

Local Government Act 1972



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

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held on Monday 3rd April 2023 at 7.30pm at Ashurst Village Hall, Ashurst

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Barrington-Johnson, Dooley, Lyle, Rajah, Rowe, Scarbrough, Soyke and Tarricone.

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Borough Cllrs Sankey and Willis were in attendance. Apologies had been received from County Cllr McInroy.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were approximately 18 members of the public present.

23/71 Covid Compliance

Those in attendance were free to decide whether to wear a mask according to their own wishes.

23/72 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for accuracy of the minutes. The recording would be deleted once the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting.

23/73 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Ellery (illness), Norton (away) and Turner (Covid-related).

23/74 Disclosure of Interests

Cllr Rowe declared an interest in item 14 as a shareholder of the Speldhurst Community Shop Ltd.

23/75 Declarations of Lobbying

Cllrs Curry and Lyle had been lobbied extensively on the Langton Green Pavilion.

23/76 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 6th March 2023

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

23/77 Public Open Session

There were approximately 18 Members of the Public present, including James Bowdidge, Anthony Fulford-Smith, Tom Franks, Guy Lambert, Rebecca Leach and Edward Pinnell.

- Anthony Fulford-Smith, a Governor from the Queen Victoria Hospital (QVH) Trust, East Grinstead made a presentation and sought opinions from Councillors and Members of the Public about what they would like to see at the QVH.

He explained that there were 26 elected Governors and their function was to hold the Trust's Non-Executive Directors to account. A 2022 reorganisation of the NHS had seen a change in the way healthcare administration was carried out, and it was now being managed by the Integrated Care Board. Following this change it was important to identify how to serve patients better and provide quality healthcare services. The QVH ranked highest in the country in 2022 for inpatient care. As a specialist hospital the areas of healthcare provided included burns, orthodontics, skin cancer treatment and sleep services. There was a minor injuries unit, and a community diagnostics contract had also recently been awarded which would enable GPs to book fast-tracked X-rays and other services for patients.

Anthony Fulford-Smith invited questions, and Cllr Dooley asked if there were any plans to make minor injuries into major injuries or add an accident and emergency department. Anthony Fulford-Smith said that although he was not dismissing this possibility it was unlikely, since the hospital was a specialist one. Cllr Soyke commented that while she had always been impressed with the service and treatment she received, parking was an issue, and Anthony Fulford-Smith advised that off-site parking was readily available on the roads around the hospital.

Rebecca Leach commented that her family had benefited from the QVH's services, and she had been impressed to hear that it was number one in the country for burns treatment.

Further questions could be emailed to qvh.governors@nhs.net and copies of the latest newsletter were available at the meeting to take away. The Chair thanked Anthony Fulford-Smith for attending and he left the meeting at 7.45 pm.

- Edward Pinnell spoke about the Speldhurst Chapel project on behalf of the Speldhurst Shop and Community Hub Committee. He said that the Chapel represented a one-off opportunity to acquire an asset and move the shop and post office into a permanent location. It would also be possible to retain space for some of the community-based activities that had taken place there in the past. If the Parish Council were able to acquire the chapel for that purpose, the Committee would then raise funds from the village to extend and revise the property. He added that full details could be found in the Committee's report, and he would also be happy to answer questions. The Chair thanked Edward Pinnell and he said he would bring forward agenda item 14, relating to the Speldhurst Chapel project, for discussion immediately after the public open session.
- James Bowdidge, Chair of Langton Green Village Society (LGVS) was attending to speak about the Langton Pavilion Café. He requested assurance from the Parish Council that they would not concede any further legal rights over Langton Green Sports Pavilion to Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA). The Chair told James Bowdidge that all the Parish Council's members of the Langton Green Pavilion review panel were in attendance at the meeting and assured him that although they were unable to give assurance at this stage, his request would inform their ongoing discussions. The Chair emphasised that discussions would be held with full transparency and James Bowdidge would be welcome to attend.
The Chair added that he would bring forward a discussion of agenda item 16, relating to Langton Green Pavilion, for discussion immediately after the public open session.

23/78 Borough and County Councillor's Reports

- Cllr Sankey did not have anything borough council related to report since Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) had entered a period of purdah prior to local elections on 4th May. However, he did have an update to make in his role as Mediator between LGCSA, Emma Howden of the Langton Pavilion Café and Speldhurst Parish Council. Cllr Sankey reported that the mediation process was still in place, and an extension of Mrs Howden's license had been agreed until 31st May. Cllr Sankey's next step was to meet with LGCSA on 12th April.
- Cllr Willis said that she had come to say goodbye as she was stepping down from her role as Borough Councillor due to family commitments. She wished the Parish Council well and the Chair thanked her for her support during her times as Borough Councillor.

