

Local Government Act 1972



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

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held on Monday 6th November 2023 at 7.30 pm in Speldhurst Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Apologies had been received from County Cllr McNroy and Borough Cllr Sankey due to holidays.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 4 members of the public present.

23/229 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for the accuracy of the minutes. The recording will be deleted once the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting.

23/230 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

There were none.

23/231 Disclosure of Interests

Cllrs Rowe and Ellery and the Assistant Clerk (KH) had all previously declared an interest in the Speldhurst Chapel Project, having shares in the original shop and post office. It was agreed that their declarations would stand as permanent disclosures of interest with the parish council regarding this matter.

23/232 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

23/233 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 2nd October 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of 2nd October 2023 Full Council meeting, previously forwarded to members, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23/234 Public Open Session

None of the members of the public attending wished to speak at this point in the meeting.

23/235 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

- Borough Cllr Curry advised that an update to the Local Plan was expected after the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Full Council December meeting.
- The Clerk was asked to extend a further invitation to Borough Cllr Allen in the hope that he would be in a position to attend some of the parish council's meetings.

23/236 Chair's Report

There was nothing further to report that was not already covered under other items.

23/237 Clerk's Report

- The Internal Audit would be carried out on Wednesday 8th November 2023.
- The KALC AGM would be held on Saturday 19th November. Councillors should let the Clerk know if they wished to attend.
- SLCC had provided an update on remote meetings which had been debated by the House of Lords. Disappointingly it had been decided that local authorities would have to continue to meet in-person to ensure good governance.
- Councillors were reminded of in-house meeting requirements.
- The Clerk is on leave from 9-17 November. The Assistant Clerks would be covering the office in her absence.

23/238 General Matters – Actionable tasks which do not fall to a committee.

Ongoing				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
76/23	Notify HMRC of dissolution of SPC Pavilion Ltd, and request zero rates from the rateable authority.	RFO/Clerk/Cllr Lyle	07/08	TBA
95/23	Purchase new tables and chairs for Pavilion and allocate £5,000 in accounting system for this.	Clerk/RFO	04/09/23	TBA/ complete
101/23	Seek quotations for works to path, step and fence at LGRG for Amenities Cttee to consider.	Asst Clerk (KH)	04/09/23	In progress
New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
103/23	Book valuations and survey on Speldhurst Chapel.	Cllr Rowe/Clerk	02/10/23	Complete
104/23	Approach Solicitors for conveyancing and preparing lease for Speldhurst Chapel.	Cllr Lyle/Clerk	02/10/23	Complete
105/23	Liaise with Cllrs re date options for Annual Parish Meeting.	Clerk	02/10/23	Complete
106/23	Chase Solicitors regarding lease for Pavilion.	Clerk	02/10/23	Complete
107/23	Email Borough Cllr Harry Allen regarding his attendance.	Clerk	06/11/23	
108/23	Make donation to TWBC Mayor's Toy Appeal.	Clerk/RFO	06/11/23	
109/23	Update Internal Financial Control Policy on website.	Clerk	06/11/23	
110/23	Send Cllr Rowe the draft PWLB application.	Clerk	06/11/23	
111/23	Prepare timeline and key dates for Speldhurst Chapel Project.	Clerk/Chair	06/11/23	
112/23	Advertise Co-Option once TWBC confirm no objections	Clerk	06/11/23	
113/23	Update committee membership	Clerk	06/11/23	
114/23	Confirm Ashurst Village Hall Trustee and ask them to confirm Companies House is updated and inform SPC representative of meetings and minutes.	Clerk	06/11/23	
115/23	Confirm arrangements for December Full Council and send invitations.	Clerk	06/11/23	

116/23	Pay authorised invoice for Counsel's fee for Pavilion.	Clerk	06/11/23	
117/23	Confirm with HMRC and Companies House no further action following dissolution of SPC Pavilion Ltd.	Clerk/RFO	06/11/23	
118/23	Apply to TWBC for 0% rateable value on Pavilion.	Clerk/RFO	06/11/23	
119/23	Arrange meeting to discuss Pavilion finances.	Clerk	06/11/23	
120/23	Look into costs of broadband for Pavilion.	Chair	06/11/23	
121/23	Arrange meeting with LGCSA to discuss Pavilion and share legal opinion with affected parties.	Clerk	06/11/23	
122/23	Report on next steps regarding Pavilion to Dec F/C.	Clerk/Pav Review P	06/11/23	
123/23	Remove SPC Pavilion Ltd sign from office entrance.	Clerk	06/11/23	
124/23	Pay authorised invoice for CCTV maintenance renewal.	Clerk	06/11/23	
121/23	Confirm Amenities Committee recommendations.	Asst Clerk (KH)	06/11/23	

23/239 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Ellery

- Report by the Chair: A meeting had been held on Monday 9th October which had been dominated by discussions on the budget.
- Budget Virements: There were no new budget virements to report.
- Ear Marked Reserves (EMR): Councillors noted the movement from General Reserves to the newly named EMRs (Playground Renewal/Repair, Contingency, Speldhurst Chapel, Election Costs and Highways) and the renamed Pavilion RRIM account (EMR Pavilion) for consistency.
- Interim Payments made since the last meeting:

Mastercard:

Payee Name	Amount Paid £	Transaction Detail
Unity Trust Bank	9.00	Credit Card Charges
Amazon Business	31.00	Water Filters for Office *
Amazon Business	11.69	Patio Magic *
Amazon Business	17.55	Toilet Paper Dispenser and Roll *
Amazon Business	64.58	Toilet Paper for Pavilion *
Amazon Business	80.40	Natural Roundup *
Amazon Business	20.00	Patio Magic for War Memorial *
Amazon Business	38.97	Reflectors for Car Park Posts *
Amazon Business	43.49	Door Mat for Pavilion *
NALC	39.22	Training *
Amazon Business	39.00	Mops for Cleaning *
Amazon Business	25.98	Mop Heads for Cleaning *

Unity:

Mazars	756.00	External Audit
Sevenoaks District Council	180.00	Premises License - Pavilion
JLM Pest Control	230.00	Pest Control
Langton Green Charitable Trust	50.00	Office Rental
Langton Green Charitable Trust	13.88	Room Hire
Unity Trust Mastercard	300.40	To bring balance to zero
BT PLC	24.96	Mobile Phone
Speldhurst Recreation Ground	15,000.00	Grant for Playground
N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	623.02	Pensions
Veolia	235.19	Waste Disposal
BT PLC	63.54	Telephone and Broadband
JS Facilities Management	191.84	Pavilion Cleaning

- e) To note decisions made under delegated authority. Items are starred above.
- f) **RESOLVED** to grant £100 to the Mayor's Toy Appeal.
- g) Initial budget discussions for 2024/25: Cllr Ellery said that an initial suggestion of £15,000 for contingency had been made by the Responsible Financial Officer and Clerk which would require an 8.9% increase, equating to 55p pcm for a Band D property. However, this would only enable the finances to break even and did not include any contingency towards the Speldhurst Chapel Project or the likely subsidy to the Pavilion, both of which were currently unknown expenses. It was **RESOLVED** that a separate meeting to discuss the budget further would be held once a clearer idea of the Pavilion and Speldhurst Chapel Project expenses were known.
- h) Caution on future expenditure: Cllr Ellery asked councillors to note caution on future spending commitments. The Pavilion and Speldhurst Chapel Project were both unforeseen expenses.
- i) Internal Financial Control Policy: It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the changes to the Internal Financial Control Policy which, for clarification, now read "babysitting expenses are allowed but prior approval by the Clerk is required", on the recommendation of the Finance Committee.
- j) Increase in credit card limit: It was **RESOLVED** to increase the Clerk's credit card limit from £2,000 to £2,500 on the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

