

Local Government Act 1972



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

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held at 7.30 pm on Monday 7th April 2025 at Ashurst Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Curry (Chair), Lyle (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Ellery (7.38pm), Leach, Norton, Rowe, Tarricone and Turner.

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

County Cllr McNroy and Borough Cllr Sharratt were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 2 members of the public present.

25/64 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The Chair advised that an audio recording had been started by the Clerk which would be used to ensure accuracy of minutes. Anyone who wished to speak should consider that their voice may be recorded and the recording could be requested via Freedom of Information.

25/65 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Dickens (holiday) and Littlefield (family reasons).
Apologies were also received from Borough Cllrs Britcher-Allan and Sankey.

25/66 Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:
Cllrs Curry, Ellery, and Rowe had shares in the Speldhurst shop and post office.

25/67 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

25/68 Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 3rd March 2025 – RESOLVED to approve that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25/69 Public Open Session

James Bowdidge, of Langton Pavilion Community Hub said that the Community Hub, which had operated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and a regular hirer of Langton Green Pavilion since January 2024, had been a great success. He said the Hub had considered the parish council's request that it increase its hire fee payments to

help cover ongoing utility costs, which had increased significantly. He had responded to this request in an email, stating that it would not be possible to consider an increase, however, the Hub's alternative proposal was to increase operating hours to include 3 Mondays a month, when Langton Pavilion Café would operate through the serving hatch as a coffee shop only so that other hirers could use the main room. The other Monday would continue to be taken up with the monthly Community Lunch when the pavilion space was provided free of charge by the council. He appealed to the council not to 'kill its golden goose', which brought in much of the pavilion's income as its main hirer. He concluded that the Community Hub would like to carry on operating out of the pavilion and hoped the parish council would agree to its proposal.

The Chair thanked James Bowdidge and said that the council would consider the proposal further.

25/70 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

Borough Cllr Sharratt:

- There was little to update on the local government reorganisation. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) had submitted a restructuring proposal to the government on 21st March. Cllr Sharratt said the restructured council was likely to be a West Kent unitary authority.
- Cllr Sharratt had attended a river walk along the River Grom hosted by the Royal Tunbridge Wells (RTW) angling club. They were doing important work to clean up the waters of the rivers Grom and Medway, accounting for 8% of water testing throughout the whole country. The River Grom around Burrswood Estate had very poor-quality water with frequent sewage emissions. The TWBC Planning Officer had also attended and would report back on the strain the local sewage systems were under. She added that the RTW Angling Club was a useful contact to have on this subject. Cllr Norton said it was important to hold Southern Water accountable for the poor quality of the water and asked what was being done at borough and county level to address the issue. Cllr Sharratt said she would ask the TWBC Scrutiny Committee about this, and to contact Southern Water if they had not already done so. Cllr McInroy added that Kent County Council (KCC) should also be involved in this discussion at the directorate level and Cllr Norton reiterated that the water company needed to be held accountable.

County Councillor McInroy:

- KCC's annual pothole blitz had started; hopefully, drivers and cyclists would soon see and feel the benefits. Operation Brock has been reinstated for traffic heading to Dover to divert at peak times.
- Cllr McInroy would be stepping down at the next election on 1st May. Richard Long would stand for the Conservative Party and Jayne Sharratt for Labour. Cllr McInroy felt sure either would do an excellent job of representing residents. He thanked the parish council for working with him during his tenure.

25/71 Clerk's Report

- The 2025 Great British Spring Clean ran from 21st March – 6th April. Details had been shared on the website and social media; councillors were reminded to let the Assistant Clerk (CB) have their photographs.
- The year-end close with Rialtas had taken place that day.
- Staff had undertaken a breakdown of their areas of work. The Assistant Clerk (CB) had created a pie chart showing the information; this had been circulated. The Clerk also thanked both Assistant Clerks for their work on the Asset register and Transparency code.
- Other items had been shared and could be viewed in the councillors' folder.

