

HELSEBY PARISH COUNCIL

Questionnaire 2022 – Summary of Results

Introduction

Helsby Parish Council distributed a short questionnaire as an insert to the Autumn 2022 edition of the Helsby News publication. The questionnaire was delivered to 2750 households. Online versions were also available to complete via the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. By the closing date of 31st October 2022, a total of 202 questionnaires had been completed amounting to a return rate of around 7%. Around half were completed online and half via paper copy. The information received in the survey will be considered by our various committees over the coming months and the comments and views expressed will also help us to draft our new business plan which will run from 2023 to 2028.

Q1 What do you like about living in Helsby?

Around half of all the respondents said that they liked the friendliness of the people and the community spirit in Helsby (97 people) as well as the easy access to surrounding countryside, including Helsby Hill (94 people). 71 respondents thought that Helsby was well situated for accessing neighbouring towns and cities and generally had good transport links. 59 people also felt that the village had good shops and local facilities. 19 people thought that Helsby was a quiet and peaceful place and 15 people thought that the village was safe and had low levels of crime. Several respondents said that they specifically liked Ho Ho Helsby.

“It's my birthplace. It's a lovely rural setting within easy reach to nearby larger places: Chester, Liverpool, Manchester, North Wales coast etc. Very friendly people. Excellent sports facilities”

Q2 What do you dislike about living in Helsby?

51 people thought that too many new houses were being built in Helsby and many of these respondents felt that such new homes would put a strain on existing local services such as health and education. Over 40 respondents thought that traffic was causing an issue in Helsby, particularly when vehicles were diverted from the M56 through the village. 20 people mentioned speeding as a particular issue and several mentioned parking on pavements and the unauthorised use of cycles and scooters on pavements. 35 people were also frustrated about road closures in Helsby with many of these mentioning the inconvenience of the long-term closure of Old Chester Road. 32 respondents were generally unhappy about noise in the village, particularly motorway noise and piling noise from the new housing developments. 28 people thought that the village looked untidy and unkempt with overgrown hedges, weeds and litter and that some verges and footpaths were poorly maintained. 19 respondents thought that crime and anti-social behaviour was an issue in the village and some wanted to see an increased police presence.

“Road closures, overgrown hedges and weeds on paths, over development on infrastructure, too much through traffic, can't join from side roads, poorly managed bin collections”

Q3 How does the present quality of life in Helsby compare with that 10 years ago?

41% of respondents said that they thought the quality of life was worse now than it was 10 years ago, 25% felt it was the same and 15% thought it was better. The remainder didn't live in Helsby 10 years ago. 52% of those who answered this question left a comment as to why they thought it was better or worse. The majority of those who felt that the quality of life was worse left a comment, with 22

comments left to explain why the quality of life had improved. 30 people thought that there had been too many new houses built in the last 10 years, with many commenting that this was stretching existing infrastructure and facilities. Others commented on the continuing road closures, levels of noise and higher levels of traffic. Of those that thought the quality of life was better, most thought this was due to the provision of new facilities in the village such as Tesco and Helsby Community Sports Club.

Q4 What are your top three priorities for action over the next 5 years?

There were almost 500 answers to this question. Two key themes stood out as being the most popular priorities:

- 92 respondents said they wished to see the completion of all the road repairs in the village and all closed roads to be re-opened (including Old Chester Road). The parish council will continue to voice concern to Cheshire West and Chester Council that Old Chester Road has now been closed for over 5 years; and
- 69 respondents felt that local services and infrastructure should be expanded to cope with all the new houses being built in Helsby (e.g. doctors, schools). The parish council will continue to push for investment, including developer contributions, to be spent locally to ensure that local residents can access doctor's appointments more easily and send their children to schools in Helsby. It is perhaps no surprise that 27 respondents would like to see no more house building at all in the village or better controls on future development.

