

Speldhurst Parish Council

MINUTES OF SPELDHURST PARISH COUNCIL'S ANNUAL MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 21st APRIL 2008 AT 7.30pm

IN LANGTON GREEN VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT: Cllr. Crundwell - Chairman, together with TWELVE Councillors and approximately 50 parishioners.

1. **Notice convening the Meeting** – Notices had been placed on the Parish Notice Boards
2. **Declarations of Interests** – No declarations were noted
3. **Apologies** – County Councillor John Davies and Ron Fisher – Chairman of Speldhurst Village Society
4. **Guest Speaker : County Councillor Keith Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Highways and David Hall, Senior Highways Engineer**

Cllr. Crundwell opened the meeting informing those present that this year's format was slightly different to give everyone a chance of meeting councillors and enjoy a glass of wine. Cllr. Crundwell introduced County Councillor Keith Ferrin.

County Councillor Keith Ferrin invited questions from the audience and responded as follows :

The Parish Council can sponsor work depending on its nature. Work on roads would require a Traffic Regulation Order which can only be obtained through KHS. A Highways contractor would need to be used and KHS made aware of any work. Contributions can be made to Highways work but the work has to be appropriate and agreed.

20mph – KHS are reviewing all speed limits within the next 3 years. No speed limits will be reviewed while this review is taking place. Our review is within this financial year (before 31st March 2009).

Small maintenance jobs are normally carried out within the month. Quality control on all work.

Traffic calming – there are disadvantages to having these installed and we should be aware that sometimes campaigns are started to get rid of them.

Zebra and Pelican crossings need an anti-slip surface which is expensive.

The Clerk was asked to write to David Hall with outstanding Parish Projects.

Cllr. Richard Wheeler, on behalf of the Parish Council, thanked County Councillor Keith Ferrin and David Hall for giving their time and answering questions.

5. **Minutes of the last meeting held on 16th April 2007** were approved and signed.
6. **Matters Arising** – There were no matters arising
7. **Chairman's Report**

Cllr. Crundwell thanked all the Parish Councillors for their continuing loyalty, support and dedication. Councillors voluntarily devote a considerable amount of time and effort to carry out their duties and responsibilities and this was very much appreciated. He thanked the Clerk for not only keeping the Councillors informed of all matter affecting the Parish Council but also for the many committee meetings she attended, meeting representatives and generally being very pro-active in her approach to Parish Council business.

Thanks were given to Police Sergeant Peter Heaton and PCSO Ray Nuttall for their support and encouragement in dealing with the matters of concern in our area.

It was with sadness, that Cllr. Crundwell advised that four councillors would be leaving the Council. Cllr. Roger Dixon had served for 17 years and during that time had been a member of most of the committees and also

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Chairman of the Planning Committee. Cllr. David Jukes had served on the Council for 19 years and Cllr. Trevor Palmer, who had not only served for many years as a Parish Councillor but had worked tirelessly with the other Trustees to bring to fruition the dream of the superb new village hall.

During the past year three new Councillors had been welcomed, Charlotte Waters, Trevor Parker and Trevor Stevens.

Cllr. Crundwell reported :

Highways - At last a new and improved road surface, signs and road markings are to be implemented at Heathgate Corner, the scene of so many accidents over recent year. A relocated safer crossing point on the Speldhurst Road for pupils attending Langton Green Junior School is due to be constructed soon. Our sincere thanks to Tom Shields, the landowner, and John Davies who has assisted with a grant towards the cost of the project.

Marchiennes - Our links with Marchiennes are being revived by Gerry Colley, to whom we are most grateful. 2008 will see the 10th Anniversary of our association.

Speldhurst - The footpath in front of the Old Northfield Public House in Speldhurst has been re-instated and our thanks to Ron Fisher and his band of grumpy old men (his expression) for carrying out the preparation work and to Kent Highways for the path re-instatement, now a much safer route for patients attending the Speldhurst surgery.

Langton Green - Langton Green now boasts a super village sign opposite The Hare and we thank Chris May and the Rural Society for their work in this achievement.

Parish Council Surgeries - Parish Council surgeries have been introduced and are proving popular and successful, thanks to the various councillors in attendance and to Pauline who has attended all the surgeries and to PCSO Ray Nuttall for his input.

Speedwatch - The interactive mobile Speedwatch device has been well used and with assistance from the Police our aim is to reduce speeds through our villages.

11. Committee Reports

Planning – please see attached report by Cllr.Dixon

Finance – please see attached report by Cllr. Mrs Jeffreys

Footpaths – Cllr. Stevens reported that there were 50 rural footpaths within the Parish and were probably some of the best maintained in the Borough. Cllr. Stevens thanked his devoted team of 15-20 volunteers and Kent County Council for their support.

Recreation – Cllr. Ellis reported that it had been a very quiet year and was pleased to report that the vandalism had ceased. The new teen and play areas were eagerly awaited.

Kent Association of Local Councils – Acts as a body for discussion between Parish Councils.

Play Area – After a year of hard work, consultation and research from the Play Area Committee, which was made up of councillors from each village, the official opening was planned for July.

The Chairman thanked members of the public for their support to the Parish Council and for attending this Annual Meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

CHAIRMAN

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PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT 2008 by Cllr. Roger Dixon (Committee Chairman)

The Chairman thanked Committee members and the Clerk for their assistance and support in the past year.

There were 137 Planning Applications reviewed in the last year, the lowest number in a year since we started keeping detailed statistics.

As before, the balance between the villages is fairly constant and reflects the balance of population within the Parish. The fall in the overall number of applications is, I believe, due to both the saturation effect of previous years and the general economic slowdown.

