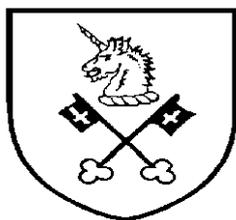


Prestbury Parish Council



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Mr Paul Traynor
Strategic Commissioning Manager
Cheshire East Council, Strategic Highways and Transport
6th Floor Delamere House
Delamere Street
Crewe CW1 2LL

21st October 2014

Dear Mr Traynor

Dissatisfactions with the delivery of outsourced services to Prestbury Village

Prestbury Parish Councillors are saddened to have to make a formal complaint to our principal authority on behalf of our residents about the poor level of service we have been receiving on a range of housekeeping issues for which Cheshire East Council are responsible.

Our concern is not only for the inadequate level of service, but also about the unacceptable responses which we receive when we raise issues. Our dissatisfaction began when the principal authority was still directly responsible for delivering these services, but it has increased significantly since they have been outsourced.

We currently have a situation in our village where footfall in the village shops and restaurants has been falling, and it is our agreed and publicised top priority as a Council to clean and to tidy the village to get back to our traditional 'picture postcard image' and to attract visitors back to the village centre. The recent poor response to our needs from CEC therefore comes at a very bad time, and is made even more frustrating when

- (a) our CEC Councillor receives the same lack of response to his communications in our support
- (b) we are told that we cannot do the work ourselves because of safety, contractual or legal reasons
- (c) public statements by CEC claim to be taking great pride in "improving services while reducing overall costs".

We have to say that in our case we see greatly reduced services and excuses offered in place of response.

We are repeatedly told that the service groups are short staffed, too busy, under-funded, have a backlog of work, have inadequate equipment or equipment which is broken down or unavailable ... etc., etc.

On almost every issue we seem to endure protracted delays and endless communications, during which time nothing happens. In some cases we receive a denial of responsibility for services which we have received in the past. Staff are reluctant to share the schedules of what we believe should be routine planned work.

Some examples are as follows:

Cleaning of Road Signage: this seems to have stopped completely and some signs are illegible and covered in moss. The repair and replacement of old and broken road name signs appears to have ceased. After long discussions CEC has indicated they have no budget for some of this work. We are considering the use of volunteers to clean these signs.

Grass and Hedge Maintenance

Many hedges are overgrown to the extent that grass corridors and public footpaths are seriously obstructed and in some cases have virtually disappeared. Examples include the southern end of Wilmslow Road and Castle Hill (i.e. the A538) down into the village, on Butley Lanes, higher up on Macclesfield Road above Prestbury Golf Club (on these two sites the footpath is now considered too narrow and dangerous for pedestrian use), Castleford Drive (where the grass verge has disappeared beneath encroaching hedge), at the entrance to Shirley's car park (where it is causing a dangerous driving 'blind spot' on exiting the car park).

We have requested weeding and removal of vegetation next to church wall, and removal of a stump from grassed central island without response so far.

Trees

There are some trees which have been identified as diseased and in danger of falling: a horse chestnut on the eastern side of the Bolin Bridge on the corner of New Road and Bridge Green has been condemned and "is to be removed soon". Another horse chestnut opposite, on the River Bollin, has been reported as diseased, there are large cracks in the trunk.

Specific Hedge agreement

It was agreed five years ago that the hedge at Parrot's Field be reduced to 1 metre in height from the Bridge Green gate up to the corner with New Road. We have repeatedly requested that this job be completed as agreed, but have received only inadequate and occasional trimming of this hedge since then.

Road and Footpath sweeping

Prestbury is an area with considerable tree cover and landscaping. This adds to its attractiveness and is a valued and protected feature of our Village Design Statement. Clearance of leaves is therefore a regular need. The present contractor (Ansa) does not have equipment which can sweep our pavements or remove moss as it is said to be too big. Requests for manual cleaning of pathways and pavement to remove weeds, moss and leaves have been ignored. We have repeatedly requested sight of the sweeping, cutting and weeding routes and schedules. Nothing has been offered. Weeding in the village has been an especially contentious issue this year, voiced by many of the residents. We understand that some weeding took place in June and September, but was seen to be ineffective.

