

BIRCHWOOD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD AT PARKERS FARM COMMUNITY CENTRE,
DELENTY DRIVE, BIRCHWOOD
ON TUESDAY 22ND MAY 2018, 6PM

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

Present: Chair – Councillor D. Ellis
Clerk – Fiona McDonald
Deputy Clerk – Clare Caddock
Business & Finance Officer – Gary Crowe

11 Residents

Apologies: Mr. R. Bowden and Mrs. P. Nelson

039/18-19 **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS 2017**

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on the 23rd May 2017 had previously been presented at the June 2017 Town Council meeting and signed as a correct record.

The Chair's Report for 2016/2017 had been published on the Town Council's website.

040/18-19 **OPENING OF THE MEETING**

The Chair, Councillor D. Ellis, opened the meeting at 6.00 pm.

Councillor D. Ellis circulated a copy of his Chair's Report and presented the report to all those present. This included an account of some of the local activities of the Town Council during the 2017/2018 municipal year; it will be published on the Town Council's website.

041/18-19 **CHAIR'S REPORT 2017/2018 – COUNCILLOR DAVID ELLIS**

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 to 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.

Another 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 who 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.

The Town Council 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 both the quality of services provided and 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.

In addition, we have 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 of Birchwood Town Council 2017/2018

The Chair invited questions or comments from residents.

(a) **Zebra Crossing on Admirals Road**

Resident, Ms. T. Hearldon raised concerns about the safety of pedestrians using the new zebra crossing on Admirals Road, following an incident recently when a bus had stopped to allow her to cross, but as she was crossing a car overtook the bus, almost knocking her down. She added that some drivers are not slowing down for the speed cushions and she has witnessed numerous near misses. When she reported this matter to the Police they said they would not pursue this incident.

As an additional point, Ms. Hearldon mentioned that she was unable to get through to the Police to report the incident on 101 and it cost her £15 to make the report via a different phone number.

Councillor Ellis suggested that the Town Council should perhaps ask some additional questions regarding the pedestrian crossing. Councillor Ellis commented that the issue is possibly not the zebra crossing and the speed cushions, but rather driver behaviour.

A resident suggested that speed cameras could perhaps be installed.

Ms. Hearldon said that a freephone number should be available to call the Police.

Resident, Mr. N. Reeves, asked whether an illuminated speed sign, which flashes up the speed that drivers are travelling could be installed. He understands that they have had a good effect in reducing speeding drivers in other local areas.

A resident commented that what is really required is actual speed enforcement. He stated that in his field of work he has some experience with speed boards/signs and agreed that they do slow drivers down, at least in the short term. He added that if it is not backed up by enforcement, there tends to be a rebound of some drivers' behaviour; they revert to travelling over the speed limit again when they realise that it doesn't make a difference, because there are no consequences related to the sign.

Mr. Atkin said that it would be difficult to engineer additional traffic calming measures into the road layout. The Town Council has been advised that a raised speed bump, that goes completely across the road, cannot be installed, as this is a route used by emergency vehicles, which could slow their journey time. It is also a busy bus route and a full speed bump would make the journey more uncomfortable not only for ambulance patients, but also for bus passengers.

Mr. Atkin added that now the PCSOs have been trained to use the Tru Cam (hand-held speed enforcement device) rather than having to rely on the speed van, it might be more feasible for the PCSO to undertake enforcement operations on Admirals Road.

Mr. Atkin also reported that, as long as the lines of sight allow it, the PCSOs have been undertaking more frequent speed enforcement operations recently, mainly in areas that were raised by residents over the years and in the 2017 Community Consultation/Survey exercise.

Recommendation:

- To contact the PCSO to enquire whether speed enforcement operations could be conducted near the zebra crossing on Admirals Road and on other stretches of Admirals Road.

(b) Speeding vehicles Warrington Road

A resident raised his concerns regarding the speed of vehicles as they travel along Warrington Road, towards Risley Village from Culcheth. He said that vehicles are coming from a 40mph speed limit into a 30mph limit, just prior to reaching Risley Village, but it appears that many are not slowing down to the required speed.

Councillor Ellis said that this is something that the Town Council could raise with the Police. However, prior to undertaking any enforcement operations, a road has to be 'coded' by the Police, as part of their process.

It was also suggested that perhaps speed strips could be requested to be installed in order to monitor this stretch of road to see just how much of an issue this is.

A resident asked whether the same could be done on Chatfield Drive. She raised her concerns about the speed of traffic travelling down what should be a 20mph road. She also added that once the Warrington East Phase 2 roadworks are underway, she fears that Chatfield Drive will, once again, become a 'rat run' as cars will divert down there to try to avoid delays on other routes.

Recommendations:

- To contact the PCSO to enquire whether speed enforcement operations could be conducted on Warrington Road – on the approach to Risley Village from Culcheth.
- To enquire about the possibility of speed strips to monitor this stretch of road for a period of time to enable data to be collected about the issue.
- To contact the PCSO to enquire whether speed enforcement operations could be undertaken on Chatfield Drive.

Councillor D.Ellis said that hopefully, once the roadworks are completed, it will improve the situation and even less vehicles will use Chatfield Drive.

Resident Mrs. J. Ellis commented that Chatfield Drive is also used by drivers of vehicles who would otherwise experience difficulty turning right from Benson Road, at the T-junction of Benson Road with Dewhurst Road, opposite the Asda garage; which can be a very difficult, sometimes dangerous, junction to exit during peak hours.

(c) Speed Limits

Councillor D. Ellis said that the issue of the change of speed limit from 20mph on Chatfield Drive, to where it (seemingly illogically) becomes 30mph, just before the road passes in front of the high school, is one of a number of issues that have recently been raised at a meeting with Borough Council Officers.

Mr. Atkin stated that the Borough Council has in the past informed us that it follows national guidelines regarding speed limits, but sometimes these don't seem to make sense when they are applied in actual environments.

Borough Council Officers were asked whether a speed limit review could be undertaken by the Borough Council to establish if the speed limits on Birchwood's roads are the right ones for the environment.

One of the Borough Council Officers stated that he would ask the Traffic Management Section to look at speed limits and the rationale for them in Birchwood; to open up a discussion about the issue.

(d) **Speed Indicator Sign**

Mr. B. Allman enquired whether the Town Council still owned the speed indicator sign that it had purchased several years ago, for the Police to use.

Mr. Atkin said the Town Council still has the sign and PCSO Bingham has taken it out a few times during the past year; however, it cannot be left unsupervised, as it would be too easy for parts to be stolen.

(e) **Chatfield Drive Speed Sign**

Ms. T. Hearldon said that the speed sign at the corner of Chatfield Drive appears to be facing in the wrong direction.

Mr. Atkin said that this should be easily sorted out.

The Town Council Maintenance Team can have a look at this to see if they can turn the sign to face the correct direction; the Borough Council may have to be contacted to re-secure the sign.

(f) **Additional queries**

A local resident, who was unable to attend tonight's meeting, had emailed a list of queries to be raised at tonight's meeting. Councillor D. Ellis presented the contents of the email on behalf of the resident (*in italics*) which were considered by the residents present:

- (i) *Fly tipping - Please could we have an update on what's happening with fly tipping. There seems to be more of it and WBC seems to be doing less. There's next to no feedback and the target of 5-6 weeks is unrealistic. Notably:*

1) Silver Lane (Pestfurlong Hill end). I reported this way back Spring 2015. WBC officers met with the Woodland Trust and admitted it's their land the bulk is on. The rubbish is on a slope and I believe WBC have said it's too tricky to collect. Incidents with some evidence is being reported but what's happening with any enforcement and convictions and what's the strategy to reduce fly tipping here as it's just going to create more of a liability for WBC?

Councillor D. Ellis informed those present that the issue of flytipping, including removal times, was raised at the meeting with Borough Council Officers on 15th May 2018. The Borough Council Officers present at that meeting will be discussing these ongoing issues with the Borough Council's Enforcement Team.

Flytipping is the responsibility of the landowner to remove and the Town Council will continue to liaise with landowners regarding these matters.

- (ii) *Armstrong Close/Deanwater Close - I reported green waste dumped near the bin by the cycleway about a month after the green bin charging was brought in and gave information about who had tipped it. I've had no feedback and it's still there and has turned into a communal compost tip for people mowing their lawn.*

This has already been reported on more than one occasion to the Borough Council.

Recommendation:

- To contact the Borough Council again regarding this issue.

- (iii) **Himalayan Balsam** - *I reported this to WBC via BTC and got the standard response of a target to sort it out. It's still in the brook and spreading to my knowledge WBC have done nothing about it. (one for Friends of Forest Park to bash?).*

This has already been reported to the Borough Council. Residents discussed the matter. They wondered whether they Borough Council views it as being an issue or not, as Himalayan Balsam is classed as an 'invasive' species.

