

**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 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 in the Palmer Room, Langton Green Village Hall**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Cllrs Rowe (Vice-Chair), Cleaver, Curry, Ellery, Leach, Littlefield, Norton, 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. Cllrs Britcher-Allan and Sankey had sent apologies.

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were 12 members of the public present.

**25/169 Election of Chair**

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

**25/170 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.

**25/171 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.**

Apologies were received from Cllr Tarricone (health-related).

**25/172 Disclosure of Interests**

Councillors' ongoing disclosures were noted:

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

**25/173 Declarations of Lobbying**

Cllrs Curry, Leach and Rowe had all been lobbied regarding Langton Green Pavilion.

**25/174 Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025 – RESOLVED** to approve that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**25/175 Public Open Session**

Cllr Leach opened the session, inviting public contributions and reminding speakers to keep within the 3-minute time limit.

- Sarah Wheatley, a Langton Green resident, and Michelle Clark of Happy Me Dance Company spoke about their weekly dance class for the Down Syndrome community, which had been running at Langton Green Pavilion for 18 months. They explained the positive impact of the class and asked if it could continue. Cllr Rowe confirmed the council had no objection and advised them to contact the Clerk to make arrangements.
- Jeremy Stirling, a long-term resident, spoke about the closure of Langton Pavilion Community Hub and Pavilion Café, describing widespread community sadness and anger expressed online. He raised concerns about Facebook posts alleging verbal abuse and suggested LGCSA may have influenced the closure. LGCSA members present objected strongly to these comments, which caused an exchange of views between members of the public. The Chair and clerks reminded all present to remain respectful and to speak only through the Chair.
- Cllr Curry clarified that previous minutes had referred to the challenges of leasing terms, which prevented commercial use, and were not intended to suggest LGCSA had been uncooperative. Chris Allen (LGCSA) added that managing a dual-use building was difficult, reiterated that LGCSA supported a café, and rejected any suggestion of conspiracy, stressing the importance of a fair tender process.
- Andy Thompson challenged the accuracy of the August 4th minutes, saying he had reminded councillors of their legal responsibilities rather than “urged” action. He raised concerns about Covid-19 grants totalling approximately £21,000 to Langton Pavilion Ltd and £14,000 to the Pavilion Café, despite their lack of legal entitlement, and confirmed these matters had been referred to Action Fraud, the Insolvency Service, and TWBC Monitoring Officer. He also raised concerns about councillor conduct, including social media comments made by a councillor’s wife, and questioned whether the councillor should recuse himself from pavilion-related discussions.
- Cllr Norton acknowledged the pavilion’s value but said it had caused conflict and urged all parties to step back for the good of the parish. Cllr Rowe reported constructive discussions with LGCSA and stressed that while not all parties agreed, they shared a commitment to doing the right thing. He rejected suggestions of conspiracy and confirmed that if any official investigation found fault, the council would address it. He also noted Mr Thompson’s suggestion of external tendering for consideration.
- The issue of social media comments was discussed further. Cllr Ellery refuted claims that he had shared private information with his wife, and after clarification Mr Thompson conceded that the information in question had already been public. Cllr Ellery emphasised that his wife formed her views independently and confirmed he would not recuse himself from pavilion matters.
- Steve Aldis asked the council to improve communication about decisions. Cllr Rowe confirmed this was in progress. There was further discussion about the accuracy of meeting minutes, with members of the public feeling they did not always reflect what had been said. The Clerk explained that minutes must be summaries rather than verbatim transcripts, and Cllr Ellery reminded the meeting that the whole council shares responsibility for approving them.
- Cllr Norton closed by stressing that there was some misunderstanding about what a parish council could and could not do and asked everyone to be realistic about its resources.

2 Members of the Public left the meeting at 8:05 pm.

### **25/176 Borough and County Councillors’ Reports**

- Borough Cllr Sharratt thanked the parish council for having been a pleasure to work with in the 2 ½ years since she had been elected. She added that much of what it did was unseen but of much value. She had attended the Public Transport Forum and raised the issue of the lack of bus service in Ashurst. There would be a Climate and Nature Fair in Calverley Grounds on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September.

Southern Water was due to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. Anyone with questions for them was welcome to forward their questions to Cllr Sharratt to pass on.

