

Local Government Act 1972



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

**Minutes of the Annual Statutory Meeting of Speldhurst Parish Council
Held on Tuesday 7th May 2024 at 7.30pm in the Palmer Room, Langton Green Village Hall**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Ellery, Leach, Lyle (Vice-Chair), Muress, Norton, Rowe and Turner.

OFFICERS PRESENT

K Neve, Clerk and K Harman, Assistant Clerk (minutes).

IN ATTENDANCE

Borough Councillors Britcher-Allan, Sankey and Sharratt were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one member of the public present.

24/85 Election of Chair

It was **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Curry as Chair of the Parish Council. He signed the Declaration of Office which was then countersigned by the Proper Officer.

24/86 Election of Vice-Chair

It was **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Lyle as Vice-Chair of the Parish Council. She signed the declaration of office which was then countersigned by the Proper Officer.

24/87 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The Chair read out the following statement:

We have a computer here taking an audio recording of the meeting, which is used to ensure our minutes are accurate. The recording will be stored at least until the minutes have been finalised, then disposed of per our data protection guidelines. As with most council-held data, as per guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the recording is considered publicly accessible information, so please consider this a 'hot microphone', as anything you say may be picked up by it and held on an inspectable record.

24/88 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Cleaver (holiday), Davies (personal reasons) and Tarricone (holiday).

24/89 Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:

Cllrs Ellery and Rowe have shares in the original Speldhurst shop and post office.

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk (KH) declared an interest in item 23a) regarding staff salaries.

24/90 Declarations of Lobbying

The Chair had been lobbied regarding the 3G pitch application for the Langton Green Recreation Ground.

24/91 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 8th April 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes, previously forwarded to members were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24/92 Co-option of new Councillor

Cllr Leach made a recommendation on behalf of the Co-option Working Group that Mrs Jade Dickens be co-opted as a councillor. It was then **RESOLVED** to co-opt Mrs Jade Dickens and after signing the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, she took her place at the meeting. Cllr Curry welcomed Cllr Dickens and said he looked forward to working with her.

24/93 Public Open Session

Mr Bjorn Simpole, Chair of the Tunbridge Wells Labour Party and resident of Rusthall was attending to introduce himself and hear parish news following the recent ward boundary changes joining Speldhurst and Rusthall. He is interested in working alongside Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) with joint ventures tackling local issues such as anti-social behaviour. The Chair thanked Mr Simpole for attending and said he hoped to start attending Rusthall Parish Council meetings himself in the future to enable discussions.

24/94 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

- Borough Cllr Sankey said that there was nothing to report at Borough level. He thanked Cllr Curry for all his hard work during the elections and said he had enjoyed working with him. He went on to introduce newly-elected Borough Cllrs Jane Sharratt and Alex Britcher-Allan.
- Borough Cllr Sharratt thanked Borough Cllr Sankey for the introduction and said she had also enjoyed working alongside Cllr Curry during the previous year. She is the editor of both Langton Life and Rusthall Life, she will be helping with the Langton Green fete this year and is looking forward to learning and listening to the issues within the community, inviting any questions councillors and members of the public may have.
- Borough Cllr Alex Britcher-Allan echoed the sentiments regarding working with Cllr Curry. She is a parish councillor for Rusthall Parish Council and is looking forward to the two parish councils working together in the future on common issues. She thanked those who took part in the community event on the previous weekend to reduce speeding.

24/95 Chair's Report

- Update on the 3G pitch: Kent County Council (KCC) Drainage and KCC Highways departments have uploaded comments onto the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Planning portal. KCC Drainage has asked for further clarification regarding connection to a sewer. KCC Highways has echoed residents' concerns regarding the inadequate carparking facilities and local road infrastructure and have put in a standing objection until the information provided in the application is quantified accurately. It is believed that the application will go to TWBC Planning Committee in either June or July and consideration should be given regarding who would represent SPC at the meeting, as should Langton Green Community Sports' Association (LGCSA).

- He had been contacted by Hugo Pound, prospective Parliamentary Candidate, asking for a meeting. After some consideration, it was agreed the best course of action would be for the Clerk to prepare a list of the key current parish issues which could be distributed to any interested parties.
- If any councillors would like to contribute towards Chris May's leaving event, they were invited to contact the Assistant Clerk, KH.

