

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

**12<sup>th</sup> May 2021 via zoom**

**Attendees:** Cllrs John Turner (JT, Chair), Ed Langridge (EL), Alan Ford (AF), Ken Howes (KH), Simon Norton (SN) and Lizzie Pannell (LP)

**In attendance:** Catherine Barrett (CB) Administrative Assistant

**Apologies for absence received from:** Cllr Ben Scarbrough (work commitments), Jenny Cooper (family commitments)

### **1) Welcome by the Chairman**

JT welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that as a working group, the EWG was not affected by Government regulations stating that parish council committees must meet in person again now that Covid-19 restrictions were easing. Therefore, the EWG could continue meeting via Zoom.

### **2) An overview of the focus areas detailed in the Environment Working Group (EWG) charter**

JT presented the focus areas listed below:

- i) Enhance the AONB and Green areas of the Parish eg. tree planting; supporting local fauna and wildlife
- ii) Reduce the environmental footprint of the Parish eg. promoting sustainable home consumption such as energy and water saving; supporting and enhancing, where possible, Council and Government environmental initiatives
- iii) Encourage residents' ideas on conservation and environmental improvements eg. via engaging school children; litter picks

JT then asked for questions.

- KH asked if there had been any formal discussion with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Kent County Council (KCC) about the charter and whether it fitted with their policy. JT replied that he had checked and ensured that the focus areas dovetailed with wider government policy, whilst giving a local perspective.
- SN asked to what extent the full Parish Council supported the EWG's objectives. JT replied that there had been a push from several Parish Councillors to resurrect the working group and that he had volunteered to chair it, with EL, Dave Pate (DP) and BS volunteering to join him. They had worked on a new set of Terms of Reference (ToR), incorporating the focus areas, and presenting them to Full Council for review. Full Council discussed the ToR in detail and made minor amendments before unanimously agreeing their contents.

### **3) SPC – measurement of GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions as part of UK's Net Zero aim**

JT presented slides taken from TWBC's presentation on Net Zero. JT felt that the first step the Parish Council should take in committing to Net Zero was to calculate a typical year's fuel consumption and convert this into an equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> measure. This would make it possible to look at ways to reduce and offset GHG emissions over time. JT said he and CB would take responsibility for this and asked for questions.

- EL asked how emissions would be measured. JT gave the example of the Parish Council van's petrol consumption. The number of litres of fuel used during 2019 – seen as a

more 'typical' year than 2020 – would be calculated and converted into an equivalent unit of CO<sub>2</sub> (eCO<sub>2</sub>).

- SN asked JT to clarify what the Parish Council owned and controlled. JT gave the example of Langton Green Village Hall Car Park. Although the parish council owned it, it did not control the number of cars parking there so would not include their fuel consumption in its calculation. It would, however, include fuel claimed as expenses when used by councillors traveling on parish council business. JT would give a full breakdown once the calculations were made.
- KH asked if the Government had officially asked for parish councils to commit to reducing carbon emissions. JT replied that although it had not directly requested this, the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) had advised that they should.

#### **4) Ideas for the EWG Green Agenda**

##### **Tips for an Environmentally Friendly Home**

JT presented a power point of household tips he had created. There was discussion about the best way to share this with residents. EL suggested printing a poster for village halls, engaging with schools and printing leaflets.

This led to a wider discussion on how to engage residents with general environmental matters and get them to take global warming seriously. LP said that explaining why you should do something was an effective tactic, for example, "turn the tap off when you brush your teeth because it saves on the energy used to process water". She also said people like to know the benefits, eg saving money, and suggested using Nextdoor as a social media platform.

SN said that communication should be kept simple and that using social media would be preferable, with less environmental impact than print. He suggested the parish council gather email addresses for as many households as possible and use email communications. It was agreed that communicating with primary schools would be an effective way to get the message across too.

KH said that getting people to understand why was important, since many people had different ideas about where the problem lay. He suggested adding a slide to this effect. It was agreed that it was important to get the right balance between data and persuasive, emotional statements. JT thanked everyone for their contributions and would propose a way forward for the next meeting

##### **Enhancing our Green Space**

EL reported that Langton Green Village Society (LGVS) had undertaken to plant 400 trees in Langton Green every year for 3 years as part of a national tree planting initiative. They had received grants from the Woodland Trust and the National Greenleaf Campaign, on condition that they make their tree planting activities educational for the community. They had hoped that every household would buy a tree, but this had not worked out quite as planned. The initiative had been successful in all other respects.

JT asked the group whether they thought other villages in the parish would benefit from tree planting, or if it would be better to focus on caring for existing trees.

KH said that there should be a two-pronged attack on tree-planting and tree-maintenance. For example, many trees in the parish that needed one did not have a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), and residents who pledged to re-plant when applying to fell existing trees did not always keep their promise. KH added that it was important to educate residents about how to look after their trees, for example trees that were being strangled by Ivy.

EL suggested writing a case study on the trees that had been part of a major tree-planting undertaking 10 years ago in Shadwell Woods.

SN reported that having a working party dedicated to looking after the Village Churchyard at Old Groombridge had been successful and felt this approach could be applied in other areas. It was agreed that there should be a clear call to action to residents to look after their trees and hedgerows. JT thanked everyone for their feedback and said he would propose a way forward when they next met.

**The Great British Spring Clean, 28<sup>th</sup> May-13<sup>th</sup> June**

JT advised that groups and individuals were already involved in litter picking across the parish. It was agreed that the Parish Council would put out a message telling residents about the Great British Spring Clean, letting them know that many of their neighbours were already working hard to keep the parish tidy, and encouraging them to do the same.

**5) Any other items for discussion**

AF said that he had enjoyed listening to all that had been said and agreed with much of it. He added that it was important to remember the local wildlife when tree-planting and managing trees. For example, some birds liked darker woodland, while flowers and seeds benefited from coppicing. AF had previously taken part in an inventory of the trees, plants and hedgerows at the Pocket Park in Roopers and would be interested in doing this for all parish-council owned land in order to have a base plan of the bio-diversity that existed. CB said she would find the original inventory of the Pocket Park.

**6) Covid Update**

It was agreed to continue meeting by Zoom, which was still necessary for some members of the group and more environmentally friendly than meeting in person.

The meeting closed at 8.43pm.