23/79 Chair's Report

The Chair paid tribute to Cllrs Soyke, Barrington-Johnson and Rajah, who would not be standing for re-election in May.

Cllr Soyke had spent over 20 years as a Parish Councillor, during which time she had also served as a Borough Councillor, Deputy Mayor and Mayor. She was also a Trustee of Ashurst Village Hall and had been instrumental in the building of the new hall. The Parish Council had benefited enormously from Cllr Soyke's knowledge of environmental, arboreal and planning matters, and thanked Cllr Soyke for her immense contributions. Cllr Soyke said she had enjoyed every minute of her time with the Parish Council.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson had served for 9 years as a Parish Councillor, spending 6 years as Chair. The Chair said how much he had personally valued the reassuring advice Cllr Barrington-Johnson gave him as he settled into the role of Chair himself. He also commented on Cllr Barrington-Johnson's contributions to the Air Traffic Committee, where his ability to understand and summarise complex issues had been invaluable. Cllr Barrington-Johnson said it was a pleasure and a privilege to serve the parish and wished the Council every success for the future.

Cllr Rajah had been a Parish Councillor since 2020, making a highly effective Chair of the Planning Committee. The Chair thanked Cllr Rajah for his patient, calm and caring presence, which would be missed by staff and Councillors alike.

23/80 Clerk's Report

- The Clerk had distributed parking fliers to Councillors, which should be issued at their discretion to offending vehicles parked on pavements in the parish.
- The deadline for nomination forms to be submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) for the local elections was 4th April.

23/81 Speldhurst Chapel Project

Councillors were asked to consider a request from the Speldhurst Shop and Community Hub Committee to apply to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) to purchase Speldhurst Chapel on behalf of the community.

The Chair asked Edward Pinnell if an unsuccessful funding application to the Community Ownership Fund had affected the scope of the project's plans. Edward Pinnell replied that it was not felt necessary to adjust plans at this stage, since the project had not yet tested how much money it could raise through other sources. If the project was unable to raise as much as expected, it would become necessary to re-address its plans.

The Chair confirmed that a formal application by Speldhurst Shop and Community Hub Committee had now been made to the Parish Council and, with Councillors' approval, the process of applying for a PWLB could now commence in accordance with Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) guidelines. A parish consultation was a necessary part of this process and would need a certain percentage of responses in favour of the proposal to progress. He asked if the Speldhurst Shop and Community Hub Committee could source volunteers to help distribute consultation literature around the parish. Edward Pinnell confirmed that this would be possible.

The Chair referred to the Responsible Financial Officer's (RFO) report, which proposed that the Parish Council should look to own the building as an asset rather than providing the funds and walking away, as had first been suggested.

Cllr Rowe suggested that it was premature to vote on beginning the PWLB application process. He recommended that the Parish Council gather more information to answer questions such as who would be responsible for ongoing maintenance costs, and if an extension was built, who would own it. He said that while these were all issues that could be worked through, the Parish Council should not move forward until they had exercised due diligence.

The Chair said that ongoing costs would be devolved to the Chapel project.

Cllr Rowe also questioned what the Parish Council would be permitted to do with their asset if the community shop ceased trading. What control would it have over who it could sell the building to?

Cllr Lyle supported Cllr Rowe's suggestion of a working group to clarify the operational management of the structure and recommended agreeing terms of reference before proceeding further.

Cllr Rajah agreed it was advisable to confirm what the Parish Council was committing to, since the PWLB process would take time and effort. The Chair asked Edward Pinnell if Speldhurst Chapel project representatives would sit down with a Working Group, to which Mr Pinnell agreed as long as this was without delay as the deadline for making an offer on the Chapel was September. It was **RESOLVED** to approve a Working Group made up of Cllrs Curry, Lyle, Rowe and Tarricone to address the questions raised. It was also **RESOLVED** to approve an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Parish Council, so that Councillors could vote on starting the application process as soon as the Working Group had made their recommendations, should it be necessary.

Members of the Speldhurst Shop and Community Hub Committee left the meeting at 8.05pm.

23/82 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG)

- a) **Update on the investigation into the energy efficiency of the boiler** – Cllr Lyle reported that Kestrel was coming in the next few weeks to modify the boiler system. The Chair allowed a question from Guy Lambert, Chair of LGCSA, who asked if Councillors were aware that the Football Association provided funding for heating. The Chair said that if this funding extended to the supply of hot water, the Parish Council would be pleased to hear more.
- b) **Update on the Pavilion Review** – Due to the ongoing mediation process, there were no updates from the Parish Council and Cllr Sankey confirmed that he had no further updates to add to the report he had made earlier in the meeting.
- c) **Rates Review** – The Chair said that the Parish Council's letter had been sent to TWBC, and Cllr Sankey confirmed that it had now been seen by Lee Collier, the Financial Officer. The Financial Officer had indicated that he would not be following up on the Parish Council's letter. It was agreed that as the Billing Authority's approach to rates relief might change in the future, the Parish Council should demand a formal response from TWBC.
- d) **SPC Pavilion Ltd** – Cllrs Barrington-Johnson and Soyke would need to be replaced as members of SPC Pavilion LTD, and the Chair said there were two courses of action – either to replace them or wind down the company. The Chair recommended that the company should cease and the Parish Council should assume responsibility for paying rates. Cllr Barrington-Johnson added that this would settle the question over rates relief. Cllr Lyle said that to dissolve the company it would be necessary to put a notice in the Law Gazette. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the dissolving of SPC LTD.

