

PRESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting Wednesday 22nd April 2020 at 8 pm.

Present	Councillor	Mr M Burleigh Mrs J Clark Mr J Healey (Chairman) Miss A Marshall Mrs S Palmer Mrs P Stark Mrs M Trinder
In Attendance		Mrs L Lathane (Clerk & Treasurer)

The meeting was held by Zoom videoconferencing.

1) Apologies

District Councillor Faye Frost and County Councillor David Barnard sent their apologies.

2) Declaration of Interests

None

3) Minutes of Previous Meeting

These were agreed as a true record. They will be signed by the Chairman at the next physical meeting we are able to hold.

4) Matters Arising

4.1: Hedge Cutting: The hedge on the North side of School Lane (the PHC side) was cut on Wednesday 4th March. It was cut very roughly and there was a lot of large debris left where it fell in the roadway, much of it being Hawthorn and more than 3-4 m long. The Chairman cleared most of the largest pieces and emailed PHC with a few details. There was at least one case of flat tyres being caused by the debris.

The other side of the road is due to be cut, but not by the same contractor.

4.2: Parking opposite the Recreation Ground: The muddy area that was there has flattened out and has gone hard for now, and there is much less mud on the road. It was reported

that parking is still taking place in that area though, which may cause a traffic accident. Councillor Stark will check when she next leaves the village early in the morning.

4.3: Broadband and Phone issues: The Chairman asked if there was generally an issue with slower broadband in the village recently. It was agreed that extra use from residents at home in the lockdown has affected internet speeds.

4.4: Kissing Gate behind the Church: The Chairman has spoken to Malcolm Lowle about the reasonable quote we have for the replacement post on the pedestrian gate and Mr Lowle has asked that the Church be billed for this. The contractor Richard Dawes has been contacted about using a 'Postsaver' sleeve for the new post in order to extend its life. He has used it before and is in favour, and he is waiting for his supplier (Lewis Tyler's near Hatfield) to re-open (possibly on 27th April) so that he can proceed with the work. The wider gate there is used for the grass mower to pass through and was installed and is maintained by the Parish Council.

4.5: Neighbourhood Plan: The Chairman wrote to thank everyone on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on behalf of the Parish Council and the village generally for their work and the very good referendum result. Several of the Group responded and were very positive about the Parish Council's appreciation.

4.6: The Green: Councillor Trinder informed the meeting that, in her view, the grass on The Green needs to be allowed to grow before it can be fertilised. It is very bare in some places. The Parish Council then needs to liaise with Trinity Lawn Care to arrange for the grass feed at an appropriate time.

4.7: Trees: Councillor Trinder has contacted Louis Harrington Smith to see if he is working at present and if so, if he knows when he will be able to undertake the tree work on The Green. It is possible that because of social distancing he may not be able to do this work for the time being. As the trees are in the Conservation area, Mr Harrington Smith will have to get consent from NHDC before he can do the work.

It was agreed that items 4.6 and 4.7 are linked and the situation on both would be monitored and any action undertaken as appropriate at a later date.

Action: Councillor Stark to check on parking at Spindle Cottage.

5) Comments from the Public

5.1: House for rent: Tom Duffin at Pilkington Farms Partnership has contacted the Clerk and asked that the Parish Council be made aware that 7 Holly Cottages, Back Lane is available for rental. It is a three-bed property and the rent will be somewhere in the region of £925 pcm. All enquiries can come through Tom, all viewings will be organised to take into consideration social distancing during lockdown.

5.2: The Well: Wally Steele has emailed Councillor Trinder about the well and the gaps in the paving stones at the base. Photos were circulated to the Parish Council. She has taken some

advice and the base needs pointing. It was agreed that Councillor Trinder would ask Frank Gormill to quote for doing this work.

Action: Councillor Trinder to request a quote for the work at the well.

6) Police Update

None

7) County and District Update

District Councillor Faye Frost sent the following to be read out at the meeting.

As you can imagine the council has been somewhat quiet during these unusual times. Essential meetings of the district council are being conducted with minimum numbers via Zoom. Full council was held in this manner last week.

Only administrative staff carrying out jobs vital in the fight against Covid 19 are working in a 'normal' manner. Most officers from the council are working from home in whatever capacity they can. Planning applications are still being dealt with. Any comments are to be made in writing, preferably via email, for consideration.

