

Local Government Act 1972



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held at 7.30pm on Monday 5th February 2024 in the Palmer Room, Langton Green Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Lyle (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Davies, Dooley, Ellery, Leach, Muress, Norton, Tarricone and Turner.

OFFICERS PRESENT

K Neve, Clerk and C Barrett, Assistant Clerk (CB) (minutes).

IN ATTENDANCE

Borough Cllrs Allen and Sankey were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was 1 member of the public present.

24/23 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for the accuracy of the minutes. The recording would be deleted in line with our data protection policy providing the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting.

24/24 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllr Rowe (away) and County Cllr McInroy, who was attending another meeting.

24/25 Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:

Cllr Lyle is a Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) Trustee of Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA).

Cllr Ellery has shares in the original Speldhurst shop and post office.

24/26 Declarations of Lobbying

Cllr Curry had been lobbied regarding the Langton Pavilion and both planning applications due to be considered under agenda item 16.

Cllr Muress had been lobbied regarding planning application 23/03460/FULL due to be considered under agenda item 16.

24/27 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 8th January 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of 8th January 2024 Full Council meeting, previously forwarded to members, were a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24/28 Public Open Session

Mr James Bowdidge, Chair of the Langton Green Village Society (LGVS), reported on the Langton Pavilion Community Hub, which he said had made a positive start. More activities had been planned for February onwards, and he anticipated a busy time ahead. A full update had been circulated via the Clerk.

Mr Bowdidge had received an inquiry from a resident about running dance classes for people who have Down Syndrome. The enquirer had stated that they would like to run classes on a Monday evening in the pavilion. This was outside the community hub's allocated hours, and Mr Bowdidge asked whether they would need to pay to use the space, and if so, how much. Cllr Curry said that councillors would discuss this inquiry under agenda item 17, which is related to Langton Green Recreation Ground.

24/29 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

Cllr Sankey thanked the parish council for producing and posting an informal guide to planning matters on its website.

He added that he had noted that Speldhurst Parish Council was one of the few parish councils in the borough that tended to remain neutral on planning applications, rather than supporting or opposing them. He asked if the parish council would consider taking a firmer stance. He said that a Planning Officer at Tunbridge Well Borough Council (TWBC) had also indicated that they would welcome more definitive input from the parish council, as feedback from parish councils was genuinely helpful when deciding on a planning application. Cllr Curry thanked Cllr Sankey for his points which would be raised at the next meeting when the Planning Committee Chair, Cllr Rowe, was able to attend.

Cllr Allen said that he had nothing to report.

24/30 Chair's Report

Cllr Curry reported that he and the Groundsman had now installed new tables, benches and trolleys in the pavilion. The purchase of these had been an investment of approximately £5,000, previously agreed by Full Council.

Wi-Fi had also been set up, complete with a family-friendly filter.

Access codes to the pavilion had been reset, and each user now had their own code which should be kept secure. There would be a log showing whose access code had been used to enter the pavilion, so it would be possible to monitor usage if necessary.

Cllr Curry added that, as always, the Groundsman had been most helpful in assisting with these tasks.

24/31 Clerk's Report

The Clerk reported that a worthy recipient of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) award had now been nominated.

As requested by the parish council, the Trustees of Ashurst Village Hall had sent the minutes from their last meeting.

Langton Green Village Hall had advised that their hire fee had increased. They also reported that the front door to the Village Hall will again be locked during the day due to complaints from clients about members of the public using the facilities and disturbing hirers. The Trustees had been unable to obtain additional grants to fund the upgrade of their main toilet facilities. They would be carrying out remedial work, mainly on the floors, around Easter time.

The Clerk reminded councillors to send their feedback regarding the office staff for their forthcoming appraisals and referred to the parish council meeting dates for the year (list previously circulated).