23/83 General Matters – Actionable tasks that do not fall to a committee.

New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting

	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
26/23	Update following policies on website where applicable: Budget Virement, Grants, Internal Financial Control System, Investment Policy, and Data Protection.	Clerk	03/04/23	
27/23	Set up Cllr Ellery as a bank signatory.	RFO	03/04/23	

28/23	Make virement and add to committed column for grant to Clerk/RFO Speldhurst Recreation Ground.		03/04/23	
29/23	Make virement and add to committed column for grant to Clerk/RFO Langton Green Village Hall.		03/04/23	
30/23	Organise Speldhurst Chapel Project WG meeting with Cllrs Clerk Lyle, Rowe, Tarricone and Curry.		03/04/23	
31/23	Send rates letter to TWBC and request formal response.	Clerk/Chair	03/04/23	
32/23	Dissolve SPC Pavilion Ltd.	Cllr Lyle	03/04/23	
33/23	Update and publish Spring Newsletter.	Asst Clerk (CB)	03/04/23	
34/23	Update Internal Audit and Highways Terms of Reference on website.	Clerk	03/04/23	
35/23	Pay printing costs of Slow Down for Horses Sign.	Clerk/RFO	03/04/23	
36/23	Accept quotation and pay for fencing work at The Green, Groombridge.	Clerk/RFO	03/04/23	
37/23	Cllr Tarricone to take over chairship of Air Traffic Cttee with handover from Cllr Barrington-Johnson.	Cllrs Tarricone and Barrington-Johnson	03/04/23	
38/23	EV Charging WG to meet to discuss EV charging contract.	Cllrs Turner, Curry, Lyle, Barrington-Johnson	03/04/23	
Ongoing				
89/22	Confirm appointment of Pavilion Building Manager.	Pav Man Cttee	04/11/22	On hold
97/22	Purchase and installation of horse warning signs.	Highways WG	04/11/22	Complete
3/23	Replace heating system at Pavilion.	Cllrs Curry/Lyle	09/01/23	In progress
9/23	Trial weed control April-Sept without use of glyphosate.	Env WG	09/01/23	In progress
17/23	Instruct Kestrel Mechanical Services Ltd to carry out the work on the Pavilion boiler.	Cllr Lyle	06/03/23	In progress
18/23	Send Rates letter to TWBC.	Clerk	06/03/23	Complete
19/23	Promote KCC Community Services Consultation on social media.	Asst Clerk (CB)	06/03/23	Completed
20/23	Put Planning Terms of Reference on website.	Clerk	06/03/23	Completed
21/23	Submit nomination papers for May elections by 4/4/23.	All Cllrs	06/03/23	In progress
22/23	Sign up for Great British Spring Clean, Cllrs to take part. and promote on social media.	Clerk/Asst Clerk Cllrs	06/03/23	Completed
23/23	Confirm acceptance of Landscape Services Contract.	Clerk	06/03/23	Completed
24/23	Put AWG policies on website.	Clerk	06/03/23	Completed
25/23	Share Gatwick Briefing Session slides with Cllrs.	Cllr Barrington-Johnson/Clerk	06/03/23	Completed

23/84 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Scarbrough

- a) There had been a meeting on 20th March.
- b) There had been no budget virements.
- c) Interim payments made since the last meeting:
 - Unity Acct:** £48 KALC - training; £336 The Living Forest - tree works; £7.05* K Harman - postage; £145.76* Viking Direct - toilet roll and paper; £7012.80 Commercial Services Trading - path installation.
 - Mastercard:** £3.49* Toolstation - spade tape connector.
- d) Decisions made under delegated authority are starred above.

- e) It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the following policies on the recommendation of the Finance Committee:
- Budget Virement Policy
 - Grant Awarding Guidelines
- f) It was **RESOLVED** to approve Cllr Ellery as a new Signatory for Unity Bank.
- g) To consider the following grant applications:
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve a grant of £7,000 to Speldhurst Recreation Ground towards the replacement of play equipment. This was in addition to an earlier grant of £8,000 for the same item.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve a grant of £10,000 to Langton Green Village Hall (LGVH) towards the cost of replacing the existing toilet facilities.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve a grant of £15,000 to LGVH towards the cost of solar panel installation, subject to confirmation of this amount by a second quotation. Funds would come from the next financial year's budget.
- h) It was **RESOLVED** to retrospectively approve the virement from the RRIM account (Repair, Renewal, Improvement and Management) earmarked reserves to cover the Langton Green Pavilion shortfall.

23/85 Accounts for Payment

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

Date	Payee Name	Reference	Amount £	Detail
04/04/23	ETI	MT2451	40.80	Re-calibrated Thermometer
04/04/23	Knockout Print	MT2452	66.00	Signs – Danger Horses
04/04/23	M R Lawrence	MT2446	75.00	Grass Cut – Speldhurst
04/04/23	MR Lawrence	MT2447	100.00	Grass Cut – Langton Green
04/04/23	Katie Neve	MT2448	59.40	Expense – mileage
12/04/23	HMRC	MT2449	1,159.19	NI and Tax
12/04/23	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	439.31	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme
20/04/23	Employees	MT2450	4,756.92	Salaries
20/04/23	EDF Energy	DD	1,721.00	Pavilion Energy
28/04/23	Castle Water	DD	50.63	Pavilion Water
04/04/23	Cloudy IT	MT2451	272.82	IT Support
04/04/23	M:power accounting	MT2452	54.00	Payroll
	TOTAL PAYMENTS		£8,795.07	

23/86 Planning Committee – Report by Cllr Rajah

A meeting had been held on 13th March. 8 applications had been considered on which the committee had remained neutral. A resident had attended to give some background to her application, and Cllr Rajah said this had been very helpful.

Cllr Rajah reported that residents had been in contact to express their concerns about the buildings on the Burrswood Estate, which were beginning to fall into disrepair. Cllr Rajah had written to the planning department at TWBC asking them to address this.

23/87 Annual Parish Meeting 2023 – Update

The Chair advised that meeting preparations were well underway with help from Cllrs Norton and Scarborough. There would be one more meeting to finalise details.

23/88 Spring Newsletter

Cllr Ellery had written about the Precept and Cllr Norton had written a Highways update. Details had also been given about the APM and the forthcoming elections. The Chair and Cllr Soyke had sent photos to be added. Cllr Rowe requested that an explanation about the pavement parking fliers be included, so that residents could understand why the council were doing this. Cllr Barrington-Johnson added that the point should be made that this had been done before. Cllr Scarbrough noted there was no update about the pavilion and Cllr Sankey suggested that the last update be included. The Assistant Clerk (CB) advised that this update was also on the website and had gone into the latest edition of Langton Life. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Newsletter, subject to these amendments.

23/89 Elections May 2023

The Clerk confirmed that 9 Councillors had now submitted their nomination forms, enabling the Parish Council to retain the General Power of Competence. There were two individuals who were interested in being co-opted on to the Parish Council after elections had taken place. This left two further vacancies to fill and the Assistant Clerk (CB) would continue to let residents know about this via the usual media channels.

23/90 Working Group (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 WG** – It was **RESOLVED** to approve the following:
 - Internal Financial Control System – this would need to be reviewed yearly.
 - Investment Policy – this could be reviewed every 2 years.
 - Data Protection Policy – This was a new policy introduced by the Clerk.
 - Internal Audit Terms of Reference (TOR) – These applied to the Internal Auditor who visited once a year.
- b) **Highways WG** – There had been a meeting on 7th March.
 - **Signs for Horses** – It was **RESOLVED** to approve these at a cost of £65.
 - **Future Meetings of the Highways WG** – It was **RESOLVED** to approve that the Highways WG would revert to committee status after the May Annual Statutory meeting. Cllr Turner had indicated that he would be able to return to face-to-face meetings at this time.
 - **Terms of Reference** – It was resolved to approve the terms of reference.
- c) **Amenities WG (AWG)** – There had been no meeting.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve emergency fencing works at The Green, Old Groombridge.
- d) **Air Traffic WG** – There had been no meeting.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve Cllr Tarricone as Chair of the Air Traffic WG. Cllr Barrington-Johnson agreed to consider staying on as a Member of Public for an interim period while Cllr Tarricone settled into his new role.
- e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – There had been no meeting.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to delegate a working group consisting of Cllrs Barrington-Johnson, Curry, Lyle and Turner, to look at the Electric Vehicle Charge Point contract.
- f) **KALC** – There was nothing to report.

23/91 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

- 17th April – Planning Committee
- 24th April – Governance Committee
- 25th April – Environment Working Group
- 9th May – Annual Full Council
- 15th May – Planning Committee
- 18th May – Annual Open Parish Meeting
- 22nd May – Amenities Committee

23/92 Items for Information:

There were none.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.38pm.

Chair