We do Recommend Approval or Refusal whenever there is a clear-cut case and will ask one of our Borough Councillors to `call in` any applications when we believe that the matter should be decided by the Western Area Planning Committee. Otherwise in the majority of cases we remain Neutral and leave the decision to the Borough Planners, but at the same time, still occasionally make additional comment.

There were two major applications of note during the year, Way High in Furzefield Avenue, Speldhurst and the proposed Middlefield development adjacent to Langton Green. Each of these is an example of what is now regarded as Brownfield Site development.

The Way High development exemplifies back garden development squeezing in units to maximise a developer's profit.

On this application we Recommended Refusal to both applications, one for 7 large detached dwellings (Refused by TWBC on several grounds including the non adherence to Policy H2) and the subsequent application for 12 dwellings which met Policy H2 (refused by TWBC on several grounds but not Policy H2).

Both of the decisions went to Appeal and the Inspector found in favour of the Developer in both cases. Whilst obviously we are not happy with the Inspector's decision it does appear to drive a `Coach and Horses` through TWBC's Policy H2.

Contrast this definition of a Brownfield Site with the proposed Middlefield development, which is based on the redevelopment of an existing site with derelict buildings and an existing access road. The site itself falls outside of the Parish but the developer purchased a house in The Boundary which is inside the Parish with the intention to demolish it in order to gain access to the development.

The Parish Council has no objections to the development per se as it will both tidy up an eyesore and provide 57 new dwellings. However, we Recommended Refusal as the original access onto the A264 was not going to be utilised.

The existing A264 access was, until a few years ago, the only access onto the site which was a commercial nursery and a residential school. We asked why shouldn't it be used now ?

The applicants are a developer and KCC own the site. This in our view gives rise to a potential conflict of interest between Kent Highway Services who are part of KCC, and KCC as the site owner with regard to this access. In view of this the Parish Council has retained a local firm of solicitors as a precaution should this application go to Judicial Review or the like and correspondence has already been passed. TWBC has yet to determine this application.

Chairman, I started by thanking the members of the committee, my Vice Chairman Trevor Palmer and the Clerk for their support. You have my eternal thanks also for the expertise you have given to the Committee, to the extent that I suggest that the Parish Council seriously considers retaining a planning consultant in the future on an ad hoc basis to assist with those large and complicated applications which we are increasingly asked to comment on.

I leave tonight after some 17 years on this Council which I have enjoyed very much.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT 2008 by Cllr. Mrs Lynn Jeffreys (Committee Chairman)

The two primary jobs of the Finance Committee are

- i) To authorise expenditure when needs arise or requests are received
- ii) To plan for future needs and ensure we maintain sufficient funds to cover both those needs AND the unexpected requests or requirements that crop up just about every year.

Last year we forecast that our expenditure this year would be around £60,000 to £70,000. If you look at the Financial Position as at 31st March 2008 you will see we weren't far wrong – payments to 31st March 2008 totalled £59,809.

The sheet listing exceptional expenses and grants shows you what needs have arisen over the last 12 months, and the pie chart shows you how the money has been shared out between the villages. You will see that Speldhurst has received most in grants this time, while most money has been spent on maintenance in Langton Green.

This is a good moment to underline that we look at each case according to its merits. We don't apportion money to the villages according to their size or number of inhabitants, nor do we decide that a certain village has already received too much money this year. Where there is a demonstrable need and parishioners are to benefit then the case will get a favourable hearing.

While you're looking at the pie chart, I'd like to mention administration. Many people see this as an undesirable expense which should be kept as low as possible – charities are often judged on their ratio of administration costs to grants. In the case of the Parish Council I would commend a much more positive attitude.

Our primary administration cost is, of course, Pauline – her pay and her expenses. But Pauline's work is for the benefit of the parish and is crucial for the effectiveness of the Parish Council. She deals with all complaints from parishioners or councillors all their requests for information, all correspondence from the Borough and County Councils. She is the central point for all correspondence from the Parish Council to other bodies, does all the necessary chasing on the phone, obtains quotes for works to be carried out, keeps the books and produces the accounts, and of course attends our meetings and records the minutes. The benefits the Parish and the Councillors obtain from her work cannot be measured in pounds and pence, but I am sure I speak for all the Councillors when I say that in good, old fashioned, value for money terms she's worth every penny.

I'll move on to part two of our job – planning for future needs. In one respect this began early last summer when we started to consider the new play area for Langton Green Recreation Ground. The sudden acceleration of the project to fit in with the Borough Council's Lottery application brought a flurry of work during the holiday period but also, much to our delight, a lottery grant of £50,000. The Parish Council's contribution to the project is expected to be £47,000 and will, of course, be the largest item of expenditure. We've also budgeted for a £20,000 contribution to Ashurst for a play area, further contributions to local churches and renovation projects and we are part-financing the improved school crossing in Langton Green with John Davies our County Councillor.

Given that in addition to funding all of these projects we must also provide for the unexpected, our Precept this year is the highest so far at £99,000. Whilst it could be said that the Langton Green play area is an exceptionally large project and that, therefore, future years' expenditure could be lower, we have seen over recent years that the Parish Council has tended to be involved in large projects on a regular basis, and recent Government pronouncements have encouraged Parish Councils to take increasing responsibility for local needs. My prediction, therefore, would be that this Council's expenditure is likely to remain somewhere near this level.

Finally, to thanks and farewells. The Finance Committee brings considerable expertise and common sense to our meetings and I am constantly reassured that as a result our decisions are well-informed and I thank them for all their guidance and assistance. With the departure of David Crundwell and David Jukes we lose our longest serving members of the committee – they predate me by some considerable margin. Their experience will be missed and is not easily replaced and our special thanks go to them.