At their last Full Council meeting, borough councillors had voted to make a considerable financial investment in Royal Victoria Place.

A Youth Consultation for 18–25-year-olds was currently underway.

- County Cllr Moreland had asked the Kent County Council administration about a bus service for Ashurst and had been told someone would be allocated to assessing bus routes. Since then, there had been a change of policy, and Cllr Moreland would ask again. He would ask the parish council for their thoughts on how to help if necessary. He was pleased to hear that Cllr Norton had been making progress in dealing with Ryan Shiel, the West Kent Highway Improvements Programme Manager. Ryan Shiel's junior colleague would shortly resume her role as the council's main point of contact, and Cllr Moreland said to let him know if he could help keep communications going when this happened.

Rusthall parish was campaigning for a pedestrian crossing on the A264 Langton Road. If anyone wished to comment, they should contact Cllr Moreland. There would be no change of speed limit if the crossing went ahead.

The Chair brought forward the agenda item relating to Langton Green Recreation Ground for discussion.

#### **25/188 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – To receive an update on the Pavilion.**

- **To receive an update on the Community Hub (CH):** Cllr Rowe reported that the Community Hub had decided not to renew. The pavilion was now vacant other than individual arrangements. Cllrs Rowe and Leach had been approached by interested parties to take over the running of the Community Hub on a temporary basis and they had suggested that they contact the Clerk, and councillors would assess the proposals in the normal way.
- **To consider the Draft of Independent Brief for the Pavilion Review:** Cllr Curry presented a draft brief setting out the need to review the Pavilion, its business model, and potential options for the future. The draft currently made reference to the CIC, which would require updating. The review was intended to be carried out independently and impartially, with the outcome to inform SPC's decision-making.

During the discussion:

- Cllr Ellery raised concerns about urgency, noting the building was currently empty and not generating income. He questioned whether the review must be entirely independent, given the need to move quickly.
- Cllr Leach emphasised the importance of full independence.
- Cllr Curry supported this view, adding that Council did not have the staff capacity to manage hires in the meantime and that Council involvement could raise further questions.
- Cllr Rowe advised against setting a strict timescale at this time as SPC would be involving 3rd parties like TWBC who had not yet confirmed their availability to assist. SPC also had finite capacity which will influence the timetable. Cllr Rowe said any short-term hire arrangements while the review was ongoing would not alter the Council's approach and if they wished to be considered for a longer term hire they could submit a proposal as part of the review. Cllr Rowe reiterated the need for transparency but final decisions are with SPC.
- Cllr Norton asked whether the review should also explore more radical options. Cllr Curry agreed that independent input could help identify alternative models. Cllr Leach saw this as an opportunity to reset and ensure inclusivity. Cllr Rowe noted that some options might fall outside the Parish Council's current remit.
- Cllr Turner expressed concern that restrictions within the lease might limit options and questioned whether certain suggestions were within SPC's authority.
- Chris Allen proposed that clarifications could be made through further informal discussion with LGCSA to help refine the scope.

**RESOLVED** to approve Cllr Curry, together with Cllrs Leach and Turner to work on the brief.

Cllr Ellery asked how we would move forward with temporary café operators which he felt should be actively pursued for the good of the community. **RESOLVED** to delegate to the working group the task of clarifying the proposals from the temporary operators. Any final decision will be brought back to Full Council.

- **To consider comments made by Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA) in relation to the Statement on the Pavilion and any other LGCSA matters:** Cllr Rowe reported that a statement had been issued after the last Full Council meeting which was shared with LGCSA prior to publication. There had been some misunderstanding in that LGCSA thought it was an opportunity for them to comment. They had concerns about the tone putting LGCSA in a negative light. The main thing is that we have a dialogue. Cllr Rowe had written to LGCSA addressing their concerns.
- **To formally note the Subject Access Request (SAR) received:** Councillors noted the receipt of the SAR. The Clerk was working to provide the information. Advice had been received from the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) and the requester would be sent the relevant information.

Councillors Moreland and Sharratt left the meeting at 8.35 pm.

