



Speldhurst
Parish Council

Working for the
whole community

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

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL'S OPEN MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 10th OCTOBER 2011 AT 7.30pm
IN SPELDHURST VILLAGE HALL**

PRESENT: Cllr. Mrs Lynn Jeffreys - Chairman, together with nine Councillors, Borough Cllr Julian Stanyer and 70 parishioners.

The following papers were available to those present: Financial; Local Needs Housing and Broadband information.

- 1. Apologies for Absence** – Cllr Mrs Hull, Cllr Owen, Cllr Ringrose, County Cllr John Davies and Borough Cllr David Jukes
- 2. Chairman's Introduction** - Cllr. Mrs Jeffreys opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining that the meeting was to give residents the opportunity to raise issues and to have an input in to how Speldhurst Parish Council spends its money in the next financial year. She introduced Committee Chairmen Cllr Parker – Finance, Cllr Mrs Podbury – Planning and Highways, Cllr Brown – Environment, Cllr Milner – Footpaths and Amenities and Cllr Woodward – Local Needs Housing and Broadband and asked Cllr Woodward to address the meeting.
- 3. Local Needs Housing** - Cllr Woodward explained that further information resulting from site surveys and assessments is awaited from English Rural Housing Association (ERHA). There will be a second Consultation Day on 9th November at 4.00-8.00pm in Speldhurst Village Hall and a Committee meeting thereafter. The Local Needs Housing Committee will not make a final decision itself but will make a recommendation to the Full Council.
- 4. Broadband** - Cllr Woodward explained that as the local rural community has poor Broadband speeds and service and a considerable number of businesses are run from home or small business premises within the parish the Parish Council has decided to ascertain what could be done to improve the situation. The surveys, prepared and distributed by the Parish Council and volunteers, are currently being collected and will be analysed by the Broadband Working Group followed by consideration of options for improvement and funding opportunities. Any offers of help and/or expertise from residents would be welcomed by the Broadband Working Group.
- 5. Question and Answer Session** - Cllr Mrs Jeffreys invited questions from the public.

Dr Philippa Smith of Speldhurst asked whether mobile masts would be used in connection with the faster Broadband project.

Cllr Woodward replied that the survey results are still awaited to establish what the need is before considering the solutions and funding.

Philip Tew of Speldhurst asked how independent the body was that dealt with the original Local Needs Housing survey.

Cllr Woodward answered that Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) is not a local Government Agency but a Voluntary Organisation with no vested interest in the outcome of the survey.

Mr Tew responded by saying that ACRK advertise that they support sustainable communities and would therefore be in favour of such a scheme.

Cllr Woodward stated that it is not ACRK's decision whether or not this LNH scheme goes ahead.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys added that this was a TWBC initiative and their relationship with ACRK was already established.

Patricia Rowland of Speldhurst asked what homework SPC had done on ACRK before they carried out the LNH survey.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys replied that LNH is a Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) initiative and when TWBC approached parishes in the borough they already had a working relationship with ACRK and were always going to use them for the surveys.

Will Stephens of Speldhurst stated that he considers Speldhurst to be a precarious rural community with incessant traffic problems and that village facilities cannot support any further developments. This was given much support by many of the people present.

Alistair McLuskie of Speldhurst said he thinks that rather than consider each proposed development in the village in turn consideration should be given to where the village should be in 10 years time.

Cllr Woodward said that he values this input and referred to the emerging concept of Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP).

Martin Rowland of Speldhurst asked whether SPC can actually veto the project or not.

Cllr Woodward advised that SPC has supported TWBC in developing the idea of LNH and that although TWBC could go ahead with the scheme without the agreement of SPC, the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) ERHA has stated that they would not go ahead without the support of SPC.

Dr Philippa Smith said she considers that if the survey had asked whether people supported building LNH on Green Belt and had only asked Speldhurst residents the responses would have been different.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys stressed that it is a Parish wide project.

David Kneeshaw of Speldhurst asked for there to be show of hands for and against the proposal.

Mrs Smith-Tilley of Speldhurst referred to 'nimbyism' and said she thinks residents of Langton Green, Ashurst and Old Groombridge would support the proposal if it meant the houses were not built in their own village. She also asked if the vote at Full Council has to be unanimous or a majority.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys confirmed that the vote is a majority of Councillors present at the meeting.

Roy Langman of Speldhurst said he suspects there will be further building on the rest of the site, is worried about the highway access and thinks the whole thing is a con that will lead to further development. This was supported by many of the people present.

A resident interrupted to accuse Councillors of bribery and corruption with the Developer.

Cllrs asked for a withdrawal.

A resident asked whether the properties will be for rental or part ownership.

Cllr Woodward advised that they will all be rental.

The resident then asked what the owner will do with the rest of the land thereafter.

Cllr Woodward replied that it is Green Belt land, this is an exception site and the rest of the land will not be purchased for the scheme and will not be allocated for housing development.

A resident asked where SPC are in the decision making process.

Cllr Woodward replied that it is still being considered and discussed. It will be a decision for the Full Council and there is no pre-conceived decision.

