

Local Government Act 1972



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

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held on Monday 2nd October 2023 at 7.30 pm in Ashurst Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Cleaver, Davies, Ellery, Leach, Muress, Rowe, Scarborough, Tarricone and Turner.

OFFICERS PRESENT

K Neve, Clerk and C Barrett, Assistant Clerk (CB) (minutes).

IN ATTENDANCE

Apologies had been received from County Cllr McInroy who was attending another meeting, and Borough Cllr Sankey due to illness.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two members of the public present.

23/209 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for the accuracy of the minutes. The recording will be deleted once the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting.

23/210 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Dooley (study-related), Lyle (away) and Norton (Covid).

23/211 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

23/212 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

23/213 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 4th September 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of 4th September 2023 Full Council meeting, previously forwarded to members, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23/214 Public Open Session

None of the members of the public attending wished to speak.

23/215 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

There were none.

23/216 Chair's Report

There were two major projects currently impacting the clerking team's workload, which meant they were beyond full capacity. While some workpieces were statutory, others may need to be deferred. Cllr Curry asked councillors to consider how they could help lighten the load and to be patient if work was late in being completed.

There was nothing of significance to report from the recent Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) meeting.

Cllrs Davies and Ellery joined the meeting at 7.35 pm.

23/217 Clerk's Report

The clerks had been kept busy with work on the Pavilion Review Freedom of Information (FOI) request, pavilion bookings, and the Speldhurst Chapel Project. Both the FOI request and managing the pavilion booking system had been particularly time-consuming for the Clerk and Assistant Clerk (KH).

Cllr Ellery asked how long it would take to provide the necessary FOI data. Cllr Curry explained that the council was obliged to put in 12-14 hours free of charge, but this did not account for the time taken to understand the scope of the request. Thereafter, it would cost £25 for each additional hour. Cllr Curry and the Clerk would 'start the clock' on their allotted 12-14 hours on Tuesday 3rd October.

There had been many inquiries from the public regarding the Speldhurst Road closure due to emergency gas works by Southern Gas Network (SGN). The Assistant Clerk (CB) had been liaising with SGN and Kent County Council (KCC) about the current closure and the need to set up better communication around future road closures. Work was scheduled to be completed on 5th October. Residents had been kept up to date via the website and Facebook.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) was carrying out a consultation on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2023-2028. TWBC had written to invite comments on its draft revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, which could be viewed on the consultation portal <https://twbc.online/hackney-and-private-hire-policy>. Anyone wishing to comment should do so before midnight on Friday 10th November 2023. The Clerk asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to take responsibility for looking at and responding to the consultation, however, no one wished to do so.

The Highways Committee had been struggling to establish a quorum, which had led to the postponement of their meeting. The Clerk asked anyone interested in joining Highways to email her.

23/218 General Matters – Actionable tasks which do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
9/23	Trial weed control April-Sept without use of glyphosate.	Env WG	09/01/23	Complete
New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
76/23	Notify HMRC of dissolution of SPC Pavilion Ltd, and request zero rates from the rateable authority.	RFO/Clerk/Cllr Lyle	07/08	TBA
89/23	Check tax implications on mobile phone for Groundsman.	RFO/Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
90/23	Allocate £10,000 in accounting system for PWLB and include item on each future agenda on progress.	RFO/Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
91/23	Publish Notice of conclusion and section 3 of AGAR on website.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
92/23	Respond to Sevenoaks DC on planning application and notify relevant Sevenoaks DC ward councillors.	Asst Clerk (KH)	04/09/23	Complete
93/23	Download app and complete paperwork for legal review	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
94/23	Confirm with Energypal the new 2-year energy contract with EDF.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete

95/23	Purchase new tables and chairs for Pavilion and allocate £5,000 in accounting system for this.	Clerk/RFO	04/09/23	TBA/ complete
96/23	Order wreaths for Remembrance Sunday and contact relevant Churches to confirm times of Services.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
97/23	Establish WG for Annual Parish Meeting 2024 and put item on agenda for next meeting.	Cllrs Curry, Muress & Tarricone/Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
98/23	Confirm appointment of SPC rep to LGVH Trustees and request updates and minutes from their meetings.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
99/23	Confirm Bronze package with Hugo Fox for website.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
100/23	Check with KCC Highways re ATCs not clashing with roadworks on Speldhurst Road.	Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
101/23	Seek quotations for works to path, step and fence at LGRGAsst Clerk (KH) for Amenities Cttee to consider.		04/09/23	In progress
102/23	Accept 2FA on office.com - Cllr Curry/Clerk to assist.	All Cllrs/Clerk	04/09/23	Complete
103/23	Book valuations and survey on Speldhurst Chapel.	Cllr Rowe/Clerk	02/10/23	
104/23	Approach Solicitors for conveyancing and preparing lease for Speldhurst Chapel.	Cllr Lyle/Clerk	02/10/23	
105/233	Liaise with Cllrs re date options for Annual Parish Meeting.	Clerk	02/10/23	
106/23	Chase Solicitors regarding lease for Pavilion.	Clerk	02/10/23	

