



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge
Minutes of the Annual Statutory Meeting of the Parish Council
held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 at 7.30pm
Conducted online via Zoom electronic communication

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Barrington-Johnson (Chairman), Mrs Soyke, Mrs Lyle, Pate, Ellery, Rowe, Turner, Scarbrough, Langridge and Myles.

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr C May – Clerk and Assistant Clerks Mrs K Harman and Mrs C Barrett

IN ATTENDANCE

Borough Cllr Stanyer was in attendance. Apologies had been received from County Cllr McInroy and Borough Cllr Ms Willis.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one member of the public present.

21/088 Election of Chairman

It was **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Pate as Chairman of the Parish Council. He will sign the declaration of office at the earliest opportunity when it will be counter-signed by the proper officer.

Cllr Pate thanked councillors for their votes of confidence and went on to thank Cllr Barrington-Johnson for his commitment over the last six years in leading the parish council, particularly during the past challenging year.

21/089 Election of Vice-Chairman

It was **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Mrs Lyle as Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council. She will also sign the declaration of office at the earliest opportunity when it will be counter-signed by the proper officer.

Cllr Mrs Lyle said that she was honoured to be serving the Parish Council and was looking forward to working with Cllr Pate.

The clerk will advise TWBC of the changes.

Cllr Pate noted that this was the first meeting after Mrs Joy Podbury had stepped down and acknowledged her huge commitment over sixteen years to the Parish Council, in addition to all her other responsibilities as Borough Councillor and then Mayor for Tunbridge Wells. She had made a phenomenal contribution to the local community and would be greatly missed.

21/090 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

No-one present intended to record the meeting.

21/091 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Rajah who was attending a course and Cllr Mrs Woodliffe who had work commitments.

21/092 Disclosure of Interests

Mrs K Harman declared an interest in items 11 d) salary and e) pension contribution increases. Mrs C Barrett declared an interest in item 11e) pension contribution increase.

21/093 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

21/094 Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 14th April 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21/095 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

Borough Cllr Stanyer said that no formal meetings had been held prior to the elections. He congratulated Cllr Pate on his election as Chairman and thanked Cllr Barrington-Johnson for his valued contribution.

21/096 Public Open Session

Mr James Hammond was attending regarding agenda item 15c) Draft Local Plan (DLP). He is joint owner of site 231 along with two other developers.

The Chairman agreed that this item on the agenda could be brought forward for discussion.

Cllr Ellery, as Chairman of the Planning Committee, explained that the DLP was in another round of consultation, the focus this time being on the legality of the plan. He voiced concerns regarding the scope for improving the biodiversity of the site compared to the existing grassland and also that the ecological and botanical importance of the site was not being appropriately considered. He also questioned the feasibility of the sustainability proposals and therefore the impact the site could have on climate change if it were developed. Cllr Rowe said that he was concerned that the grasslands survey carried out on the site had not been given true justification in the DLP and that on several occasions during the past year, SPC's detailed objections to applications had been ignored by TWBC which did not provide much confidence that future objections to a planning application would be considered. It was also noted that S106 payments should contribute towards improvements to the village of Speldhurst and not put towards the proposed works at Southwood Road Recreation Ground in Rusthall – an application which the parish council strongly objected to and were attempting to get removed from the DLP.

Mr Hammond was then invited to speak. He said that TWBC's grasslands survey had been carried out which concluded site 231 is of low botanical and ecological interest. The TPO's which had recently been implemented would be respected if the site is developed. He said that the site did offer the opportunity to increase the biological habitat through a detailed boundary and hedge planting scheme and the indication was that the site would be more diverse after a period of 30 years had elapsed. He noted that allocation of the S106 payment was being dealt with by TWBC and that the developers would be in support of the funds being allocated in Speldhurst should a need be demonstrated. The developers are keen to work closely with the parish council if the development goes ahead. Regarding sustainability, he felt that the site was well positioned for local services and noted that not all journeys would require a car. Since the pandemic, there was now a focus on connectivity at home with less residents needing to commute to a place of work.

Cllr Ellery asked if a planning consultant could be employed to investigate if site 231 is appropriate for development in terms of the biodiversity and sustainability concerns and their relevance to national policies. He did not think councillors had sufficient technical knowledge to be able to make an informed decision. Cllr Mrs Soyke said that the site had been investigated thoroughly previously, the public had already been consulted as well as councillors and the matter debated for years. She therefore did not think a consultant was necessary. Cllr Langridge said that residents had expressed an interest for low-cost housing in the parish plan which the scheme would provide.

