

Speldhurst Parish Council  
PARISH PLAN  
A vision for the future



Produced by Speldhurst Parish Plan Working Group

September 2016



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All information from the questionnaire was given to Lake Market Research and will remain secure and confidential. Details were only used for research purposes and will not be passed on to any third parties or used for marketing purposes in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## FOREWORD FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

This Parish Plan was developed, at the instigation of the Parish Council, by a Working Group of volunteers from within the Parish. An enormous amount of time and consideration has gone into the development of the Plan and its proposed actions, including using information helpfully provided by residents in a series of open meetings and a comprehensive survey of all households. It also reflects information secured from local businesses through face-to-face meetings. The proposed actions cover the full range of activities of Speldhurst Parish Council plus a number of areas in which the Council is not normally directly or indirectly involved.

The Plan provides an intentionally demanding list of actions and timelines. The Parish Council does not have the resources (physical or financial) to address all the proposed actions and in the identified timelines. Nevertheless, the Council has decided to adopt the plan in its entirety, with the objective of addressing as many of the actions as it can. The proposed actions will all contribute to an improvement in our environment, and will remain valid aspirations even if they are not achievable within the timetable proposed in the Plan. Adopting the Plan unaltered has the merit of ensuring that all the recommended actions are captured.

Whilst the Parish Council will work on many of the individual items, the Plan's action items include many that require the involvement of volunteers from within the community. The involvement of volunteers from within the Parish will be crucial in enabling us to bring about the many improvements proposed. The Survey identified the fact that a large number of residents were willing to volunteer for various activities within the Parish, although all survey responses were anonymous. One recommendation in the Plan is the development of a register of volunteers and as the first action in response I would like to appeal to all those prepared to devote a small amount of time to enhancing our community to submit their names as soon as possible to the Parish Clerk, Chris May, so we can start to compile a Volunteer List.

This has been a huge exercise first to ascertain the wishes of the community and then to develop a Plan for the next few years to address your concerns and aspirations. I would like to record my thanks, and those of the whole Parish Council, to the volunteer working group and in particular its Chairman Ken Howes, as well as Ed Langridge and Simon Norton, for the tireless and unstinting effort they have, over a considerable period of time, put into creating this Plan for 'us' (that is, the whole Parish community).

Neil Barrington-Johnson

Chairman, Speldhurst Parish Council



Speldhurst Parish comprises the villages of Ashurst, Langton Green, Old Groombridge and Speldhurst. The village of Groombridge is split with the larger part being within Withyham Parish in East Sussex and Old Groombridge within Speldhurst Parish. For most residents Tunbridge Wells is the nearest large town. Most of the Parish is semi-rural or rural, with Langton Green being the largest and most populated village. The Parish enjoys conservation areas, areas of Green Belt and areas of landscape importance. Recently, Country Life voted Langton Green as one of the best Kent commuter villages, although that could easily apply to the other villages in the Parish.

In 2014 Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) agreed to the development of a Parish Plan based on the needs of residents. It set up a Working Group to take on the project and the Plan outlined in this document is the result of their efforts. Crucially it is founded on an understanding of residents' needs and concerns which have been ascertained from both qualitative and quantitative research.

The research findings drawn upon to develop the Plan come from:

1. The Residents' Survey conducted in late 2015, to which about 50 % of households in the Parish responded. Details of the Survey results can be found on the Parish website at [www.speldhurstparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.speldhurstparishcouncil.gov.uk)\*
2. Feedback from Open Days held within each village during 2015.
3. Interviews with a range of businesses in 2015.

*\*Where Survey percentages are shown they relate to the percentage of households responding to the specific Survey question*

A Parish Plan sets out the vision, objectives and initiatives that the Parish Council will take over the next few years to improve the quality of life for residents of the Parish. It is a non-statutory neighbourhood planning tool, which means that it may be considered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC), but will carry less weight in the decision-making process on planning matters than a formally adopted Neighbourhood Plan. However, an advantage of a non-statutory neighbourhood planning tool is that the scope does not have to be limited to matters covered by planning law. So the Parish Plan can and does include a range of community issues and activities as part of a Parish vision. It can also be the foundation and evidence base on which a Neighbourhood Plan could be developed. SPC will consider in the coming months whether to progress to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The Parish Plan provides a framework for action by SPC, and other volunteers working with SPC, in the community. It is intended to cover at least the next 5 years; but the programme of actions outlined in the Plan will be reviewed and modified, as necessary, and in view of changing circumstances, on an annual basis.

The Plan is divided into 12 Sections, each covering a different topic. Each Section summarises findings from research within the community, challenges and constraints in tackling the issues raised, and how the Parish Council proposes to respond. Planned actions are briefly highlighted indicating possible timeframes for implementation, possible levels of cost involved to the Parish, and organisations, agencies and individuals that would be consulted or partnered with to achieve the objectives. Recognising that all residents in the Parish can help in improving the quality of life for all, each Section also provides some examples of 'what we can do as individuals'.

Alongside other Parishes across the country, the Plan is set in the context of some significant challenges facing local government in the foreseeable future: the pressure for additional housing, environmental pressures, infrastructure challenges, maintaining the character and integrity of villages, financial constraints and how to get more residents involved in volunteering in their communities. Any Government cut-backs can filter down to Parish level and might curtail activities that residents would consider important, or require an increase in funding through the Precept.

Traffic and highways issues in the Parish have increased in recent years and are adversely impacting on the quality of life for residents. It is anticipated that over the next five years road traffic volume will increase due to population increase in the Tunbridge Wells Borough. There will also be a growth in cycling and in addition both residents and local businesses are affected by the lack of parking facilities within the villages, as well as by road conditions.

### Research Findings

- a) The 2015 Household Survey confirmed that road traffic remains residents' biggest concern. It was also the top concern in 2010.

Concern over speeding and related problems came through in several sections, with as much as 90% of respondents indicating concern over speeding and a similar 88% concerned about traffic volumes and pollution.

- b) Traffic is the top issue cited by those who believe quality of life in the Parish has declined. Several factors drive this response:

- Speeding is the top/joint top traffic concern in Ashurst, Old Groombridge and Speldhurst and the second in Langton Green.
- Road maintenance and pothole repair is the top/joint top traffic concern in Ashurst and Langton Green, the second in Old Groombridge and the third in Speldhurst.
- Other significant traffic related concerns are heavy goods vehicles (65%), pavement parking (53%), roadside parking (44%), cycle lane availability (38%), number of cyclists (25%) and number of pedestrian crossings (25%).

- c) Residents favour a range of responses, with traffic calming the most popular measure (54%) and school 20mph zones, improved speed signage, speed cameras and lower general speed limits also securing significant support.

- d) 38% of household respondents have children who walk to school and so availability of safe pavements, pedestrian crossings and 20mph speed limits is of paramount importance.

- e) Residents are divided on whether more cycling in the Parish is desirable or not. There is significant support for the introduction of cycle lanes, which would encourage more cyclists, but equally many are concerned about the traffic impact. There may be an age factor causing this division, with younger people more likely to cycle. 6% of household survey respondents have children cycling to school.

