

November 2024 Birchwood Town Council Meeting:

(1 to 3) Apologies, Declarations of Interest, Public Participation (including the Police Report).

(4) The approval of the September 2024 Council Meeting Minutes.

Clerks Report to the Council

(5) Progress Report - Copies of the main correspondence sent out/received since the Council Meeting in September 2024. **(6)** New Items for the consideration of the Council not otherwise raised in the Progress Report. **(7)** Members' Referrals. **(8)** Planning Matters. **(9)** Accounts for Payment **(10 and 11)** Part I Finance; including approval of Minutes, main correspondence sent /received since the September 2024 Meeting (progress). **(12)** New items received since the September 2024 Meeting. **(13)** Budget and Precept 2025/2026 **(14)** Part II Finance, Audit and Personnel, including approval of Minutes.

Clerks Report to the Council & Part I Finance Agenda

6 New Items

6.1 Warrington Borough Council (WBC) *(details already circulated and/or available in the office)*

- (a) Sent/received – various emails/online reports/telephone calls following queries/contact from residents regarding flytipping, tree/shrubbery issues, grass cutting, etc.
- (b) Received – various traffic notices.
- (c) Sent/received – email to WBC Environmental Crime Enforcement re abandoned shopping trolleys in Birchwood.
- (d) Sent – email re: some areas in need of maintenance, including a land ownership query. The BTC Maintenance Team completed all tasks within their scope and forwarded the remaining issues to WBC.

6.2 Your Housing Group (YHG)

Sent/received – various emails/reports following queries/contact from residents including issues with flytipping, shrubbery maintenance, fallen trees, damaged bollards, etc.

6.3 Miscellaneous Correspondence (majority not copied in papers – already circulated / available in the office)

- (a) Received – various emails from Warrington Voluntary Action (WVA).
- (b) Sent/received – email from a resident regarding overgrown shrubs coming into residents' properties from Birchwood Golf Club. As the resident has tried numerous times to contact the club, BTC contacted on their behalf. We are still awaiting a response.
- (c) Received – email from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service containing a link to their Annual Report 23/24.
- (d) Received – invitation for BTC to participate in a Christmas Tree Festival which is fundraising for a group of local Scouts on 7th December 2024. This was circulated to Members to ask for their thoughts.
- (e) Received – invitation to the Annual Remembrance Service outside Birchwood Shopping Centre, hosted by Birchwood Lions.

6.4 Cheshire Police – Various Neighbourhood Alerts received (already circulated).

6.5 Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) *(already circulated – copies available in the office)*

- (a) Received – NALC publications including the Chief Executive's Bulletins, events information, etc.
- (b) Received – ChALC weekly e-bulletins with various attachments, details of training sessions, etc.
- (c) Received – SLCC – various updates, briefings, news items, etc.

6.6 Publications Received - Various LGC e-mail correspondence/briefings.

6.7 Urgent /Time Sensitive Matters

To receive any urgent and/or time sensitive matters that have been received since the publication of the Clerk's Report for noting and/or action.

7 Members' Referrals - None for this meeting.

8 Current Planning Applications for Comment and Observation and Other Related Planning Issues

8.1 (a) **Warrington Borough Council - Development Management Committee (DMC)**

DMC meetings took place on 03/10/2024 and 17/10/2024. No items of relevance to Birchwood were on the agenda. The next meeting of the DMC is scheduled to take place on 7th November 2024. There are no items specifically relevant to Birchwood listed on the agenda.

- (b) Information re: enforcement cases specific to Birchwood have been circulated to Members.
- (c) Received – an email from The Planning Inspectorate with correspondence relating to the proposed Intermodal Logistics Park North. This was forwarded to Members.
- (d) Received – information re: stopping up of highway, ‘an irregular shaped southern part width of Benson Road. It commences 68 metres north west of the north western corner of the Aldi store and extends in a north westerly direction for a distance of 5 metres when measured along its northern boundary and having a maximum width of 1.5 metres.

