



Speldhurst
Parish Council

*Working for the
whole community*

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

**Minutes of a Finance Committee Meeting held in The Main Hall Speldhurst Village Hall on
Monday 19th July 2010 at 7.30pm**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllrs. Parker (Chairman), Mrs Hull, Mrs Soyke, Mrs Waters, Wheeler, Pendleton and Cllr. Mrs Jeffreys (ex officio)

OFFICER PRESENT: Chris May – Clerk, Mrs Meirion Flemington – Assistant Clerk

- 1. Election of Chairman** – Cllr Mrs Hull proposed that Cllr Parker be re-elected Chairman and this was **AGREED**. The committee discussed the period of office that a Chairman should serve and it was **AGREED** that three years was the preferred term.
- 2. Declarations of Interests:** The following declared prejudicial interests; Chris May and Mrs Flemington – Agenda item 22 – overtime consideration. Cllr Mrs Soyke – Agenda item 13 - Ashurst land – budget decision. Cllr Mrs Hull – Agenda item 18 – Heritage Days – grant request.
- 3. Declarations of Lobbying:** None received
- 4. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Mrs Podbury (holiday)
- 5. Minutes** of the meeting dated **7th May 2010**, copies having previously been forwarded to Members, were approved and signed as a correct record.
- 6. Matters Arising and Correspondence** – The clerk advised the committee that he had purchased a printer from PC World at a cost of £150 and he had given his printer to the assistant until the Parish office is built. He advised that he had met with Steven Noad of KHS at the site of the old Watson Hall and had given him the plans and was awaiting KHS comments. A newsletter was again discussed and **it was decided to have one ready for delivery by the end of September**. It would incorporate news of the date of the Open meeting and the reasoning behind the Parish Office. The clerk warned against involvement of delivering future issues and advised that they should be available in hard copy from village halls, newsagents and on the website. Cllr Mrs Hull advised that she had had a conversation with Paul Harvey who enquired after the notice board – he has been advised by the clerk that due to the impasse over the site the notice board in Groombridge is now being renewed this year.
- 7. Financial Position as at 30th June 2010** - The Clerk had previously circulated the Financial Position and this was duly noted by the Committee.
- 8. 2010-11 Budget to date – changes to papers** – The clerk had reorganised the budget sheets and these were circulated to members at the Full Council meeting. He had decided that the first sheet should be a summary sheet only and that the other items would be transferred to a new “Maintenance” sheet. Since then he had conversations with Cllr Mrs Jeffreys and between them they had decided to further re-organise the “Grants” sheet because it included items that were not grants and all the grants were now on one sheet. The new sheets had been circulated and members had seen the changes and

these were **AGREED**. Cllr Mrs Waters asked if another column could be added showing over/under budget figures. **Clerk to amend the sheets.**