With tidy tips closed, the number of illegal fly tips along our country lanes is increasing daily, from garden and household waste to drug paraphernalia. I'm uncertain how efficient Urbaser are at present as they have furloughed some staff. For a similar reason, garden waste and caddy collections have ceased until further notice.

It seems that many of our local businesses are really going the extra mile during this period to ensure residents are looked after. We send our thanks to them all.

We would also like to thank the individuals who have come forward to offer help to those vulnerable and self-isolating who may struggle to get to the shops or pharmacies.

Primary School allocations have now been released.

We hope all Councillors and their families remain healthy.

If you need our help at all please do contact us at any time.

8) Planning Applications

8.1: Land off Castlefield: Councillor Trinder has been in contact with the Interim Property Consultant at NHDC who told her that Kevin Rolfe of Aitchison Raffety has been instructed to market the field. Given the current circumstances, full marketing will not start until life begins to emerge from lockdown. NHDC are using the time to prepare some reports and

undertake investigations that will assist in expediting the sale once they are able to commence marketing. The land will be advertised in the Estates Gazette. NHDC expect to have 20 developers who have a serious initial interest, although they won't all necessarily take it further.

8.2: De-registration of Village Green: Councillor Trinder has received the decision from the Planning Inspectorate on the application to de-register a section of village green to provide access for the new house to be built in the garden of Glebe House. The application has been granted. It also confirms the Parish Council as owners.

Hertfordshire County Council's Definitive Map Officer has contacted Councillor Trinder to confirm the details of the land being released so that their records can be updated to show that this particular piece of land is no longer village green.

The next step is to get the land valued by an independent, professional valuer. Councillor Trinder has instructed a valuer who undertook a site visit on Tuesday 14 April but she has not received his report yet.

Once the price is agreed and assuming that Mr Cherry wants to proceed with the purchase, the Parish Council have to insert a section 123 notice in the Comet for two consecutive weeks. This allows members of the public to enquire about the sale of the land

The Parish Council's expenses will be paid by Mr Cherry.

8.3: Dower House, Listed Building Consent: The Clerk has submitted a letter of support for this application.

8.4: Old Coach House: This application has received conditional permission and building work has already begun.

8.5: Reeves Cottage: The Clerk has submitted a letter of support for this application. It has received Conditional Permission.

9) Cricket Club Representation

9.1: Electrical Work at the Pavilion: Councillor Trinder had contacted electricians about PAT testing, the roller shutter switches and the 5-year electrical wiring check but none of this has been done because of Covid 19. When businesses start working again, she suggests getting the switches replaced and the wiring check has to be done but the PAT testing could be left until the start of the 2021 season as there is no indication yet as to how much cricket will be played this season, if any.

The shutter service could also be delayed until April 2021. The Parish Council agreed with these suggestions.

9.2: Risk Assessments: The Parish Council needs to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place for the pavilion for insurance purposes. It was agreed that Councillor Trinder would liaise with the Cricket Club to ensure that these are in place.

9.3: Signs on gate: On April 1st, following consultation with the Chairman and the Cricket Club, Councillor Trinder put a note on the pedestrian gate at the Recreation Ground asking for it to be left off the latch. The gate was difficult to open and close, particularly for older residents.

The Chairman has now eased the latch so that it opens more easily but it has been decided to leave the Do Not Close notice up so that people don't need to touch the handle in the present circumstances.

On April 17th, Councillors Burleigh and Trinder agreed that the Cricket Club could put a No Parking sign on the Recreation Ground gate. People are parking there to go for a walk, preventing the groundsmen being able to access the ground.

9.4: Cricket Season: Councillor Burleigh informed the meeting that it was still unclear as to whether there would be any cricket played this season due to Covid-19. The Club was relatively healthy in regards to finances so hopefully they will manage without the income that the season brings in.

Action: Councillor Trinder to arrange for the shutter switches to be replaced and the 5 year wiring test to be undertaken.

Action: Councillor Trinder to liaise with the Cricket Club to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place.

10) Hertfordshire Highways Update

Councillor Trinder reported that the work on the corner of Butchers Lane did not take place during the last week of March as planned because only urgent work is being undertaken at the present time.

Councillor Clark informed the meeting that there was water on Back Lane again. It is not clear whether this is a spring or a leak. This issue will be raised with Highways after the lockdown has been lifted.

11) Parish Paths Partnership

11.1: Wain Wood Footpath: Councillor Clark reported that she had been informed that large 'Private woods NO entry' and 'No unauthorised access' signage was confusing some walkers in Wain Wood from the Bunyans Cottage end. Walkers had been unable or not confident to venture further and find the actual footpath where it leaves the track and heads up into the wood adjacent to Bunyans Cottage.

