

**Minutes of Haigh Annual Parish Meeting  
Held Tuesday 21 May 2024  
7:10pm – The School Room, Haigh Kitchen Courtyard**

**Present:** Councillor Paul Kenyon (Chairman), Cllrs Roberta Darbyshire, Ian Parker, Marie-Clare Kenyon, Andrew Wilson and Mrs Krystyna Pilkington (Parish Clerk)  
AI & AI and 14 members of the public

**1 Welcome by the Chairman**

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. Cllr Paul Kenyon introduced himself and explained that the public were also welcome to attend the ordinary meetings of the Council, which took place throughout the year. If they wished to attend, they were asked to let the Clerk know in advance.

He then introduced the other members of the Parish Council present. Cllr Andrew Keogh, who had joined the Council a year ago, and Cllr Jill Ingram, who had just recently become a Parish Councillor, had both been unable to attend.

The role of Parish Councillor was an unpaid, voluntary position. Haigh Parish Council met at St David's Parish Rooms and the schedule of meetings was displayed on the notice boards and on Wigan Council's website.

The Parish Council met with Wigan Council's executive four times a year to raise and discuss matters of concern in the Parish. Since the last Annual Parish Meeting the focus had been on lobbying for improvements to the condition of the canal towpath in Haigh, creating a joined-up bridleway and restoring the footpath that ran along the only stretch of the River Douglas in Haigh that was accessible to the public.

**The Canal Towpath**

After a slow start initially, recent weeks had witnessed some movement from both Wigan Council and the Canal & River Trust. The Parish Council were willing to make a small financial contribution towards the cost of the upgrade. Because the finances available would not be very large, the towpath would not be upgraded to the same level as the sections that were part of the Bee Network, but the restoration to be undertaken would make the towpath more usable.

**A Joined-Up Bridleway**

The Parish Council were working on finding a way to develop a joined-up bridleway in the area.

**Riverside Footpath**

The footpath running alongside the River Douglas had been degraded by flooding and the area could not be accessed during the Winter months. Two options for addressing the issue were under consideration: (i) constructing raised walkways and (ii) creating an alternative route. The matter was still under discussion.

**Planning Applications**

The Parish Council could comment on planning applications. They had no power to stop planning applications, only to lobby against them, if that was what they wished. For several years now the Council had been monitoring progress with respect to the application submitted for permission to create a small housing development on the footprint of Leyland Mill.

## **Christmas Lights**

Following a request from residents a couple of years ago, the Council was working on the provision of Christmas decorations in the historical centre of the Parish. Not having identified a location for a Christmas tree, they were looking into the feasibility of providing lamp post motifs.

## **2 Apologies**

Cllrs Andrew Keogh and Jill Ingram

## **3 Matters Introduced by Members of the Public**

### **Canal Towpath**

A resident asked whether the Community Payback Scheme could provide the workforce for the towpath upgrade. The Chairman replied that the plan was to approach them. If between £15,000 and £20,000 could be raised for materials it would be possible to complete most of the work required if a team from the Community Payback Scheme were to provide the labour.

## **4 Minutes of the Last Annual Parish Meeting (7 March 2023)**

**Resolved:** The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday, 7 March 2023 were agreed to be a true and correct record.

## **5 Clerk's Report**

The Clerk's report, which had been previously circulated, was received.  
*See Appendix A.*

**Resolved:** The Clerk's report was accepted.

## **6 A Presentation by AI & AI**

Cllr Paul Kenyon introduced AI & , the artistic directors of the Haigh Hall restoration and development project, who had been invited to provide an update on progress with The Masterplan.

### **Introduction**

AI & AI began by saying that they had about 35 workstreams in connection with the project and would not be able to update the electors on everything during the evening. However, they intended to update everyone on about 5 of them.

Since securing Heritage Lottery and Levelling Up funding, additional match funding had been secured from the Arts Council and the GMCA as well as the original match funding from Wigan Council. AI & AI described how the process of securing further funding from a variety of sources had snowballed.

### **Plantation Gates**

AI & AI described the history of how the lodges that make up the plantation gates had been used and the current poor condition of their interiors, where the floor of one of them had collapsed. Structurally the lodges were in good condition. AI & AI were working with Purcell (the best conservation architects in the country) on this project. Their attention to detail was impressive. So

much so that both buildings would be completely restored to their original condition, making a fantastic entrance to the estate.