9. **Review of budget vs expenditure** – The committee discussed how it should look at future requests for grants following a recent controversial decision. Cllr Mrs Jeffreys pointed out that the budget was an estimate and that every request should be considered on merit and not necessarily against the budget which was considered the previous year without current information and because circumstances do change. She highlighted that the Council does authorise grants where no money has been budgeted and they are considered on merit. Cllr Mrs Waters said that sometimes the email authorisation system falls down because some items require an open and full discussion and suggested that no decisions that go over budget should be made by email. Cllr Parker said that because we have under spent on certain projects it does not mean that we can overspend on other items. Cllr Mrs Soyke said that we had to be flexible and there was no merit in sticking to a hypothetical budget which was there as a guideline. She emphasised that the aim of the Council was to make a difference and that the recent decision had exposed an important point. After much discussion it was agreed to review requests on merit and not just against the budget.
10. **Proposal to consider a professional book keeping system** – The clerk had recently attended a WWYC course and under the finance section there was a review of other Council's accounts. He said that the excel spreadsheets employed by SPC looked unprofessional and were cumbersome to administer and extremely complicated when none of the sheets interacted. He had been advised by one of the lecturers that RBS Alpha was the most suitable and the system was used by several local councils. He had visited Goudhurst last week to see the system in action and recommended to Council that this system be employed. Cllr Pendleton said that a link to online banking would be a worthwhile addition and Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that if the Council wanted to become a Quality Parish Council then a professional book keeping system would be a requirement. It was **RESOLVED** to allocate up to £1,000 for the installation and training of the new system subject to the clerk's satisfaction that it had a satisfactory summary system of expenditure vs budget.
11. **Reserves** – The clerk said that KALC had recommended, as a guideline, that 40% of the precept should be the general reserve figure. He emphasised that the general reserves were there for an emergency and should be able to keep the council solvent for up to year if, for example, the precept was delayed. Earmarked reserves (i.e. money set aside for certain projects) are not included in this figure and an external auditor would view excessive general reserves as bad financial management (as they would inadequate reserves). **The Council would review its General Reserve policy.**
12. **Notes for next year's precept** – The clerk reminded the committee that when reviewing the precept for the next financial year that additional money needed to be set aside for a possible election and for extra audit cost because the annual turnover would be above £200,000. **The clerk was asked to write TWBC to find out the cost of an election.** Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that the Council should also consider an information package for anyone who wanted to be a Parish Councillor. **Cllr Mrs Hull would ask KALC if they were producing any such packs.**
13. **Ashurst land – budget decision** – Cllr Mrs Soyke summarised the position: the Village Hall Trust is now taking responsibility for the land and will be applying for adverse possession (although it is not hopeful this will be granted). If not it will fence the area without insurance which will cost about £8,000. The money that had been allocated in last year's budget was therefore no longer required but she asked that £5,000 remain in case of a grant being requested towards the costs. The Finance Committee **AGREED** to advise Full Council that £15,000 will be transferred from this section in to the contingency account.
14. **ISS Ashurst – maintenance notification** – KHS had asked the owners of The Old School House if an ISS could be sited on their land and this request was refused. Cllr Mrs Soyke had contacted Mr Thompson the owner of Chafford Park Farm if one could be sited on his land and the clerk confirmed that he had given permission. For it to be sanctioned by KHS the hedge would need to be maintained (it is not at present) and the clerk asked permission to authorise the maintenance of the hedge twice yearly at an approximate cost of £40. This was **AGREED**. He then explained the difference between an ISS and a SID and was asked to look into the possibility of the Parish Council purchasing a SID.
15. **KALC Finance Conference 2010 25th September at Lenham** – Cllrs Mrs Hull and Parker requested to attend along with either (or both) clerk(s).

16. **Groundsman** – An advertisement was to be put in Langton Life (copied to other magazines) to try and find someone willing to maintain the Langton Green Recreation Ground for a certain number of hours per week. The clerk asked whether the Council preferred having an employee on the payroll or someone on a sub-contracted basis. It was **AGREED** that a contracted basis whereby they would send an invoice for the hours worked. A contract would be written.
17. **EDF – Street Lighting** – The clerk had nothing further to report; SSE had taken over a month to provide an estimate. He was recommended to approach EON.
18. **Heritage Days – grant request** – A request to fund a Heritage walk around Speldhurst had been submitted to all members. Cllr Parker suggested a maximum of £100 and this was **AGREED**.
19. **Dates of Finance Meetings** – Cllr Mrs Podbury had put forward a motion suggesting that meeting dates should be fixed in advance. This was discussed and it was agreed that some dates could be agreed in advance for example an autumn Open Meeting and the precept meetings in November. Other meetings could be arranged provisionally on a quarterly basis but impromptu meetings could still be called when necessary. The meeting dates would be unpublished.
20. **Date of Open Meeting in October** – It was **AGREED** to hold the meeting on October 11th and the clerk was asked to book a main hall for the evening, preferably Langton Green because it was most central.
21. **Consideration for the future use of Direct Debits for some Utility Bills** – The clerk had spoken to several local Councils who all used Direct Debits (DD) to pay certain bills. Staplehurst (until recently a Quality Parish Council) had been using them for over 14 years. The clerk said that BT bills especially were charging £9 for not using DD and the saving would be £36 pa and reduce any chance of late payment fees. It was **RESOLVED** to allow DDs on certain bills in the future.
22. **Clerk's salary – overtime consideration** – The clerk said that the overtime agreement was due to end next month and he said that he and the assistant should be able to manage the work between them without exceeding the 35 hours total. He asked what the Council wanted to do should the situation arise when the hours had been used up but there was more work to be done. A common sense and flexible approach was agreed.
23. **Items for Information** – Cllr Mrs Jeffreys reported on the NALC course – it had been edifying and said that if the Council wished to meet the criteria of a Quality Council there was work to be done which would include some expenditure (information packs; communication and information – not only outlay but maintenance). Cllr Mrs Soyke had asked if the recent imposed pay freeze affected Parish clerks. Cllr Pendelton said that he was still waiting for comments about the website and that there are future costs (training and updating) that need to be considered. The clerk noted that the Iwade Parish Council (near Sittingbourne) had recently spent £13,000 subsidising faster broadband. **He was asked to look in to it further and report.**

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

CHAIRMAN