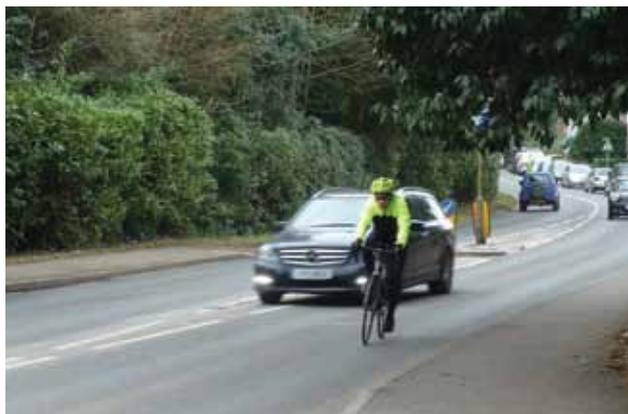


## Challenges and Constraints

- a) For road traffic, most powers and policy levers lie with government or agencies at the national or county level, and not the Parish Council.
- b) This constraint is exacerbated by recent reductions to public expenditure plans, which mean that the relevant agencies will have smaller capital and running cost budgets with which to address traffic concerns.
- c) SPC has a role, and is doing much good work in relation to Speedwatch training and sessions, speed limits, interactive speed signs, warning notices, parking, accident reporting, traffic surveys and police liaison. However, it is clear from the Residents' Survey that SPC will need to do even more if it is to exert a measurable impact on traffic problems.
- d) TWBC has recently approved a policy to introduce cycle routes, including one which goes through part of Langton Green. At present there are no dedicated cycle lanes or roads in the Parish but there is unauthorised cycling on pavements, especially on the main Langton Road (A264) through Langton Green. Whilst SPC will actively support the use of cycles rather than cars in the Parish, the nature of the Parish road network makes it almost impossible to create separate cycle lanes on some key roads within the Parish.
- e) The growth in cycle traffic on the main interconnecting roads within the villages will increase the risk of accidents unless dedicated cycle lanes can be created.
- f) The absence of adequate parking facilities in some areas of the Parish means that pavement parking is, unfortunately, commonplace in those locations.

## Parish Council Aims

- a) With the extent of traffic problems and the constraints noted above, achieving measurable improvements over the next five years will be a major challenge. Given the importance of traffic concerns to residents' overall quality of life, SPC will tackle that challenge robustly as a central part of its Parish Plan. The Highways Committee will spearhead implementation of the planned actions agreed within SPC.
- b) When specific problems arise it will continue to be the responsibility of Councillors from each village to report and propose measures to SPC.
- c) SPC will make full use of the limited resources and powers it has to help deliver its objectives on traffic. It will actively engage the local community in this work.
- d) The key to achieving SPC's goals on traffic is to maximise its influence and leverage over Kent County Council (KCC), Kent Highways and Kent Police. SPC will do that by developing well-researched proposals for improvement and advocating these in imaginative, persistent and co-ordinated ways.
- e) SPC will learn and apply lessons from the extensive work it has done thus far on traffic and highways issues.
- f) SPC will co-operate with TWBC in identifying and investigating cycle lane possibilities and any agreed TWBC plan for their introduction, where appropriate. This will be in line with TWBC's Borough-wide strategy on cycling.
- g) At some stage it may be necessary to consider whether residents would be prepared to accept a higher Precept to be able to fund more traffic-solving measures.



## ACTION PLAN

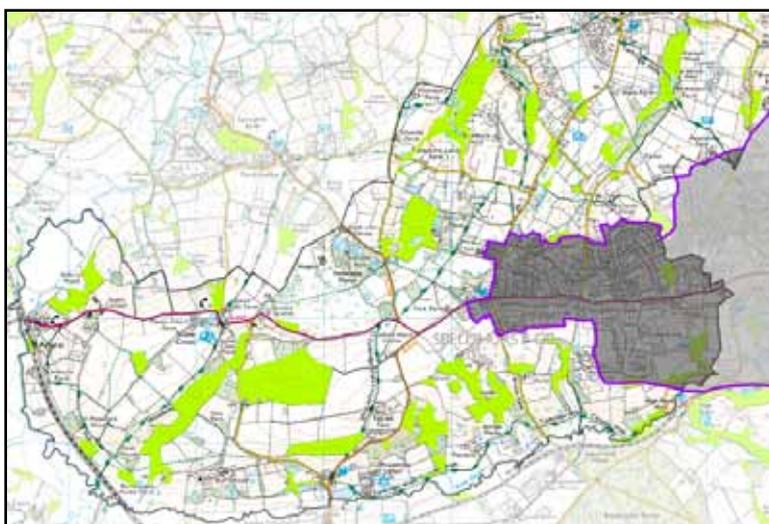
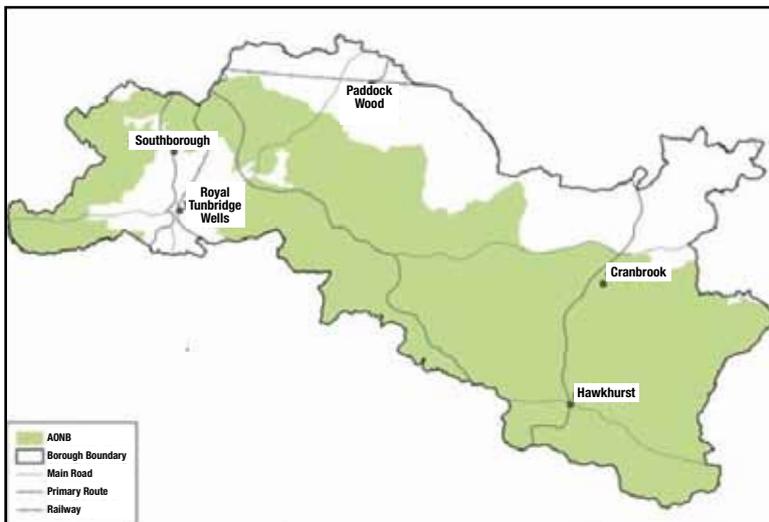
ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
<b>Strategic Influencing</b>				
Chair of SPC will invite the Leader of KCC, the Director of Kent Highways, Transportation and Waste and the Kent Chief Constable to visit the Parish to gain first-hand insights into the traffic issues experienced by rural neighbourhoods like ours.	High	By 31.12.16	None	KCC; Kent Police
SPC will put in place a simple communications plan for mobilising public support on selected traffic issues through local community organizations, press, broadcasters and social media platforms.	Medium	By 31.12.17	Low	Local media & community groups
Chair of SPC will write to the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner formally requesting more concerted police enforcement of the law on speeding in blackspots within the Parish.	Medium	ASAP	None	PCC
SPC to produce a short written assessment of how well Kent Highways and Kent Police have responded to the Parish's traffic needs and send this to the Director of Kent Highways and the Chief Constable.	Medium	End of Financial Year – starting April 2017	Low	Kent Highways Kent Police
<b>Enforcement</b>				
Build an active team of at least 20 trained Speedwatch volunteers and maintain this going forward.	High	By 1.7.17	Low	Kent Police; local residents
Undertake 12 Speedwatch sessions across the Parish each financial year. Request Kent Police to attend at least 4 of these.	Medium	By 5.4.17 & each year thereafter	Low	Kent Police: local residents
Report all results of Speedwatch sessions to Kent Police within 10 working days.	Medium	System in place by 30.9.16	Low	Kent Police
Operate a rota of Speed Interactive Displays (SIDs) in agreed village locations during 2016 and subsequent years.	High	By 30.9.16	Low	Kent Highways; Kent Police
<b>Design Solutions</b>				
Seek implementation of a) the current request for 20 mph speed zones around Langton Green and Speldhurst Primary Schools and b) consider their application to other areas of the Parish, not just outside schools, e.g. on roads where there are no pavements.	High	by 31.3.17(a) & 31.3.18 (b)	Med.	KCC; TWBC; Kent Police; village primary schools

