



EAST PRESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES: of the Proceedings of the Monthly Meeting of East Preston Parish Council held at 19:00 on Monday, 30th June 2025 at East Preston Infant School, Lashmar Road, East Preston

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bowman, Andrea Chapman, Lisa Duff, Barbara Gale, John Gunston, Helen Hill, Elizabeth Linton, Glyn Mathias, David Moore, Steve Toney (Chairman) and Steven Wilkinson

ALSO: Simon Cross, Clerk to the Council

Mrs Linda Denton, Mr Julian Ellis, Mr Chris and Mrs Valerie Eschbæcher, Mr Dave Jull, Ms Elizabeth Kruk, Mr Arthur Lowry, Mrs Sue Morley, Mr Adrian Passfield, Mr Peter and Mrs Sioned Vos

ABSENT: Councillors Kit Bradshaw and Rick McElroy

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The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council

WSALC – West Sussex Association of Local Councils

WSSC – West Sussex County Council

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The meeting opened at 19:00.

521/25 INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Toney welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked them for attending this extra meeting, explained the meeting protocol and safety information and led a round of introductions.

522/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1998 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to accept the apologies received from Cllrs Bradshaw (work) and McElroy (away).

An apology had also been received from West Sussex County Councillor Roger Elkins.

522/25 DECLARATION OF PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None were declared.

523/25 PUBLIC SESSION

SM asked whether extended premises would mean Dr Beccy Cooper MP would be able to hold more surgeries in the village. The Clerk replied Dr Cooper had already held more surgeries in the village than her predecessor was known to have held in the last seventeen years of his term of office. The Clerk explained surgeries were no longer held on a drop-in basis as they had been years ago; following the murders of Jo Cox MP and David Amess MP, security for all MPs had been increased. He explained how SM could apply to attend a surgery.

CE asked whether the council had considered the loss of interest which would result from spending some of its reserves and what any conversion costs would be. The Clerk replied the loss of interest was being factored in. The council knew there would be conversion costs but until the building belonged to the council it was impossible to know exactly what was the potential of the building. Cllr Toney said the initial conversion costs would be to make the flat self-contained.

PV asked whether there were any figures available. Cllr Gunston responded, initially apologising for advising the Clerk not to include too many overwhelming figures in the article in the e-newsletter published on 25th June. Cllr Gunston explained the council was looking to take £200,000 from reserves which would leave it with a year's worth of running costs (at current levels). A loan of £250,000 was being proposed; this would be a public works loan at a fixed rate of 5.05% repayable over 10 years. The repayment per year was a shade over £32,000. Potential income from the two-bedroom flat above the office space was £1,500pcm; at 80% occupancy that would generate £14,400 to the council. Most council meetings would be able to be held in the new meeting space, which would save on room hire.

DJ suggested further savings would likely be possible once the utilities and similar were combined as far as they could be combined.

AL said he had initially had very mixed feelings about the proposal questioning why the excess reserves could not simply be given back to the residents. Then he thought about it some more and he remembered the council "does such a good job" helmed by a "superb administrator" so why not expand the focal point of the village? A larger council facility might also stop another building company taking office space in the village. AL expressed his deep concerns about inconsiderate parking at the southern end of the village and recounted how he had narrowly missed hitting an old man who had walked into the road from between two 4x4s; AL said he was grateful he had been driving at under 20mph. AL summed up his feelings by saying he trusts this council.

LD said she had recently spoken to an ADC civil parking enforcement officer, and he had advised her members of the public had to keep on reporting poor parking to ADC's civil parking enforcement team. Cllr Toney said civil parking enforcement officers did visit East Preston but upon arrival, all the illegal parking disappeared.

DJ asked whether the council was aware of any other interest in the property. The Clerk said the council was not aware.

LD said the proposed extended premises was not just an excellent idea, it was a necessity.

