

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 3rd May 2017
at 8.00pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors Mr M Burleigh
Mrs J Clark
Mr D Drew
Mr J N C Healey (Chairman)
Mrs S Palmer
Mrs P Stark
Mrs M Trinder

In attendance Mark Higgin (Treasurer)
Lisa Lathane (Clerk)

Six members of the public:
Andy Cole
Alison Jeffers
Sue Griffiths
Ita Leaver
Vicky Lunniss
Jenny Murray

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from: County Councillor David Barnard, District Councillor Faye Frost, PC Matt Jenkins, Jenny Woolner from Preston Nursery School, Sue Wallace-Woodroffe from Princess Helena College and Richard Coles from The Preston Trust.

2) Declaration of interests: There were no Declarations of Interests.

3) Election of Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor Pam Stark and seconded by Councillor David Drew 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 John Healey and seconded by Councillor Sandra Palmer that Pam Stark be elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

5) Appointment of Treasurer

It was proposed by Councillor Jane Clark and seconded by Councillor Matt Burleigh that Mark Higgin be re-appointed as Treasurer for the ensuing year. This resolution was passed unanimously.

6) Minutes of the last AGM

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 4 May 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 1 June 2016.

7) Chairman's Report

I have about 5 minutes' worth here, a few facts and figures on some of the work that we have been doing over the past 12 months, mainly the bigger tasks but I shall include a few of the smaller jobs too. I do also want to acknowledge the input that other village groups and many individuals contribute, people often just quietly getting on with a variety of work that helps keep Preston the village we all treasure.

The routine work has continued very much as before such as the grass cutting on the areas we are responsible for including the Playgrounds, works on several of the trees, the litter bins and dog bins, another substantial pond clearance, clean-up and replanting as winter began (we found that we have a healthy population of the Ramshorn snail in Preston's Pond). We have had some good maintenance on the village roads although keeping up with the rate of pothole formation has again been challenging this last winter. We are glad of the many contractors who do most of this work. For the roads it is Hertfordshire CC who are responsible and we try to encourage more villagers to report potholes and any other road problems, there is an easy link on the County Council website, the more reports they receive the higher the priority given, it's as simple as that. The ditches were dug out again along Charlton Road and potholes filled in there. A new gully was installed at The Green and two nearby pavements were resurfaced, although we were not able to get the materials we wanted despite it being in the Conservation Area; a thorough renovation was achieved for the footpath from the Green to the Primary School. Progress we believe with the Vicars Grove waste site, towards the Little Almshoe crossroads, where the roadway is forever muddy and which has brought many heavy trucks through the village lanes. Planning permission for this site expired last September and enforcement action has been taken by Herts CC for the owners to do the intended restoration work and to close the site. We were one of several successful objections to an application by Vicars Grove for major expansion.

The telephone box is now fully working again, for free emergency calls and other calls by card payment, we had support from Peter Lilley which worked

some magic, and the box is at last on BT's programme for repainting this year though probably without repairs to the door. We encouraged and supported Vodafone and Telefonica with their planning permission for a mobile phone mast in Preston and directed them towards the Preston reservoir site, to include 3G and now 4G as well as providing the older GSM signals. Planning Approval was granted last October, other unrelated works have been going on at the site in the meantime, now finished, but we don't yet have a date for the phone mast works.

One of the biggest consumers of time and energies has again been planning issues. Preston has continued to grow for decades by mainly one-off new builds and conversions and small developments. You may remember the major 2007 North Herts Preferred Options proposals, and then in the 2009 the eight Additional Sites for new houses on 16 hectares (39 acres) of land at Preston, an additional area bigger than the entire village. The Parish Council, very much supported by many individual villagers, have been fighting against development on such a scale for a long time. The long-term focus of planning has changed and is now very much in the North Herts Local Plan, part of a nationwide governmental push for millions more houses across Britain as a whole over the period to 2031. Revised forecasts come from the Office for National Statistics each year with the North Herts allocation now being for 14600 new homes by 2031, of which Preston has been allocated 21 new houses with the one identified site being the Chequers Lane field. This is the plan that is currently being submitted by NHDC to the government for assessment by an independent Planning Inspector towards the end of this year, with the plan perhaps being formalised by the end of 2018. We expect that the large part of Preston's allocation of 21 can and will occur through one-off and small developments as has been the pattern in the village for decades. The purpose of these Local Plans is to identify sites, it will then be up to whether builders are interested in the sites and if so to submit applications through the normal planning processes. We believe that absolutely no future development in Preston is not an option, and many of our residents do not expect there to be no development, but we would strongly oppose so many houses crammed into any one area, so completely at odds with the existing village character. Others also point out that the UK has never achieved anywhere near such a rate of construction as could meet the ONS national forecasts, the country doesn't have sufficient builders, mortgage finance, nor the infrastructure, etc.