The following priorities were also notable:

- 43 respondents mentioned traffic issues including speeding and illegal/obstructive parking. The parish council will continue to report any issues to the local PCSO, particularly around local schools, and we have also been exploring the possibility of an average speed camera system in the village. Several people also commented on reducing noise levels from the M56.
- 41 respondents felt that tackling crime and anti-social behaviour should be a priority. We will continue to work with our local PCSO to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. In 2022, we installed CCTV cameras and lights in the parish field to help combat any issues in this area.
- 40 respondents felt that there were too many weeds, litter and overgrown vegetation in Helsby. We will continue to report any issues to Cheshire West and Chester Council and local landowners, where appropriate, for remediation. Similarly, 13 respondents felt that local footpaths and pavements were in need of attention and a number of others wished to see Helsby Quarry tunnel footpath re-opened. 8 people suggested planting more wildflowers in the area.
- 19 people raised the importance of a strong community, with suggestions such as more facilities for young and older people and more village events.
- A number of people felt that sports facilities could be improved - 16 respondents felt that Helsby needed additional sports facilities such as a new sports hall/gym and 9 people specifically wanted a swimming pool. The parish council were delighted to support the development of Helsby Community Sports Club and will continue to encourage the growth of any additional facilities in the future.
- 16 people thought public transport in the area should be improved or the services that were currently provided should be protected. Several people also wished to see cycle links enhanced locally, although there were a number of negative comments in relation to the new cycleway between Helsby High School and Frodsham.

In terms of other priorities raised, some suggestions were outside of the council's control such as better street lighting, household waste disposal and tackling issues with the gypsy and traveller community (within the remit of Cheshire West and Chester Council). Others were for the business community to consider such as providing more local shops and restaurants. Appendix 1 contains some additional suggestions made in this response that the council could perhaps address within its next 5-year plan. These will be discussed by the council over the coming months, mainly through its Environment and Parks, Cemetery and Allotments Committees, or if outside of the Council's remit, referred to Cheshire West and Chester Council or other relevant organisations.

Q5 As a resident, how do you feel about Helsby?

83% of respondents said that Helsby was a village community that they wanted to be a part of. Only 17% of people said that Helsby was just a place to live. This aligns closely with the answers given in Question 1 where many respondents said that they liked the friendliness of the people and the community spirit in Helsby. It is reassuring that many local residents would appear to have a strong sense of community spirit and were keen to engage in local events and use local businesses and facilities.

Q6 We are considering spending money on the following projects. Which would you support?

In this question, we presented a number of ideas for local projects that respondents might wish to support. Whilst no particular project received universal support, the two most popular projects were: refurbishment of Helsby Community Centre (57%) and the provision of play equipment for wheelchair users (54%). The parish council will work together with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Helsby Community Association to look into funding a number of potential refurbishment projects at the community centre, including the installation of more energy efficient LED lighting. One respondent mentioned the poor state of the men's toilet in particular. The Parks, Cemetery and Allotments Committee will also explore different types of wheelchair friendly play equipment and make recommendations to Full Council in 2023.

There was also some support for three other projects: average speed cameras (40%), new village planters (43%) and a summer fete/carnival (48%). The council has expressed an interest in an average speed camera pilot project being promoted by Cheshire's Police and Crime Commissioner. It is understood that we have not been shortlisted as one of the pilot areas initially but we will continue to work with the PCC and others as the project develops. We also work closely with our local PCSO to monitor the general levels of speeding in the village and Cheshire Police have recently invested in a new handheld speed camera device for the local area.

You may have already noticed that the parish council have installed a number of new black planters both at Helsby Community Sports Club and outside the shops on Chester Road. This was a pilot project implemented earlier in 2022 given that some of the green planters were reaching the end of their recommended shelf life. We feel that the new planters do help to smarten up the village and fit better with other street furniture such as our new noticeboards and litter bins. Two respondents suggested spray painting the old green ones rather than scrapping them altogether. The Environment Committee will take any views expressed in the questionnaire on board when considering any further investment. We would also like to take an opportunity to thank our volunteers who kindly give us their time to look after each of the 21 individual planters around the village.

We are sure you will all agree that Ho Ho Helsby is a wonderful annual Christmas event in the village and seems to go from strength to strength every year. Some of you may remember that Helsby used to have a summer carnival and suggestions have been made for more community events in the village.

The parish council will consider funding and organising a summer fete but as with any community event, we would need to rely on the goodwill of volunteers and local organisations to make it a success. Please contact us if you would like to join a working group to consider making any plans for 2023 and beyond.