Safety Bollards on the bend by the Bridge Hotel

These bollards have been in place for many years in recognition of the serious risk to pedestrians on the footpath outside the Bridge Hotel where traffic comes round a blind bend adjacent to this footpath. Near misses have regularly been reported by pedestrians at this site. The bollards were damaged two years ago by traffic overrunning the edge of the footpath, and they were then removed. We have regularly requested their replacement ever since. New replacement bollards were purchased by CEC over a year ago and stored awaiting installation. Subsequent requests for their replacement have been either ignored or replied to with various excuses and platitudes. Recent lengthy correspondence has produced a set of new technical objections to the direct replacement of these longstanding and traditional items of protection against a known and significant road safety hazard.

Lights on the footpath from the station to the village

These lights were installed some years ago for safety and security reasons on a very dark and narrow section of raised footpath giving access to the village from the station. They have proved inadequate ever since their installation with repeated failures and damage due to vandalism. They need to be replaced by a more robust design. This discussion has been going on for 5 years.

Gulley Cleaning

We have for many years been complaining about local roadside flooding after heavy rain, due to the apparent blockage of local rainwater drains and gulleys. Requests for a copy of the gully cleaning schedule resulted in prevarication. This issue came to a head following repeated instances of the flooding of dwellings in the village centre. After the helpful involvement of the Flood Risk Manager and his team, a multi-agency meeting was arranged and a plan has now emerged to survey all of the village drains and gulleys and to prepare plans for their enhancement. A contributory factor to this has been the lack of gully cleaning, as confirmed by the inspections required as a part of the planned survey found that many drains and gulleys were completely blocked around some of the areas suffering flooding. We still seek assurance that a regular, effective and sustainable gully cleaning schedule will be put in place on an ongoing basis.

There is an annual gully cleaning program, and we have recently been informed of this date, but we feel that this is not sufficient to keep our gullies clear in this heavily wooded area.

Zebra Crossing

We waited a long time for the village Zebra Crossing to be painted with specialist paint, but the new paint has already started to fade when a little over twelve months old.

Road repairs and excavations

There has recently been an apparent lack of proper communication and co-ordination of road works between utility companies, BT and CEC. This was apparent when the village centre was newly surfaced and then immediately dug up for drainage work earlier this year. Currently a series of excavations by BT without consultation or announcement have lasted about two weeks on Macclesfield Road, followed by a changing planned date for the closure of this road for resurfacing. We recognise the need for this work, but would

request full consultation, planning and information about work which causes long delays and disruption of traffic flow at peak times.

Many roads in and around Prestbury have been attended to repair wear and potholes over the past four years, but this has frequently been patching with substandard tarmac, which then quickly breaks up again. This poor quality of repair must simply cause extra cost later. We were promised last year that, where possible, potholes in the Prestbury area would be filled using a new high velocity machine. We are not aware of the use of this machine, as it is shared with Buckinghamshire.

Grass verges are inevitably damaged by contractors vehicles during roadway and roadside excavations, as was the case on Macclesfield Road on several recent occasions. We have repeatedly asked CEC to pursue contractors to complete repairs, but there has been little or no follow up to our requests to improve their crude restoration work, and scars remain on the verges long after. These do not help our aim of keeping up to the standards which meet our Village Design Statement and of attracting more visitors to the village centre.

Contractor

CEC staff and contractors have been willing to visit this Parish Council to discuss problems, but the meetings have not made much change to the service and there has been little action or change in response to our concerns.

When Ringway Jacobs won the contract with CEC, they promised to issue a survey to parish councils every six months, so that their performance could be monitored and commented on. We have reminded RJ of this obligation every six months since October 2011. Since then, the largest number of comments returned have been critical of the condition of the highways and the gullies/drains.

Yours faithfully

Arthur Dicken, Chairman
On behalf of Prestbury Parish Council

Copy to:

Georgina Ryder, Parish Clerk
Prestbury Parish Councillors
Prestbury Ward CEC Councillor Paul Findlow
Mr Andrew Ross, Senior Officer Highways.
Mr Paul Traynor, Strategic Commissioning Manager – Highways