The plantation gates would become one of the main entrances to the site for public transport from the town centre. A shuttle would collect visitors from the gates and transfer them up to the Hall. One of the lodges would become a small visitor centre housing the ticket office, an accessible toilet and a small gift shop. The other lodge would be a space in which an internationally renowned artist could be commissioned to work.

AI & AI described how they hoped the interiors would look. The project had already been through planning and was now going through the pre-tender stage to gauge the degree of interest from contractors.

### **External Work on the Hall**

The restoration of the exterior was currently in progress. It was hoped that the scaffolding would have been removed by the end of the year and that the work on the exterior will have been completed. It was anticipated that this would be on time.

The stonework on the exterior was very well cut when first constructed. To avoid damaging the stonework free standing scaffolding had been used. The company instructed to work on the restoration of the stonework employed highly skilled personnel who were very experienced in this field and were doing a wonderful job. Stone from the quarry at Rivington was being used to replace stones and lintels that needed replacing.

One of the sides of the Hall just had algae on it. This had been expertly cleaned by the stonemasons. The other side was covered with soot and was still black. The way forward was being considered.

All of the slates had been removed from the roof. They had disintegrated when they were removed and would all need to be replaced. A new roof would be constructed in the same slate pattern and using the same quality of slate as the original. This had put the project slightly over budget. A temporary roof had been erected to protect the interior of the building.

Many of the chimneys had been very damaged. The chimneys that were not damaged were scanned and the information gained from this exercise had been used to inform the re-casting of the chimneys, resulting in a perfect restoration.

Rainwater had been the cause of a certain amount of damage to both the exterior and interior of the building resulting in the formation of dry rot.

### **Internal Work on the Hall**

The internal work should begin once the external work had been finished – hopefully by January 2025 - and should take about two and a half years to complete. It was hoped that the Hall would open to the public in 2027.

The conservation architects with whom AI & AI were working on both the exterior and the interior were paying great attention to detail and restoring as much as possible to how it had been originally.

Some plans for the interior had had to be re-assessed and would probably not go ahead, as the areas of the Hall that they had related to were not really suitable for the general public to access. However, most of the plans for the interior remained unchanged from what had previously been published.

Although it was anticipated that, in line with popular demand, the Café would be larger than originally planned.

A number of major collections had already been secured for display in the building. The provision of educational spaces was a major feature of the restoration. Various national public bodies were beginning to recognise the project as a flagship not just for the Wigan area, but also for Greater Manchester.

AI & AI had recently visited the Balcarres Estate in Scotland and described their experiences there. They had found many of the things held in the family archives to be great sources of inspiration where the project was concerned.

### **The Bothy Yard**

Most things relating to the Bothy that could be seen in paintings, drawings and early photographs had been identified and there were plans to restore and transform the area. All the buildings would be coming back into use and the area would become the centre for horticulture on the site. The funding for this had been secured.

### **The Plantations Play Trail**

This project was started before Covid, but had not progressed very far because of Covid. When AI & AI took over they felt that the original trail had too many play points. The number of points was reduced from twenty-two to four and an artist (David Bethell) was commissioned to design play sculptures for each of the remaining play points. David Bethell involved children attending a selection of schools across Wigan to provide him with inspiration for the sculptures.

The aim of the play trail was to encourage people to explore the plantations on foot and enjoy the natural landscape. It was hoped that the trail would go under construction in three or four months.

### **Amphitheatre for a Tree**

This project was due to begin construction in a few weeks and was being funded by the Arts Council. An archeological search was carried out first. Nothing of value was found, so the project had been allowed to go ahead. The Rotary Club had donated £10,000 towards the cost of the project. The donation had enabled a signature magnolia tree costing £8,000 to be purchased for the centre of the amphitheatre. AI & AI provided more details about what the project involved.

AI & AI then took questions from the audience, who were interested in who would be responsible for ensuring that, once up and running, the project remained sustainable long after the restoration had been completed. This led to a discussion.

The Chairman thanked AI & AI for their superb presentation.

The Meeting Closed at 9:00pm

**Chairman**