

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 2nd June 2025 at Langton Green Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Rowe (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Curry, Ellery, Littlefield, Norton, Tarricone, and Turner.

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

County Cllr Moreland and Borough Cllr Sharratt were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 2 members of the public present.

25/110 Election of Chair

In the absence of a permanent Chair, Cllr Cleaver was elected to chair the meeting.

25/111 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The Chair advised that the Clerk had started an audio recording, which would be used to ensure the 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.

25/112 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dickens and Leach (for family reasons).

25/113 Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:

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

25/114 Declarations of Lobbying

Cllr Rowe had been lobbied concerning the renewal of Langton Pavilion Community Hub's hire agreement, which would be discussed under agenda item 19.

Cllr Norton had been lobbied concerning mowing on Groombridge Village Green, which would be discussed under agenda item 12c.

25/115 Minutes of the Annual Statutory Full Council meeting held on 6th May 2025 – RESOLVED to approve that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25/116 Public Open Session

David Crundwell, a Groombridge resident, spoke about the no-mow status of The Green. He questioned how well thought-out the no-mow project had been and asked if Members of the Environment Working Group had read guidance from the Royal Horticultural Society about the best way to encourage wildflowers. This involved mowing the grass 3 or 4 times a year, rather than twice a year, the parish council's current mowing schedule for the no-mow area. He said he had visited the Green and taken photos of two clumps of Ox-Eye Daisies, and these were the only wildflowers he could see; otherwise, the area was populated by weeds. In comparison, many wildflowers grew in the churchyard opposite, where there was a no-mow policy while they bloomed, followed by a cut in June.

David suggested a wild 'corridor' instead of such a large area; The Green should be a well-tended, quintessential village green, an attractive setting for walkers, visitors, and residents living on Bird-in-Hand Street and The Walks.

He asked Cllr Norton how he had canvassed residents for their opinions in 2022. Cllr Norton replied that he had asked for views via the village WhatsApp group and the Old Groombridge Conservation Group. He had received over 40 replies in favour of the project.

David concluded that the term 're-wilding', which had been used in the early stages of the project, was misleading and suggested that the council was more concerned with developing biodiversity than listening to the democratic preferences of residents.

Sarah Crosbie-Jones, an Old Groombridge resident living directly opposite the no-mow area of The Green, said the outcome was not what anyone in Old Groombridge expected, and residents had not been updated and felt misled. She said they were told The Green would look lovely, and had thought it would be planted with wildflower seeds. Those previously in favour were also unhappy because they were told it would be an experiment, but the project had continued into a 3rd year and looked like a mess. She said visitors to her home agreed and asked if the council had run out of money to mow properly. She added that only Dandelions grew, the seeds of which floated into her garden and took root. She concluded that aesthetics was important, especially when living in a conservation area, and urged the parish council to reconsider its no-mow policy.

Cllr Turner thanked both speakers for their input and engagement with what could be an emotive subject. He said there had been an assessment of what was growing in the no-mow area during the 2023 and 2024 growing seasons, and in fact, there was evidence of a number of plants emerging. The Environment Working Group's late conservation expert, Alan Ford, had documented these and explained their significance. Cllr Turner felt it would be a shame not to continue; however, he recognised that the views of residents must be taken into consideration.

Cllr Norton said it was heartening to talk about The Green at Old Groombridge, an important part of the parish not often discussed. He thanked both speakers for their contribution and added that the council needed knowledgeable, engaged people to contribute. He said he took some responsibility for the outcome as it had been naïve not to anticipate that the hoped-for no-mow results would take time and effort to achieve. With that said, he felt that a fairly precise explanation of what was to be done at the Green had been provided at the outset.

Cllr Cleaver thanked the members of public for attending and said the matter would be discussed in more detail under agenda item 12c.

David Crundwell and Sarah Crosbie-Jones left the meeting at 7.55 pm.

25/117 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

Borough Cllr Sharratt:

- Local government reorganisation – There was an upcoming review of several wards which were currently unparished and had all their services delivered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) or Kent County

Council (KCC). A future unitary authority would mean residents in these areas would be further away from local councillors to represent them. There would be a public consultation shortly to help decide whether new town or parish councils should be formed.

