



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

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY, 27th MARCH 2012 at 8pm
IN SPELDHURST VILLAGE HALL**

This Parish Meeting was called by six electors to propose the following motion:

“This Parish is in favour of the Preservation of all areas of Green Belt within the Parish without exception”

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Mrs Jeffreys and the minutes taken by the Clerk, Chris May with approximately 75 people in attendance including Borough Cllrs Mrs Soyke, Jukes and Stanyer.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced herself and the Clerk. She then asked Mr Tew to open the debate as he was one of the electors who had called the meeting.

Mr Tew proposed the motion and this was seconded by Mrs Smith-Tilley. He read a statement in which he said there were two issues that he was concerned about i) the Local Needs Housing (LNH) process which he said had been rejected by parishioners and ii) that Cllrs were not representing the views of the parishioners. He said that in his opinion Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK), the organisation which carried out the original survey, was not an independent organisation and the consultation event held in November was a platform for English Rural Housing Association (ERHA) to promote the development. He said that the LNH committee rejected the proposed development at their meeting in January but he wondered why this decision was overturned at the Full Council meeting in February. He said that he was against the development on Green Belt.

Mrs Smith-Tilley referred to the field (site 15) and said that she and her husband had tried to buy it when it was last offered for sale but were told that they had been outbid but this was apparently not so. However they had been reassured by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) that no development would be allowed on the site for a number of reasons including the fact that it was Green Belt. The field has since been gifted to someone who does not live in the village. Having been let down by earlier reassurances she does not accept Council guarantees that no further development will happen especially if the utilities infrastructure is in place.

Cllr Jukes (TWBC) said that he was in favour of the motion except the part that said “without exception”. He said that in a court of law it would not stand because of the exceptions that are allowed on Green Belt, one of which is Agricultural Occupancy Condition (AOC). He referred to a map of Tunbridge Wells and said that of the 6,000 houses which had to be built by 2027 4,500 had been already allocated mostly on Brown Field sites. 150 were to be built in Hawkhurst and a 1,000 in Tunbridge Wells, of which 300 might be on the hospital site. He referred to the statements today in the House of Commons by our MP who was handing unprecedented power to the communities and wanted to ensure the places we cherish are bequeathed to the next generation.

Alan Marriot referred to the MP’s speech and stressed two things: i) Localism – which he interpreted as taking in to account the views of the community and ii) Sustainability – the need for developments to support both growth and jobs with an infrastructure while protecting the environment and he said that the Parish Council should consider this.

Cllr Stanyer (TWBC) referred to the Green Belt policy out today. He stated that he absolutely supports the motion tonight and said that the Local Development Plan (LDF) going through now needs a further 700 houses to be built and he does not want Speldhurst to be considered. He was at odds with the Parish Council on this issue, said he had always opposed it and thought the process flawed.

Mr Danks said the Green Belt had been established in 1947 by the foresight of previous generations. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will assist in fighting encroachment but rural exception sites are still allowed and said that any use needs proper consultation and careful considered thought.

Mr Brown was pleased to see so many Cllrs present listening to the public. He explained he was a Cllr until February and had voted against the proposed development. He felt strongly that Langton Green, Ashurst and Old Groombridge should have been considered. He also said in his opinion the local connection was not strong enough. He was concerned that should the poll not to build on Green Belt was rejected it could be taken as a green light to build on it.

Mrs Ponsford referred to the Parish Council's Parish Vision document which said the Council would encourage the protection of the Green belt. She was amazed the proposed development had gone so far and in her opinion there was no choice between housing and Green Belt because if Green Belt land is taken it is lost forever. She said that no one has a right to live where they grow up.

Mr Jeffrey suggested that the words "without exception" be deleted.

Mr Tew in response said the Save Our Green Belt Group (SOGB) was against urban sprawl and having consulted Cllr Jukes suggested that the proposal become "This Parish is in favour of the Preservation of all areas of Green Belt within the Parish excepting areas of existing developed sites within the Green belt".

Mr Howes said this could mean that one house could be demolished and 100 built in its place.

Mrs Chapatte said it would lose the force of the message.

Mr Danks said just delete "without exception".

There was some discussion of alternative forms of wording.

Mr Ponsford referred to the Government's statement this afternoon and the definition of "sustainable" – better lives for us should not mean worse lives for the future generation. He said that Green Belt should be treasured and the Government's announcement encouraged the restriction of sprawl, encroachment and wanted to stop villages merging. He said he noted that the Parish Council was establishing a Neighbourhood Planning Working Group and encouraged people to get involved at this stage.

Mr Wren said he felt the proposed motion was short sighted. It could mean that the school could not expand for example. He realised that he was in the minority and declared that he had applied for a place if the development went ahead because he could not afford anywhere else in the village. In his opinion there were not enough young people in the village and the social ranges were limited. He felt there was a need for the housing but acknowledged he was biased and said there was a lack of middle housing which is leading to the village being full of older people.

Mrs Townsend agreed with Mr Wren. She worked at the CAB and saw a need for housing every day. She felt Speldhurst was becoming a middle income ghetto.

Cllr Mrs Soyke (TWBC) supported Mr Ponsford's encouragement of members of the public to work with the Parish Council's initiative in creating a Neighbourhood Plan.

Mr Jeffreys said that for the last three years he had worked at CAB and said there was a housing crisis in Tunbridge Wells and because of that he was strongly opposed to this motion.

Cllr Mrs Podbury said she had been lobbied by a number of people both for and against and therefore supported a referendum.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that not all people chose to come to the meeting because they were intimidated by the opposition.

Cllr Mrs Hull said that she had suggested that the TWBC policy needed to be changed to accommodate young people like Mr Wren in that all social housing within the village should be classed as Local Needs.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that a Parish Poll will cost £2,500 and is not binding. She added the motion would put the Parish Council in a difficult position particularly with regard to any proposed development on recreation grounds.

Mrs Smith-Tilley suggested that if the Poll was not binding the Parish Council could use its discretion.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys observed that a poll would then change nothing.

Mr Clark said he was concerned that the pro opinion would be ignored at Borough Council level.

Mr Robinson asked what the term Green Belt means in the proposed motion? Is it the village envelope or outside the envelope? It has to be clear.

It was clarified that the words “Green Belt” refer to the land outside the village envelope.

Mrs Smith-Tilley again suggested that the words “without exception” be deleted.

Mr Irving said he supported Mr Wren – the village should be able to find places for young people but he was convinced that once the initial development went ahead the rest of the field would be built on.

Mr Howes said he was concerned that they had not heard from many of the body of opinion against.

Mrs Cambridge suggested that there should be no mention that this poll is requested by Speldhurst residents because it an issue that affects the whole parish and might encourage parishioners living outside the village to vote in favour of development to avoid their area being considered.

Mr Tew responded by saying there was a wider point and it was not just LNH.

Mr Critchlow said he did not like unsigned fly posters being put up and distributed around the village and therefore would not support the motion.

Mr Clark said he thought the lack of transparency on LNH generally is disgraceful and Cllrs need to apply vigilance on all parts of the concept.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys then asked what the motion was to be

It was decided and agreed it should be **“This Parish is in favour of the Preservation of all areas of Green Belt within the Parish”**. By a show of hands the majority demanded a poll.

The Clerk would contact TWBC next day and arrange a poll which would probably be held on Thursday April 19th. He explained that the Village Halls would be open as polling stations between 4-9pm.

There being nothing further to discuss the meeting closed at 9.25pm

CHAIRMAN