

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL  
HELD AT PARKERS FARM COMMUNITY CENTRE, DELENTY DRIVE, RISLEY ON  
TUESDAY 27th MAY 2008**

**PRESENT:** Chair – Councillor Higgins  
Clerk – Fiona McDonald  
Business and Finance Officer – Gary Crowe  
Deputy Clerk – Clare Caddock

**16 Residents**

**1. Opening of the Meeting**

The Chair, Councillor Higgins opened the meeting at 6.30 pm and reported on the local activities of the Town Council in his year of office.

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

**2. Minutes of Proceedings**

Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2007 were presented and signed as a correct record.

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

This report will be published in the Summer 2008 issue of Birchwood Community News, delivered to all residents.

**3. Chair's Report**

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

**Chairman's Annual Report 2007/2008**

It has been a pleasure to be Chair of the Town Council during such an eventful year and I would now like to report on the key issues dealt with in Birchwood during 2007/2008.

**Parkers Farm Renovation Works**

When I took over from Cllr Pauline Nelson as Chair in May 2007, the refurbishment of Parkers Farm Barn and garner had just started. I am delighted to say that the renovation work is now complete and we now have a functional building to be proud of.

The renovation was far from being straightforward as the barn is Grade II listed so wherever possible the contractors used reclaimed building materials. The end result is a fit-for-purpose, attractive building which, I think you will agree, is an excellent asset for the community.

The buildings now house the Community Maintenance Team. This allowed us to vacate the rented space we were utilising on Birchwood Park, and has meant that we could bring all of our work operations onto one site thus improving operational efficiency whilst reducing expenditure, increasing our community assets and protecting the remaining local heritage buildings.

## **Land Acquisition**

During the year we were approached by Warrington Borough Council and English Partnerships to consider taking on the leases of two separate parcels of land. One is located within Locking Stumps and the other is the land that the Birchwood Youth and Community Centre stands on. After a great deal of deliberation, consultation and acquiring independent valuations, the Town Council has either already taken on or is in the process of taking on these two leases as it believes both are valuable assets for the future.

The land in Locking Stumps is a hard standing area for the storage of caravans which is almost fully occupied. At the time of going to press I think we may have only one space still available. The Town Council believe that taking on this lease was the right thing to do to free up some of the space taken up by caravans on the housing estates.

## **Update on PCSOs**

You may recall that, after consultation with the residents of Birchwood, the Town Council opted to part fund a dedicated Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) for the area in an effort to address the increase in levels of crime and anti social behaviour and to give residents peace of mind. We believe that this scheme has been, and will hopefully continue to be, a huge success in Birchwood. Crime levels are substantially lower than they have been in previous years, which is good news for us all.

The PCSOs have built up excellent working relationships with the local community and also work with those who commit anti social behaviour and unlawful activity within the Birchwood area in an effort to rid the area of crime. This close liaison provides the intelligence to enable them to address some of the concerns you, as residents, have. They have instigated numerous search warrants for drugs and stolen property within the Birchwood area and can be seen out regularly patrolling on both foot beat and pedal cycle preventing and detecting crime and providing reassurance to the residents of Birchwood.

There are now three PCSOs working within Birchwood, namely PCSO Allison Davies, PCSO Stuart Hill and a new addition to the team PCSO Phil Pickering. The Town Council has had some excellent feedback from the community on the work that they do in the area, so we would like to pass on our thanks and we look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

In response to residents' concerns over speeding traffic, 2007/2008 has seen more speed campaigns conducted by the Police within Birchwood, particularly along the key access roads. In addition they have been out with the ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) equipment to target those motorists driving without a valid licence, insurance or MOT.

## **Parking**

We are currently working with other organisations in an attempt to resolve some of the major parking problems in the area, not least the Birchwood Railway Station. Multi-agency talks are currently underway in an effort to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all as soon as possible. We are mindful of the problems encountered by pedestrians and public transport on an almost daily basis when trying to access the station. We will keep you informed of any developments via our website.

## **Planning**

The Town Council is a statutory consultee for planning applications pertaining to Birchwood. During a year we see quite a number of applications coming through our offices some controversial, some not.

This year has seen some particularly contentious planning applications such as the Biffa Waste Site Extension, the plans for a private airstrip at Woolston, No.1 and No.3 Delenty Drive and the proposed development for the Hamnett Court/Ainscough Road site to name but a few. The majority of these were refused by the Borough Council after representation from the Town Council and residents but in some cases the developers have filed an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate and decisions are awaited.