- New Mayor – Cllr David Osborne had been elected Mayor for the 2025-26 term. His chosen charity was TS Brilliant, which worked with young people. Cllr Beverley Palmer had been elected Deputy Mayor.
- The closing date to apply for the UK Shared Prosperity government fund was 12th June.
- Business de-carbonisation grants of up to £2,099 could be applied for until 16th June.
- A Langton Green resident had not received any post for 3 weeks, and Cllr Sharratt asked if residents elsewhere in the parish had experienced the same. Cllr Curry said it was likely that there was no permanent Royal Mail delivery person allocated to the area and advised asking Royal Mail to confirm and address the matter.

County Cllr Moreland:

- County Cllr Moreland introduced himself as the councillor representing Tunbridge Wells West at Kent County Council (KCC).
- He said that the most common concern among residents related to highways and road safety. He understood that communication from the Highways department at Kent County Council had become increasingly poor. He had a meeting scheduled with KCC Highways representatives.
- He explained that the Tunbridge Wells West Division consisted of parished and unparished areas; parishes could submit Highways Improvement Plans (HIPs) to KCC, but unparished areas could not. He had seen a copy of the parish council's HIP and suggested that he wouldn't interfere with this plan unless asked for help chasing KCC.
- Cllr Moreland had been in contact with a resident who had asked for an extension of the 20mph limit and flashing lights at Speldhurst Primary School. There was some discussion about the approaches already taken by the parish council to address the two issues of congestion and speeding on this stretch of road.
- Another resident had emailed about an overgrown footpath on Farnham Lane.
- Cllr Moreland would like to pursue a Bus Service from Ashurst to Tunbridge Wells. Cllr Sharratt said she would forward him an email with data to support this undertaking.

25/118 Clerk's Report

- Thanks were given to the clerks and councillors for making the Annual Parish Meeting such a successful event.
- In the absence of a permanent Chair, a rota had been circulated of councillors to take turns chairing Full Council meetings. In-house training would be organised. Cllr Rowe would continue as a point of contact for the clerks.
- The new grounds maintenance contract had increased by £20 a month. This was because of an increase in the area to be mowed and strimmed, which had not been carried out by the previous contractor. The Clerk was impressed by the new contractor who had quickly dealt with an overgrown hedge on the A264 Langton Road.
- The Tunbridge Wells Parish Chairmen's Group Minutes of 25th March and Kent PCC News were circulated.
- The Community Police Officer, PC Whitehead, had visited the office in May to check whether there were any issues for her to address.
- Annual routine CCTV maintenance had been carried out.

25/119 General Matters – Actionable tasks that do not fall to a committee.

All items were either in progress or complete.

	Existing	Owner	Created	Status
25/25	Transfer funds into savings account when precept arrives.	Clerk	07/04/25	Complete
26/25	Share councillor vacancies with organisations eg WI, U3A, LGVS, Thrive, Schools etc.	Clerk	07/04/25	In progress
27/25	Send invitations for APM. Councillors to pass on suggestions of invitees.	Clerk/Cllrs	07/04/25	Complete

