



BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Chair's Report 2023 – 2024

I would like to start by saying that I have really enjoyed my year as Chair of Birchwood Town Council, supported by Vice Chair Jacquie Sheridan and the whole Town Council team; Councillors and staff.

My role as Chair and Councillor has given me a different, more rounded, perspective on life in Birchwood.

I grew up in Birchwood and have always thought it was a great place, but I didn't realise how much time and effort goes in to keeping the area looking as good as it does. Having seen it from the other side it gives a different insight and I now understand the challenges faced by staff, other local organisations and individuals on a day-to-day basis.

Some of the support available is provided by a dedicated band of volunteers who give their time freely to provide much needed facilities and assistance for the community, such as running the Birchwood Forest Park Café and helping with the foodbank. Birchwood Lions facilitate the annual Remembrance Service and arrange for Santa to visit during his hectic December schedule whilst fundraising for many other good causes. Then there is the team of volunteers who have turned the fortunes of the Birchwood Youth and Community Centre around making it a thriving hub for varied activities for all ages. The list goes on. We have much to be thankful for in our community and I, for one, really appreciate it.

In June we had the annual Birchwood Carnival which I was privileged to formally open. The procession, led by Batida Rio, snaked its way across the park via the newly installed memorial dedicated to the Royal Ordnance Factory Workers which I was asked to unveil. This was a huge honour.

The weather was glorious, and we had a fabulous day. Most of the acts and attractions are provided free of charge thanks to the unwavering efforts of the Carnival Committee and some very generous local sponsors.

We could not put on events like this without the additional support of volunteers and local organisations, and the Carnival Committee has been working hard to put together another event taking place on Sunday June 9th which also promises to be fantastic.

Discussions are currently underway with Warrington Borough Council to add to the heritage of Birchwood by adding some sort of information panel at the cemetery on Cross Lane South. This was also the site of the old Risley Presbyterian Church.

In February the Vice Chair, Cllr Jacquie Sheridan accompanied by Cllr Julie Brereton attended the licensing of Revd Tabitha Rao, who is the new Vicar at the Church of the Transfiguration on Admirals Road. We wish her well in her new role.

Speeding has frequently been raised as an issue of concern by residents, so the Town Council purchased and installed two speed indicator devices, one of which was installed on Warrington Road in Risley and the other on Admirals Road not far from Keyes Close. These, in addition to the regular speed monitoring undertaken by the Police, should help to encourage motorists to adhere to speed limits.

In addition, Councillors have been working with Warrington Borough Council to review some of the local speed limits and review signage in areas where concerns had been raised.

The Council has made the difficult decision this year not to undertake additional grass cutting in Birchwood. A great deal of thought went into this but after considering the level of resource required and alternative local priorities, it was decided that the Town Council team will be concentrating on other local environmental work for this year. Warrington Borough Council will still be undertaking its normal frequency of grass cutting.

The Town Council is a statutory consultee for planning applications within Birchwood and so lends its support to residents if a controversial planning application is submitted, such as the redevelopment of the Trident Industrial Estate.

Several Councillors attended and spoke to the application at the Development Management Committee, vehemently opposing the plans, but despite the best efforts of all those involved the plans were approved by the Planning Committee.

The Town Council is in the throes of changing over from fluorescent to LED lighting in its premises which should help to reduce bills as well as providing a more efficient and 'climate friendly' light source. This changeover will be carried out in phases as finances allow.

Councillors and staff have attended several walkabouts with Your Housing Group to highlight issues of concern, one of which was during the Borough Council's bin strikes which saw waste piling up on several of our local streets.

I would like to thank residents for their patience during the weeks of strikes by the Borough Council's binmen and for disposing of their waste responsibly. I know it wasn't easy for people, but we do appreciate your efforts.

Going forward, a number of locations have been identified by the team as areas that require attention and we met with Your Housing Group recently to show them these areas and to ask for their urgent intervention in tackling these concerns.

The scourge of abandoned shopping trolleys also reared its head again and has become particularly problematic, so we have been working closely with the Borough Council's enforcement team as well as local retailers to tackle it, with some success. There is still some way to go but we will keep pressing for improvement and deterrents.

On a more positive note, we continue to liaise with Warrington Borough Council regarding siting a couple of new benches in the area. We have also enquired about re-installing some waste bins which were removed due to vandalism, and we have finalised the sites for wildflowers during the 2024 season.

The Town Council team has seen two new additions to our staff and one retirement during the year and we would like to wish them all well.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague Councillors and our hard-working Town Council staff for the time, dedication and commitment they have given to residents and I would like to pass on my best wishes to my successor.

Councillor Joe Dempsey

Chair, Birchwood Town Council 2023-2024