



What is Speldhurst Chapel Project?

Please note, our Parish Consultation on Speldhurst Chapel Project is now closed. The details on this page are for information only.

Every household in Speldhurst Parish will shortly receive a communication from Speldhurst Parish Council by post. This will contain information and questions on the Speldhurst Chapel Project consultation. The consultation runs from 9am on 1st August until midnight on 30th August.

While you might already be familiar with this project if you live in Speldhurst, you may not know about it if you live in Ashurst, Langton Green or Old Groombridge.

In Brief

Led by a volunteer group of Speldhurst residents, Speldhurst Chapel Project aims to secure the future of Speldhurst Community Shop and Post Office. The shop's current lease expires in 2024 and it might close if it does not have a building to occupy.

The goal is to purchase the Speldhurst Chapel site opposite the Community Shop and Post Office which has been put up for sale by the current owners as a permanent home. Speldhurst Parish Council have been approached by representatives from Speldhurst Chapel Project with a request that the Council consider applying to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) for a loan to purchase Speldhurst Chapel*. If the Council proceeds with purchasing the Speldhurst Chapel site the Speldhurst Chapel Project will undertake to raise funds via a community share offer to refurbish the building to provide a new home for the Shop and Post Office, and a community hub.

Parish Councillors have worked closely with Speldhurst Chapel Project to gain a full understanding of their proposal. A working group of councillors liaised with our Finance Officer, who investigated the financial implications of a loan, and spoke to another local Parish Council who recently completed the same process. During 2023 the working party have presented back to Full Council at monthly meetings, enabling councillors to have informed discussions about the viability of the project.

**Before agreeing to take out a loan the Parish Council is undertaking a parish-wide consultation to gauge whether residents are in favour of us proceeding with the purchase, as it would mean an increase in council tax for residents living in Speldhurst Parish for the purpose of the loan repayment. To understand more about how this would affect you, see Question 2 in our list of FAQs.*

Have Your Say

At a Full Council meeting in July 2023, councillors voted to conduct a consultation asking the whole parish for feedback on Speldhurst Chapel Project's proposal. This consultation is a requirement of the PWLB application process.

To ensure that everyone's views are considered, the Parish Council is now seeking feedback from **all** households in Ashurst, Langton Green, Old Groombridge and Speldhurst. Your input is key if we want to make a decision that truly reflects the whole parish's opinion on whether we should proceed with a loan. Please take the time to read the information below, and on our supplementary information page before you participate in the consultation.



About Speldhurst Community Shop and Post Office

Speldhurst Chapel Project have supplied some information about the management of the current Shop and Post Office, and how this management model will help their project succeed.

"Speldhurst Community Shop Limited (SCSL) established in 2019 as a Community Benefit Society. It was formed to acquire Speldhurst's Shop and Post Office which was at risk of closure. An oversubscribed community share offer raised £75,000 from over 230 residents,

with Speldhurst Parish Council granting a further £15,000. This enabled the community to take ownership of the Shop and successfully apply for a licence to operate the Post Office.

The shop employs 1 full-time shop manager and 0.5 FTE assistants, while many residents regularly volunteer in a variety of roles.

The shop operates viably without needing additional financial support. A full-time manager handles day-to-day operations, overseen by a management committee (elected annually). The management committee regularly communicate with their 220 members, encourage new membership, and hold statutory members' meetings.

SCSL's Community Asset Credentials

1. *The Shop and Post Office has successfully operated under community ownership since 2019. The management committee has gained invaluable experience in managing a community asset along the way.*
2. *If successful in relocating to the Chapel, we will continue to employ an experienced full-time shop manager and 0.5 FTE equivalent assistants.*
3. *Our loyal Shop and Post Office volunteers are key to our success, and we expect that the new premises will attract more.*
4. *A further working group of volunteers have pledged their time and expertise to turn the Chapel Project into a reality. This group supplement – and complement – existing SCSL management committee who continue to oversee Shop and Post Office operations."*



Timeframes and Finances

If Speldhurst Chapel Project achieves its aim of relocating the Shop and Post Office, the anticipated timings will look something like this:

- September 2023: Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) will meet on 4th September; using the findings from the parish consultation to inform their decision, they will vote to decide whether to progress with their application for a £325,000 Public Works Board Loan to finance the purchase of the Chapel.
- October 2023: Assuming the Parish Council vote in favour of proceeding, Speldhurst Chapel Project will launch a fund raise of c£400,000 in Speldhurst by way of a Community Share offer, together with donations, grants, and matched funding from a charitable trust. Funds raised will pay for building works and refurbishments. To

understand more about how Speldhurst Chapel Project will be funded, see extra information about Finances.

- December 23: Assuming Speldhurst Chapel Project are successful in raising funds, the Parish Council will agree terms with the seller and anticipate a sale completion date in the 1st quarter of 2024.
- Throughout 2024:
 - SPC and SCSL will agree terms of lease
 - SCSL will make a planning application for change of use
 - SCSL will tender for extension / refurbishment works
 - Building works will commence
 - Shop & Post Office relocation
 - End of 2024: The Shop, Post Office and Community Hub will be open for business

Your Next Steps

Do you still have questions? Find out the answers on our supplementary information page, where you will see a list of FAQ's, extra financial detail, and plans and drawings showing what the new shop, post office and community hub will look like.

Alternatively, you can attend a drop-in session at Speldhurst Chapel on Saturday 19th August between 1pm and 3pm. Parish Councillors and representatives from Speldhurst Chapel Project will be available to answer your questions.

You can respond to the consultation in one of 3 ways:

1. Complete a form online.
2. Email our Clerk, Katie Neve, with your responses to the questionnaire you receive in the post: clerk@speldhurstparishcouncil.gov.uk
3. Write down your answers and return to: The Clerk, Speldhurst Parish Council, Langton Green Recreation Ground, Speldhurst Road, Langton Green, TN3 OJJ

Remember, you have until midnight on 30th August to have your say!