



EAST PRESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES: of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday, 20th February 2023 at East Preston Infant School, Lashmar Road, East Preston at 18:00

PRESENT: Councillors John Gunston, Elizabeth Linton, Glyn Mathias, Rick McElroy (Chairman), Steve Toney and Steven Wilkinson

ALSO: Clerk to the Council, Simon Cross

(Councillor) Patricia Gander, East Preston in Bloom (from 18:12)

Bookkeeper to the Council, Tracy Khoo (from 18:12)

The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council;

WSSC – West Sussex County Council.

The meeting opened at 18:00. Cllr McElroy welcomed everyone present.

151/23 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

All committee members were present.

152/23 PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None were declared.

153/23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

154/23 EAST PRESTON VILLAGE PRESCHOOL – FOREST SCHOOL PROPOSAL

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

East Preston Village Preschool

Committee is asked to consider a request from East Preston Village Preschool, to create a Forest School area on the northern side of the cricket pavilion on the Warren Recreation Ground.

On 10th January, the council received the following email from the team at East Preston Village Preschool:

Good Morning Simon

I have attempted to draw a rough plan of what we would like to do regarding the Forest School. We intend it to blend in with our surroundings as much as possible by using only natural resources.

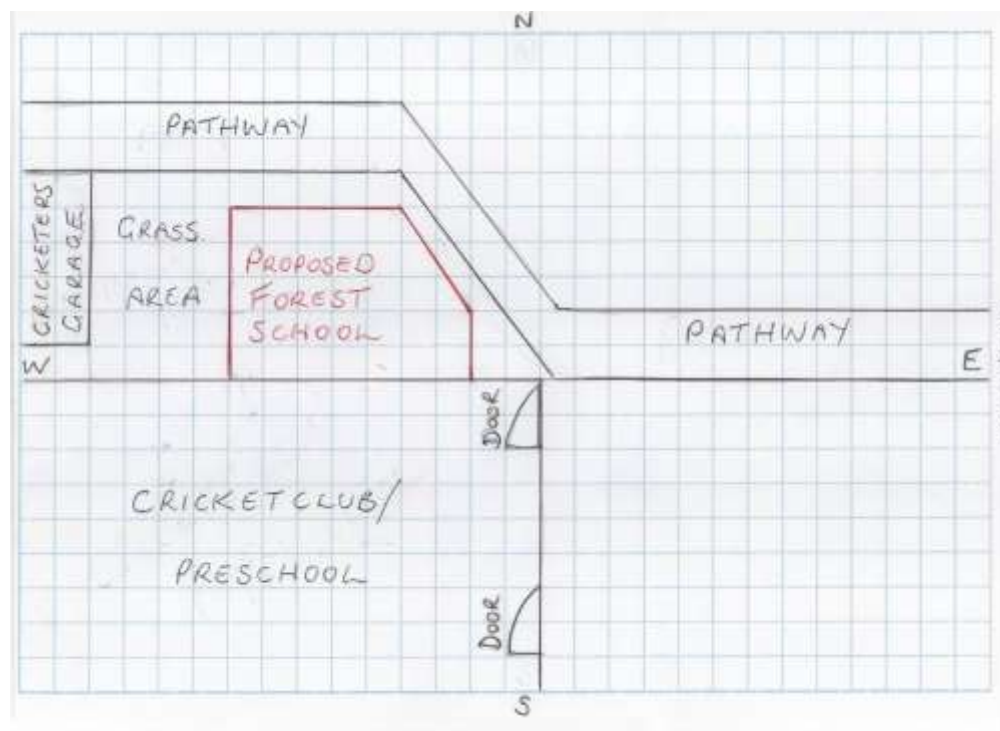
Firstly we will need to get a "clef fence" in place before we can proceed and we wondered if you could give us some contacts that you would recommend, once you give us the "go ahead"

The Cricket Club have confirmed they are happy for us to use this area, so hopefully you will too!

Kind regards

Lorraine and the Team

East Preston Village Preschool



In an attempt to turn this around quickly for the Preschool, I emailed this around to all committee members on 17th January, asking if they were happy with the proposal or wanted to discuss it. No member said they were not happy with the scheme but there was a request to discuss it at this meeting.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

14th February 2023

Concerns were raised about whether or not a cleft fence would be secure enough and about whether the proposed area would be big enough. The committee AGREED with the Chairman it was not up to the council to consider such matters.

The committee AGREED unanimously to allow the East Preston Village Preschool to proceed with its Forest School proposal as detailed in the report above.