Councillor Clark has spoken with Tom Duffin and now a large PFP footpath sign has been erected near the gate of Bunyans Cottage showing the route the path takes.

Councillor Clark has contacted Andrew Burton, Senior RoW Projects Officer HCC, enquiring if the Parish Council could acquire some of their second hand way markers to put on the access track to Bunyans cottage to boost people's confidence that they are indeed walking the right way. These have already been delivered, and placed on the track by Councillor Clark. Also delivered were some permissive path discs.

Tom Duffin has asked that the subject of bikes in Wain Wood be raised again. It was agreed that once the Permissive Path is 'live' we will see if further 'No Bikes' signs will help to reduce numbers.

There had also been concerns of people using the valley fields as a loop to join both footpaths, this is very close to a high seat used for deer stalking. It has been agreed that Pilkington Farms and David Clark will put stock fencing up to prevent this happening.

11.2: Way marker at Austage End: Councillor Clark has also reported to Andrew Burton a broken way marker post at Austage End. He has added it to the CMS job list for when they resume normal duties as obviously this is not a priority.

11.3: COVID-19: One field gate has been removed adjacent to a kissing gate along the outer edge of Wain Wood to allow people to freely pass without the need to handle gates.

11.4: Permissive Path: As of Thursday 16th April 2020, the Permissive Path legal paper work is finally completed between Pilkington Farms Partnership and Hertfordshire County Council. This has been put on file by the Clerk.

It was agreed that the Parish Council should look into putting a kissing gate by Bunyan's Cottage and at the top of the path, which should hopefully be a deterrent to cyclists. Councillor Clark suggested that the Cricket Club could contribute to costs for the kissing gates as a good will gesture. It was agreed that Councillor Clark will look into costs for kissing gates and report back to the Parish Council, Councillor Burleigh could then raise this with the Cricket Club. The next steps are:

It says in the Permissive Path agreement that 'HCC will sign and way mark the route'. Tom Duffin has asked Andrew Burton for a timescale on the work.

Councillor Clark will put together a sign board for the Permissive Path – a basic sloping surface on a single post, the surface to be covered with a piece of Perspex to protect the laminated information sheets.

It was agreed that Councillor Clark will put out a PNS informing the village of the Permissive Path and thanking Pilkington Farm Partnership and Hertfordshire County Council for their continued support in the local communities.

11.5: Walk Leaflets: The Tatmore Loop walk leaflets have nearly run out. It was agreed that Councillor Clark will look into printing prices.

Action: Councillor Clark to send out a PNS regarding the new Permissive Path.

Action: Councillor Clark to investigate printing prices for the Walk Leaflet.

Action: Councillor Clark to look into the costs for kissing gates.

12) Local Plan

The hearing sessions booked for March were postponed because of Covid 19 and there is no indication yet as to when they will take place.

13) Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan Referendum was held on Thursday 5 March with a positive outcome. There was a 41% turn out with 91% voting in favour and 9% voting against the Neighbourhood Plan. NHDC formally “made” the Neighbourhood plan on Thursday 2 April and it will be part of the statutory development plan for North Hertfordshire until 2031. The preferences expressed by residents of the parish in the survey undertaken in January 2017 were the starting point for the Neighbourhood Plan and as far as possible these are incorporated into the planning policies.

The Decision Statement has been sent out by NHDC to anyone on their database who has expressed an interest in Preston, made a representation at the Regulation 16 stage and all statutory consultees.

Councillor Trinder has circulated the Neighbourhood Plan policies to Parish Councillors as they now have to be used when commenting on all planning applications for the parish.

Hard backed copies of the Neighbourhood Plan are available to buy. The closing date for orders is Tuesday 5 May and this opportunity will be advertised again in the May newsletter, PNS and the Parish Council database. The final price will be determined by the number of orders. The minimum order number of 25 copies has been exceeded.

14) Parish Council Employers Policies

The Clerk had sent the current policies around to the members of the Council ahead of the meeting with amended dates. These policies were agreed by the Councillors.

15) Parish Council Insurance

Councillor Trinder had previously circulated details of 4 insurance quotations. It was decided that the Parish Council would take up a three-year agreement with AXA as they provide a comprehensive policy for a competitive price. The Parish Council will review the insurance provision and again seek a number of quotations to ensure that they continue to obtain good value for money in 2023.