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Develop and submit formal written requests to KCC/Kent Highways for traffic calming measures for the Parish's worst speeding locations (assuming 4 for now), incorporating pedestrian crossings and improved provision for pedestrians and cyclists where appropriate.	High	By 1.7.17	Med.	KCC; TWBC; Kent Highways; Kent Police
<b>Evidence Gathering</b>				
Strengthen and formalise arrangements for systematically gathering and reporting data on accidents and dangerous parking. Remind residents of the process for reporting accidents to SPC.	Medium	By 31.12.16	Low	Kent Highways; Kent Police
Further publicise how residents can report accidents, potholes and other highways issues, including user-friendly links from the SPC Website. Encourage residents to report directly to Kent Highways/Police, copying in SPC.	Medium	By 31.12.16	Low	Kent Highways; Kent Police
<b>Cycling</b>				
Develop an SPC strategy re cycling in the Parish and advise TWBC to ensure consistency with any TWBC proposed cycle lane routes that affect the Parish. Volunteer to draft.	High	By 31.12.17	None	TWBC; KCC; Volunteer advisers
Seek a volunteer to evaluate feasibility and viability of cycle lane from The Hare, Langton Green to The Spa Hotel.	High	By 31.12.16	High (To KCC)	TWBC, KCC (planning started)
Consider the merits and feasibility of 'cycle warning signs' at known danger spots.	Medium	End 2017	Low/ Medium	TWBC, KCC
<b>Pavements</b>				
Investigate increased signage relating to lack of pavements ('pedestrians in road' or 'no pavements') in dangerous locations, e.g. Groombridge Hill.	Medium	Mid 2017	Medium	

#### What we can do as individuals

- Volunteer for Speedwatch.
- Set a good example when parking - avoid parking on pavements unless absolutely necessary and avoid parking in locations which obstruct the road view of other motorists.
- Keep within the speed limit at all times.
- Avoid cycling abreast or making it difficult for other traffic to pass.
- Be courteous to other road users at all times.
- Report any observed or known accidents to SPC.

Residents consider the protection of the Parish rural environment and green space as the most important factor in making the Parish a ‘good place to live’.



The Parish is situated on the western side of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, largely designated as an “area of outstanding natural beauty” (AONB), and part of the High Weald, a medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills, sandstone outcrops, small irregular-shaped fields, scattered farmsteads, and ancient Rights of Way. Recreation grounds are located in the communities of Langton Green, Ashurst and Speldhurst, as well as village greens in both Old Groombridge and Langton Green. There are also three conservation areas within the boundaries of the Parish, one located in Speldhurst village centre, and in areas adjacent to the village greens in Langton Green and Old Groombridge. There are also about 50 public footpaths and two bridleways in the Parish. Many are heavily used.

**Research Findings**

- a) The 2015 Household Survey confirmed that residents place the highest possible value on protecting and enhancing the countryside, green spaces and the rural character of villages across Speldhurst Parish.
- b) Most households rate all aspects of environmental protection as highly important: countryside conservation (98%); protecting green areas (96%); tree conservation (95%); footpath maintenance and networks (96% and 92%) and preserving village identity (91%).
- c) The most pressing threats to the environment are seen to be traffic (speed and volume); loss of green/open spaces; loss of village character; planning decisions, and aircraft noise.

d) Other concerns raised by residents include footpaths maintenance, litter, fly-tipping, and tree preservation and management.

### **Challenges and Constraints**

- a) Population growth and urbanisation in the South-East creates major environmental challenges.
- b) Most relevant powers and policy levers are above Parish Council level.
- c) Public expenditure cuts may weaken environmental protections. For example, KCC has dropped many of our Parish footpaths from their official clearance schedule.
- d) Strong community and volunteer support is needed. For example, Public Rights of Way such as footpaths and bridleways are valued as a Parish asset and there is a need for their ongoing maintenance by a team of volunteers.

### **Parish Council Aims**

- a) Given residents' priorities, SPC will make robust actions on environmental issues a key part of its Parish Plan, drawing on the experience of the existing Planning Committee.
- b) SPC will continue to pay rigorous attention to its Environmental Policy, revisiting it and updating it as necessary.
- c) SPC will strive to maximise its influence/leverage over environmental decision-makers and actively engage with the local community on the main issues.
- d) SPC will consider the creation of a community-led Environment Group to support its activities.
- e) SPC will go beyond resisting environmentally detrimental change; it will work proactively to celebrate, promote and enhance the Parish's environment as an asset for all.
- f) SPC will continue to work with volunteers in an effort to maintain key footpaths in the Parish for the convenience of residents. This may also encourage walkers from elsewhere to visit the Parish.
- e) Ongoing maintenance of Public Rights of Way will continue to be a Parish priority. In the Parish there is a dedicated group of footpath volunteers who undertake the necessary work, and it is anticipated that the Parish will need to continue to rely on these volunteers.



**ACTION PLAN**

Note: The Parish Plan sections on Housing and Planning, Highways and Traffic, and Gatwick also contain actions relating to environmental aspects.

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>PRIORITY</b>	<b>TIMETABLE</b>	<b>COST</b>	<b>PARTNERS</b>
<b>Information Gathering/Dissemination</b>				
Note and confirm the Parish’s environmentally protected areas/designations as mapped/listed on TWBC’s Website.	Medium	By 31.1.17	Low	TWBC; KCC
Encourage residents to use the above information by strongly promoting its availability and providing links from SPC’s Website.	Medium	By 31.3.17	Low	Village Societies
Provide residents with high quality signposting (via the SPC Website) to sources of information on how to protect their environment (e.g. monitoring/ countering tree diseases).	Medium	By 31.7.17	Low	Woodland Trust; Environment Agency
<b>Influencing</b>				
Produce a communication articulating the findings of the 2015 Residents’ Survey that protecting and improving the local countryside, green spaces and rural character of villages is a key priority of residents. This communication will feature on the SPC website and SPC will request its inclusion in village magazines.	High	By 31.3.17	None	Village Societies
In line with the above, review the SPC Environment Policy of 3rd March 2014 to strengthen reference where appropriate to the environmental protection issues highlighted in the Survey results.	High	By 31.1.17	None	
Share the above Policy Statement with key external stakeholders. SPC will take this into account in planning and decision making.	High	By 30.6.17	Low	TWBC; KCC
Proactively support protection of the environment within and around the Parish, emphasising Green Belt and conservation designations where possible.	High	Continuous	Low	TWBC; KCC
Work with local stakeholders in seeking to protect and enhance the Parish’s Village Greens as key community assets.	High	Continuous	Low	Village Societies; Green Owners; TWBC

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
<b>Operations</b>				
Consider the establishment of an Environment Group, also comprising volunteers, to monitor all environmental aspects within the Parish and to report on these periodically to SPC, with any recommendations as appropriate.	Medium	By 30.6.17	Low	Village Societies
Encourage residents to establish Environment Teams to plan and carry out litter picks and identify and perform other environmental actions, such as tree planting, TPO monitoring and liaising with footpaths group, with SPC approval/support.	High	By 31.12.17	Low Cost re tree planting could be high	Village Societies
Approach schools within the Parish about a) direct involvement in the environmental volunteering work above and/or b) awareness of local environmental protection issues.	Medium	By 31.5.17	Low	Langton & Speldhurst Primary Schools; Holmewood House.
Encourage residents to report to the appropriate authority environmental issues which require action such as fly-tipping, blocked drains and overgrown hedges, copying in the SPC Clerk.	Medium	By 31.12.17	Low	TWBC; Kent Highways
Continue to protect and maintain local footpaths and Rights of Way, involving Parish volunteers.	High	Ongoing	None	KCC, Kent High Weald Partnership
Environment Group to review progress against this Plan and advise on the environmental aspects of all SPC's operations.	Medium	Quarterly	Low	None

#### What we can do as individuals

- Drop no litter, and educate children not to do so either. Help pick up litter.
- Volunteer to help maintain local footpaths.
- Respect Tree Preservation Orders and replace trees which have died/been removed.
- Contribute to wildlife protection and monitoring.
- Control overgrown hedges, trees and bushes which are encroaching on footpaths and roads.
- As dog walkers, prevent dog-fouling and remove dog dirt using bags provided.
- Report cases of fly-tipping.
- Support/ participate in the Environment Committee.

