



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

Minutes of a Finance Committee Meeting held in The Committee Room, Speldhurst Village Hall on Monday 21st February 2011 at 7.30pm

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllrs. Parker (Chairman), Mrs Hull, Mrs Podbury, Mrs Soyke, Pendleton and Cllr. Mrs Jeffreys (ex officio)

OFFICER PRESENT: Chris May – Clerk, Mrs Meirion Flemington – Assistant Clerk

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: There were seven members of the public present

1. **Declarations of Interests:** Cllr Mrs Soyke - personal and prejudicial interest in the Ashurst Church; Cllr Mrs Hull – personal interest in Salt Bin for Furzefield Avenue; Chris May and Meirion Flemington - personal and prejudicial interest in Clerks' hours
2. **Declarations of Lobbying:** Cllr Mrs Hull had received a petition from residents of Furzefield Avenue which she had passed to the Clerk.
3. **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Wheeler – prior engagement
4. **Minutes** of the meeting dated **8th November 2010**, copies having previously been forwarded to Members, were approved and signed as a correct record.
5. **Public Open Session:** The meeting was adjourned.
Mr Jeffrey was concerned why the Council was giving grants for a school trip to Marchiennes and enquired about the amount being carried forward that would be unspent in the present financial year. The Clerk and Councillors advised him of the main figures and the reasons for the under spend. Mr Bright said he was present to try and gain more knowledge of the budget process and understand the process. There were no other questions from members of the public.
Cllr Mrs Soyke had been able to obtain more copies of the survey of the Civic Complex because of the problems of distribution throughout the Parish and advised that there had been an extension of the completion date.
The meeting was reopened.
6. **Matters Arising and Correspondence** – Cllr Mrs Hull gave the Clerk more petitions from residents of Furzefield Avenue regarding the need for a salt bin.
7. **St Martin of Tours Church, Ashurst** – Cllr Mrs Soyke left the room.
There had been a number of questions regarding recent correspondence from the Treasurer, Christopher Blyth regarding a request for a possible increase in the grant towards the fencing and he answered questions submitted to him by Cllr Parker verbally so that the committee could better understand the Church's finances. The Church does have funds and there is a separate fund for Churchyard work. There is specific work that is imminent which includes the path on the south side (£1,000) and work on a beech tree (£980) and now three quarters of the fencing needs replacing (the A264 side being in good condition). He said it was important that the boundary of the churchyard was

marked and that oak was specified. He was asked by Cllr Mrs Hull if he would consider less expensive options and he said in nearly 40 years the fencing had only been replaced twice and that the Church considered oak good value.

The Church is grade 1 listed and needs redecorating due to damp and at this time there was no indication of the cost – possibly £22,000 for which he was budgeting and for the first time the Church budget would be in deficit. They would approach a number of Trusts and there would be an appeal (only 200 people in the Village).

There was much discussion by members and Cllr Pendleton proposed that the Council meet the full cost of the fencing (£3,500). Cllr Mrs Podbury suggested a figure of £2,500. There was a vote and it was **AGREED** by 3-2 to recommend to Full Council that the full cost of the fencing be paid for by the Council. Cllr Mrs Soyke rejoined the meeting.

