



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, 19th August 2024 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

Roy Allen and Mark Seager, Sea Road Beach Access Limited (until 18:39)

Mick Stevens and John Wintle, 1st East Preston Scout Group (both until 18:23)

Nicola Harlow and Janine Nicholson, East Preston Festival Committee (both until 18:13)

The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council;

WSCC – West Sussex County Council.

The meeting opened at 18:02.

Cllr McElroy welcomed everyone present and led a round of introductions.

604/24 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

All committee members were present.

605/24 PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Cllr Toney	Greener Buildings Fund – 1 st East Preston Scout Group	Personal; Cllr Toney was Chairman of the 1 st East Preston Scout Group
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606/24 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The meeting AGREED members of the public could speak at the appropriate Agenda Item if they wished.

607/24 EAST PRESTON FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

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

East Preston Festival Committee

Committee is asked to receive an update from East Preston Festival Committee.

At the committee’s last meeting, there was some discussion about withholding the council’s financial contribution towards the Festival Committee’s insurance until we had a better idea about how the Festival Committee is going to safeguard its members by becoming a more formal entity. As it happened, the Festival Committee’s insurance renewal did not allow for that withholding, and, electronically, committee members agreed the insurance payment should be made.

Janine Nicholson and Nicola Harlow, Chairman and Treasurer respectively of the Festival Committee, have asked to come to this meeting to provide an update on the Festival Committee becoming a Community Interest Company.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

9th August 2024

The Festival Committee was represented by Janine Nicholson, Chairman, and Nicola Harlow, Treasurer. Janine explained the Festival Committee, partly in response to concerns expressed by this committee but also for its own reasons, had started to look at becoming a more formal body. It was not possible to become a charity as the Charity Commission did not permit festivals to register.

Nicola said the preferred option, after research, was for the Festival Committee to become a Community Interest Company (CIC), which limited the liability of each committee member to £1. Such a company needed an asset lock – on the occasion of the company ceasing to exist, its assets should be allocated to another organisation. The Festival Committee was thinking this could be the parish council or the East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation, with the agreement of whichever of those organisations it chose. Janine said the assets was basically any money the Festival Committee had in the bank, there were few physical assets. The committee AGREED unanimously it was happy for the council to be the named beneficiary if that is the option the Festival Committee chose. Once the CIC had been set up, Festival Committee members would become Directors.

Cllr Wilkinson suggested the Festival Committee might also want to look at the option of becoming a Community Benefit Society before making a final decision. Nicola said she would although the CIC option ticked all the right boxes.

(Mrs Harlow and Mrs Nicholson left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

608/24 GREENER BUILDINGS FUND – 1ST EAST PRESTON SCOUT GROUP

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

Greener Buildings Fund – 1st East Preston Scout Group

Committee is asked to consider a request from 1st East Preston Scout Group for a grant from the council’s Greener Buildings Fund.

Cllr Gunston to lead on this item.

Organisation – charity no	Amount requested? (£)	Councillor notes:
1 st East Preston Scout Group 305895	£6,000 - £7,000 “Installation of solar panels on Scout Hall”	

At the beginning of the financial year, the council had £35,814.22 in the Greener Buildings Fund, with £10,000 of that provisionally allocated to East Preston Football Club, provided it can raise the other funds required for its project to replace its floodlighting.

Group Scout Leader Mick Stevens and fellow Trustee, John Wintle, may attend this meeting in support of this application.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

Cllr Gunston reminded the committee of the council’s intentions in setting up a Greener Buildings Fund. He also explained the council’s (limited) involvement in setting up a local energy company, as part of which the Scouts could benefit.

Mick Stevens, Group Scout Leader, and John Wintle, Trustee, provided the committee with the background to their application to the Greener Buildings Fund. Mick explained the Scout Group’s accounts looked healthy because the Scout Association required all groups to have sufficient funds in the bank to cover a year’s running costs; effectively, that money was untouchable. The proposed batteries will be stored inside the Scout Hall, securely, and will be tamperproof. John said he hoped they would be able to persuade the installer not to charge VAT on the system.