155/23 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE – COUNCIL OFFICE – OFFICER CHAIRS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Council Office – new chairs

On behalf of the Personnel Committee, the committee is asked to consider expenditure on office furniture of up to £1,000.

Back in July 2021, the Personnel Committee agreed the council should buy new office chairs for the staff (Minute 495/21). This did not take place at the time though because it became tied up with rearranging the office and that in turn was put on hold pending the possible purchase of the Conservative Hall.

Dawn and I both have chairs which are probably overdue for replacement – I think my chair must be ten years old at least. To that end, I contacted a company highly recommended by East Preston Infant School, and a representative visited the Council Office on Thursday, 12th January. He had hoped to meet all four office-based members of staff but, on the day, Tracy was unavailable.

At the time of the Personnel Committee meeting on 16th January, a quotation was not available from the salesman, but that committee agreed to ask this committee to agree the expenditure, realising it would be more than some might expect.

At Alison's request, in addition to quoting for a new office chair for each of the four office-based members of staff, he also quoted for a replacement, smaller desk for her. This will give better accessibility to the body of the office again, but will probably mean Alison will need to have some shelves installed on the north wall of the office. Each chair would be £190, total £760, and the replacement desk would be £225, total £985, excl. VAT, including delivery. The chairs come with a five-year warranty, which really does suggest my current, cheaper chair is well past its best.

This committee controls the budget line *Parish Buildings – Parish Office Maintenance/Improvements*, which had £3,000 assigned for the current year. To date, the only predicted expenditure against that budget line will be for the fencing at the back of the Council Office, currently predicted to be £1,625, although that may increase as a result of any Japanese knotweed work in the garden. Even if that increased to £2,000, that would leave sufficient to purchase the new chairs and the new desk. It should still be possible to complete the purchase and delivery within this financial year.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

14th February 2023

The committee AGREED unanimously to purchase four new officer chairs and a new desk for Alison up to £1,000 excl VAT. This money will be paid from the Admin budget line: Public Buildings - Parish Office Maintenance/Improvements

156/23 EAST PRESTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - REVIEW

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

East Preston Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Mathias to lead on this item.

The East Preston Neighbourhood Plan was made early in 2015. Section 3.7 states, "The Parish Council also proposes to complete a formal review of the EPNP once every five years." Arguably, not having undertaken such a review formally yet could leave the village

open to developers claiming the Neighbourhood Plan is out-of-date, even if we felt that was nothing to change at a review.

The Neighbourhood Plan was created with assistance from Neil Homer of a company called Oneill Homer. The Planning & Licensing Committee has agreed to review the Neighbourhood Plan, after some uncertainty, and would like to work with Oneill Homer again.

Section 11.1.h of the council's Financial Regulations states "at least two written quotations must be obtained" for works estimated to cost between £3,000 and £15,000. Neil Homer expects a review to costs in the region of £10,000.

The Planning & Licensing Committee would like this committee to agree to waive this requirement for two reasons. Firstly, the council has worked successfully with Oneill Homer before, he knows the council, the area, Arun District Council and that counts for a lot. Secondly, Neil expects the council would be successful in accessing grants for much of or all of the £10,000. Thirdly, now the committee has made its decision to review the Plan, it would be sensible to get this underway as soon as possible.

For these reasons, **committee is asked to waive Section 11.1.h of the council's Financial Regulations for the selection of a consultant to assist with a review of the East Preston Neighbourhood Plan.**

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

7th December 2022

Cllr Mathias provided additional background. Cllr Wilkinson said he had been impressed by Neil Homer on the one free-of-charge call the Planning & Licensing Committee had had with Neil.

The committee AGREED unanimously to waive Section 11.1.h of the council's Financial Regulations for the selection of a consultant to assist with a review of the East Preston Neighbourhood Plan.

The committee AGREED unanimously it was sensible to work with the same company as had helped draft the initial Neighbourhood Plan and which, therefore, had a degree of familiarity with the village.

157/23 EAST PRESTON MEN IN SHEDS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

East Preston Men in Sheds

This item is purely to mention any matters raised by the East Preston Men in Sheds group. At the time of writing there is nothing for discussion.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th February 2023

The Clerk said he had been approached by the committee of East Preston Men in Sheds wanting a tripartite meeting with the council and the East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation committee. This would be to discuss the proposal to site a cabin in the car-park of the Village Hall. The Clerk confirmed the proposal was back to the cabin running parallel to the fence to the south of the Village Hall, in the south-western corner of the car-park. The base for the proposed cabin had recently been marked out by the Premises Manager of the Village Hall in conjunction with a member of Men in Sheds.

Cllr McElroy offered to attend the meeting but accepted his presence could be seen as a conflict of interest, he being married to the Chairman of the Village Hall Foundation.