8. **Financial Position as at 31st January 2011** - The Clerk had previously circulated the Financial Position and this was duly noted by the Committee.
9. **2010-11 Budget and Supplementary Information and review of budget vs expenditure –**
Councillors reviewed the figures that had been previously circulated.
10. **2011-12 Budget –** The precept recommended by the Finance Committee of £133,900 had been reduced by Full Council to £123,900 and decisions had to be made where to reduce next year's budget by £10,000. The Clerk had made recommendations in the papers distributed prior to the meeting of £5,000 from the Langton Green Pavilion; £3,000 from Tree planting and maintenance and £2,000 from the Speldhurst Recreation.
Cllr Mrs Podbury suggested that the Highways budget of £6,000 could be cut next year as there were adequate funds in place; that the tree and maintenance budget be cut by £3,000 and the Amenities Miscellaneous amount of £500 be cut and the Langton Green Pavilion budget be reduced by £500. The Clerk cautioned against cutting the Highways budget and said that it was more likely that funds would be needed in the next financial year than the Pavilion.
Cllrs supported the cuts recommended by Cllr Podbury.
11. **Parish Office –** Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that an email had been received from the Trustees on Sunday advising that the structural engineers had delivered a plan which calls for additional foundations. In order to definitely know whether additional foundations are required there is a necessity to excavate two test pits, one of which is on land owned by the Council. Cllr Mrs Jeffreys had referred this to the Transfer of Land Committee and email approval had been given for this to go ahead. If additional foundations are deemed necessary then the overall cost could increase by £15,000 (our part being about £6,000) on top of the £76,000 referred to in the Full Council minutes dated 7th February. Because of the uncertainty it was decided to defer any decision on the term of the PWLB loan until the Full Council meeting dated 7th March 2011, when it is imperative that a decision is made so that the PWLB loan can be applied for to coincide with funding that the Trustees anticipate receiving from KCC.
12. **New Parish Council Website –** The webmaster has said that the number of updates required by the Parish Council was in excess of what he had imagined and was therefore requested an increase in the monthly payment from £10 to £25 or £30. **Cost of training the Clerk to carry out this function was unclear and the Clerk was asked to make further investigations and report.**
13. **Insurance Policy –** The Clerk reminded Members that the insurance policy was due for renewal at a cost of £2,819.92 and would be paid at the March Full Council meeting.
14. **Speldhurst School –** At a recent meeting at Speldhurst School the head teacher, Mrs Hayward, had asked if the Council could assist with financing for the new canopy, as their capital budget had been cut by 80%, and what remained was already earmarked for ICT. The School had provided more information stating that the canopy was a statutory requirement and that they had opted for a 16mm polycarbonate canopy, which was more expensive than the PVC option but would last much longer at an overall cost of £14,400. Based on this information Councillors deliberated and **AGREED** to recommend to Full Council that a grant of £3,000 be made to the School towards the canopy.
15. **Lockable posts –** The Clerk had nothing further to report because he was expecting some feedback from residents. He will make further investigations.

16. **Langton Green School Trip to Marchiennes** – An email had been received from the School asking if the Council would be prepared to contribute £450 towards the annual trip. The request was discussed and it was within the figure budgeted for and therefore **AGREED**.
17. **Salt Bin – Furzefield Avenue** – A total of 31 petition forms requesting the replacement of a salt/grit bin had been handed in to the Clerk requesting that the salt bin, at the corner of Furzefield Avenue and Barden Road be re-instated. **The Clerk was requested to contact Kent Highway Services** bearing in mind that KCC Member, John Davies had agreed to fund it out of his Member Fund should it satisfy KHS criteria.
18. **Clerk's Hours** – The Clerk said that it had not been necessary to work overtime in December, January and February and he said that he was trying to maintain a strict 25 hours per week.
The Clerk and the Assistant Clerk left the room.
Cllr Mrs Jeffreys reported that she and Cllr Parker had had a meeting with the Clerk and had carried out his annual appraisal and he had passed it. They were both due, in accordance with their contract, an increase in their salary of one spinal point with effect from April 1st 2011. Councillors **AGREED** to increase their respective salaries. This increased the Clerk to LC2 32 and the Assistant Clerk to LC1 19 and represented a pro rata annual increase of £524 and £173 respectively.
19. **Membership of ACRK** – Annual membership of ACRK was up for renewal and there were two options – individual Parish Council £35 or Parish Council and a Community Hall £65. As there were three Village Halls within the Parish the Clerk was asked to clarify if it would include all of them.
20. **Banking Arrangements** – The Clerk reported that Cllr Mrs Waters and Cllr Ellis had been replaced by Cllrs Milner and Parker as signatories and this was now in place but internet access had been unavailable since the change. He also reported that he had requested from Barclays that an automatic “sweep” facility be put place to save having to regularly transfer money from one account to another. He had been informed that this was chargeable but had since been informed by another Parish Council that Barclays did not charge them for the “sweep”. He was in email correspondence with them on these outstanding matters.
21. **Items for Information** – There were none.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

CHAIRMAN