8.2 **Planning Decisions**

- (a) **Application No. 2024/01116/FULH** 71 Woolmer Close, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6TT. Part single, part double, rear extension. **Granted.**
- (b) **Application No. 2024/00897/VARC** Heathfield House Day Nursery, Heathfield House, Delenty Drive, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6AP. Variation of Conditions 1 (Alteration to parking layout), Condition 2 (Increase to 68 Children), Condition 4 (Revised parking condition wording to reflect revised plan as per Condition 1) on 2019/35322 won on appeal. **Granted.**
- (c) **Application No. 2024/01142/ADV** Pentahotel, Pentahotel Aston Avenue, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6ZN. Installation of replacement signs to include, 2xsets of totem panels fitted to existing steelwork, 1x illuminated projecting sign, 1x set of illuminated letters and logo, 1x illuminated fascia sign, and 3x set of replacement panels to existing framepost. **Granted.**
- (d) **Application No. 2024/1157/FULH** 14a Keyes Close, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6RU. One and a half storey side extension and proposed front porch. **Granted.**

8.3 **Planning Applications (Already circulated – not copied in papers) - all plans can be viewed via:**

http://www.warrington.gov.uk/home/transport_planning_and_environment/Planning/Searchplanning_applications/

Certain applications are not Planning Applications; therefore, there is no statutory opportunity to allow 21 days for comments, e.g.: Non material amendment applications, Lawful development certificates (S192) and 28 day prior approval/determination applications. These are received for information only.

- (a) **Application No. 2024/01237/CLDP** 42 Pennant Close, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6RR. Proposed single storey rear extension.
- (b) **Application No. 2024/01308/DISCON** Unit 722 Birchwood Park, Warrington. Discharge of Condition 16 (Vibration) on previously approved application 2015/26044.
- (c) **Application No. 2024/01333/ADV** BP, Oakwood Gate Service Station, Oakwood Gate, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6RW. 1 No. illuminated totem sign.
- (d) **Application No. 2024/01371/DISCON** Land at Junction 11 of the M62 Motorway, Warrington. Discharge of Condition No. 27 (Badger Survey) attached to planning permission 2023/00333/VARC.
- (e) **Application No. 2024/01372/DISCON** Land at Junction 11 of the M62 Motorway, Warrington. Discharge of Condition No. 28 (Water Vole Survey) attached to planning permission 2023/00333/VARC.
- (f) To consider, if necessary, any time sensitive planning applications received after publication of the Clerks Report.

PART I FINANCE

9 **Payment of Accounts**

Members are asked to consider and approve the payment of accounts.

- 10 (a) **To receive the Minutes and recommendations of the Part I Finance, Audit and Personnel Meeting held on 24th September 2024: for formal ratification/approval.**
- (b) **To consider and approve the notes of the Working Party Meeting held on 8th October 2024.**
- (c) **To resolve to incorporate the Working Party Meeting Notes into the November 2024 Minutes.**

11 Progress Finance, Audit & Personnel Items

The majority of items previously discussed under this section will, at this meeting, be discussed under Budget and Precept Meeting part of this agenda.

11.1 Website

The new website is due to go live on Friday 8th November 2024.

11.2 Oakwood Notice Board

To inform Members that the board has been installed.

11.3 Co-operative Banking

To note that the Administrative Assistant has now been added as a signatory on the Co-operative accounts. We will arrange for a 'token' to be purchased for her use.

11.4 Digital Accounting

To note that the RFO is now using the Scribe Accounting Software package only to present the accounts. The accounts are no longer being input onto spreadsheets.

11.5 Locking Stumps Primary School – Joint User Agreement for MUGA

- (a) Several emails have been exchanged regarding this matter and issues that BTC have concerns about.
- (b) To note that the RFO has, so far, contacted six different Solicitors to ask if they would be prepared to act on BTC's behalf regarding the drawing up of a new joint agreement between the school and BTC (WBC is no longer involved, other than leasing the land to the school). Four have not replied, the other two have declined our request to quote.

11.6 Worknest

- (a) To note that we have received the formal contract for signing. **To ask Members to formally resolve that this can now be progressed.**
- (b) **To ask Members to consider** the additional option of taking out Legal Expenses Insurance (LEI) with Worknest; which would cost, approximately, an additional £250.00 per year. This would cover:
 - Defence costs, representation and awards
 - Protection against all types of claims, including unfair dismissal, discrimination and TUPE
 - No self-insurance model, no conflict of interest
 - Expert support from our dedicated Litigation Team throughout the claims process
 - Legal representation from a barrister included in the cost

We made enquiries with Zurich, our current insurance provider, their LEI cover is with DAS Law, which would not work with Worknest's Employment Law team, if a case ever went to an employment tribunal. It cannot be unpicked from the overall insurance cover we have with Zurich. BTC can, however, take out additional insurance cover with Worknest, if required. The Council can be double-insured, as long as it only claims under one policy.