23/219 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Ellery

- Report by the Chair including any committee meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the minutes having previously been forwarded to all members. The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 9th October.
- Report on budget virements and request that the virements listed be approved. It was **RESOLVED** to approve expenditure for Speldhurst Chapel, a legal review for Langton Green Pavilion, and furniture for the pavilion, as detailed in the Full Council minutes of 4th September 2023.
- Report on interim payments made since the last meeting.
Mastercard: £57.49* LG Service Station for Fuel for Van; £140* Royal British Legion for wreaths; £6.49* Amazon for fire security tamper seals; 12.41* Sainsbury's for tool fuel.
Unity: £812.40 Broxap Ltd for replacement bins at LGRG; 1,362.77 DD to Mastercard to bring balance to zero; £2,500 Cooper and Burnett for legal fees; £31.25 LG Village Hall for room hire; £36 Ashurst Village Hall for room hire; £375 Langton Life for Magazine Article; £278.86 DD to Veolia for waste and recycling; £884.86 NEST pension; £63.54 BT Broadband.
- To note decisions made under delegated authority. Items are starred above.

23/220 Accounts for Payment

It was **RESOLVED** that the invoices as listed below and checked by Cllr Leach, be paid.

Date	Payee Name	Reference	Amount £	Detail
02/10/2023	BT PLC	DD	63.54	Office Phone & Broadband
03/10/2023	M R Lawrence	MT2547	365.00	Mowing
03/10/2023	Hugo Fox	MT2548	122.28	Website Subscription
03/10/2023	Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd	MT2549	2,520.00	Pitch Maintenance
03/10/2023	Katie Neve	MT2550	8.10	Mileage
03/10/2023	Hallmaster Ltd	MT2553	238.80	Pavilion Booking System
03/10/2023	Tate & Tonbridge Fencing	MT2554	2.18	Palisade to repair fencing
13/10/2023	M:power accounting	MT	54.00	Payroll
20/10/2023	EDF Energy	DD	1,721.00	Pavilion Energy
20/10/2023	Employees	MT2551	5,065.98	Salaries
20/10/2023	HMRC	MT2552	2,341.34	Tax and NI
29/10/2023	Castle Water	DD	25.35	Pavilion Water
30/10/2023	Cloudy IT	MT2539	361.80	IT Support
	TOTAL PAYMENTS		£12,889.37	

23/221 Speldhurst Chapel Project

- To provide an update on the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) application – Cllr Rowe reported that the Chapel Project had now negotiated a lease extension for the chapel and the project could continue to move forward. Cllr Rowe had lined up two commercial valuations and a structural survey. The cost of the commercial valuations was priced at £1,750 each, while the cost of a structural survey was priced at £1,000. There was much discussion about whether two commercial valuations were necessary, given the cost, and the following points were made for and against this proposal:
 - Cllr Scarborough queried the cost and said that in his opinion just one valuation was sufficient.
 - Cllr Muress said that a ‘belt and braces’ approach comprising two valuations and a structural survey was necessary if the council was to avoid future issues.
 - It was felt that it was important to be able to demonstrate to critics of the project that the council had applied due diligence before taking on a considerable 25-year loan.
 - Cllr Curry added that paying for the two valuations and structural survey – a total cost of £4,500 – would be the parish council’s first solid expenditure for the project, as the Speldhurst Chapel Project team had covered the cost of the public consultation.

It was **RESOLVED** by a majority to approve two commercial valuations and a structural survey, however, one more valuation quote would be obtained before instructing the surveyors originally identified by Cllr Rowe. Cllr Scarborough said that it would be wise to investigate whether a solicitor could be appointed pending valuation.

- To consider the appointment of a solicitor for the purchase and lease of Speldhurst Chapel – Cllr Lyle had recommended using a specialised solicitor for the conveyancing and drafting of a lease agreement. Cllr Curry suggested approaching Cooper Burnett, who had been appointed to work on the Langton Green Pavilion review, to ask if they could do the work or recommend someone who could. It was agreed that Cllr Lyle should continue to work on this.

23/222 Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2024

To receive an update from the working group on progress regarding an appropriate date, location, and speaker - while previous meetings had featured a keynote speaker, Cllr Curry proposed that the 2024 APM should be a pared-down event, focussing on the parish council’s activities and achievements during the preceding year. The meeting would need to take place between 1st March and 1st June, and it was agreed that the Chair and the Clerk would send out potential dates for councillors to vote on.

23/223 Newsletter

To consider the future of the newsletter – The Clerk explained that the Assistant Clerk (CB) regularly and consistently provides articles for each of the village magazines and puts news alerts on the website and in the village Facebook chat groups. Putting together the bi-annual newsletter was an additional workload and its reach was questionable. The Clerk said that no one had been in touch asking about the newsletter since she had started working at the parish council. Instead of bi-annually, could a newsletter be put out periodically when there was something significant to say? For example, a newsletter in January could be dedicated to the outcome of the Speldhurst Chapel project.