25/72 General Matters – Actionable tasks that do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
12/25	Purchase new SID batteries.	Clerk/Chair	03/03/25	Complete
13/25	Include EWG Terms of Reference and Weed Control Trial on next FC agenda.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete

14/25	Include a post on SPC website and social media asking residents to report low flying planes.	Chair/Asst Clerk (CB)	03/03/25	Complete
15/25	Confirm renewals of canine waste contract.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete
16/25	Ask each Committee Chair to provide a summary for the APM.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete
17/25	Circulate Community Hub update to councillors.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete
18/25	Write to LGCSA regarding Management Agreement and Fundraising.	Chair	03/03/25	Complete
19/25	Include renewal of Community Hub lease on next FC agenda.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete
20/25	Remove existing nappy bin collection at Pavilion and request users to take their nappies home and not put in the general waste bin.	Clerk	03/03/25	Complete
21/25	Advertise the Great British Spring Clean on social media and offer use of SPC litter picking equipment and ask for photographs for newsletter.	Asst Clerk (CB)	03/03/25	Complete
	New	Owner	Created	Status
22/25	Update the Policy for Use of Council Land on website.	Asst Clerk (KH)	07/04/25	
23/25	Update the EWG Terms of Reference on website.	Asst Clerk (CB)	07/04/25	
24/25	Include Environment Policy on next Full Council agenda.	Clerk	07/04/25	
25/25	Transfer funds into savings account when precept arrives.	Clerk	07/04/25	
26/25	Share councillor vacancies with organisations eg WI, U3A, LGVS, Thrive, Schools etc.	Clerk	07/04/25	
27/25	Send invitations for APM. Councillors to pass on suggestions of invitees.	Clerk/Cllrs	07/04/25	
28/25	Arrange meeting of Pavilion WG.	Clerk	07/04/25	
29/25	Include item on next Full Council Agenda for discussion following Pavilion WG meeting and circulation to Cllrs for comment.	Clerk	07/04/25	
30/25	Include renewal of Community Hub hire agreement on next Full Council agenda.	Clerk	07/04/25	
31/25	Update Premises Licence to be held by Pavilion Working Group and confirm terms of reference.	Clerk	07/04/25	

25/73 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** – Cllr Lyle, Governance Chair: A meeting was scheduled for 28th April.
- b) **Highways Committee** – Cllr Norton, Highways Chair: A meeting had been held on 24th February, and the minutes had been circulated. Following appeals made via social media and the parish magazines, the clerks were logging reports from residents about collisions, near misses, and sightings of deer on highways.
Langton Green Speedwatch was still very active, but the other 3 villages were not currently operating Speedwatch, and the clerks were working to try and re-establish these. They continued to press on issues around Langton Green Primary School and were talking to residents about the potential crossing area and yellow lines. Progress was slow. They had not given up on the idea of a speed enforcement van.
- c) **Amenities Committee** – Cllr Lyle, Chair: A meeting had been held on 24th March, when the Committee covered various items of business.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve changes to the Policy for Use of Council Land on the Committee's recommendation.

d) **Environment WG (EWG)** – Cllr Turner, Chair: A meeting had been held on 25th February. Meeting notes would be provided at the next Full Council.

- It was **RESOLVED** to approve a change to the EWG Terms of Reference, which stated that the Working Group would be able to comment on any large-scale application with environmental implications.
- To consider the use of non-glyphosate weed control on parish council land – Cllr Turner reported that a trial of alternative approaches to mowing and weed control had commenced in 2022 with a biodiversity programme and reduced mowing in Pocket Park, Speldhurst, and the Green at Old Groombridge. This had seen a corresponding reduction in mowing costs.

A glyphosate-free weed control trial followed at Langton Green Recreation Ground during the 2023 and 2024 growing seasons. The 2023 trial had been one of trial and error, while 2024 had been a more efficient trial period, using Natural Roundup as the sole means of weed control. The weed control work had been no more labour-intensive for the Groundsman because the approach had changed, with weed control being carried out only when and where weeds presented a trip or other health and safety hazard.

Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) had confirmed that their contractors had not used glyphosate on the pitches at Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) since 2019.

It was noted that a nationwide glyphosate review was scheduled for December 2025. Cllr Turner concluded that the Working Group would like to continue using Natural Roundup, and councillors **RESOLVED** to approve this course of action.

e) **KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils)** – Cllr Curry had attended the Parish Chairs' meeting, where parish councils were asked to come forward with 'oven-ready' projects for the rural road safety fund. Cllr Curry said that thanks to the parish council's Highways Highway Improvement Plan (HIP), there were projects ready to pursue. With the future devolution of KCC and a new unitary authority, there had been concern from some parish councils that assets in their parish, which were currently owned by TWBC would become their inherited responsibility. Cllr Curry asked councillors to let the Clerk know if they were aware of any assets in the parish owned by KCC or TWBC, so that steps could be taken well in advance of this.

The Tunbridge Wells Agreement stated that the Leader of TWBC is meant to attend and Chair the Parish Chairs meeting, however, the current Leader had not been doing so, and Cllr Curry intended to raise this and push him to attend to ensure more productive meetings.

It was noted that although there was no firm idea of what devolution would mean for parish councils, briefing so far had suggested they would be given more authority.

f) **Air Traffic Issues** – The Clerk was starting to receive reports of low-flying planes as a result of posts on the website, social media, and parish magazines.

25/74 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Rowe. There had been no meeting – a meeting had been held on 10th March. Detailed budget reports were included for councillors' information.

a) Report on interim payments made since the last meeting.

Unity Trust Bank: £250 Grant to TW Counselling Centre; £203.50* Tate Fencing for Groombridge Green Post repairs; £375 Langton Life; £140.63 Tivoli for canine waste removal; £27.54 DD Talk Talk for Pavilion Broadband; £69.42 DD BT for Office Broadband and Phone; £175 Martyn Lawrence for Mowing and Strimming.

Mastercard: £9 DD card charge; £169.50 TV Licence for Pavilion.

b) To note decisions made under delegated authority – starred above.

c) Report on budget virements and a request that the following be retrospectively approved:

£6,106 from General Reserves (from the unspent Speldhurst Chapel Public Works Loan Board - £30,680) to the Speldhurst Chapel EMR to balance the deficit.

£15,000 to the Pavilion Maintenance EMR and the balance of £9,574 to the Playground Renewal and Repair EMR.

The virements were required before the end of the financial year, and councillors **RESOLVED** to approve them.

- d) To consider the recommendation of the Finance Committee to approve the transfer of funds into the Cambridge and Nationwide Building Society accounts up to the FSCS (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) threshold of £85,000 when the 2025/26 precept is received.

Funds also to be added to the CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Investment Management Limited) Public Sector Deposit Fund, leaving sufficient funds in the Unity Trust Bank Account to pay monthly invoices and direct debits.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve these transferrals and additions. Cllr Rowe said that the interest earned would decrease this year in line with the interest rate.

Councillors noted the reports which had been sent to them by the Clerk.

25/75 Accounts for Payment

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

Date	Payee Name	Reference	Amount £	Detail
01/04/25	TWBC	MT	536.43	Non-Domestic Rates
08/04/25	Langton Green Village Hall	MT	45.13	Room Hire
08/04/25	Langton Green Village Hall	MT	50.00	Office Rent
08/04/25	Langton Green Village Hall	MT	690.72	Office Electricity
08/04/25	Brooklynn Monk	MT	20.00	Pavilion Cleaning
08/04/25	Cloudy IT	MT	268.32	IT Support
08/04/25	KALC	MT	2,244.00	Subscription
08/04/25	Viking Direct	MT	244.73	Toilet Roll and Stationery
08/04/25	Rialtas Bookkeeping	MT	1,164.00	Annual Accountancy Agrmt
10/04/25	BT/EE	DD	28.64	Office Mobile
10/04/25	NEST	DD	701.74	Pensions
16/04/25	Unity Trust Mastercard	MT	278.48	Credit Card Bill
17/04/25	Castle Water	DD	45.97	Pavilion Water
18/04/25	HMRC	MT	1,283.09	HMRC
18/04/25	Employees	MT	5,267.87	Salaries
20/04/25	EDF Energy	DD	595.71	Pavilion Energy
24/04/25	Npower	DD	109.14	Street Lighting - Groombridge
28/04/25	Hugo Fox	DD	11.99	Website Administration
28/04/25	Veolia	DD	347.98	Waste and Recycling
30/04/25	Unity Trust Bank	DD	12.90	Monthly Bank Charges
	TOTAL PAYMENTS		13,946.84	

25/76 Update on Vacancy on Council

To receive an update – there were currently two vacancies, and there had been no further interest in these. Cllr Norton suggested asking to advertise with local organisations such as the Women's Institute and the University of the Third Age, and through the TWBC weekly email. It was suggested that a video be made about the benefits of being a parish councillor.