The Town Council supported the Car Phone Warehouse in their planning application for additional car parking space. Council Members remained steadfast in their belief that approval of this proposal would benefit the community by reducing the number of employees' cars parking on the local housing estates causing distress and inconvenience to residents. Fortunately, the Borough Council's Development Control Committee agreed with the arguments and saw fit to approve the proposal.

## **Recycling and Flytipping**

Recycling is something we could all do more of. At present we believe there are insufficient resources within Birchwood especially in view of the fact that people travel in from outside the area to recycle.

Quite often the recycle bay at the Birchwood Shopping Centre is left in a mess, so the Town Council has been retained by Warrington Borough Council to clean the recycle bays twice a week on a Monday and a Friday. However, we need to request your assistance. If you visit the banks and they are full, please do not leave items by the side of them. This can be classed as flytipped waste which carries a fine, and in high winds the plastic and cardboard gets blown about which can be hazardous for motorists and pedestrians alike.

When cleaning the area, some of our Maintenance Team have been subjected to verbal abuse. Please bear in mind that it is not the Maintenance Team making the mess, they are there to clean it up to make the area safe, clean and tidy for all to use.

On a more positive note kerbside collections for recycling will hopefully be coming to Birchwood later on in the year which may alleviate the problems at the recycling bays.

## **Abandoned Trolleys**

Several meetings have taken place regarding abandoned shopping trolleys, and although the problem has drastically reduced it has still not been resolved. The Town Council will continue to work with ASDA, ALDI, Frontis Homes and Warrington Borough Council in an effort to rid the area of this unsightly trolley nuisance.

## **Environmental Enhancements**

The Town Council has been considering how it can enhance the environment in ways which 'don't cost the earth'! We have recently had discussions with the Borough Council about

planting a wild flower meadow on the 'dog bone' island near Oakwood Gate. After several discussions, Council Members agreed to trial this area. Once the flowers are established we would like your comments to see what you think and from there we will decide whether to expand the scheme into other areas or to abandon it. Work should begin on the roundabout in the next week or so.

Council Officers and Members have been working with the Birchwood Partnership and Warrington Borough Council to look at the possibility of tidying and rejuvenating 'The Walled Garden'. In its heyday the garden was well used and many local residents still have fond memories of it. Unfortunately, over the years the area has been neglected and it has suffered some vandalism.

The garden has been looked at by professionals, and despite being relieved of some of the specimen plants, early indications are that the majority of the remaining vegetation is in a reasonable condition and just requires some TLC. This is a project that the Town Council is keen to be involved with and hopes that it can help in bringing the garden back to being a pleasant oasis.

We are looking at other initiatives in a bid to brighten up the roadsides and make Birchwood an attractive place to live in or visit. This includes looking at the re-planting of a couple of roundabouts in the area which have been uncared for. They are currently overgrown with brambles and look unsightly. There are also plans afoot to plant small flower beds beneath some of the signage in Birchwood. You may have seen these in other areas of Warrington but not in Birchwood.

We hope that you will agree that we are making every effort to make Birchwood more attractive, bringing a splash of colour to the area. If any of you have any other suggestions as to how this can be achieved for the Town Council to explore further and consider, then please let us know. Please bear in mind that we do not own any of the land we are working on we have to obtain the landowners permission and in some cases enlist their help and co-operation.

### **Partnership Working**

We are always looking at opportunities to work in partnership with local organisations to benefit Birchwood and share costs.

We are currently working in partnership with Frontis Homes, Warrington Borough Council and Oakwood residents to provide much needed recreation facilities to compliment the schemes already in place in Locking Stumps and Gorse Covert (on Birchwood Forest Park).

In the summer of 2007 we worked in partnership with Frontis Homes, Warrington Wolves Foundation and Birchwood High School to deliver a very successful summer playscheme for our local children. The scheme was funded with the held of an £8,200 lottery grant given under the 'Awards for All' scheme.

During 2007/2008 we have developed further the working partnership we have with a great number of organisations. We believe that it is essential for all the agencies and businesses involved in Birchwood to work together to achieve a smart, safe and successful Birchwood going forward.

## **Community Strategy**

To this end the Town Council worked with the Birchwood Forum and The Birchwood Partnership to publish a local strategy document in 2006 to cover a planned period to 2012.

