



Riston Parish Council
Long Riston
Hull
East Riding of Yorkshire
HU11 5JF
Mobile: 07562 572293
Email: clerk@ristonparish.org

Riston Parish Council Statement from the meeting held on 2nd December 2025

As you will be aware the PC has recently issued a statement declaring its intentions to revert the management of the hall to the PFC as it was originally. This comes following a number of unanimous votes by Cllrs. This is also in line with the lawful published constitution which governs the administration of the land and buildings which are held in trust by the Parish Council. This statement comes following a meeting with the PFC and their Hey Smile Foundation representatives in June and following a formal letter from the PFC Solicitor in August; inviting us to write and confirm "we will retain responsibility for maintaining the hall". The Parish Council have always made clear our views on this matter to the PFC. As such, this has not come as a surprise to the PFC. The Parish Council has also taken advice from a solicitor who specialises in this and related areas.

For the benefit of those who are not aware of the legal and historical situation I will describe it briefly now.

All this land was purchased several decades ago by the PFC. As the PFC is an unincorporated charity, this means it is not a legal incorporated entity and can only act through a group of individuals. It is therefore an established practice for an incorporated entity such as the Parish Council to hold these assets "in trust" for the benefit of the PFC.

This site included a Wooden Hut known to be used by the WI. It should be noted that the PFC sought grant funding and it was the PFC who proposed, planned and built the current village hall in the 1970's (see document).

The Parish Council has no influence or say in the management of the PFC or how it manages and maintains the assets. Indeed item 2 of the Governing constitution specifically states that *"The complete management and control of the Trust Property and the arrangements for its use shall be vested in a Committee of Management, which shall indemnify the Trustees and keep them indemnified against all liability in respect thereof"*

This essentially means that this lawful document is specifically crafted not to put the Parish Council in a situation of being in anyway liable whatsoever. Under the present arrangement we are not operating in accordance with the constitution. The Parish Council raises funds via the precept on everyone's council tax and we do not have the appetite to see tax payers cash be spent on a building which should lawfully be managed, funded and maintained by the PFC registered charity. This is just one reason that the arrangement is to be redressed.

It should be noted that the Parish Council has allegedly operated in this way since 1991 when a voluntary arrangement for the Parish Council was allegedly agreed to due to the retirement of the Chairman of the sub committee and the lack of a secretary. It seems this arrangement was never reversed. It should be noted the PFC now have 11 registered trustees and various associate volunteers. As such the ability to undertake the obligations seems improved.

It should also be noted that the Parish Council has 8 Cllrs at present and at the next election ERYC have reduced the number of available seats down to only 7. It is therefore easy to see that the situation is to some degree becoming reversed. This is the second reason for this action.



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I turn now to the funding aspect of this Parish Council in relation to the hall. It has been mentioned that the precept was increased to cover the upkeep of the hall at the time of this voluntary arrangement. We have not seen evidence to prove this, not least because all the original council minutes were never handed over when we took office. This is a matter we have also taken advice on.

What I can confirm is that then we took office in May 2023 the minutes show the bank balance to be £30,413 as of mid April 2023. This figure did increase to just over £37k by October. This was due to the fact we as new Cllrs had no access to the Bank. There was no online banking and a lot of the transactions were cash. Incoming payments for precept were increasing the bank balance, however payments to cover costs like cutting the Playing field grass, painting the lines in the PFC car park and paying the Clerks Salary – I was paying out of my own personal bank account due to having no access the Parish Bank Account.

The maintenance and condition of the hall was quickly brought to our attention when one of the internal walls moved and part of the ceiling fell onto children who had been playing in the hall. This gave rise to instruct a RICS qualified surveyor to inspect the condition of the building. It soon became clear that the building is in need of major repairs and/or not operating as intended. 123 individual items were recorded. 25 described as Major Defects, 97 described as Satisfactory and 1 described as Good... which was the paintwork.

We have spent over £2000 on a much needed partial electrical rewire and LED lights as part of the EICR which the building failed. There was also just over £3000 spent on interior paintwork. Beyond this it is difficult to identify what maintenance the building has had in the past few decades.

This naturally brings itself back to the pinacol point of indemnity of risk for the Parish Council. The Asbestos roof leaks, the concrete walls are corroding, the bolts are failing and the walls are damp due to poor drainage. The Parish Council has no wish to adopt the risk and liability of this structure and we feel sure the majority of our residents would like to see the Management Committee meet the obligations of their constitution and leverage their charity status, raise funds and address the situation as it sees fit. There has been a clear and inspiring demonstration of the funds the PFC are capable of raising and we applaud the awards the Vice Chairman has received in the course of these impressive activities.

Furthermore we would welcome the PFC undertaking local fundraising to raise funds for operational costs. In previous years activities such as Xmas light competitions and even a village gala were held, all of which were enjoyed by residents and helped raise cash for the PFC. Sadly these type of PFC led activities have recently been missing.

On balance, we've seen Cllrs undertaking significant fundraising ideas to raise cash and physically donate it to the PFC. This year Cllr Aston and Taylor undertook a sponsored cycle ride to the Menin Gate – Belgium, Cllr Brown and Britton sponsored and helped produce the remarkable "Riston Remembers VE80" Production, even simple ideas like producing Calendars or running the scarecrow trail were run by Cllrs and funds donated to the PFC. In previous years Cllr Britton has completed a 24hr run, donated his private consultation fees and also run a small coffee shop stall from his kitchen window as well as make significant personal donations to fund the PFC. These efforts alone have seen donations of literally thousands of pounds go to the PFC.



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Separately, but in addition, we have just seen the PFC publish the figures validating that nearly £7,300 has been granted by the Parish Council in the last 2 years alone. This is against an annual precept of averaging around £12,000 over the same 2 year period. It is clear to see this still represents an average of over 30% of all residents' precept being given to the PFC.

We have no record of prior years funding to the PFC as the Parish Council documentation is yet to be handed over as mentioned previously.

We would like to see the PFC embrace the hall as an opportunity. While it is an aged building it lends itself to a facility that might be improved to serve food and drinks after an event or even to passing cyclists. This hall could be made into a 'destination' for the community with the right leadership, ambition and effort. The Parish Council would welcome and support where possible enterprise and *self-sufficiency*. Item 12 of the constitution makes clear the obligations placed upon the PFC to meet the costs to maintain and insure these assets. We feel sure the residents would like to support and gain the mutual benefit of such fundraising initiatives.

Finally, we draw your attention to the wider challenges facing this Parish Council. We have previously made clear the significant governance challenges we'd had to address since undertaking office. We have had to invest and remediate this Parish Council and make it lawful. We have in recent weeks faced some unfortunate cost challenges which those of you who are following the published minutes will have seen. We are working hard to balance budgets so as not to pass all costs on to residents in these times of austerity. This is a constant challenge for a variety of reasons, having to hedge against risk, meet the routine operating costs of a Council while trying to provide value for the entire village also drives these decisions.

To put this another way, the Parish Council should not have to meet the risk and liability of an under invested Hall. Funds are to be used for the benefit of the full demographic of the village and a wide range of initiatives outside of the curtilage of the land we simply hold in trust for others.

I would like to conclude by urging village residents to reach out to our Clerk with any questions and follow the official Parish Council facebook page and Parish Council website for updates and information. I would urge residents to avoid getting your facts from the less reliable generic facebook groups.