Planning applications relating to properties within Speldhurst Parish can be found on the TWBC Planning Portal. Members of the public can comment on those applications on the Portal; they also can attend TWBC Planning Committee meetings and subject to certain conditions can comment on applications on the agenda.

TWBC consults all Parish Councils on planning applications within their Parish because of their local knowledge. SPC Planning Committee meets monthly; parishioners can also attend these meetings and can comment on applications on the agenda during the Public Open Session. The committee handles about a dozen applications per meeting and committee members carry out site visits as required. The recent trend in applications has related to extensions to existing housing rather than new building developments.

**NB** It is important to emphasise that, in relation to planning applications within the Parish, SPC is a consultee only. In common with any resident of the Parish, it has the right to make recommendations for approval or refusal, or to remain neutral. Where SPC recommends refusal, specific grounds based on valid planning reasons must be given. SPC has no power to impose its decision on the local planning authority, or to refuse a consent once it has been granted.

### Research Findings

- a) 41% of households are satisfied with the housing availability in the Parish overall and a further 31% are ambivalent.
- b) However, there is support (46%) for more affordable housing and homes for young people in particular, but this is on the basis that any developments do not have a detrimental impact on the environment or the character of the village communities; also if new homes are built most residents want such developments to be small (no more than 5 homes) and on previously developed land (also known as brownfield sites).
- c) 58% of households say that maintaining green space and rural environment should have a greater priority than building more homes to satisfy local needs. Just 5% consider that building more homes should be the priority.



### Challenges and Constraints

- a) SPC has limited powers in decisions regarding planning, but will continue to provide input and recommendations from local knowledge on key planning developments to TWBC. To strengthen SPC's influence in these matters, consideration will be given to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish.

- b) A large proportion of the Parish is already designated as Conservation Areas, Green Belt, Area of Landscape Importance, etc and there will be increasing pressure for development on such land. SPC will actively challenge planning decisions of TWBC or Central Government that it feels are inappropriate. However, it is important to understand that Green Belt and Conservation Areas are now being built on, due to the demand for additional housing. This demand can be used by developers to override local objections, and even local and Neighbourhood plans. As a result there is a risk of unwanted developments being imposed on us irrespective of, and despite the efforts of, SPC and TWBC to oppose them.
- c) There is increasing pressure from TWBC for more homes to be built within the Borough. There are sites on the TWBC Site Allocations Local Plan which could be considered for development.

### Parish Council Aims

- a) SPC seeks to safeguard the character and individual integrity of the village communities across the Parish and the pleasant semi-rural environment.
- b) SPC seeks to foster vibrant village communities, with housing availability for all age-groups, local shops and local amenities. These aims will be reflected in planning recommendations made to TWBC .
- c) Applications for small residential developments on infill and redevelopment on brownfield sites within the Parish will be supported subject to proposals being well-designed and meeting all relevant requirements set out in other policies in the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan and the Core Strategy, and where such development:
- Will not involve the outward extension of the built-up area of our villages and/or encroach onto Green Belt/AONB land;
  - Is not considered to be backland or unneighbourly development that requires unsuitable access, reduces the privacy of adjoining properties or is inconsistent with the character of the locality;
  - Provides a mix of housing types. Affordable housing targets on developments are set by TWBC, unless we develop our own affordable housing policy as part of a Neighbourhood Plan.
  - Be of good design. Proposals for all forms of new development must plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design. Applications proposing unsympathetic designs, that are inappropriate to their locations, or pay inadequate regard to issues of renewable energy technologies, landscape and biodiversity considerations are likely to be refused.

These criteria will also be applied to Affordable and Local Needs Housing proposals.



## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
SPC will consider whether it is necessary to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish.	High	2017	Medium	TWBC
Advise TWBC of the Residents' views re housing developments in the Parish; ascertain from TWBC where any Rural Exception sites exist and also the status of existing potential development sites within the Parish.	High	ASAP	None	TWBC, Village Societies
Work proactively with TWBC to protect the Parish from large scale developments that would impact adversely on those quality of life aspects that Parish residents currently value.	High	ASAP	None	TWBC, Village Societies

**NB Whilst the second and third points above can be actioned, it is very important to understand that any such action by SPC and TWBC may have zero effect in resisting unwanted development.**

### What we can do as individuals

- Report planning infringements to SPC and TWBC.
- Keep informed of planning applications submitted for approval and raise any valid concerns if you have any.
- Ensure that our own planning applications are appropriate to the village community in which we live and sympathetic to the neighbourhood environment.



There is growing concern within the Parish both about aircraft noise and also the potential impact on life in the Parish resulting from the proposed expansion of Gatwick airport capacity.

### Research Findings

- a) In 2010 the Parish Survey indicated Gatwick was not seen to be a serious issue for residents. However, the problem of aircraft noise was the second biggest issue raised at the Village Open Days in Summer 2015.
- b) The Residents' Survey revealed a significant level of negativity in the Parish towards Gatwick Airport, with the only major favourable response mentioned being its convenience for air travel by local people. The highest levels of concern expressed in the Survey were: unacceptable aircraft noise, frequency of aircraft flying over the Parish and an increase in air pollution. Most households also felt that the number of night flights is excessive.

### Parish Council Aims and Policies

- a) SPC has been, and will continue to be proactive in representing the views of local residents in the following ways:
  - An active member from the beginning of High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group (HWCAAG) which now has 19 member councils representing 100,000 residents.
  - Active member of HWCAAG in responses to Consultations and representations to MPs, County Councils, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), National Air Traffic Services (NATS), and airlines among others.
  - SPC has itself responded to 6 public consultations since Jan 2014 on Airspace change, Airports Commission Framework and Guidelines, Airports Commission, Gatwick Expansion and Gatwick Airport Independent Arrivals Review
  - We have written to and met with our MP Greg Clark to complain about both the Airports Commission and Gatwick consultation, and on the Airbus A320 whine issue
  - We have written repeatedly to easyJet pressing for A320 modifications and provided supporting information to Greg Clark
  - In addition, on the A320 issue we have lobbied British Airways (BA), CAA, NATS, Department of Transport (DfT), other local MPs, Gatwick Airport (and easyJet) for modification. We lobbied easyJet very actively and supported Greg Clark's push to get easyJet to advance their refit programme. As a result they have accelerated to mid-2016 completion from 2017.
  - We have written to all airlines operating Airbus A320 series aircraft to and from Gatwick, pressing for modification of all unmodified aircraft (researched and written by SPC, letters sent by HWCAAG).
  - One SPC Councillor (who is also a TWBC Councillor) has attended all Gatcom meetings since 2013 and also worked very actively to raise the profile of the issue within TWBC. This eventually led to an Open Meeting which resulted in a formal motion being adopted opposing expansion of Gatwick, opposing flight path concentration and supporting cessation of night flights.
  - SPC also actively worked with HWCAAG to secure similar support from KCC both for flight path dispersal and opposition to Gatwick expansion (initially KCC was ambivalent on the former and only expressed opposition to an estuary airport proposal, by implication appearing to support Gatwick). Securing this double reversal of position by KCC was absolutely crucial.
  - SPC was also represented in several meetings with the Airports Commission during its consultations.
  - The Gatwick Arrivals Review conducted late 2015 produced many recommendations. We have individually, and as a member of HWCAAG, reviewed the report and recommendations and responded.
  - One recommendation of the Review was the establishment of a Noise Management Board and we have successfully lobbied for HWCAAG to have a seat on that Board.
  - Gatwick Airport has accepted all recommendations and we will monitor progress on these.
- b) Going forward, continued pressure will be placed by SPC, in conjunction with other Parishes on Gatwick Airport, in an effort to ensure that the quality of life enjoyed by Parish residents is not impacted adversely by current and future flights over the Parish, whether or not agreement is given to proceed with the construction of another runway at the airport.

## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Lobby all airlines using A320 at Gatwick to retrofit.	High	2016	nil	HWCAAG
Lobby easyJet and BA re non-expansion of Gatwick.	High	March-September 2016	minimal	HWCAAG
Lobby key expansion stakeholders* to oppose expansion.	High	March 2016 onwards	minimal	HWCAAG
Lobby a wide range of MPs(incl PM and Chancellor) and others to reconsider all airport expansion options, not just reconsider Gatwick.	High	June-September 2016	none	None (HWCAAG may also lobby but SPC is in any event doing so individually)
Review Gatwick response to Independent Arrivals Review.  Subsequent actions depending on Gatwick's response.	High	Completed in April 2016. Gatwick has accepted all recommendations	Nil	Done individually and as part of HWCAAG
Maintain review of Gatwick's implementation of any actions from Ind. Arr. Review.	Medium	April 2016- March 2017	Nil	HWCAAG plus GON and other action groups
Maintain pressure on Gatwick and CAA and NATS for swathe widening (Indep Arr Review recommendation).	High	April 2016- March 2017	Nil	HWCAAG plus GON and other action groups
Lobby DfT , CAA , key MPs for cessation of night flights.	Medium	Late 2016- mid 2017	Nil	HWCAAG plus GON and other action groups

\* HWCAAG has produced a comprehensive stakeholder matrix and we have ascribed responsibility for each stakeholder to a specific HWCAAG member council (there are 19 member councils) and SPC is again leading on several stakeholders.

### What we can do as individuals

- Respond to any requests for letters of complaint or campaign funding requests.
- Continue to complain to Gatwick Noise Complaints line about unacceptable aircraft noise.



The Parish is characterised by a relatively small number of businesses, of small physical size and turnover, that are predominantly self-owned. It is assumed that a substantial majority are run from rented premises. Types of businesses range from those operating in the business to business market to consumer outlets having a direct retail interface with the local population and passing traffic, e.g. newsagents, post office, public houses and restaurants, garage. In addition there are firms having a local consumer interface through the web and business to business outlets, such as printing where most trade is web-based or remote from the customer.

There are also several working farms in the Parish which provide a rural aspect to the Parish.

In 2015 interviews were conducted with a range of local businesses to ascertain their perspectives on opportunities and challenges of running a business in the Parish.

### Research Findings

The views of the business community vary according to the nature and type of business and its location. However, there are some common themes.

- a) **Traffic/Parking** - This problem arguably affects business to consumer outlets more than anyone else. Lack of parking inhibits customers from stopping but conflicts with local resident parking needs. Traffic speed also affects propensity to stop and shop.
- b) **Local support** – Almost without exception, the research indicates those businesses that might be expected to derive their trade from the local community are disappointed by the lack of local support. This has resulted in several questioning their future viability and is consistent with the trend of closure of similar outlets locally in recent years. Paradoxically, the local area is considered prosperous and therefore in theory a good place to do business.
- c) **Young people** – There is a perception that the Parish is seeing a decline in young people, who are leaving for a variety of reasons. Lack of affordable accommodation and creation of training/apprentice opportunities were cited several times. This ultimately affects labour supply and customer numbers.
- d) **Infrastructure** – Mobile reception is generally thought to be poor, but only one business thought internet speeds poor; others commented positively.
- e) **Cost of doing business**- Differences in view on business costs are linked to business size. For small businesses, cost is not an issue because of small business rate relief and the fact that few staff are employed. However, falling revenue through weak local support is a major issue to future viability. In larger establishments, business rates, rent and the impact of the increase in minimum wage are all seen as significant issues.
- f) **Future viability** – Most businesses, of all types, are optimistic about the medium term future and see the Parish as a good place to be located. The notable exceptions are those most dependent on local customer support or which suffer from parking constraints.
- g) **Local planning administration** – There is a general feeling that local planning administration is problematic and not particularly helpful or encouraging to local businesses.

## Parish Council Aims

- a) SPC is committed to encouraging small local businesses to flourish, and where it can will actively seek to address some of the issues that are seen as a constraint to businesses that are either operating in the Parish or considering setting up in the Parish.
- b) In line with the Residents' Survey findings, there is a need to protect the last remaining retail outlet space in the villages, in the expectation that retail businesses that serve local communities, such as Convenience stores and Post Offices for example, will be seriously missed if they disappear. Key to the success of these outlets is the extent to which local residents will actually shop there. There is a 'use or lose' possibility which can only be addressed by increasing local support, and the Council will consider working with local businesses to help them devise campaign strategies to help these 'community' businesses by encouraging such support.
- c) There is an opportunity to encourage more small businesses in the area, especially those supporting local tourism. The Parish is blessed with, or in close proximity to, historic churches, pubs and other attractions like Groombridge Place and Penshurst Place. It also offers attractive country walks.



## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Encourage volunteers to create a Speldhurst Parish Small Business Forum (invite all local businesses) to develop ways of supporting existing and new businesses.	Medium	End 2017	Low	TWBC, Chamber of Commerce
<b>Parking/traffic</b>				
Consider recommending creation of 30-minute parking slots outside retail outlets (noting issues re enforcement, loss of resident parking).	Medium	Mid 2017	None	TWBC
Address speeding concerns (see Traffic and Highways Section).				
<b>Business support</b>				
Encourage volunteers to initiate local campaigns, e.g. “Support your local business”, “Your local business needs you”; including leaflet distribution, car and window stickers, stall at village fetes, and local magazine articles. Active participation of local businesses is essential.	Medium	End 2017/ ongoing	Medium (Sponsorship to be sought)	
Consider promoting (via Parish website) the nearby visitor attractions to encourage small businesses to set up in the Parish or existing businesses to benefit from more trade.	Low	2018	Low	
<b>Communications</b>				
Actions included within Broadband and Mobile Phone Section.				

### What we can do as individuals

- Use local shops, restaurants, pubs, trades people and other businesses more often.

There has been a reduction in some local amenities in recent years (e.g. Langton Green Post Office) and considerable pressure on local retail outlets. It is likely that, for economic reasons, there will be further pressure on such amenities.

### Research Findings

- a) There is significant variation across the Parish in resident satisfaction with local amenities. The greatest dissatisfaction is with broadband and mobile services.
- b) Amenities that residents would like to see improved in their village include Post Office services (28%), the number and type of local shops (28%), doctor's surgery availability (28%) and adult recreation and sport facilities (22%).

### Challenges and Constraints

- a) Most amenities are run by commercial enterprises, so SPC's impact is limited.
- b) Costs are a significant barrier to the delivery of amenities like sports and entertainment facilities.

### Parish Council Aims

- a) SPC recognizes resident preferences for vibrant village communities with the type and range of amenities typically enjoyed by villages, e.g. community centre, recreation field, pub, local village shops, Post Office and doctor's surgery, etc. It will seek to foster and encourage such amenities within the Parish.
- b) SPC will endeavour to ensure that, as needs change with emergent technologies, specific amenities will be evaluated for introduction into the Parish. In view of the developments in vehicle technology, the Parish should consider installing electric vehicle charging points, available by payment at various locations in the Parish, e.g. village hall car parks.



## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Identify the possible location of a public tennis court facility in the Parish. Investigate Great and Little Footway court – use/potential.	Medium	End 2017	Funding to be determined	
Revisit the potential to reintroduce a Post Office facility in Langton Green, e.g. at the garage, or a mobile P.O.	Low	Mid 2018	None	Unknown
Contact NHS Primary Trust to consider the possibility of a doctor's surgery in Langton Green.	Medium	Mid 2017	None	NHS Primary Trust
Consider electric car charging points at Village Halls (this is of course in conflict with the current pressure on limited parking particularly at Langton Green Village Hall).	Low	End 2017	Possible installation costs	TWBC/Co-Wheels (Car Club partners)
SPC to write to Electric Vehicle Trade Associations to invite them to consider installing charging points within the Parish and to seek clarification of the criteria for installation and costs (initial and on-going). Seek clarification on who pays for the power supplied.	Low	End 2017	None	TWBC

### What we can do as individuals

- Use and look after amenities within the Parish that are already available.



Both buses and railways serve the Parish although the most common form of transport by far is the private car. There is also anecdotal evidence of a growing interest in cycling. Currently four different bus companies serve routes that run through the Parish, and they are all subsidised to some extent. One additional company serves Rusthall. There is also an express coach service from Langton Green to London leaving very early in the morning and returning in the evening, and a number of taxi firms and private individuals who offer transport in and out of the Parish. The only public railway station within the Parish is at Ashurst, which is on the Uckfield to London Bridge line, and mainly serves Ashurst and Groombridge residents. Peshurst station is just 4 miles away and provides an additional service to London. The main access to London for the Parish, however, is from Tunbridge Wells station which has a frequent fast service running from early morning to late evening. Tonbridge and Hildenborough stations are also used to access London.

### Research Findings

- a) When asked directly, 37% of households stated that public transport services need to be improved. However, when considered alongside other amenities, only 1% of respondents mentioned a need for improvement in public transport. This suggests many feel services could be improved but actually do not prioritise it highly against other Parish needs.
- b) Resident satisfaction/dissatisfaction with bus services to Tunbridge Wells is split fairly evenly. However dissatisfaction is much higher in Ashurst and Speldhurst, probably because those villages have a relatively poorer service compared to that of Langton Green.
- c) There is a strong interest in extension of the 281 bus service to Langton Green and Speldhurst with about 50% stating that they want a more frequent service to Tunbridge Wells. The reasons for this need further examination. It could be that current bus travellers want more choice, or that potential bus users are prohibited by non-availability of services at certain hours of the day, especially in the afternoon and evening.
- d) 48% of household respondents have children travelling by bus but, with current bus service availability and timetabling, it is unlikely that more buses are required at the peak travelling hours for schoolchildren.
- e) There are timetabling issues that could be addressed by the bus companies, e.g. the need for early morning buses to enable a sensible rail commute from Tunbridge Wells to London, and the absence of late night buses from Tunbridge Wells to the villages.
- f) There is a high level of satisfaction with the rail service to London. However, 13% of survey respondents in the Parish want a later service stopping at Ashurst in the evening.

### Challenges and Constraints

- a) KCC is looking at ways to reduce Kent's bus subsidy budget, with the possible emphasis on withdrawing evening and weekend services. Even if there are cost reductions affecting our Parish, it will be difficult to persuade the bus companies to expand services in the current economic climate.
- b) Whilst the research shows a demand for increased bus services, it is not clear how much residents would actually use those services. Anecdotal evidence shows that at present many existing services have low passenger utilisation. More data is needed before additional services can be justified.



## Parish Council Aims

- a) SPC will continue to monitor the availability and suitability of public transport serving the Parish and lobby the relevant transport companies to ensure that service availability and standards are optimised for the benefit of Parish residents.
- b) Given the current level of bus subsidies to the Parish the focus will be to lobby for the rearrangement of current schedules and extend the 281 service, which has the lowest subsidy, to Langton Green and Speldhurst. However, it is unlikely that an increase in the number of buses per day would be commercially viable for any bus company. The aim would therefore be to ensure bus service availability throughout the day at more regular intervals.
- c) Specifically, it is proposed to initiate discussions with the bus companies to adjust their timetables to provide for a minimum frequency of a half-hourly bus service from The Hare in Langton Green and correspondingly return from Tunbridge Wells. It is also recommended that discussions take place with Arriva on selective extension of the 281 to Langton Green and Speldhurst, to support the above and provide for an early morning and late evening service.
- d) Longer term consideration will be given to exploring the feasibility of self-help transport from Ashurst and Speldhurst along the lines of the Wharfedale project launched recently. ([http://www.vetch.co.uk/uw\\_bus/about.htm](http://www.vetch.co.uk/uw_bus/about.htm)) This will need to be a volunteer group from within the Parish but SPC will assist in publicising calls for participants **IF** there is an unequivocal demand identified.

## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Lobby local bus companies to revise schedules to provide for more meaningful frequencies.	Medium	End 2016	None	Bus companies. KCC
Lobby Arriva to investigate extending 281 service at early morning and late evening to Langton (and potentially Speldhurst).	Medium	End 2016	Cost to Arriva as would require more buses	Arriva, KCC
Publicise request for volunteers to examine feasibility of village self-help local transportation.	Low	End 2017	Unknown (subsidy possibly required)	
Lobby Southern Rail to ensure last Uckfield train stops at Ashurst.	Medium	End 2016	None	Southern Rail
Obtain more data on public transport usage and demand in the Parish.	Low	2018	None	Volunteers

### What we can do as individuals

- Use public transport services if you value them.

The level of crime across the Parish is relatively low compared with the rest of Kent. Statistics relating to the Parish itself are not available, but the top four crimes in Speldhurst and Bidborough (which are grouped together in Police records) over the last six years are: 1 Theft Offences, 2 Burglary (other than dwelling), 3 Criminal Damage Offences, and 4 Violence against the Person. There are no major trends evident in the data, but whilst Cybercrime was not recorded as such in this period it is now very much on the increase nationwide.

In the absence of a regular police presence in the Parish, there is a reliance on residents to play a part in crime prevention. In particular, there is a growing number of Neighbourhood Watch (NhW) initiatives in the Parish, which exist to encourage and to help residents themselves to combat crime in their locality and to increase safety, mainly in the home. NhW is the largest voluntary organisation in the country and can help residents obtain information on types of crime and criminal techniques, as well as other information on their safety and trading standards. In our Parish, each NhW Coordinator is a Member of West Kent Neighbourhood Watch Association.

### Research Findings

- a) The main concerns of residents are Theft & Burglary (57%), Cybercrime (54%), Vandalism (31%) and Anti-social Behaviour (27%).
- b) The proximity to London is considered to have an adverse effect on crime levels, as does the affluent appearance of many parts of our villages.
- c) There are concerns about policing levels and police action on some reported crimes.
- d) There is significant support (73%) from residents for CCTV if the cameras are limited and carefully sited.

### Challenges and Constraints

- a) There have been two major reductions over the last four years in funding for the Police, resulting inevitably in reduced manning levels, especially 'on the beat.' This trend will not be reversed and we need to do what we can to counteract the Police reductions in numbers.
- b) Cybercrime, and the related crime of stolen identity, is rapidly increasing and there is negligible police resources to deal with it. There is no coherent or coordinated protection against cybercrime.