23/240 Accounts for Payment

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

Date	Payee Name	Reference	Amount £	Detail
07/11/2023	Durlings	MT2562	2,100.00	Red Book Valuation for Chapel
07/11/2023	Leo Horsfield Surveying Ltd	MT2563	1,800.00	Valuation & Survey for Chapel
07/11/2023	M R Lawrence	MT2564	380.00	Mowing and Strimming
07/11/2023	Kestrel Mechanical Services	MT2565	734.50	Kestrel Mechanical Services
07/11/2023	Cooper Burnett	MT2566	1,508.40	Legal Fees Pavilion
07/11/2023	Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd	MT2567	1,260.00	Pitch Maintenance
07/11/2023	T Bonard Electrical Ltd	MT2568	153.60	PAT Testing SPC
07/11/2023	T Bonard Electrical Ltd	MT2569	134.40	PAT Testing Pavilion
07/11/2023	m:power accounting	MT2570	54.00	Payroll
07/11/2023	Ashurst McDermott Hall	MT2571	45.00	Room Hire
07/11/2023	JS Facilities Management	MT2572	151.21	Pavilion Cleaning
07/11/2023	Katie Neve	MT2573	13.50	Mileage
07/11/2023	SLCC	MT2574	222.00	Membership - Neve
07/11/2023	SLCC	MT2575	177.00	Membership - Harman
07/11/2023	SLCC	MT2576	177.00	Membership - Barrett
07/11/2023	Streetlights	MT2577	27.84	Street Lighting
07/11/2023	Tivoli	MT2578	935.76	Dog Waste April-Oct
10/11/2023	BT PLC	DD	24.96	Mobile Phone
16/11/2023	KCC (KCS)	DD	126.95	Photocopier
20/11/2023	Employees	MT2579	5,066.38	Salaries - November
20/11/2023	EDF Energy	DD	1,721.00	Pavilion Energy
22/11/2023	HMRC	MT2580	1,317.60	Tax and NI
27/11/2023	UK Debt Management	DD	2,425.37	PWLB - Pavilion
28/11/2023	Veolia	DD	254.65	Waste & Recycling Collection
29/11/2023	Castle Water	DD	25.35	Pavilion Water
29/11/2023	Commercial Services Trading	MT2582	442.48	Grounds Maintenance – Groombridge

29/11/2023	Commercial Services Trading	MT2583	835.74	Grounds Maintenance – Langton Green
29/11/2023	Cloudy IT	MT2584	355.92	IT Services
30/11/2023	Sunstone	MT2581	2,220.00	CCTV Annual Maintenance
30/11/2023	BT PLC	DD	63.54	Office Phone & Broadband
	Total Payments		24,694.15	

23/241 Speldhurst Chapel Project

- To note expenditure to date: £1,750 (excl VAT) to Durlings and £1,500 (excl VAT) to Leo Horsfield Surveying Ltd for the provision of a Red Book valuation were both noted.
- Instructions had been sent out to three different solicitors asking them to provide an estimate of their costs if they wish to be considered.
- Cllr Rowe provided an update on the project's progress:
 - The survey and valuations on the chapel had been carried out and the reports were expected later that week.
 - A meeting of the Speldhurst Chapel Project working group would be held on Friday 10th November.
 - Solicitors had been approached for quotes to act on Speldhurst Parish Council's (SPC) behalf in the purchase and preparation of the lease for the community shop.
 - The prospectus for fundraising had been prepared and would be published soon.
 - Three public meetings would be held in the coming weeks.
 - The Clerk would work with the RFO to submit the Public Works Loan Board (PWBL) application as soon as possible.
 - The results of the PWLB application were unlikely to be known until after the deadline for the precept submission to TWBC. SPC should therefore proceed with budget discussions on the basis that the loan is approved.
 - If the fundraising is not as successful as hoped, the scope of works could be reduced or other forms of funding could be sought by the Speldhurst Community Shop Ltd. The PWLB application does not depend on the success of the fundraising.
 - The Speldhurst Community Shop Ltd hoped to raise £200,000 and had obtained match funding.
 - The loan would only be drawn down by SPC once councillors were completely satisfied with all the details.

23/242 Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the APM would be held on Monday 29th April 2024. Councillors were asked by the Clerk to diarise this meeting.

23/243 Vacancy on Council

A notice to fill the casual councillor vacancy by co-option was published on Friday 20th October would expire on Thursday 9th November. If no objections are received by TWBC, the vacancy could then be advertised for co-option (for another 14 working days). It was **RESOLVED** that a working group of Cllrs Tarricone, Norton, Leach and Muress would interview prospective candidates.

23/244 Committee Membership

- It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Cleaver would leave the Environment Working Group (EWG) and join the Highways Committee.
- No one volunteered to join the Finance Committee. The Chair said this opportunity would remain open and he could attend on an ex-officio basis if required for a quorum.
- It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Rowe becomes Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee. He would leave the Planning Committee in May 2024 after five years' membership.
- It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Turner remain Chair of the Environment Working Group. Despite the fact that Cllr Turner had already completed the maximum requirement of three years as Chair on the EWG, it was agreed that the group should still be able to benefit from his expertise, experience and passion for the environment and he could therefore continue in his role as Chair for another term.

