

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 6th May 2020
at 8.00pm via Zoom Video Conferencing

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)

One member of the public: Wally Steele

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 Angela Marshall that Margaret Trinder be elected as Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

4) Election of Vice Chairman

It was proposed by Councillor Margaret Trinder and seconded by Councillor Pam Stark that Jane Clark be elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. The resolution was passed unanimously.

Councillor Trinder thanked Councillor Healey for the years he spent as Chairman, and for all his hard work.

After the election of Councillor Margaret Trinder as Chairman for the coming year, she took over from Councillor John Healey for the rest of the meeting.

5) Minutes of the last AGM

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 8 May 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman at the Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 5 June 2019.

6) Chairman's Report

The Chairman's Report has been written by the outgoing Chairman; Councillor Healey.

This will be a summary of some of the Parish Council's work and progress from the past 12 months, a cross-section of the routine jobs and some of the highlights. We also gratefully recognise the continuing input from many Villagers who quietly take on a range of tasks themselves that really help in looking after Preston, with examples including litter picking, cleaning up Village structures and signs, salting some of the crossroads on icy mornings, and so on, and we thank them all. I must emphasise the major inputs made by my fellow councillors throughout, it is everyone's efforts, initiatives and energies that are involved.

Planning Applications have continued to come in steady progression, around a dozen that needed full consideration plus a few simpler submissions, overall a few less than in the previous year. The Parish Council is invited to comment on all of them while it is North-Herts District Council who are the planning authority and who make the final planning decisions, or occasionally Herts County Council for some sites.

We objected again to more applications for Vicar's Grove. The site activities are shut down for the present time and we are glad of the relief from the usual roadway mud, mess and nuisance around there. The levels of heavy traffic linked to the site have also very much reduced. None of the long-promised restoration and landscaping seems to have progressed, contrary to the frequent commitments made over the past decade and more, as also confirmed by Herts County Council Planning who have been able to visit and inspected it more closely.

Work at the Grade 2 listed Dower House continues, it will result in 6 new properties and will be followed by a conversion of the separate barn close by. There has been a stream of other planning applications linked to the Dower House but these are all relatively minor variations as work has progressed through the old building and minor amendments to the original proposals have had to be incorporated. The plans for Preston Hills Farm, down the narrow green lane from Crunnells Green, for 4 listed barn conversions gained planning approval late last year. Some simple conditions we had asked for were agreed, including passing places on the lane to help prevent damage to the soft verges.

Other planning applications for Preston included a few house extensions, where our main concerns were to minimise any impact on adjacent houses or the immediate locality. We also responded again on the East of Luton

proposals to build some of Luton's housing allocation in North Herts, and requested that these proposals be removed from the North Herts Local Plan.

Objections were made to the proposed scale of further expansion at Luton Airport, to again nearly double the present capacity to reach 32 Million passengers per annum. The airport's previous promises in 2012 and again in 2015 have not been implemented, particularly their commitments to introduce a much higher proportion of more modern and quieter planes both day and night. We had discussed the proposals with our district and county councillors, with our MP Bim Afolami and with LADACAN, and each one of us made strong objections. It was also asked that the planning application be called in by the Secretary of State, rather than be decided on by Luton Borough Council as in the past. Luton BC is of course the sole owner and beneficiary of Luton Airport through their company Luton London Airport Ltd. We wait to see what approvals may be granted.

In case you missed it, the new telephone mast at Preston Reservoir became operational last July for O2 customers. Reception for EE and Vodafone is still weak but with some suggestion of upcoming improvements.

An important step for planning policies as they affect the Village is the Preston Neighbourhood Plan, which successfully concluded its review by the external planning examiner and is now formally instated by NHDC. It covers development for the period to 2031 and includes objectives and planning policies based on major preferences that emerged from the end-2017 survey of all the Village. A separate steering group from the Village has been engaged in developing this Plan, working hard over a period of more than 3 years and in liaison with NHDC. The Neighbourhood Plan is a key basis for the shape of future development.

NHDC have continued to develop their Local Plan which includes the objective as set by the national government of 22000 new homes in North Herts for the period 2011 – 2031. This document might get completed next year, it will define our Village boundary and importantly it is expected to upgrade the land around Preston to Green Belt.

Two of the regular annual inspections that are carried out are for the public playgrounds and their equipment, at the Millennium Field and at the Recreation Ground. The total numbers of findings have been falling each year and this time the findings consisted of only low risk and very low risk items, which are duly being followed up. An inspection of the Cricket Pavilion shutters found that one of the motor and barrel assemblies needed to be replaced, new end locks were also fitted to improve their security, and new replacements for the shutter control switches are now available for fitting.

This January, the Village pond had a major maintenance and clean-up visit.

Five years on from the previous one, a survey of the Village trees was carried out in March from which one tree was identified as dying and has since been felled. Five trees at The Green were identified as needing early attention to remove dead wood and some low branches, and this work is scheduled to take place imminently.