Recommendation:

- To contact the Borough Council again regarding this issue.

- (iv) **Paying twice** - *I'm concerned that WBC are not doing what they should for Birchwood because BTC pick up the slack (for example grass cutting). This means I pay WBC to do something which they don't. Then I pay BTC to do it and put it right. Is this a false perception on my part and how is this managed so Birchwood gets its fair share of services from WBC?*

Councillor D. Ellis stated that this is another perceived issue that has previously been raised with the Borough Council and was, again, at the recent meeting on 15th May 2018.

The Town Council is keen to ensure that Town Council residents do receive 'value for money' from the Borough Council. It has been agreed that regular meetings will be set up with three Senior Borough Council Officers, the Clerk and the Town Council's Senior Maintenance Operative to improve partnership working arrangements.

Regarding the specific example of grass cutting; Birchwood receives the same grass cutting operations from the Borough Council as the rest of Local Town and Parish Councils do in Warrington; what the Town Council does is to undertake an intermediate cut, between the Borough's cuts, in their areas (where we have their permission to do so) to keep grass in Birchwood looking neater than it would otherwise. The length of the grass was complained about by many residents when the Borough initially reduced their cutting frequency throughout Warrington, due to dwindling resources, several years ago.

Your Housing Group is responsible for areas that are maintained by their contractors.

- (v) **Glover Road Crossing** - *I've witnessed a child being hit by a car running red. My own kids being pulled back from a car running red and recently my sister's kids being another near hit. When I reported this to Cllr Bolton I was informed it was too low a priority and WBC consider this a link road. Is there any way we can get WBC to rethink this or raise its priority? Maybe data recording of speeds?*

Councillor D. Ellis said that this is an issue that has been raised with the Police and Borough on many occasions and over many years (noting that Cllr Bolton has not been a Member of the Council for several years).

Mr. Atkin commented that this is really an issue relating to the need for speed enforcement.

Recommendation:

- To contact the Borough Council again regarding this issue to ask if there are any additional traffic calming measures that could be introduced at this site.
- To contact the PCSOs to ask for speed enforcement operations to be undertaken near this site.

- (vi) **Maintenance plan** - *Maintenance of trees/bushes seems to be ad hoc with little consideration to nesting birds or habitat. Also I've enquired about if a TPO was placed on a tree I liked on private land to WBC and I never got a response - it was just passed from department to department. Birchwood is part of the Carbon Landscape, is important for wildlife and is special in its integrated habitats. Would a maintenance plan for Birchwood tie all this together so we protect our local wildlife and minimise any impact whilst delivering maintenance? Should BTC be putting on those special trees or groups of trees that are of important amenity to Birchwood's community. Could a plan save money by reducing the need for areas that WBC maintain that are needless or could become lower maintenance if it was converted to say a wildflower meadow rather than regularly mowed.*

Councillor D. Ellis stated that the majority of tree maintenance has to be undertaken by the landowner (the Town Council might cut back a (small) overhanging branch occasionally, with the landowner's permission, if it is causing a health and safety risk). Any shrubbery work undertaken in bird nesting season is only undertaken if necessary and once a site has been checked for nests.

The Town Council has no say regarding tree protection orders (TPO).

The Town Council is engaging with the Borough Council in order to continue with the wildflower meadow planting scheme for 2018 and additional sites are being planted, including some in the Forest Park (some of which are being funded by The Friends of the Forest Park). However, this does not reduce maintenance, as the ground has to be prepared each time the seeds are to be planted – the wildflowers are not self-seeding.

Lack of feedback regarding resident's queries is another issue which was raised with Borough Council Officers at the meeting which took place on 15th May 2018. It was reported, at that meeting, that unless a person specifically requests feedback, it will not be routinely sent, due to the large number of queries that the Borough Council receives.

Email enquiries should receive an initial (generic) response, with a unique reference number that can be used by the person making the enquiry to follow up their issue at a later date.

The resident ended their email by stating, "*Finally can I express my thanks for your efforts in trying to fix things that are not so good with Birchwood and for making sure there's lots already right with it too.*"

Recommendation:

To contact the resident regarding their queries above.

As there were no further questions or comments from residents, it was explained that comments and queries raised at the Annual Town Meeting will be noted as 'recommendations' and presented to the Council for further consideration and action where possible.

Councillor D. Ellis thanked all residents for attending and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting concluded at 6.35 pm.