



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

**NOTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2024 AT  
7.00PM FOR A 7.30PM START IN SPELDHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL**

There were 11 Councillors and 3 Clerks in attendance along with Tunbridge Wells Borough Cllr Matthew Sankey.

Apologies received from: Cllrs Davies (family commitment); Tarricone (holiday) and Turner (covid related). Additionally, apologies had been received from County Cllr James McInroy.

There were over 40 residents in attendance.

**1. Chair's welcome and housekeeping**

The Chair welcomed everyone explaining it was a statutory meeting and outlining the role Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) plays within the parish. This included amongst many other things keeping our eyes and ears to the ground on local matters affecting residents, in liaison with both Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Kent County Council (KCC) Highways whilst all the time exercising good governance and finances and doing what we can to protect and enhance our environment.

**2. An update from the Langton Community Hub**

James Bowdidge, Chair of the Langton Green Community Hub provided an update on the wide range of activities taking place in the pavilion. He thanked both SPC and Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) for their support working together to enable such an amazing facility for the benefit of the whole community.

**3. An update from the Speldhurst Chapel Project**

Edward Pinnell, Chair of the Speldhurst Chapel Project working group provided an update. He said that the working group, in liaison with SPC, were making good progress on the project with many community members working towards the end goal. In summary:

- The offer from SPC had been accepted on the chapel by the seller;
- The final drawings were complete and they were liaising with TWBC planning with an application hoped for May;
- They are in the process of changing the building's use;
- The finances would soon be called in (residents' pledges plus charitable contributions);
- Builders' quotes were being refreshed to make sure plans are still affordable;
- The land is currently being registered by the owners.

Once these actions are complete, SPC will draw down the loan and the lease will be signed.

#### 4. Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Community Award Presentation

Cllrs Leach and Lyle presented a post-humous award to the late Josie Gamble for her vast contribution to the community in Langton Green including a wide range of groups and fundraising events which she had thrown herself into with warmth, energy and delicious baking to make everyone feel welcome and loved. Her husband Mark collected the award on his late wife's behalf thanking everyone for their kind words.

#### 5. Updates from Parish Council Groups

**Highways:** Report by Cllr Norton, Chair of the Highways Committee.

- Road safety remains a major concern for many residents and the parish council alike.
- The responsibility for the road infrastructure is with KCC, speed limits is Kent Police and parking/enforcement is with TWBC.
- Lobbying outside agencies is always a time-consuming process and any progress slow due to the bureaucracy involved. SPC knows its communities and has a better understanding of its needs than outside agencies. It uses the evidence provided by the community and the speed indicator devices (SIDS) to lobby to try and achieve results. Although some limited success has been achieved, SPC will continue to lobby on your behalf.
- SPC has a rolling Highways Improvement Plan which it works towards with KCC.
- Action is also coordinated locally, an example being the Speedwatch teams which operate in the villages – please let us know if you would like to volunteer to be part of one of the teams.
- KCC's website enables residents to report any faults. Please use it!

**Footpaths:** Report by Cllr Muress

We have a fabulous facility of 54 footpaths within the parish. Please report any fallen trees or broken stiles using the QR codes on fenceposts or report directly to SPC.

Q: Ashurst resident: A lot of heavy-duty vehicles such as lorries race through the village. The road is not adequate for the size and speed of vehicles. Can data on this be collected?

A: Clerk: SPC can ask KCC to install a temporary Automatic Traffic Count strip to gather data.

Q: Speldhurst resident: Can Penshurst Road have a SID installed? Residents would be happy to contribute to the costs.

A: Cllr Norton: The Police have to approve each SID location. Please contact the Clerk in the first instance so that an enquiry can be made.