We have been glad of some good support from Hertfordshire Highways and their roads contractors, including resurfacing over the past year of lengths in School Lane and all along the road from Preston to Ley Green. Some work has also been completed at the Church Lane/ Back Lane crossroads where the verges and kerbing had been degrading over the past decades due to different factors, not least the larger and heavier trucks that have been manoeuvring round that junction as well as an earlier spate of careless parking by contractors' vans. Parts of the crossroads have already been re-done, the corners are now a little less tight than previously and are strengthened with higher and stronger kerbing behind grass crete reinforced verges, and the remaining two corners are becoming overdue for their own re-make. We also heard in March that Herts County Council have been awarded a substantial government grant with a large portion to be allocated to the county's lanes.

A very current step is the progress being made for a new footpath through Wain Wood, our only Site of Special Scientific Interest/ SSSI, as a permissive path. It is being achieved with a strong support from Pilkington Farms Partnership and from HCC's Rights of Way officers. The woods remain in private ownership, and good signage and other effort will be made to keep walkers to the designated track.

This has not been an exhaustive list of the Parish Council's activities but tries to cover a cross-section of the jobs done, and I sincerely thank my fellow councillors for the combined total of their work together with the input of others, for all the good progress made since our last AGM.

Councillor Healey was thanked for producing a comprehensive report.

7) Treasurer's Report

Lisa Lathane, Treasurer to the Parish Council reported that at the start of the 2019/20 financial year the Parish Council had funds of £17,008.10 which were later supplemented by income of £14,175.62 the largest parts of which related to the precept which totalled £6,600, Section 106 Monies of £3190.59, and income from a local resident of £4900 towards a specific project.

The Section 106 Monies were passed to the Village Hall Committee for the work carried out to update the area at the front of the Village Hall, including the wall and steps. It also went towards creating a disabled access at the back of the hall and improving the path at the side to make it accessible for wheel chairs and push chairs.

The Parish Council applied to the Planning Inspectorate to have a small portion of Village Green released in Chequers Lane. This is to create access for a new property. The local resident paid the Parish Council's expenses of £4900.

We spent £773.34 on work to the Village Green/pond and £706.66 on Church Meadow. A large part of spending in both areas were for grass cutting. The Parish Council spent £4160.05 on the Recreation Ground and Pavilion,

although some of this latter amount was offset by a contribution of £453.78 from the Cricket Club.

Other larger items of expenditure were incurred by carrying out a tree survey in the Village, this cost £690. It is an important survey to have completed, and will be carried out every 5 years.

In all, expenditure totalled £20,261.41 leaving the Parish Council with £10,922.31 in the bank at the year end

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for producing the report and for her work during the year on the Parish Council accounts and financial transactions.

8) Reports by Local Organisations

The following organisations had sent reports ahead of the meeting to be read by the Parish Council:

Preston Cricket Club
Village Hall Committee
Preston Village Society
The Red Lion
The Preston Trust
Neighbourhood Watch
St Martin's Church

The Chairman thanked Councillor Burleigh and Wally Steele for producing their reports and asked the Clerk to email the organisations who hadn't joined the meeting to thank them for the time and effort required to submit their reports.

9) Neighbourhood Plan: Councillor Trinder reported that at the last AGM, the Neighbourhood Plan was at the end of the Regulation 16 Consultation which produced 37 comments from 12 organisations and individuals. This consultation, the Examiner's expenses and the referendum were the responsibility of NHDC for both organisation and payment. They have applied to the Government for a grant of £20,000 towards their costs.

The remaining steps in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan were the appointment of the Independent Examiner, receiving the Examiner's report and amending the Plan to include the Examiner's modifications. NHDC agreed that the final version of the Neighbourhood Plan could go to referendum which was held on March 5 2020

There was a 41% turn out for the referendum with 91% voting in favour and 9% voting against the Neighbourhood Plan. NHDC formally "made" the Neighbourhood Plan on April 2 2020 and it will be part of the statutory development plan for North Hertfordshire until 2031.

The Parish Council is responsible for reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan and on the advice of the Independent Examiner, this must be done when the Local

Plan has been in place for a year. NHDC will have to take the Neighbourhood Plan policies into account during the planning process and the Parish Council need to use the Policies when commenting on planning applications.

The production of the Neighbourhood Plan which started with the Village meeting on 26 June 2016 and ended on 2 April 2020 when the Plan was made by NHDC took 3 years, 9 months and 7 days in total. The Steering Group is grateful for all the support it has received from the Parish Council, Clare Skeels of NHDC and the residents of Preston during the production period. They are proud of what they have achieved and now hand over to the Parish Council who will monitor the Neighbourhood Plan for the next eleven years.

10) Any other Business:

10.1: Village Green: Councillor Marshall asked if she should instruct Trinity Lawn Care to start work on the Green. It was agreed that The Chairman will inform Councillor Marshall when Louis Harrington-Smith has finished carrying out the tree work, and then Trinity can begin.

11) Date and time of next AGM: Wednesday 5 May 2021 at 8 pm

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm.