

Local Government Act 1972



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

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held at 7.00 pm on Monday 2nd December 2024 in the Committee Room, Speldhurst Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Curry (Chair), Lyle (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Davies, Dickens, Ellery, Leach, Littlefield, and Rowe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

K Neve, Clerk and C Barrett (CB), Assistant Clerk (minutes).

IN ATTENDANCE

County Councillor McInroy and Borough Councillors Sankey and Sharratt were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 3 members of the public present.

24/232 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The Chair read out the following statement: "An audio recording has been started. It will be used to ensure our minutes are accurate, but be aware that your voice may be recorded, and the recording could be requested from us via Freedom of Information."

24/233 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Norton and Tarricone (health reasons), and Turner (prior commitment).

24/234 Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:

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

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk (CB) had an interest in the precept setting discussions relating to payroll matters.

24/235 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

24/236 Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 4th November 2024 – RESOLVED to approve that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24/237 Public Open Session – Steve Alldis was attending to speak about the café and farm shop at Dragonfly Farm, Speldhurst, which was in the process of being built. He asked if the parish council had been aware of this project when it carried out its consultation on the chapel project, and if so, why had it not included information so that residents could make a decision based on this information?

Cllr Curry replied that the development of Dragonfly Farm had been a possibility for several years, however, at the time of the consultation there had been no definite indication that development would go ahead. He added that other businesses such as Groombridge Farm Shop, which could be seen as a competitor of Speldhurst Community Shop, had existed for some time now, however, this had not been mentioned in the consultation either.

Cllr Littlefield said that his concerns about a farm shop taking business from the Community Shop and Post Office had been alleviated by speaking to the owners of Dragonfly Farm, as it was clear that Dragonfly Farm was aiming to attract a different market with a high-end butchery counter and café. Cllr Sankey said he had also spoken to the Chapel Project team and Dragonfly Farm, and it had been concluded that the two operations would not compete and would move forward in different directions.

Cllr Ellery said that the community shop's post office counter was another point of difference between the two enterprises and that it was a vital reason to have the shop. Furthermore, a shop in the centre of the village was essential for elderly residents with mobility issues.

Cllr Rowe said that representatives from the chapel project had held several public meetings and drop-in sessions during the consultation period, and questions had been asked about Dragonfly Farm then, which they had been happy to answer.

Guy Lambert of Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) was attending to speak on various matters as follows:

- He and Steve Alldis had recently met with James Bowdidge, Chair of Langton Green Village Society (LGVS) in an informal capacity. Mr Lambert had explained to Mr Bowdidge how he believed the operation of the Pavilion Café could be made compliant with the current legal framework. Mr Lambert had previously offered to similarly advise the parish council, and that offer was still available. He said that Mr Bowdidge had shared LGCSA's concerns about the potential losses of £37,000 pa that the parish council (and hence the parish ratepayers) had now conceded it was facing. He said it was a highly cordial and constructive meeting, and Mr Bowdidge was considering his position.
- Mr Lambert asked when the parish council became aware of the planning application for a double-storey extension at Langton Green Primary School? Should they have informed the parish of it?
- And in light of both its consent to this application and support for LGCSA's 3G pitch project, would the parish council change its position of unanimous opposition to LGCSA's proposal regarding the re-submission of the 3G planning application?

Cllr Lyle clarified that the application at Langton Green Primary School was for a wellbeing hub which would incorporate a second storey to extend the existing facility. Cllr Curry confirmed that the Planning Committee had considered the application as they did all planning applications from the parish. Cllr Curry added that it was not the parish council's responsibility to make residents aware of planning applications; this was for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Planning to do. Mr Lambert said if this was the case, why had LGCSA been criticized for not making residents aware when they had first applied for a 3G pitch application?

In reply to Mr Lambert's question about whether the parish council would change its position of opposition when LGCSA resubmitted the 3G pitch application, Cllr Curry said the council did not have a position and it would be unwise to pre-suppose one. It would consider any new application on its merits.

Mr Aldis asked how much of the proposed approximate 8% increase in the precept would be spent on addressing the shortfall in pavilion maintenance costs. Cllr Curry confirmed that the precept increase would be addressed in full as part of the Finance Committee agenda item but in short, not all of the increase would be used to fund the pavilion, it would be earmarked for a range of financial obligations including a significant increase in National Insurance contributions for staff.

Mr Aldis said his final question related to Cllr Curry's comment at the November Full Council meeting about Mr Lambert's generosity in sharing his vision for running the pavilion. Could Cllr Curry confirm when these suggestions had been received? Cllr Curry said he could not give exact dates at that moment but would be happy to follow up with an answer in writing.

24/238 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

County Cllr McInroy said that there was nothing of local importance to report, and it was agreed that he would follow up by email with an update on other Kent County Council (KCC) matters he was working on.

