

Preston Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Wednesday 5th May 2021
at 8.00pm via Zoom Video Conferencing

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

In attendance Lisa Lathane (Clerk & Treasurer)

One member of the public: Inneke Luitingh

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 John Healey and seconded by Councillor Angela Marshall that Jane Clark 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 6 May 2020 were approved at the Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 3 June 2020. and signed by the Chairman on November 2 2020.

6) Chairman's Report

A year ago, the last AGM was held by Zoom video conferencing. At that point I don't think any of us thought this year's AGM would also be via Zoom. Due to Covid 19, all Parish Council meetings over the last year have been successfully held on Zoom and we're grateful to Councillor Burleigh for facilitating this.

In the last year we have had the AGM and eight Parish Council meetings with 100% attendance at all of them.

Commenting on Planning Applications is a key part of the role of Parish Councillors. We have carefully considered and responded to 13 applications, one of which required three responses as changes were made to it over time. This particular application also went twice to the NHDC Planning Control Committee which proved to be an interesting experience whether watching on YouTube or participating via Zoom. As well as planning applications within the Parish, the Parish Council has also submitted responses to those concerning Luton airport.

The Preston Parish Neighbourhood Plan was formally made in April 2020 so the Parish Council is monitoring how it is being addressed in applications and in decisions made by Planning Officers as it is now part of the statutory development plan for North Hertfordshire.

Local residents are made aware of Planning Applications via the village website, the Parish Council database and PNS. Anyone can submit a response to any application should they wish to do so. Planning officers take all the comments they receive into account when making their decision on the outcome of the application.

Councillor Clark has continued to work on the Permissive Path in Wain Wood. The Path became legal last April and since then Councillor Clark has installed information boards in the wood which have been well received. She has also worked with Hertfordshire's Rights of Way Officer and Pilkington Farm Partnership to install gates on the route. With support from County Councillor David Barnard we were able to get some second hand gates, free of charge and only had to buy additional parts which saved a considerable amount of money. A major piece of work has been installing the kissing gate at the entry into the wood from the Recreation Ground. This has been moved to a better position, away from the cricket nets.

The Parish Council maintains the pavilion, the play equipment in both Church Meadow and the Recreation Ground and the pond. A grant of £200 from County Councillor David Barnard will enable half a day's work on the pond to be undertaken this summer to improve its visual aspect by cutting back vegetation and generally tidying up. Larger items of maintenance will be undertaken within the limitations of the budget. There are not as many grants available as there were a few years ago which is having an effect on what the Parish Council is able to do.

The area opposite the Recreation Ground was increasingly being used for parking and becoming very unsightly. In order to prevent parking, recycled posts to blend in with the surroundings, with reflectors attached so that they are visible in the dark, were installed. This has been successful and they look as if have been there for a considerable time. Open Reach, who did park there, were very co-operative and agreed to park in front of the Recreation Ground gate. No-one else is allowed to park there, otherwise the groundsmen are unable to get in. So far, this has worked well.

PHC were unable to continue to print the monthly village newsletter so since January 2020 it has been printed by Preston Trust with the costs shared equally by St Martin's Church Committee, the Parish Council and Preston Trust.

As the pandemic started, the Parish Council and Preston Trust jointly set up a helpline for use by village residents. Thirty-five volunteers were available, although there wasn't a huge demand for help. The helpline stopped at the beginning of April as there was clearly no requirement for it to continue.

The Parish Council has been looking into the issue of parking around The Green on busy weekends in Spring and Summer but so far hasn't found a workable solution. This will be kept under review.

I am very grateful to the Clerk, who is also the Treasurer, for all her work and support this year. The Parish Council wouldn't be able to function efficiently without her.

I am also grateful to the many volunteers from the village who work hard and often unnoticed in a variety of ways, in particular by litter picking, to protect the local environment.

The Parish Council is a corporate body and none of the initiatives and activities I have described here could take place without everyone playing their part. I am grateful to all the Parish Councillors for their support as we strive to maintain the unique character of Preston with its strong sense of community. We will continue to do this in the next year to the best of our abilities.

I sincerely hope that the 2022 AGM will be held in the Village Hall with representatives of village organisations being able to attend to present their reports in person.

7) Treasurer's Report

Lisa Lathane, Treasurer to the Parish Council reported that at the start of the 2020/21 financial year the Parish Council had funds of £12,445 which were later supplemented by income of £9776 the largest parts of which related to the precept which totalled £7,300. Other income came from reclaiming VAT, a Locality Budget Grant and income from a local resident towards a specific project.

We spent £693.08 on work to the Village Green, which included grass cutting, a fertilisation treatment on the village green grass, and work on repointing the well. A total of £563.92 was spent on Church Meadow which included grass cutting and hedge cutting. The Parish Council spent £3924.91 on the Recreation Ground and Pavilion, although some of this latter amount was offset by a contribution of £561.97 from the Cricket Club. Some necessary work was carried out in the Pavilion to ensure it was safe, including an electrical inspection and a service on all fire extinguishers.

In all, expenditure totalled £12,134 leaving the Parish Council with £10,086 in the bank at the year end.

8) Reports by Local Organisations

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

County and District Councillor David Barnard
Preston Primary School
Preston Cricket Club
Village Hall Committee
Neighbourhood Watch

The Parish Council asked Inneke Luitingh questions about her report on Preston Primary School.

9) Any other Business:

None

10) Date and time of next AGM: Thursday 12 May 2022 at 8 pm

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm.