

NOTES ON A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG)

14th February 2024 via Teams

Attendees: Cllr John Turner (JT) (Chair), with Alan Ford (AF), Ed Langridge (EL) and Ken Howes (KH)

In Attendance: Catherine Barrett (CB), Assistant Clerk

Members of the Public: There were none.

Apologies: Kay Dooley (study commitment), Domenico Tarricone (personal commitment), Lizzie Pannell (working abroad), and Dave Pate (prior commitment).

1. To appoint a councillor to act as Chair for the meeting

JT was willing to continue as Chair, but he had been in the role since January 2021, and the working group's Terms of Reference (ToR) state that a Chair can only serve for 3 years.

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint JT as Chair for the current meeting. There would be an opportunity to amend the ToR under agenda item 6, and a recommendation would be made that Full Council agree to this amendment so that JT could continue in the role.

2. To ask members for their consent to record the meeting to aid the production of meeting notes

Members consented to the meeting being recorded by CB using the Teams recording function for the accuracy of the minutes. She would delete the recording once the minutes had been signed off at the next EWG meeting.

3. To give an overview of action points and updates from the previous meeting on 31st October

The action points are listed below. Points 05/23, 10/23, 13/23, 16/23, 19/23, and 20/23 were marked as complete, 12/23 and 15/23 were marked as in progress, 17/23 and 18/23 were marked as ongoing and 01/24 through to 07/24 were marked as to be actioned (TBA).

4. Financial Review

The Budget and Funding summary, giving an overview of incomings and outgoings for the 2023/24 financial year, had been circulated. JT confirmed that Sussex Lund, a part of the High Weald Organisation, had now awarded funding for the biodiversity project in Pocket Park, Speldhurst.

5. Points for information from Full Council

- Decision regarding the Zero Hour Climate and Ecology Bill Campaign – JT reported that Full Council had decided not to pledge support for the campaign as they would prefer the parish council to have its own message rather than attach itself to another cause.
- Decision regarding EV Charging Bay enforcement – JT reported that Full Council had accepted the working group's proposal about monitoring the use of the EV charging bays. The parish council would not try to police parking, but they would loosely monitor how many non-EVs were parking in the bays for long periods. If councillors were present, they would give a gentle reminder about the purpose of the parking bays, and office staff would make a note of complaints from anyone who had been prevented from using the bays for charging. An assessment of the trial period would be made in March, and an action point was set for CB to arrange a meeting with JT for this purpose. CB confirmed that she was hoping to receive usage data from Kent County Council (KCC) towards the end of March. She added that she had chased her contact at KCC several times about a quote for additional signage advertising the chargers without success. She would continue to follow up.

6. Review of Terms of Reference (ToR)

- To approve a change of wording to enable the Chair to continue in their role beyond the 3 years currently specified – It was **RESOLVED** to recommend the following additional wording to Full Council (additional wording in bold):
“No Chairman may hold office for more than three years in succession **unless approved by Full Council.**”
- To approve a change of wording relating to the minimum number of required councillors on the committee, and the minimum number of required councillors for a quorum – Given the low attendance rate, it was **RESOLVED** not to make any changes relating to increasing the required number of councillors.

7. To give an update on re-wilding activities at Pocket Park, Speldhurst, including:

- Sussex Lund’s decision on funding – Together with funding the next stage of Laurel removal in Pocket Park, Sussex Lund had also offered to fund replacement hedging, however, this was conditional on the parish council using whips rather than hedging plants. JT would get a costing for whips, and CB would ask Withyham Parish Council about their recent hedging project.
- An updated schedule of works – JT was due to meet the Tree Surgeon who would carry out the Laurel removal to discuss the work, which was scheduled for late February.
- An update on the noticeboard and bird/bat boxes – JT and AF had installed the birdboxes in January. At the same time, they had talked through the work to be done. Once this work was completed by the tree surgeon (planned for Feb 29th) they would identify locations for the trees that would replace the Laurels.

