

Preston Capes
Annual Parish Meeting Thursday 17th May 2018
Minutes

Attendance; Cllr Sophia Maddison, Mervyn Maddison, Sylvia Delacoe, Mike Delacoe, Sheila Bull, Peter Bull, David Cox, Belinda Heap, Lorraine Bannister, Cllr Robin Brown, Jane Arblaster, Claire Hoare, Gerard Hoare, Maureen Franks, Pauline Clarke, Roma Hughes, Roger Elkin, Jason Whitwell, Penny Eves, Mike Eves and Cllr Dixie Hughes (Chairman)
Apologies; Cllr Scilla Smith & Cllr Bill Dearn

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming County Councillor Robin Brown to the meeting; and then reporting on events since the last Annual Parish Meeting; mentioning, in reverse chronological order;

3rd May 2018 – Uncontested Parish Council Election; with three new Councillors; Scilla Smith, Rachel Bracher & Graham Stanton

21st April 2018 – the passing of Ron Street; one of the villages oldest residents

8th April 2018 & 22nd October 2017 – Parish Council Litter Picks; organised by Cllr Bill Dearn and carried out by “...the usual 15-or-so stalwarts”

3rd September 2017 – Merchant Navy Day Flag-Raising, on the Church flag-pole; attended Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Merchant Navy Association members from Birmingham and some 40 village residents

The Chairman added, “We will be hoisting the Red Duster again this year, on Sunday 2nd September.” He also announced that the Parish Council had decided to mark Armed Forces Day, with a similar Flag-Raising event, at the Church, on Sunday 1st July

The Chairman then reported on the demise of Speedwatch in Preston Capes (Full account attached)

The Chairman also reported that since the last Annual Parish Meeting, the Parish Council had met; in Ordinary & Extraordinary meetings; 14 times; and that he and other Councillors had attended 12 other meetings with the Police, the Police & Crime Commissioner and Daventry District Council.

The Chairman announced that copies of reports from County Councillor Robin Brown; Village Hall Trustee, Mike Delacoe and Village Education Charity Treasurer, Cllr Bill Dearn were all available.

The Chairman pointed out that the Tree Warden, David Cox, and the Footpath Warden, Roger Elkin, were both present.

The meeting was then opened for Questions from the floor;

Gerard Hoare questioned the “New Format” of the meeting; saying that the old format, where reports from organisations were read out to everyone, was better; this view was supported by Roger Elkin. Several attendees then spoke in favour of the new format; and the general consensus was to remain with it.

Claire Hoare asked that the names of Councillors & Wardens, along with any special responsibilities they have, be posted on the Village Notice Boards. The Chairman agreed to organise this. (List attached)

Claire Hoare also asked for a 1st Aid course to be arranged; it was agreed that this would be put on the next Parish Council Agenda. It was also agreed that details of how to access the defibrillator would be circulated.

The Chairman then announced that the bar was now open, and that other refreshments were available.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL DIXIE HUGHES

Good evening and welcome to the 2018 Preston Capes Annual Parish Meeting... Our County Councillor, Robin Brown, is with us; along with his annual report, copies of which are available. Tonight sees a full meeting of Daventry District Council; therefore none of our District Councillors could make.

So 2018, Working back through the year; the third of May saw yet another uncontested election for our; or rather your Parish Council; We nearly had one; but for one candidate failing to meet the nomination deadline... A contested election; Preston Capes' last was in 2006; has its pros & cons. It does mean an improved mandate; but carries with it an inordinate cost; to you the tax-payers. On this occasion we had our full quota of candidates; so no co-options.

I am pleased to report that Roger Elkin continues as our Footpath Warden and David Cox continues as our Tree Warden.

On a sad note, it was back on 21st April that Preston Capes lost one of its oldest residents. Ron Street is sorely missed but many of us have fond memories of him. It was a shame that, being uninformed of his funeral arrangements, many of us were unable to say goodbye to an old friend...

The 8th of April of this year and 22nd October last year saw two Parish Council litter picks; as ever ably organised by Bill Dearn. Each time we saw the usual 15-or-so stalwarts appear, and though we would welcome more, that 15 represents about 7.5% of our population; I'm sure that Weedon or Woodford would be staggered by a turnout of over 200... After starting with bacon butties, the usual stacks of black bags were accumulated; the problem seemingly being a constant. We will be repeating the process in October...

On September 3rd last year we successfully commemorated Merchant Navy day, on its centenary, with the hoisting of the Red Ensign on the church flag-pole. The event was attended by our MP, some Merchant Navy Association members from Birmingham and some 40 of our residents... Playing that same percentage game, that is akin to Daventry having an attendance of 6,000 at such an event; and is to be congratulated. We will be hoisting the Red Duster again this year, on the 2nd September.