Borough Cllr Sankey asked councillors to consider the Better Streets consultation currently in progress for the St John's and St James's areas of Tunbridge Wells. He was concerned there would be a significant knock-on effect if drivers could no longer use the smaller roads around St John's. Faced with traffic congestion on the main St John's trunk road, there was a strong possibility they would use Speldhurst, Rusthall, and Langton Green instead. Cllr Curry said it would not be possible to delegate responsibility for the consultation to the Highways Committee as they would not meet until after the deadline, however, he requested that councillors read the consultation and respond individually if they could.

Cllr Sankey reported that footfall for Royal Victoria Place Shopping Centre was up by 26% from last year and that Ely Court was now full. The 2025 business plan for the shopping centre was now available.

Borough Cllr Sharratt had attended the Love Where We Live Awards and was pleased to see LGCSA player Emily Bowen and local food waste café and shop, Charlie's Angels both win awards. She added that the Teddy Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal, providing Christmas presents for families in crisis, ran until 17th December. Finally, there was a new website for jobs in Tunbridge Wells: <https://tunbridgewells.works/>.

24/239 Chair's Report

There was nothing to report that was not already covered on the agenda.

24/240 Clerk's Report

- **Consultation on Remote Meetings** – Councillors were reminded to complete the consultation regarding remote meetings before the deadline of 19th December. The consultation related to remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings and could be found on the GOV.UK website.
- **Clerks' Conference** – The Clerk and Assistant Clerk (KH) had attended the recent KALC Clerks' conference in Sevenoaks. Presentations, which had been shared with councillors, included:
 - Keith Stevens - Chair of NALC - Civility and Respect/Martyn's Law
 - Kent Fire and Rescue - Resilience Plans
 - Kent Police - Working Together and the Current Priorities
 - Worknest - HR and Staff Appraisals
 - ALCC - Workplace Bullying
- **Councillor Training** – Following advice at the Clerks' conference, councillors were reminded that it was necessary to attend relevant training. The Clerk had been liaising with neighbouring parishes to organise a local training event and hoped to agree on a date soon.

- **Bonfires** – The office had received an email from a resident complaining about bonfires in the Speldhurst area. The Assistant Clerk (CB) had posted reminders on the website and Facebook about the need for consideration when lighting bonfires. The resident had also been asked to provide details on the source of the bonfire so that TWBC could be advised as it appeared that toxic materials were being burned. The Clerk said that the parish council was limited as to what else they could do.
- **Veolia** – Veolia had advised a price increase from 1st December 2024. The annual waste transfer note had been renewed.

24/241 General Matters – Actionable tasks which do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
20/24	Contact TWBC Licensing regarding alcohol licence for the Pavilion.	Clerk	06/02/24	In progress
60/24	Proceed with purchase of Speldhurst Chapel.	Cllr Rowe/Clerk	05/08/24	Complete
66/24	Confirm and proceed with rubber matting replacement at Junior Playground.	Asst Clerk (KH)	05/08/24	Complete
70/24	Order wreaths for Remembrance Sunday Services.	Clerk	02/09/24	Complete
76/24	Renew website provision subscription when received.	Clerk	02/09/24	TBA
77/24	Dispose of redundant IT equipment via CeX.	Clerk	02/09/24	Complete
80/24	Draft email regarding Emirates flight pattern.	Cllr Tarricone/Clerk	02/09/24	In progress
81/24	Schedule Air Traffic Committee Meeting.	Clerk	02/09/24	In progress
83/24	Follow up email from Cllr Astra Birch re Youth Funding.	Cllr Curry	07/10	Complete
84/24	Contact KCC regarding IT equipment recycling.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
85/24	Take out a Public Sector Deposit Fund with CCLA.	Clerk	07/10	In progress
86/24	Update the following on the website and cllrs' folder: Finance Committee Terms of Reference, Internal Financial Control System and Investment Policy.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
87/24	Confirm and pay the following grants: Speldhurst Lunch Club and All Saints' Church.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
88/24	Include agenda item for next Full Council to confirm purchase of Speldhurst Chapel.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
89/24	Circulate draft documents for purchase of Speldhurst Chapel to councillors.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
90/24	Set up interview for co-option candidate.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
91/24	Include in minutes receipt of LGCSA email with their intention to resubmit their 3G pitch planning application.	Clerk/Asst Clerk (CB)	07/10	Complete
92/24	Circulate information being sent by LGCSA on artificial pitches.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
93/24	Prepare document of positive steps to send to LGCSA.	Cllrs Curry/Muress	07/10	Complete
94/24	Include possible parking stress survey on next FC agenda.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
95/24	Confirm approval of quotation for CCTV Wi-Fi link.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
96/24	Seek extension for consideration of grounds maintenance contract and include on next Full Council agenda.	Clerk	07/10	Complete
97/24	Prepare the 6-month agreement for the Community Hub.	Chair/Clerk	04/11	Complete
99/24	Establish working group to carry out review of the pavilion.	Chair/Clerk	04/11	TBA
99/24	Investigate parking survey with KCC.	Chair	04/11	TBA

