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2024 - 2028

Birchwood Town Council Strategic Plan - Draft



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Birchwood Town Council Strategic Plan

1. Introduction:

This plan has been put together by a task force of members of Birchwood Town Council. It is a way of ensuring the continued improvement of the area, principally for its residents, and continues the work carried out in our previous strategic plan. This is especially important at a time when local government expenditure continues to be under severe pressure.

The plan provides an analysis of the current situation in Birchwood, and a resulting framework for local action to potentially improve the general quality of life for all who live and work in the ward. It is intended that this plan should be updated annually, if necessary, to take account of any changes which may impact the actions needed and to add any new actions resulting from resident consultation and through our work with key partners.

2. Our mission:

Our mission is to work together effectively as the elected leaders in our community, to achieve the goals and objectives set out in our Strategic Plans through the implementation and regular review of our accompanying action plan and to achieve our vision within the elected term from 2024 to 2028.

3. Our Vision:

It is our vision as a Town Council to operate to the highest possible standards. In this way, we will add more value for our residents and make Birchwood a highly desirable place to live, work, socialise and play. We will help create a safe, attractive, prosperous and healthy environment, where the Birchwood community is aligned, integrated and supportive.

One way of reaching this goal is by putting into place standards consistent with the NALC quality accreditations. There are various levels of accreditation of which the Quality Gold is the highest. It demonstrates the very highest level of leadership for local communities, bringing people together, having excellent business planning processes, ensuring value for money, whilst constantly seeking new innovations and opportunities to improve. Currently there are no councils in Warrington which are accredited at any level.

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3.1 Our Strategic Objectives:

The following is the list of our key strategic objectives which are examined in more detail in the accompanying action plan and which will help us to achieve our vision.

Objective 1: To ensure that the best possible image of Birchwood is projected to the wider community throughout Warrington and beyond.

Objective 2: Build further on the green environment enjoyed in Birchwood by protecting what we already have, enhancing the environment where possible and by helping ensure that our residents can benefit from it to the full.

Objective 3: Ensure that the work of the council is of the highest possible standard and provides the best possible outcomes for residents while providing excellent value for money.

Objective 4: To build a greater sense of community and belonging in the residents of Birchwood.

Objective 5: Work more closely with local businesses and other stakeholders to positively impact the lives of those who live and work in Birchwood.

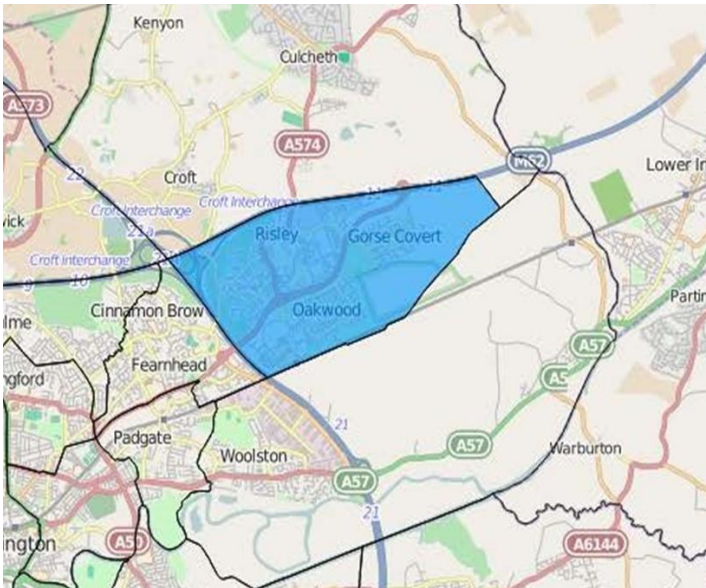
Objective 6: Seek sources of additional funding to allow additional development of Birchwood as an area.

Objective 7: To Work to Improve community safety.

Objective 8: Involve residents more in decisions made by the council.

4. Birchwood Town Profile:

Birchwood is one of 22 wards within Warrington. On the map shown, Birchwood is the area which is shaded in blue.



Birchwood is an area of Warrington developed mainly in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of Warrington New Town. It measures 810 hectares. At the time of the 2011 Census, Birchwood was home to 13.20 persons per hectare.

The latest mid-year estimates suggest that there were 10,261 people living in Birchwood in 2019, and Census 2011 indicated that the area contained 4,839 households.