The Assistant Clerk added that she felt resident engagement with the parish council had been high this year. The Facebook page had gained a considerable number of followers, and the Chapel Project consultation had meant that every household had received a communication in the post from the parish council for the first time in several years. With so much to do in the office, she would value the opportunity to defer a time-consuming workpiece.

Councillors agreed to the newsletter being rested for the time being but requested that the question of ensuring effective and engaging communications with residents be re-visited. Cllr Leach suggested that committees should come up with key messages they would like to go out to residents.

23/224 Planning Committee

Report by the Planning Chair including any committee meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the minutes having previously been forwarded to all members – a meeting had been held on 18th September and the draft minutes had been circulated. Cllr Rowe reported that 10 applications had been considered, and the committee had remained neutral on 9 of them, with 1 application already having been approved.

23/225 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – to receive an update on the Pavilion Review.

Councillor Curry reported that the Pavilion Review Panel was still working to reach an agreement with Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) on the details of the agreed Heads of Terms.

- a) It was **RESOLVED** to approve the delegated decision of the Pavilion Review Panel to engage Cooper Burnett Solicitors to carry out the legal review and transfer £2,500 towards the legal fees.
- b) To consider the quotation for the storage cupboard for the Pavilion – discussion of this item would be deferred until the next Full Council.
- c) To consider the hire charges for the Pavilion – Cllr Curry asked councillors to consider whether a discounted charge should be given to charities booking the Pavilion. He said that having investigated the hire charge levied by other halls, there did not appear to be a precedent for doing this. It was agreed that it would be preferable to keep one fee for all. Cllr Rowe added that the council already waived the hire charge for Emma Howden on Mondays when she ran community-focused lunches and events.

23/226 Committees and Working Groups (WG) and other Reports: to include any meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the draft minutes having previously been forwarded to all Members

- a) **Governance Committee** – There had been no meeting; the next meeting was scheduled for Monday 23rd October.
- b) **Highways Committee** – There had been no meeting and the next meeting on 3rd October had been postponed with a new date to be scheduled.
 - **Footpaths Co-Ordinator Update** – Cllr Muress had been working with the Assistant Clerk (CB) to establish which councillors would be happy to monitor parish footpaths for any issues or necessary repairs. They were making progress and planned to write a piece on footpaths for the November parish magazines.
- c) **Amenities Committee** – There had been no meeting; the next meeting was scheduled for Monday 30th October.
- d) **Air Traffic Committee** – There had been no meeting, and it had not been possible to establish a quorum for a meeting to formalise comments on Gatwick Airport's 2nd runway application to the Planning Inspectorate. It was **RESOLVED** to delegate authority to a working party made up of Cllrs Tarricone (committee chair) and Curry, together with Mr Barrington-Johnson and Mr Howden, the committee's two Members of the Public, to meet and formalise a response, for submission by 29th October.
- e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – Report by Cllr Turner. A meeting was held on 6th September, and subsequently, an application was submitted to Sussex Lund for funding of £2,000 to develop biodiversity in Pocket Park, Roopers. A decision would be made in January 2024. The Clerk had also applied to Crowborough Tesco to fund the biodiversity project at Pocket Park, and the project could be voted for by shoppers.
 - **Weed Control Trial** – To provide an update and to consider an approach to weed control in 2024 – The trial took place at Langton Green Recreation Ground and the groundsman, supervised by Cllr Turner, had trialled various products and approaches to weed control in different areas, including the car park, footpaths, the paved area around the pavilion, and the playground. Cllr Turner said that the trial had not been straightforward since it had not been possible to carry out weed control in July due to bad weather. Additionally, the Groundsman had tended to use Glyphosate-based weed killer more heavily in previous years, while this year, areas such as the grass verge bordering the footpath leading from the recreation ground to Langton Green Primary School, had been left to grow with occasional strimming. However, while a direct comparison was not possible – and it was clear that nothing was as effective at weed control as Glyphosate – it had been possible to conclude that a product called Natural Round up did work when used regularly. This product had proved more effective than a solution of vinegar, washing up liquid, and salt.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve a further trial of this product in 2024, using the lessons learned from the 2023 growing season to apply the product more efficiently right from the start of April.

Cllr Leach left the meeting at 8.52 p.m.

f) **KALC** – Report by the Chair. There was nothing to report.

23/227 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

9th October – Finance Committee

16th October – Planning Committee

23rd October – Governance Committee

30th October – Amenities Committee

31st October – Environment Working Group

6th November – Full Council

13th November – Planning Committee

20th November – Finance Committee

27th November – Amenities Committee (TBC)

23/228 Items for Information:

Cllr Scarbrough informed members that he would be stepping down from the parish council with immediate effect. Cllr Curry said that he was sorry to see him go and thanked him for the many contributions he had made to the parish.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.59 pm.

Chair