

## NOTES ON A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG)

24<sup>th</sup> January 2023 via Teams

**Attendees:** Cllrs John Turner (JT), (Chair) and Domenico Tarricone (DT), with Alan Ford (AF), Ken Howes (KH), Ed Langridge (EL), Dave Pate (DP) and Lizzie Pannell (LP)

**In attendance:** Catherine Barrett (CB) Assistant Clerk

**Members of Public:** There were no members of the public present.

**Apologies:** Cllr Kay Dooley (KD) due to health reasons.

1. **John to ask members for their consent to record the meeting to aid the production of meeting minutes**  
Members consented to the meeting being recorded by CB using the Teams recording function for the purpose of accuracy of the minutes. She would delete the recording once the minutes had been signed off at the next EWG meeting.
2. **John to update on review of alternatives to Glyphosate**  
John advised the group that it had been agreed by Full Council to trial alternative methods of weed control on parish council-owned land during the 2023 growing season, starting in April. Furthermore, the grass verge along the footpath from Langton Green Pavilion up to the entrance to Langton Green Primary School would be left to grow with the aim of enhancing biodiversity. The exception to this rule was that if a significant health and safety issue arose which could not be resolved using any of the alternative methods proposed, then Glyphosate would be used. Full council had agreed that the Weed Control Policy did not need to be updated until completion of the trial at the end of the 2023 growing season in October.

CB had contacted Langton Green Village Society, who had indicated that they would be willing to help with hand weeding.

JT pointed out that Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) were responsible for maintaining the sports pitches at the recreation ground, and since no viable alternative to Glyphosate had yet been identified for weed control on large areas of grass, they would continue to use Glyphosate for the time being.

EL asked if there was any further information about a national or global ban on Glyphosate, and what were other councils doing to anticipate this possibility? JT answered that there was no definitive information, but that the Parish Council was in a position to be at the forefront of a move away from Glyphosate.

DT asked how decisions were made and policies produced around issues such as weed control. JT explained that items were discussed and recommendations made by the EWG, which were then taken to full council for formal approval.

EL asked how the review of the trial would be carried out at the end of the growing season. JT replied that it would be a case of learning as we went along, talking to the Groundsman about how the alternatives were working, and making tweaks where necessary.

An update would go out in parish magazines and on social media once details had been finalised. **JT and CB to work on this.**

**3. John to update on electric vehicle charge points at Langton Green Recreation Ground**

The Parish Council's application to Kent County Council (KCC) for funding was originally submitted in November 2021. Although this application passed to the next stage, the process was delayed by funding issues. An initial survey of Langton Green Village Hall carpark had then been undertaken by a Surveyor from KCC's appointed contractor, Volker, however, he was due to leave the company a few days later and was unable to produce a sufficient report. A second survey was carried out in December 2022, and the Surveyor indicated that the most feasible location for the charge points was in the parking spaces behind the council office. JT was now awaiting a contract from KCC. He hoped to update on progress at the next meeting.

**4. John and Ken to update on a response to the South East Water Public Consultation**

South East Water had published a water resources management plan outlining strategies for the next 50 years. JT and KH had studied the plan, which was a comprehensive document of over 200 pages long. JT reported that although some of the plan was beyond their competence in understanding water management measures, there was a bigger picture which they felt able to comment on.

SE Water planned to spend £3-4bn in the coming decades to improve water quality, supply infrastructure and reduce water leakage with an aim also to reduce water consumption per household over the next 20 years by 25%.

KH added that the overall aim of the plan was about achieving a supply/demand balance. However, achieving reduced demand focussed on soft measures such as education, rather than tackling infrastructure. He said that there was no reference to funding for these measures, but there was mention of an increase in tariff. While the plan was an adaptive one which could be manipulated, if necessary, further down the line, KH felt it may not be robust enough to address certain issues, while tariff increases would affect Kent residents.