Two other projects received far less support. Only 14% of respondents supported a landscaping project at Sherwood Court. Sherwood Court is located behind Helsby Community Centre and contains the outdoor gym equipment, the table tennis table and a pavilion. The parish council leases this area of land from Cheshire West and Chester Council. In recent years, some of the paving and general landscaping in this area has deteriorated and would benefit from an overall tidy up. It is acknowledged that some respondents may not have realised that this area was known as Sherwood Court and this could have impacted on the apparent low level of support for this project. Nevertheless, the parish council will take any views expressed when planning the allocation of future resources for this area.

The final proposed project, a public arts statue, received only 5% of support from respondents. Following the allocation of developer contribution funding to arts projects in Helsby as well as a grant from the Arts Council, the parish council worked with a number of creative specialists in 2022 on the first phase of the 'Helsby the Art of Here' project. This involved working with several groups in the local community to develop a leaflet and a sound piece. Funding is still available for a second phase of the project and several councillors thought that a statue to depict Helsby's heritage might be the best way forward. Given the apparent lack of support for a statue, it is clear that further community consultation is required about where monies may best be spent in this area.

We also asked respondents what other projects they would like to see. Some of the answers closely aligned with the priorities set out in Question 4 and have therefore not been repeated here— i.e. re-opening Old Chester Road, provision of a gym and swimming pool in the village, improving play facilities, wildflower planting and tidying up the village in general. A number of other ideas were suggested which are set out for consideration in Appendix 1.

Q7 Would you support the designation of a conservation area in Helsby?

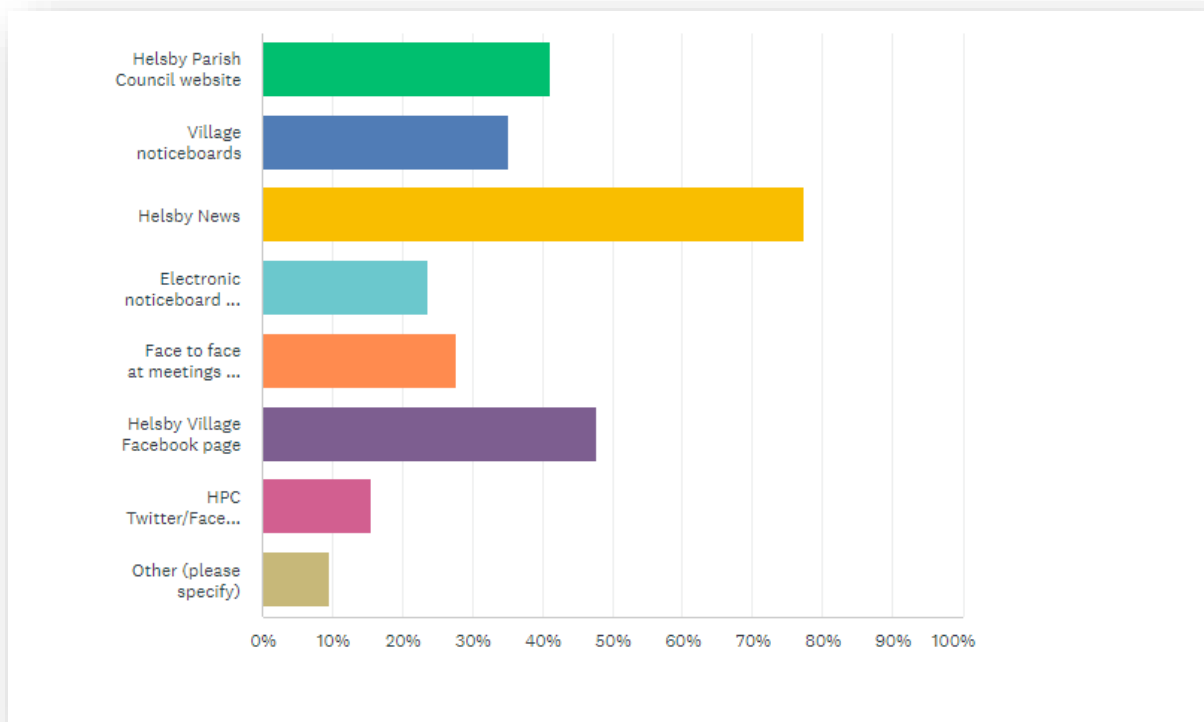
The parish council wanted to ask about the community's potential support for a conservation area in Helsby. During Covid, we carried out some initial exploratory work with Cheshire West and Chester Council and a draft report was produced which identified the area around Helsby Hill as a possible conservation area. At the time, we received arguments both against and in favour of the proposals so we knew that the concept divided opinions locally. Whilst it was difficult in this survey to give the full background to conservation areas generally, we did provide a weblink for respondents to find out more information.