There are some significant positives for Preston in the proposed Local Plan, particularly that the previously identified greenfield sites around the village are now designated for upgrading to Green Belt status, which would achieve strong protection for the future.

We did also realise from the various proposals and from our own meetings with North Herts Planning and others, that we had to consider a Neighbourhood Plan for Preston, a relatively new step made possible under the government's 2011 Localism Act and which Parish Councils can prepare, in which all residents would have a say in the type of development that should happen here. This is a major piece of new legislation. Neighbourhood Plans once achieved, examined and approved, then have Statutory Effect which the local planning authorities have to take into account.

There was overwhelming support in a village meeting held on 20 June last year to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan. Volunteers stepped forward and formed an excellent Steering Group, they have made great progress, and have already just completed the first stage of the process. There is a good way yet to go, and the Steering Group will need everyone's support and help.

This has been just a cross-section of some of the Council's activity this past year, some other work will come up in the reports by local organisations this evening. A few final points I should just like to mention. Recent improvements to footpaths and byways have included works around the gateways on Butchers Lane and at the top of Wain Wood, while the gateway itself in Wain Wood was replaced in October. You will have noticed the Speed Indication Device (SID) if you have driven in from Ley Green, and we are looking at the scope for a second site that we can alternate this SID to. The outcome of the questionnaires has been awaited in terms of a possible 20 mph speed limit on some roads, and this outcome as you probably now know is clearly in favour of such a limit. There continues to be good support from our police and our proactive PCSO Heather Burrows, and Matt Jenkins is back with the rural police unit; crime thankfully remains relatively low, there have been a few exceptions, rural crime in the North Herts area showed an increase last year, and a large increase in the theft of pets, including from closed gardens. In a raid on one site earlier this year the police recovered more than 30 stolen dogs.

We had the annual playground inspections carried out in December and have followed up a number of actions, particularly in the Church Meadow playground including cutting the brambles further back from the play areas and replacing the wooden legs on the swings. Although the swings were installed in 2003, the manufacturers did agree to make their own inspection and then to cover the main costs of the replacements, as well as provide a new 15 year guarantee for them.

Finally, I do thank my fellow councillors for all their contributions to these items and the rest of the work carried out, and to thank the people of Preston for your support too.

8) Treasurer's Report

Mark Higgin, Treasurer to the Parish Council reported that at the start of the 2016/17 financial year the Parish Council had funds of £28,484.82 which were later supplemented by income of £14,175.62 the largest parts of which related to the precept which totalled £6,360 and grants amounting to £6,959.62.

We spent £1,482.00 on work to the Village Green/pond, £2,018.54 on Church Meadow and £4,015.45 on the Recreation Ground although some of this latter amount was offset by a contribution of £1,095 from the Cricket Club.

Other significant expenditure was incurred in connection with the Neighbourhood Plan where costs of £6,998.47 were to a large extent, offset by the grant income already mentioned above.

In all, expenditure totalled £20,201.70 leaving the Parish Council with £22,458.74 in the bank at the year end.

9) 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:

Herts County Council Councillor	David Barnard (read by Clerk)
North Herts District Council Councillor	David Barnard (read by Councillor M Trinder)
Preston Nursery School	Jenny Woolner (read by the Chairman)
Preston Primary School	Vicky Lunniss
Princess Helena College	Sue Wallace-Woodroffe (read by Councillor M Trinder)
Herts Constabulary	PC Matt Jenkins (read by Clerk)
Neighbourhood Watch	Ita Leaver
St Martin's Church	Andy Cole
Friends of St Martin's	Sue Griffiths
Preston Cricket Club	Matt Burleigh
Preston Trust	Richard Coles (read by Councillor M Trinder)
Preston Village Society	Jenny Murray
Village Hall Committee	Jenny Murray
The Red Lion	Alison Jeffers

10) Any other Business

There were no items of any other business.

11) Date and time of next AGM: Wednesday 2 May 2018 at 8 p.m

The meeting closed at 9.28 p.m.