

Chairmans report 2025

Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting will take place on 16th April and is a great opportunity to celebrate the various groups within our village and hear from each of them.

If you're a resident looking to get more involved in the community, this is the perfect chance to see what's on offer.

Each year, the Chairman of the Parish Council provides an update on the Council's work, and we circulate this report in advance. Below are some key topics we've been focusing on.

I would like to start by thanking my fellow members of the Parish Council for the time they devote to the village. They are all volunteers and they commit their time to the village in an effort to make it a better place. I would also like to thank all of the community minded individuals that run groups, create events and devote time to the village in a variety of ways.

There will always be people who complain about life in the village but we have an amazing community and that does not happen by accident. It is the people that live here who make it so special. Thank you!

Highways and Pedestrian Safety

The village's Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) outlines 3–4 priority projects we would like Kent Highways to implement. While our proposals are consistently described as pragmatic and sensible, we have yet to see meaningful action on key issues such as speeding.

Last year, speed monitoring was carried out to support our request for a 20mph speed limit. However, because the average recorded speed was 26mph, it was deemed too high to introduce a lower limit. We continue to push for solutions.

We are also exploring alternative pedestrian routes to improve safety. One potential route runs from The Grange via the tarmac path to the field behind the shop. However, in winter, it becomes impassable due to mud. We have discussed installing a concrete track with the landowner, who is open to the idea if we can fund it.

To date, our request for funding from KCC has been unsuccessful, but we continue to seek financial support. One potential source is S106 funding from the Six Acres development, which brings us to our next point...

S106 Funding – Six Acres Development

Housing developments often generate S106 funding, which can be allocated to local projects. When The Grange was built, £250,000 was set aside for a new community centre—funds we are hoping to use to either purchase the Garden Centre or build a new hall at the recreation ground.

We are also exploring whether S106 funds from Six Acres could be used for:

Improvements to the play park – a well-loved facility for children in the village.

A contribution towards the pedestrian route mentioned above.

While this funding is far from guaranteed, if you don't ask, you don't get, and we believe these are reasonable requests.

Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)

We aim to use S106 money from The Grange to build a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). These courts can be used for multiple sports, including football, pickleball, tennis, netball, and basketball.

We have £34,000 potentially available in S106 funds, but the total cost is twice this amount. We are exploring ways to:

Build the court in sections

Apply for grants

Use other village funds to cover the shortfall

If we don't act soon, this money could be redirected to a neighbouring village—something we want to avoid. It has already been suggested that neighbouring villages may try and lay claim to some of these funds. In our view this would be wholly unfair given that the money was raised from a development that was built in our village. It stands to reason that we should be the village to benefit from this money!

Six Acres Development – Planning Delays

Progress on the Six Acres development has stalled due to wildlife surveys requested by Dover District Council. The Planning Officer has reassured us that she has never seen a similar application fail because of these surveys, which is encouraging—though frustrating.

It seems odd that an environmental survey is required on a field where pesticides are used, making it unlikely to be a significant wildlife habitat. However, we must work within the system and find ways to move forward.

Garden Centre – Negotiations Ongoing

At the time of writing, negotiations to lease and potentially purchase the Garden Centre are ongoing.

We had originally agreed to lease the site from 1st April, with the intention of purchasing half the site in July. However, we cannot commit to a purchase until planning for Six Acres is approved. As this has been delayed, we are working to secure a deal that suits both parties.

We remain confident—based on discussions with the Planning Officer—that Six Acres will be approved. If we proceed with leasing the site, our financial exposure would be limited to lease payments, ensuring the site remains available until we can buy it.

Importantly, we will not enter into a lease agreement unless it includes an obligation for the site to be sold to us, as we do not want to lease it only for it to be sold to another buyer.

Increase in Village Precept

Some residents have raised concerns about the increase in the village precept, which led to a 91% rise in the parish portion of council tax bills.

While this sounds high in percentage terms, in real terms it equates to around £6 per month for most households—a modest sum when considering the benefits to the village.

We sent a letter with the newsletter to all households explaining the increase and invited residents to a meeting to discuss it. The village voted 2:1 in favour of the increase.

The primary reason for the increase was to fund a bridging loan (if required) to enable us to purchase the Garden Centre as a new community hub.

We hope to avoid taking out a loan, as we expect funds to be in place for the purchase.

If we don't use the money, we can reduce next year's precept accordingly.

The funds could also be used to support the MUGA project, preventing us from losing \$106 money.

I have spoken personally with residents concerned about the increase, and they have understood the reasoning. I am happy to discuss this with anyone who has questions—please feel free to get in touch. Not everyone will agree, but we followed a democratic process and acted on the majority decision.

Preston Summerfest

Despite last summer's bad weather, Preston Summerfest was a great success, with residents turning out despite the rain.

This event, supported and organised by the Parish Council, was created to bring the community together while raising money for charity.

This year's lineup is especially exciting, featuring bands and acts that usually perform in major stadiums and nightclubs. There will be a wide variety of music and lots of activities for children.

Buy your tickets now!

We would greatly appreciate early ticket purchases, as this helps us plan the event more effectively.

Ticket prices will rise closer to the event – so buying now is the best deal.

You can purchase tickets from [Skiddle.com](https://www.skiddle.com) or the village shop.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Final Thoughts

The past year has been busy, and while there have been challenges, we continue to push forward on key issues that matter to the village.

Thank you for your support, and I hope to see many of you at the Annual Parish Meeting on 16th April.

Tommy Gale, Chairman, Preston & Elmstone Parish Council