



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

**NOTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 25th APRIL 2016 AT
7.30PM IN SPELDHURST VILLAGE HALL**

There were 11 Councillors and two Clerks in attendance along with Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillors David Jukes and Julian Stanyer.

Kent County Councillor John Davies and Cllrs Milner and Parker sent their apologies.

There were approximately 30 residents in attendance.

Parish Council Chairman Cllr Barrington-Johnson opened the meeting and welcomed everyone attending.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson introduced David Jukes, Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. David Jukes explained that he had been due to speak at the meeting this evening but election rules state that this is not allowed within 6 weeks of an election. He introduced William Benson as his replacement.

William Benson explained that TWBC provide 54 wide ranging services, they employ 270 people and have 48 Councillors. William highlighted the challenges faced by TWBC which are

- Finance
- Centralisation
- Housing demand vs supply
- Matching growth with infrastructure

He said that the cost of adult social care is rising significantly and the number of people benefitting is small. In terms of funding, Tunbridge Wells has a low level of Council Tax compared with many other towns in Kent. Government grant funding is reducing each year and by 2019/2020 Tunbridge Wells won't be receiving any grant from Central Government. These factors combined mean that the core spending power per dwelling in Tunbridge Wells is low. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council have focused on increasing revenue from various sources including shopping centres. They have

adopted an ‘enabling’ strategy which means that residents and local businesses are doing more for themselves.

William then talked about Centralisation and said that central departments are increasingly protected – 72% of government income is spent centrally in the UK which is very high compared with France (35%) and Germany (19%)

Turning to the issue of supply and demand of housing William said that there have been huge changes in planning legislation. Plans are in place to build 6,000 new homes by 2033 but a need for 12,000 homes has been identified, creating a significant shortfall. This will also create a need for improved infrastructure.

William highlighted successes such as the A21 and North Farm road improvements, the transformation of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, Calverley Grounds and the Community hubs created in Cranbrook and Southborough. The Assembly Hall has also been upgraded and tourism signs have been installed in Tunbridge Wells Town Centre.

To conclude William said that there needs to be devolution from Central to Local Government. In particular TWBC would like to take responsibility for Highways from KCC. In terms of future plans the new theatre and Council Offices scheme is progressing, there are plans for more sports facilities and community hubs.

Question and answer session:

- Q. There is a high level of expenditure in very specific areas eg. Social care
- A. KCC are responsible for social care. Thresholds for intervention are set by Government but intervention now only takes place in critical cases. With more people over 65 than under 18 this is causing pressure on funds.
- Q. Parking charges in Tunbridge Wells are so high, people are being put off going into the town.
- A. Car parks in town are well used and often over-subscribed for season tickets. He said that finding change for parking can be problematic but revenue from parking is essential to the Council due to lack of Central Government funding. Car park revenue is used by the Borough Council to fund essential services.
- Q. New cashless system for parking is good but mobile reception is not good enough in all car park levels.
- A. Improvements are being made. Wifi is now available in the multi-storey car park and drivers are allowed 15 minutes without being issued with a fine. Royal Victoria Place will also become a payment on exit system following the success of this system in the Great Hall Car Park.
- Q. In the recent Parish Survey the two main issues were identified as 1) speeding traffic through the villages and 2) Gatwick. What comments can you make on what can be done about these issues?
- A. Re Gatwick, TWBC are lobbying and within SPC Cllr Mrs Soyke is actively working on this. On the issue of speeding there is a campaign called ‘20’s Plenty’. This scheme costs money to

put in place and funding it is a KCC responsibility and also requires the police service for enforcement.

- Q. On the issue of parking enforcement do attendants benefit from giving fines? Can more training be given so they learn to use discretion?
- A. Parking wardens do use discretion and tickets are only issued if they are deserved.
- Q. On the issue of claiming for pothole damage the level of bureaucracy is so high. Generally the roads are in appalling condition and this is due to lack of funding.
- A. Agreed that the roads are in very poor condition. Bureaucracy for claims is high to reduce claims. Advice is to report all potholes.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson thanked William Benson for his very informative talk.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson introduced Ken Howes, Chairman of the Parish Plan Working Group.

