

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 2nd May 2018
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 P Stark
Mrs M Trinder

In attendance Lisa Lathane (Clerk & Treasurer)

Six members of the public:
Sue Griffiths
Ita Leaver
Malcolm Lowle
Vicky Lunniss
Jenny Murray
Wally Steele

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from: Parish Councillor Sandra Palmer, County Councillor David Barnard, District Councillor Faye Frost, PC Matt Jenkins, Jenny Woolner from Preston Nursery School and Alison Jeffers from the Red Lion

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 Jane Clark 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 Margaret Trinder that Pam Stark be elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

5) Minutes of the last AGM

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 3 May 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 7 June 2017.

6) Chairman's Report

This summary of the Parish Council's work will be a snapshot of just some of the highlights, routine tasks, and a few low points and frustrations from the past year. I must emphasise the major inputs made by my fellow councillors throughout, it is everyone's efforts, energies and initiative over these 12 months that have achieved some progress and helped to maintain and sometimes enhance our cherished village environment and its facilities. It's a pleasure to see the number of villagers here this evening. I think you know that all our meetings are public meetings to which everyone is very welcome to attend, about 9 meetings a year, all of them here in the Village Hall and on the dates as posted on the notice board on the Green.

Preston Village Green has seen some modest benefits, including repairs to the roof and leadwork on the well, one of the village's 63 designated listed structures. Then a seemingly very simple step that really has taken years of persistence and effort was to get our public telephone line reinstated and working followed by repairs to the phone box itself and a clean-up and even a repaint inside and out last October, and repainting of the postbox at the same time. I do notice many sad and faded and broken phone boxes around the country and I am delighted in just a small way that Preston's is not one of them. The Recreation Ground has also had an uplift, where Preston Cricket Club with great assistance from Maydencroft now have a superb new oak gateway, and the problems with the difficult pedestrian gate are resolved.

Our telephone box has extra importance for us because of the poor mobile signal that we suffer and the sometimes unreliable home phone lines. You might just recall that the company Waldon Telecom acting on behalf of several mobile companies had been given planning approval for a new telephone mast at the Preston reservoir site, much encouraged and supported by the parish council, but that was in October 2016. Waldon tell us that their legal processes and other preparations are completed, but nothing more has happened since and I have no expected schedule to report.

The more mundane jobs around the village continue, with the first grass cutting of the year now done by our new contractors Greenwoods, the first impressions of them are good. The pond had a major clear out and clean up in February, footpaths are generally in good shape if presently muddy, fallen trees have occasionally needed to be removed and broken posts replaced, and we are trying to keep on top of the vigorous brambles, nettles, and scores of saplings in those areas around Preston where they are particularly not wanted. At last some of the worst potholes around the village have been repaired by Hertfordshire Highways and this time, they tell us, with a new, longer lasting compound. We are still however trying to get some progress on the pot holes going out towards Ley Green, where part or most of the problem is linked to the water that runs down from Back lane.

We organise annual safety inspections of our two playgrounds using a national inspection body, and their latest visit in December resulted in 16 low risk and 6 very low risk findings that we have reviewed and for which we have allocated priorities. Some findings do surprise us, a couple this year for the basketball area on the Recreation ground with its basketball post and metal ring, and the finding that we should provide a prominent notice that says 'not intended for children under 3' and particularly not to hang from the basketball ring. We do of course have to assess all the findings seriously and carefully and do something about them. There is some degree of good progress here, we had quite a number of findings the previous year in the next category up, rated as moderate risks, that we worked on and resolved and are not featured again this year.

A different concern last summer was with intermittent odours in parts of Chequers Lane and Templars Close, drain smells which became worse during hot weather, and which persisted despite the water company and other experts finding that everything was operating correctly. 'It's the farmers muck spreading' was one of their alternative suggestions. The smells seemed to affect only some properties, and we received 8 concerns in response to questionnaires sent to 33 houses in these roads. The problem ceased with the end of the summer which prevented further progress but we have to expect that it will start up again and we have to identify the source and how to resolve it.

One of the major and time-consuming roles for the Parish Council is planning matters. Our planning authority is North Herts District Council and it is they who make the planning decisions, while the parish council is usually always consulted together with immediate neighbours on any new proposals. We have had I think about 7 new applications started across the parish in the past 12 months and 2 or 3 others from the previous year have either progressed or occasionally been withdrawn, and there have been several other applications for extensions or major alterations. We do look carefully at all these applications, we do often find concerns or elements of controversy, or receive comments from neighbours, which we try to resolve. In the end we were able to support most of this year's planning applications, sometimes after changes (mostly small changes and quickly agreed) or with conditions attached to our support. We submit our local comments if we have any, back to North Herts, and they make the planning decisions. Sometimes our comments have an effect, and sometimes none at all.