8. To discuss an approach to points of focus for 2024

- Year 2 pesticide-free weed control trial – John and Catherine would meet with the Groundsman in the 2nd week of March to agree on a schedule for him to treat weeds with a Glyphosate-free solution throughout the growing season. The trial would be assessed at the end of the growing season.
- Recycling at home – It was agreed that LP’s copy about recycling at home was of excellent quality and could be submitted to parish magazines and shared on social media. CB would submit this to the April parish magazines.
- Energy Saving – a discussion would be deferred until the next meeting.
- Sewage Discharges in parish streams and rivers – a discussion would be deferred until DP and DT were able to attend.
- Tree planting and awareness – EL said he was not aware of anyone having followed up on the success of the Langton Green Village Society (LGVS) tree-planting initiative, which had taken place during 2020 and 2021. He added that ongoing maintenance and care were crucial for newly planted trees to survive, and any future thoughts of tree planting should be accompanied by these questions: where is the best location for these trees to be planted to give them the highest chance of survival, and how are we going to follow up with tree care? An action point was set for Ed to bring a Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) study of tree cover to the next meeting. A further action point was set for him to follow up with LGVS to see if they had any data about the success of their tree-planting initiative.

9. Items for Full Council

- Proposed change of wording in ToR.
- Feedback regarding Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) planning application for a 3G pitch.

10. Items for Information

- Langton Green Community Sports Association Planning Application (LGCSA) for a 3G artificial grass pitch at Langton Green Recreation Ground
[24/00235/FULL | Creation of 3G Artificial Grass Pitch with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights, access footpaths, tree removal and replacement planting | Langton Green Recreation Ground Speldhurst Road Langton Green Tunbridge Wells Kent TN3 0JJ \(midkent.gov.uk\)](#)

JT gave members some context about the planning application and the deadline for commenting. He said that the parish council’s Planning Committee had met, listened to approximately 40 members of the public, and discussed the application themselves, and would make a recommendation as to whether to support, oppose, or remain neutral at Full Council on 4th March. All councillors would then vote, and the parish council’s feedback would be sent to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC).

Due to its size and significance for the parish, the parish council had asked Borough Cllr Harry Allen to 'call in' the application, which meant that the borough council's planning committee would now be responsible for deciding whether to grant the application, instead of a Planning Officer. CB said that members of the public could continue to comment until the 1st of March, and the Planning Clerk had requested a further extension, and was waiting to hear an answer from TWBC.

KH asked why there had been no earlier notification about the planning application from TWBC, or a warning to expect it from the parish council. Many residents were only now beginning to hear about it since the yellow planning fliers had only just gone up and, despite being signed up for planning alerts from TWBC, he and his neighbour had not received anything about a 3G pitch. CB answered that as soon as the application had been validated and sent through to the parish council Planning Clerk, she updated their website and social media pages, and had continued to post updates. Due to the timing of the application and the initial cut-off date for comments, it had not been possible to publish information in the parish magazines before the deadline for March.

CB added that while they had heard a few months back that an application for a 3G pitch was likely to be submitted, the parish council had not had any communication as to when the application would be submitted or any further detail as to its nature. She said that she did not think it would have been appropriate to warn residents to look out for an application that may or may not happen.

An action point was set for CB to follow up with the TWBC Planning Officer to ask when notification of the application had gone out to those residents signed up for planning alerts.

JT explained that the working group could give feedback on the application, to be passed on to Full Council at the March meeting. The following material considerations were discussed:

- **Highway safety, and Traffic and parking issues**

EL and KH commented on the limited parking space available; the 90 spaces quoted in the planning application were never enough when extra events such as the football fiesta took place, creating parking issues in the locality. There was concern that similar numbers of vehicles would now be attempting to park on an almost daily basis if the 3G went ahead.

The road infrastructure was similarly inadequate, creating significant congestion when extra events took place on the Rec. No provision or plan had been made in the application for any parking management or traffic mitigation because these existing issues had not been acknowledged in the application. However, the ongoing traffic issues on Speldhurst Road – including parking for schools, speeding, and dangerous parking on Winstone Scott Avenue and Lampington Row – were known to be one of the main concerns for parish residents and the parish council's Highways Committee had been in discussions with KCC for some time about how to improve this situation.

