



Birchwood Town Council

Chair's Annual Report 2018/19

It has been a pleasure to serve as the Chair of Birchwood Town Council for the last 12 months; a year which has presented both challenges and opportunities.

The Town Council was made aware that the Council Tax Support grant from Warrington Borough Council was to be removed for 2019/20, which would result in a significant reduction in our overall budget so, in order to maintain the levels of service that local residents enjoy we were presented with some financial challenges. The decision made was to increase the precept whilst utilising some money from Council reserves in order to retain the status quo.

During the year, Councillors and officers have spent a lot of time meeting with representatives of Warrington Borough Council and Your Housing Group in order to further improve working relationships. In the climate of austerity, it is even more important that we all work together to make the best use of the resources we have at our disposal.

Of all the Parish Councils in Warrington, Birchwood Town Council is quite unique in its approach in that there is a team of eight Maintenance Operatives who are out Monday to Friday in all weathers looking after the area whether it be litterpicking, grass cutting, cutting shrubbery, gritting, cleaning road signs or scraping back footpath edges. To my knowledge, no other Parish Council in Warrington has the same level of resource.

A new planter has now been installed on Copperfield Close in Locking Stumps which will be closely followed, we hope, by other locations. Before we can install any planters, we have to obtain the landowner's permission and ensure that the location will not have a detrimental impact on sightlines or the maintenance of underground services.

As Chair of the Town Council, one of my first 'duties' was to formally open the Birchwood Carnival. As far as I can recall, it was the first year the event had been supported financially by a number of local businesses. The Committee was extremely thankful as it enabled them to extend the programme of entertainment and activities on offer. Apart from the sun shining and the smiles on people's faces, it was a great day and, for me personally, one of the highlights was the Llama display team!

We are very fortunate that this year's Carnival has, again, been supported with kind donations from several of our local businesses that are keen to give something back to the local community.

Events, such as the Carnival, depend on the support of many volunteers that give up their time to help to make these events run smoothly. There are various local volunteer groups who work together to improve the environment; whilst others provide support and activities for the community, whether it be working with young people or those who are disadvantaged.

All our local volunteers put in a lot of time and effort and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for the valuable contribution that they make and the opportunities that they give to others.

We are a community that comes together in difficult times and there have been several examples in the last 12 months. For example, there was an incident on the motorway network during the extremely hot temperatures last summer which resulted in standing traffic for a considerable length of time. Local residents took water and refreshments to those stranded motorists, some of whom had very young children in their vehicles. I would like to thank you all for your selflessness; it makes me very proud to be a part of this great community.

Birchwood Youth and Community Centre on Delenty Drive is now a thriving facility with many regular user groups. This year the centre has gone through an extensive programme of refurbishment under the management of Cllr David Ellis. A couple of local businesses provided the materials, manpower, chairs and some new lightweight, folding tables so we are very thankful to them.

The centre is now 'home' to the Birchwood Repair Café, Birchwood Seniors, Age Concern and a Signing Choir to name a few.

On behalf of the Town Council, I would also like to take the opportunity to formally thank Cllr Pauline Nelson and Carole for the many years they have supported the Youth and Community Centre.

During the year, we have continued to work with Your Housing, a local housing association; conducting regular walkabouts and, more recently, a tidy up day. During the walkabouts we highlight things that matter to our residents; issues that have been reported to the Town Council.

We hold regular meetings with officers of Warrington Borough Council, again, covering issues that are of concern to our residents and it also works with other organisations such as The Woodland Trust and The Land Trust.

The Town Council liaised with The Woodland Trust regarding a leaking retaining wall located near to the Fire Station. After heavy rain and extremely cold weather the 'run off' from the pond extended across the footpath and in some instances the water froze, creating a hazard for pedestrians. Several months ago, work was undertaken by the Woodland Trust to rectify the situation and there is now no longer a leaking wall.

One of the roles of the Town Council is to act as a statutory consultee for planning applications and supporting the views of residents.

During the year, there was an application regarding New Hall Farm. The plan was for an electrical generation facility which, despite the best efforts of a number of Councillors and local residents, who presented objections to the proposals, was eventually granted on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate. Subsequently, a further application was submitted by the developer to extend the hours of operation. An objection was submitted by the Town Council and consequently Councillors, supported by several residents, attended the Development Management Committee Meeting of Warrington Borough Council to object. On this occasion the application was approved by the Planning Committee.

There is a lot of coverage in the media regarding the detrimental effect that some of our behaviours are having on climate and biodiversity. At the Town Council meeting held in April 2019, Members passed a motion to declare a Climate and Environment Emergency, with a target of reducing Birchwood's carbon footprint by 2030.

We are all aware of the detrimental impact our everyday living is having on the environment, so the Town Council has formed a sub-committee to look at ways we can all play our part in making a positive difference that will benefit both future generations and our environment.

Whilst the planters, mentioned earlier in my report, will introduce more colour into our roadsides, the flowers will also attract pollinators and other insects, all of which are really important to our ecosystem.

Local residents have been worried about speeding traffic with several areas being identified as areas of concern. The Council has held discussions with both the Police and Warrington Borough Council to identify ways in which we can make a positive difference.

As a result, there is new signage on Ordnance Avenue which clearly identifies the speed limit whilst warning motorists that speed enforcement is undertaken.

In addition, Warrington Borough Council conducted a speed survey on Warrington Road which identified that the route would benefit from some speed enforcement. I am pleased to report that the Police have now obtained a site code which will enable them to carry out speed enforcement at this location.

Chatfield Drive has also been identified as another area of concern based on inconsiderate parking, vehicles travelling in excess of 20 mph and the 20 mph speed limit not extending past the high school. At the time of writing my report, Warrington Borough Council is looking to address these matters by extending the 20 mph zone and introducing double yellow lines along the entire length of Chatfield Drive.

In my experience, we have a team dedicated to the wellbeing of Birchwood and its residents. The work that is undertaken on behalf of the community is extremely varied and carried out to a high standard.

We will continue to make progress, build positive relationships and make improvements on your behalf wherever, and if, we can.

I am certain that my successor will continue this good work, and I hope that you will continue to lend your support.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors, Town Council Officers and the Maintenance Team for all their hard work, dedication and support during the last 12 months. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you all.

Councillor Ian Atkin

Chair, Birchwood Town Council 2018/19