The committee AGREED to donate 50% of the system costs up to a maximum of £8,000. In line with other grants from this fund, payment would be upon receipt of an invoice following completion of the work. A new earmarked reserve of £8,000 will be set up, reducing the Greener Buildings Fund by £8,000.

Cllr Toney did not vote on the award to 1st East Preston Scout Group as he is the Chairman of the group.

(Messrs Stevens and Wintle left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

609/24 GRANT AID 2024/25 – SEA ROAD BEACH ACCESS LIMITED

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

Grant Aid – Sea Road Beach Access Limited

Committee is asked to continue consideration of the following Grant Aid request for the current financial year.

Organisation – charity no	Amount requested? (£)	Councillor notes:
Sea Road Beach Access Limited n/a	£3,000 “To pay for the materials of phase one of the boardwalk at the end of Sea Road; that provides access for all to reach East Preston beach.”	

The council budgeted £7,000 for Section 137 Grant Aid donations this financial year, and by the end of the committee’s last meeting, all bar £930.08 had been allocated as donations.

The committee did not consider this Application at that meeting beyond agreeing to defer consideration pending Sea Road Beach Access Limited receiving Consent to Build from the landowner, initially thought to be Arun District Council but it says it is not the landowner.

In an email dated 17th July, Roy Allen, a director of the company, advised:

At the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 14 May 2024 a Grant Aid application from Sea Road Beach Access Limited (attached below) was considered. A decision was postponed because of uncertainty about the Landowner where the boardwalk will be located.

We can find no Landowner for the land where the boardwalk will be located.

At a virtual meeting of the Directors of Sea Road Beach Access on 8 June 2024 the Directors passed the following Resolution:

Following the advice detailed in Andrew Turner's email to Mark Seager on 7 June 2024 . . . and after due consideration IT WAS RESOLVED to proceed with fund raising, the procurement of materials and the installation of the boardwalk detailed in the Permitted planning application EP/145/23/PL.

In view of this I would like to ask the Parish Council to reconsider our Grant Application at the Finance and General Purposes committee meeting on 19 August 2024.

Yours
Roy Allen
Director, Sea Road Beach Access Limited

Roy has also asked whether the council would permit the company to store components in the area behind the Council Office until the end of October, after which the items would be moved to Coastal Caravan Park.

Mark Seager and Roy Allen have said they will attend the meeting.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

31st July 2024

Roy Allen and Mark Seager are both Directors of Sea Road Beach Access Limited. Roy provided an update on crowdfunding for the project, which now stood at £18,007, meaning the prototypes were funded. Regarding land ownership, Roy explained the legal advice the company had received. The company currently had two other grant applications being considered, both with charitable foundations within West Sussex. Roy added the company hoped the project could be completed by 31st March as that was when their planned storage would cease to be available.

Cllr McElroy said local authorities could not gift money to limited companies, unless the authority had asked for the service being provided, which was not the case here. Therefore, the council could not meet this grant request from Sea Road Beach Access Limited. Cllr McElroy provided an explanation on why he felt this was so.

Cllr Gunston asked for a decision on this matter to be deferred as the council still wanted to support the Beach Access project, but that support needed to be legal and appropriate. A deferral would give both sides time to consider their options. He suggested the limited company could consider becoming a Community Interest Company and he was willing to share his experience in this matter.

Cllr Wilkinson expressed concerns about where any liability would lie if the limited company folded and the beach access was left unmaintained. Roy said the limited company had estimated it would cost approximately £2,000 a year to insure and maintain the beach access, which the company expected to be able to raise by public donations. Mark said the company was working in the best interests of the village and none of the three Directors envisaged the company folding.

Should either party wish it, the Clerk said an extraordinary meeting of this committee could be called to discuss this again before the meeting scheduled for November.

(Messrs Allen and Seager left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

610/24 GRANT AID 2024/25 – CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

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

Grant Aid 2024/25

Committee is asked to consider the following Grant Aid request for the current financial year.

On 22nd February, the council received a letter from Arun & Chichester Citizens Advice asking whether the council “would consider a contribution of £100 towards the core funding costs of Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice.” That letter has been circulated with these Supporting Papers.

I replied, sending a Grant Aid application form, something I also sent on 1st August, but no completed form has been received.

Committee could consider whether it could donate £100 to this well-established organization without a completed application form. The council awarded £250 last year, which would have been after sight of a completed application form.

After the committee’s last meeting, there was just over £800 left in the Section 137 budget line for this year.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

8th August 2024

The committee AGREED unanimously to award £100 as requested.

This left just over £700 in the Section 137 budget line for 2024/25.

611/24 LASHMAR RECREATION GROUND

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

Arun District Council – Lashmar Recreation Ground

Committee is asked to consider a donation towards the refurbishment of the skatepark at Lashmar Recreation Ground.

At the beginning of the year, Arun District Council started to work upon a proposal to improve the skatepark at Lashmar Recreation Ground. In July, ADC undertook a public consultation on proposals, with the caveat there was not a lot of money available.

ADC would like this council to consider a financial contribution to the scheme. The following is from Ros Bryant, Landscape Officer (Projects):

Prior to your committee meeting this month I’ve listed below a rough breakdown of various costs we have previously received for another site. These costs are based on skate park features with a Skatelite Pro composite surface, an outdoor material made of laminated compressed paper which is an alternative option to steel.

Mini ramp - £19 – 23K
Flat bank hip - £5K
Flat bank - £10K
Inclined box - £4K
Straight rail - £500-600

Tarmac surfacing (area approximately 210m²) - £13-15K

Please let me know the outcome of your meeting on the potential offer of a donation towards the project.

The output from the public consultation is circulated with these Supporting Papers. Ros said, “We had 59 responses which is a good number for a survey of this kind and provides some useful insight into user opinion on the facility.”

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

The committee AGREED unanimously to defer any decision upon this matter until it had seen sight of what the District Council’s proposal was.

612/24 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS SCHEDULE

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

Financial Regulations and Financial Regulations Schedule

Committee is asked to review the council’s Financial Regulations and Financial Regulations Schedule.

At the last meeting, we learnt NALC had issued new Model Financial Regulations. Cllr Gunston has reviewed these and has had one meeting with Adrian and me at which together we went through about half of the proposed new Financial Regulations. At the time of writing, we have not been able to review the second half in order to provide the committee with a revised set of Financial Regulations to consider. Work is in progress.

Meanwhile, committee may wish to consider the sums in the current Financial Regulations Schedule. The Schedule was last updated in November 2022. Other councils locally have recently increased the figures in, particularly, paragraph 11.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

With time pressing on, the committee AGREED unanimously to defer any decision upon this matter until the committee’s next meeting.

613/24 INSURANCE

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

Insurance

Committee is asked to review the council’s insurance policy.

Renewal time is rapidly approaching and the committee is asked to consider the Pre Renewal Questionnaire circulated with these Supporting Papers. Is there anything any committee member feels needs to be changed or updated?

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

The committee AGREED unanimously it had no comments to make about the Pre-Renewal Questionnaire.

614/24 FUTURE OF THE CONSERVATIVE HALL

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

Conservative Hall Working Party

The committee is asked to receive an update on the future of the Conservative Hall.

As committee members will be aware, the council received a letter on 17th July (it had been sent to an old email address a few days before that) from the Trustees informing the council the Trustees offer to gift the Conservative Hall to the council had been withdrawn. A For Sale sign was erected at the hall on Friday, 26th July. The council's Conservative Hall working party met on 29th July and agreed to offer a meeting with the Trustees, the council to be represented at that meeting by Cllrs Linton and Wilkinson. An initial letter to that effect was sent to the Trustees on 30th July with a follow-up letter sent on 7th August. Messrs Chapman and Bower have both spoken to be separately and the message is the Trustees are unwilling to talk to the council at this time.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

The Clerk reported he had been contacted by a former Chairman of the Council who had heard the venue was being sold to a Worthing-based undertaker for use as a funeral parlour and venue.

The Clerk advised the last meeting of the Conservative Hall Working Party had AGREED the council should ask the Trustees for a meeting, subsequent to which two letters had been sent to the Trustees offering such a meeting, the second mentioning the possibility of the council purchasing the venue.

The purchase price was listed as £410,000. On top of that would be fees plus renovations, possibly taking the amount to be spent up to between £600,000 and £650,000. Did the council have a mandate from the public to spend that money?

Cllr McElroy said the recent Annual General Meeting of the East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation proved to him people like having an available venue on hand but were less keen to contribute to its running, financially or otherwise.

Cllr Gunston said the fear of losing the venue to redevelopment felt very real at the moment.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Clerk should enquire of the estate agents whether a bid from the council would be considered. Such a request would not be a commitment but it would indicate whether or not the Trustees would be interested in an approach from the council.

615/24 COUNCIL OFFICE – INTRUDER ALARM SYSTEM

The following paper was circulated in advance of the meeting:

Council Office – intruder alarm system

Committee is asked to agree to expenditure of up to £120 to replace the 360 PIR (passive infrared sensor) in the meeting room at the Council Office.

There are three such sensors in the office, one by each of the front and back door and a third in the meeting room – the latter is kind of a fallback if either of the other two fails. The meeting room sensor needs replacing.

Alternatively, we may want to consider spending up to £500 to get all three replaced at the same time.

There is about £1,000 left in the budget line for Parish Office Maintenance/Improvements this year.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

The committee AGREED unanimously all three existing passive infrared sensors should be replaced, funding to come from the Parish Office Maintenance/Improvements budget line.

616/24 EAST PRESTON & KINGSTON VILLAGE HALL FOUNDATION

The following paper was circulated in advance of the meeting:

East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation

Committee is asked to note the Foundation's latest Fire Risk Assessment.

The current Premises Manager, Roy Allen, has provided the council with a copy of the Foundation's latest Fire Risk Assessment. The assessment was carried out by Richard Gamble-Frost of G.F. Fire Solutions on 29th July. The file is too large to circulate electronically, but let me know if you would like a copy.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13th August 2024

The Clerk had written to committee members earlier in the day saying the Village Hall Foundation committee needed some assistance with implementing the improvements suggested by the Fire Risk Assessment. Cllrs Toney and Wilkinson volunteered to help.

617/24 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH MAY 2024

The draft Minutes had been circulated to all councillors on 15th May asking for suggested amendments by 22nd May. None had been received.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Minutes could be signed as a true record of the meeting held on 14th May and Cllr McElroy duly signed the Minutes.

618/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

Updates from previous meetings

Minute 348/24 – Grant Aid 2024/25 – East Preston Men in Sheds – the East Preston Men in Sheds shed is now up and running and councillors were invited to a preview reception on 2nd August. An article about the shed was included in the e-newsletter published on 7th August.

Minute 349/24 – Grant Aid 2024/25 – most, if not all, beneficiaries have provided thanks for the grants awarded. If I have time, I will provide a table of responses in due course.

Minute 350/24 – Section 144 Grant Aid – East Preston Festival Committee – as reported above, it was necessary to seek agreement electronically to pay the Festival Committee’s insurance premium this year, rather than waiting for an update about

charitable status (or otherwise). At least four committee members agreed payment should be made before the start of this year’s Festival, and that happened.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

9th August 2024

Nothing was added.

619/24 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (18TH NOVEMBER)

Nothing new was suggested.

The Meeting closed at 19:03.

Chairman: *Cllr Rick McElroy* Date: **16th September 2024**

(END)