24/96 Clerk's Report

- **Footpath WT431 Groombridge:** The order and notice have now been confirmed.
- **Tunbridge Wells District Police:** Next meeting is on 19th June 10am-1pm at Tunbridge Wells Police Station, Crescent Road.
- Ashurst Village Hall Trustees Meeting: Meeting paperwork was in the councillors' file for information.
- **Langton Green Village Hall – Update:**
 - **Footpath WT431 Groombridge:** The order and notice have now been confirmed.
 - **Tunbridge Wells District Police:** Next meeting is on 19th June 10-1 at TW Police Station, Crescent Road.
 - **Ashurst Village Hall Trust meeting:** Meeting paperwork was in the councillors' file for information.
 - **Langton Green Village Hall – Update:**
 - The first stage of remedial works to the toilets at the LGVH will take place w/c 7th May. Temporary toilets will be provided and all hirers and the school have been informed.
 - The Trustees have now decided that the solar project should rank higher in their work list so the agreed grant from SPC will be paid in the current financial year.
 - The outstanding grant for the washrooms project will be kept in the Ear Marked Reserves (EMR) account for drawdown later.

24/97 General Matters – Actionable tasks which do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
07/24	Set up meeting to discuss ongoing relationship with LGCSA.	Cllrs Davies, Mures, Chris Allen and James Bowdidge	08/01/24	In progress
20/24	Contact TWBC Licensing regarding alcohol licence for the Pavilion.	Clerk	06/02/24	In progress
22/24	Accept quotation for the replacement of rubber matting in junior playground and replacement of spring clamps on Spring Moon at a total max cost of £13,000.	Asst Clerk (KH)	06/02/24	Re Tendering in Progress
25/24	Undertake EICR report for Pavilion and provide original certificate.	Cllr Curry/Clerk	04/03/24	In progress
33/24	Open 95 day business notice account with Hampshire Trust and move over the £85,000 in the current Hampshire Trust account and give immediate notice.	Clerk	08/04/24	Complete
36/24	Book annual service for defibrillators.	Asst Clerk (KH)	08/04/24	Complete
New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
37/24	Update the following (on website where applicable): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee membership (tbc at 1st cttee meeting) • Risk Assessment • AGAR submission and Inspection Period 	Clerk	07/05/24	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of Internal Control • Standing Orders • Internal Audit Terms of Reference 			
38/24	Transfer funds into new Hampshire Trust account.	Clerk	07/05/24	
39/24	Inform Payroll and Staff of pay awards.	Clerk/Chair	07/05/24	

24/98 Appointment of Committees including Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) representative

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the committee membership as suggested by the Clerk with the addition that Cllr Norton would join the Air Traffic Working Group (Chair and Vice-Chairs to be elected at the first meeting of each committee/working group).

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chair is to be the KALC representative, and the Vice-Chair is Deputy.

24/99 Annual Return

- Risk Assessments** - It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Risk Assessment document which had been reviewed and updated by the Governance Committee.
- 2023/24 Internal Audit Report** - It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Internal Audit Report which had been reviewed by the Governance Committee. The Chair thanked the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) for another successful annual audit.
- Annual Return** – Cllr Lyle read out the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). It was **RESOLVED** that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return be signed by the Chair on behalf of the parish council, on the recommendation of the Governance Committee.
- Accounting Statements** – It was **RESOLVED** that the Accounting Statement be signed by the Chair on behalf of the parish council, on the recommendation of the Governance Committee.
- Public Inspection period of the Annual Return:** It was **RESOLVED** that the public inspection period would run from 3rd June 2024 to 12th July 2024 (inclusive).

24/100 The General Power of Competence

The Chairman explained how the Council qualifies for the General Power of Competence and the benefits to SPC and it was **RESOLVED** to re-adopt the General Power of Competence (LA2011 S1(1)) for the next term of office.

24/101 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Ellery

- There had not been a meeting since the last Full Council meeting.
- There had been no budget virements.
- Interim payments made since the last meeting:

Unity Acct:

BT PLC	DD	£26.93	Office Mobile
Talk Talk Business	DD	£13.70	Pavilion Broadband
Salvum	MT	£594.00	Legionella Risk Assessment
Viking Direct	MT	£109.18	Toilet Roll for Pavilion
Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT	£39.31	Meeting Rooms
Elite Hivis	MT	£97.74*	Hi Vis Jacket
Unity Trust Mastercard	Credit Crd	£9.00	Credit Card Fee

Castle Water	DD	£53.14	Pavilion Water
Employees	MT	£5,130.73	Salaries
N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	£623.02	Pensions
NPower	DD	£94.47	Street Light at Groombridge
BT	DD	£69.42	Office Broadband and Phone

Mastercard:

