



# 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, 18<sup>th</sup> November 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

Mrs Sue Morley (until 19:55)

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The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council;

WSCC – West Sussex County Council.

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The meeting opened at 18:00. Cllr McElroy welcomed Mrs Morley to the meeting and confirmed she knew everyone else at the meeting.

### **844/24 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE**

All committee members were present.

Cllr Moore, a member of the Leases Working Party, had sent his apologies for this meeting.

### **845/24 PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

None were declared

### **846/24 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Mrs Morley said she had not been to a Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting before, and was here to see how the council made financial decisions.

### **847/24 GRANT AID 2024/25 – DECO 8 (MANOR ROAD GARAGE)**

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

## **Grant Aid – Deco 8 (Manor Road Garage)**

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

Organisation – charity no	Amount requested? (£)	Councillor notes:
Deco 8 (Manor Rd Garage) n/a	“A contribution from EPPC would be greatly appreciated”  “Contribution to renovation of Grade 2 petrol pumps.”	

At its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019, the committee agreed to award £400 for the refurbishment of the pumps which was being undertaken at that time.

At the time of writing, there is £830.08 left in this year’s Grant Aid budget.

Should the committee again agree to provide some financial support for the regular refurbishment of the petrol pumps, perhaps it may wish to consider setting up an earmarked reserve into which it could maybe deposit £100 a year, something like that.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Committee members expressed concern the refurbishment of the petrol pumps was not being paid for from the development’s own maintenance resources. The estimated costs of the works was £1,205. The pumps had last been refurbished in 2019.

Cllr Gunston said he was not averse to the council donating towards this work, but what fundraising had the organisation already undertaken and why had it asked the council for help.

The Clerk said he had changed his mind and thought the council should consider making this a second and final donation. Now this was a second time of having the works completed, the organisation should be in a better position to predict the duration and budget through the maintenance fees accordingly.

The committee AGREED to donate £400 to the organisation for this refurbishment of the petrol pumps but also to make it clear this was a final donation. This donation would leave £430.08 in the Grant Aid budget for the current year.

The committee also AGREED it would be approachable again in future if the organisation had really exhausted all its options. The Clerk said the wording of the letter would be able to make that clear.

### **848/24 GRANT AID 2024/25 – BAYTREE COMMUNITY LUNCH CLUB**

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

## **Grant Aid – Baytree Community Lunch Club**

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

Organisation – charity no	Amount requested? (£)	Councillor notes:
Baytree Community Lunch Club n/a	£500 - £750  “Assistance towards the Community Christmas Day Lunch”	

As councillors will be aware, the Baytree Community Lunch Club took over the Community Christmas Day Lunch from Our Lady, Star of the Sea church in 2023. In

2023, 44 people and eight helpers attended the lunch and the group predicts an increase of up to 10% this year.

Committees are allowed to spend up to 5% over a budget line without referring to Full Council. The budget was set at £7,000, so with the extra 5% that makes £7,350.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The committee AGREED to donate £750 to the Baytree Community Lunch Club for its Christmas Day lunch.

This donation would take the Grant Aid budget line over by £319.92, which was within the 5% tolerance allowed by the council (Financial Regulations 2020 v4, section 4.2). Therefore, this donation would not need to be referred to Full Council, but any further donations in this financial year would need to be.

#### **849/24 2025/26 BUDGETS**

The following paper was circulated in advance of the meeting:

### **2025/26 Budgets**

**Committee is asked to begin consideration of the committee's two budgets for the forthcoming financial year.** The committee is responsible for the Admin and Finance & General Purposes Committee budget.

Adrian and I have worked on an initial budget proposal for both committees plus the Audit & Governance Committee.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Budget proposals for the following three committees had been circulated in advance of the meeting: Admin, Audit & Governance and Finance & General Purposes.

The committee AGREED the proposed budget for the Audit & Governance Committee.

The committee AGREED to increase the proposed Grant Aid budget to £10,000 for 2025/26, but to decrease the Crime Prevention line to £2,500 as this line was mainly for expenditure for a village youth club/facility. There was an earmarked reserve containing £30,000 should there be any youth provision in the near future.

#### **850/24 LEASES WORKING PARTY – EAST PRESTON & KINGSTON BOWLS CLUB**

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

### **Leases Working Party – East Preston & Kingston Bowls Club**

**Committee is asked to continue to consider the renewal of the lease to East Preston & Kingston Bowls Club.**

I have a meeting with the council's solicitor, Rob Fawcett of E J Moyle LLP on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> November. This will consider the letter received from East Preston and Kingston Bowls Club's solicitor dated 16<sup>th</sup> July. Within that letter, the club was offering an annual rent of £75. The council's most recent offer to the club was "to propose an annual rental of £1,000, increasing by £25 annually."

I approached Marshall Clark, the company which undertook the council's surveys of the Conservative Hall. After much deliberation, it very reluctantly said it might be able to

undertake a survey for us, and asked for some further information on similar leases we have negotiated recently. I provided the requested information, but that only seems to have made the company even more reluctant to undertake a survey for us as it has said no further correspondence.