54% of people said that they would support the designation of a conservation area in Helsby, 24% were against such a designation and 21% said they were unsure. Whilst just over half of respondents were in support, the council feels that there is still substantial work to do before it could recommend a designation (Cheshire West and Chester would make the final decision). Alongside this, the parish council is also involved with the potential Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) designation of the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge and this could have implications for the conservation and protection of local historical assets. The Environment Committee will keep a close eye on any further developments with the AONB designation and will revisit the potential for a conservation area in Helsby in this context in the near future.

Q8 How would you like the Parish Council to communicate with you?

The parish council would like to be as accessible and engaging as possible to everyone in the community. We are aware that communication methods change over time, particularly as new technologies continue to evolve. We display our agendas and information about the council on our noticeboard at Helsby Community Sports Club and we often produce a short article for inclusion in Helsby News. We also have an up-to-date website which includes all our agenda and minutes and information about our councillors and important council documents.

The vast majority of respondents wanted us to communicate via Helsby News (82%). Given this, it might be useful to include more detailed articles with parish council news in future editions. Several respondents commented that distributing paper copies was costly and unsustainable and the newsletter should be distributed electronically. We will discuss options with the editorial team. Whilst the council doesn't have its own Facebook page, we do include information on the Helsby Village Facebook page from time to time. Given that 48% of respondents wanted us to communicate via Facebook, we may contribute more widely to the village page and perhaps consider creating our own page in the future. 41% said they wanted us to communicate via website. One respondent felt that our current website was clunky and could be better so we will look at its current design and compare this with best practice (see www.helsbyparish.org.uk). 35% of respondents would like us to continue posting information on noticeboards. The council has recently invested in three new boards around the village and we will ensure that both council and community information is posted there on a regular basis.



We also asked for any other suggestions in terms of how we might improve our communication. 9 people suggested that we could communicate via e-mail which we will explore further. One person suggested we could hold a quarterly meeting to discuss local issues. All Helsby Parish Council meetings and our committee meetings are open to the public and local issues are discussed at each one. We hold around 30 meetings every year. Agendas and meetings details are available on our website.

Q9a Are you aware that we hold monthly surgeries in our office on the first Saturday of each month at 10am? Q9b Would you be interested in coming along to raise any issues/meet some of our parish councillors?

Since we resumed our councillor surgeries following the Covid outbreak, attendance by members of the public has been disappointingly low. These surgeries provide local residents with the opportunity to discuss local issues with two of our parish councillors. Our CW&C ward councillor is usually also in attendance. 56% of respondents weren't aware about the surgeries so we will publicise these more widely. Reassuringly, 56% of respondents said that they would be interested in attending so we will continue to hold them and hopefully more people will start to attend. We are now more regularly advertising our surgeries and alternating locations in an attempt to boost attendance.

Q10 Are there any other issues in the parish that you would like to bring to our attention? Please use the box below to identify any issues or concerns you may have or any ideas you have for the community?

93 respondents answered this question. Many responses related to issues already raised in previous answers but there were also a wide range of comments and ideas that the parish council will consider as set out in Appendix 1. Several people raised issues about the parish council itself. We were delighted to receive praise from some respondents: *"I think Helsby owes the Parish Council and staff a debt of gratitude for keeping all the areas owned and managed by them looking fantastic and in great condition"* but we also take on board a number of criticisms from others and will seek to remedy these: *"I have attended a Parish Council meeting but was put off by the layout of the room. The Councillors had their back to me, so I was talking to the backs of their heads which I found disconcerting to the point of rude. You need a better room layout"*; *"The Council should maybe try to be friendlier in its approach and more transparent about projects and activities. Then it would attract more and younger councillors"*.

