

MINUTES OF THE BIRCHWOOD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD AT PARKERS FARM, DELENTY DRIVE
ON TUESDAY 14TH MAY 2024, 6.00 PM

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

Present: Chair – Joe Dempsey
Clerk – Fiona McDonald
RFO/Deputy Clerk – Clare Caddock
Administrative Assistant – Hannah Thomas

13 residents

031/24-25 **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS 2023**

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting held at Parker’s Farm, Delenty Drive on the 23rd May 2023 had previously been presented at the June 2023 Town Council meeting and signed as a correct record.

032/24-25 **OPENING OF THE MEETING**

The Chair, former Councillor Joe Dempsey, opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

Mr Dempsey presented his Chair’s report for 2023/2024 and thanked everyone for their hard work over the last year.

033/24-25 **CHAIR’S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024 – JOE DEMPSEY (CHAIR)**

‘I would like to start by saying that I have really enjoyed my year as Chair of Birchwood Town Council, supported by Vice Chair, Councillor Jacque 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 actually 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 Jacque 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 a number of 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.'

034/24-25

COMMUNITY ISSUES

The Chair invited questions or comments from residents, regarding issues that they would like the Town Council to consider/represent the community on over the next municipal year.

(a) Communal Bin Areas on Harcourt Close

Mrs Brereton reported that several residents have complained to her regarding the communal bin areas on Harcourt Close. The residents believe that the number of bins there currently is not sufficient for the amount of rubbish produced and is therefore leading to flytipping and vermin.

The Clerk stated that this is something YHG coordinate with WBC, so would have to be arranged by them.

(b) Speeding Around Birchwood

Mr Atkin queried whether there is any data to support whether the new SIDs that were installed along Admirals Road and Warrington Road have been effective, and if this is the case, whether the Council could look into other sites that may be able to benefit from 30 MPH signs or SIDs.

Mr Dhillon stated that the roundabout at Glover Road, Birchwood Park Avenue and Garrett Fild junction there are frequent accidents due to speeding.

Mr Ball said that Gorse Covert Road would benefit from a reduction in the speed limit, as some vehicles drive quickly despite parked cars and a school nearby.

Mr Ellis said that he has been looking into downloading data from the SIDs and that by the next BTC meeting, he hopes to have some data to share.

(c) Parking Issues

Mr Atkin stated that questionable parking around Birchwood is becoming unsafe.

He said that on Gorse Covert Road, the parking around the school and opposite Mosslands Care Facility creates sightline issues, particularly as it is effectively one long bend.

This has caused many instances where bus drivers have to manoeuvre around the stationary vehicles and find themselves facing oncoming traffic.

Mrs Sheridan stated that in her professional capacity, she has become aware that many of the poorly parked cars on the road, could belong to people visiting Mosslands Care Facility. She said that there is ample parking inside of the complex, but signage is either non-existent or not obvious.

Mrs Sheridan added that most of the addresses are hard to find and there are occasions that carers, district nurses and delivery drivers are getting out of their vehicles to locate addresses on foot, and abandoning their cars/vans on Gorse Covert Road in the process.

Mrs Sheridan wondered whether some signs could be installed to direct visitors to Mosslands to their car park.

Mr Ball stated that further up the same road, opposite Falstone Close, there are often poorly parked vehicles due to an educational nature class for children which occurs periodically and there have been instances where residents' drives have been blocked by people attending the event.

As a consequence of this, some residents have chosen to block their drives on the days of these events to prevent any obstruction to their drives by attendees to the event.

Mr Ellis stated that he is aware of the educational nature events, and will speak to the organiser regarding safer parking.

Mr Atkin also stated that near the Spar Shop in Risley, road markings, including double yellow lines, have been re-painted, but vehicles are still parking dangerously and on the yellow lines.

(d) Shopping Trolleys

Mrs Sheridan stated that she hopes that the Council can continue working with residents and the shopping centre this year to resolve the problem.

The Clerk stated that this is an ongoing issue and that Officers will continue to liaise with the stores and collection agencies accordingly.

(e) Community Gardens in Birchwood

Mr Ellis stated that he would like the Council to consider the potential for a community garden in Birchwood, as the area has no allotments and there are many residents who do not have a garden.

He said that there would have to be enough interest from the community. Mr Ellis stated that this could be ascertained by consulting with residents online.

He added that, with produce prices likely to increase following the heavy rainfall we have experienced this year creating problems for farmers' crops, residents might prefer to help cultivate their own, and if there was an option for a community garden, this might facilitate residents' wishes.

Mr Atkin stated that there have been similar groups set up in the past and though interest was initially high, membership dwindled, and the group leaders were left to do the majority of the work.

Mrs Brereton said that ideally there should be a community space for planting in each area of Birchwood.

The Clerk Stated that there are some larger raised planter areas which are unkempt that could possibly be considered as locations to plant vegetables, etc.

As there were no other comments or queries from residents, the Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm.