

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 8th May 2019
at 8.00pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors Mr M Burleigh
Mrs J Clark
Mr J Healey (Chairman)
Miss A Marshall
Mrs S Palmer
Mrs P Stark
Mrs M Trinder

In attendance Lisa Lathane (Clerk & Treasurer)

Ten members of the public: Sarah Davis
Adrian Hardy
Alison Jeffers
David Keast
Ita Leaver
Hugh Reeves
Meta Reeves
Wally Steele
Brian Waters
Jenny Woolner

1) Apologies: None

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 Sandra Palmer 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 Pam Stark that Margaret Trinder 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 2 May 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 6 June 2018.

6) Chairman's Report

I have about 5 minutes' worth here, with the aim of just a cross-section of the Parish Council's work over the last 12 months, some highlights and some of the routine jobs too. There are of course many others who contribute in looking after Preston, I look round at the breadth of organisations represented here in the village hall this evening, plus the many other individuals who quietly get on, unbeknown to many of us, with their local litter picking, washing village signs, helping clear our roads of fallen trees, helping clear some of the snow and ice from the smaller lanes, and more.

For the Parish Council, a major element is always planning issues and particularly village planning applications of which we have received about 20 or more this past year, a record in my own experience. The Planning Authority is of course NHDC and it is their planning officers and planning committee who make the decisions. The parish council is one of the several statutory consultees that they have to contact, but it is North Herts who make the final decisions. We always respond, often to support an application, sometimes to recommend changes or perhaps conditions to approvals, and just occasionally to object, which is the most difficult part, to criticise the plans of fellow villagers or to seek out details which we think need to be clear. The immediate neighbours are sometimes reluctant to submit their own concerns knowing they will be on record and published, so they may express their concerns to us instead which is of course welcome, and we have to consider and try to get the balance right. Happily, many planning applications are straightforward, they have perhaps already been discussed with the various neighbours, the design and materials are sympathetic to the locality, their scale is in keeping. Often the larger applications are the most time consuming. You will have seen that work is well underway at the Dower House next to PHC to turn that listed building into 6 new dwellings. We supported that application, the Dower House has been empty for years and looking somewhat sad and run down, but we did seek a condition that there would be a footway provided for the future families and their children to get safe walking access to the village centre, it might have required part of the path to be within the edges of the PHC ground due to the tightness of Hitchin Road, but this concern was not supported by North Herts. There is also a recent application to convert an old single storey barn there to another dwelling, which we are also supporting. We are trying for a second time to have the 30 mph area extended further out along Hitchin Road, from its present start near the Recreation Ground out to where the Welcome to Preston sign sits.

Some better success at last with the Vicars Grove recycling site down beyond Poynders End and near the Little Almshoe crossroads, a long-term nuisance which includes the muddy roadway. The site had been allowed to continue for the purpose of restoration work but the planning permission expired in 2016 and still with no clear restoration work evident. Enforcement action has finally

been achieved and it seems that no operations are currently continuing, although the site is used as an overnight depot for the trucks of Welwyn Services and Toon Materials.

Some progress too with the new mobile phone mast at Preston Reservoir. Many years back we had supported an application by Vodafone but nothing happened and so that planning approval expired. We directed Waldon Telecom and Telefonica to the site in 2016 when they were wanting to install a new base station and mast, the application was formally approved though again no work started, until recently. A 21-meter mast with aerials and dishes is now installed and reasonably hidden within the trees, it will cover 2G, 3G and 4G bands, and we now just await final connections so that at last Preston might have a decent mobile signal.

One other large planning application just to mention is at Preston Hill Farm at the far end of the narrow lane down from Crunnells Green, where the cattery and some stables had been until last year. It's an ancient settlement, farmyard and well head, with 4 very old Grade II listed barns and outbuildings, with a proposal to convert them to 4 dwellings, 2, 3 and 4 bed roomed. We had raised some concerns to the first planning application in 2018, the North Herts conservation officer raised many objections, and a new application was submitted this year which we are supporting with some conditions, particularly to protect the grass verges along that very attractive lane. The applicants themselves and, importantly, Hertfordshire Highways seem to be with us on this.

That lane to Preston Hill Farm also leads to one of Preston's most popular footpaths into Hitchwood or further on to St Pauls Walden, it's one of several footpaths that get a lot of Jane's attention if surfaces degrade or hedges overgrow the paths, and which then have to be fixed through the cooperation of Herts County Council. We still get a few motorbikes which are illegal on footpaths though fewer of these than previously. Separately, a route for a 1-hour suggested walk on the Tatmore Hills loop (down the Charlton Road and beyond Sootfield Green), has been printed with a national grant from the Parish Paths Partnership, a route currently with its bluebells in full flower and the herd of fallow deer there, some copies of the map are in the Red Lion, and a copy is also going on the Preston Village website so that it can be downloaded and printed anytime.