31/25	Update Premises Licence to be held by Pavilion Working Group and confirm terms of reference.	Clerk	07/04/25	In progress
32/25	Set up rota of councillors to chair future Full Council meetings.	Clerk	06/05/25	Complete
33/25	Amend Terms of References for committees to reflect reduction in number of meetings.	Clerks	06/05/25	In progress
34/25	Include Annual Return item on June FC agenda.	Clerk	06/05/25	Complete
35/25	Include/update the following on the website and cllrs' folder: Committee membership, Statement of Internal Control, Internal Audit ToFR, Fixed Asset Register, the following policies: Health and Safety; Transparency Code; Complaints; Documents, Records and Correspondence; Equality and Diversity / Disability Discrimination; Freedom of Information; Lone Worker; and Environment.	Clerk	06/05/25	In progress
36/25	Notify staff and payroll of pay award.	Clerk	06/05/25	Complete
37/25	Respond to Little Birches Nursery's request for higher replacement fence.	Asst Clerk (KH)	06/05/25	In progress
38/25	Include links regarding Air Traffic Groups on website.	Asst Clerk (CB)	06/05/25	In progress
39/25	Carry out virements from General Reserves to EMRS.	Clerk	06/05/25	Complete
40/25	Confirm Community Hub renewal.	Clerk	06/05/25	Complete
41/25	Establish review process for Community Hub.	Pav WG	06/05/25	In progress
42/25	Confirm increased charges for Pavilion and update website.	Asst Clerk (CB)	06/05/25	In progress
43/25	Establish Pavilion Licence Committee and confirm ToFR.	Clerk	06/05/25	In progress
	New	Owner	Created	Status
44/25	Include/update Council Policy for use of council land on website.	Clerk		
45/25	Update residents on Groombridge Green re mowing of the Green.	Clerk/Cllr Norton	02/06/25	
46/25	Include Annual Return on website and notice board and submit to external auditor.	Clerk	02/06/25	
47/25	Respond to LGVS re hanging baskets.	Clerk	02/06/25	
48/25	Remove Air Traffic item from future agenda.	Clerk	02/06/25	
49/25	Add Cllr Turner as bank signatory.	Clerk	02/06/25	
50/25	Transfer funds if necessary to Unity Bank Trust.	Clerk	02/06/25	
51/25	Confirm renewal with Cloudy IT and pay invoice.	Clerk	02/06/25	
52/25	Set up working group of councillors to look at next year's APM and potential change of focus. Contact other PCs on theirs.	Clerk	02/06/25	
53/25	Organise for councillors to attend next Community Lunch.	Clerk	02/06/25	

25/120 Annual Return

- a) **Risk Assessments** - It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Risk Assessment document which had been reviewed and updated by the Governance Committee.
- b) **2024/25 Internal Audit Report** - It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Internal Audit Report which had been reviewed by the Governance Committee.
- It was noted that the internal audit report advised that fixed assets valued under £500 did not need to be included in the Fixed Asset Register. This matter would be addressed further at the next Finance and Governance Committee meeting.

- c) **Annual Return** – It was **RESOLVED** that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return be signed by the Chair on behalf of the parish council, on the recommendation of the Governance Committee.
- d) **Accounting Statements** – It was **RESOLVED** that the Accounting Statement be signed by the Chair on behalf of the parish council, on the recommendation of the Governance Committee.
- e) **Public Inspection period of the Annual Return:** It was **RESOLVED** that the public inspection period would run from 3rd June 2024 to 15th July 2025 (inclusive).

25/121 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) **Highways Committee** – Cllr Norton, Highways Chair. There had been no meeting. Following the council's decision to streamline committees, Highways committee meetings would move from four to three per year. Consequently, there would be no June meeting, and the next meeting would happen in September.
Despite all the Clerk's efforts, there continued to be no response from KCC Highways on the issues raised in the HIP, so Cllr Norton was heartened by Cllr Moreland's readiness to tackle this. Cllr Norton and Cllr Moreland were due to meet with Borough Cllr Sankey to address his concerns about repeated road traffic accidents on Etherington Hill.
Cllr Rowe referred to a Facebook post expressing concern about traffic outside Speldhurst Primary School. This post had led to several comments, and Borough Cllr Sankey had encouraged those posting to attend the Full Council Meeting to voice their concerns in person. It was disappointing that no one had done so.
Cllr Ellery asked Cllr Sharratt if the TWBC enforcement vehicle could attend Speldhurst more frequently. There were several junctions where vehicles parked on double yellow lines, including the Ferbies/Langton Road junction, where parents consistently parked on the double yellow lines at pick up/drop off, making it impossible to enter and exit Ferbies safely. Cllr Sharratt said she thought the enforcement vehicle came through most days but would check this.

- b) **Amenities Committee** – Cllr Turner. There had been no meeting.

- **Mowing Guidelines** – Residents had expressed opposing views about the council's mowing practice at various sites around the parish. Some had complained that the council did not mow enough, others that it mowed too much and destroyed wildflowers. Responding to these complaints was time-intensive for the clerks, so they had produced a set of recommendations for councillors to approve.