Councillor Trinder will complete the necessary forms and will liaise with the Treasurer to arrange the payment.

Action: Councillor Trinder and the Treasurer to complete the paperwork and pay for the Insurance prior to the renewal date of June 1st.

16) Corona Virus Update

The helpline system organised by The Preston Trust and the Parish Council was set up very quickly and there are 35 people who are helping in a variety of ways. The system is working well, although there haven't been large numbers of requests for help so far, but that could change at any time. A lot of vulnerable residents have arranged help with their families and neighbours which reduce the calls to the helpline.

Councillor Trinder suggested that the Parish Council should consider some financial support for The Preston Trust who so far has borne all the printing and costs of this joint initiative. Following discussion, it was further suggested that the newsletter could be produced with the Parish Council and the Church Committee sharing the costs with The Preston Trust, subject to the amount required. It was agreed that Councillor Trinder would contact Wally Steele, Chairman of The Preston Trust to obtain the cost and she would then liaise with the Parish Council. Councillor Stark will ask the Church Committee if they would be willing to agree to this suggestion.

Action: Councillor Trinder to obtain the cost of producing the newsletter from Wally Steele.

Action: Councillor Stark to ask the Church Committee if they would be willing to contribute to the newsletter costs.

17) Chairman's Report

NHDC has published all the Council Tax charges for North Herts parishes and towns. Preston Parish Council settled on an increase in the parish precept of 8.99%. The parish precept is a relatively small part of the total council tax, and overall, the council tax for a typical Preston house has increased by about 4.0%. Preston stands just above half way in the table of the 36 local parishes and towns.

18) Clerk's Report

The Parish Council meeting dates were agreed for the following year. The Clerk will publish them on the website, on the village noticeboard and inform Preston Nursery School of the dates.

19) Treasurer's Report

Preston Parish Council - Summary Financial Report as at 22nd April 2020

Community Account

Balance as at:	2nd March 2020	£	£
			<u>£ 324.58</u>

Payments authorised at meeting:

Date	Recipient		
27th March 2020	Clerk Wages	£	355.11
16th March 2020	RJ Dawes - Grass Cutting	£	288.00
8th April 2020	Affinity Water	£	34.50
		£	<u>677.61</u>

Monies received:

Date	From		
6th April 2020	NHDC - Precept	£	3,650.00
		£	<u>3,650.00</u>

Balance as at:	22nd April 2020	£	<u>3,296.97</u>
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Business Premium Account

Balance as at:	2nd March 2020	£	<u>13,180.21</u>
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Monies Received

Balance as at:	22nd April 2020	£	<u>13,180.21</u>
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Total bank balances £16,477.18

19.1: Budget: The Clerk had circulated the final budget for 2019/2020 to the Parish Council ahead of the meeting.

20.2: E.on: The direct debit for payments to E.on for the Pavilion has been set up.

20.3: Audit: Nick Broughton has kindly agreed to carry out the Internal Audit again this year.

We today received instructions from PKF Littlejohn, the external auditors, regarding this year's audit. There is still a requirement for the Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) to be signed in person and minuted. They won't however accept forms signed during lockdown, therefore the deadline has been extended to the 1st September.

Action: The Clerk to work with Nick Broughton on getting the AGAR forms ready to be signed at the next physical Parish Council meeting. Social distancing will be adhered to.

19) Any Other Business

20.1: Parish Council Roles: Councillor Trinder noted that last April, it was agreed that the Chairman would step down after another year in the role. The Chairman is happy to continue with this planned arrangement and the Parish Council agreed that Councillor Trinder would become Chair at the AGM. It was suggested and agreed that Councillor Clark would become Vice-Chair at the AGM which is being held on Wednesday 6 May by a Zoom video conference.

20.2: Dog Fouling & Gates: Councillor Trinder reported that a member of the public had contacted PNS about dog fouling and the gate at Castlefield being left open.

The Parish Council noted that generally Preston residents were very good at clearing up after their dogs but a gentle reminder would be put in the May newsletter. Councillor Clark will put some signs up in the woods because it is acknowledged that it is often visitors who do not clear up after their animals.

Councillor Trinder and the Clerk will respond to the resident about these matters.

Action: Councillor Trinder to put a note in the May newsletter about dog fouling.

Action: Councillor Clark to put signs up in the woods about dog fouling.

Action: Councillor Trinder and the Clerk to respond to the local resident.

20) Date and Time of next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd June 2020 at 8 pm.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.