100/24	Confirm and pay donation to the Mayor's Toy Appeal.	Clerk	04/11	Complete
101/24	Confirm appointment of Cllr Tarricone as Trustee for ASVH.	Clerk	04/11	Complete
102/24	Confirm acceptance of the grounds maintenance contract for 2025/26 with 3 Counties Grounds Maintenance.	Clerk	04/11	Complete
	New	Owner	Created	Status
103/24	Circulate the following to councillors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better Streets Consultation Remote Meetings Consultation Councillor Training Details KALC Award Details Toy Appeal Collection Points 	Clerk	02/12	
104/24	Confirm and pay grant to Speldhurst Church and update Grants List.	Clerk	02/12	
105/24	Set up agreed EMRs.	Clerk	02/12	
106/24	Include precept item on January Full Council agenda.	Clerk	02/12	
107/24	Advertise co-option vacancy and contact interested resident.	Clerk	02/12	
108/24	Confirm and pay CCTV renewal.	Clerk	02/12	
109/24	Update committee membership and Standing Orders on website and in councillors' folder.	Clerk	02/12	
110/24	Include item on January Full Council agenda on the future of the Air Traffic Committee.	Clerk	02/12	

24/242 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Rowe, Finance Committee Chair

A meeting had been held on 25th November and the minutes circulated.

a) Interim payments made since the last meeting:

Unity Trust Bank: Unity Trust Bank: £300,933.60 to Michelmores LLP for purchase of Speldhurst Chapel; £28 to Unity Bank for CHAPS payment.

b) To note decisions made under delegated authority – there were none.

c) It was **RESOLVED** to approve the decision of the Finance Committee to authorise Cllrs Curry, Rowe, and Norton as signatories on the CCLA Public Sector Fund application.

d) After some discussion it was **RESOLVED** to award a grant of £250 to St Mary's Church, Speldhurst towards clock repairs on the church tower. While this would not cover the full amount it was agreed it would be prudent to keep back half of the £500 left in the year's budget for church maintenance as there was a likelihood it would be needed elsewhere.

e) Precept 2025/26 – At the last Finance Committee meeting it was suggested that an increase of 8.7% to £245,361 in precept be recommended to the Full Council for approval. After some discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the recommended precept, which would involve setting up new earmarked reserves (EMRS) under the following headings:

Pavilion Legal Fees	£2,500
Parish Office Building Works	£750
CCTV	£1,625
LGRG Play Area	£5,000
LGRG Car Park	£1,000
Life-Saving Appliances	£7,500
Pavilion Maintenance	£15,000

Cllr Rowe reminded Members that a final vote would be held at the January Full Council meeting.

Steve Alldis and Guy Lambert left the meeting at 7.45pm.

24/243 Accounts for Payment

RESOLVED that the invoices as listed below and checked by Cllr Davies be paid.

Date Paid	Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid £	Transaction Detail
02/12/2024	Unity Trust Bank	DD	9.00	Credit Card Monthly Charge
03/12/2024	Brooklynn Monk	MT2833	160.00	Pavilion Cleaning
03/12/2024	Kate Harman	MT2834	63.90	Expenses
03/12/2024	Katie Neve	MT2835	63.80	Expenses
03/12/2024	Mr L Cooper	MT2836	32.73	Expenses
03/12/2024	April Skies Accounting	MT2837	429.25	Internal Audit
03/12/2024	D Mortimer	MT2838	75.00	Repair of Groombridge Benches
03/12/2024	Capel Groundcare	MT2839	72.00	Outdoor Playground Inspection
03/12/2024	Viking Direct	MT2840	109.18	Toilet Roll
03/12/2024	WJ-Sunstone	MT2841	930.05	CCTV WiFi Link
03/12/2024	SLCC	MT2842	481.00	2 x Membership Fees
03/12/2024	Tivoli	MT2843	140.63	Canine Waste Collection
03/12/2024	Cloudy IT	MT2844	268.32	IT Services
03/12/2024	Zurich Municipal	MT2845	233.16	Chapel Insurance
03/12/2024	Michelmores LLP	MT2846	9,600.00	Chapel Legal Fees
03/12/2024	M R Lawrence	MT2847	350.00	Mowing and Strimming
03/12/2024	Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd	MT2848	420.00	Pitch Maintenance
03/12/2024	JLM Pest Control	MT2849	230.00	Pest Control
03/12/2024	Michelmores LLP	MT2846	-9,600.00	Pavilion Legal Fees - Reversal
03/12/2024	Michelmores LLP	MT2846	9,600.00	Speldhurst Chapel Legal Fees
03/12/2024	Langton Life	MT2852	375.00	Adverts for Dec 24/Jan 25
03/12/2024	CPRE	MT2853	60.00	Annual Membership
10/12/2024	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	703.37	Pensions
10/12/2024	Talk Talk Business	DD	27.54	Pavilion Broadband
10/12/2024	BT PLC	DD	26.93	Office Mobile
13/12/2024	m:power accounting	MT2832	57.60	Payroll
13/12/2024	KCC (KCS)	DD	5.34	Photocopier
20/12/2024	HMRC	MT2850	1,289.54	Tax and NI
20/12/2024	Employees	MT2851	6,281.46	Salaries
20/12/2024	EDF Energy	DD	667.00	Pavilion Electricity
30/12/2024	BT PLC	DD	69.42	Office Broadband and Phone