12 New Finance, Audit & Personnel Items

12.1 Bank Account Reconciliation

- (a) To receive the Town Council's Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the accounting period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024.
- (b) To receive the Town Council's Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the accounting period 1st April 2024 – 31st October 2024.
- (c) To note that the payroll figure for September 2024 was £15,244.77 (9) staff. For October 2024 it was £15,285.88 (9 staff).

After consideration and approval by Members, the schedules will be signed by the Clerk or RFO, and the Chair, as soon as is practicable.

12.2 Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)

To note that the renewal information has been received from the SLCC for the 2025/2026 fee to renew the Clerk's membership. For 2025/2026 this will be £360.00. **Are Members happy for the Council to continue to pay this membership fee for the Clerk?**

12.3 Policies for Approval

- (a) **To ask Members to consider for approval** the draft Social Media Policy.
- (b) To ask Members to consider for approval the draft Sexual Harassment Policy. This needs to be considered in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities and Bullying and Harassment Policies. **Members are asked to consider all three policies for formal approval.**

12.4 Grant Application

To consider a grant application from Birchwood Lions, requesting £150.00 to support the annual Community Service of Remembrance, taking place on 9th November 2024. *Note: this application was received earlier, in October 2024, but as there was no October 2024 meeting, could not be formally discussed until now.*

12.4 Urgent /Time Sensitive Matters

To receive any Finance/Audit/Personnel urgent and/or time sensitive matters that have been received since the publication of the Clerk's Report for noting and/or action.

13. BUDGET, STRATEGY & PRECEPT MEETING FOR THE 2025/2026 FINANCIAL YEAR

To note that the full contents of the Working Party Meeting notes will be incorporated as part of the formal November 2024 Budget, Strategy & Precept Meeting Minutes.

The agenda items below are based on those notes and recommendations made at that meeting. Members are requested to formally resolve their approval of the recommendations as follows:

13.1 *Maintenance Team Operations*

Following discussions about Maintenance Team resources and priorities, it was recommended that:

Recommendation: That BTC continues to suspend intermittent mowing for the 2025/2026 season and concentrates on other maintenance work priorities.

13.2 *Staff wages*

This will be discussed as a Part II item (confidential).

13.3 *BTC Vehicles and Vehicle Replacement Policy / General Equipment Reserves*

Recommendation: Members unanimously agreed to recommend that BTC continues to maintain around £70,000 of earmarked reserves for vehicle replacement/general equipment funds.

13.4 *Community Development/Projects Fund Earmarked Reserves*

- (a) **Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs)** – The RFO asked Members to consider whether, going forward, the Council wishes to consider the purchase and installation of additional SIDs (approx. £3,500 each).

Recommendation: Councillor Ellis to analyse the data and bring the information to a future meeting, to enable Councillors to make a more informed decision regarding whether BTC should consider funding the installation of additional SIDs in the area.

Councillor Ellis has, between meetings, prepared a comprehensive report regarding the two SIDs currently in situ (copied to Members in their papers).

His recommendation is that the SID on Warrington Road remains in place. However, he suggests that BTC should liaise with WBC and ask if they would install another pole at a different location, potentially Locking Stumps Lane. Once this is done, the Admirals Road SID could be relocated to the new location, which would involve using WBC, with a cherry picker, to take the SID down and relocate it, which would be at an estimated cost of somewhere between £250 to £600, depending on whether existing poles are in place.

(b) *Benches*

Recommendation: To approve the financing of two/three additional benches in 2025/2026, if appropriate locations can be found and approved by the relevant landowners.

To note that at the time of publishing the Clerk's Report, we have still not received any update from WBC regarding whether they have been able to reserve/allocate the three benches BTC asked for.

(c) *Litter Bins*

Recommendation: To approve the financing of two/three additional litter bins in 2025/2026, if appropriate locations can be found and approved by the relevant landowners. To ask Members and the Maintenance Team to suggest potential sites.

(d) *BTC Bus Shelters*

Recommendation: To approve liaising with WBC to potentially make a contribution towards the replacement of bus shelters.

To note that between meetings, Councillor Ellis has exchanged emails with the Public Transport Team Leader at WBC. BTC's request for two new replacement shelters has been captured on WBC's 25/26 planning list. The emails suggest that there may be a grant system being designed to fund such work, but other options are also being considered.

To suggest that we await further updates regarding possible funding/part-funding options going forward.

(e) *Community Development Fund Earmarked Reserves Level*

Recommendation: To increase the Community Development Fund earmarked reserve to around £45,000 and remove this heading from the main budget line cost codes and Schedule A.

13.5 *Elections Earmarked Reserves*

At the time of publishing the Clerk's Report the costs of the May 2024 all-out elections are still unknown.