**Environment Working Group:** Report by Cllr Curry on behalf of Cllr Turner, Chair of the EWG

- SPC has been undertaking a project for the last year to increase the biodiversity in Pocket Park, Roopers, Speldhurst, using funding obtained from TWBC, Tesco and Sussex Lund. Invasive species have been removed, grass has been left to 'rewild' and several new species have already been seen growing. Bat and bird boxes have been installed along with a noticeboard giving residents updates on the area.
- Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers have been installed in the Langton Green Recreation Ground carpark.
- Weed control: A trial of glyphosate-free weed control is being carried out during this year's growing season. We will share the results with the parish.
- Please visit SPC's website for lots of recycling and energy saving ideas.

**Planning Committee:** Report by Cllr Rowe

- SPC are consultees only – we are not the decision makers. We comment on all planning applications in the parish following discussion at monthly planning meetings which residents are

welcome to attend. We do not do a full technical assessment but purely view each application as if we are a resident and take into account any comments left by residents/neighbours on the planning portal.

- Residents have complained to us in the past that they are not personally advised of applications within their neighbourhood however this is not within our remit - unfortunately, we do not have the capacity to carry out this role and we therefore urge everyone to sign up to planning application alerts which can be done very easily on the TWBC website.

Q: Why are residents' full addresses included on the TWBC planning portal and not redacted? It can prevent residents from submitting their honest views.

Q: Are you aware that fictitious names and addresses (for example, for local businesses) have been submitted on the planning portal?

A: We share your concerns. The Chair and Borough Cllr Sankey would speak to the Borough Council regarding this concern.

Q: Resident of Ashurst: I have serious concerns regarding the floodlights in the application for the 3G pitch on the LGRG. A similar situation has been experienced in Ashurst regarding lighting from an extension of the railway platform.

A: SPC has already submitted its comments on this application. If residents have any concerns regarding any applications, they should go onto the TWBC planning portal and submit a comment for the planning officer (who is making the decision on that application) to take into account. If you would like help with the portal, please contact SPC's office.

**Governance Committee:** Report by Cllr Lyle

The Governance Committee meet 3 times a year - governing and monitoring SPC's systems is a fundamental part of our integrity as a council.

**Amenities Committee:** Report by Cllr Lyle

- The Amenities Committee looks after the physical buildings and facilities that the parish council owns including trees.
- The recreation ground at Langton Green is the largest area, (the sports association is responsible for the upkeep of the pitches).
- We work closely with the Environment Working Group for example on the biodiversity projects at Pocket Park, Roopers, Speldhurst and Groombridge Green.

**Finance Committee:** Report by Cllr Ellery

Residents can see a line on their council tax bill from TWBC showing a payment to SPC. This is our income (precept) which we use to run the parish council and its activities. We work hard to look after your money well and deliver for you as parishioners on such things as:

- Public works loan (SPC office and Speldhurst Chapel);
- Public spaces eg trees, the Langton Green recreation ground and pavilion – maintenance, carpark and playground;
- Rising utility bills;
- Grants for schools, village halls and other events/projects within the community;
- Defibrillators;
- Churchyards;
- Legal obligations;
- Highways projects.

**Questions to Councillors**

Q: How many residents are aware of the TWBC website to report near misses by motorists which provides valuable data for the police?

A: Thank you for raising this. We will think about how we can publicise this useful tool.

Q: Tunbridge Wells has become a ghost town with nowhere to park and very few shops. What is being done to improve this?

A: Borough Cllr Matthew Sankey: Early last year TWBC bought the leasehold for the Royal Victoria Place shopping centre. Previous owners were land-banking it however TWBC are keen to open up new shops and are in negotiations with many retailers. Watch this space.

Q: Regarding the rise in council tax to cover the purchase of the Speldhurst Chapel for the shop and post office– is this rise for a fixed time?

A: Chair: We have a fixed time loan of 25 years at which point the payments will drop. Before we began proceedings to purchase the chapel, we carried out a parish-wide community survey to make sure all residents were aware of the implications of the Public Works Board loan on their council tax payments. The responses came back with a resounding go-ahead.

### **Conclusion and close**

The Chair thanked members of the public for attending the event and for being interested in their community.

The meeting closed at 8.44pm.

Chair