

The Preston Trust Chairman's Report

PT AGM 13th May 2018

Over the last 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.

Last summer The Trust again put a huge amount of effort into organising the Village Day. The event was blessed with good weather, and some new attractions such as the Treasure Hunt were introduced, as well as the ever-popular dog show. Sadly, it was noticeable that fewer villagers turned out for the event than in previous years, so combined with the lack of support for the Bake Off which had to be cancelled, and declining entries into the Scarecrow competition in previous years, meant that we concluded the event should not run this year. We asked for feedback on the changing or cancelling Village Day last October, but received none, so we have asked for feedback on the idea of running a barn dance this Autumn instead. We have now had a good level of response, probably enough to justify using The Trust's resources to put the event on (TBC). If you haven't let us know what you think about the idea, and if you are likely to attend such an event, then please do so as soon as possible.

During the summer we funded some new children's chairs for the village hall which were in desperate need of replacement. We also shared funding of a new BBQ with the Red Lion and the Church which we used for Village Day, and will also be used for Open Gardens, pub events, and anything else these three parties put on for the benefit of the community. We also made a significant contribution towards the cost of equipping the newly refurbished Primary School library.

After the summer break, The Trust organised a short talk in the village hall on the work of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. This was well attended, perhaps thanks in part to the free cheese and wine! Kevin FitzGerald, honorary director of the Hertfordshire branch, gave an informative talk with some great questions afterwards, and he shed light on some of the myths and nuances of the local planning process. The Trust has subsequently joined the CPRE so that we have a regular source of information as to what the hot issues are, how the CPRE are addressing them, and how we might be able to contribute. We have also joined LADACAN (Luton And District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise). This will enable us to keep in-touch with their activities, and Tim Justham, our flying ace, has presented some valuable technical information to the Preston Trust committee which may be used in future representations on airport expansion and aircraft noise.

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.

At the end of the year we once again organised the Christmas tree lighting event at the Red Lion. We installed the tree ourselves which turned out to be probably the largest one we've had, and provided the food and drink. The pub was adorned with pictures from the primary school which were created for the art competition we sponsor there, and the choir sang and encouraged us to join in for much merriment. Once again the event was enjoyed by a large section of the village who make this one of the highlights of the year.

While the visible events were happening during the last quarter of the year, our web masters Wally and Tim were working away in a darkened room huddled around a hot computer designing the new village website. The new site was launched in January and the radical overhaul means that we have a visually arresting, informative, and easy to maintain source of information for all people and organisations in the village to take advantage of. Some societies have their own websites which we link to, and some, like the Parish Council, have their content on the village website and are able to update it directly themselves. This continues our aspiration to bring the community together, and complements the email Preston News Service which has been used even more widely over this last year following its launch in January 2017. You will probably have had lots of letters and emails about the new General Data Protection Regulations coming into force on the 25th May, and soon we will be contacting PNS subscribers to ask them to reconfirm their wish for us to contact them so that we will be compliant, along with some other changes we need to make.

The bi-annual litter pick, instituted last year, has again made a big difference to our environment and has been well-supported. The new partnership we have with North Herts District Council has been a great bonus which affords us equipment and their collection of the rubbish which we gathered. This partnership also gave us the added boost we needed to organise an additional litter pick in Church Meadow and Sootfield Green which were identified during the normal litter pick as areas needing extra attention. The litter pick is strangely one of my favourite activities because it brings the community together for a common purpose which is not very glamorous, but benefits all who live in and visit the village.

In April we were alerted to yet another application to develop, rather than shut down the Vicars Grove waste pit. We have made a strong objection to the application, and have pressed the council to enforce the site's restoration to agricultural pastureland which should have been completed by September 2016 as per the conditions of its original planning consent granted in 2010. We will continue to make representations on behalf of villagers in conjunction with individuals and the Parish Council so that our opinions on planning as a community are heard loud and clear.

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 residents being members as possible so that we are representing the majority of the village, so please do take any opportunity to encourage your friends and neighbours to join up as well.

Finally, a word on the committee members. We are fortunate to have people who are willing to volunteer their time and energy for the Trust's objectives. This year there are a number standing down and we will be re-doubling our efforts to recruit some new committee members.

- John Robinson has served since 2015, but is leaving the committee due to work commitments.
- Brian Waters was a founding father of The Preston Trust, and re-joined the committee some 5 years ago when its viable continuance was in question. He has been a great influence during this period when I have worked with him, and the committee are sad to see him leave, but assured of his continued support whenever able.
- Robert Young has served as Treasurer since joining in 2015, which has also included the task of being membership secretary. I would like to thank Robert for his brilliant skills at the role, and also for the quietly efficient way in which he goes about the task.
- I have had the privilege of serving on the committee for nearly five years, four years as Chairman, but today marks my last Preston Trust meeting as I am stepping down from the committee.

Thankfully we have committee members willing to stand as the new Chairman and Treasurer which we will vote on later.

We have achieved many new things over the past four or five years of which the committee should be proud. Highlights include the Village Days, Preston History book launch, regular litter picks, taking part in the Queen's 90th birthday event at PHC, launching the Preston News Service, and providing regular Preston Trust update newsletters. I have tried to steer the Preston Trust towards activities which bring the community together, especially as the village has grown. Although I am stepping down for personal reasons, my passion for the village and The Trust is undiminished, so I fully intend to support The Trust whenever I can in future.