whereas the ones that BTC use cannot.

The Clerk reported it appeared that WBC was assuming that BTC would undertake all of the grass cutting again, as we had last year (with the exception of a few plots that we are not allowed to cut). We had done this due to the initial chaos caused by the Covid pandemic, when resources were severely stretched due to WBC staff self-isolating, and when some people were shielding, etc. meaning that their available staff had to be allocated to other core services.

The Clerk said that she has made it clear that this was never intended to be a permanent solution. BTC grass cutting is being undertaken as an 'add-on' service for our community – not instead of WBC doing it.

However, it has been agreed that, due to the ongoing issues with Covid, BTC will continue to work in partnership with WBC and will undertake some of their mowing responsibilities again, this year.

338/20-21 **MANAGEMENT OF ROADSIDE VERGES**

The Clerk said that following the Member's referral raised at the February meeting, regarding the management of roadside verges – whereby in some areas only one strip of grass verge is mown, allowing the rest of the grassed area to grow 'wild' to encourage natural flowering and biodiversity – she had spoken to WBC as requested.

WBC is happy to try out this proposal in some areas of Birchwood and have asked where – so that their operatives do not cut a whole verge where BTC would like it to be allowed to grow.

The Clerk asked Members if they have any location preferences that they would like to leave to grow wild, this year. They need to be an appropriate width to enable one strip to be cut, with enough left for an impact of wild growth.

Members discussed the matter, and it was resolved to 'experiment' with some stretches on Ordnance Avenue.

Action Clerk's office to contact WBC regarding the above.

339/20-21 **REPLACEMENT BIN IN THE FOREST PARK**

The Clerk confirmed that a specific bin in Birchwood Forest Park, reported as missing by Councillor D. Ellis, had been replaced.

340/20-21 **UPDATE – PLANNING**

Application No. 2021/38590 Stanford House, Garrett Field, Birchwood Park, WA3 7BH. Proposed external alterations as part of a programme of comprehensive refurbishments at Birchwood Park.

The Clerk reported that, as requested at the February meeting, comments had been submitted to the Planning Department regarding this application.

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

341/20-21 WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

- (a) Sent/received – various emails / online reports following contact from a resident re: overgrown shrubbery to the rear of an area in Gorse Covert, and trees, including some on Havisham Close following the receipt of an anonymous complaint on behalf of some residents of Havisham Close.

Where we have contact details of residents, we advise them that WBC now requests that any complaints about issues on WBC land should be reported directly to them, not via BTC – either by telephoning 01925 443322 or reporting online by creating a free My Warrington account by visiting the Borough Council's website:
<https://my.warrington.gov.uk/en>

- (b) Sent – details of a broken utility cover on the footpath outside the ex-police station on Delenty Drive. Also information regarding mud on the road from the building site has been reported.
- (c) Received – Details of a consultation re: a proposal to re-introduce a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Warrington.
- (d) Sent – emails re: damaged verges where people park their vehicles and walk through to the skate park on Ordnance Avenue, and to report a badly corroded road sign at Ecclestone Close. Also, to report a significant amount of litter on Leacroft Road, asking that WBC contacts the landowners to clear their land, where it is privately owned.
- (e) Received – Notice of Election for the Parish Wards – displayed on our notice boards.

342/20-21 YOUR HOUSING GROUP

The Town Council is continuing to send/receive – various emails re: flytipping, waste left over from coppicing works, a YHG tree affecting a private property, people regularly throwing rubbish out of their vehicle at an address in Oakwood, etc.

YHG is sending a letter to all residents of a road in Oakwood where there has been a significant amount of flytipping recently.

343/20-21 MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

- (a) Received – Various update/information emails from Warrington Voluntary Action.
- (b) Received – A copy of the HS2 Route Wide Update information presented in January to BTC. This was published on our website and Facebook page.
- (c) Received/sent – emails re: a request from a resident re: BTC facilitating a litter pick, disposing of waste, etc. The Clerk has replied (see email in papers) explaining that they need to obtain permission from the landowners – which BTC is not, and some points to consider when arranging a litter pick, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor D. Ellis commented that because the BTC team litter pick all residential areas regularly, there is not really a need for a litter picking event, as such. Where some clean-ups might be needed are mostly in the more 'wooded' or 'shrubby heavy' areas, which create different issues, as much of the waste in these areas is more likely to be flytipped items, not 'normal' litter.

In addition, there is the possibility of health and safety hazards, which our team has PPE to guard against, to enable them to stay safe – such as needles, rusty nails, blackthorn, broken glass, human waste, etc.

- (d) We were copied into an email sent to WBC and also copied to Birchwood Park, regarding pedestrian/buggy/wheelchair access, notably a lack of dropped kerbs on a journey from Warrington Road and Busy Nought to Fives nursery on the business park.

Members discussed the information received from the resident and agreed that the route is a difficult one for people with mobility issues, buggies, wheelchairs, mobility scooters, etc.

Members **unanimously resolved** that BTC should contact WBC and the Business Park regarding this matter.

Action Clerks office to contact WBC and the Business Park regarding the concerns raised by the resident.