Ken Howes explained that the Parish Plan is still work in progress. The Working Group is made up of residents from the four villages of the Parish and Parish and Borough Councillors. Views within the group can be quite diverse. Since the Open Days held in 2015 a questionnaire has been developed by a professional organisation who have also analysed the results. A questionnaire for young people was also produced and many businesses in the Parish have been interviewed.

Although over 90% of respondents are happy and satisfied, there are a number who believe there has been a deterioration in the standard of living and the main issues highlighted are highways and speeding traffic, Gatwick and local shopping facilities. The main controversial issue within the Working Group is the demand and supply of housing. The survey identifies a need for more housing for young people and the elderly but it also shows a strong desire to protect the environment. The Group is now developing actions for a draft plan for enforcement.

Ken said that 150 people had identified themselves as willing volunteers in the survey and that many volunteers would be needed to implement some of the actions identified by the Working Group. Volunteers will be essential for improvements to be made.

Ken thanked all the people involved in distributing and collecting the questionnaires.

Cllr Mrs Price said that the questionnaire had identified a concern over the high number of cyclists on local roads and she questioned why this would be a concern. Ken Howes explained that Groombridge Hill is a problem for motorists and cyclists as the speed limit is 50mph and the road is very narrow. He said that if the Parish had proper cycle paths it would be unlikely there would be concerns over cycling.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson thanked Ken for his talk about the Parish Plan and for the enormous effort being put into the Working Group. He then gave a resume of the Speldhurst Parish Council year. He reported that there had been much change over the past 12 months, with the Council losing 5 Councillors but also recruiting 5 new Councillors. Min Flemington has left as Assistant Clerk and has been replaced by Kate Plunkett.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson said that he would like to thank all the Councillors who had helped him through his first year as Chairman with particular thanks to Chris May and Lynn Jeffreys for providing guidance. He also thanked all the volunteers on Committees, the Speedwatch volunteers and the Parish Plan Working Group volunteers and those people who help maintain paths and footways.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson said there had been successes over the year including the installation of defibrillators in each village. He thanked Stephen Benbow for running much needed training sessions which had been extremely useful and interesting.

On the issue of road traffic Cllr Barrington-Johnson said that there are 4 speed indicator devices around the Parish and these get moved around on a regular basis. There have been more speedwatch sessions and these will continue. If there are any volunteers who would like to get involved with speedwatch then sessions could be run more regularly. Nick Critchlow asked whether wheelie bins could have the speed limit sticker on them to remind motorists but the '20's plenty' design needs to be completed first. Stephen Benbow said that there needs to be more police awareness, otherwise a fatality on a road in the village is highly likely. The Clerk replied that all speeding is reported to Kent Police and there is a consequence for speeding. Speedwatch sessions have to be held at a location which has been assessed as safe. Paul Harvey said that on the third warning from a speedwatch session action is taken. The Clerk clarified that this is not as good as being caught by the Police but in the absence of Police, speedwatch is very useful. More volunteers for speedwatch are needed.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson singled out the Planning Committee for praise as it has a lot to do – the Committee looks at all planning applications and discusses them in some depth. The Committee meets once a month and does many site visits.

The disappointment this year has been the 20mph scheme – the Council have been trying to get 20mph zones around Langton Green and Speldhurst schools. This is a frustration but there will be success eventually. We have a qualified yes from KCC for the scheme and SPC have offered to pay the costs but there has still been no progress. William Benson said that TWBC are trying to take responsibility for Highways from KCC.

Cllr Barrington-Johnson thanked all the speakers, all the residents who attended and the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for their work in organising this Annual Parish Meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Chairman