Richard Larkin of Speldhurst asked why a brown field site was not being considered instead of this green field site in Green Belt.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys stated in response to several of the above questions and statements that seven houses in Speldhurst was definitely not nearly a big enough scheme to make bribery an option and that all the available brown field sites in the parish had been considered and ruled out by TWBC.

Ken Gornall of Speldhurst said he is pleased to hear it would be a fully tenanted scheme but wonders if those who have expressed an interest in one of the properties realise this. He also asked how people on a low income could afford to rent the properties.

Cllr Woodward explained that the rents will be lower than the market rents because the land cost is significantly lower and the construction costs are reduced by grant aid.

Will Stephens asked about the land value.

Alistair McLuskie stated that as he understands it, it would be above existing market value but a long way below development value.

Nicola Wood of Speldhurst asked how the highway access on a busy bend can be justified.

Cllr Woodward confirmed that Kent Highways have had input into the highway access location and will be consulted again as part of the planning process.

Cllr Mrs Podbury reported that there is currently a pre-application enquiry regarding the access and highways.

Richard Larkin said that a driveway from their house onto Langton Road was shut off in 1971 for safety reasons.

Cllr Woodward advised that Kent Highways suggest that implemented traffic calming as part of the scheme will make this section of road safer.

John Andrew thanked SPC for their highway signs but said there are still many issues. He suggested Interactive Speed Signs (ISS) would be helpful on Langton Road by the School, in Barden Road by the shop and further outside the village on the dangerous bend in Barden Road.

Cllr Mrs Podbury confirmed that speeding was a major concern of residents from Parish Vision.

Marianne Buckley of Langton Green asked whether Highways consider the impact extra houses and associated vehicles have on the traffic and safety because she said that traffic will increase.

Angie Larkin of Speldhurst said she did not consider enough car parking spaces were allocated within the development.

Cllr Brown advised that there are 12 car spaces allocated on the drawings.

Cllr Langridge advised that SPC have asked ERHA if this is considered sufficient and if visiting vehicles will be able to park on the access road.

Graham Smith-Tilley of Speldhurst asked whether there could be another survey for Speldhurst residents only. Again there was much support by many of the people present.

Cllr Woodward advised that there are no plans for a further survey.

Cllr Parker referred to the Consultation Day and suggested residents with concerns should attend this.

Jane Sandall of Went Farm House, Speldhurst said they are one of the closest residential properties to the site and never received the original survey.

Patricia Rowland referred to the comments on the notice of the Consultation Day and said she feels it misrepresents her views and those of other residents and that the Consultation Day is propaganda.

Cllr Milner responded that the comments are based on written comments from residents on the first Consultation Day. He urged residents to attend and/or make comments on the second Consultation Day.

David Kneeshaw reported that he has picked up 70 bags of dog poo over the last 3 months from the lane leading between Langton Road and Shadwell Wood and that several of the offenders were in the room.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys agreed that dog poo is a big problem in the parish.

Sana Smith-Tilley asked again for a Speldhurst specific LNH survey asking residents views on building on Green Belt land and stated that she thinks the Consultation Day will be a 'hard sell' by ERHA. This was again supported by the majority of people attending.

Will Stephens said he does not think 4.00-8.00pm is enough appropriate time for the consultation. Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said it had to achieve a balance between the availability of residents and ERHA representatives.

Patricia Rowland asked if there could be a webpage or Facebook page for people to make their comments.

Alan Marriott asked how this site was chosen.

Cllr Woodward said that TWBC and SPC originally considered at least 15 sites which were all looked at in detail before being ruled out leaving site 15 as the only option to go forward.

Ken Gornall asked why the LNH could only be built in Speldhurst and not in any of the other villages in the parish.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys agreed that it was not particularly logical but said it is TWBC policy which SPC cannot do anything about.

Alistair McLuskie asked if anyone present was in favour of the scheme.

Alastair Swan said he and his girlfriend are very interested in one of the properties and have long-standing Speldhurst connections.

The Reverend Douglas Wren said he supports the proposals. He thinks we need a healthy mixed community. His son has put his name down for a property.

Mr Wren said he has lived in the village for 10 years and would want to be able to stay in the village if his father moved to a new Parish.

Chris Glover of Speldhurst said he is in support of the proposal.

Danny Mastri said he does not object in principle but would not want to see more than 7 houses and was concerned it was setting a precedent.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys advised that in the future NDPs may come into play.

Cllr Woodward emphasised that the parish is going to have to contribute to the housing need within the borough.

Philip Tew said that if the other villages in the parish could not be built on for whatever reason then it made the need for a survey among residents of the village more necessary.

Nicola Wood asked why the TWBC ruling on LNH excludes the other villages within the parish.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys explained that planning rules excluded Ashurst because it has no Limit to Build Development (LBD), Langton Green because the LBD encompasses Rusthall and Groombridge because it adjoins the Sussex side of the village.

Patricia Rowland asked if SPC would challenge it and Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that the Parish Council already had.

Richard Larkin asked when SPC had last looked at ERHA's financial situation. He said their recently published accounts show them as being £11.3million in debt and having just borrowed a further £13million.