On the Subject of Commemorative occasions, and there is a plethora of them, the Parish Council has chosen to celebrate Armed Forces Day, with a similar flag-hoisting event; This will be on July 1st; serendipitously also a Village Hall Bar day...

That takes us back to the last Annual Parish Meeting on 18th May 2017. At which meeting; in regard to Speedwatch; I gave a summary of the results we'd had over the previous 4 years and commented that;

"...it is hard to see what we achieve; but at least, by recording these sorts of results, we are constantly reminding the powers that be that Preston Capes Parish does have a major speeding problem, especially along the Charwelton to Maidford Road."

I reported that, I had "raised our frustrations at the last Town & Parish Councils' Meeting at DDC, and as a result there is now one ray-of-hope, in this endeavour;" That the "DDC has

been discussing with the Police, the possibility of the DDC issuing Anti-Social Behaviour tickets to some of the more persistent and/or more serious offenders...". I suggested that we should "...wait and see..."

The upshot was that the Daventry Neighbourhood Policing Team and Daventry District Council came to an agreement whereby; using the results we gathered; DDC would indeed issue Community Protection Fixed Penalty tickets to the more persistent and/or more serious offenders... Unfortunately; when informed of this; the Police Road Safety Team at Northampton; the organisers of Speedwatch; rather "threw their toys out of the pram."

The Road Safety Team Manager, by email, informed us that though they didn't approve of this use of data collected using their equipment; they "would not be adverse to" Daventry Neighbourhood Policing Team and DDC "piloting a completely separate scheme aside from Community Speed Watch, at a local area level collecting and processing the data, issue warning letters and follow through with Community Protection Notices at their own discretion."

He continued; "On this basis and respecting Preston Capes Parish Council's clear wishes to be involved, I propose that Preston Capes Parish Council be released from the forthcoming Community Speed Watch activities, thereby enabling them to be engaged in the pilot without conflict of interest. The email concluded; "Whilst holding a degree of reservation, I will be watching with interest and hope of success."

I therefore asked him the obvious question; "Does this mean we will still have use of the equipment; the speed recording device etc.?" Pointing out that; "We are due to take on this kit on 5th August; without it, we can obviously do nothing."

I also asked; "Assuming we still have the use of that kit, does your proposal mean we send our results to DDC only, and not to Northants Police?" His reply was clear; "To avoid any potential conflict of interest and cross sharing of data it is proposed that Preston Capes Parish Council be released from the Community Speed Watch activities forthwith and thereby not to be provided with the enforcement equipment and associated resources on 5th August 2017."

It was as if, in some virtual playground, we'd been told; "Yes, you can try to play your own game of football, but this is our ball and you can't have it." And so ended 2017 Speedwatch in Preston Capes...

Since our last Annual Parish Meeting, the Parish Council has met, in Ordinary & Extraordinary meetings; 14 times

I and other members have, as Parish Councillors, attended 12 other meetings with the Police, the Police & Crime Commissioner and Daventry District Council...

That is all I intend to say at this juncture;

But if you have any questions about Parish Council matters I'm happy to answer them now; Councillor Bill Dearn, as well as being Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council, is also the Treasurer of the Village Education Charity, and though he couldn't be here himself, has sent its annual report as well.

I know that Mike Delacoe is here somewhere, with the Village Hall Trustees report, and other organisations' representatives are hopefully also here... The bar is now open and Tea or Coffee is also available

REPORT FROM OUR COUNTY COUNCILLOR ROBIN BROWN

Annual Report 2017/18

May 2017 the County Elections were held and I was re-elected to represent your village.

Sadly this year has been the most traumatic I have ever experienced; many will have read the newspaper reports of the difficulties that the Council has faced in balancing its books; the Government Inspectors Report and my sacking from the Cabinet following the Leader, Cllr Heather Smiths' resignation, on March 15th 2018. I will now take this opportunity to give you my view of the Events.

Having set the budget in February 2017, by June it became clear the Social Services in both Children's & Adults were not going to stay within Budget and the demand in both areas was much more than forecast with the savings planned undeliverable. This failure which followed the same pattern as the previous three years was unacceptable and in consequence as Cabinet Member for Finance I asked the Finance Director to instigate a "Peer" Review via the Local Government Association (L.G.A.)

The review published in September was damning of the Services Budgetary Control, the short term nature of the overall budget and the need to take a longer term view of the forward plan. It also made clear the need to consider the Sale & Leaseback of the newly opened HQ, One Angel Square. Plus increasing the budgets for Social Care became a priority (actioned in the 2018/19 budget). In consequence the Budget Process was fundamentally changed and a Cabinet Paper in October was presented outlining £10 million savings across Libraries, Bus Subsidies, Trading Standards, Winter Gritting, Highway Maintenance and Empowering Councillor Grants to name but a few. The Chief Executive had left, the FD was appointed as an interim CExec and two days after that October Cabinet meeting three of the seven MP's in the County expressed for the very first time "no confidence" in the Leadership of the Council!