My conversation with the solicitor will be mainly on the legal aspects as set out in the club's solicitor's letter and also whether he can recommend a company to carry out a survey, although he has already indicated that may not be cost-effective.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The Clerk asked the committee for some ideas of what sums they wanted him to discuss with the solicitor of 29<sup>th</sup> November.

The council's Land and Buildings Strategy, last reviewed in 2023 (Audit & Governance Committee, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2023, Minute 586/23), stated leases would be "Normally, for a maximum of 25 years."

Various sums were proposed as a potential annual rental, with periodic increments (the council's Land and Buildings Strategy states, "Rent increases will be in line with RPI and reviewed every 5 years.") (The tennis club's lease has an increase of a set sum every five years.)

Generally, the committee AGREED the annual rental should be pro-rata that of the tennis club, but also the committee ACCEPTED there were some differences around the memberships of the two clubs. Mrs Morley said she knew there were members of the bowls club who were there more for their mental health than their physical health.

The committee AGREED it was time the bowls club came to the table and negotiated in person with the council, otherwise it would run the risk of not having a new lease in time for May 2025.

The committee AGREED an annual rent of £500 was a good starting point for continuing negotiations.

The committee AGREED the Clerk should ask the club for details of current membership and subs for both active and social members.

#### **851/24 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 continue work on the council's Financial Regulations and Financial Regulations Schedule.**

Thanks to Cllr Gunston for the work he has already completed on this project. Adrian and I still have some work to do, but should be in a position to present revised Financial Regulations to the committee's next meeting.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The Clerk again thanked Cllr Gunston for the work he had completed on the new Model Financial Regulations, but added he and Adrian Vyse, the council's bookkeeper had not found time to complete Cllr Gunston's work. They had scheduled to do this work on the morning of Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Cllr Gunston offered to be there too if he was available.

#### **852/24 ASSET REGISTER SOFTWARE**

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

## **Accounting Software: Asset Register**

**Committee is asked to agree to add the Asset Register to Rialtus at a cost of £1,000 (including VAT).**

Currently, the council's Asset Register is an Excel spreadsheet which, over time and because of different internal auditors' different interpretations of the information which should or should not be in an Asset Register, has become rather unwieldy. The council is now using Rialtus as its accounting software and can add an Asset Register module. Although this seems expensive, it would encourage us to sort out the messy parts of our existing Asset Register. A decision to proceed will need to be ratified by Full Council.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The Clerk spoke in support of this proposal. Although apparently expensive, the cost was a one-off charge, and would enable the council to run a tighter asset register.

Cllr Gunston added an integrated asset register would also assist any internal auditors in their work on the council's financial management.

The committee AGREED unanimously to purchase the Asset Register part of Rialtus accountancy software. There was exactly £1,000 in the Software Purchases budget line, so this did not need to be referred to Full Council.

### **853/24 COUNCIL OFFICE COMPUTER HARDWARE**

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

## **Council Office – new equipment**

**Committee is asked to purchase three new PCs for the office as they will become unsupported with Windows 10 end of life on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025.**

Fentons IT is one of the two companies we have used in recent years for hardware and has audited the PCs it has provided. Of the four desktop PCs, two definitely need to be replaced as they will not be able to run Windows 11, and a third should be replaced because of its age.

Conservative estimate for replacement of the three PCs mentioned above is £1,725 excluding VAT. There would be additional expenditure on setting up the PCs and suchlike.

There is £2,000 in the budget line for this year. I suggest we ask Full Council for an additional £1,000 to cover any peripherals and unforeseen expenditure related to this. I shall also ask our other company, Northstar, for a quote for three replacement PCs.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The committee AGREED unanimously to ask Full Council for an additional £1,000 from reserves to facilitate the purchase of three new PCs for the office.

The committee HOPED some of the kit being replaced would have a useful afterlife.

### **854/24 BANK ACCOUNTS AND SIGNATORIES**

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

# **Bank accounts and signatories**

**Committee is asked to consider the council's bank accounts and signatories.**

The council has a number of bank accounts as we know. Recently, it has become clear we do not (yet) have a clear record of which councillors are signatories for which accounts, although it is likely Cllrs Toney, Gunston, Mathias and Wilkinson are the signatories for all accounts. Adrian is currently working on pinning this information down, which is proving harder with some accounts than we would like.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Cllrs McElroy and Linton did not believe they were signatories on any of the council's bank accounts. Cllrs Toney, Gunston, Mathias and Wilkinson were therefore the likely signatories. The committee AGREED the Clerk and the bookkeeper should be joint contact points for all accounts, where banks allowed that.

## **855/24 CONSERVATIVE HALL EARMARKED RESERVE**

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

### **Conservative Hall**

**Committee is asked to consider the Conservative Hall earmarked reserve.**

Earlier in the year, the council set up an earmarked reserve of £100,000 towards any expenditure the council may have encountered had the Trustees completed its transfer of the Conservative Hall to the council.