24/32 General Matters – Actionable tasks which do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
95/23	Purchase new tables and chairs for Pavilion and allocate £5,000 in accounting system for this.	Clerk/RFO	04/09/23	Complete

117/23	Confirm with HMRC and Companies House no further action following dissolution of SPC Pavilion Ltd.	Clerk/RFO	06/11/23	Complete
118/23	Apply to TWBC for 0% rateable value on Pavilion.	Clerk/RFO	06/11/23	Complete
120/23	Look into costs of broadband for Pavilion.	Chair	06/11/23	Complete
New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
128/23	Submit nominations for KALC Community Awards Scheme to Clerk.	All Cllrs	04/12/23	Complete
01/24	Look into Cloudy IT/Microsoft 365 price increase and report back to Cllrs Curry and Ellery.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
02/24	Notify TWBC of agreed precept.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
03/24	Email prospective solicitors to ask what they would be prepared to cap their costs at for the Chapel Project and make appointment.	Clerk/Cllr Lyle	08/01/24	Complete
04/24	Confirm minute authorisation for the PWLB to Parish Borrowing.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
05/24	Re-advertise for councillor vacancy.	Clerk	08/01/23	Complete
06/24	Set up meeting to consider nominations for KALC award and submit nomination.	Clerk/Cllrs Curry and Turner	08/01/24	Complete
07/24	Set up meeting to discuss ongoing relationship with LGCSA.	Cllrs Davies, Mures, Chris Allen and James Bowdidge	08/01/24	In progress
08/24	Confirm with TWBC the transfer of small business rate relief from office to Pavilion.	Clerk	08/01/24	In progress
09/24	Set up Broadband for Pavilion up to £30 pm.	Clerk/Chair	08/01/24	Complete
10/24	Find out from KALC what it would mean for SPC if KCC becomes bankrupt.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
11/24	Check the EWG Terms of Reference regarding the length of time for the Chair.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
12/24	Update Policy for Use of Council Land on website.	Clerk/Asst Clerk (KH)	08/01/24	Complete
13/24	Renew Landscape Services Contract and ask them to confirm the reduced mowing at Groombridge Green.	Clerk	08/01/24	Complete
14/24	Accept quotation from Living Forest and confirm tree works at Roopers, Speldhurst.	Asst Clerk (KH)	08/01/24	Complete
15/24	Confirm contract for quarterly inspections of playgrounds with Capel Groundcare.	Asst Clerk (KH)	08/01/24	Complete
16/24	Confirm contract for 6 monthly service and inspection of zipwire with Capel Groundcare.	Asst Clerk (KH)	08/01/24	Complete
17/24	Submit formal offer of up to £300,000 to purchase Speldhurst Chapel.	Clerk/Cllr Rowe	06/02/24	
18/24	Schedule meeting of the Annual Parish Open Meeting.	Clerk	06/02/24	
19/24	Submit responses on planning applications to TWBC.	Asst Clerk (KH)	06/02/24	
20/24	Contact TWBC Licensing regarding alcohol licence for the Pavilion.	Clerk	06/02/24	
21/24	Confirm with KCC councillors' agreement to the design fees for Old Groombridge highway improvements.	Clerk	06/02/24	
22/24	Accept quotation for the replacement of rubber matting in junior playground and replacement of spring clamps on Spring Moon at a total max cost of £13,000.	Asst Clerk (KH)	06/02/24	
23/24	Add to next FC agenda Community Right to Buy bid.	Clerk	06/24	

24/33 Finance Committee

Report by the Chair, Cllr Ellery: There had not been a meeting.

- a) Budget Virements: There were no new budget virements to report.
- b) Interim Payments:
Unity Trust Bank: £375.00 Langton Life; £5261.69 Gopak Ltd, furniture for Langton Pavilion; £63.54 BT, office broadband and phone; £133.68 Tivoli, dog waste emptying.
Unity Trust Mastercard: £9.00 Card Charges; £18.00 SJ Osborne & Son, key cutting; £79.49 Langton Green Service Station, van and tool fuels; £71.00 English Woodlands, tree for The Green, Langton Green; £32.30 The Workplace Depot, cable warning tape.
- c) To note decisions made under delegated authority: There were none.

24/34 Accounts for Payment

It was **RESOLVED** that the invoices as listed below and checked by Cllr Davies, be paid.