### Parish Council Aims

- a) SPC's aim is to work with the Police and other agencies to ensure there is no increase in crime levels in the Parish, and ideally a reduction. It will achieve this through:
  - Establishing an ongoing dialogue with the Police at senior level.
  - Continuing to monitor the incidence of crime in the Parish.
  - Facilitating contact with Area and Local Neighbourhood Watch (NhW) for residents interested in setting up of NhW in their immediate localities.
  - Informing residents of the benefits of e-watch and Country Eye. e-watch is a twice weekly newsletter that reports recent crimes and, where useful, detection of crimes. It also gives safety warnings in other areas, such as advice from Fire & Rescue and Kent Trading Standards. Country Eye is an 'app' developed especially for rural areas.
  - Informing residents of Crimestoppers, so they can anonymously report crimes without fear.
- b) SPC will evaluate the costs and benefits of CCTV and subject to the findings will, if appropriate, develop a programme for the installation of CCTV devices in carefully selected locations in the villages. CCTV can be very useful when there is an absence of police officers and can be used as a detection tool as well as a crime and speeding deterrent. Modern units can include systems to reduce the 'intrusion aspect'. Camera siting, the detail capability, whether on-line or for retrospective inspection, can all be specified to suit particular circumstances. Part of the evaluation will include the potential for funding contributions from the Police and/or village organisations. It is recognised that, whilst there is widespread support amongst residents for some CCTV, there is also a high level of concern from many others and both views need to be considered carefully.

c) SPC will seek to inform residents regarding cybercrime attacks. The aim will be to identify an ‘expert’ volunteer who can advise residents, possibly through newsletters, magazines and on the website. SPC will alert residents to the Action Fraud website (recommended by the Police), and other websites such as, “Get Safe on-line” and “Hoax Slayer.”

## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Set up / maintain a dialogue with the Police at a senior level to discuss the concerns of the Parish and how the Parish can help the Police.	High re set up, medium for ongoing meetings	Set up asap then annual meetings	None	Police, NhW
SPC to encourage the provision of a KEEP SAFE leaflet to every household, to be developed, produced and distributed by volunteers. SPC to assist in co-ordinating this effort.	Low	Late 2017	Medium Value?	Police and other Emergency Services
Publicise and encourage new NhW Schemes and help residents in setting them up through facilitating contacts. Encourage volunteers to become Coordinators.	Medium	Set up system asap, then aim at six Schemes p.a.	Minimal	NhW, Police (PCSOs, VWLO), Volunteer Coordinators, Country Eye.
Seek an expert volunteer on Cybercrime, to advise and assist residents and develop a Communications Programme.	High	Set up asap	Minimal	e-watch, NhW, Police, Kent Trading Standards
Provide information to residents via SPC website of sources of information to help them to make their homes and possessions secure.	Part of NHW Schemes	With NhW Schemes	Minimal	NhW, Police, VWLO
Introduce Crimestoppers to residents so they can report crimes without fear.	Implement with NhW Schemes and publicise regularly	As opportunities occur and with NhW Schemes	None	Crimestoppers, NhW
1. Pilot a CCTV installation in Langton Green to monitor effectiveness and impact. 2. Subject to the results and effectiveness of (1) and specific relevant local residents’ approval install CCTVs in selected locations in the Parish, with usage regulations.	High	Pilot by end 2017 Subsequent development subject to experience and local endorsement	£3k-£4k per unit plus operating costs	NhW, Police, Power suppliers, Other involved bodies (schools, Pubs, churches, etc.)

### What we can do as individuals

- Watch out for and inform Crimestoppers or the Police on suspicious behaviour.
- Participate in Neighbourhood Watch schemes.
- Secure all property - house, out-houses, cars and bicycles.
- Watch out for neighbours and especially the vulnerable and elderly.



SPC set up a working group in 2013 to examine the standard of broadband services. A Parish-wide survey was conducted at the time and the information it provided was used to lobby Borough and County levels of local government on the need for action. Kent County was able to successfully obtain Central Government funds to 'gap-fund' supplier investments, which resulted in all street cabinets in the Parish being 'glass-fibred' (from late 2014 to late 2015), leading to much improved service speeds (in fact, to what is commonly referred to as 'superfast'). However, households connected over long distances by copper cable to their fibred street cabinets still suffer from attenuated signals. Government-funded improvements were required to meet a 2 Mbps speed level, compared with about 80 Mbps being available to those closely connected (provided they contracted with their supplier to pay for such superfast connection). The wide gap between the two levels of service has resulted in negative opinion of many households on the relatively poor service they are getting.

Regarding mobile phone services, there is a mobile network coverage problem in more rural areas and valleys and in less populated areas (see [www.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage)). There is a commitment between government and suppliers to ensure that 85% of the country is covered.

### Research Findings

- a) Broadband and mobile services are important factors in determining residents' overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with Speldhurst Parish as a place to live. There is a strong desire for improvement in these services.
- b) About 43% of households are dissatisfied with broadband speed/connection; and significantly more than that in Ashurst, where about three quarters of households are dissatisfied. About half of all households would like to see services improved, while as many as 85% of Ashurst households are seeking such improvement.
- c) About 51% of households are dissatisfied with their mobile-phone reception. About half of all Parish households would like to see services improved, with over 70% of Ashurst and Old Groombridge households seeking such improvement.



### Challenges and Constraints

- a) Re broadband, Ofcom want to see 8 Mbps as the minimum speed level, and government is signalling the need for 10 Mbps as the minimum. The question is whether providers will deliver. BT has apparently said it is intending to, but this could take a few years.
- b) Re mobile phone coverage, improvements are dependent on mast-sharing and the installation of new masts. These may have an environmental impact.

### Parish Council Aims

- a) Consider seeking to arrange Supplier Open Days in the Parish, so residents have a greater awareness of service levels/ coverage and choices available.
- b) Specifically, seek volunteers to set up a small working group to determine precisely the service levels available across the Parish, especially to more remote households in Ashurst and Old Groombridge, and consider what actions could be taken to improve these facilities.

### ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Seek volunteers to set up a Working Group to evaluate the current level of broadband and mobile phone services across the Parish, especially in rural areas, and the options available for improvement.	High	By Jun.2017	None	Resident Volunteers
Encourage residents to lobby network providers if there is conclusive evidence of poor reception and SPC to support lobbying activity.	Medium	By mid 2017	Low	Volunteers

#### What we can do as individuals

- Participate in working and lobbying groups.

Speldhurst Parish Council is proud of its schools and their achievements and is keen to provide whatever assistance it can to ensure the educational experience for young people in the Parish remains of the highest quality. Education is consequently an integral part of the Parish Plan, despite the fact that the Parish Council is not responsible for education in the Parish or the number of school places available to Parish residents. School provision in the area is governed by school governors and Local Authority admission criteria. At the same time, Local Government Associations are currently highlighting to central Government the ongoing increase in birth rates in their respective areas, which is adding pressure on school places.

There are two very popular primary schools in the Parish and two nearby in neighbouring Parishes. There are also three nursery or pre-school establishments, and one in Groombridge, just outside the Parish. There are no mainstream state secondary schools in the Parish and children have to travel to secondary schools across Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge, or even to Sevenoaks.

### Research Findings

- a) The main issues raised from the research concern the availability of school places and school admissions policies. For state primary schools, admissions criteria are set by the Board of Governors in liaison with the local authority.
- b) There is a relatively strong level of satisfaction with nursery provision (50%) and primary school provision (56%) but almost one in five say they are unhappy with the number of primary school places available in the Parish.
- c) Secondary school places are a greater concern. 28% of households are satisfied, but a significant proportion (41%) are dissatisfied. 31% are neutral. Whilst the quantitative research did not cover reasons for dissatisfaction, village Open Day feedback and anecdotal evidence suggests that for secondary schools the increased population in the Borough has made it more difficult for Speldhurst Parish residents to secure places in the most popular, nearest schools in the Borough.
- d) Anecdotal evidence indicates some parental concern at the inability of securing a place for their children in their first choice of school, particularly if they have recently moved into the Parish.