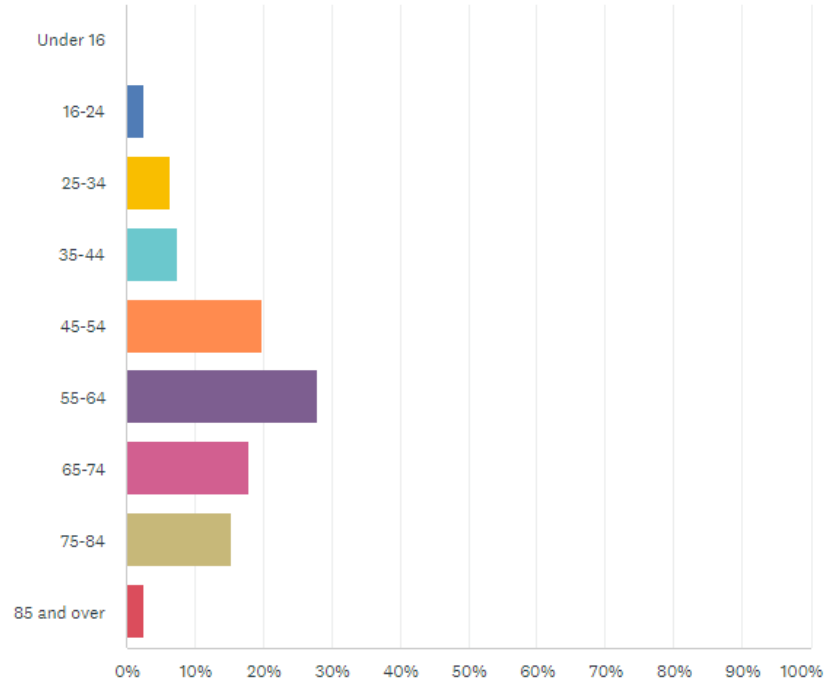
Several people made reference to the new cycle route between Helsby High School and the Netherton Hall in Frodsham. This is unsurprising given that the project was being developed at the time the questionnaire was circulated. A number of respondents felt that the route was dangerous and a waste of public money. We will feed these views back to Cheshire West and Chester Council. There were also a number of comments made to say that the borough councillor was difficult to contact. Again, we will report this back to CW&C.

Q11 Would you be interested in joining the parish council?

The parish council can have up to 15 councillors representing the three wards in Helsby. Currently we have only 10 councillors and we are always keen to encourage new people to join. We have recently introduced a councillor induction programme along with a buddy system to help new councillors settle into the role. Whilst 69% of respondents said that they would not be interested in joining the council, 5% of people said they were interested (contact parishclerk@helsbyparish.org.uk for further details) and 26% said they were unsure. Parish council elections are also being held in 2023 – we will be circulating some information about this on our website and noticeboards shortly.

Q12 Finally, to ensure that we have a representative selection of the local community, please indicate the age group you belong to below:

There was generally a good cross section of ages completing the questionnaire as shown in the table below with the majority being in the 55-64 year age bracket (28%). The aligns fairly closely with the age demographic in Helsby.



APPENDIX 1

Project Ideas from the Survey and suggested HPC Committee Actions (Finance/Environment/ Parks, Allotments and Cemetery)

Idea	Responsibility	Comments
Improvement of Sherwood Court with planted areas/pleasant walks	Environment Committee	Work to commence 2023
Places to sit and talk	Environment Committee	There are benches around the Village, we were discouraged from putting anymore around, by the Police, as it would likely create ASB. The Park and Sherwood Court have suitable places
A community garden	Environment Committee	Where?
Helsby carnival	Environment Committee (organisers required)	Willing to support but need organisers
Adapt the outdoor gym so wheelchair users can enjoy it	Environment Committee	Needs consideration when looking at the landscaping scheme
Development of a community orchard/garden	Environment Committee	Where?
Something that represents Helsby history	Environment Committee	BICC history
More flowers/hanging baskets and entering Britain in Bloom	Environment Committee	Canvas shop owners
Local art mural to depict community values involving local children	Environment Committee	Get schools signed up and involved
Better Christmas lights	Environment Committee	Ongoing every year
Use of the parish field for more community events	Environment Committee	Parish field is always available
Spread the Christmas lights over a shorter distance for more impact	Environment Committee	I wonder what residents in the extremities of the Village would think?
A bench for walkers at Bates Lane/Tarvin Road junction	Environment Committee	There are benches around the Village, we were discouraged from putting anymore around, by the Police, as it would likely create ASB. The Park and Sherwood Court have suitable places
Time capsule at Maltby Triangle in memory of the Queen	Environment Committee	Need clearance from CWaC as we only lease the land. School project?
A flagpole to mark civic or commemorative special occasions	Environment Committee	There is a flagpole in Helsby at St Paul's Church. Other alternative may be at the park in which case this would be the PCA Committee