Recommendation: To approve holding £12,000 in the Elections earmarked reserves fund, and £3,000 in the main budget line (may change if we receive an actual invoice prior to setting the Budget).

13.6 *Contingency Fund*

Recommendation: To approve holding £30,000 in the 25//26 Contingency Fund earmarked reserves.

13.7 *Utilities*

Following discussions at the Working Party Meeting re: Water, Gas and Electricity pricing the RFO proposed that, as we have more 'specific' figures **1 on Schedule A** 'General and Water Rates/Gas/Electric be reduced from £9,500 to £5,500, which should allow for any unexpected increase in gas, electricity and water usage.

Recommendation: To approve a figure of £5,500 for Item 1 on Schedule A.

13.8 *Additional Items for Consideration*

(a) *Wildflowers / bulbs*

Recommendation: To approve a budget of around £600 for wildflowers and £600 for bulbs (a total of approximately £1,200).

(b) *Birchwood Carnival*

Recommendation: To approve financial support for the 2025 Carnival by paying for the marquee, tables, chairs and portaloos, as in previous years.

(c) *North Warrington Cavy Club (NWCC) Storage Fees*

Recommendation: To maintain the storage fees for NWCC at £400 for 2025/2026.

(d) *Birchwood Youth and Community Centre (BYCC) Tenancy*

Recommendation: To approve an increase in the tenancy fee from £1 to £12 per year (starting from the 25/26 financial year) to be collected in advance and to tie in with the cycle of a Council.

(e) **Insurance/Subs/Fees/Vehicle Tax**

To note that this includes a number of different insurances, services, vehicle tax, etc.

The RFO had asked Members to consider having the budget line for this item (Item 2 on Schedule A) in the amount of around £21,000 for 2025/2026.

Recommendation: To approve an amount of around £21,000 for this item on Schedule A.

(f) **Deliberative Democracy Tools**

Various options and related costs were discussed in detail at the Working Party Meeting.

Recommendation: Rather than using specific tools, to use simpler methods for consultations with Birchwood's community, such as 'SurveyMonkey', which would require a plan to be purchased (these vary in price) or in-house prepared questionnaires with open-ended questions.

(g) **Training**

Recommendation: For a new item of Training/Staff and Councillor Development to be added to Schedule A in the amount of around £3,000 for 2025/2026.

13.9 Band D Figures

To note at the time of publishing the Clerk's Report, we have still not received the Band D figures from WBC. This might have an effect on Schedule A and the Proposed Year End Balances once received. If so, final, amended figures will need to be presented at the December 2024 meeting.

13.10 Income

Recommendation: To use the lower figure of £4,500 for expected income when calculating proposed Precept figures for 2025/2026.

13.11 Proposed Schedule A / Projected Year End March 2024 Balances and Precept Options

Members are asked to consider the proposed Schedule A figures as presented below. These may be subject to change once Band D figures are known.

Recommendation: To approve the Schedule A figures, whilst noting they may change slightly.

13.12 Draft Projected Year End Balances and Precept Options for 24/25 and 25/26

To note the projected year end balances and four Precept options presented to Members for their consideration (see attached).

- (i) To note that a £210,000 6-month cash flow level is being proposed from 2025/2026 onwards.
- (ii) It is proposed that an approximate amount of £24,902 is taken from the 2024/2025 estimated underspend, and put back into general balances.
- (iii) The RFO asked Members to note the draft projection year end balances for 2024/2025 and projected year end expenditure for 2024/2026, using the estimated schedule A figures; with 0% 1%, 2% and 3% precept increase options for 2025/2026 being illustrated.
- (iv) To note that the currently unknown Band D figures may have an effect on these projections, when they have been received.

Recommendation: To consider a nil percentage Precept increase at the November 2024 meeting, noting however, that there are still some figures from outside sources to be received and to consider that might have an effect on this proposed recommendation.

To ask Members to express a preference, in principle, regarding the level of Precept for 2025/2026.

13.13 Strategic Plan

Recommendation: To consider the document at the November 2024 meeting for formal approval (with any changes if necessary).

Recommendation: To review the document on a regular basis.

**BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
YEAR-END PROJECTED OUTTURN 2024/2025
AND FINANCIAL PROJECTION FOR 2025/2026 AND 2026/2027**

ITEM NO.	EXPENDITURE ITEM	BUDGET 2024/2025	PROJECTED EXPENDITURE OUTTURN 2024/2025	BUDGET ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE 2025/2026	BUDGET ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE 2026/2027
1	General and Water Rates/Gas/Electric	£ 9,500	£ 4,500	£ 5,500	£ 6,500
2	Insurance/Subs/Fees/Car Tax/Bank Charges	£ 19,000	£ 19,000	£ 21,000	£ 21,000
3	Employment costs (inc employer NI & superannuation)	£ 290,000	£ 285,500	£ 315,000	£ 345,000
4A	Civic - Chairman's Allowance	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ 1,000
4B	Civic - Newsletter	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ 1,000
4C	Councillors Allowances/Expenses	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
5	Town Council Revenue Expenditure (inc. cleaning services)	£ 50,000	£ 45,000	£ 50,000	£ 55,000
6	Training/Staff and Councillor Development	Δ	-	£ 3,000	£ 3,500
6	Community Developments/Projects	* £ 7,000	£ 4,000	n/a	n/a
7	Town Council Elections	£ 6,000	£ 3,000	£ 3,000	£ 3,000
8	Grants/donations	£ 5,000	£ 3,500	£ 5,000	£ 5,000
9	Parkers Farm Estate/Maintenance	£ 4,000	£ 4,000	£ 2,000	£ 2,000
10	Loans inc. Mortgage Fund for Parkers Farm Estate	£ 18,500	£ 18,500	£ 17,710	£ 16,950
	TOTALS	£ 411,000	£ 389,000	£ 424,210	£ 459,950

Signed _____ Chair

Signed _____ Clerk

Signed _____ RFO

Date: 16th October 2024

Δ To propose a new expenditure item of 'Training' - replacing 'Community / Development Projects'

* To propose that Community/Development Projects are now wholly encompassed within earmarked reserves

Birchwood Town Council - Oct/Nov 24 - DRAFT PROJECTION YEAR END BALANCES 24-25 and 25-26		BAND D FIGURES CURRENTLY UNKNOWN			SHEET 1 (slightly amended)
Projection - Year End March 2025 Balances (rounded)		Projection - To Year End March 2026 Balances (rounded)			
Income		0% increase	1% increase	2% increase	3% increase
Balances B/F March 2023 (audited)	£ 373,807.00	£ 376,902.00	£ 376,902.00	£ 376,902.00	£ 376,902.00
Precept 24-25	£ 383,095.00	£ 383,095.00	£ 386,926.00	£ 390,757.00	£ 394,588.00
General Income approx. (bank interest & other)	£ 9,000.00	£ 4,500.00	£ 4,500.00	£ 4,500.00	£ 4,500.00
<i>(Bank interest remained higher than expected 24/25.)</i>		£ 24,902.00	£ 24,902.00	£ 24,902.00	£ 24,902.00
2025/2026 change in Band D properties (unknown)					
Total:	£ 765,902.00	£ 789,399.00	£ 793,230.00	£ 797,061.00	£ 800,892.00
Expenditure					
See Budget Schedule A					
Projected Expenditure: 24-25	£ 389,000.00	£ 424,210.00	£ 424,210.00	£ 424,210.00	£ 424,210.00
Projected end March 2025 Balances	£ 376,902.00	£ 365,189.00	£ 369,020.00	£ 372,851.00	£ 376,682.00
Less 6 months Cash flow	£ 200,000.00	£ 210,000.00	£ 210,000.00	£ 210,000.00	£ 210,000.00
Therefore projected Reserves / Earmarked funds available	£ 176,902.00	£ 155,189.00	£ 159,020.00	£ 162,851.00	£ 166,682.00
Elections	£ 12,000.00	£ 12,000.00	£ 12,000.00	£ 12,000.00	£ 12,000.00
Vehicles/Equipment	£ 70,000.00	£ 70,000.00	£ 70,000.00	£ 70,000.00	£ 70,000.00
Community Development (inc. SIDs, benches, etc.)	£ 40,000.00	£ 45,000.00	£ 45,000.00	£ 45,000.00	£ 45,000.00
Contingency Fund	£ 30,000.00	£ 30,000.00	£ 30,000.00	£ 30,000.00	£ 30,000.00
Potentially to put back into general balances for 2024/2025 from underspend	£ 24,902.00	-£ 1,811.00	£ 2,020.00	£ 5,851.00	£ 9,682.00
	£ 176,902.00	£ 155,189.00	£ 159,020.00	£ 162,851.00	£ 166,682.00
Band D Precept in 2024/2025 = £120.66		£120.66	£121.87	£123.08	£ 124.28
		nil increase	+£1.21 per year	+£2.42 per year	+£3.62 per year