It was **RESOLVED** that a decision on SPC's stance on site 231 would be delayed until after a planning consultant had clarified the technical aspect of both the biodiversity and sustainability of the site which would enable councillors to make an informed decision. This was however dependent on her ability and availability to provide the required information by the deadline. Mrs Harman would contact a planning consultant which would be paid for under delegated authority and the item would be added to the next planning committee agenda for further discussion.

Mr Hammond left the meeting at 8.30pm.

21/097 Appointment of Committees including KALC Representative.

- a) It was **RESOLVED** that all existing committee membership be reviewed and confirmed at the next Full Council meetings. Chairmen would be elected at the next committee meeting. Finance required a new Chairman as Cllr Mrs Lyle had served beyond her term due to Covid.
- b) **RESOLVED** that the Chairman is the KALC representative and the Vice-Chairman is deputy.

21/098 Governance Committee

Cllr Mrs Lyle reported the following:

- a) There had been a meeting of the Governance Committee on 26th April, the minutes having been circulated to all members.
- b) **RESOLVED** that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) be signed on the recommendation of the Governance Committee. Cllr Mrs Lyle thanked the clerk for his accounting efficiency which enabled the return to be completed smoothly.
- c) Cllr Mrs Lyle said that nine candidates had been interviewed and that the panel of Councillors, which comprised of Cllrs Pate, Barrington-Johnson and Mrs Lyle, were unanimous in recommending Mrs Katie Neve, who had over 30 years' experience working for TWBC.

RESOLVED that Mrs Katie Neve, be appointed as the new clerk as recommended by the Governance Committee. Her starting salary was £32,000pa pro rata and she would be working 25 hours pw. The present clerk, Chris May, will hand over the work over a number of months and would stay on as Responsible Finance Officer while Mrs Neve looks to gain the CiLCA qualification.

d) Mrs Harman was admitted to the waiting room for this item.

RESOLVED that Mrs Harman receive a salary increase on the recommendation of the Governance Committee from £13ph to £14ph backdated to April 1st 2021 for passing CiLCA.

e) Mrs Barrett was admitted to the waiting room for this item.

RESOLVED that SPC’s pension contributions for employees increase from 3% to 5% with effect from 1st June 2021 on the recommendation of the Governance Committee.

Mrs Harman and Mrs Barrett re-joined the meeting.

f) **RESOLVED** that a further two laptops be purchased to enable flexible home-working up to a value of £500 per laptop plus any necessary accessories. Cllr Ellery asked that SPC’s employer’s responsibilities in terms of staff working conditions (at home and in the office) be considered. It was agreed that this would be included on the next Governance Committee agenda.

g) **RESOLVED** to reappoint the Internal Auditor, Mr David Buckett.

h) **RESOLVED** to reappoint Mr C May as the Data Protection Officer (DPO).

21/099 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Mrs Lyle

a) There had not been a meeting of the Finance Committee since the last Full Council meeting. The first half of the precept had been received from TWBC.

b) Report on budget virements: Approval was requested for a virement of £15K which had been transferred from the contingency account for the two £10K grants to the primary schools. Provision had already been made for £5K and the total of £20k was added to committed funds. **RESOLVED** to approve the virement.

c) Report on interim payments made since the last meeting: Unity Bank account: £59.33 to Mastercard to pay balance; £51.80 Eon street light electricity and £25.08 Mobile.

Mastercard: £9.00 Fees; £154.04 Stainer for Pavilion; £21.54 Fire Assembly signs; £24.43 Supplies*; £59.22 Petrol*; £22.66 post mix* and £10.52 supplies*

The Clerk confirmed that the payment to Cloudy IT, which had been listed last month, had been cancelled. The contract would be discussed with the company at a meeting the following week, however, Cllr Rajah did not feel he had the authority to act on behalf of the council in this matter. Cllrs Mrs Lyle and Ellery said they would try and join the meeting and if the issues could be resolved it was hoped that the contract could be recommended. The Clerk thanked Cllr Rajah for the time and effort he had put into reviewing the 38-page contract supplied by Cloudy IT.

d) Report on decisions made under delegated authority are starred* above.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Mrs Lyle for her diligent 4-year term as Chairman of the Finance Committee.

21/100 Accounts for Payment

RESOLVED to pay the invoices as listed. The Clerk thanked Cllr Mrs Lyle for all her help with finance matters.

Payee Name	Ref.	Amount £	Detail
Langton Life	MT1995	300.00	Advertising Langton Life
Be Sure	MT1996	630.00	Annual Maintenance Support
KCC Highways	MT1997	15,000.00	Speed Limit Reduction
Tate & Tonbridge Fencing	MT1998	273.96	Replacement Oak T Post

M R Lawrence	MT1999	380.00	Mowing and Strimming
EDF Energy	DD	322.00	Pavilion - Electricity
Employees	MT2000	3,905.29	Salaries
N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	MT2001	175.80	Pension payments
UK Debt Management Office	DD	2,640.95	PWLB repayment

Total: £23,628.00

21/101 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG)

Cllr Mrs Lyle reported on behalf of the Pavilion Management Committee.