As part of the discussion, Cllr Turner brought forward item agenda 12c, relating to mowing at The Green at Groombridge, and it was **RESOLVED** to approve the following:

- All parish-council-owned land would continue to be mown as usual for the foreseeable future. Health and safety obligations, such as ensuring an adequate line of sight for vehicles exiting driveways bordered by parish council land, must take priority. The parish council would eventually aim to create 're-wilded' or 'no-mow' areas on all its land where safe to do so, however, it did not currently have the resources to facilitate this.

The following exceptions were made:

1. **Pocket Park, Speldhurst:** The EWG would continue its rewilding project at Pocket Park, with a central area of grass left unmown during the growing season and cut at the end of August/beginning of September. The grass surrounding this area would continue to be mown as usual.
2. **The Green at Old Groombridge:** After some discussion it was agreed that the EWG would continue its no-mow project until the end of the growing season. The Assistant Clerk (CB) had been in contact with a local conservation volunteer who would be willing to inspect the area once a month in June, July and August to identify and explain which plants were growing and any pollinators that were attracted to the area. The council would then write to residents explaining the outcome of these inspections and asking them their views on whether the no-mow project should be continued in 2026. Cllr Norton would also communicate via WhatsApp and other local channels of communication to ensure that residents were kept informed.

- Although the parish council did not own the land on public footpaths WT88 and WT89, which connected Speldhurst Road with residential roads in Langton Green, the Groundsman cut back the overgrowth in the growing season as a goodwill gesture. These footpaths were used heavily by families traveling to and from school, those with prams and pushchairs, and those with mobility aids/scooters. Health and safety must take priority, and the Groundsman would continue to cut back overgrowth where necessary to ensure safe usage of the footpaths.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to amend the Use of Council Land Policy from 'Village Hall Trustees' to 'The Langton Green Village Hall Charitable Incorporated Organisation' with the remainder of the policy staying the same.
- c) **Environment WG (EWG)** – Cllr Turner, Chair. There had been no meeting.
The Green at Old Groombridge – this item had been addressed alongside matters relating to the Amenities Committee.
- d) **KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils)** – Having attended a recent Parish Chairs meeting Cllr Curry reported that other councils were reorganising their operations in a similar streamlining exercise to the one carried out by the parish council. Cllr Curry had expressed disappointment that the Head of TWBC was not chairing the meeting and would continue to push on this matter.
- e) **Air Traffic Issues** – The May bulletin from CAGNE Gatwick had been circulated. Cllr Rowe requested that Air Traffic be removed from this section of the agenda since the committee had been disbanded. Air Traffic matters could be covered under "Items for Information" if there were any matters to raise.

25/122 Finance and Governance Committee – Report by Cllr Rowe. Minutes of the last Governance Committee meeting had been circulated.

- a) The detailed budget reports were noted.
- b) Report on interim payments made since the last meeting.
Unity Trust Bank: £51.36 Castle Water DD for Pavilion water; £25,000 transfer to Nationwide BS (previously reported as £20,000); £579.60 3 Counties Grounds Maintenance Ltd contracted work; £522.05 DD Unity Trust Credit Card Payment.
Mastercard: £9 DD card charge; £222.09* Amazon for Portable PA; £19.99* Amazon for Water Filter Jug; £42.10* Wickes for Gravel, Grass Seed and Sacks for LGRG.
- c) It was **RESOLVED** to note the decisions made under delegated authority.
- d) It was **RESOLVED** that following Cllr Lyle's retirement from the council, Cllr Turner would replace her as a signatory on the Bank and Building Society accounts.
- e) It was **RESOLVED** that funds of up to £30,000 be transferred from each of the Cambridge Building Society and Nationwide Building Society accounts in July, August and September to ensure the Unity Trust account remains sufficiently funded until the next precept payment is received in October.
- f) It was **RESOLVED** to renew the council's contract with Cloudy IT with an annual payment.