### 25/177 Clerk's Report

Councillors were asked to join in expressing thanks to the two Assistant Clerks, Kate Harman and Catherine Barrett, for their dedication and hard work for the parish council over many years, and to wish them luck in their future plans. The Clerk would be on annual leave from 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> October, and the Assistant Clerk (CB) had kindly agreed to cover Full Council on 6<sup>th</sup> October. The Clerk would also be on leave on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

2 Members of the Public left the meeting at 8.40 pm.

### 25/178 General Matters – Actionable tasks that do not fall to a committee.

All items were either in progress or complete.

|       | Existing                                                                                                                   | Owner           | Created  | Status      |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| 31/25 | Update Premises Licence to be held by Pavilion Working Group and confirm terms of reference.                               | Clerk           | 07/04/25 | In progress |
| 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 |
| 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 | In progress |
| 56/25 | Write to solicitors regarding Pavilion.                                                                                    | Clerk/Cllr Rowe | 07/07/25 | TBA         |
| 63/25 | Undertake insurance restatement valuation on Speldhurst Chapel.                                                            | Cllr Rowe/Clerk | 04/08/25 | TBA         |
|       | New                                                                                                                        | Owner           | Created  | Status      |
| 67/25 | Confirm approval of £587 (excl. VAT) to Capel Groundcare to replace the chains on the swings in the junior playground.     | Clerk           | 01/09/25 |             |
| 68/25 | Confirm appointments of Deputy Clerk and Parish Council Administrator.                                                     | Clerk           | 01/09/25 |             |
| 69/25 | Order Wreaths for Remembrance Sunday.                                                                                      | Clerk           | 01/09/25 |             |
| 70/25 | Compile a list of potential dates for the Annual Parish Meeting.                                                           | Clerk           | 01/09/25 |             |

7 Members of the public left the meeting at 8.42 pm.

### 25/179 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

- Highways Committee – Report by Cllr Norton. There had been no meeting. Ryan Shiel from KCC had been helpful in finding a solution for a crossing on Speldhurst Road. This would not qualify for the funding from TWBC; however, more modest work was needed in Old Groombridge, and on the Etherington Hill/Stockland Green

junction in Speldhurst. Cllr Norton was pressing for these in order to hit the TWBC timescale and felt encouraged by the status of these 3 priority projects.

b) Amenities Committee – Report by Cllr Turner. There had been no meeting.

- It was **RESOLVED** to approve payment of £587 (excl. VAT) to Capel Groundcare to replace the chains on the swings in the junior playground, as highlighted as a necessity in the recent playground inspection report.

c) KALC – Cllr Curry would attend a Parish Chairs meeting the following day, which would focus on local government reorganisation.

## **25/180 Finance and Governance Committee – Report by Cllr Rowe.**

Report by the Chair including any Committee Meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the Minutes having previously been forwarded to all Members. There had been no meeting.

a) Councillors noted the detailed budget reports.

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

**Unity Trust Bank:** £69.17 Talk Talk DD for Pavilion Broadband and office phone and broadband; £89.00 DD Unity Trust Credit Card Payment; £798.19 DD NEST Pension; £16.63 LHVH for room hire; £350 M R Lawrence for mowing and strimming; £840 Agrifactors for LGRG pitch maintenance; £100.82 Kidman's for machinery equipment and oil; ££40.02 KCC(KCS) for photocopying; £63.47 DD Castle Water for pavilion water.

**Mastercard:** £9 DD card charge; £14.00\* B&Q for Hammerite Paint.

c) Councillors noted decisions made under delegated authority, starred above.

d) It was **RESOLVED** to approve the appointment of Helen Chater and Alison Dry for the positions of Deputy Clerk and Parish Council Administrator, respectively, on the recommendation of the interview panel made up of Cllrs Curry, Rowe and Turner.