We will, later this year, produce a report covering the first two years of work by the community against this strategy. However, nothing stands still and it is evident that the strategy for Birchwood to 2012 does need a rethink to match the national change reflecting local community and neighbourhood plans and to ensure we work with emerging new national government and borough strategy objectives for local communities.

I firmly believe that the Town Council's strategy decision taken some years ago to introduce our own maintenance team has provided Birchwood residents with an 'added value' range of services. The additional work is funded through the additional precept of £1.68 per week for a band 'D' council tax household and the work undertaken by our own dedicated maintenance team means that Birchwood's cleanliness and environmental works stand out against most, if not all, other areas in Warrington.

The higher level of local services we provide is now taken for granted, but those who may recall the past issues in Birchwood would not now accept a reduction in service level to those former days.

The Town Council is able to offer grant aid to help support a number of community events during the year such as the Birchwood Carnival and the annual Fun Run. We are also able to grant financial assistance to smaller community groups to help them provide much needed equipment or services to run local interest groups. Without this financial assistance many would struggle to survive.

I would like to assure you that before any grant is awarded a strict process has to be adhered to and applications must comply with our criteria in order that we fulfil our fiduciary responsibilities.

## **The Team**

Birchwood Town Council currently has a team of five full-time Maintenance staff, three part-time office staff and a part-time Caretaker. The Maintenance Team are out and about from 8.00 am until 4.00 pm each day, and the office is usually manned from 9.00 am until 4.00 pm (outside of these hours there is an answering machine). On occasion we may have to close a little earlier, but the phone is usually redirected to a member of staff.

Our staff are available to help with any queries you may have and if they don't know the answer or are unable to help they will usually know someone who can help.

We have had two staff retire during the year, namely Clive Sayer one of our Community Maintenance Officers and Avril Jackson the Administration Assistant. Both were long serving members of the team, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of them for the valuable contribution they have made to the community and the Town Council during their time with us.

## **In Conclusion**

Our main Council meeting each month is open for any resident to come along to ask questions and comment on the way we provide services. We do our best to serve the local community and will strive to continue to do so. I have reported on the main issues of the 2007/2008 year, but many more one-off items have been dealt with in Council by Councillors and/or staff so I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank them for their contribution.

We keep our residents up to date on our work and other local issues through the publication of our own community magazine. We continue to operate on the basis of an open information and access policy to residents and like to think that we are a 'can do' Council.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and staff of the Town Council for the support they have given me over the past year and offer my successor every good wish for 2008/2009.

## 4. **Community Issues**

- (a) The Chair was asked by resident, Mr Evans, whether the Town Council could expedite the work that had been started by the Borough Council on the footpath near Locking Stumps School, but which appeared to have come to a halt, leaving a hole in the pavement, which although it did have barriers around, these kept being removed, allegedly by children.

Resident, Mr Keeney, stated that he had suggested that the Borough Council cover the hole with heavy metal plating; although there were concerns that there was the possibility that this could be stolen and weighed in as scrap metal.

The Clerk/Deputy Clerk stated that we had contacted the Borough Council regarding this matter. We were informed that the purpose of the work was to investigate and resolve issues of severe flooding on the footpath in the area whenever there are heavy rains. However, once the work had commenced it became evident that the problem was more complicated than originally thought and could not be solved quickly. The work team had had to be moved to another area of Warrington to deal with an issue of greater priority, but would be back as soon as possible to complete the work.

The Clerk stated that we had been informed that there was now part of a tree stuck down the hole and that she had reported this to Warrington Borough Council. They stated that a metal plate could be more hazardous than barriers.

- (b) A resident of Gorse Covert raised the issue of uneven and loose bricks on the footpath around and outside The Poacher and the Spar shop.

The Clerk stated that she would refer this to Warrington Borough Council for their attention.

- (c) Another resident, stated that he had been informed by someone who lives near the pond on Inglewood Close in Gorse Covert, that they have a problem with rats. Apparently the response from Environmental Health department at the Borough Council was that bird food should not be put out in their garden as this might be attracting rats. The resident felt that it was their right to put out bird food in their

garden and wanted further explanation from Environmental Health about the advice given.

The Clerk stated that at 6.30pm, prior to the main June meeting, Environmental Health will be giving a presentation to the Town Council about their roles and responsibilities and suggested that the issue could be raised with them then.

- (d) A resident stated that the lighting from the BP garage island to Birchwood Fire Station was out again on both sides.

The Clerk stated that the matter would be brought to the attention of Warrington Borough Council.

***The Meeting concluded at 6.55 pm.***