



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

**Minutes of a Planning Committee Meeting held at 7.30pm on
Monday 12th February 2024 in the Gallery Room, Langton Green Recreation Ground**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllrs Rowe (Chair), Tarricone (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Curry, Davies, Dooley and Norton.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mrs K Harman – Assistant Clerk and Mrs K Neve – Clerk.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENT: There were 40 members of the public present.

1. **To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting**
The Assistant Clerk was recording the meeting for the purpose of accuracy of the minutes and would delete the recording once the minutes had been signed at the next Planning Committee meeting.
2. **To receive and approve apologies and reasons for absence**
Apologies were received from Cllr Muress who was on holiday.
3. **Disclosures of Interests**
There were none.
4. **Declarations of Lobbying**
Cllr Curry had been lobbied regarding Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA)'s application for a 3G pitch on the Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG).
5. **Minutes: RESOLVED** That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 15th January 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.
6. **Public Open Session:**
There were 40 members of the public present regarding LGCSA's application for a 3G pitch, one of which spoke in favour of the 3G pitch, one representative from LGCSA who did not wish to speak and it appeared that the remainder were objecting to the application.

Cllr Rowe welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed them of the process for those who wished to speak. He outlined the parish council's role as a consultee only and explained that the application was not from Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC), SPC had to-date not been consulted in any way on the application and that the final decision on the application would be made by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC). A total of 19 residents spoke – 1 for and 18 against the 3G proposal.

Summary of residents' comments in favour of the 3G application:

- Thanked LGCSA for raising the funds from the Football Foundation.

- Believes it is the perfect site for such a facility – close to the school and with the infrastructure already in place.
- Concerns about the rubber crumb surface however other surfaces are available and could be investigated.

Summary of residents' comments objecting to the application:

- Majority of those leaving comments on the planning portal do not live in the parish which raised concern of a 'NIMBY' attitude. It is important to act in the best interests of the village rather than the football club. These kinds of facilities are normally within towns and not suitable for a rural village.
- The local primary school do not support the application.
- Lack of notice given of the proposal – residents nearest to the pitch were not informed, no consultation with residents carried out by LGCSA.
- Further due diligence on the environmental impact of the proposal should be carried out. Detrimental impact on wildlife including the deer, bats, Great Crested newts and elderly horses.
- Light pollution which will prevent the dark skies currently enjoyed by the village.
- Noise pollution from the increased traffic, tannoys and from teenagers when leaving late at night.
- Most of those that spoke had an understanding of and supported what LGCSA were trying to achieve in terms of increasing the availability of an all-weather pitch for outside exercise.
- There are other 3 or 4G pitches available for use nearby for example at Bennett Memorial, St Gregory's and Tunbridge Wells Boys' Grammar Schools.
- The hours of operation are anti-social and the 10pm curfew is too late.
- Traffic – increased volume which has been vastly underestimated on the application and an assumption made that the already busy carpark can accommodate this increase.
- Flooding concerns, especially since the serious floods to neighbouring properties following the recent drainage works.
- Damage to flora and fauna including rare species and 23 fully-grown trees being felled.
- Dramatic negative impact on the character of the area which is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Contamination from microplastics used in the rubber surface which will be banned in Europe in 2031 and will eventually become landfill.
- The 3G would restrict access and usage to a field that is currently open to all.

7. **Planning Appeals**

There were none.

8. **Planning applications for discussion and decision:**

24/00235/FULL – Langton Green Recreation Ground, Speldhurst Road, Langton Green

Proposal: Creation of 3G Artificial Grass pitch with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights, access footpaths, tree removal and replacement planting.

Further discussion between Councillors in order to formulate a response to Full Council took place. This included consideration and discussion of certain points raised in the public session. Cllr Curry reported that he had visited the 3G pitch at Bennett Memorial School on 10th February 2024 by invitation of LGCSA. He had discussed various aspects including impacts and mitigations of parking, the surface material, the fencing and the local demand, with Chris Allen of LGCSA. Cllr Curry further reported that two queries he had made received satisfactory answers: the published version of the biodiversity report, while missing surface areas the paths would occupy, would still

result in a positive net gain; and confirmation of the position of the access path in relation to the swales.

SPC Planning Committee's response, to be circulated to all councillors ahead of SPC's Full Council meeting on 4th March 2024 for a final response on behalf of the parish council to be made:

The Planning Committee recognises the importance of children playing sports and acknowledges it would be beneficial to have outdoor facilities which can be used all year round regardless of weather conditions. But after careful consideration of this planning application, SPC has concluded that this planning application goes way beyond an all-weather pitch and the negatives far outweigh the positives. SPC is therefore unanimous in recommending to Full Council that SPC object to this planning application. They felt the planning application lacked a lot of detail which meant the true impact and level of disruption to local residents was being totally underestimated.

The reasons for objecting are many and varied but broadly fall into the following categories:

Local infrastructure not able to support this facility which is inappropriate for a small rural village setting when taken together with an increase in disturbance, noise and nuisance.

- Limited details provided on usage other than the hours of operation which are 7 days per week from 8am to 10pm or thereabouts. No details on split between competitive matches and for training; there are references to hiring of facility to 3rd parties but no details to who, how often and when; references to facility being used for adult football which current site is not used for; limited information on how many spectators can be accommodated and how numbers will be managed.
- Without usage details it is not possible to determine traffic volumes which will clearly increase with the hours of operation being proposed or parking requirements which already struggle to accommodate demand for existing facilities and services. Not possible to quantify noise levels and other general nuisances associated with increased levels of people activity. Therefore, not possible to undertake any adequate modelling of impacts and to determine what levels of mitigation are required and what these would look like.
- Local roads are already congested at various times during the week and on weekends. The road between the junction with the A264 and Lampington Row is often difficult to navigate due to the parking of customers of the Hare pub effectively reducing this part of the road to a single lane. Speldhurst Road is also often blocked due to traffic congestion when there is overspill from the carpark and this is before any additional traffic resulting from the proposed 3g pitch.
- The designated car park to be used for the new facility is regularly full and even during quieter periods can be busy with existing demand. On 15.02.2024 at 10.20 there were 75 parked cars counted. The only modelling undertaken by the applicant assumed 90 vacant spaces always being available which is plainly untrue. The new 3g facility will only worsen the parking problems in this part of LG.
- Noise levels cannot be analysed because no usage information has been provided. What is clear though is with increased usage, the additional hours of operation and the addition of adult football with spectators, noise levels will increase and be sustained over much longer periods.
- There are no safe crossing points in this part of LG. Combining increased traffic with higher pedestrian numbers accessing the 3g facility particularly during winter months and in the dark with no streetlights creates a much higher risk of a pedestrian being hit by a car. No risk assessment has been provided by the applicant.

- The application is silent on changing and toilet facilities covering the hours of operation being proposed.

Impact on the character or appearance of the area and to the local ecology

- The designated field is accessible to all local residents to walk on, play on and use for other recreational activities 24x7. This will be lost as the 3g pitch will be fenced and only accessible with approved access. The advantages of recreational exercise will be lost to causal users who will be excluded from accessing this field therefore reducing rather than increasing opportunities for residents.
- Light pollution from floodlights in a low light area. LG has no streetlights and the area around the designated field is regarded by local residents as a dark skies area. This will be inextricably lost as a benefit.
- The facility will damage the local ecology and the floodlights will drive away local wildlife. This part of LG has a very rural feel and presence which will be completely lost.
- Application states 23 mature trees will have to be removed. While replacement trees will be planted it will take many years for them to reach maturity and provide equivalent habitat that is being lost
- The designated field is part of the AONB.

Environment & Health

- There is uncertainty over the longer term for this type of 3g pitch. Sports England and the Football Foundations position on 3g pitches can be read here <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/position-statement-on-3g-pitches>.
- The results of a major study by the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) that will determine the long-term future and viability of this type of 3g pitch is due to be announced in Spring 2025. Given this important milestone it makes no sense to install a new 3g pitch in a rural setting with all the health & environmental risks associated with this type of pitch until a decision on their future is announced.
- The EU has already banned 3g pitches of this type from 2031. It is anticipated that supplies to maintain existing 3g pitches will become increasingly less available as the 2031 date approaches thus raising a question over the sustainability of a 3g pitch in LG.
- Contamination of land due to microplastics is well documented.

Drainage

- It is felt that proposals for drainage do not go far enough and there are insufficient guarantees and safeguards in place to protect nearby properties from water run-off. Local properties were flooded as recently as 2020 due primarily to excessive water run-off from the drainage work undertaken on the Recreation Ground by the applicant.
- Extreme weather events are occurring more frequently than has been modelled.
- The proposed drainage solution is unclear with references to retaining and disposing of surface water onsite and other references suggesting a connection to an existing drainage system. Either way there are no details of our surrounding land or the local drainage system will be protected from contamination of microplastics in the surface water being discharged.