The 2 playgrounds behind the church and near the cricket pavilion had a formal annual inspection again last December. I think there is now nothing above the low and very low risk categories, and a programme of work to resolve most of those is underway.

I hope everyone has tried the fruit and vegetable stall which started up 8-9 months ago. A similar one run by the same people had been operating in Gosmore, we had long discussion and many questions (which were all well received), and the progress and good feedback from villagers since has been overwhelmingly very positive. The concept of a village shop is possibly not realistic in a village this size so we are indeed positive about the progress made by Jeff and Paul who provide the produce and run the stall, they are most amenable to all feedback, good or critical. They have persevered through two thefts of their money, the cooperation of the Red Lion in now

helping to look after payments has been a superb help. Jo and Ray find the supplies good in their own cooking, and we do hope this initiative might continue to flourish and might last.

You will have noted some change of faces among us councillors. David Drew took very honourable retirement late last year. David's genius was in successfully bringing broadband into Preston, under a new approach that BT and Openreach have since adopted for hundreds of other rural communities across Britain. David would be a difficult act to follow in many ways so I am delighted Angela signed up last December with evident impact and energies. Our Parish Clerk Lisa now also has the Treasurer's role to fill. She started by tracking down some elusive in-payments. And we will have the much-appreciated input from Nick Broughton again this year as an independent auditor of our accounts. Nick's auditing work and also his financial experience and good advice are invaluable.

Margaret has been in the midst of contacts with Hertfordshire Highways and their contractors, who are responsible for all things roads. At last the whole length of road from the end of Church Lane to Ley Green has been substantially resurfaced. Before this recent rain it was therefore very disappointing to see more water lying near the electricity station, it may or may not be water off the fields, and we still have something to sort out there. Margaret has an agreed plan with Herts Highways for the Butchers Lane / Back Lane crossroads, though we may have to wait a while for County funding. We get great support from our 3 District Councillors and our County Councillor, they have a big area to cover, we particularly see Faye Frost and David Barnard here, and Claire Strong too.

I think we all know of the planning moves this year by Luton Airport, who have already reached the doubling of passenger numbers years ahead of the airports previous statements and who are jumping in and seeking a doubling of numbers again, with hardly any of the promised significant increase in quieter planes. The Preston Trust has just published a good summary from LADACAN, I think the email was on May 3rd. The Parish Council will be making an objection by going onto the Luton Borough Council website, and I would urge anyone and everyone to spend 10 minutes reading the information from the Preston Trust and making a short and simple objection to Luton Borough Council.

On everyone's behalf, I sincerely thank my fellow Parish Councillors in all of these examples for their work throughout the past 12 months. It is of course the combined total input that has achieved some degrees of progress over the past year.

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 £18023 which were later supplemented by income of £10165 the largest parts of which related to the precept which totalled £6400, a VAT refund of £2758.27 and a grant of £1000.

We spent £900 on grass cutting on the Village Green/pond and £309.60 on Church Meadow. We have spent £2544 on the Recreation Ground and Pavilion although some of this amount was offset by a contribution from the Cricket Club.

Other significant expenditure was incurred by the design and print costs of a Walks Leaflet and the Waymarkers that line the route. This cost in total £1242 but was largely covered by a grant of £1000. The Parish Council also donated £1000 to the Church extension appeal. At the end of the financial year the Parish Council had £16,975.94 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:

Preston Nursery School	Jenny Woolner
Princess Helena College	Sarah Davis
Herts Constabulary	PC Matt Jenkins (read by the Clerk)
Neighbourhood Watch	Ita Leaver
Friends of St Martin's	Sue Griffiths (read by Councillor Trinder)
Preston Cricket Club	Matt Burleigh
Preston Trust	Wally Steele
Preston Village Society	Ita Leaver
Village Hall Committee	Ita Leaver
The Red Lion	Alison Jeffers

9) Neighbourhood Plan: Councillor Trinder provided a comprehensive report on the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan. Following advice from NHDC last July this was revised and strengthened in light of the comments received from the Regulation 16 Consultation. Further work was undertaken when the main modifications were made public in November and the revised plan was reviewed by NHDC in January. The Steering Group made some further amendments and on February 11th, the second submission draft was sent to NHDC and the Regulation 16 consultation ran from 12 March to 25 April.

Comments from the Regulation 16 Consultation will be posted on the NHDC website and the Council will liaise with the Steering Group on the appointment of an Examiner.

The Examiner will work on the Neighbourhood Plan and produce a report. NHDC Cabinet has to accept the report and agree to proceed to a referendum. If the outcome of the referendum is positive, that is 50% of those voting vote in favour, the Neighbourhood Plan is made and its policies have to be adhered to by NHDC. The Steering Group hope that the referendum will take place this Autumn.

Wally Steele, as Chairman of the Steering Group, then added a few words to remember Malcolm Gomm, a member of the Steering Group who passed away recently.

10) Any other Business: None

11) Date and time of next AGM: Wednesday 6 May 2020 at 8 pm

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm.

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