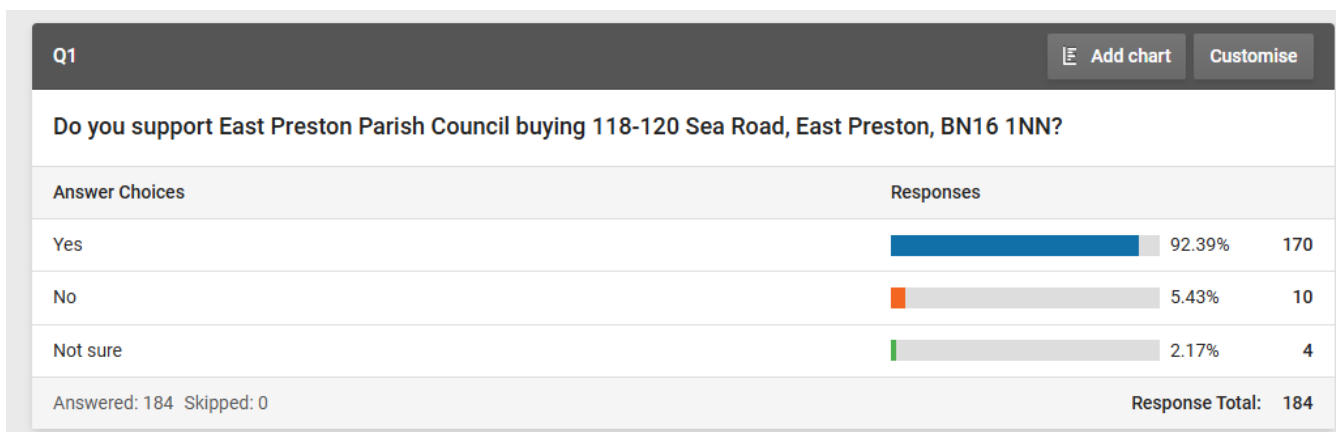
JE suggested the council was an excellent purchaser, no chain, no complications and, as such, the council could ask the vendor to withdraw the property from sale immediately a sale had been agreed.

DJ asked whether the council would have to pay stamp duty. The Clerk replied he thought so and PV confirmed this after a quick Google search.

JE suggested the council took a reputable builder around the building in addition to having a full structural survey as the latter would likely be full of disclaimers.

Informally, the Chairman asked those members of the public present to show their support for the proposal and all voted in favour. The Chairman thanked them for their support.

At the start of the meeting, 184 residents had responded to the online survey which had been included in the e-newsletter published on 25th June:



524/25 COUNCIL RESPONSES

Cllr Toney confirmed the council would be undertaking a full structural survey.

Cllr Chapman said the new facility would be primarily for East Preston residents and she hoped they would use active forms of travel to get to the facility – walking and cycling.

Cllr Bowman said it was possible to exchange in four weeks. Cllr Gunston said securing the public works loan might take up to six weeks presently, according to the Chief Executive of the West Sussex Association of Local Councils.

525/25 118-120 SEA ROAD, EAST PRESTON

The council NOTED the following report circulated in advance of the meeting:

118-120 Sea Road, East Preston

Council is asked to consider matters related to the proposed purchase of 118-120 Sea Road, East Preston, BN16 1NN.

As previously discussed at the Extraordinary Meeting held on 16th June, the property known as 118-120 Sea Road is currently on the market comprising ground floor office space and two-storey living accommodation above. This property adjoins the existing council premises at 122 (office) and 124 (flat) Sea Road. The property is on the market for £450,000, and is for sale Freehold.

The council's Flat & Frontage Working Party thinks this is an ideal and possibly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the council to buy extended premises. The ground floor could, amongst other uses, become a meeting venue for village groups and could also provide office accommodation for those groups too. The meeting venue would be big enough to hold most, if not all, council committee meetings, which would reduce the amount of money the council currently spends on room hire.

The current government's devolution and local government reorganisation agenda could well mean this council's workload could increase in the next few years, possibly requiring additional staff.

The council could host organisations which could be beneficial to the village, e.g. Citizens Advice and Sussex Police sessions again. There is an outside chance we may even be able to get a bank to visit again.

All of the above could herald the beginning of the council sitting at the centre of a community hub. The council could oversee the creation of more new groups in the village just as it has East Preston Men in Sheds, East Preston in Bloom and East Preston Repair Café in recent years, all groups which add great value to the village.