SPC land

- No details provided by the applicant about the footpath access they wish to build on Council land including whether footpaths will be lit or dark.
- No Environmental Impact or Ecological Assessment specific to footpaths has been provided.
- As a footpath will run parallel to the swales which may contain lying water there is a danger of a person, especially a young child, falling into the swale particularly at night. No risk or H&S assessment has been provided and what safeguarding solutions will be implemented.
- The Sports Association will require permission from Speldhurst Parish Council to build the footpaths which has not been granted.
- The application is silent on where the site access would be but it is understood the applicant wishes this to be via the Recreation Ground. This will also require approval from Speldhurst Parish Council which has not been granted.

A general concern of SPC was that the applicant had not undertaken any community engagement or public consultation before submitting the planning application. This was despite informing SPC earlier in 2023 they would be doing so. And while LGCSA have understandably encouraged their members and supporters to actively support the application it is noted a significant number of the letters of support are from people who do not live in the Parish and of those that do, the majority do not live close to the area which will be most affected. The fact that a significant number of the supporters of this application live outside the Parish simply reinforces how real the risk and the concerns are about the ability of the local infrastructure to cope with the influx of potential users. A comment from a local resident that resonated with the PC was that the football club had become a victim of its own success, and while they should be applauded for this, they also need to recognise the unsuitability of the location for the 3G pitch.

24/00279/LBC – 2 The Walks, The Green, Groombridge

Proposal: Listed Building Consent – Enlarge bathroom to accommodate a shower.

Decision: We support this application which is small in scope and fully in keeping with the fabric of this historic listed building.

24/00238/TPO – 6 Ironstones, Langton Green

Proposal: Trees: Silver Birch (T1) – Reduce overhang to boundary line.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Tree Officer.

24/00253/TCA – Holly Tree Cottage, 2 Penshurst Road, Speldhurst

Proposal: Trees in a Conservation Area Notification – Leylandii (T1) – Remove branch resting on shed and reduce by approximately 40%.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Conservation Officer.

24/00215/TPO – David Salomons Estate, Broomhill Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells

Proposal: Trees: Oak (T1) – Dismantle to 3.5m habitat pole; Oak (T2) – Raise canopy and cut back 3 no. low hanging branches to give 1.5m clearance from garage.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Tree Officer.

24/00232/FULL – Beech Hanger, Groombridge Road, Groombridge

Proposal: Variation of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 22/02495/FULL – Reduce glazing on extension.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Planning Officer.

24/00204/FULL – Birchetts Stables and Barn, Franks Hollow Road, Speldhurst

Proposal: Removal of riding area, conversion of existing stable to dwelling, conversion of barn to garage and shed.

Decision: We request that the Conservation and AONB officers inspect this application for its merits with regard to the AONB but otherwise remain neutral.

24/00174/TPO – 12 Roopers, Speldhurst

Proposal: Trees: Tilia (T1) – Raise crown over highway approximately 5.5m; Beech (T2) – Raise crown approximately 4.5m and reduce back lower limbs over driveway approximately 1.5-2m, cutting to appropriate branch axils.

Decision: We support this application.

24/00128/TPO – 2 Ironstones, Langton Green

Proposal: Trees: Oak (O1 & O2) – Removal of epicormic growth from trunk up to crown and deadwood.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Planning Officer.

24/00086/LBC - The Cottage, Speldhurst Hill, Speldhurst

Proposal: Listed Building Consent – Alterations to ancillary garage including addition of rooflight, change from garage door to cladding and window, alterations to materials in relation to 23/02911/FULL.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Conservation Officer.

24/00063/FULL – Manor Court Farm, Ashurst Road, Ashurst

Proposal: Variation of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 23/02668/FULL – Replace proposed plans to show southward enlargement of lounge/kitchen/dining area. Changes to east elevation fenestration, relocate front door to east elevation. Alterations to rooflights. Adjustments to site plan.

Decision: We object and share the concerns raised by the Conservation Officer and agree the proposal would be harmful to the Farmhouse.

24/00274/FULL – 27 Great Footway, Langton Green

Proposal: Erection of two-storey side extension, single-storey rear extension and removal of chimney.

Decision: Remain neutral, leave to Planning Officer.

9. Compliance Issues

The Assistant Clerk had reported the issue of shipping containers installed on private land on Leggs Lane to TWBC who had confirmed that the containers are temporary and therefore permitted in the short term.

10. Items for information

- Date of next Planning Committee meeting: 11th March 2024 – Palmer Room, LGVH.
- The Assistant Clerk was asked to email Borough Cllr Allen and the Case Officer, requesting that the application for the 3G pitch on the Langton Green Recreation Ground is called in on behalf of the Planning Committee.
- Burrswood: Cllr Norton advised that some of the houses in the estate are being actioned off. Additionally, residents would welcome a more unified and holistic approach to any building works carried out which would be more beneficial to the overall quality of works.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting finished at 9.25 pm.

Chair