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In previous strategy documents, a summary of some aspects of the ward profile were included in the document. It feels more appropriate this time to refer the reader to the full text of the ward profile which can be found at the following web address: - [Birchwood - 2022 ward profile \(warrington.gov.uk\)](https://www.warrington.gov.uk/birchwood-2022-ward-profile)

This profile includes a wide variety of information about the ward and its residents compared to Warrington as a whole.

5. Local facilities and usage:

5.1 Primary Schools

Birchwood has three primary schools:

Locking Stumps*

Gorse Covert*

Birchwood C of E, Oakwood

5.2 Secondary and other schools

There is one high school - Birchwood Community High School* - which, until recently had a sixth form college specialising mostly in vocational qualifications. Our understanding is that, due to low numbers, the sixth form has now closed.

* Part of the One Community Trust (Academy)

Birchwood School is a 25-place independent specialist school for boys and girls aged 8 – 18 who have Autistic Spectrum Conditions and associated learning needs.

5.3 Churches

Church of the Transfiguration, Admirals Road, Oakwood (Church of England)



This church has an informal service on Sundays and operates a lunch club as well as hosting 'The Bread and Butter Thing'.

Thomas Risley Church, Glover Road, Locking Stumps (United Reformed Church)



The church has a thriving congregation and runs several activities which it operates directly including Tommy Tots, Treats Coffee Shop, Arts and Crafts and the Wednesday Club (for over 55's). It also hosts several community groups, including the Brownies.

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Birchwood Community Church (Evangelical)

This is a community-focussed Evangelical Church. Services take place at Birchwood High School.

The Encounter Centre hosts a variety of activities including Ignite Youth Group, Saplings Mums and Tots and coffee mornings.

5.4 Sports facilities

Livewire, Birchwood. This facility houses one of the few indoor tennis centres in the North West of England and it has four outdoor hard surface courts.

There is a large gym facility as well as other halls for playing sports.

The high school has several well-used 3G pitches for football and other sports.

There are also a few, more informal, multi-use games areas (MUGA) in Birchwood.

Birchwood Forest Park has grass football pitches as well as a MUGA.

5.5 Parks and recreation

Birchwood is blessed with an extraordinary variety of green and open spaces from woodland to meadows, ponds, gardens and parks. The following provides a short summary of some of the main attractions.

Risley Moss and Visitor Centre



Risley Moss is a remnant lowland raised bog that was created following the last Ice Age. It is locally referred to as the 'mossland' and is part of the Manchester Mosses Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its rare mossland habitat and plants. It is also a Local Nature Reserve.

The site is open six days a week (closed on Fridays) and it is an important local asset, used widely by residents and visitors from outside the area.

Risley Moss is managed by the Ranger Service of Warrington Borough Council, under the guidance of Natural England, with the objective of the restoration of active lowland raised bog. The Ranger Centre has a community room which can be used by community groups.

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Oakwood Gate Walled Garden



The walled garden is a part of Birchwood Forest Park, but it has not been properly maintained for some years.

It was built in the original water reservoirs of the old ordnance factory as part of the New Town Development. Originally, it housed a variety of attractive, exotic plants and shrubs and there was a series of wooden walkways and pergolas. In its day the Walled Garden was very much appreciated by those who used it.

The cost of restoration would be extremely high so sadly its condition continues to deteriorate. A local group of volunteers have been carrying out some limited work to remove dead branches and thin out some of the overgrowth with Warrington Borough Council undertaking any necessary maintenance to replace rotten slats on the wooden walkways.

Birchwood Forest Park

This is the main park in Birchwood which incorporates playing fields, a skateboard park, a pump track for BMX bikes, a MUGA, children's play area and outdoor exercise machines. This is arguably one of the best parks in Warrington.

The Ranger Centre which houses the toilets, changing rooms and showers was recently upgraded by WBC. There is a Ranger who works on the site, although he also covers a couple of other local parks. A 'Friends Group' operate a highly successful café from spring through to the autumn, mostly at weekends and through their hard work and fundraising a number of improvements have been made to the park.

Gorse Covert Mounds and Pestfurlong Hill



This 'suburban' site belongs to the Woodland Trust and it is a mosaic of mixed woodland, meadows and ponds which support an amazing variety of plants and wildlife.

Its network of accessible paths allow visitors to enjoy woodland and waterside walks, and there are some stunning views from Pestfurlong Hill. On a clear day, you can see as far as the West Pennine Moors.

There is a group of 'Friends' who carry out work at the site and they also organise occasional guided walks.