It also suggested that government intervention, together with cooperation from appliance manufacturers and consumer goods companies may be required to achieve the reduced water demand.

SE Water has a goal to reduce to reduce water leakage by 50% by 2050. Given the recent issues with water leaks experienced in the parish and across the South East, it was suggested that SE Water should be more aggressive in their goal to reduce water leakage over this time period.

**It was agreed that these observations would inform a recommended response by JT and KH, which would go to Full Council to approve for submission.**

**5. John and Catherine to update on Planning Terms of reference (ToR)**

JT explained that the Planning Committee had considered the following sentence suggested by DP and KH on behalf of the EWG:

*Ensure environmental matters are considered in all relevant decisions especially when considering planning applications and its key role in submissions to the Borough Planning Authority*

But had voted against incorporating it into their ToR at the November 2022 Planning Committee meeting. At the January meeting they had considered an alternative amendment, which was to include a list of considerations – including environmental – which they took into account when deciding whether to object, remain neutral or support a planning application before it went to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Planning Officer. They voted against making this alternative amendment, and their reasons for doing so could be read in the January Planning Committee Meeting Minutes.

JT said that no one should assume that this decision meant that the Planning Committee ignored environmental considerations when looking at planning applications. CB added that previous meeting minutes – which were available on the parish council website – showed multiple examples of the continued attention the Committee paid to environmental considerations.

CB would forward the January Planning Committee meeting Minutes to the working group.

## 6. John to lead a discussion on a Biodiversity Plan for 2023

CB gave an update on actions completed and actions still to be taken at Pocket Park, Langton Green Recreation Ground and The Green at Old Groombridge. JT then asked Members to contribute their ideas towards a Biodiversity Plan for 2023.

EL said it was advisable to approach schools now to see how they would like to be involved during the 2023 growing season, and CB agreed to contact them.

DT suggested approaching local companies to see if they had volunteering schemes in place. His own workplace allocated employees time off to volunteer, and this would be an effective way of getting jobs done.

LP reported that she had contacted the Speldhurst Guides to ask if they would like members of the EWG to run a session on building bug hotels or making bird boxes, however, these activities were already in place. EL reported that the Langton Guides had been interested in this, and he would follow up with them.

KH asked if the information about Pocket Park which AF had put together could be used to produce educational material that could be shared with the community. JT suggested producing a quarterly quiz highlighting new species that could go out via media channels. JT, AF and CB would do more work on this.

DT said he would be happy to get involved with mini lectures on biodiversity in the local area and what the parish council were doing to protect it. LP added that nature walks from each corner of the parish had been well attended previously. These had been led by AF, and it was agreed that doing something similar again was a good idea.

## 7. Any other Business

JT reported that Borough Cllr Matthew Sankey had been given funding for the design phase of a bike path across the commons from Langton Green to Tunbridge Wells.

DT confirmed that he would be joining the EWG permanently.

AF said he would list and photograph developments in Pocket Park throughout 2023. He noted that it would be interesting to monitor the different species of moths throughout the year, which could number more than 300 different breeds.

EL asked if the parish footpaths could be incorporated into the EWG's nature walks and talks.

DP reported that he had been investigating the sewage discharged into the stream near his house. The water company was licensed to make these discharges which were a regular occurrence, and having investigated, DP discovered that they had resulted in a high level of toxicity in the water. He said that while he was at the beginning of his investigations, he hoped this would become an issue that the EWG would be interested in. DP shared the following links with the group:

[Barden Mill Stream](#) | [Catchment Data Explorer](#) | [Catchment Data Explorer](#)

[Raw sewage in our rivers | The Rivers Trust](#)

EL added that the sewage treatment works near the River Grom also made sewage discharges on a regular basis.

JT commented that he had not been aware of these discharges and said it was unlikely that many other people living in the parish would know about them. **It was agreed that members would look at the information contained in the links shared by DP and discuss further at the next meeting.**

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting ended at 8.08pm.