

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 4th May 2016
at 8.00pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors Mr M Burleigh
Mrs J Clark
Mrs D Day
Mr D Drew
Mr J N C Healey
Mrs M Trinder (Clerk)

In attendance Mark Higgin (Treasurer)

Eight members of the public: James Bentall
Diane Blockley
Andy Cole
Ita Leaver
Vicki Lunniss
Jenny Murray
Brian Waters
Jenny Woolner

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Parish Councillor Pam Stark, County Councillor David Barnard, District Councillor Faye Frost, PC Matt Jenkins, PCSO Heather Burrows

2) Declaration of interests: There were no declarations of interests.

3) Election of Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor David Drew and seconded by Councillor Diane Day that John Healey be elected as Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

4) Election of Vice Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor Margaret Trinder and seconded by Councillor Jane Clark that Pam Stark be elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

5) Appointment of Parish Clerk

It was proposed by Councillor John Healey and seconded by Councillor Diane Day that Margaret Trinder be re-appointed as Clerk for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

6) Appointment of Treasurer

It was proposed by Councillor Diane Day and seconded by Councillor Margaret Trinder that Mark Higgin be re-appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year. This resolution was passed unanimously.

7) Minutes of the last AGM

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 13 May 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 21 July 2015.

8) Chairman's Report

Preston Parish Council continues to meet about every 6 weeks, nine meetings in the past year. The dates of our meetings are on the front of the village newsletter, they are public meetings and we welcome the villagers who sometimes come, including anyone with questions, concerns, information or suggestions. We are 7 Parish Councillors including Margaret Trinder, who also acts as Clerk to the Parish Council. Mark Higgin is our Treasurer, he took over from Robert Young a year ago, and we much appreciate this input. Our contact details are on the village website, and the minutes of our meetings are also there as well as being posted on the Notice Board on the Green.

Our meetings often include one of North Hertfordshire District Councillors and/or our Hertfordshire County Councillor and from them we hear and can discuss something of the wider policies and activities that affect us. These area councillors are also one of our sources of grants for work and projects around the village.

I have chosen a few facts and figures and specifics from the past year to mention briefly. Time and energies have again been taken up by the NHDC Draft Local Plan published 18 months ago, which is particularly about additional housing numbers decided by central government and allocated to the North Herts area for the 20 year period 2011-2031. The next draft of the Local Plan has been delayed to September and we understand that the numbers are being revised upwards, to 14400 new houses for North Herts plus a possible 2060 for Luton Borough Council to be built on Hertfordshire land 3 miles away from here at Cockernhoe village. Preston was

allocated a full share which for us means 36 new houses over the 20 year period to 2031 which corresponds to a 23% increase on our existing numbers and is one of the higher increases in percentage terms. Nearly half of Preston's numbers have been built in the past couple of years. We are also concerned that this draft Local Plan redraws the village boundary whereas we want to keep the green spaces that we still have close to the village centre as green space. A meeting earlier this year with North Hertfordshire Planning at Letchworth did not give us much optimism for achieving what we want, but something we did discuss with them was the idea that Preston should consider developing a Neighbourhood Plan which would strengthen our position in the long term. Neighbourhood Plans are a relatively new concept introduced through the Localism Act of 2011. These Plans cannot be used to block development but they can decide where and what type of development should happen in a village. The Parish Councillors have unanimously concluded that, under a Steering Group of residents, Preston should develop such a Plan and we have decided to present and propose this at a Village Meeting on Sunday June 26th to see what residents think and whether a Steering Group from a cross section of the village can be formed. It is not a quick process and may need a couple of years to take through the stages of preparation and approvals.

In the meantime, we have been making good headway on many of our usual tasks. The routine work has been continuing in the background without too many hitches, including the usual grass cutting, litter bins and dog bins, inspecting and repairing parish property including playground equipment, rotting gates and posts on footpaths and removing fallen trees, and a substantial pond clearance and service earlier this year together with some replanting. We have continued good progress with Hertfordshire Highways and we were until recently the only village in Hertfordshire to have an agreed Parish Action Plan with Ringway, the County Council's Highways contractor, an Action Plan that identifies, prioritises and has dates scheduled for many of the essential road and footpath works within the parish.