25/77 Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2025

Each committee Chair was asked to provide a summary for their APM presentation. The main focus would be on the guest speakers. Cllr Curry thanked those who had already sent theirs. Advertising boards were in hand. Councillors were asked to advise the Clerk of anyone they would like to invite.

25/78 Speldhurst Chapel Project

Cllr Rowe reported that work had started on renovations to the Chapel building. Formal approval had now been confirmed by the parish council's insurers. The Community Shop had additional insurance to cover the work in progress. Cllr Rowe said it had been a professional job so far; the target completion date was the end of October, with the intention of moving the shop and post office into the Chapel building by mid-November. The Post Office would not allow a move during the six weeks leading up to Christmas.

The Clerk confirmed there was a refund of £92.89 to come from the parish council's solicitors.

25/79 Planning Committee – Report provided by Cllr Cleaver, Planning Chair: A meeting had been held on 17th March, and the minutes circulated.

Cllr Cleaver said that several Members of the Public had attended with concerns about a series of applications at a property on Stockland Green Road. This brought to light two issues the parish council should be aware of. Firstly, the purchase of agricultural premises was not an issue if the plot was used well; however, if someone bought the plot and a series of planning applications followed, this would result in entirely different premises and should be considered as a development rather than several incidental planning applications on one property. In this instance, the applicant had a pattern of submitting planning applications which were then amended once permission had been granted, culminating in a series of more ambitious changes than initially proposed.

The other issue of trees and Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) was also highlighted. The Stockland Green Road application had not mentioned trees, but it was known that trees existed. Meanwhile, the committee had considered an application for tree felling at a property in Ryders, requesting that a replacement tree be planted if the application was granted.

Cllr Cleaver said that other applications for consideration had been routine.

25/80 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) and Pavilion

- An update on the Community Hub had been circulated.
- Shared matters with Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA): A Working Group of Cllrs Curry, Dickens, and Leach had met with various parties to try and move the pavilion's finances onto a more stable footing. They had met with James Ponsford, Chair of LGCSA, and asked LGCSA for a voluntary contribution towards pavilion utility costs but had not yet received a response.
- To consider the renewal of the Community Hub Hire Agreement: The Working Group had met with James Bowdidge and suggested that the Community Hub pay an increased hourly hire fee or commit to raising funds through voluntary fundraising; these suggestions had been rejected, but the Community Hub had made an alternative proposal. Cllr Curry said this would need to be discussed further by the Working Group but briefly explained that the Community Hub had proposed extending their pavilion hire to include Mondays. The Hub had also proposed not opening during the school holidays so the council could schedule alternative bookings. Cllr Curry asked that the Working Group be delegated authority to complete further work on this proposal and report back the following month, and it was **RESOLVED** to approve this. Cllr Rowe asked that any further external communications regarding the pavilion only refer to details that had been agreed and minuted at Full Council.
- To consider the holding of the Premises Licence: Cllr Curry said he did not believe the current premises licence was being correctly upheld. He proposed updating the licence and would address this with the Working Group.

25/81 Chair's Report

There was nothing further to report.

25/82 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

- 14th April - Planning Committee
- 28th April – Governance Committee
- 6th May – Full Council – Langton Green Pavilion - Tuesday

25/84 Items for Information

- Cllr Norton asked councillors to note 29th June in their diaries, when a church service and picnic on The Green at Old Groombridge would take place to mark the 400th anniversary of St John the Evangelist Church.
- Cllr Curry said he was considering stepping down as Chair due to the ongoing pressure he felt that he was under from key stakeholders. He added that this pressure had been impacting his well-being. Members were saddened to hear this from Cllr Curry and agreed that he was an excellent Chair in the face of continuing challenges. It was agreed that the mental health of parish councillors and staff was not always taken into consideration by members of the public in their interactions with 'the council'. The Clerk said she would take measures to remind all stakeholders who were in regular contact that communications must come through the office.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.49 pm.

Chair