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5.6 Public Houses

There are four public houses within the Birchwood boundary, as follows:

	<p>Nelsons Quarterdeck Admirals Road Birchwood</p>		<p>The Peacock Benson Road Birchwood</p>
	<p>Turf and Feather Glover Road Locking Stumps</p>		<p>The Poacher <small>(also hosts Birchwood Spice Indian Restaurant)</small> Gorse Covert Road Gorse Covert</p>

5.7 Local community groups (not including any commercial groups)

- Friends of Birchwood Forest Park
- Friends of Gorse Covert Mounds
- RiMAG (Risley Moss Action Group)
- Birchwood Carnival Committee
- Birchwood Library – adult & young person’s reading groups
- Birchwood Leisure & Tennis Centre
- The Engine Rooms at Birchwood Park (includes a large café/pizzeria and a commercial gym – Alive and Well)
- Woodlands Children’s Centre located at Birchwood C of E School, Oakwood
- Spectrum Striders - a running club with more than 200 members both male and female. Organise the Birchwood 10K.
- Birchwood Juniors Football Club
- Scouts, Cubs, Brownies, Guides etc. – 12th Warrington East Scouts/Cubs/Beavers meet at the Scout Hut on Warrington Road, Locking Stumps, 9th Warrington East meet at Gorse Covert Primary School.
- Air Cadets – meet at Birchwood Forest Park
- Birchwood Youth and Community Centre on Delenty Drive - hosts Slimming World and the ‘Flying Pin Cushions’ (sewing group) as well as running several of its own activities including the Birchwood Repair Café, Birchwood Creates (Arts and Crafts), Birchwood Chats (a men’s group), Pilates and the Little Lunch Club (Mums and Tots)

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5.8 Local business organisations and facilities

Birchwood Park – North West Nuclear Forum – this was formed when Birchwood Forum discontinued its activities. While this group has been inactive for a while, it is understood that it will be starting up again.

The Centre, Birchwood Park

The Centre at Birchwood Park is a first-class facility which is mainly for employees within Birchwood Park. The Centre is placed within a very attractive environment with a lake which ducks and other water birds



frequent. There is also a gym – Alive and Well. The main building houses a restaurant with excellent quality food, a coffee bar and conference facilities which has been extensively refurbished since the last strategy was put together.

The facility is well used by the community as well as those working on the business park.

Birchwood Park also has the only allotments within the Birchwood Town Council area currently.

Analysis:

The following analysis includes aspects over which the Town Council has no direct control, but they are included for completeness and to ensure that the issues are taken up with key stakeholders.

6.1 Positive features of Birchwood – areas to build on

- Birchwood has a high proportion of green spaces and is generally a very pleasant environment for residents, visitors to the area and local businesses.
- Birchwood is located in close proximity to the M62, M6, M56, Manchester and Liverpool Airports and railway stations serving both the North/South and East/West routes.
- It has important and thriving business parks providing local employment.
- Traffic flow through Birchwood was significantly improved with the ‘pinch point’ improvements.
- Residents like the floral displays planted by WBC and by BTC.
- Birchwood Youth & Community Centre has introduced a range of activities for residents, all at zero or very low cost, making these accessible to all.

6.2 Issues which need to be addressed

- There are clear pockets of deprivation in Birchwood which coincide with areas of poor health – diabetes, obesity etc. These areas have almost certainly become more deprived due to the cost of living crisis.
- We have increasing numbers of residents who are living in fuel poverty, with some homes capping off their utilities to avoid paying the standing charge.

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- Littering and fly-tipping problems occur across the ward, especially along arterial routes eg. Birchwood Way and Birchwood Park Avenue. It is also more prevalent in some residential areas.
- The general upkeep (by landowners) of the green spaces has deteriorated in the last few years as WBC and other organisations have had to reduce resource and costs. This has made the area look untidy and somewhat neglected. Additional grass cutting carried out by Birchwood Town Council was discontinued due to issues with the quality of equipment being provided. Maintenance of green spaces in social housing areas has also deteriorated.
- There is limited communication/engagement with residents.
- The walled garden and the two ponds beyond it (owned by WBC) continue to be in a very poor state.
- There is substantial traffic noise in some areas of Birchwood, specifically those closest to the M6 and M62 and Birchwood Way where vehicles travel faster.
- Signage could be improved throughout the ward.
- Parking at the Birchwood Centre/Medical Centre/Dentist and in other business areas is becoming increasingly difficult.
- There are no allotments in Birchwood for residents.
- Residents find it difficult to identify like-minded individuals with whom they can associate.

