

Birchwood Town Council

Chair's Report 2021-22

I hope that this report finds everyone in good health and good spirits following what has been a tumultuous couple of years. This time last year we were all hoping that Covid would be a distant memory and we could start to return to normal; little did we know! We have had to dig deep and whilst there are still many challenges ahead, we are resilient as a community, and I have no doubt that we will come through it stronger.

The Town Council has continued to adopt new ways of working whilst providing all the usual services, regularly adapting to take account of the ever-changing Covid regulations. The team has continued to provide the full range of services as well as picking up some additional work from other organisations in order to backfill any gaps due to staffing issues. This was done to reduce any negative impact for our residents.

We are often asked what the team does and why Birchwood residents pay the highest precept in Warrington.

I think it is worth saying that all Parish Councils and areas of Warrington are not the same and they do not all provide the same services. Some are more rural and some more urban, with all presenting different priorities and challenges. Birchwood presents special challenges because of the extent of planted shrubbery which has to be maintained.

Birchwood Town Council has a team of nine staff, some of whom are trained and equipped to carry out many of the day-to-day maintenance tasks in the area. We run a fleet of vehicles and we are purchasing Parkers Farm, one of very few listed buildings in Birchwood. The team empty many of the local litter bins, litterpick the streets on a rota, scrape back the edges of footpaths, undertake some hedgecutting, pruning and mowing, clean road signs, undertake winter gritting, clear glass, visually check and clean play areas each day as well as many other tasks that may crop up.

As a service, this goes well beyond what most other parishes do and is what helps to keep Birchwood clean and tidy. As an example, many parishes have to depend on volunteers to do litterpicking. Based on the amount of work undertaken and the scope of that work, our service offers excellent value for money. It is perhaps worth noting that during the early part of lockdown our ability to carry out the usual maintenance work was not possible, and the impact could be quickly seen.

Day to day, we work alongside many local organisations to address the concerns and wishes of the local community and support local events such as the annual Carnival.

Following the Town Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, we have been making further inroads to going greener. During 2021, three of the Council's fleet were becoming unviable

and very costly to keep on the road so the Council made the decision to look at replacing them with their electric equivalent. Last year, my predecessor reported that the Council had decided to wait until there were more options available and the cost of electric vans had come down. The opportunity to purchase at a reasonable price arose and we managed to place deposits on two vehicles just before the price increased due to material shortages.

I am pleased to report that, in December 2021, we took delivery of two new, fully electric Maxus EDeliver3 vans. Although this was a considered purchase, in the longer term the reduced running costs should eventually offset the purchase price whilst providing a greener mode of transport.

We have also identified a number of grassed verges that could be left to grow wild in order to encourage biodiversity. There are six of these areas in total; one near the fire station underpass with the remainder along Ordnance Avenue and on Moss Gate. These areas will be complemented by some areas sown with wildflowers for your enjoyment.

The Council has continued to work with Warrington Borough Council and Your Housing Group, with a welcome return to regular meetings and walkabouts.

The Council, on behalf of residents, continues to press for improvements to the aesthetic of the area and investment.

We are currently working on a project to refurbish the Locking Stumps Play area with Warrington Borough Council, which was originally identified as a priority area and approved two years ago by the previous Council. Progress on this has been unavoidably delayed due to the availability of sub-contractors and the spiralling cost of materials. As a result, the final schematic is yet to be determined but the current aim is to refurbish the equipment already there as well as installing a couple of new pieces of play equipment for children to enjoy.

Birchwood Carnival will be making a welcome return on Sunday, 12th June; I think we are all in need of it! The event has been sponsored by the Town Council as well as a few other local organisations and there will be a varied programme of entertainment and activities on offer.

The Town Council has represented the community's views on several controversial planning applications throughout the last 12 months and, although the outcomes have not always been what was hoped for, we will always endeavour to support the views of residents.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors and the entire Town Council team for their unwavering support during the past 12 months and wish my successor well for their tenure as Chair.

Cllr Russ Bowden

Chair, Birchwood Town Council 2021-22