The committee was happy for a tripartite meeting to take place and AGREED unanimously Cllrs Toney and Gander would be best placed to attend.

158/23 RINGFENCING AND OVERSPENDS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Ringfencing and overspends

Currently requests for ringfencing unspent amounts within a committee's annual budget are put before Full Council; this seems unnecessarily bureaucratic to me. Committees have delegated responsibility for their own finances so I don't see why they should not be able to make their own decisions, within reason, for ringfencing unspent amounts.

Committees also have the ability to overspend by up to 5% on any budget line without referring back to Full Council (Full Council, 18th May 2015, Minute 288/15, Resolution 0892). Some of the overspends which have been referred to Full Council recently may well have been within this tolerance and may not have needed to go to Full Council. Something for committees to remember. I also wonder whether approval of overspends above 5% could not be approved by this committee rather than going to Full Council.

This is just notice I am thinking about these two matters. Any thoughts welcome.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

15th February 2023

After some discussion, the committee AGREED unanimously to the Clerk's proposal committees could manage their own ringfencing without explicit approval from Full Council. As the Chairman summarised, the council has already agreed for that money to be spent against that budget line, but if circumstances make it impossible to spend the money in the given budget year, there is no reason why the committee cannot decide the future of that money for itself,

Committee members felt overspend requests above 5% should still be referred to Full Council as it met more frequently than this committee. The Clerk will consider this some more but will leave the process as it is currently.

159/23 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH DECEMBER 2022

The draft Minutes had been circulated to all councillors on 16th December asking for suggested amendments by 22nd December. Cllr Wilkinson had spotted a typo which had been subsequently rectified.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Minutes could be signed as a true record of the meeting held on 12th December. Cllr McElroy duly signed the Minutes.

160/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Updates from previous meetings

Minute 166/22 – Warren Recreation Ground – Annual Return – the Annual Return was submitted to the Charity Commission on 26th January, five days ahead of the cut-off date. Whilst this was not as much earlier as I had hoped, mainly because of handover problems between the previous accountant and the new accountants, at no point did I fear we would miss the deadline this year, and I had no occasion to chase the new accountants. The latter have said now they have completed their work on this once, next year they should be able to help us submit our Annual Return within a few weeks of the Annual General Meeting.

Minute 1058/22 – Budget and Precept for 2023/24 – as committee members will know, Full Council agreed to the proposed budget of £314,883.28 and to freeze the precept at

£98.43 for a Band D property, resulting in a precept of £278,261.61. I informed ADC of this on 11th January, and this has been acknowledged.

Minute 1060/22 – Defibrillator Fund – East Preston & Kingston Village Hall

Foundation – the council purchased a replacement defibrillator cabinet for the Village Hall on 14th December. Having received no response from the company about whether it not it could raise us an invoice, I placed the order as the excluding VAT amount was within the upper limit for credit card usage agreed at the committee's November meeting.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

14th February 2023

Nothing was added.

161/23 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (16TH MAY)

Unusually, because of the new term, the coronation and Bank Holidays, the meeting would be held on a Tuesday.

Cllr Wilkinson questioned whether the council should be paying income tax on the flat above the Council Office, income from events and long-term leases to the Village Hall and the sports clubs. The Clerk said four different internal auditors had worked from the council in his time, and none had raised this as an issue. He and Cllr Wilkinson had both done internet searches on this topic and failed to find anything relevant. Other committee members suggested it may be because the council had a not-for-profit status and may therefore not be liable for tax.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Clerk should ask the council's current internal auditor, Mulberry & Co..

Cllr Wilkinson also referred to his action to review the Council Plan 2022-2025. He had found the East Preston Action Plan, published in 2012, and had noted there was useful information contained within and a lot of crossover between the two documents. He said he would circulate the East Preston Action Plan to all committee chairs and members of this committee so a full discussion could be had at the committee's May meeting about combining the two documents into a new Council Plan.

(Mrs Gander arrived at the conclusion of this item.)

162/23 EAST PRESTON IN BLOOM

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

East Preston in Bloom

On 12th February, the council received the following letter:



c/o Parish Council office
122 Sea Road,
East Preston
BN16 1NN

12th February 2023

Finance Committee
East Preston Parish Council

Good morning

In 2022/2023 the Parish Council agreed a grant of £5,000 to support the East Preston in Bloom group fulfil one of their aims to enhance the floral displays in the village, plus regular maintenance and tidying of public areas. The sum of £1,000 was already included in the Community Engagement budget.

