

## **Chair's Report 2019-2020**

I was delighted to be elected as Chair of the Town Council for 2019/2020 and I am pleased to present my report for the last 12 months, a report being written in the midst of an unprecedented health pandemic which is affecting all of us in so many different ways.

Firstly, I would like to take a moment on behalf of the Town Council to remember those that we have sadly lost, to extend our sincere condolences to their families, friends and loved ones and to pass on our thoughts and best wishes to those who may be poorly or may have been otherwise affected during this dreadful time.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all the keyworkers, volunteers and anyone else who is working hard in very difficult circumstances to look after our community. There are so many of you and I think I can speak for the community when I say that we are very appreciative and thankful for your contribution, selflessness and acts of kindness. I would like to thank in particular, the work of the officers and staff of Birchwood Town Council, on behalf of our community for their hard work and dedication during the pandemic.

It is at times like these we are reminded how fantastic our community is and how fortunate we are that people genuinely look out for each other. In the midst of everything, there have been some fabulous good news stories including residents turning their hand to making much needed face visors for the NHS, those providing food parcels for people self-isolating or in need, and those walking a neighbour's dog or picking up some medication or shopping. Thank you all.

Some members of the community may be suffering in silence. If you are then please reach out to someone. There is help available. If you are not sure who to turn to there are people and organisations that can help and support you, you just need to take that all important first step.

There's still a long way to go for us all, but we will get through this together.

Regrettably, the situation meant that we were left with no option but to cancel the Birchwood Carnival for this year.

We had a fantastic programme of acts and attractions planned for the day, but it quickly became apparent to the committee that it was unlikely the event would be able to go ahead. However, we are hopeful that it will return next year to lift everyone's spirits. As we would start to plan the event in September we will have to look at the information available at that time in order to make a decision as to how to proceed.

During the lockdown period, the Town Council has still been operating although we, like the majority of other organisations, have had to work in a very different way in order to protect both staff and residents.

Government legislation was passed in early April which, for the first time, allowed Councils to hold virtual meetings rather than meeting face to face. Additional changes have also been made for this year which have removed the requirement to hold an annual meeting and an extension to the period of time for external audit. These steps have been put in place in order to balance the regulatory requirements with the government guidance on face to face meetings and gatherings.

The Chair would usually present his/her report at the Annual Town Meeting so, as this meeting will not be taking place this year, I would still like to take the opportunity to update you on some of the Council's activities during the last 12 months.

Local elections were also delayed due to the pandemic, they do not take place until 2021 so the Town Council remains unchanged at the present time. Councillors details are on the website should you need to contact us for assistance.

Liaison with key partners continues and meetings are taking place in the virtual world rather than face to face.

We would ask for the continued patience and understanding of local residents whilst we all try to navigate this ever-changing situation.

The maintenance team is still out and about in the community emptying bins, litter picking, removing fly tipping, mowing, maintaining planters etc. All their work will be carried out observing social distancing and operatives have been provided with additional PPE. We have also made adjustments to the way in which we work such as staggering start and finish times in order to look after the welfare of our employees

The Parkers Farm building has now re-opened, although we ask that any visitors respect social distancing and ring the bell before entering the building, wait for attention and use the hand sanitiser provided. This is as much for the protection of visitors as well as staff.

I think it is fair to say that the Covid 19 pandemic has had a huge impact on all of our lives, whether personal or professional and it is sometimes hard to see beyond it and what normal life is but we have made every effort to continue as best we can and although things have had to be done differently, not that much changed. The Town Council has continued to represent the views of the local community at a number of meetings with Your Housing Group to address concerns raised by local residents, although more recently these are being done via modern technology.

Last summer a number of meetings took place with the senior management of Your Housing where the views of residents were put forward. I think it is fair to say that at that time the comments were mostly negative. From these meetings a number of measures were put in place by Your Housing in order to resolve the issues and there are now a number of regular meetings that take place with senior management and staff to maintain the lines of communication.

Earlier on this year there was a huge influx of cars parking along Glover Road and on local housing estates in Locking Stumps causing problems for residents.

It transpired that the situation arose as a result of parking restrictions being enforced on the staff car park at the Sellafield site at Hinton House. Once the Town Council was made aware of this by residents, we made contact with Sellafield Limited, the Police and Warrington Borough Council in order to monitor the situation and ensure that alternative parking arrangements were made as a matter of urgency in order to take these vehicles off the residential streets.

After several weeks some additional, temporary parking had been secured and gradually the situation improved. Going forward, the Town Council will continue to monitor the situation.

Concerns about vehicles parking along Chatfield Drive had also been raised with the Town Council on a number of occasions, however, due to the lack of parking restrictions in that location, Police and Enforcement Officers were not able to issue tickets.

It was reported by my predecessor, Cllr Ian Atkin, that Councillors were hoping that double yellow lines and an extension to the 20 mph zone on Chatfield Drive would be approved and I am pleased to confirm that these have now been installed.

Birchwood is a very pleasant area and we are fortunate to have a lot of green spaces and ponds which attract birds and wildlife.

In the springtime there is a proliferation of ducks either soaking up the sunshine or waddling down, or across, our local roads. During lockdown, residents have been posting photographs of the ducklings swimming on the pond at the walled garden. They are considered part of the community and, understandably, residents were concerned for their safety, particularly near the road.

The Town Council was approached to see if some appropriate signage could be installed and I am pleased to report that this request was granted by Warrington Borough Council and there are now several warning signs to make motorists aware of the presence of ducks in the area.

I am also pleased to report that, after much hard work the trolley locks have been reinstated on the Asda trolleys which should reduce the number of abandoned trolleys in the area. The Town Council will continue to press Asda for a better long term solution as, although it has reduced the problem it is still an unwelcome blight on the local area.

In June 2019, Birchwood Town Council unanimously approved a climate emergency motion and, following the Climate Change working party meeting held on 11th September 2019, it prepared a detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan. Cllr David Ellis, one of your local Town Councillors, is also a member of the Warrington Climate Emergency Commission.

During the year, there have been a number of major planning applications under consideration; Extra MSA Motorway Services and the proposals for a new housing development on the ex-Foxwood site on Chatfield Drive.

In order to ensure that local residents had an opportunity to have their say, the Town Council liaised with representatives of each organisation to request that additional consultation events were scheduled and that the number of properties being sent a letter notifying the residents of the plans for each location was increased beyond the usual radius requirements for planning.

Birchwood Youth and Community Centre on Delenty Drive, which is open to the local community, has undergone a comprehensive update with the support of the Town Council and some local organisations. There are now a number of social and interest activities taking place there, such as Birchwood Creates (crafts), Birchwood Acts (drama), regular games nights, Birchwood Repair Café, Sisters United, a photography club and live music.

Sadly, the old railway footbridge at Birchwood Railway Station was subjected to vandalism, with several of the glass panels being smashed. The broken glass was cleared up by Town Council staff and the matter reported to Warrington Borough Council which owns the bridge.

The Borough Council is in the process of looking into various options for the design of the bridge going forward, replacing the glass panels with something more robust and suitable for this location. Once these designs become available they will be forwarded to the Town Council.

I will be continuing my tenure as Chair for an additional period of time and please rest assured that the Town Council will continue to serve the community as best it can.

I would like to thank my colleague Councillors and Town Council staff for their continuing support and assistance and look forward to working with you all in the months ahead.

*Cllr Nigel Reeves*  
*Chair of the Council*  
*2019-2020*