

The Preston Trust Chairman's Report

PT AGM 14th May 2017

I have now completed three years as chairman, and I would firstly like to thank all The Trust committee members for their help over the past few years, without whom none of what we have delivered would have been possible. Richard Woolfson joined the committee in June last year and was put straight to work on our summer events. Wally Steele and Rae Reynolds have just joined us last week. Christina is sadly leaving the Trust committee. She joined in 2013, becoming Secretary in 2014. We would all like to thank Christina for her work over the past 4 or so years during this time when the Trust has been reinvigorated. I think our committee meeting a couple of weeks ago reminded us all of the valuable contribution to discussions which Christina makes, and which will be sorely missed.

Over the past year The Trust has sought to continue its regular activities, and introduce new ones in line with its main objectives of enhancing the village, preserving village history, promoting high standards of planning, and providing financial support for any purposes which fulfil these objectives.

The Trust has continued to maintain the village website, not a trivial task, and organised the Christmas tree lighting event at the Red Lion. This year we installed the tree ourselves which enabled us to have a bigger and better tree than recent years which complemented the previous year's new lights. We also provided the food and drink, and arranged for the event to include the ladies' choir and an art competition from the Primary School. This event is still a highlight of the year for all ages to gather together which enriches our community.

The Trust had a busy summer last year with firstly organising a stall at Princess Helena College's Garden Party in honour of the Queen's 90th birthday. This was an opportunity to contribute not only to a village event, but also foster new links with the school. The 1946-1956 decade-themed ladder game proved a hit which was then replicated at village day.

Village Day itself consumes a significant amount of The Trust's time, and following on from its successful debut in 2014, it continues to be a popular event as reported in the Local Plan survey. In fact, it was pleasing to see that this and the Christmas tree event were the best attended annual activities village-wide. At last year's Village Day the scarecrows featured again, the school entertained with their dancing, the dog show was barking mad, the cars gleamed, the police even arrived to join in and allow children to set the riot van's sirens blaring, and the band played the night out. This year, on 8th July, the scarecrows will be given a rest in favour of a treasure hunt and the Great Preston Bakeoff, but otherwise we hope the format will continue to bring everyone together for an enjoyable day. One of the main aims is not only that everyone in the village will have a great time, but that The Trust will help build community by facilitating the coming together of our many village societies, clubs, and residents.

Over the past 12 months we have also launched three new regular activities. The first was in response to a suggestion made at last year's AGM following a one-off litter pick we organised in aid of the Clean for the Queen birthday initiative. We implemented the suggestion that this become a regular event and are now running a litter pick in the Spring and Autumn each year. The two we have run so far have been well-attended by residents of Preston to clear away the debris that unfortunately can build up. We appreciate that some villagers regularly pick up litter, and hope that this bi-annual blitz will greatly assist in enhancing the environment for everyone.

The Preston Trust main objectives:

- To enhance and preserve Preston for the benefit of all the villagers and visitors.
- To secure the preservation and protection of features of historic or public interest, including the village's history.
- To promote high standards of planning and architecture.
- To support financially and promote any purpose for the benefit of villagers and in particular, its children and senior citizens.

The second initiative has been to provide quarterly update newsletters to members on email. This has been a short, visually attractive way to update people on activities and requests. The newsletter is now being distributed far more widely than just members by our third initiative, the Preston News Service.

We launched the Preston News Service in January and now have 150 people from 100 houses signed up. The email news service is designed to be a hub for all village societies, schools, church, and individual residents to disseminate information village-wide, especially at short notice or reminder items which complement the monthly newsletter. While not all residents are on email, with so many people signed up, and with the amount of information that has already been flowing through it, I think this initiative has already been proven to be a great success. It is another way of building community which I am very keen the Trust does as part of its mandate.

We have continued to work with the Parish Council, discussing initiatives such as road speed monitoring and reduction, planting along the fence at Castelfield, and maintenance of the phone box. You will probably know that these items have pleasingly been progressed by the Parish Council over the past months.

Looking ahead to the next year, as well as the regular events, we are planning to fund training for two lifeguards so that the summer swimming club at PHC can continue to operate and provide a wide range of opening times. We are also in discussion with the Primary school over helping to fund the school library refurbishment, along with the Parent Staff Association. We are also very conscious of the pressures on our surrounding environment, whether it be the Vicars Grove recycling plant, solar panel farms, or large destruction of green belt such as the proposal for Cockernhoe. We will continue to make representations on behalf of villagers in conjunction with individuals and the Parish Council so that our opinions as a community are heard loud and clear.

Finally, as far as plans for the next year are concerned, we are hoping for a flurry of entries for the village photographic competition. This is intended as something fun for all ages, and also something which will preserve a pictorial history of the village. Last year's winners have been displayed in the Red Lion since last summer, and we hope to replace them with new photos this year, so please get clicking!

So in conclusion The Trust has had an active twelve months and thanks the village for its support. We are always looking for new projects and ideas to consider, so there will be an opportunity for you to voice these at the end of this meeting. We rely on financial contributions from the village, so The Trust would like to take this opportunity to encourage you all to renew your subscriptions when you receive a form next month. We would like to see as many people being members as possible so that we are representing as many of the village as possible, so please do take any opportunity to encourage your friends and neighbours in the village to join up as well.