



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, 16th June 2025 at East Preston Infant School, Lashmar Road, East Preston
- PRESENT:** Councillors Kit Bradshaw, Andrea Chapman, Lisa Duff, Barbara Gale, John Gunston, Helen Hill, Glyn Mathias and Steve Toney (Chairman)
- ALSO:** Simon Cross, Clerk to the Council
- ABSENT:** Councillors Christine Bowman, Elizabeth Linton, Rick McElroy, David Moore and Steven Wilkinson
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The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council;
AoSERA – Angmering-on-Sea Estate Residents' Association
NHS – National Health Service;
NR – Network Rail;
PCSO – Police Community Support Officer;
SLCC – Society of Local Council Clerks;

TRO – Traffic Regulation Order;
VHF – East Preston & Kingston Village Hall Foundation;
WRA – Willowhayne Residents' Association;
WSCC – West Sussex County Council;
WSALC – West Sussex Association of Local Councils

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The meeting opened at 19:04.

485/25 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.

486/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1993 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to accept the apologies received from Cllrs Bowman, Linton and Wilkinson (all away but not together).

487/25 DECLARATION OF PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None were declared.

488/25 PUBLIC SESSION

No members of the public attended the meeting.

489/25 118-120 SEA ROAD, EAST PRESTON

Cllr Toney explained the meeting had been called for council to consider the possible purchase of the property known as 118-120 Sea Road, an office with a two-bedroom flat above it, not currently self-contained. The current business was moving on and this gave the council an opportunity to expand.

The property was on the market for £450,000.

Five members of the council's Flat & Frontage Working Party (Cllrs Toney, Linton, Gale, Gunston and Moore) had viewed the property a few days ahead of this meeting. There would be work required, not least to make the flat self-contained, but all five members of the working party felt this was too good an opportunity to miss. Part of the additional space could be used as a larger meeting room than that in the Council Office, meaning most of the council's meetings could be held there, reducing the council's meeting room hire bill. When not in use for council meetings, this meeting room could be used by local groups. There was a garage to the side of the property and a small garden at the back. The estate agent had estimated monthly rental for the flat of £1,500.

Cllr Toney handed over to Cllr Gunston, as Vice-Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, for some financial thoughts. Cllr Gunston reported the council had, approximately, £550,000 in reserves. The National Association of Local Councils' Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance 2024 Practitioners' Guide stated, "As authorities have no legal powers to hold revenue reserves other than those for reasonable working capital needs, or for specifically earmarked purposes, whenever an authority's year-end general reserve is significantly higher than the annual precept or rates and special levies, an explanation should be provided to the auditor." This project was possibly the best use yet he could think of to reduce the council's reserves. Currently, a year's operating costs were about £350,000. That meant the council could use £200,000 as a downpayment and seek a loan of between £250,000 and £300,000, to include some money for refurbishment. Although in 2020, the Public Works Loan Commissioners were abolished and their statutory powers transferred to HM Treasury, loans are still called PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) loans. A loan of £250,000 on a 10-year annuity basis (i.e. the annual repayment sum does not vary) would cost approximately £32,000 each year. Annual income on the two-bedroom flat at the rate suggested by the agent would be £18,000 although fees would need to be deducted from that. Cllr Gunston explained the terms of the loan could be changed to suit, for example the term could be extended. A loan request had to be submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) via the West Sussex Association of Local Councils. The Clerk had already advised that organisation such a request may be forthcoming.

Cllr Gunston proposed a few more benefits of expanding into the building: room for additional staff as the council prepared for devolution and additional responsibilities after local government reorganisation; hosting groups such as Citizens Advice again, giving residents easier access to those services; an information point for residents uncertain after local government reorganisation; another rental property in the village at a time when demand far outstrips availability; shared office space for village organisations; a library of things operated from the garage; a community asset only likely to appreciate in value.

Feedback was all positive. Offering more services in the future would require more space and that might justify an increase in the precept which, at the time of the meeting, had not been increased for five years. Anyone visiting the Council Office could not fail to notice the cramped working conditions for the staff, particularly for Alison in the reception area. Better storage could lead to a cleaner and clearer, more professional face being offered to the public. As the flat above the Council Office was managed by an agent, having a second flat in the council's portfolio would not unduly increase the officers' workload.

1994 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to pursue the purchase of the property known as 118-120 Sea Road subject to purchase price, loan availability and agreement at a Full Council meeting.

1995 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously to submit a loan application request to the West Sussex Association of Local Councils.

1996 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously this project should be managed by the Flat & Frontage Working Party.

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.

1997 The Council **RESOLVED** unanimously an initial offer of £405,000, with the option to increase bids to £420,000 at this time.

490/25 NEW ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (7TH JULY)

Nothing was added. The council NOTED there were currently no meetings scheduled for 30th June should a further meeting solely on this topic be needed.

The meeting ended at 19:52.

Chairman: **Cllr Steve Toney**

Date: **7th July 2025**

END