6.3 Opportunities

- Create improved level of pride in Birchwood and a commitment to making it better.
- Publish a newsletter to keep residents informed.
- Continue to use social media channels as a vehicle for communicating with residents.
- Carry out further, more focused and relevant surveys with residents to establish needs and priorities, possibly using deliberative democracy tools.
- Explore further community volunteering opportunities.
- Make sure that employees of the business area are fully aware of the local facilities (e.g. outdoor exercise machines) and they appreciate the community in which they work.
- Find ways in which local companies can get involved with effective corporate social responsibility projects.
- Encourage the uptake of non-carbon-based energy sources within Birchwood.
- Make better use of the Birchwood Town Council website to make it a window on the ward and promote what we have to offer.
- Investigate grants etc. as a potential source of funding.
- Installation of further Speed Indicator Devices.
- Identification of households not using heating in winter.
- Potential to reduce local traffic at morning peak and 3 pm to 4 pm by encouraging the use of public transport, or other means, rather than cars.

6.4 Threats

- Further reductions in local government expenditure.
- Increasing traffic could further degrade the general quality of life.

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- Further commercial development of the Birchwood Centre could make parking more difficult.
- Limitations on infrastructure investment.

6. Resident Consultation Process

During the period of the last strategy, extensive consultation was carried out. It is intended that during the period of this strategy more focussed, specific consultation should take place using on-line deliberative democracy tools if this is deemed to be appropriate.

7. Action plan

Objective 1: To ensure that the best possible image of Birchwood is projected to the wider community throughout Warrington and beyond:

Actions	Responsible	Completion date	Resources required	Status
1.1 Work with local publications such as The Essential Guide to ensure that all local good news stories are well-publicised	Designated member for liaison with publications/Officers	On-going	Requires input of stories Needs contacts within the publications	
1.2 Develop a new and more informative website for the Town Council that effectively informs about Birchwood, it's facilities, things to do, links to local transport information, volunteering opportunities, etc. and utilise the Town Council's Facebook page for regular communication	Officers/Members	On-going	Cost of hosting of new site Manpower hours to keep it updated	
1.3 Issue a regular newsletter to residents about progress on our plans and other news items so that they can see what is happening and feel that	Officers/Members	Every 3 to 6 months	Cost of printing c300 copies	

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<p>they are a part of what is being achieved.</p> <p>Two sides of A4 that could be left with local shops.</p> <p>Set up subscription via email to send out to residents</p>			<p>GDPR requirements and officer time</p>	
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Objective 2: Ensure that the work of the council is of a high standard and provides the best possible outcomes for residents while providing excellent value for money

Actions	Responsible	Completion Date	Resources required	Status
2.1 Consider any additional requirements to allow BTC to achieve NALC Foundation status as a way of ensuring best practice and giving residents the highest level of confidence in what we do as a Town Council. All documents etc. to be on council website	All	2025/2026	<p>Work required to conform with requirements. £ 50 registration with NALC and £ 80 for assessment</p> <p>Officer time and additional ongoing costs</p>	
2.2 Ensure that all Councillors have the appropriate training to carry out the role effectively	All	On-going	<p>Cost of specific training and time to undertake training</p>	
2.3 Investigate the potential use of deliberative democracy tools to investigate services that residents would like. Results to be fed into budget cycle and focus investment/expenditure choices where appropriate.	Officers/Strategy Committee	On-going	<p>The cost will depend on which tools are used. There are free tools, but they may be less</p>	

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Look at use as a means of collecting resident ideas, pinpointing issues etc.			appropriate than paid ones.	
2.4 Ongoing engagement with residents	All	On-going	Time/resource	

Objective 3: Protecting and maintaining the green environment in Birchwood, enhancing it where possible and helping to ensure that our residents can benefit from it to the full.