## **25/181 Accounts for Payment**

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

| Date       | Payee Name                     | Reference | Amount Paid £ | Transaction Detail             |
|------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 02/09/2025 | Capel Groundcare               | MT3012    | 306.60        | Playground Inspection & Repair |
| 02/09/2025 | 3 Counties Grounds Maintenance | MT3013    | 715.20        | Monthly Grounds Maintenance    |
| 02/09/2025 | Tivoli                         | MT3014    | 162.20        | Monthly Canine Waste Removal   |
| 02/09/2025 | KALC                           | MT3015    | 84.00         | KALC Finance Conference        |
| 02/09/2025 | PPL PRS Ltd                    | MT3016    | 743.32        | Pavilion Music Licence         |
| 02/09/2025 | T.Bonard Electrical LTD        | MT3017    | 516.00        | Electrical Fitting of Defibs   |
| 10/09/2025 | BT PLC                         | DD        | 28.64         | Office Mobile                  |
| 10/09/2025 | Talk Talk Business             | DD        | 69.17         | Pav/Office Broadband/Phone     |
| 12/09/2025 | KCC (KCS)                      | DD        | 40.02         | Photocopier                    |
| 12/09/2025 | EDF Energy                     | DD        | 790.74        | Pavilion Electricity           |
| 19/09/2025 | HMRC                           | MT3018    | 1,940.34      | Income Tax and NI              |
| 28/09/2025 | Hugo Fox                       | DD        | 11.99         | Monthly Website Subscription   |

**25/182 Audited AGAR 2024-25** – The notice of conclusion, which the Clerk was waiting to receive, would be posted on the website and noticeboard as required by the audit process.

**25/183 Speldhurst Remembrance Sunday** – It was **RESOLVED** to approve Councillors Tarricone, Leach, Norton, and Ellery to lay the wreaths at the churches in Ashurst, Langton Green, Old Groombridge and Speldhurst on behalf of the

Parish Council on Remembrance Sunday, which would fall on 9<sup>th</sup> November. Wreaths would be ordered from the Royal British Legion Village.

**25/184 Annual Parish Meeting 2026** – The Annual Parish Meeting (APM) must be held between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June. In 2026 it was due to be held in Langton Green. It was agreed to defer further discussion about dates, themes and speakers until the October Full Council meeting; in the meantime, the Clerk would compile a list of potential dates.

**25/185 Update on Vacancies on the Council** – The notice period expired on 18<sup>th</sup> August, and a co-option notice was now being advertised. There had been some interested parties, and the Clerks had followed up or were due to follow up with them. It was **RESOLVED** to approve Councillors Curry, Rowe and Turner to form an interview panel and meet with the interested candidates.

**25/186 Speldhurst Chapel** – Cllr Rowe reported that 22<sup>nd</sup> November had been set as the date for the community shop and post office to move into the Chapel building. The shop would close for about a week beforehand. Councillors were glad to hear that the process was going smoothly and commended the hard work of all involved. Cllr Rowe said that the Insurance Reinstatement Valuation was booked for Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> September. The cost is £500 + VAT.

**25/187 Planning Committee** – Cllr Curry said there had been no meeting and there was nothing further to report.

#### **25/188 Diary Dates**

- 8<sup>th</sup> September – Finance and Governance Committee
- 15<sup>th</sup> September – Planning Committee
- 22<sup>nd</sup> September – Highways Committee
- Rota for Chairing Full Council Meetings:
  - October Full Council – Giles Littlefield
  - November Full Council – TBC
  - December Full Council – Richard Ellery TBC
  - January Full Council – Domenico Tarricone
  - February Full Council – John Turner
  - March Full Council – Paul Curry

#### **25/189 Items for Information**

- The Clerk had circulated the following for information:
  - KALC News – August 2025
  - Parish Chairs Minutes – June 2025
  - Email from TWBC regarding Local Government Reorganisation
- Cllr Turner was due to meet Nature Plus, a company interested in working with the parish council on a biodiversity programme.
- Cllr Curry congratulated the Clerk for successfully managing the recruitment process to find 2 new staff members and keeping the council office running smoothly during the interim period.
- The Clerk noted that it would be necessary to postpone the Finance and Governance Committee meeting scheduled for 8<sup>th</sup> September if Cllr Tarricone was unable to attend as it would not be possible to raise a quorum of 4. It was agreed to reschedule.
- The Assistant Clerk (CB) advised, for those who did not know, that a new incumbent had been appointed for the parish churches. The hard work of the church wardens and lay people who had kept the churches going during the interim was noted.

- Cllr Norton said he had worked with Cllr Turner and the Assistant Clerk (CB) to write to residents of Old Groombridge asking for their view on whether to continue a no-mow approach to the lower section of The Green for the following year's growing season. It was encouraging that several residents had already responded, and Cllr Norton would share further feedback at the October Full Council meeting.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 9.08 pm.

**Chair**