



Birchwood Town Council

Chair's Annual Report

I have been a Birchwood resident for more than 30 years, and it has been a real privilege to have been the Chair of Birchwood Town Council for the last 12 months. It has given me the opportunity to get know many of our residents and members of all the volunteer groups who do a fantastic job of helping to make Birchwood a better place to live. In the future it is my hope that many more volunteers will come forward to help with a range of initiatives which we are currently looking at and which we will be looking at in the future.

During the past year, much of my focus has been on volunteering; encouraging and supporting both the groups and volunteers themselves.

An excellent example of how volunteer groups can make a difference is the Friends of Birchwood Forest Park which carries out work both in the café and some maintenance of the park itself.

The café has been very successful and has become a wonderful place for local residents to sit down, relax with a cup of coffee and a slice of homemade cake and get to know new friends. It has recently become a member of the Chatty Café movement. This ensures that there is a designated table for those who would like to sit down and chat to others. Any profit made is being used to make improvements within the park, such as extensive wild flower planting.

A group of volunteers started work to improve the walled garden which had sadly been left to go rather wild due to a lack of available resources at the Borough Council.

I have also been out working with the 'Trolley Angels', a group of volunteers which do a fantastic job recovering abandoned shopping trolleys. During my year of office, I have been working closely with them to try and engage with some of the other key partners to find ways to further reduce the problem.

In the next two months, with the help and leadership of several enthusiastic residents, we will be launching a Repair Café in the Birchwood Youth and Community Centre on Delenty Drive. This will be manned by volunteer repairers who will be there to help fix broken items that residents bring, and all of this is free of charge. This helps reduce waste and helps to lengthen the life of items that would otherwise have to be replaced.

Birchwood has always been a town where there is an excellent community spirit and these volunteer projects are helping to take this to a new level as well as providing an immense level of satisfaction and pride for all those involved.

The Town Council has continued through the year to implement its strategic plan which was published over a year ago. Our aim was to make this plan resident led, and to achieve this, we carried out a comprehensive survey of every resident household in Birchwood.

One of our objectives was to build on existing processes which would enable us to gain council quality accreditation from the National Association of Local Councils, something we have made good progress with.

As a Town Council, we aim to ensure that we provide excellent value for money for our residents as well as implementing projects that they have identified as being important.

Birchwood has special requirements due to the high level of landscaping maintenance that is needed in the area. It is therefore critical that we can provide value for money whilst looking for innovative ways to keep costs down. This is especially true at a time of continued pressure on local government due to reductions in grants from central government which has created a tendency to push more and more work on to parish and town councils. As an example, reduced grass-cutting by Warrington Borough Council meant that Birchwood Town Council had to do some of the work if standards were to be maintained.

We do not expect the financial pressures to get any easier as Warrington Borough Council intends to stop passing on the council tax support grant for parishes, something which has already happened in many other areas of the country. This will mean a potential loss of around 15% of our income and will present a significant challenge for us in the coming years.

As Chair of the Town Council, I have been working with local businesses and the Birchwood Forum and we are hopeful that a future Business Improvement District scheme in Birchwood, funded by local businesses may help to address improvements to main roads through the town. Further progress on this is expected by July.

We were also delighted that some of our local businesses have supported Birchwood Carnival which, as we celebrate 50 years, promises to be one of the biggest and best so far.

The Town Council is currently working with Warrington Borough Council and with Your Housing Group to look at addressing some of the areas of concern residents have and to ensure that we are all working as effectively as possible.

It has also been working closely with Your Housing Group and a group of local tenants who have set up a tenants' association with a view to working together more constructively to improve the quality of services provided and to improve the general environment.

Last year, work was started on improvements to the Brook Footpath which were completed in the early summer. The work carried out has made a big difference to the quality of the footpath as well as cutting back some of the overhanging trees. We hope that residents who have never visited this area will get the chance to have a pleasant stroll along the path. It is lovely and a real haven of peace and tranquillity that seems a thousand miles from the hustle and bustle of the Birchwood Centre.

During the year, Councillors have represented residents' views at the Borough Council's Development Management Committee on planning applications; such as the one for the development located on the ex-Oliver Plunkett site off Admirals Road, some amendments were made to the original plans by the developers and a new zebra crossing and traffic calming measures were built into the scheme. We also supported residents in their objection to the New Hall Farm facility for the generation of electricity from gas and the storage of electricity which was subsequently refused.

We have also been making enquiries with the Borough Council regarding the impact on Birchwood residents of noise and air pollution, something we will continue to challenge on our residents' behalf.

We work closely with the Police on issues which are of concern to residents, such as speeding and anti-social behaviour. Based on your input, there has been regular speed monitoring by our Police Community Support Officers in the locations which you identified, during the survey, as being a problem.

We are also intending to increase the amount of information which is on the Birchwood Town Council website and we hope to be producing a newsletter on a more regular basis.

Going forward, based on resident input we are hoping to encourage more local activities which will interest as many people as possible, and make the community even better.

Birchwood is our town and it is an exceptional place to live. Studies have shown that living in a green environment like the one we enjoy has a really positive effect on both physical and mental health. Please rest assured that we will continue to work hard on your behalf to maintain and improve our local environment.

The last 12 months have been a fantastic experience for me, as a relatively new Councillor, I have gained a much better insight into the work of the Town Council and the variety and scope of the work that gets done on behalf of the residents of Birchwood.

I believe we have continued to make progress and together we can make Birchwood a really special place. I would ask you all to give my successor the same support you have given me.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow councillors, our Town Council Officers and our fantastic maintenance team for all their hard work and support during the last 12 months. It has been a real pleasure working with you all.

Councillor David Ellis
Chair
Birchwood Town Council 2017/18