23/245 Appointee to Ashurst Village Hall

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Tarricone remain SPC's Appointee to Ashurst Village Hall. Cllr Tarricone said that he had to date not received any communications from the Village Hall administrators and the Clerk was therefore asked to check with them that they had updated Companies House and also ask them to advise Cllr Tarricone of any future notifications and meetings.

23/246 December Full Council Meeting

The Clerk said that December's meeting would be in the Langton Green Village Hall and that The Hare had been provisionally booked for the post-meeting Christmas drinks. Cllrs agreed that the reception, which is paid for out of the Chair's expenses, would this year remain scaled-back due to the current financial position.

23/247 Suggested Office Hours Over the Christmas Period

It was **RESOLVED** that the office be closed over the Christmas period from and including Friday 22nd December to Tuesday 2nd January 2024. The Clerks would occasionally monitor emails during this period of closure for anything urgent.

23/248 Planning Committee

Cllr Rowe, Planning Chair, reported that there had been a meeting of the Planning Committee on 16th October 2023, the draft minutes of which had previously been circulated to all members. During this meeting, 15 applications had been considered, and the committee had remained neutral on all of them.

23/249 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – to receive an update on the Pavilion Review.

The response to the legal review was considered. The Chair advised that the legal advice had been received from Counsel and that the delegated authority to the Pavilion Working Group (PWG) had therefore now expired. Cllr Lyle said that the PWG had decided the most effective way to move forward now was to be transparent with the advice received in the spirit of building a good working relationship with all parties involved. Cllr Ellery stated that he did not believe it was in SPC's best interests to share its legal advice, which was confidential to SPC who had paid for it in full, with all parties concerned. A vote was then held, the results as follows:

Votes in favour of sharing the legal advice: 10

Votes against sharing the legal advice: 2

It was therefore **RESOLVED** by majority vote to continue with the select sharing of the Legal Counsel's advice. Cllr Curry then ran through the advice received from the lawyer which in summary confirmed that SPC has the overall responsibility for the Pavilion and therefore the right to decide who uses it and when. There was, however, a query over the permitted use of the function room by the café, a matter which had been raised previously by Langton Green Charitable Sports Association (LGCSA). The Counsel had outlined that the permitted use must only be for activities which are incidental to sporting or social activity, which it was agreed did not include the café. Cllr Rowe warned that without the café income, the building could become too much of a financial burden for SPC and it was therefore important that the 'permitted use' be reconsidered in the Terms. It was also noted that a broadband contract for the pavilion for all hirers' use should be reconsidered. The legal advice was then discussed in great detail by councillors and the following action plan agreed:

1. To share the information received from Counsel with all parties involved (LGCSA and the café proprietor).
2. Take LGCSA up on their offer of working together in an effort to come to a mutually agreeable way forward for use of the pavilion.
3. Address what is covered in the agreement by the term 'permitted use' with a view to changing it to include the running of the café.

It was then **RESOLVED** to reinstate the Pavilion Working Group with delegated authority to work with LGCSA on behalf of SPC with the aim of reporting back to either an Extraordinary General Meeting or the December Full Council meeting at which point any formal decisions could be considered.

- Expenditure to date for the legal review of £1,257 (excl VAT) to Cooper Burnett Solicitors was noted. (The £2,500 already approved was for Counsel's fee). It was **RESOLVED** - to pay a further £500 for Counsel's further advice that had been sought for clarification.

- The dissolution of SPC Pavilion Ltd was noted. An application could now be made to TWBC for a rates rebate for the pavilion.

23/250 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 (Chair) reported that a meeting had been held on 2nd November. **RESOLVED** that the CCTV maintenance contract with Sunstone would be renewed at a cost of £1,804.88.
- b) **Highways Committee** – Cllr Norton (Chair) advised that the next meeting would be held on 21st November and then went on to provide a report including:
The committee had been experiencing problems with being quorate.
The Automated Traffic Counts had produced concerning results in both Langton Green and Old Groombridge which he hoped to discuss further with Kent County Council (KCC) ahead of the meeting on the 21st.
The go-ahead had now been received from KCC for the planters to be installed in the layby in Langton Green.
Miller Homes had not objected to a footpath on their land in Farnham Lane. Members of the committee would approach the residents to discuss further.
 - **Footpaths Co-Ordinator Update** – Cllr Muress said that he was working with the Assistant Clerk (CB) to allocate footpaths in the parish and liaise with landlords in an effort to get repairs completed.