It was agreed at the November 2022 meeting of the F & GP Committee to transfer £250 to the EP in Bloom bank account when the balance fell below £250, in order to reimburse members of the group for any expenditure made etc. To date the expenditure funded by East Preston Parish Council directly is £1025.49 from the Community Engagement budget, and £1778.08 from the £5,000 grant.

The group has planned and completed several projects in the village and has further plans for the forthcoming year. During the next two months we plan the following which we anticipate will be funded via the £5,000 grant:

- Purchase plants/shrubs for the newly created bed in Two Acres – with an estimated cost of £150.
- Purchase shrubs for the eastern bed at the library – estimated cost £50
- Preparation of a memorial flower bed for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to be sited around the Jubilee tree on the village green, (Tivoli) - plus purchase of plants approx. £100
- Purchase of a tree to be sited on the land at the junction of Sea Road/Normandy Drive under WSCC donate a tree scheme – cost £209.80.
- RHS Affiliated community group insurance - £75

We are aware of the need to be actively involved in fundraising, but this is difficult in the current economic climate and to date our appeals have not been successful, apart from the receipt of two grants, £200 from the East Preston Festival Committee and £50 from Councillor Terry Chapman, for work undertaken at the Conservative Hall. We have spent £104.48 on plants from these fundraising initiatives.

It is our intention to make a grant application in May 2023, but I am now writing to request additional funding for the interim months of April and May, especially as this is a busy time of the gardening year.

Patricia Gander
Secretary, East Preston in Bloom

EAST PRESTON IN BLOOM EXPENDITURE TO DATE

From £5,000 grant			
25/10/2022	BACS	Cliff Edmunds - EP in Bloom - Install bollards etc	250.00
25/10/2022	BACS	Cliff Edmunds - EP in Bloom - Install bollards materials	26.39
25/11/2022	BACS	EP in Bloom - Account Top Up as agreed	250.00
10/12/2022	BACS	Tivoli - EP in Bloom new flower bed on Village Green	473.90
	DUE IN	Tivoli - Two Acres bed	776.79
			1777.08

From £1,000 Community Engagement budget			
25/05/2022	BACS	Cllr Gunston (Ferring Ctry Ctr) - Plants etc for EP in Bloom	103.43
25/05/2022	BACS	Cllr Gunston (Ferring Ctry Ctr) - Herbs etc for EP in Bloom	63.22
09/06/2022		Kerry's Tearoom - Committee Meeting 26/5/22	7.80
10/06/2022	DD	Green Waste Club - Brown Bin Collections	183.72
10/08/2022	BACS	Barclaycard (SaveWaterSaveMoney) - Water Butt kit	87.48
10/09/2022	BACS	Barclaycard (SaveWaterSaveMoney) - Water Butt link kit	8.32
10/09/2022	BACS	Barclaycard (The Green Waste Club) - Brown Bin at office	91.86
25/09/2022	BACS	Ricara - Add'n hi viz waistcoats	37.25
25/09/2022	BACS	Ricara - Carriage charge	7.95
10/10/2022	BACS	NBB Recycled Furniture - 2 x add'n bollards for nthrn shops	200.00
10/10/2022	BACS	Mr & Mrs Longman (Parker Building Supplies) - Re-imburse	39.65
25/10/2022	BACS	Carol Longman (Ferring Ctry Ctre) - Re-imburse for manure	23.63
25/10/2022	BACS	Carol Longman (Ferring Ctry Ctre) - Re-imburse for Heuchera	78.18
25/10/2022	BACS	Carol Longman (Ferring Ctry Ctre) - Re-imburse Shrubs etc	69.00
25/10/2022	BACS	Carol Longman (Ferring Nurseries) - Re-imburse Ferns	24.00
			1025.49
Funded directly by EP in Bloom			
		Plants for various beds	104.48

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

14th February 2023

Mrs Gander explained she was attending the meeting as the Secretary of East Preston in Bloom rather than as a councillor. Mrs Gander recapped the progress the group had made around the village in the past year, and the praise received from members of the public. The group had found fundraising difficult in the current economic climate although it had received a grant from the Conservative Hall and another from the East Preston Festival Committee, whilst a few local businesses had helped in more practical ways.

The group felt very fortunate for the council's financial support to date. At its meeting on 7th March 2022, the council had "resolved unanimously to ring-fence £5,000 within the council's reserves for use by the East Preston in Bloom project group. Any remainder of this sum not spent by 31st March 2023 will return to the council's reserves." (Minute 207/22, Resolution 1628) Mrs Gander pointed out the group had spent less than £2,000 of that £5,000, but the group was coming up to an expensive time of year with new planting to be purchased and other projects to be funded as detailed in her report above.