There is no hurry to do anything with the earmarked reserve at this time, we just need to show we have considered it.

There is a longer-term longer conversation to be had about projects upon which the council could spend some of its resources.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The committee AGREED the earmarked reserve should remain in place until at least the end of the financial year, longer if the sale has not completed. There will be solicitors' fees and possibly other expenditure still to be deducted from the reserve.

Cllr Gunston reminded the committee of the Clerk's comment the council needed to start thinking about projects upon which it could make use of the Conservative Hall earmarked reserve once it had agreed to return the earmarked reserve to the general reserve.

## **856/24 KINGSTON PARISH COUNCIL**

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

### **Kingston Parish Council**

**Committee is asked to consider a financial contribution to Kingston Parish Council's planning Judicial Review.**

As members will be aware, Kingston Parish Council has been advised it has sufficient justification for a Judicial Review into the Planning Permission granted under

K/46/23/PL, which was described as “Erection of 47 No residential dwellings (including affordable homes)” on “Land north-east of Kingston Lane”.

Kingston Parish Council has written to its residents and several East Preston residents directly and this council has included details of the request in the council’s e-newsletter. Kingston Parish Council is looking for £35,000 and has raised about £8,000 so far, via the Crowdfunder platform and direct donations.

I had hoped Kingston Parish Council may have provided some words to go alongside this request by now, but at the time of writing, I am still waiting.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The committee AGREED the council should support Kingston Parish Council in its judicial review endeavour. After some discussion about a sum, the committee AGREED unanimously to donate £1,000 initially, but with the ability to match its crowdfunding sum up to a maximum of £10,000 (including the initial £1,000).

#### **857/24 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

The draft Minutes had been circulated to all councillors on 18<sup>th</sup> September asking for suggested amendments by 25<sup>th</sup> September. None had been received.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Minutes could be signed as a true record of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September and Cllr McElroy duly signed the Minutes.

#### **858/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

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

### **Updates from previous meetings**

**Minute 608/24 – Greener Buildings Fund – 1<sup>st</sup> East Preston Scout Group** – the Assistant Group Scout Leader, Cheryl Stevens, informed me on 4<sup>th</sup> November the solar panels had been installed in the previous week. As council had agreed to donate 50% of the costs up to £8,000, we have donated £6,954. No VAT was charged.

**Minute 611/24 – Lashmar Recreation Ground** – a couple of days after the meeting, I reverted to my ADC Parks contact, “My committee deferred making a decision on funding as it would like to see a proposed design so it can see what it would actually be contributing towards. Do you have anything I can share with them?” Still no reply to date.

**Minute 615/24 – Council Office – intruder alarm system** – only two Passive Infrared Sensors were replaced as there are only two in the building not three. This was at a cost of £198 excluding VAT. Subsequently, we have also had to have a repair carried out on the door contact at the front of the office, this at a cost of £165 excluding VAT.

**Minute 685/24 – Grant Aid 2024/25 – Sea Road Beach Access Limited** – following the meeting, Roy Allen asked me for an explanation he could include in the Sea Road Beach Access Newsletter No, 12, which was published on 21<sup>st</sup> September. The explanation ran as follows: “The parish council remains committed to improving beach access for all. Whilst broadly supportive of the Sea Road Beach Access Limited proposal and recognising there is a lot of support across the village for the proposal, the council feels to award public money to an unproven scheme would not be sensible. Once the proposal has been proven to be fit for purpose, the council would be happy to consider a grant towards ongoing costs, for example but not limited to, insurance cover.” There was little to no feedback on this to the Council Office, although it was raised by a member of the public at the October Full Council meeting, following which a further three members of the Disability Action Group

came to see me, individually, about the council's decision. All seemed to appreciate the council's stance after I had explained it further.

**Minute 686/24 – East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation** – at the October Full Council meeting, council agreed to grant £10,000 to the Village Hall Foundation for works related to its recent Fire Risk Assessment (Minute 730/24, Resolution 1898).

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Minute 685/24 – Sea Road Beach Access Limited** – the Clerk reported Mr Allen had said he would like a conversation about the council taking ownership of the boardwalk in due course. Cllr Gunston reported Mr Allen had withdrawn from East Preston Repair Café to concentrate on the boardwalk and other matters.

**Minute 686/24 – East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation** – the Clerk had received the following update from Mrs McElroy, Chairman of the foundation, “Just to give the Parish Council an update on the Fire Regulation work. The carpenter will be starting the 1st week of December on all the internal doors and fire break requirements. I have a 3rd and final window and door company coming into quote for the exterior doors next week. Just leaving the Ramps to be investigated and a company instructed once all parties are happy.”

**859/24 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (9<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER)**

Nothing new was suggested.

*The Meeting closed at 19:00.*

Chairman: *Cllr John Gunston*      Date: **9<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

(END)