25/123 Accounts for Payment

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

Date Paid	Payee-Name	Reference	Amount £	Transaction Detail
03/06/2025	M R Lawrence	MT2953	835.00	Mowing and Strimming
03/06/2025	Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2954	351.67	Electricity for Office Jan-Apr
03/06/2025	Tivoli	MT2955	162.20	Canine Waste Removal
03/06/2025	Knockout Print	MT2956	300.00	Recreation Ground Signs
03/06/2025	Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd	MT2957	840.00	Pitch Maintenance
03/06/2025	Capel Groundcare	MT2958	84.00	Playground Inspection
03/06/2025	Langton Life	MT2959	375.00	Magazine Article Jun/Jul
03/06/2025	Prontaplumb Limited	MT2960	168.00	Thermostatic Mixing Valve
03/06/2025	Tate Fencing Ltd	MT	33.89	Post and Drymix

03/06/2025	Langton Pavilion Cafe	MT2962	64.63	Cleaning Products for Pavilion
03/06/2025	Katie Neve	MT2963	36.45	Travel Expenses
03/06/2025	3 Counties Grounds Maintenance	MT2964	1,102.80	Grounds Maintenance
03/06/2025	Employees	MT2965	6,178.09	Salaries
07/06/2025	Talk Talk Business	DD	29.63	Pavilion Broadband
10/06/2025	KCC (KCS)	DD	35.54	Photocopier
10/06/2025	BT PLC	DD	28.64	Office Mobile
15/06/2025	Hugo Fox	DD	11.99	Website
20/06/2025	EDF Energy	DD	790.74	Pavilion Electricity
22/06/2025	HMRC	MT2961	1,563.46	NI and Income Tax
30/06/2025	BT PLC	DD	74.56	Office Phone and Broadband
		Total Payments	13,066.29	

25/124 Update on Vacancy on Council

The Assistant Clerk (CB) would write a recruitment article for the next parish magazines and the website. It was noted that Cllr Norton had also written to the University of the 3rd Age (U3A) asking if it was possible to circulate the vacancies to parish residents.

25/125 Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2025

A discussion was held regarding the format of the 2026 meeting, with a suggestion that the meeting be held in Langton Pavilion, with groups and organisations from the parish invited. The Clerk noted that Withyham Parish Council held their APM at the weekend, with local organisations having stalls and interacting with residents. This approach would need more input from councillors, and preparation would need to begin earlier. The Clerk asked anyone interested in getting involved to let her know.

It was noted that changing the format to this type of event could be time-consuming, and there should still be an allocated amount of time for the parish council to make a presentation to those present about what it does and how it spends the precept.

It was suggested that the Clerk talk to other parish councils, including Withyham, about what they do.

25/126 Speldhurst Chapel Project

The latest update had been circulated, and the project was making good progress.

25/126 Planning Committee – Report provided by Cllr Curry, Planning Chair: A meeting had been held on 12th May, and the minutes circulated. Cllr Curry said the Committee had reformatted their responses to become more comprehensive. They had supported 2 applications, opposed 1, and remained neutral on the rest. They would monitor the outcome of the application they had opposed, which related to tree-felling.

25/127 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) and Pavilion

An update on the Community Hub (CH) had been circulated.

- Cllr Rowe reported that the CH had expressed reservations about renewing the hire agreement for a further 12 months. Several discussions had taken place between Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) and the CH to address their concerns, with good progress being made. A final decision by the CH would be made within the next week.
- Shared matters with Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA): Cllr Rowe informed the meeting that he would be circulating a new proposal setting out terms for access and use of the pavilion by LGCSA for discussion and approval at the next meeting.

25/128 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

- 16th June – Planning Committee
- 7th July – Full Council – ASVH
- 14th July – Planning Committee
- 21st July – Finance and Governance Committee
- Rota for Chairing Full Council Meetings:
 - **July** – Alan Rowe
 - **August** – Simon Norton
 - **September** – Rebecca Leach
 - **October** – Giles Littlefield
 - **November** – Jade Dickens
 - **December** – Richard Ellery TBC
 - **January** – Domenico Tarricone
 - **February** – John Turner
 - **March** – Paul Curry

25/84 Items for Information

- The Clerk asked for volunteers to attend the July lunch club at Langton Pavilion.
- The Clerk reminded councillors that Alan Ford's funeral would take place on 11th June – the details of which had been circulated.
- The Village Society had installed hanging baskets on the lamp posts. They also requested permission to place two baskets on the village sign, which they own, although it is situated on council land. Councillors agreed to this request.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 9.18 pm.

Chair