- a) The café would to be opening up inside from the 17th May following government guidelines and full rent would therefore be paid to SPC from that date. There had been some unresolved discussions with LGCSA regarding maintenance of the pavilion which were ongoing.
- b) Traffic management and the installation of grid matting to alleviate parking:
- c) Improvements to the pathway from Lampington Row to the LGRG:
- d) Drainage project update:
Items b), c) and d): Cllr Mrs Lyle was in the process of obtaining quotations for all three and would report back at the next meeting.

21/102 Planning Committee

Cllr Ellery reported the following:

- a) A meeting of the planning committee had been held on the 19th April which was chaired by Cllr Rajah in Cllr Ellery's absence, the minutes having been circulated to all members.
- b) Planning Application 21/01016/FULL. Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Planning Officer.
- c) SPC's response to the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan regarding site 231 – this item was discussed under 21/096 – Public Open Session.
- d) SPC's response to the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan regarding Jockey Farm: **RESOLVED** to appoint a planning consultant jointly with Rusthall PC at a rate of £70 ph to assist with SPC's response to the DLP in relation to Jockey Farm.
- e) A meeting had been held with Martin Homes regarding the planned change of use of Burrswood in Groombridge. Martin Homes had engaged with TWBC on a pre-planning basis and appeared keen to engage with the local community regarding the proposals.

21/103 Future Meetings of the Council

Following the expiry of the Government's special dispensation for parish councils to hold meetings electronically on 6th May, the clerk advised that from 7th May meetings would need to be face-to-face (in a restricted environment). Hybrid meetings (part face-to-face, part electronic) were not allowed. The Chairman asked all councillors to let the clerk know if they were willing to attend meetings in person during the immediate period to June 21st. The government plans to review all restrictions then and subject to meeting criteria set by them, England is expected to have all current restrictions lifted. He said that no one should feel pressured to attend if they had safety concerns. Meeting notices would need to include information advising members of the public that it would be obligatory for them to obtain permission to attend each meeting in advance. The clerk was asked to investigate the validity of members of the public attending meetings virtually. It was agreed that the safety of councillors and staff would not be compromised over the right of members of the public to attend meetings.

21/104 Annual Parish Meeting

All plans for the APM had been provisional until it was known if the meeting was to be held virtually or in person and also if the speaker was re-elected. There was much discussion amongst councillors regarding the viability and safety of the meeting. Mrs Barrett, who had been clerking the APM working group, said that she had attended Speldhurst Village Hall, where the meeting was to be held, and a risk assessment has been carried out. All appropriate safety precautions would be taken. The format would involve a short film with a voice-over which would be uploaded to the website. The event would be ticketed, and it was agreed that attendance kept to a minimum. Councillors should not attend if they did not feel comfortable. A decision finalising the details of the meeting would be made on the 10th May when a meeting of the APM working group was to be held.

9.30pm RESOLVED to continue the meeting.

21/105 Newsletter

It was **RESOLVED** to use the newsletter in the existing format with a few minor changes adding details of the new Chairman, Vice Chairman and Clerk.

21/106 Chairman's Report

There was nothing to report.

21/107 Committee Reports to include any Committee Meetings held since the last Full Council Meeting, the Draft Minutes having been previously forwarded to all Members.

- a) **Highways:** Cllr Pate said that a meeting had been held with KCC via zoom and the speed reduction scheme for the A264 and B2110 was confirmed. The scheme was being advertised on notice boards and social media.
- b) **Amenities:** Cllr Rowe advised that there had been no meeting and that he was currently investigating the Council's obligations regarding maintenance of the area inherited thirteen years ago opposite The Green in Langton Green.
- c) **Air Traffic:** There was nothing to report.
- d) **Footpaths Working Group:** Cllr Langridge advised that he and Mrs Barrett have been working on defining the role of the Council following on from KCC's edict on health and safety.
- e) **Environment Working Group:** Cllr Turner said that the working group would meet on Wednesday May 12th by zoom.
- f) **KALC:** there was nothing to report.

21/108 Covid Compliance

There was nothing further to add.

21/109 Items for Information:

Cllr Mrs Lyle advised that there had been bonfires/barbeques lit on the Recreation Ground. She will bring the matter to the next Amenities meeting.

There being no further items the meeting closed at 9.39 pm.

Chairman