Designs showed that if permission was granted, pathways would be installed on the Rec giving access from the car park to the 3G. With the expected number of users, heavy use of these paths was anticipated, but there were no details of the future cost of maintenance or responsibility in the application. This is on parish council-owned land.

- **Impact on the Community and other Services**

KH said that he and many other residents of the parish had used the field in question for general recreation for many years. Activities included games, walking (both to access the nearby Public Footpath and as an extension of the walk around the recreation ground), and picnicking. It was an open, rural space with woods at its perimeter. Taking away a grassy area that was fully inclusive to all ages and groups, enclosing it, and limiting its purpose would have a genuinely detrimental impact on the wider community. An action point was set for CB to confirm whether this area was an AONB.

It was agreed that noise pollution for residents had not been sufficiently addressed in the application. Simply asking people to be respectful was not felt to be adequate noise pollution mitigation.

- **Effect on trees and wildlife/nature conservation**

A biodiversity gain of 10% was quoted in the application which stated it would take down 23 trees and replace them with 20 of better quality. This seemed to be a minimal increase and just because of the type of trees replanted. It was felt that to take away such a large open rural space this apparent biodiversity increase seemed a paper exercise only.

KH noted that any trees not removed would still experience a disturbance at their roots and in the surrounding soil quality due to construction work. He would also like to know how the newly planted

trees would be monitored during the crucial period after planting, as this was not detailed in the application.

Members expressed concern about the high light pollution caused by floodlights around the area. This would impact residents living nearby, as well as bats – no members had ever heard of ‘light-tolerant’ bats – and AF commented that the lights would be brighter at certain times of the year. He added that there was no mention of a range of other wildlife species that would be affected by the development, including the deer that were frequently seen and the moths who would be attracted to the lights and distracted from ‘what they should be doing’ as important pollinators. It was agreed that these points also cast doubt on the biodiversity net gain quoted in the application.

It was **RESOLVED** that JT would present these points to Full Council. He would put together a presentation and ask members of the working group to give their feedback before the meeting.

With nothing further to discuss, the meeting ended at 8.52 pm.

Summary of Action Points

No.	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
05/23	Purchase Lectern Noticeboard	CB	25/04	Complete
10/23	Draft recommendation on EVC Bay enforcement for Full Council	JT	06/09	Complete
13/23	Order and install birdboxes	CB/AF/JT	06/09	Complete
16/23	Prepare a proposal asking Full Council to formally support the Zero Hour Climate and Ecology Bill	JT	31/10	Complete
19/23	Produce a guide to household recycling for sharing in parish magazines and on social media	LP	31/10	Complete
20/23	Look for the energy-saving graphics shared previously with the purpose of publishing them again.	JT	31/10	Complete
12/23	Develop an approach to primary schools to get them involved with Pocket Park, Speldhurst	RL & LP	06/09	In progress
15/23	Contact Greg Clark to request a conversation about water quality in parish rivers. DP to send DT anecdotal evidence to include in his email.	DT/DP	06/09	In progress
17/23	Follow up with KCC about extra EV Charger signage – are they willing to design, install, and finance?	CB	31/10	Ongoing
18/23	Submit articles about EV Chargers to parish magazines and share them on social media/website	CB	31/10	Ongoing
01/24	Arrange a meeting with JT to assess the usage of EV chargers. Chase quarterly usage statistics from KCC	CB	14/02/24	TBA
02/24	Present amended ToR to Full Council for approval	CB/JT	14/02	TBA
03/24	Get pricing for Whips to use as replacement hedging at Pocket Park	CB/JT	14/02	TBA

04/24	Arrange meeting in 2 nd week of March with JT and the Groundsman to agree on a weed-control schedule for the 2024 growing season	CB	14/02	TBA
05/24	Share Recycling at home copy on social media and in parish magazines	CB	14/02	TBA
06/24	Follow up with LGVS on the success of their tree planting initiative and bring TWBC tree cover study to the next meeting	EL	14/02	TBA
07/24	Prepare feedback on the LGCSA 3G planning application for Full Council	JT (with approval needed from WG members)	14/02	TBA