A long running concern is the former quarry site Vicars Grove at the bottom of Poynders End hill, near the Little Almshoe crossroads. This Green Belt site is within the St Ippolyts parish but the scale of operations, the state of the road and the numbers of HGVs outside the scope of their permission have all impacted on Preston for more than 2 decades. The site falls under Herts County Council's jurisdiction, and the few enforcement efforts over this long period have proved quite ineffective. Eventually the site was theoretically closed by Herts Council in 2016 for contravention of planning conditions. A new application has now been made by the site owners to restart their activities. We have strongly objected to this as have several other local organisations and some individuals, the application is likely to run for a few months yet before we hear any outcome.

A particular planning headline is the NHDC Local Plan which makes provision for some 14,000 new houses across the North-Herts district over the period 2011 – 2031, numbers allocated by the Government to North-Herts from population forecasts calculated by the Office for National Statistics and reassessed each year. Preston's total is for another 21 new houses by 2031. The Local Plan approved by NHDC was submitted to the government in June last year, it was similar to the 2014 draft despite the huge numbers of comments made during the so-called consultation period. Formal hearings in front of an independent planning inspector started last November and ran until late March this year. North-Herts Council's early expectations were that the Plan would be in place in about March 2019. As yet it is too early to have had feedback from the inspector.

I want quickly to emphasise a couple of other points before I end. All the North Herts villages are experiencing some increase in crime and especially including burglaries, thefts from outbuildings especially where not well secured, car theft, and dog theft, where dogs are being stolen from back gardens and even taken when out on their lead. Please take greater steps to avoid being a victim, do come to one of the Saturday morning police surgeries here in the village hall, and talk to our excellent and pro-active PCSOs. The other one to mention is the fly-tipping that blights and obstructs the lanes, and which seems bound to increase as a result of the brown bin charge. If you see any fly-tipping and if you have chance to get a vehicle registration number, it can be reported on the non-emergency 101 number, or via our parish clerk Lisa or one of us councillors if you prefer.

I have already thanked my fellow councillors, and finally I do also thank yourselves and acknowledge the help and support we are given by the village of Preston, and thanks also to our district and county councillors for their valued input and support.

7) Treasurer's Report

Lisa Lathane, Treasurer to the Parish Council reported that at the start of the 2017/18 financial year the Parish Council had funds of £23,688.46 which were later supplemented by income of £12,398.04 the largest parts of which related to the precept which totalled £5,600 and grants amounting to £5,042.

We spent £1580 on work to the Village Green/pond and £840 on Church Meadow. These figures include grass cutting, and lead repair work to the well. We have spent £1158.158 on the Recreation Ground and Pavilion although some of this latter amount was offset by a contribution of £289.98 (830.58 in total) from the Cricket Club.

Other significant expenditure was incurred in connection with the Neighbourhood Plan where costs of £5686.65 were to a large extent, offset by the grant income already mentioned above. At the end of the financial year the Parish Council had £17,372.60 in the bank.

8) 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:

North Herts District Council Councillor	David Barnard (read by the Clerk)
Preston Nursery School	Jenny Woolner (read by the Clerk)
Preston Primary School	Vicky Lunniss
Herts Constabulary	PC Matt Jenkins (read by the Clerk)
Neighbourhood Watch	Ita Leaver
St Martin's Church	Malcolm Lowle
Friends of St Martin's	Sue Griffiths
Preston Cricket Club	Matt Burleigh
Preston Trust	Wally Steele
Preston Village Society	Jenny Murray
Village Hall Committee	Jenny Murray
The Red Lion	Alison Jeffers (read by the Clerk)

9) Neighbourhood Plan: As Parish Council representative on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Councillor Trinder provided a comprehensive report on the process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan for Preston. The Submission Draft was sent to NHDC on Friday 27 April. The next step is the Regulation 16 Consultation which is undertaken and funded by the District Council.

The total cost of producing the Neighbourhood Plan is £ 13,082.42, including VAT. The cost to the Parish Council is £2245.14 as grants totalling £9400 were received and the Parish Council can claim back VAT which was £1,698.96.

The costs are low because the Steering Group have done as much of the work as possible themselves. The Independent Planning Consultant was used as a critical friend, rather than asking her to write large sections of the Plan. Wally Steele's IT skills meant that the production could be done "in-house". If we had had to pay for this, the costs would have been considerably more.

10) Any other Business

10.1 Phone Mast: Sue Griffiths asked if we knew whether the phone mast, when it is installed, will be a traditional post or a tree. It is the understanding of the Parish Council that it would look like a tree.

10.2 Reverend Elizabeth Bunker: Malcolm Lowle informed the meeting that Reverend Elizabeth Bunker will be retiring at the end of September.

10.3 Extension of Church Yard: Malcolm Lowle informed the meeting that there is a possibility that the Church will ask to purchase a small area of the Millennium Playground. This area is currently covered in brambles and is next to the gate from the Church Yard into the Millennium Playground. The

Chairman stated that this would be added to the agenda of the next PPC Meeting for further discussion.

11) Date and time of next AGM: Wednesday 8 May 2019 at 8 pm

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.

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