Money for public art could be used for a QEII memorial	Environment Committee	Good idea but what and where?
Outdoor film screening/theatre	Environment Committee	Where?
Calisthenics gym equipment in local park/in general more facilities	PCA/Env Committees	Some of this type of equipment is already installed at Sherwood Court
Replant all the trees felled around Helsby park	PCA Committee	PCA to obtain quotes for this work already, along with some stump grinding of felled trees
Skatepark/cycle park for children	PCA Committee	PCA to consider demand for this and find a suitable location (e.g. work with new housing providers)
Installing wheelchair accessible play equipment in parks	PCA Committee	PCA currently exploring options, report to be presented for consideration
Improved play areas for children	PCA Committee	Council is putting earmarked funds aside for improvements to the play area. To explore options for the 5-year business plan
Buying land for long-term cemetery space and new allotments	PCA Committee	Council is putting earmarked funds aside for a future land purchase and we are monitoring any suitable land for sale as it comes on the market. It is estimated we have at least 20 years left before cemetery space runs out
Dog area where they can run off lead safely	PCA Committee	The parish field already provides a large area for dogs to exercise and areas like Helsby Hill are also within easy reach
Better basketball facility	PCA Committee	PCA to consider demand for this and find a suitable location (e.g. work with new housing providers)
A park at the high school end of the village	PCA Committee	The Council does not own any land in this location but there could be scope for a new park if the Council purchased land for cemetery space in the future
Ban dogs and install perimeter fencing around the playing field	PCA Committee	Dogs are already banned from a large area within the children's play area.
Buying Helsby Community Centre and Sherwood Court from CW&C for long-term use	Finance Committee	To consider in a future Business Plan

Project Ideas for other Potential Organisations to Explore Further

Idea	Responsibility	Comments
More accessibility in public areas for wheelchair users	CW&C	Write to CWaC
Zebra crossing by Lower Robin Hood Lane junction with main road	CW&C	This has been raised previously and Highways did a study which proved there was insufficient pedestrians to warrant a crossing. Highways could be contacted again to carry out another study?
Trees in the village centre	CW&C	Where and what?
More public rubbish bins including some for recyclable items	CW&C	CWaC will be loathe to do this as it will mean more bins to empty. They could be written to and asked to evaluate
Bus shelters at the bottom of Crescent Drive and at Chester Road/Plovers Lane junction	CW&C	What does this refer to? There is a bus shelter at Plover's Lane and Bates Lane. The bus stop at the bottom of Crescent Drive has insufficient footpath width to erect a shelter
Change road layout of Callender Way/Gardens into Tesco to reduce near misses	CW&C	Evidence? There is a roundabout and people should respect how to drive around there
Speed bumps or traffic calming in Robin Hood Lane and Old Chester Road	CW&C	It's a 20mph zone but we could write to Highways for their opinion
Traffic calming measures on the Rock	CW&C	It's a 20mph zone but we could write to Highways for their opinion
Control cars parking outside Helsby High School	CW&C	Cars at drop off times only. Police turn a blind eye to the parking in the cycle lanes. Write to CWaC and the Police about this concern
Restrict loss of historic buildings i.e. Horse and Jockey, BICC gatehouse etc.	CW&C	Work being done on the Local Listing
Reduce pollution from industry	CW&C	CWaC Environmental
New health centre/wellbeing hub	CW&C	The doctors are not in favour of this
30mph speed outside Helsby High	CW&C	Write to Highways they have specific criteria. A variable speed limit during school times has been requested previously but nothing back
Improved green transport	CW&C	CWaC plans?
More cycleways and safe cycle infrastructure	CW&C	Cycle North Cheshire study ongoing
Keeping Helsby Library up to date and welcoming	CW&C	CWaC