24/244 Speldhurst Chapel Project – Report by Cllr Rowe

- To provide an update on the Project – Cllr Rowe said that the purchase was due to complete on 3rd December. Once the purchase had gone through, the building would immediately be leased to Speldhurst Community Shop and Post Office.
The interest rate for the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) was 5.55%. The initial annual repayment would be £31,037.50 (£13,000 capital and £18,037.50 interest, which would decrease over time). Interest was payable twice yearly (May and November) and the loan was over 25 years.
The building had been valued for insurance purposes at £550,000.
- The expenditure amount to date of £18,308 was noted, with a further invoice of £8,000 to be paid.

24/245 Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Community Awards Scheme 2025 – The deadline for nominations was 7th February. The Clerk asked councillors to be ready to nominate individuals at the January Full Council meeting.

24/246 Update on Vacancy on Council – The Clerk said that as the deadline for calling an election had passed, the vacancy for a new councillor could now be advertised. She added that an Ashurst resident had expressed interest, but asked councillors to let her know if they knew of any other interested parties.

24/247 Planning Committee – Report by Cllr Cleaver

A meeting was held on 11th November and the minutes had been circulated. Cllr Cleaver said that representatives from Home Grown Hotels had attended to give a presentation about their proposals for a new branch of The Pig at Groombridge Place. Cllr Cleaver commended them for taking the time to talk to the committee and answer Members' questions. The committee had not found any issues with the application and had voted to support it. The Speldhurst Chapel planning application was among other applications considered at the meeting and the committee had voted to support this. Cllr Cleaver added that the committee acted as a consultee only and was not the decision maker.

24/248 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – To receive an update on the Pavilion.

- To receive an update on the Community Hub – Cllr Curry said that the community hub had emailed an update about their activities which councillors could find in the meeting folder.
- To receive an update on shared matters with LGCSA – Cllr Curry said there would be nothing to report until January Full Council.

24/249 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 Committee** – Report by Cllr Ellery. A meeting was held on 18th November and the minutes had been circulated.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the renewal of the CCTV maintenance contract with Sunstone as recommended by the Governance Committee £1,896.25 excluding VAT.
 - It was noted that the Internal Auditor had submitted his report following his visit on 25th November. This could be found in the councillors' folder.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve the increase in the current insurance policy to cover the purchase of Speldhurst Chapel as recommended by the Governance Committee.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve changes to the Standing Orders as recommended by the Governance Committee relating to the order of business on the agenda.
 - The following committee membership changes were noted:
 - Cllr Littlefield would join Amenities, Highways, and Planning
 - Trevor Myles would join Highways as a member of the public
 - Cllr Ellery would step down from Highways and join Amenities
 - Cllr Lyle would replace Cllr Ellery as Chair of Governance

- Cllr Cleaver would join Governance
 - Cllr Curry would replace Cllr Tarricone as Vice-Chair of Planning
 - Cllr Curry would replace Cllr Tarricone on the Environment Working Group
 - Cllr Curry would step down from Air Traffic
 - Cllr Tarricone would step down from Air Traffic
- b) **Highways Committee** – Report by Cllr Norton. There had been no meeting; the committee would next meet on 16th December.
- c) **Amenities Committee** – Report by Cllr Mrs Lyle. There had been no meeting; the committee would next meet on 20th January 2025.
- d) **Air Traffic Committee** – Report by Cllr Curry. A discussion had taken place at the Governance Committee meeting about the lack of time and resources to deal with air traffic issues. Cllr Curry said it might be necessary to dissolve the committee and respond to consultations as a council when they came up. It was agreed that a final decision should be deferred until Cllr Norton could contribute to the discussion.
- e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – There had been no meeting.
- f) **KALC** – There was nothing to report.

24/250 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

- 9th December - Planning Committee
- 16th December – Highways Committee
- 6th January – Full Council – LGVH

24/251 Items for Information

There were none.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.02pm.

Chair