- (e) A telephone call was received from a resident requesting a 'safe', fenced off area on the Forest Park where dogs could be let off their leads to run loose. Copies of the excerpts of minutes from when this was previously proposed, in 2018, were sent to the resident for information. The proposal was not progressed at that time.
- (f) Received/sent – emails with Croft Parish Council re: flytipping signage, as they were hoping to put up some 'deterrent' signs in Croft. WBC has advised Croft Parish Council that any flytipping signs may require planning permission. Unless it is a sign detailed in 'The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Direction 2016' it is not a permitted sign on the highway.
- (g) Received - various LGC magazines and e-mail briefings, Clerks & Councils Direct – March 2021

344/20-21 **2021 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The Clerk reported that Local Councils are being advised to hold their Annual Parish Meetings (where all Members are residents) before the legislation for allowing remote meetings comes to an end.

The Regulations currently permit remote access for participants in local authority meetings that need to be held, or are held, before 7 May 2021.

The Annual Parish Meeting must be held each year between March 1st and June 1st.

Members were asked to consider holding the Annual Parish Meeting one month earlier than our norm – i.e. just prior to the April meeting, via Zoom.

Councillor Fitzsimmons **proposed**, Councillor D. Ellis **seconded** and it was **unanimously resolved** by those Members present, that the Annual Parish Meeting will be held via Zoom on Tuesday 27th April 2021.

345/20-21 **CHESHIRE POLICE**

- (a) Received – Stakeholder Update – March 2021
- (b) Sent/received – emails re: a resident's concern about parking issues on a road in Oakwood. PCSO Titans will take a look at the area the area when he is next on duty.

346/20-21 **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, and various other bulletins and updates, including details of the launch of a new guide on cyber security.

- (b) Received - ChALC weekly e-bulletins with various attachments, updates, details of training sessions, etc.
- (c) Received – from SLCC – news updates, training information, details of the March Branch Meeting, etc.

347/20-21 **MEMBERS’ REFERRALS MADE VIA THE CLERK PRIOR TO THE MEETING FOR CONSIDERATION AT THIS COUNCIL MEETING**

A Member’s Referral request had been made by a Councillor prior to the meeting; but in consultation with the Chair, on consideration, it was agreed to defer it until after the elections, due to purdah rules.

348/20-21 **CURRENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR COMMENT AND OBSERVATION AND OTHER RELATED PLANNING ISSUES**

(a) **Warrington Borough Council**

- (i) Development Management Committee (DMC)

At the time of publishing the Clerk’s Report, we had not received any documents/links to documents for future DMC meetings.

- (ii) Received – Licensing Application for Sal and Pepper Catering Ltd. Leacroft Road. Comments were required by 15th March 2021. Comments previously made by BTC at the pre-application stage will be taken into account when WBC considers the application.

(b) **Enforcement Cases**

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

Enforcement ref: ENF/21/08510 has been opened regarding ‘*mud being deposited on the highway, CEMP not approved 2020/36647*’ from the building site on Delenty Drive.

(c) **Planning Decisions**

- (i) Application No. 2020/38369 1-4 Raglan Court, Risley Industrial Estate, WA3 6SZ. Proposed change of use from Use Class E to Class E and / or Class B and / or Class B8. **Approved with conditions.**
- (ii) Application No. 2020/38393 56 Rockingham Close, Birchwood, WA3 6UY. Proposed first floor side extension, conversion of integral garage & addition of link detached garage. **Approved with conditions.**
- (iii) Application No. 2021/38487 1 Whitworth Close, Birchwood, WA3 6PY. Proposed single storey side extension, projecting 3m off rear elevation and construction of front porch. **Approved with conditions.**

(d) **Planning Applications**

All plans can be viewed via:

http://www.warrington.gov.uk/home/transport_planning_and_environment/Planning/Se arch_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.

- (a) Application No. 2021/38848 19 Kelsall Close, Birchwood, WA3 6LZ. Proposed single storey extensions to front and side elevations along with conversion of the garage to a habitable room – alternative to planning consent 2018/33723.
- (b) Application No. 2021/38868 BT, Stanford House, Garrett Field, Birchwood, WA3 7TH. Proposed 3 x totem signs and 2 x Halo illuminated brand logo signs.
- (c) Application No. 2021/38864 39 Inglewood Close, Birchwood, WA3 6UJ. Proposed double storey side extension.
- (d) Application No. 2021/38932 410 Birchwood Boulevard, WA3 7WD. Proposed high level company logo signage, panel mounted to existing external brickwork wall.
- (e) Application No. 2021/38974 30 Applecross Close, Birchwood, WA3 6UX. Proposed single storey side and rear extension.
- (f) Application No. 2021/38995 6 Bickerton Close, Birchwood, WA3 6LS. Proposed two-storey and single storey rear extensions.
- (g) Application No. 2020/38359 5 Cadshaw Close, Birchwood, WA3 7LR. Notification of amendments: ‘Amended design and description removing 1st floor’. Original description: ‘Proposed single storey rear extension including render to all external elevations.’

Members did not have comments or objections to make regarding the above applications at this time.

349/20-21 **CURRENT STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Councillor D. Ellis said that there are no specific updates to offer at the present time re: the Birchwood Town Council Strategy and Action Plan.

For information, in his role as Chair of Trustees of Birchwood Youth and Community Centre (BYCC) he stated that, having not been able to open, the centre’s reserves are currently being depleted – although they are still relatively healthy.

He has arranged for a company to come in to give a quote for replacing the fluorescent lights with LED lighting. Once BYCC has a quote, they will be able to apply for grant funding from the Cheshire Community Fund to support the purchase of new, more environmentally friendly lighting.

Councillor D. Ellis added that he has finally managed to agree BYCC’s position on their water usage, with the water company, and should now be making a saving of around £500 per year.

This part of the meeting concluded at 6.40pm.