The Vicars Grove waste site has been an on-going issue for us all, it has kept the road to Little Almshoe crossroads in a filthy state for the last two decades, and because of this experience we and many others lodged objections to a proposed enormous expansion of its operations. The progress previously promised by its operators was nowhere near to being achieved, and the application for the expansion was formally rejected late last year. Requirements were also imposed to try and tighten up on the currently licensed operations there, but their effectiveness has yet to be seen.

It was a big disappointment to its users to lose our Library Van service last October and nothing will truly replace it. We accepted the best alternative available, of the Community Book Swap which includes a range of books supplied by the library service. This new initiative was set up and opened by village volunteers in March and is held here in the Village Hall every other Saturday morning, dates as always are in the Newsletter. It is something new, do try it out and support them, comments from users have been good and the volunteers are determined to make it successful.

Something that several residents have continued to raise is traffic speed and ways to make the village lanes safer, especially for pedestrians. Thank you to everyone who has put the stickers onto their wheelie bins, yes a simple step but a strongly visible reminder. We also discussed having a few additional road signs and repeaters and

these have been installed at spots recommended by Hertfordshire Highways. Another step is to try and start the process to reduce the village speed limit to 20, even though this seems to be a 5-year long process and the odds of achieving it for Preston may not be great.

The Parish Council owns the land at the Recreation Ground which thanks to the loving care it enjoys from the Cricket Club remains in excellent condition, it is an outstanding public facility and a village asset, and we have been glad to support the Cricket Club where we can.

Crime in Preston has thankfully remained very low, and the village has the good support of PC Matt Jenkins and our very proactive PCSO Heather Burrows. The police run a Saturday morning session in the village every few months, the dates are flagged up in the Newsletter, there is not a big attendance but do try it out.

I could go on but I had better stop. I do emphasise that the work I have been summarising has been through the efforts of all the Parish Councillors and it is an opportunity for me to thank them each for their individual contributions during the past year. Finally I must also take this opportunity, and this is really on behalf of the whole village, that I must acknowledge and praise the efforts and input of many individuals and groups across Preston, and certainly including those organisations reporting here tonight, for their work and contributions that continue to keep Preston the thriving community that we truly are.

10) Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer informed the meeting that the Parish Council has two accounts, a community account which conducts the day to day business and a business saver account.

At the start of the financial year, the community account had £12343.31. Income during the year is from various sources including the precept of £6360 paid in two instalments in April and September. This amount is paid to the Parish Council by NHDC and is an element of the Council Tax which is paid to NHDC by local residents. Other income has come from grants, a VAT refund and £7 gate money for access to the Recreation Ground. This gives a total income of £11340.17, bringing the amount in the account to £23683.48.

The expenditure during the year was £8411.44, leaving £1522.04 in the account. Expenditure included electricity: £552, grass cutting: £786, tree works: £1800, NHDC bin emptying: £580, insurance: £1003. A total of £5750 was spent on the physical fabric of the village and £2141 on the Recreation Ground. The expenditure was about the same as in the last financial year. When the amount in the community account is added to the Business Saver Account which has £13159.83, the Parish Council has funds totalling £28431.87.

Brian Waters asked what the money was going to be spent on but it was explained that it was necessary to have some contingencies, particularly if the water main which runs across the Recreation Ground had to be replaced. A revised estimate of what this

might cost will be sought. The Clerk explained that recently we had been very successful in obtaining grants which means we save Parish Council funds leading to an increase in reserves, year on year. The Treasurer informed the meeting that there is some unspent grant money in the account. It is acknowledged that the auditors will be of the view that the reserves are too high.

11) Reports by Local Organisations

The Chairman thanked all the members of the public who had come along to the meeting to listen to reports from various organisations. The meeting continued with interesting reports by the following:

Preston Nursery School	Jenny Woolner
Preston Primary School	Vicki Lunniss
Princess Helena College	James Bentall
Herts Constabulary	Hitchin Rural Team (read by Clerk)
Neighbourhood Watch	Ita Leaver
St Martin's Church	Andy Cole
Friends of St Martin's	Di Blockley
Preston Cricket Club	Matt Burleigh
Preston Trust	Andy Cole
Preston Village Society	Jenny Murray
Village Hall Committee	Jenny Murray
The Red Lion	Brian Waters

12) Any other Business

There were no items of any other business.

13) Date and time of next AGM: Wednesday 3 May 2017 at 8 p.m

The meeting closed at 9.25 p.m.