### Challenges and Constraints

- a) A recent rise in the birth rate will lead to added pressures on primary school places.
- b) Langton Green Primary School has been frequently over-subscribed. The School is increasing its planned intake from 210 pupils (2010) to 420 (2018) which should ease entry for primary school places in the area.
- c) Speldhurst Primary School is oversubscribed and has a waiting list each year, mainly due to families moving into the village. With an intake of only 20 each year, many places are taken up by siblings of children already at the school.
- d) Schools' admissions policies impact on availability as proximity of the home to the school may be seen as less of a priority than having a sibling already at the school.
- e) All local grammar schools tend to be oversubscribed, as are non-selective schools in Tunbridge Wells.

### Parish Council Aims and Policies

- a) SPC will work proactively with the village schools to ensure they continue to be integrated into the local community and can potentially involve the children in Parish activities and projects that can provide an educational experience.

### ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
SPC will work with schools in the Parish to determine the feasibility of establishing a programme of initiatives/actions that could be of mutual benefit.	Medium	Annual meeting minimum	None	Parish Schools Village Societies
SPC will raise with KCC how to improve the prospects of local children getting admission to local schools.	Medium	31/7/17	Low	KCC
SPC will work with local schools to optimize use of school buildings by outside groups to enhance funding (LG - Pavilion).	Medium	Ongoing	None	Schools Village Societies
SPC will consider support for individual requests for funding for initiatives brought to its attention by local education providers.	Ongoing	Ongoing	Low/Medium	Schools

#### What we can do as individuals

- Take part in school activities.
- Encourage village organisations to support the schools.

SPC communicates with residents in several ways: via a website, newsletter, village magazines, and for certain events via posters and other signage. At present there is no formal communication via social media or blog.

The SPC website (www.speldhurstparishcouncil.gov.uk) is primarily an information delivery website, with opportunities to download documents (largely committee agendas and minutes). At present there is no functional capability (e.g. the means to register residents' interests in, say, volunteering or receiving electronic news by email). The Clerk has a Twitter account which is promoted on the home page of the website.

SPC is already engaged in a website refresh but it will be important to consider wider opportunities for website development as part of the process upgrade.

**Research Findings**

- a) Twice as many respondents feel 'informed' by SPC, as those who feel 'not informed'.
- b) Improvements in communications are seen as important.
- c) About 40% of households want to know more about what SPC does, and see more email communications; and about 30% want to see SPC's website improved.
- d) Providing electronic copies of newsletters, avoiding the cost of printed copy and physical distribution, has been suggested by residents.

**Challenges and Constraints**

- a) Website upgrades and ongoing management can be labour-intensive.
- b) Assessing which are the best means of communications to reach the greatest number of residents.

**Parish Council Aims**

- a) Improve resident awareness of what SPC does and the latest developments in the Parish by:
  - Implementing a coherent and co-ordinated communications strategy
  - Employing communications tools that reach a wider audience.
  - Developing an improved website, with relevant functionality, and electronic connections that meet defined and SPC-agreed needs.

Consider including website capability for residents to provide a satisfaction measure with the website, as well as suggest any ongoing improvements.
- b) Encourage residents to visit the Parish website for information.



## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Define the characteristics/features required of an improved website and the implications and costs of implementation and ongoing management.	High	mid 2017	Low	Volunteer needed
Improve/ Upgrade SPC website, adding functionality as required.	High	Ongoing	Medium (TBD)	Resident Volunteers
Set up Working Group to evaluate and recommend to SPC a communications strategy and communications options, including use of social media, for informing residents and receiving their opinions.	High	By June 2017 (staged approach)	Medium (TBD)	Resident Volunteers

### What we can do as individuals

- Keep abreast of Parish developments by regularly visiting the website.
- Provide views to SPC on the merits of different communications options.
- Help neighbours who do not use electronic mail/have access to a computer.
- Volunteer to help distribute newsletters, etc.



Throughout the Parish there are some residents who regularly volunteer to help in Parish activities such as Traffic Speedwatch, footpath maintenance and litter clearance, or are involved in voluntary organisations. It is imperative that Parish residents become more involved in creating and preserving the community environment they want to live in, as in the next few years a greater reliance on volunteer work within the Parish will be inevitable in view of limited Parish Council resourcing and funding.

**Research Findings**

a) The Residents’ Survey indicated that many more residents would be willing to provide assistance in some way. A surprising number state they are already involved in voluntary activities in the Parish, but potentially many more could be engaged in Parish-led activities, as the Survey results below suggest.

ACTIVITIES	ALREADY INVOLVED	WOULD LIKE TO GET INVOLVED
For children and young people	93	60
For the elderly and infirm	60	67
Nature conservation and management	27	170
Footpath maintenance	33	112
Traffic Speedwatch	13	107
Litter Clearance	27	155
Helping organise Parish events/ community activities	81	74

It is likely that the ‘already involved’ figure includes charity workers and organisations like the Guides, Mothers Union etc., rather than reflecting those involved in SPC-related activities.

**Parish Council Aims**

- a) SPC’s objective is to encourage volunteer participation, but also to provide more structure to the process in the creation of a Parish Volunteer Programme and in recognising volunteer contributions. It is recognised that volunteers would have interest in helping in some activities but not others. Also, some are unable to provide a regular commitment but would be happy to be involved on an ad hoc basis.
- b) It is envisaged that more activities in the future could benefit from volunteer participation. These would include Parish event organisation, environment protection and monitoring, working group involvement and community liaison.
- c) The Volunteer Programme will be led by a nominated volunteer. The approach will be to advertise for volunteers more actively through village magazines, newsletters, social media and on the website for specific projects or specific tasks.
- d) Volunteers will be placed on a Parish register which will be regularly updated and managed by a designated Parish Councillor, or a volunteer.

## ACTION PLAN

ACTION	PRIORITY	TIMETABLE	COST	PARTNERS
Develop a Volunteer Programme, identifying a range of specific activities for which volunteers are required; communicate the Programme to the residents.	Medium	By mid 2017	None	Volunteer Resident(s)
Develop a Communications Plan for the Volunteer Programme, utilising the website, social media, newsletters, village magazines.	Medium	Ongoing	Low	Volunteer Resident(s)
Develop, manage and monitor a Volunteer Register, to help facilitate volunteer engagement.	Medium	Ongoing	None	Volunteer Resident
Specifically encourage young people in the Parish to participate and lead volunteer activities for the benefit of the Parish.	Medium	Ongoing	None	Local schools, clubs, churches, etc
Create a Speldhurst Parish Volunteer Award (Certificate) in recognition for outstanding volunteer contribution to the Parish.	Low	By end 2017	Low	

### What we can do as individuals

- Register for volunteer activity, indicating the type of contribution you are interested in, with any particular skill or interest you may have such as computers, tree maintenance, wildlife conservation, planning and project management, communications, security.
- Indicate any tools or equipment that could, on occasion, be used for Parish activities-e.g. trailers and vans, wood or metal workshop, signage material, etc.
- Help maintain the Volunteer Register.



## FINAL THOUGHTS - A VISION FOR THE PARISH

The Parish Plan is designed to provide a purpose and framework for Parish Council activities over the next few years. Those activities are founded on meeting the needs and addressing the concerns of residents with a view to improving the quality of life across the Parish.

Many of the aspects covered in the Plan are not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council, but the Council is committed, on behalf of the residents, to engaging with those bodies and organisations that do have final responsibility. Based on the views that residents have expressed, the aim will be to persuade and influence the decisions made.

No Plan can be rigid. Changing circumstances mean that it will need to be reviewed and potentially revised from time to time. But the overall vision for Speldhurst Parish Council will remain the same, namely:

- To provide a high quality local environment for parishioners, through the delivery of appropriate and effective services and through representation of their interests with other government and commercial agencies.
- To ensure the first-class management and governance of the Parish Council.
- To create partnerships with external organisations in order to deliver our Vision.
- To facilitate greater parishioner engagement and volunteer participation in Parish matters.



# SPELDHURST PARISH

a great place to live!