Date Paid	Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid	Detail
06/02/2024	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	MT620	960.51	Election Costs
06/02/24	Groombridge Village Magazine	MT2620	34.00	Groombridge Village Magazine
06/02/2024	Brooklynn Monk	MT2621	117.00	Pavilion Cleaning
06/02/2024	Katie Neve	MT2622	18.00	Mileage
06/02/2024	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2624	592.84	SPC Office Electricity
06/02/2024	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2625	60.13	Room Hire for Dec & Jan
06/02/2024	Kestrel Mechanical Services Ltd	MT2626	368.03	Repairs to Pavilion Leak
06/02/2024	HMRC	MT2629	1,285.63	Tax and NI
06/02/2024	Cloudy IT	MT2630	355.92	IT Support
10/02/2024	BT PLC	DD	24.96	Office Mobile Phone
16/02/2024	KCC (KCS)	DD	126.95	Photocopier Feb-April
16/02/2024	Tivoli	MT2623	133.68	Dog Waste Emptying
20/02/2024	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	623.02	Pensions
20/02/2024	Employees	MT2628	5,098.35	Salaries
28/02/2024	Veolia	DD	256.68	Waste Collection

24/35 Speldhurst Chapel Project – To provide an update on the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) application Cllr Rowe had submitted a full report before going away and this had been circulated. The Clerk reported that Michelmores had now been appointed as the council's solicitors.

- To consider authorising the Clerk to submit a formal offer of up to £300,000 to the owners of the chapel to purchase the building and site now that the PWLB has been approved - The Clerk advised that the parish council now had a year to draw down the loan. It was **RESOLVED** to authorise the Clerk to make the offer subject to conditions.
- Cllr Curry invited Mr Bowdidge to talk about the Community Right to Buy bid which had previously been made on the existing shop and post office. Mr Bowdidge said that this bid had been led by the parish council and he had helped the former shop owner when she attempted to appeal against it. The owner now leased the shop to Speldhurst's Community Shop Ltd, and she was willing to be flexible about the lease to accommodate their schedule as they organised the move into the chapel building. In return, she asked that the Community Right to Buy bid was not renewed by the parish council. Cllr Curry thanked Mr Bowdidge for his question and an action point was set for this item to be added to the next Full Council agenda.

24/36 Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2024 – To receive an update from the working group on progress – Cllr Curry said that the meeting would take the form of an update by the parish council to the community. An action point was set for the Clerk to schedule a meeting of the APM working group.

24/37 Vacancy on Council – An update.

The Clerk said that she would ask the local schools to share the vacancy. Cllr Curry said he had noted that other parish councils often had one or more vacancies to fill and operated an ‘open-door’ policy without actively advertising. Cllr Leach said she would speak to a contact who might be interested in the role.

24/38 Planning Committee

A meeting was held on 15th January and draft minutes had been circulated.

- To consider the following planning applications:

23/03460/FULL – Land Rear of 17A Holmewood Ridge, Langton Green

Proposal: Change of use of paddock land to residential curtilage (retrospective).

Decision: Speldhurst Parish Council opposes this retrospective application which undermines the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Metropolitan Green Belt protections at this important natural site. We further demand full reinstatement to its previous condition with the planting of mature trees.

23/03466/FULL – Lower Church Farm, Speldhurst Hill, Speldhurst

Proposal: Removal of condition 1 of 03/00200/FULL – removal of the agricultural and livery occupancy condition attached to Lower Church Farm and its transfer to the proposed new 1 bed dwelling that has been granted under planning permission application 20/01115/FULL located within the northern section of Barn A.

Decision: Speldhurst Parish Council has significant reservations to the merits of this application and must object to it. This appears to be an indirect repeat of previous applications to remove the condition from this site - instead applying it to a small one-bedroom end of barn to be able to release the 4-bedroom farmhouse from the restriction. These are not like for like, and we are concerned about the future of viable agricultural use of the site if this were to be approved.

We are not satisfied with the lack of evidence provided regarding the reduced saleability of the land and note that the farmhouse was built in the 1990s with the agricultural tie as a major reason for the permission being granted originally.

Cllr Curry reported that the application for the 3G pitch at Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) has been received and would be debated at the next Planning Committee meeting who would then make a recommendation to Full Council before submitting comments to TWBC.

24/39 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – To receive an update on the Pavilion

- To receive an update on the Community Hub – Cllr Curry reported that although in its early stage, the Community Hub appeared to be progressing well.
- To receive an update on the Pavilion Partnership working with LGCSA – Cllr Curry had now handed over to Councillors Davies and Muress, who would replace him in the pavilion partnership. He had been working on the first draft of an operational agreement between LGCSA and the parish council with Mr Chris Allen. This agreement would require approval from the LGCSA Trustees, together with Cllr Davies and Cllr Muress to proceed to the next stage. Cllr Muress said that he had met with Mr Guy Lambert, Chair of LGCSA. It had been a positive meeting and he was hopeful that a productive new partnership would develop. He added that he was mindful of the parish council’s financial obligations to the pavilion and that this was a responsibility that needed to be understood by all.
- To receive an update about the rates situation for the Pavilion – Cllr Curry reported that the rateable authority had generated its first bill to the parish council. Now that SPC Pavilion Ltd had been dissolved, the Pavilion no longer qualified for small business rate relief. TWBC had offered to swap the council’s obligation for the rates on the Pavilion and the Office which was considerably less.

- To consider setting up a designated premises supervisor committee guidance for an alcohol license - The Clerk said that if a single person were to be named, they would have to go on an extensive training course. The Pavilion Management Committee had previously managed the license, however, since it was no longer in existence, it was suggested that a committee of one councillor, one or two members of council staff, and one representative from the Community Hub could take on the role. Borough Cllr Sankey offered to help look into what was needed, and an action point was set for the Clerk to investigate further.

24/40 Committees and Working Groups (WG) and other Reports: to include any meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the draft minutes having previously been forwarded to all Members

a) Governance Committee – Report by Cllr Lyle

A meeting was held on 29th January. Cllr Lyle said that committee members had looked at a document of a sample risk assessment. This document was extremely detailed, and Cllr Lyle suggested that each committee address a single section in order to make the task more manageable.

b) Highways Committee – Report by Cllr Norton

There had been no meeting, however, Cllr Norton had been active in pursuing Kent County Council (KCC), who had run speed surveys in Langton Green and Old Groombridge. The results showed significant speeding issues and speeding had been particularly bad at the junction of Winstone Scott Avenue and the entrance to Langton Green Village Hall car park, which was the location that the Highways committee had identified for a pedestrian crossing.

KCC had followed up the speeding surveys with several suggestions for both Langton Green and Old Groombridge, including suggested signage at £1,000 per sign. Cllr Norton had pushed back on this amount and KCC had then offered to pay for the signage as a part of their maintenance responsibilities. They had also agreed to waive the design fee for the proposed pedestrian crossing in Langton Green.

Cllr Norton was now setting up a meeting with County Cllr McInroy, with the purpose of asking him exactly what KCC could do to help with traffic-calming measures in the parish. He added that the Clerk was pursuing barriers outside Langton Green Primary School, and that the Highways committee was trying to achieve safer walking routes to and from the village hall and primary school for those coming from the east of the village. Cllr Norton added that he had written to Chief Inspector of Tunbridge Wells Police asking for more regular enforcement presence.

- To consider authorising payment of £1,006 to Kent County Council (KCC) for highway design fees at Old Groombridge – It was **RESOLVED** to approve this amount.

c) Amenities Committee – Report by Cllr Lyle

There had been no meeting. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the replacement of the rubber matting in the junior playground, LGRG, and the replacement of the spring clamps on the Spring Moon at a total maximum cost of £13,000, subject to a sufficient number of quotes having first been obtained.

d) Air Traffic Committee – Report by Cllr Curry

There had been no meeting. Cllr Curry explained that he would assume the role of Chair in the short term while Cllr Tarricone attended to other commitments. Cllr Curry asked for more councillors with an interest in air traffic to join the committee and Cllr Norton said that he would be interested in joining.

Cllr Muress reported that he had attended an online call about the proposed change of airspace at Gatwick South. He would share the recording of the call with anyone interested in listening to it.

- It was **RESOLVED** to delegate authority to the Air Traffic committee to represent the parish council at a series of hearings to be held in February and March related to the Gatwick Airport Northern Runway application. The Air Traffic Committee would meet on 7th February to discuss this further.

e) Environment WG (EWG) – Report by Cllr Turner

Cllr Turner reported that Sussex Lund had awarded funding of £1,300 for Laurel removal and other works at Pocket Park, Speldhurst. The EWG would next meet on 14th February.

f) **KALC** – Report by the Chair – There was nothing to report.

24/41 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

12th February 2024 – Planning Committee

14th February 2024 – Environment Working Group

19th February 2024 – Amenities Committee

27th February – Highways Committee

4th March – Full Council (SPVH)

11th March – Planning Committee

18th March – Finance Committee

24/42 Items for Information:

There would be an item on the next FC agenda to discuss recording of meetings, following the recent Freedom of Information request for a copy of a previous recording, prior to its deletion.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 9.08pm.

Chair