Making the outside of Helsby Community Centre more welcoming with plants/landscaping	CW&C	Being looked at
Review of the Local List of Historic Buildings	CW&C	Ongoing
Repaint white stop lines (e.g. bottom of Old Chester Road by the cemetery) and make street signs clearer	CW&C	Report on App
Signs advising distance motorists should leave when passing cyclist	CW&C	It's in the Highway Code
Traffic noise cameras	CW&C	????
30mph limit on Alvanley Road past Helsby Quarry	CW&C	What is it now?
Restrict cars parking by bus stop outside Junoon restaurant	CW&C	There are no current restrictions apart from the bus stop. Highways advice
Clear the passageway between 3 Ways Garage and Hillview Ave	CW&C	This is CWaC's responsibility but if we had a resource, we could do it. Double taxation issue
Promotion of renewable energy and more emphasis on sustainability	CW&C	CWaC Environmental
Clear signage for HGV drivers in Helsby that Frodsham Bridge is height restricted	CW&C	Why is this our issue?
Speed bumps on Latham Avenue	CW&C	It's a 20mph zone but we could write to Highways for their opinion
Refurbishing Helsby Community Centre	HCA, CW&C and HPC	CC improvement plan
New signage to warn of pedestrians on access routes to open spaces	CW&C/landowners	Where?
Make Helsby Hill a conservation area	CW&C or Sandstone Ridge (via AONB)	Sandstone Ridge plans
Car chargers	CW&C/private business	CWaC have a plan for Chester City centre but do they have one for rural areas?
More police presence	Police/PCC	Write to PCC with concerns
The danger of cars going downhill on Rake Lane	Police	Write to PCC with concerns
New village plants in existing ones	Planter volunteers	Marj Thoburn?

More community projects e.g. litter picking days	Organisers required	RSK?
Creating an amateur theatre facility by expanding the community centre or with a new building	Finance/Lease	And who wants to take ownership of it? Capital costs?
More trees, wildflowers and ponds	CW&C and Cheshire Wildlife Trust	CW&C and Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Wildlife projects	Cheshire Wildlife Trust	Are there any that we know about?
Viewpoint map(s) on top of Helsby Hill	National Trust	Good idea, tie in with King's coronation
Safer access to Helsby Hill and better policing there	National Trust/Police	Don't understand the issue.
Car access onto Helsby Hill	National Trust	Doubt it but they could be asked. What if someone was to drive too near the edge? How would walkers be protected from the cars? Joyriders could be an issue
Annual sports day	Schools	Hillside have one
Solar electricity on HCSC, community centre, etc.	Building owners (CW&C, HCSC)	Grant for HCSC applied for
Activities for teens	Community venues/ voluntary community organisations	Scouts / Guides or some other group that would be willing to take it on
Education campaign about Smoke Control Area and reduction of bonfires	Cheshire Fire Service	Cheshire Fire Service
Commission local services to provide community-based support services for the elderly	Voluntary and community organisations	Cheshire Community Action may have some ideas
Mental health support group	Voluntary and community organisations	Already a men's one set up. It's Good 2 Talk. They may know of a female equivalent
Better utilisation of newly built community sports club for community events	HCSC	Facility can be hired if groups want to organise a specific event
Hold events for the whole community, not just sports events	Organisers needed	Advertise?

Farmers market to promote local produce/business	Local businesses	???
Improve the park fences at Callender Gardens	Mere's Edge Developers	Persimmon Estates own and operate the playground. Residents pay a fee for this so they should be chasing them
Provision of more affordable housing	241 being built soon	241 being built soon
Insulate council homes	Weaver Vale Housing Trust	See if Weaver Vale Housing Trust have a plan
Stop parking on grass verge on the Rock	Local residents	PC has no authority on this matter
Open up the route to Mouldsworth on the disused railway line	Joint partnership (e.g. HPC, Sustrans, Network Rail)	CWaC could help
Set a goal of best kept or most improved village. Regain "best kept village" status.	Competition no longer held	Competition no longer held
Better signage on A56 for Community Centre/Library/Health Centre	Signage already there	Signage already there