Although not currently self-contained, the flat (120) could easily be made self-contained, enabling it to become additional income for the council/village and remain a rental property at a time when rental properties are hard to find.

Buying the property would provide another community asset for the village and would likely only appreciate in value.

Council needs to agree a purchase price.

There is a proposal to take about £200,000 from the council's current reserves which would reduce those more to the recommended level of a year's running costs. The remainder of the agreed purchase price would need to come from a loan.

Council can apply for a public works loan. To do so, the council needs to garner the support of the West Sussex Association of Local Councils. To that end, I have had a conversation with Trevor Leggo, CEO, and he believes the proposal is very sensible and he will happily support it. Trevor said we would need to gauge a degree of public support for the proposal although he accepted time was a constraint in this instance. In the e-newsletter published at 15:00 on 25th June, we explained the project to members of the public and asked them to complete a short questionnaire showing their support or otherwise for the proposal.

The loan itself, costing just over £32,000 a year over 10 years would add 11.14% to the precept. However, based upon current figures, we expect the loan, when offset by income from the additional rental property and other likely income, will mean an increase of no more than £5.72 on a Band D property. East Preston precept for a Band D property is currently £98.43 (and has been since April 2020) so £5.72 is just under 6%.

At its next meeting, the Finance & General Purposes Committee will consider any risks related to this loan and add them to the council's Risk Register.

Informally, on Carnival Parade day, Cllr Linton mentioned the proposal to Dr Beccy Cooper MP, who was also supportive of the idea.

Council to agree to apply for an annuity public works loan of £250,000 – repayable over 10years at a cost of c.£32,000 per year.

Council to agree to release other funds required to complete the purchase of this property.

This may involve the payment of some penalty fees should we need to withdraw any funds from some of our longer-term accounts. Adrian is currently working out the financial implications upon our bank accounts and I will have more information on this at the time of the meeting (circulated in advance if possible).

Council to agree to appoint a solicitor to work on its behalf on this proposed purchase.

This supporting paper may be updated as more information becomes available, but any updated version will be issued no later than midday on 30th June.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

25th June 2025

At 10:25 on the day of the meeting, the Clerk had circulated the then survey results to councillors; this included any freeform comments respondents had made. At that time, the results were: Yes – 92.13% (164), No – 5.62% (10) and Not Sure – 2.25% (4).

Adrian had advised there would only be a small fee of £28 payable to release necessary funds from one of the council's bank accounts needed for this project. Money could be withdrawn from the other two necessary accounts with notice but no financial penalty.

The Chairman led the council through a series of discussions and votes.

1999 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to pursue the purchase of the property known as 118-120 Sea Road subject to purchase price, survey results and loan availability.

2000 The Council **RESOLVED** to pursue the purchase of the property known as 118-120 Sea Road at a price of up to £450,000.

The most recent correspondence from the agents was the vendor agreed the purchase price of £425,000 with two conditions. Firstly, an aim to exchange within four weeks of the sale being agreed and secondly, the council should pay the vendor's agency fees of 1% plus VAT.

The view was the council would aim to exchange within four weeks, on the understanding there were other professionals involved over which the council had less control, for example, surveyor and solicitor, the latter presumably on both sides.

2001 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously not to pay the vendor's agency fees.

2002 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to apply to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for a public works loan of £250,000, fixed rate, annuity over ten years.

The council had to apply for the public works loan via the West Sussex Association of Local Councils. The Clerk had already explained the proposal to the Chief Executive, Trevor Leggo, and he fully agreed this was too good an opportunity to miss. The Clerk would complete the paperwork with the Chairman and Cllr Gunston after the meeting and send it to Trevor Leggo, with a covering letter, on the morning after the meeting.

There was some discussion as to whether a councillor should be assigned lead councillor for the negotiations around the sale. It was AGREED to consider this further at the July Full Council meeting.

2003 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to initiate a full structural survey of the property.

Cllr Gunston said it had been great to have such interaction from the public at a council meeting and he thanked them all for their positive support of the proposal.

526/25 NEW ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (7TH JULY)

Nothing was added.

The meeting ended at 19:46.

Chairman: **Cllr Steve Toney**

Date: **7th July 2025**

END