Actions:	Responsible	Completion date	Resources required	Status
3.1 Find ways to help reduce rubbish and fly-tipping (including trolleys) in Birchwood especially through effective campaigning, education and possible enforcement. Include Birchwood High School; educating learners. Investigate powers to enforce locally with WBC.	Officers/Members WBC, YHG Local supermarkets, BCHS Head Teacher/ Governors etc.	On-going	Time Commitment from other organisations Letters from YHG to tenants etc	
3.2 Publicise public footpaths better so they are used more often by including a link on the Town Council website. Look at possible expansion of signage and putting	Officers/Members Walking to Wellness	Dec 2025	Possible cost of printing leaflets. Resource	

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together some specific walking routes.				
3.3 Continue to plant bulbs, plants and wildflowers appropriately	BTC with landowner permission	On-going	Within set budget	
3.4 Ensure that information about 'what's on' in Birchwood is displayed prominently both physically and electronically	Officers	On-going	Include on new BTC website and on noticeboards	
3.5 Potentially install further speed indicator devices across Birchwood following an appraisal of the impact of those already in situ	Town Clerk/ Members/Police/WBC	On-going until considered completed	Approximately £3,500 per sign Need to be budgeted for Time/resource to gather and review data	
3.6 Assess the impact of the reduced grass-cutting during 2024-25 season and make a decision about BTC's future role. Note: this may involve input from residents regarding priorities.	Officers/Members/Maintenance Team/WBC	Dec 2024	Would require considerable investment in equipment and resource and would impact on other duties.	
3.7 Consider installation of additional public	Officers/Members/landowners	On-going	Approx £1400 per bench. Note that there are	

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benches as rest places.			limited locations where these can be placed.	
3.8 Establish a local history trail. Additional information boards at identified locations.	Officers/Members/WBC/landowners	Dec 2027	Around £1K per sign	
3.9 Further explore the potential to operate a community garden in an identified plot within Locking Stumps and the possibility of funding from local businesses to establish this.	Officers/Members/WBC/landowners	Dec 2027	Not known at this stage	
3.10 Continue to work closely with Your Housing Group to identify issues through local walkabouts and monitoring comments through the Birchwood Facebook page and try to work to resolve them.	Members/Officers/YHG	Quarterly walkabouts? Resource		
3.11 Undertake walkabouts in other areas (private housing etc. to identify issues)	Representative member, where possible	On-going walkabouts where appropriate Resource	None	

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3.12 Continue to work with WBC to ensure that the Town Council's work is complementary to their work/statutory responsibilities and not instead of.	Officers/Members/WBC	On-going	Time and resource	
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Objective 4: To build a greater sense of community and belonging

Actions:	Responsible	Completion date	Resources required	Status
4.1 Continue to identify the activities people would like to get involved in/with and consider assistance if appropriate	All	On-going	Not known at this stage Possible short survey	
4.2 Make a list of volunteering opportunities available in Birchwood and publicise Contact, and work with, Warrington Voluntary Action to put potential volunteers in contact with local opportunities	Town Council/ Community Centre Trustees	On-going	None Resource	
4.3 Recognise volunteers in some way – perhaps an annual event – Volunteer of the Year award. Etc. Criteria for the award to be determined	Officers/Members Recognition to be given by Chair of BTC		Cost of award and of holding the event. Time to consider criteria and nominations etc	

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4.4 Continue to provide small grants for community groups from an annual fund of £4,000 (subject to annual reappraisal)	BTC Members	On-going	Annual budgeted amount	
4.5 Look into the possibility of other local events such as a Vintage Vehicle Fair or Kids Science Fair etc.	Officers/Members/WBC/ Birchwood Park	On-going	Not known at this time	

Objective 5: Work closely with local businesses and other stakeholders to positively impact the lives of those who live and work in Birchwood.

Actions:	Responsible	Completion date	Resources required	Status
5.1 Work with local businesses to see how they might be more involved in the neighbourhood in terms of exercising their corporate responsibility. This could include possibility of volunteering. Make sure that local businesses are aware of all local facilities available.	Officers/Chair/Members	On-going	Time	
5.2 Work with Birchwood Medical Centre and other healthcare partners to see if there are ways in which specific projects	Officers /Designated Member	On-going		

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<p>might be funded which would have a positive impact on local health inequalities.</p> <p>For example, cost of heating and health screening.</p> <p>Look at buying an IR camera to identify households in fuel poverty while also helping residents identify ways to reduce their fuel bills</p>			<p>IR Camera about £1500 for a quality camera</p>	
<p>5.3 Monitor local parking issues and work with partners to identify potential solutions eg. local school drop off/pick up. Current problem sites such as Gorse Covert Road.</p>	<p>Members/Officers/PCSO/Enforcement WBC Highways</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>Not known at this time</p>	

Objective 6: Seek sources of additional funding to allow development of Birchwood as an area