TV Licensing	£169.50	TV Licence for Pavilion
Travis Perkins	£21.87*	Brick & Patio Cleaner & WD40
Toolstation	£15.76*	Glue for skirting in Pavilion
Langton Green Service Station	£59.13*	Fuel for Van
Amazon Business	£109.95*	Natural Roundup
Toolstation	£24.95*	Screws and Goggles
Tesco	£95.83*	Drinks for Annual Parish Meeting
Trade Point	£4.00*	Tiles for Pavilion Shower
Toolstation	£7.96*	Goggles

- d) Decisions made under delegated authority are starred above.
- e) It was **RESOLVED** to transfer £85,000 from Unity Trust Bank to a new 95-day-notice savings account with Hampshire Trust which would achieve an interest rate of 4.5%.
- f) Consideration was given to the quotation received from Cloudy IT for their services and support package. The Clerks confirmed that they were pleased with the current service being provided. It was agreed that Cllrs Ellery and Curry would investigate alternative service suppliers to ensure good value for money was being received.
- g) Cllr Rowe requested that the portion of the precept received from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council towards the Speldhurst Chapel be held in a separate account for the sake of transparency. It was agreed that this decision would be put to Full Council in June.

24/102 Accounts for Payment

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

Date	Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid £	Transaction Detail
08/05/2024	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	623.02	Pensions
08/05/2024	Michelmores LLP	MT2687	3,322.80	Speldhurst Chapel Fees
08/05/2024	m:power accounting	MT2686	57.60	Payroll - May
08/05/2024	KALC	MT2685	2,118.00	Annual Subscription
08/05/2024	RBS Software Solutions	MT2684	648.00	Year End Closedown
08/05/2024	Tivoli	MT2683	140.63	Dog Waste Removal
08/05/2024	April Skies Accounting	MT2682	391.75	Internal Audit
08/05/2024	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2681	272.41	SPC Office Electricity
08/05/2024	Streetlights	MT2680	27.84	Streetlights Maintenance

08/05/2024	Brooklynn Monk	MT2679	135.00	Pavilion Cleaning - April
08/05/2024	M R Lawrence	MT2678	350.00	Mowing and Strimming
08/05/2024	Speldhurst CE Primary Sch PTA	MT2677	45.00	Donation - APM Room Hire
08/05/2024	Mr L Cooper	MT2676	42.19	Miscellaneous Maintenance
08/05/2024	Katie Neve	MT2675	25.20	Travel Expenses
08/05/2024	Kate Harman	MT2674	25.00	Office Clean
08/05/2024	Cloudy IT	MT2690	355.92	IT Service and Support
08/05/2024	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2691	1,500.00	Grant to Little Birches
08/05/2024	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2692	20.50	Room Hire
10/05/2024	BT PLC	DD	26.93	Office Mobile Phone
13/05/2024	Hampshire Trust 95day	Transfer	85,000.00	Unity to HTB 95day acc
16/05/2024	Unity Trust Mastercard	Cred Card	517.95	To bring balance to zero
17/05/2024	Castle Water	DD	43.35	Pavilion Water
17/05/2024	KCC (KCS)	DD	126.95	Photocopier
20/05/2024	Employees	MT2688	4,896.97	Salaries - May
22/05/2024	HMRC	MT2689	1,252.85	Tax and NI
28/05/2024	UK Debt Management Office	DD	2,382.25	PWLB - Office
28/05/2024	Veolia	DD	271.03	Waste and Recycling

24/103 Speldhurst Chapel Project

CLlr Rowe provided an update on the project and in particular the latest concerning the overage clause. The purchase of the property comes with an overage clause since the purchase price is based on the current class of use of F1(f) which is a place of worship. During negotiations the sellers agreed they would not invoke the overage clause if it was changed to F2(a) which is for community shops. Speldhurst Shop has since stated they will require a mix of use classes. These are F2(b) - community meeting space, Ea - commercial shop & Eb - shop can sell food. SPC approached the sellers who agreed to allow the use classes required by Speldhurst Shop without invoking the overage clause but this exemption only applies to Speldhurst Shop.

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the overage clause on the proviso that the exemption would apply to both Speldhurst Community Shop and the charity Speldhurst Chapel Community Hub (SCCH). CLlr Rowe to follow up with the sellers to confirm exemption would also apply to SCCH.

Expenditure to date: Expenditure to Michelmores LLP for professional charges regarding the purchase and lease of Speldhurst chapel was £3,322.80.

CLlr Leach left the meeting at 8.50pm.

24/104 Planning Committee

There had been a meeting on 15th April 2024, the draft minutes of which had been circulated. CLlr Rowe provided an update:

- Four applications had been considered and the committee had remained neutral on them all.
- CLlr Norton had provided an update on the Pig Hotel in Groombridge which was detailed in the planning minutes.
- An update on the 3G Pitch Application at Langton Green Recreation Ground had been provided earlier in the meeting.