The committee AGREED to allow the East Preston in Bloom project to continue to spend the rest of the £5,000 allocated in March 2022, fully understanding that would take the group beyond the end of March 2023. Mrs Gander said the group would continue to provide spending reports to the council and would also submit an application for 2023/24 Grant Aid.

Mrs Gander thanked the committee for its decision and continued support of the initiative which she was sure was greatly appreciated by residents.

(Mrs Khoo arrived at the conclusion of this item.)

163/23 **BANKING**

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Banking arrangements

Committee is asked to consider the council's banking arrangements.

Tracy has provided the following report for consideration by this meeting.

Bank Structure and Operating Guidance

Version 1.8 February 2023

Summary

For the purpose of protection of public funds and maximum interest benefit, the Parish Council will endeavour to continue to maintain multiple bank accounts in compliance with the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) limit. **The current protected deposit limit continues at £85,000 (from 30th January 2017) across all accounts with one particular financial institution.**

During the financial year 2022/23 the Council has noted the interest rates have started to rise significantly again, providing a higher return on its deposit accounts. Due to the unrest in the economy the interest rates are constantly fluctuating and are still on the whole increasing.

This review of the Council's bank accounts is to provide the Council with an up-to-date summary of monies held. The Accounts are outlined below and reflect monies held in each account as at 13/01/2023 (the latest Current Account statement):-

Current Account	267,799.08
Nationwide Building Society	
(Instant Savings A/C)	85,000.00
Monmouthshire Building Society - NOW CLOSED DOWN	
Julian Hodge Bank – NOW CLOSED DOWN	
Cambridge & Counties Bank	89,620.53
(120-Day Notice Account)	
United Trust Bank	88,045.69
(200-Day Notice Account)	
Redwood Bank	89,240.55
(35-Day Notice Deposit Account)	

As the Council can see from the list above, two of the Deposit Accounts have closed. Hodge Bank stopped offering deposit accounts and sent the Council's funds back and it was agreed to close Monmouthshire BS's Account due to the restrictive nature of obtaining statements etc online. This has left the Council's Current Account with a high level of funds in it.

The F&GP Committee had previously agreed to look at opening a 3-yr Fixed Bond for a better rate of interest and opening two further Fixed Notice Deposit Accounts. However, since this was agreed, interest rates have

continued to fluctuate greatly and it was agreed by email that re-investing the Council's funds should be revisited at the next F&GP meeting.

One of the Deposit Accounts previously approached since the last F&GP Meeting was the Hinckley & Rugby Building Society. However, the email response below was received:-

Dear Mrs Khoo

Thank you for your enquiry. I can confirm that the Business 90 Day Notice Account is not available out of our principal trading address, I am sorry but your postcode is not in the correct area.

Please contact us if you require further assistance.

Yours Sincerely

Christine

Senior

Savings

Tilley

Assistant



The fixed 3-year Fixed Bond rates were also looked at and the best rate to date for the 3-year Fixed Rate Bond is with Cambridge & Counties Bank but again this can change overnight in the current climate! When I was proposing United Trust Bank going over to a 3-year Fixed Rate Bond Account I then realised Cambridge & Counties Bank was offering an even better rate in January at 4.6% AER. This rate has now already dropped to 3.6% AER but is still one of the better rates around for Charities and Trusts etc. I have already asked Councillors to sign and complete the Cambridge & Counties 3-Year Fixed Rate Bond Form but it has not been sent to date.

The F&GP Committee is asked to again review the bank/building society accounts the Council currently holds and advise how it would like to treat the high level of funds held in the Barclays Current Account, given the half yearly precept of another £139K+ will go into the Current Account in April.

The option of available Deposit Accounts and interest yields are always subject to changes and market forces.

Perhaps the committee could consider delegating further action on this at this time to two committee members who could then liaise closely with Tracy and take any necessary decisions.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

14th February 2023

Mrs Khoo provided detailed background to her report.

The committee AGREED unanimously protecting the council's money was more important than finding the highest rate of interest and AGREED unanimously Mrs Khoo should be able to progress opening new accounts without the need for this committee's further approval. As Mrs Khoo pointed out, several committee members would be involved in opening new accounts as signatories. The meeting AGREED the four signatories on all accounts should be Cllrs Gunston,

Mathias, Toney and Wilkinson. The Clerk would check whether Financial Regulations needed to be amended to reflect this.

New accounts should be opened at £80,000 if they did not have the option to have interest paid directly into the council's current account.

The Meeting closed at 18:49.

Chairman: *Cllr Rick McElroy* Date: **16th May 2022**

(END)