Actions:	Responsible	Completion date	Resources required	Status
<p>6.1 Continue to identify potential sources of funding to help further develop amenities</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>Resource to put together bids</p>	

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Objective 7: To Work to Improve community safety and well-being

Actions	Responsible	Completion Date	Resources required	Status
<p>7.1 Work with WBC to ensure that street lighting issues already raised are addressed. The work undertaken assessed the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Impact of tree canopies 2. Light strength/dark areas 3. Any lights which are not functioning <p>Locking Stumps and Gorse Covert were completed Oakwood still needs to be done</p>	<p>Officers/Members/WBC</p> <p>Members in Oakwood to complete assessment</p>	Dec 2025	<p>Time</p> <p>WBC resource and investment</p>	
<p>7.2 Continue to monitor traffic issues through Birchwood, especially traffic speeds which are affecting both noise levels and safety. Make decision about potential addition of further Speed Indicator Devices based on impact and budget available.</p>	Members/Officers WBC		<p>Resource to review data on speeds, accidents etc.</p> <p>Feedback from residents</p> <p>Budget</p>	
<p>7.3 Consider ways in which it might be possible to provide cost-effective public transport around Birchwood; work done so far suggests that this may not be easy</p>	<p>Officers/Members/ Warrington's Own Buses</p>	Dec 2027	<p>Time</p> <p>Financing</p>	
<p>7.4 Work to find ways to reduce deprivation locally especially fuel poverty by working with</p>	Members/Bridgewater Health	On-going	Purchase of a thermal imaging camera	

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WDP energy advisors and with Bridgewater Community Health			(Noted previously)	
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Note that there are several initiatives in previous sections which are expected to have a positive impact on crime, vandalism and safety.

Key:

- Action completion is not due for more than 3 months or is completed
- Action is due within the next month and not completed
- Item is overdue or cannot be completed

What we currently do for residents:

Our current range of operational activities relevant to this strategy, vision and statement of objectives are set out in the following summary of work and project related activities:

We employ and train our staff to certified standards.

We have a local workforce to provide and undertake environmental work activities to meet several of our objectives, e.g.

1. General community maintenance work eg litter picking, reporting abandoned shopping trolleys etc.
2. Provide hedgecutting, strimming and some very minor tree maintenance (eg fallen branches).
3. Blowing leaves off the main footpaths during the autumn months.
4. Scrape and edge some of the main footpaths in Birchwood.
5. Emptying around 40 litter bins twice weekly, or more frequently if necessary.
6. General maintenance to Town Council premises, vehicles and equipment.
7. Cleanse and visually check local play and recreation areas (play areas funded all or in part by the Town Council).
8. Remove/liaise with landowners regarding the removal of graffiti.
9. Provide and maintain floral displays – planters, hanging baskets, bulbs and wildflowers.
10. Provide and maintain some benches in the local area.

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11. Occasional other tasks such as gritting footpaths outside shops for resident safety, cleaning road signs.
12. Removal of some flytipping.

The Town Council also owns and provides a central Council office to provide administration, liaison and help deliver services to meet the Council's service requirements and resident issues.

Additionally, the Town Council provides:

- A. Communication with residents using the following:
 - Website
 - Facebook
 - Local noticeboards
 - Public participation session – Town Council Meetings
 - Councillor Surgeries
- B. Provide/facilitate access/liason meetings for Police issues to be raised formally by, or on behalf of, residents.
- C. Active liaison with Warrington Borough Council on agency service issues, Including infrastructure problems, traffic related matters and other environmental/local matters.
- D. Liaise with local Social Housing landlords regarding maintenance of green spaces etc.
- E. Community development/asset maintenance initiatives.
The community development programme provides some capital funding for initiatives such as the speed indicator devices to improve road safety in Birchwood.

It has also provided funds towards the local Memorial to the women who worked in ROF Risley in Birchwood and will also be funding a couple of new benches.

The Town Council will continue to campaign to protect local open spaces.

In recent years, the Council has provided funds to install or improve local play and multi-use games areas where funding was limited. Some of this has been achieved by working in partnership with other organisations.

Additionally, the Town Council has, in the past, provided funding support towards local bus shelters, some street lighting improvements, footpath installation and supported other general schemes e.g. Encounter Statue, the Remembrance Memorial at the Shopping Centre, improvements to local play provision and it has supported the Locking Stumps Youth and Community Centre and the annual Birchwood Carnival.

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