9.24pm: It was **RESOLVED** to continue the meeting beyond 9.30pm if required.

- c) **Amenities Committee** – Cllr Lyle (Chair) reported that a meeting had been held on 30th October with the following items being recommended for consideration and approval:
 - **RESOLVED** that the Groundsman carries out repairs to the fences surrounding the junior playground and courtyard at a cost of £360.
 - **RESOLVED** that a Crab Apple Golden Hornet be purchased by the Assistant Clerk (KH) and planted on The Green, Langton Green by the Groundsman, up to a maximum value of £150.
 - **RESOLVED** that the following changes to the Amenities Committee Terms of Reference be made:
 - Items 1 and 3: To add “Vice-Chair” following “Chair”.
 - Item 7c): Remove existing and replace with “To work with the Environment Working Group in relation to the land and assets of Speldhurst Parish Council”.
 - Item 10: To remove the word “annually” and replace it with “in accordance with the council’s schedule of policies”.
 - To remove the final paragraph regarding the authority of the working group in addition to the two *’s in the document.
 - **RESOLVED** to instruct Martyn Lawrence to carry out a general tidy-up of Pocket Park to include clearing the brambles and tree off-shoots at a maximum cost of £500.
 - **RESOLVED** to book a playground inspection for 2024 at a cost of £170.
 - **RESOLVED** that on further consideration, the rear step and path from the Main Hall, Langton Green Village Hall is the responsibility of the Village Hall Trustees because it is considered an integral part of the fabric of the village hall building. SPC would therefore not be responsible for any maintenance or repairs being carried out.
 - Cllr Lyle said that some future consideration should be given to delegating authority for minor expenditure to the Amenities Committee to prevent such items having to be considered by Full Council.
- d) **Air Traffic Committee** – Cllr Tarricone (Chair) reported that a response on behalf of the parish by SPC had been submitted to the consultation by the deadline but that to date no response had been received. Cllr Tarricone was thanked for his excellent response which he said he had composed with the help of Mr Neil Barrington-Johnson.
- e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – Cllr Turner (Chair) reported that a meeting had been held on 31st October and provided the following update:

- EV Chargers: These were now installed and available for use. Cllr Turner thanked the Assistant Clerk (CB) for all the hard work she had put into this project over the previous two years. Unfortunately, the wrong location had been indicated on the EV charger location maps by KCC for the two parking bays and they were awaiting an update. They had asked KCC for signage to alert members of the public to the bays and SPC would also publicise the chargers via its normal media channels.
 - Pocket Park: The applications for funding had been submitted and it was hoped a response would be received in January. He would provide an update when more is known.
 - Approval for the EWG to pledge support for the Zero Hour Campaign: Cllr Turner had provided full information to councillors on what was involved in a pledge in the meeting pack. Cllrs Ellery and Curry voiced concern at SPC “piggy-backing” onto another (political) organisation’s campaign and said they would rather SPC has its own message. A vote was then taken and there were many abstentions as there was concern from Cllrs about pledging support. Cllr Turner then withdrew the motion.
 - Cllr Cleaver said that the EWG hoped to provide detailed information for residents regarding recycling when the new system is put in place by TWBC.
- f) **KALC** – The Chair said that he had received information about the possible availability of Section 106 funding in the borough and would carry out investigations into SPC’s eligibility to submit a request(s). It was agreed that a list of suitable projects with supporting evidence could be prepared in advance in the hope of being able to take advantage of any such funding.

23/250 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

13th November – Planning Committee
20th November – Finance Committee
21st November – Highways Committee
4th December – Full Council (7pm start)
11th December – Planning Committee

23/251 Items for Information:

- Cllr Lyle reported that the Headmaster at Langton Green Primary School (where she is a Governor) had flagged up that tensions were raising with regards to traffic and parking issues at the school with some very anti-social behaviour being displayed.
- Cllr Tarricone reported that he had been unable to gather any volunteers to run a Speedwatch campaign in Ashurst. Cllr Curry said that he would work with Cllr Tarricone running a training session in the hope of gathering support in the village.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 9.48 pm.

Chair