Alistair McLuskie reiterated his earlier comment as regards where the parish should be in 10 years time.

Cllr Woodward said that he is keeping a watching brief on NDPs.

Sana Smith-Tilley stressed that opposition is not because it is Local Needs Housing but because it is building on the Green Belt.

Peter Soyke of Ashurst said he is in favour of the concept of LNH being pursued and he stressed that Green Belt is just a legislative term, the boundaries of which can be changed for good reason or an exception site approved for LNH, such as in this case.

Dr Philippa Smith asked about other affordable housing provision in the parish.

Cllr Mrs Soyke advised that where a private development of more than 10 houses is approved an element of social housing has to be provided by the developer.

Alistair McLuskie asked about the Bradleys Mill site which he referred to as 'coming up for planning every 18 months or so' and could it be considered for LNH.

Cllr Mrs Podbury responded that it was considered initially but had to be excluded on planning and highways grounds and wouldn't be suitable for LNH.

Angie Larkin asked how then the Wallers development achieved planning permission.

A resident said that Went Farm Business Units (21 of them) did not receive the Broadband survey and that there are approx 40 cars in and out of Went Farm every day. He also said that Speldhurst Playground will be looking for grant funding next year for improvements.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that the next Finance Committee Meeting is on 24th October and the next Full Council Meeting on 7th November at which meetings the budgets for next year will be discussed and agreed and that the Parish Council would be pleased to hear from any local/community organisations looking for finance/funding for next year.

A resident asked why there could not be a further survey just for Speldhurst residents if the Parish Council is impartial about LNH. Again there was much support from the floor.

Ian Cox said that he is relatively impartial but he thinks SPC is not.

The Reverend Douglas Wren appealed that there should not be a show of hands at this meeting for and against the LNH proposal as it would not be appropriate or representative. He also expressed concern at anonymous letters and groups that are a feature in this debate.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys agreed that anonymous letters and groups are a concern and not appropriate.

Sana Smith-Tilley said that she and other residents have formed 'Save Our Green Belt' and by not putting their names to letters and leaflets had not intended to cause concern or be anonymous. She said that she and her husband had attended all meetings on the subject.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that TWBC are giving approx £2,500 to the parish for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012 and that the Parish Council are intending to match fund this to give a total of approx £5,000. She suggested that anyone who would like to organise a community event for the Jubilee and would like to apply for a grant towards the cost should let the Parish Council know and submit a grant request.

Dr Philippa Smith said she is concerned about safety when the bus drops off secondary school children at the end of the school day outside Speldhurst School. They have to step off the bus and immediately cross the road without any visibility and the risk of cars passing the parked bus at speed. She was asked to contact the Clerk with her concerns.

Nick Critchlow of Speldhurst thinks SPC's own highway signs are good but that there are still other issues. He said he was disappointed that County Councillor John Davies and Borough Councillor David Jukes were not present. He also suggested a LNH brown field site at Barden Mill.

Mrs Wallis of Speldhurst asked if there can be any assurance that development will not eventually extend from the LNH site to Langton Green.

Ian Marriot said he thinks Alistair McLuskie's idea of a long term plan for the parish is very sensible. Cllr Milner spoke of the meeting that members of the Parish Council Planning Committee recently had with Greg Clark MP and said that residents input will be sought in connection with NDPs.

Glen Posling former Chairman of High Weald Housing Association now Town and Country Housing spoke about housing needs and provision.

Cllr Mrs Podbury said that the aim of the NDP will be for a scheme for each of the 4 villages.

Richard Larkin asked again that if that is the case why couldn't there be a further LNH survey just for Speldhurst.

Nicola Wood said that she thinks in general people sympathise with the need for Local Need Housing but feels 'railroaded' into the site.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys responded that the site is the only possible site.

Cllr Mrs Podbury pointed out to everyone present that all the Planning Policies are 'up in the air' at present and that the Localism Bill is constantly changing.

Cllr Langridge reported that the Government is funding 135 Parish Councils nationwide to pilot NDPs and that the results will then be used as a template for other Parish Councils.

A resident asked why Speldhurst had not applied to be one of the pilot councils and Cllr Langridge explained that you could not apply, they were simply chosen by the Government.

Ken Gornall asked for confirmation that if he attends the LNH Consultation Day on 9th November he will have the opportunity to state his case.

Cllr Woodward confirmed that he would and that anyone who cannot attend can email their comments.

Marianne Buckley asked for more information about Broadband.

Cllr Woodward advised that work will start on analysing the results of the survey during the week commencing 17th October.

Chris Mann of Dene Way, Speldhurst commended the Broadband Working Group on their survey. He also reported that he constantly monitors his Broadband speeds and his tracking graph tells him that 88% of the UK is getting better speeds than he is.

A resident said that average speeds are 0.8 Mbps in Furzefield Avenue and 3Mbps at Went Farm Business Units.

Nick Critchlow mentioned that there is a redundant cast iron water supply pipe running through Speldhurst and could it be used in any way for Broadband.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

CHAIRMAN