During November many "Star Chambers" were held to review, and then propose a sustainable budget for 2018. The plans however required the continued use of "in year" capital receipts (Selling the Silver) to ensure end of year balance plus an increase of local council tax that would exceed the governments "cap".

The Secretary of State has the power to allow an increase and in December the Leader wrote to him making the case to allow a significant increase in Council Tax, we delayed the Cabinet meeting in December but there was no response. Albeit the Local Government funding settlement was published at the end of December allowing an extra 1% over the cap on the tax plus extending for three years the use of In Year Capital Receipts.

Early in January the Sec. of State, informed the Council he was sending in a Best Value Inspector to review the Finances and Culture of the Council. That Inspector, Max Caller, started mid January and published his report on the 15th March. He interviewed many Councillors and staff and appointed, as his deputy inspector, an officer who had been involved with the LGA Peer review six months prior.

I was the third person he interviewed after the Leader & CExec. It was clear to me that he was convinced the council did not need extra funding for Social Care, the peer report was referred to constantly and my insistence that "In Year Capital Receipts" was the bridge to moving to a sustainable budget via the "Fairer Funding" formulae from government was rubbish as never going to happen. The only way to manage a budget is to "cut your cloth" to suit your means! As if that was not the intention every year we had been in control!

The problems of balancing the budget became more difficult when during January the sale of land at Buckton Fields for £12 million was deemed as unachievable as planning was not granted within the time frame expected. That fact by the end of the month caused the Finance Director to issue a

Section 114 notice, the first time since the year 2000. This notice originally legislated for in the "80's" was designed to allow the FD to stop all spending as there would be a risk that the authority would fail to balance their books which is illegal! That notice is issued without consulting elected members and caused all the MP's in the County to sign an open letter to the leader telling her to resign as they then wanted Commissioners to take over the council. There followed a six week period where individual MP's pressurised and harassed the Leader who made it clear she would stay until the Inspector's report was made public. The External Auditors became more critical of the budget being proposed for the 22nd February; to the extent they issued an official Audit notice requiring the Council to pause and reflect before setting the budget as they believed there was a risk it would be illegal.

The meeting was delayed by six days a further £10 million of cuts reinstated which was then passed at Full Council on the 28th February allowing the precept to go ahead and Tax bills to go out!

Suffice to say the Best Value Inspectors report heaps blame on the County Council for not managing its finances; wasting money on schemes to reduce costs that could not work and allowed a Culture within the organisation of Social Care where budget discipline was never exercised. Further that the reliance on the "In Year" Capital receipts was not sustainable oddly something I made very clear to our Council, our MP and the Inspector! Bottom line no fault of Government as funding must be adequate.

The issue of extra funding for growth was rubbish as apparently we had not taken into account the increases in council tax all the extra houses had provided!!! Never mind that Northampton Development Corporation started fifty years ago and the in County growth accelerated dramatically over the last fifteen years! Our County has the highest growth % of over 65's and the state of our two General Hospitals is only making matters worse. My solution of using all resources available to ensure Social Care bills were paid and the belief that there was underfunding have been trashed. I am wrong according to the Inspectors report.

What now

As from 15th March following the Leaders resignation the Deputy Leader Cllr Matt Golby became Acting Leader and his first act on Friday the 16th March was to phone me and ask that I resign; to my question why; he responded "because the conservative group and the MP's want you out" my response you can imagine --- he sacked me!

I am still your County Councillor and do not intend to resign, I will continue until the next Election which is currently May 2021. However the Inspectors Report makes the recommendation that the County Council and the Seven District and Borough Councils are abolished and two Unitary Councils are put in their place with the Elections brought forward to May 2020. This however will need agreement of all of the councils, as the Secretary of State does not have powers to impose the change without enacting new Primary Legislation and with Parliamentary time so busy with Brexit it is unlikely to be available!

My role as a "backbencher" will be quite a change having been part of the Executive since the Conservative Administration took over in 2005. I am disappointed that the County Council has failed to develop its funding arguments to ensure we provided all the Statutory and Non Statutory services as planned. The crisis in Social Care is in my opinion a National Issue and not purely local. The political decisions required need action now for there are a number of other County Councils facing the same pressures we have albeit twelve to eighteen months from the precipice we have now reached.

Many say I should apologise for my failings in managing the Finance Portfolio, my response has been that I firmly believed that the growth in the County plus the historic underfunding the County has endured required I use every effort to provide the maximum funding for the provision of vital services. Hence my persistence in using capital assets to balance the books; alongside that I

question the motivation of some of our MP's who now believe that a two Unitary Council will solve all the funding issues when the current Leaders of Daventry & South Northants District Councils have said otherwise.

Finally I am very sorry that I was not successful in maintaining the services we all want but you have my promise you will have my commitment representing you to the best of my ability and helping where ever possible.

Robin WW Brown
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April 2018