24/105 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG)

- Update on the Community Hub: A long list of activities had been provided by the Hub and circulated to members which included something for everyone from dance and wellbeing, community lunches, a book swap, Thrive Langton, children's music and Hug from the Hub where small gifts had been left in envelopes around the village for residents to find.
- Update on the Pavilion Partnership working with LGCSA: Cllr Muress reported that an internal SPC meeting had been held to discuss the future financial implications of the pavilion and it had been agreed to employ the services of a building surveyor to gain a better understanding. Cllr Dickens volunteered to help Cllr Muress with the tender documents.
- Consideration was given to the approval of £1,085.00 expenditure to switch the pavilion boiler remotely with Southern Control Services Ltd. It was **RESOLVED** not to action a switch at the current time but to bear it in mind in the future when considering the bigger financial picture of the pavilion.
- The Legionella Risk Assessment undertaken by Salvum was noted. It was agreed that the Chair would discuss isolating the showers with LGCSA.

24/106 Vacancies

Following the co-option of Cllr Dickens, there was one vacancy remaining on the parish council.

24/107 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 WG** – Cllr Lyle reported that there had been a meeting on 22nd April when the following items were considered and it had been agreed to make a recommendation to Full Council for their approval:

- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Statement of Internal Control.
- It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Internal Audit Report.
- It was **RESOLVED** to reappoint Mike Platten of April Skies Accounting as the Internal Auditor (IA) for 2024/25.
- It was **RESOLVED** to appoint the Clerk as Data Protection Officer (DPO).
- It was **RESOLVED** to confirm that the Fixed Asset Register is correct.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the review and adoption of Standing Orders.

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk (KH) left the meeting whilst the staff salaries were discussed:

- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the following pay awards, to be backdated from 1st April 2024:
 - Groundsman – increase in hourly rate from £15.17ph to £15.93ph
 - Assistant Clerk (CB) – increase in hourly rate from £14.29ph to £16.25ph
 - Assistant Clerk (KH) – increase in hourly rate from £16.00ph to £17.80ph
 - Clerk – increase in hourly rate from £20.33ph to £23.55ph.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve a three month trial of the Assistant Clerk (CB) to administer the Pavilion Bookings; the extra hours (max 2 per week) to be billed on a monthly basis.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the CCTV self-assessment.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Internal Audit Terms of Reference.

b) **Highways WG** – There had been no meeting. Cllr Norton said that they would resume chasing KCC for actions which had been promised but not delivered and it was disappointing and frustrating that so little progress was able to be made despite all the hard work put in by SPC. The importance of educating members of the public regarding the restrictions and boundaries which were preventing faster progress being achieved was discussed to

manage expectations. It was agreed that this could be done via more regular social media posts, in particular encouraging residents to 'Report a Fault' on the KCC website which is a quick and easy way to get many matters resolved. It was noted that the gateways had become overgrown and Cllr Norton encouraged everyone to log a complaint on the 'Report a Fault' website.

- c) **Amenities WG (AWG)** – There had been no meeting.
RESOLVED that the dig at Pocket Park could proceed under revised requirements which included the use of a metal detector. The Speldhurst Brownies had been invited to attend the dig site to help investigate any finds.
- d) **Air Traffic WG** – There had been no meeting.
- e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – There had been no meeting. Cllr Turner reported that the Groundsman had commenced using the glyphosate-free weedkiller at the LGRG. Works would continue at Pocket Park and it was hoped that some positive change could be seen in the coming weeks.
- f) **KALC** – The Chair reported that he had been contacted by Cllr Kim Fletcher, Chair of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council regarding supporting a pressure campaign to secure a new non-selective secondary school in the Weald. It was agreed to wait until more information was known about the campaign.

24/108 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

13th May – Planning Committee

20th May – Amenities Committee

3rd June – Full Council

24/109 Items for Information:

Cllr Ellery advised that he had been reappointed as the SPC Speldhurst Village Hall Trustee at a recent trustees' meeting. The village Hall was hoping to have a new nursery school opening in September and were currently in discussions with prospective suppliers. He would be attending the Speldhurst Recreation Ground Committee meeting on the 9th May.

Cllr Lyle reported that the boardwalks in Shadwell Woods were in a very dangerous condition and needed urgent repair. The Assistant Clerk (KH) advised that the Assistant Clerk (CB) had been in regular communications with KCC and they were aware of the situation. It was hoped the repairs would be carried out in the near future. She went on to say that KCC had made a good job of repairs to the pathway and steps when entering the woods opposite Speldhurst School as well as installing new metal gates.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 9.21pm.

Chair